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# The Feast of Harvest.

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## A THANKSGIVING SERMON;

PREACHED IN THE

Irish Street Presbyterian Church,

On Thursday, November 18, 1858.

BY

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PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

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PHILADELPHIA:

J. W. BRADLEY, PUBLISHER, 48 NORTH FOURTH STREET.

1858.

## EXODUS xxiii. 16.

### "THE FEAST OF HARVEST."

\* WE have assembled again in God's house upon, what may be called, the great religious festival of the American year. These "*Thanksgivings*" of the separate States are taking more and more the character, and, but for a pitiful perversity characteristic of certain Chief Magistrates, would to-day have taken the character altogether, of a grand National Jubilee. Originally Puritanical institutions, they have become a part of our common and ceremonial law, until, all the families of the land look for and enjoy them.

We have selected for this occasion a text, which, to the Executive proclamation calling us together, adds the solemnity of a Divine sanction. It is historic of the existence, and character, of festivals not dissimilar among God's ancient covenant people. Perhaps we have been accustomed to regard the Hebrew religion as especially wanting in the joyous element; doubting almost the possibility of religious gladness, amid its sternly sacrificial rites, and its august doctrinal Theism. But, if so, we have erred widely. Under every Dispensation alike has religion, as set forth by God, been essentially joyous. "*The ways of wisdom,*" whether trodden by the old patri-

archs pitching tents; or by the Levites bearing the Tabernacle; or by the Tribes established in Canaan and going up to the worship of Zion; or by Christians under the fuller light of the Gospel ascending to glory, have been always and altogether "*ways of pleasantness.*"

The pervading spirit of the Hebrew economy was jubilant. Its ritual solemnity was hopeful and triumphant. The later Pharisaism, with its face disfigured, was a monstrous degeneration from the exulting faith of those earlier and palmier days of old Israel, when the harp and the viol, the tabret and cymbal, stringed instruments and organs, were their accessories of worship. Over and above the solemn joy of the daily Temple service, there were several great occasions every year, when the whole Jewish people kept religious festival by Divine appointment.

The design of these anniversaries is apparent. They served as perpetual memorials of grand historic events in their national experience; they counteracted the unsocial tendencies of their peculiar tribal divisions; and, by bringing the males of the people periodically together in their great central City, repressed local and sectional jealousies, and consolidated different Tribes into one composite nation; they moreover afforded the whole people stated seasons of recreation, so necessary to the development of man's physical and moral nature.

With such evident purposes of good did God appoint them, and the old Jews kept them fittingly. Probably the world has never witnessed the parallel of these Hebrew anniversaries. At their approach,

the whole nation woke to holiday: every heart bounded, every eye flashed. From valley to mountain top, the land broke forth into singing, and cottage, and palace, and hamlet, and city, with harp and song and festal procession, were joyous before God. Jerusalem, then the glory of the whole earth, the City of the great King, was thronged with exulting thousands. Not only the chiefs and nobles of the Tribes, but the mighty men of the whole earth, philosophers, and sages, and conquerors, and kings—proselytes from furthest lands—came up in their pomp and power, to keep exulting festival before God in the grand central City of their glorious faith.

Now of one of these national holidays, we have record in the text—"THE FEAST OF HARVEST."—This was their Pentecost. So called from a Greek word signifying "*Fifty*"—because it occurred on the fiftieth day from the feast of unleavened bread. It was properly a Harvest festival, in which the Jew offered thanksgiving unto God for having kindly brought unto fulness the ripened fruits of the earth.

