

Thanksgiving Sermon.

Delivered by Prof. J. Durham, at Williams Cal.,
Nov. 30, 1882.

"I will praise the name of God with a song
and will magnify him with thanksgiving." Ps.
99:30.

"Oh that men would praise the Lord for his
goodness, and for his wonderful works to the
children of men." Ps. 107:8.

The idea of a thanksgiving day was first suggested by the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year as was enjoined upon the children of Israel. "And the feast of harvest, the first fruits of the labors, which thou hast sown in the field; and the feast of ingathering which is in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labors out of the field." Ex. 23:16. Thanksgiving has been observed in Europe for about 400 years. The first ever observed on the American continent was after the first harvest in the colonies at Plymouth in 1621, yet we will not ignore the fact, that in 1620, when the *May Flower* dropped into that lovely harbor, and, for the first time, the hand of the white man drove the Atlantic's murmuring billows against old Plymouth rock, while the receding wave left the ocean's briny tear of joy dangling to the rocky crag, to greet the morning sunbeam which was too glad to form the gilded bow of promise, to those noble Puritan sires who, with gladdened hearts and footsteps light and free, leaped upon the new world, kissed the sod, dedicated it to God and his glory, sang their first song of praise, and offered the first prayer of thanksgiving to the Giver of all good for this land of the free and home of the brave, and then bared their foreheads for the heavenly benedictions of the angels of the Most High.

In New England, in July, 1623, a day of fasting and prayer was appointed on account of a drowth; a rain came abundantly while they were praying, and Gov. Bradford appointed a day of thanksgiving which was observed with religious services; and an annual thanksgiving was observed during the Revolution, but no national appointment was made till after the general thanksgiving for peace in 1784; and the first national appointment was made by Washington in 1789 for the adoption of the constitution.

We need to stop our business occasionally and express our national thanks—like a ship at sea, we should examine our log-book that we may know whether the political tide that sweeps over the affairs of

men, has led us away from the true pole star of our nation's success and glory. Some form of government has always existed; God has given man the foundation of government, the principles of law, it being left in the hands of man as to its exact form, but when that government is thus formulated God holds man responsible for its management, for a government is for the "punishment of evil doers and for the praise of them that do well." "Reverence to God is the tap root of all true patriotism," for "happy is that nation whose God is the Lord," and those who assemble and live out these thanks are the salt of the Republic. Many will spend this day in the many whirl and Bacchanalian revelry and call it all thanksgiving service, but with such God will not be well pleased, for all worship, to be acceptable to him, must be in harmony with his nature. A nation or people that stands out opposed to his design will not prosper. Certain influences will arise that will prostrate their power and their pride.

"God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps on the sea,
And rides upon the storm."

Old Babylon got in the way of God's will, and her king, Nebuchadnezzar, was made to dwell with the beasts and eat grass as the ox, and his son, Belshazzar, made a great feast and praised the gods of gold and silver, and that night his destiny was given in a hand writing on the wall. Soon was that kingdom brought to desolation. Rome rose to be the mistress of the world, but "loose revelry, and riot bold," led her nobles; and vice and folly marked each footstep, and where is Rome to-day? A thing of the past, now only being exhumed from the debris of ages, while history marks her by her classic bards and heroes of the forum. Three hundred years before Christ, Epicurus, an old Athenian philosopher, arose with his followers, with the belief that pleasure was the chief good, and that life was a chance, and there are many Epicureans now who have the same motto, "Eat, drink and be merry, for to-morrow we die." And I doubt not that were we, as a nation, to take this for our motto, that the hand writing of our destiny would soon be seen on the wall of this great Republic. It seems very plain that God was working out a plan in the counsel of his own will for this

land of ours. There are many strange events occur in the affairs of men that after the lesson has been written it is easy for us to read it. At the close of the ten persecutions in Rome they supposed the followers of Christ were all crushed out, but when Constantine came to the throne, he said he saw a representation of the cross of Christ in the air enclosed in with the words "*hoc vinci*," by this you shall conquer. The persecutions ceased. The Christians were simply resting. The dark ages came on, a dark pall, gloomy and sad enshrouded the world of mind; but in the course of time, in the beginning of the eleventh century, the crusades crumbled the opposing forces, and as things melted away the church emerged from the mist and gloomy shades. Then the great Reformation followed, led by Luther and others. Luther shrank from the idea of departing from the religion of his fathers, but God was in the movement, the clouds of superstition were to be riven and the scroll of darkness that hung over the pure word was to be torn away, and in time God sent the Wesleys and Campbells to America to prepare the minds for deeper piety and to take the Bible alone as the religion of Protestants. Thus was the plan fast being executed for the preparation of this land for the Gospel in its purity. So the United States stands to-day as the advance guard of invention and Christianity, and should we not, kind friends, come together with thankful hearts. Josephus says when the Jews were subject to the Romans that two times a day they offered prayer for the Emperor. God's purposes cannot be opposed, so he has always had a praying and thanksgiving people somewhere whom he would guard. When the *May Flower* started for America, God sent a storm that stranded the French fleet that followed the pilgrims, and Puritanic strictness was not entirely disfavored by our Heavenly Father; it was to be crystalized into the national heart for a purpose. Through the Revolution we can see plans being consummated. The ragged regiment that Gen. Gates was ashamed of was raised up to help defend our liberties, and each drop of blood from the feet of Washington's army at Valley Forge was a seed of American liberty. God sent the heavy rains that raised the Catawba behind the retreating American

army, and they were saved from Cornwallis; and God sent a storm at the siege of Yorktown to prevent the retreat of the British across York river. And when Gen. Washington was found in earnest prayer for the success of the American cause, a British officer said, "We will never be able to conquer that man."

Now let us see what has been the result of this great problem.

We have 1st, a free church; 2nd, a free government; 3rd, an equalization of society, with the ballot box as the national safeguard. This nation has no Westminster Abbey, a spot wherein is concealed the dust of kings. No, America needs none, it may matter little where the dust of her heroes rest so their good deeds are a living entity in the hearts and lives of a free people. We look around us at our own happy land and see what she has wrought out for the world. She has given her public school system to the great Empire of Japan, which, till '71, was closed against other nations. She has given to the world the telegraph, the steamboat, the telephone, the electric light, and a thousand other of the grandest improvements and discoveries, that have appeared on the earth. Her natural resources and position on the globe, make her the gem of the ocean. And as a God fearing and God loving people, Pere Hyacinth said on his eve of departure to his French home, "I will go and tell my people what a nation you have here who honor God and revere the Bible." So when foreign immigration comes in they are Americanized, and the Romanists see this, hence they want to overthrow our public school system, for they know the second generation will be Protestants. Gladstone said, "The balance of trade is in favor of America." Look at England, our mother, she ought to be the happiest of all, mistress of the sea, the sun always shining on her territory somewhere, and her civilization everywhere; but she is oppressed in finance; the laboring classes at home and in Ireland crying for bread, with oppression and starvation at the door, her farmers in distress and her artizans packing their tools and turning to our "Land of the Free and home of the Brave." Across the channel, go to France, the home of Lafayette, a Republic, but with a lack of that moral principle and godly reverence that