To understand the peculiar interest the Jew took in this holiday, you must remember that the Israelites, after their establishment in Canaan, were almost entirely a nation of farmers. The peasant and the noble, in their respective spheres, were alike husbandmen. While a small portion of the tribes on the eastern side of Jordan led a purely pastoral life, the great body of the people were engaged mainly in the cultivation of the soil. And they were encouraged in agriculture, as no other people have ever been, by their peculiar civil economy. By Divine direction, not

only did every tribe have the ownership of its particular province, but each family in the tribe had as well its specified inheritance, which could never be wholly alienated. No great landholding aristocracy could therefore arise among them. The poorest Jew was by law a full proprietor of the soil. His homestead was a freehold by irrevocable title. If for a time alienated by debt or misfortune, it returned to him again unincumbered at the year of Jubilee. Every husbandman felt, therefore, that all improvements in his freehold were for the benefit of himself, and his children. And, under this encouragement to labor, the whole land of Israel was in the highest state of cultivation. Probably, in this respect, no country on earth ever equalled it. Naturally a land of rare productiveness, it was well described as "*a good land of brooks, of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of the valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil-olive and honey; wherein they should eat bread without scarceness, and should not lack any good thing*"—a land, in a word, altogether unrivalled in its exuberant and exhaustless productiveness. And possessed of such a freehold, encouraged to its culture and improvement by such immunities, it is not wonderful that the Land of Promise becomes the garden of the world.

The peculiar productions of all zones were native to its widely diversified soil and climate. Grains of all species grew richly on the plains; plantations of olives covered its sandy hills; its low clay soils nourished groves of stately palms; its sharp mountain sides were hung with the ripe clusters of vineyards.

Even the rocks in precipitous places were made fertile by artificial embankments; so that in the autumn time, corn fields, and vineyards, and orange groves, and orchards, and forests, rose in ascending circles from valley to hill top, covering the whole landscape with lavish beauty, till the old Canaan seemed fittingly a very emblem of Heaven.

Now, we say, that unto such a people, inhabiting such a country, this Feast of Harvest was necessarily a grand and glorious festival. Its annual return could not but wake the nation to gladness. Fair and befitting were the exulting rites of that old holiday, when from every hamlet and home, from glens of the vine and olive, and from valleys golden with corn, the thousands of Israel went up to appear before God in Zion, filling the land, as they passed, with those old choral harmonies: "Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion. For he hath strengthened the bars of thy gates; he hath blessed thy children within thee. He maketh peace in thy borders, and filleth thee with the finest of the wheat. He hath not dealt so with any nation. Praise ye the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in the firmament of his power. Praise him with the sound of the trumpet. Praise him with the timbrel and dance. Kings of the earth, and all people: princes and all judges of the earth: both young men and maidens, old men and children. Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord."

Such was the Harvest-feast of God's covenant people. And herein have we warrant for such feasts among ourselves. Without pressing again the anal-

ogy between this American people and the old Hebrew nation, we find in our circumstances this day, precisely the things which rendered these festivals personally, and politically, and religiously, a necessity in their history.

We, too, want great national and religious holidays, *to keep in mind great national providences*. Our history as a people has been as manifestly distinguished as theirs by Divine interposals of mercy; and we, too, should have great annual gatherings, to make grateful acknowledgment of God's wonderful deliverances; thus setting up in the hearts even of children's children, grand memorial-pillars—our Ebenezers of Divine help unto all generations.

We need them, moreover, as verily as the Jews, *for their conservative political influence*—to counteract the sectional and unsocial tendencies of our great tribal divisions. As the old memories of Moses and Joshua, and the triumph at the Red Sea, and the mighty victories of the Exodus—revived and perpetuated by their yearly festivals—bound the several tribes together in loving brotherhood; so would it be with us. And if we could have, like them, a grand national Pentecost—something like our Fourth of July, as it lay in the thought of old John Adams and George Washington—as it ought to be, and would be, without its gas and gunpowder—a sublime national tribe-gathering!—reviving strongly in the great American heart the memories of Plymouth Rock, and Jamestown, and Bunker Hill, and Mount Vernon—memories of our old deliverances and triumphs—deepening, as with the chisel of an old

Mortality, the inscriptions which the lapse of time and the ruthless storms of party and fanaticism are so sadly defacing on our old monuments of a common and glorious Past—hanging new garlands, woven by loving hands and fragrant with the dew of old memories, upon the tombs of men, that, like Israel's champions, led us in our Exodus, and established us in our Canaan. I say, if we could come up nationally to such Pentecosts, then no living man would ever again dare breathe of *discord* and *disunion*—for chords, tender as our loves and stronger than our lives, woven of religion and holy with old memories, as the memorial festivals uniting Judah and Ephraim, would bind us together and bind us to God!

Meanwhile we need such Pentecostal holidays for those *personal* advantages which they brought to the Hebrews. They furnish that harmless relaxation so constitutionally necessary to our highest well-being. Real pleasure, as well physical as moral, is always the true law of life. Even “at God's right hand,” “fullness of joy” is the proposed end of our being. Not indeed lawless and frivolous gratifications, but pleasures of that serene and celestial quality, which invigorates the body and ennoble the soul. And such pleasures demand for their exercise seasonable relaxations.

Now if there is any thing the American people need it is *recreation*. Perhaps we have enough of an enervating dissipation. But true pleasure *re-creates*, and we need re-creating. We want great, noble, national, holidays. Such as God appointed to the Jews in their annual festivals.

Our *Physical* nature needs them. We do not live out half our days because the bow is ever bent—the sinew ever strained—the brain ever scheming. Men that ought to be young at sixty, are superannuated at thirty. Boyhood is bald-headed, and middle age hobbles on crutches. Our life chords are broken by over-tension: there is no break upon the ear, no escape-valve for the vapor, and the physical man is shattered by the very speed of its flight.

Our *moral* nature needs them. Human virtues are like flowers that thrive best in the sunshine. Plato, the philosophic moralist, encouraged in his disciples moods of exuberant gayety, checking their joyous impulses only at the approach of some grave formalist; saying: "Silence now, my friends, let us be wise—*there is a fool coming.*"

Stupid gravity is not virtue, else the ass and the owl, the most portentously grave of all animals, were our models of manhood. True virtue is genial, and joyous; walking earth in bright raiment, and with bounding footsteps. And the nervous, restless, unrepining, devouring intensity of purpose wherewith our men follow their business, is as disastrous to the nobler moral bloom and aroma of the heart, as a roaring hurricane, to a garden of roses.

Above all, our *religious* nature needs them. The true joy of the Lord is the Christian's strength. Cheerfulness is a very element of godliness. Religion is not the stern heroism of the soul clothed in sack-cloth, and marching to martyrdom. It is rather the perfect harmony of all the soul's faculties moving together in that music of joy and love, in which the

whole man marches heavenward. To come to Christ, is not to abide in tombs, cutting ourselves with stones, and terrifying with our self-torturing cries every passing traveller—but it is rather, to come abroad from these Gadarene graves, having the sorrowful devil cast out of us, that we may return to our loving homes, jubilant and exulting. Piety is not a poisonous mushroom, growing best in the night, but a fragrant rose of Sharon, needing the sunshine. True religion asks, and will have recreations, if denied the pure, it will seek the perverted. The old Puritans strove hard to render religion a torment, and, in their dread of recreations, having abandoned all true amusement to Satan, were forced to seek Satanic amusement, hunting Quakers as wild beasts, and making bonfires of witches.

The old Jews did this thing better with their joyous holidays; when with harp and viol, they went up to Zion. Jehovah was not mistaken in the religious regimen of his children. He knew, and provided for, a great want of their natures, when he appointed their festivals. The American church sorely needs a like baptism of gladness, that shall send her to her Zion with bounding feet, and shining garments, making manifest to the world, that the service of God is not a sore bondage, but that the ways of pleasantness are her pathways to glory.

It is right, therefore, on all these grounds, and on others; it is right, it is fitting, it befits our higher frames and moods of true piety, that, on occasions like the present, we should dismiss from our minds

all sorrowful emotions, and "worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."

This is our Pentecost—our feast of harvest. And even in its lowest aspect, *as a grateful acknowledgment of God's goodness, in preserving for our use the kindly fruits of the earth*, it is a fitting occasion of thankfulness.

We have come to the close of a year of great plenty; our fields have yielded their increase, and our garners groan with supplies for the famine of a world. And for this we should keep joyous festival before God.

We, indeed, who live in great cities, oftentimes overlook this. In considering the evidences of our national prosperity, we ignore the Agricultural. Arts, Manufactures, Commerce, in those we rejoice. Is the stock-market buoyant? Do the banks discount freely? Are our emporiums crowded with stuffs and merchantmen? Is the hum of industry loud in our workshops? Is the canvass of commerce white on our waters? These are the questions wherewith we seek evidences of our national prosperity. But herein we forget the greater interest whereon these things hinge—the interests of Agriculture—the simpler thrift, and surer, if slower, gains of the husbandman.

True it is, the princely manufacturer or merchant, sometimes casts a kindly eye over the cheering records of the corn-trade, and says, "Well, bread-stuffs are cheaper, and the poor man should be thankful." As if the fruits of the earth were to the poor man, more than the rich, God's noble benefaction. Alas,

foolish reasoner! Let the labor of the husbandman fail—let God shut up the heavens that they rain not, and parch the plough-ground into barrenness, and what becomes of the rich man? Can he grind his gold with millstones? or leaven his bank stock into bread? with all his hoarded wealth will he not starve side by side with the beggar in the midst of the famine? Ah, these ears of ripened corn, are the true germs of life for the great human household!

The wheels of our workshops, the sails of our commerce, the implements of science, the pen of genius, the pencil and chisel of artists, the eloquent tongue of the orator, the scheming brain of the statesman, the equipages of wealth, the banquetings of pleasure, all—all that render earth, in its tides of life, anything but a great sepulchre—move, and have being and power, only because the fields yield their fruits to the patient toil of the husbandman. We might manage to live without merchants, without manufacturers, without mariners, without orators, without politicians, without poets,—perhaps we might possibly survive the loss of demagogues and opera-singers, and prize-fighters and congressmen. To read some of the newspapers, one would think we might live without a President; but *sure I am we could not live without Ploughmen!*

Suspend for a single twelvemonth the world's practical agriculture, and death's shadow is over it. Our harvests are our sustenance; and in their prodigal abundance should be gathered joyfully. *Life* for you, and for me, and for all of us,—Life, with all its energies and aims and ambitions, its love and hope and

joy,—Life in the heart, the household, the home; that grand and glorious thing, LIFE, hath ripened for us in these golden sheaves, and gone unto the garner. And our feast of harvest should be kept like the Jews, as a grand religious holiday.

It is scarcely possible to over-estimate the importance of agriculture. It surpasses commerce and manufacture, as a cause is superior to its effects,—as an inner life is of more moment than its various outward functions. We talk of the immense commerce of England,—when, in fact, she pays more annually for fertilizers of her lands than the entire gains of her commerce; and the total value of her year's crop, animal and vegetable, was some time ago reported to Parliament to be three thousand millions of dollars.

Meanwhile, the *reflex* influences of industrial agriculture on our physical and social well-being are as well incalculable. After all, the finest products of our farm-lands are found *in our farm-houses*. Things better than corn and cabbages are grown on plough-ground,—bone, muscle, sinew, nerve, brain, heart; these all thrive and strengthen by agriculture. The specimens of strong, hale, common-sense MANHOOD seen at our annual Fairs are a finer show than all the fat cattle and sheep and noble horses, and the brave array of farm-fruits and implements. Agriculture purifies morals, chastens taste, deepens the religious element, develops the individual man. And it were a giant's stride in human progress if the whole multitude of non-producing drones that swarm in our market-places, (politicians, speculators, fast men, rich

idlers,) were driven into the rural districts, to cultivate at the same time cabbages and *themselves*.

Then, too, the genius of American agriculture is politically Democratic, or (if the Solons of our time have discovered a difference to us unintelligible) Republican. It allows no aristocratic monopoly of the soil. The one-man power, or the few-men power, gives place here of necessity to the every-man power in the proprietorship of small freeholds.

Most easy were it to show, had we time, how incalculable are the benefits of agriculture to all classes; and to make manifest the dependence of our modern civilization, social and political, upon the agricultural interest.

No wonder, then, that the Jew kept his Pentecost! No wonder that in brave old Scotland men went afield with sickle and bagpipe, reaping the ripened corn to sounds of sweet music! No wonder that the fairest of festivals was the sweet old "Harvest home" of merry England! No wonder that, in view of what God has done for us, as Lord of the harvest, we, looking forth upon the wealth of fruitful fields outside our pent-up cities—that grander world, beyond the narrow world of Trade, the shallow world of fashion, that world of dew, and sunshine, and bursting buds, and bending fruits, where every hill breathes a benison, and every valley is odorous with blessing—at the close of a year whose wealth of golden spoil might spread luxuriously the boards of famishing nations; no marvel, I say, that we, a blessed people in all our borders, should gather in these Temples

where our fathers worshipped with our offering of First-fruits to the God of the harvest.

This, then, is the first and lowest aspect of our annual Thanksgiving—a *time of praise to God for the ripened fruits of the earth*. But then it has higher aspects. It had even to the Jews. When first brought forth from Egyptian servitude, they knew little truly of God; they thought of Him, as of the dead idols of the Nile; and these feasts of harvest taught them to recognize the Divine agency in life's common blessings. But, as they advanced in intellectual Theology, these festivals took a wider, and loftier range and meaning. The feast of the Passover, at first commemorative of the deliverance from Egypt, came to be regarded as prophetic of Christ's coming sacrifice. And the feast of Pentecost, originally a simple expression of thankfulness for Harvests, became successively a memorial. *First*, of the giving of the Law at Sinai, and *Secondly*, of the descent of the Holy Ghost at Jerusalem. So that, in their later history, this feast of harvest, was an occasion of thanksgiving, not merely for annual physical blessings, but for all their distinguishing mercies, both civil and religious.

And so should it be with us. Our Thanksgiving is partly in view of the ripened fruits of the earth; but mainly in view of other and higher blessings. And in this regard, as well, it is properly—a *feast of harvest*. In respect of all things; not merely the natural fruits of the Earth; but all great human interests, Political, Intellectual, Religious. We may be said to live, *in the world's great Harvest-time!* We

have reaped, and are reaping, the ripened and ripening fruits of all Earth's past generations. Consider this a little.

First: This is true—*Politically*—Philosophically considered the grand end and aim of all civil progress is *human freedom*—the highest development and culture of the individual and free manhood. Monarchy the one-man-power, Oligarchy the few-men-power, are but the successive stages of the growing life, up to the ripened product of the true Democracy—the all-men-power. To this end hath tendered all political progress; and beyond this there is no progress. This is the harvest of Earth's long political husbandry; and *we* are reaping it. Till the great American development, the world had known no true Democracy. The old Republicans, falsely so called, were not forms of self-government, but things rudimental and embryonic; the mind's abortive and premature struggles to bring forth freedom. And our American Nationality is the "first fruits" of true liberty. It is, indeed, but the *first* fruits. In one respect this Nationality is only a *germ*—the first sowing of a true seed for a great harvest of Republics, which we know not of as yet—a handful of corn on the mountains, that, in its diffusion of enlightened liberty and universal self-government, shall yet wave like Lebanon in the grand harvest of the world. "The world will be either Cossack or Republican," said Napoleon, and we say, not Cossack, for the world in God's husbandry, not for tares but for wheat.

Ours is but the first fruits, but then they are *ripe* fruits! The great human Aloe hath shot forth one

glorious spike, and brought forth one blossom? For centuries the race made its slow progress from the gnarled roots of the elder Despotisms. On the Trans-Atlantic continents, Empires rose, and flourished, and fell; Rome, Greece, Persia, Assyria, Egypt,—in each human nature struggled, into great forms and developments of life. There were buds, and green leaves, and early blossoms, amid the mighty branches; but, alas, the unripened fruit was shaken by convulsions, and fell as the fig tree casteth her untimely figs! But at last, in this western world, the fruits of true Liberty seem ripening in the sunshine. No man can read our past history, and not cry out in faith, “this is God’s husbandry!” The careful keeping of this virgin soil for a new product—the winnowing, amid wild convulsions, as with fire and flame, of the old humanity, for a new seed to scatter on this glorious plough-ground—the germination, the strong rooting, the slow growth, amid seething rains and whistling storms of our struggling Colonial life. These are the manifestations of a grand Divine husbandry!

Who questions it longer? Verily, it is a story of marvels! That feeble folk, like seed by the wayside, on Plymouth Rock, and the Peninsula of Jamestown—that struggle for existence, as of untimely buds for life, amid the chill blasts and rank growths of the wilderness—but, as the germs rooted and shot upward, that miraculous progress, as the green vine of Nineveh—hamlet after hamlet, city after city, State after State,—the stupendous growth of a virgin world—rising up in their strength; shooting downward strong roots, and upward great branches; and

yet, not according to the old vegetable law—each the germ of a separate and independent life—but, rather like the mighty Indian tree, the lengthening branch bending downward to the ground, forming for itself new roots, and becoming a new trunk, till the whole land is covered with the growth of *a single tree*, with the seeming of a forest—so, all these Sovereign States, covering a Continent, and yet all bound by the common law and life of freedom, into one grand Composite Nation! Verily here is Divine working!

Look at America as she stands before you this day. Her agriculture, her arts, her commerce, her happy homes, her great cities, her matchless civil franchises, her institutions of knowledge and charity, her broad boundaries, her vast resources, her magic progress in the inspiration of her youthful and exulting life, her present beatitude, her boundless and magnificent future, as she stands the living embodiment of civil and religious freedom—the shooting of the civil life of all generations into one grand century flower of humanity! Look at all this, I say, and then tell me if this seems not a harvest field in man’s golden autumn? And whether your thought be of the struggles of old nations to bring forth freedom: or of our own historic struggles for colonial life; tell me, if the *ripened grain* waves not in the fields around us, and our thanksgiving this day for civil and national blessings be not unto our God—a *great feast of Harvests*?

Then passing from the *Political*, the same thought is true in regard of the *Intellectual*. It is a thought well worthy our pondering, on an occasion like this—

*that we live in the harvest time of mind and thought!* Carefully considered, the development of the "Mental," follows the law of material development. "First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." Genius is first poetical; then practical. First the flaunting blossom: then the substantial fruit. From the beginning, man's law of intellectual progress has been, from the abstract to the practical—from Ideas to Facts. The Practical, being the fruit of the Imaginative, as the ripened corn is the fruit of the plant's inner life. And, as the plant-germ must experience its successive vegetable transformations before it ripens out fruit, so it would seem necessary for every great thought to pass through a series of embryonic changes, before it can attain to a perfect and practical development. And in this respect we seem to live in man's intellectual harvest-time. The generations ago have been times of preparation—the seasons of thought-germ, and thought-blossom, rather than of thought-fruit. We cannot enlarge here, but must content ourselves with a few illustrations of the truth—that in our time the old speculative and sentimental "Ideas" have become great "practical Facts."

The old *Astrology*, which, looking upon the stars as prophetic hieroglyphics, and reading therein the fate of men and empires, burst into radiant but poisonous blossoms of superstition, on the plains of Assyria and beneath the blue Egyptian heavens, hath ripened into a grand practical science, till our *Astronomy* elevated the race into the regions of most useful philosophy and loftiest knowledge of God.

The splendid yet disastrous dreams of the old *Alchymy*, have showered their false blooms and ripened into a grand science, until the wild visions of the philosopher's stone, the universal solvent, the universal medicine, are more than realized in the immeasurable benefits unto agriculture and manufactures and the arts of true practical *Chemistry*.

The old *Magnetism*, whose highest aim was to furnish playthings for children, was the toy-blossom which has ripened now into substantial fruit; and, in the *mariner's compass*, furnished a key to the gates of ocean, and a guide through the mighty paths of the sea, and given unto man the islands and continents of a world.

The idle fancy of the old Hollander, *carving rude letters in beech bark*, for sport, was the thought-germ, whose perfected fruit is the *Printing Press*—that gigantic power on the earth, before which, the old despotisms and superstitions of the world are passing away as mists from a sunburst—whose earthly results are all the wonders of progressive civilization, and whose heavenly utterances, are the leaves of the Tree of Life, for the healing of the nations!

*Steam*—that fantastic shape that played aerial, and useless, before the eyes of old dreamers—hath assumed a personality of glory and power. And the thought-germ, that seemed a vanishing vapor, is to-day, the mightiest reality of life—Man's Titanic Servant everywhere; chained in the dark caverns of the earth; fettered to the wheels of great machinery; harnessed on the thoroughfares of traffic; rushing through the valleys; leaping on the mountains;

whispering gallery, rolls again sullenly voiceless above its hidden secrets—nevertheless we say, it did become the world to exult over this new and magnificent development—*this ripening into fruit of one of God's great thought-flowers!*—this progress from a weak germ into waving harvest, of one of those stupendous purposes whereby God, “dividing the water-courses for a way for His lightnings,” is lifting the race from the ancient thralldom, into his own glorious liberty, and setting up, on the ruins of old Empires, the throne of his Son in triumph and forever!

Now we might multiply our illustrations indefinitely, but our limits forbid. The thought is—That, in the historic progress of the race, every great philosophic discovery passes slowly, like the germination and growth of a plant, from the embryonic of speculation, or sentimental thought, to the practical and useful of life's great realities. And that in this regard, it is our high privilege to live in the *harvest-time*. In past generations, intellect has been busy in a rudimental husbandry—felling the great forests; draining the low marshes; subduing the rugged soil; scattering the seed; and watching, and waiting for the increase. The old philosophy; the old civilization; the old politics, civil and ecclesiastical; the old chivalry; the old poetry—these were the thought-germs, the thought-leaves, the thought-blossoms, which have ripened, and are ripening around us into God's glorious fruit!

We live in earth's prodigal and luxuriant autumn—in times when marvelous things are the rule, and mean things the exception—in an economy of pro-

digies, each one a seeming miracle to men's earlier comprehension, and yet all, only the ripened development of their own thought-germs!—And if the law of all husbandry be—“to sow in tears and reap in joy”—then, our thanksgiving, that we live in these eventful times, should be unto God, this day—a *great feast of Harvest!*

III. Passing this, we observe once more and *Finally*—That this same law of development, we have been tracing through the *Political* and *Intellectual*, will be found to rule in THE SPIRITUAL—and in this regard should we mainly rejoice, that we live in life's Harvest time.

From the first rude altar at the gate of Paradise to the magnificent Temple in Jerusalem, the religious development under the old dispensation was—like vegetable life—from the shooting germ to the splendid blossom. But even then it was but a blossom! That Levitical economy, even in its perfection, was only preparatory to the evangelical,—a cumbrous scaffolding to an inner spiritual building!—types and shadows, that found antitype and substance in Christ the Redeemer! Nor even with the coming of Christ did the religious progress end. Hope, rather than fruition, was the law even of Apostolic service. From the hour of Christ's ascension to heaven, *The Future*—the magnificent future; the unimagined, mysterious, transcendent, latter-day glory—was that for which faithful men waited and labored and prayed. These men lived in the *Gospel's great seed-time*.

True, indeed, there was even from the first a per-

petual gathering of scattered bundles on the earth for the heavenly garner. But the great harvest of the race delayed its coming. And yet that harvest must come,—yea, alike from prophecy and the signs of the times, we judge that even now it is ripening around us.

No thoughtful man can have failed to perceive, as a peculiarity of this generation, a grand awakening of the human mind unto what we may call *The Spiritual*. True, indeed, the set thitherward of the popular thought seems oftentimes in false directions. Our Spiritualized Philosophy is æronautical, losing itself in the clouds,—borne heavenward by unsavory and inflammable gases. Our Poetry, under the Spiritual afflatus, has become mystically spasmodic,—uttering transcendental nothings, very wild and *very watery*. Even our popular Spiritualism, as a *Religion*, sits at the feet of tipping, rapping, trance-speaking, psychologized imposture; its man-prophets clairvoyant and celestial, with a very weak and unwholesome inspiration,—its woman-prophets strong-minded and seraphic, as witches in Endor.

And yet, all these things, ludicrous and lamentable as they are, self-considered, nevertheless, as indications of the movement of the popular mind, are, to a thoughtful man, full of moment. They are like refuse wood on the waters, indicating the great tide-currents of thought towards a higher Spirituality,—like sere leaves, falling in a forest, signifying with their sad voices that the autumn-time is near, with its grand gathering of harvest.

Nor are these signs false. For, in the midst of

these manifestations, *the true Church of God hath been wonderfully roused to a new life of Spirituality!* Let us look as suspiciously as we will upon the great Revival of the present year; and make what abatements we may, in view of false elements and accessories. Nevertheless, no man can fail to perceive a movement, unique and universal in the Church, of a power that seems like a new advent of the Comforter. Nor will the true student of history be likely to question its *permanency*.

Since Christ came there have been but three revival seasons comparable with the present; the old Pentecost, in the first century, the Reformation in the sixteenth, and the great Awakening in the eighteenth; and each of these was an epoch of change in the Church, not only general, but permanent. Each lifted the Church to, and left her in, a higher spiritual condition.

Now, if this be the law of the present, then we seem to be drawing nigh to the great millennial day-spring! Hitherto we have enjoyed partial and periodic revivals; but to-day the movement seems world-wide. The old religious forces have been Divinely quickened. Through the old channels Divine grace is flowing as a spring-time flood, till the banks are overflowed with the waters of Salvation; and sectarianism, that went forth of old to dig separate rills for its own feeble vine, sits now exulting in the great wave of Salvation that waters into strength the whole glorious vineyard.

A new law of Christian progress has come. The silent power of this revival, its signal permanency, its

seemingly universality; the desire, the hope, the fixed purpose, under God, that it shall remain permanent and universal; all these give it the seeming of the dawn of the world's great harvest.

Let a man walk through the husbandry of a land, and find, here and there, a small field, wherein are a few ripened and scattered ears, and he regards them as the premature fruits of a shallow soil, or an untempered sun, and reads therein no sure sign of the golden autumn. But if, on the contrary, as he walks aboad, he finds the whole land roused by a common impulse—if every hamlet is noisy with men who sharpen the sickle and drive the wain afield—if all the sunny mountain-slopes are vocal with the song of the grape-gatherers, and the mower's scythe gleams in every valley, and reapers bind the yellow sheaves in all the great corn-fields—then he feels sure that no inconsiderable and untimely growth is being gathered, but that truly the latter rains have fallen, and autumnal suns have warmed the broad earth, and that this song of girded men is the great hymn of harvest.

And just so do the signs of the present times—this universal expectancy—this universal preparation—this universal labor—this unwonted activity of earnest men, in every village and hamlet in the land to gather fruit unto salvation—this mingling together in the toil, of all Christian sects in harmonious brotherhood—this opening of new fields of labor; new channels of labor; new agencies of labor—this expectation, in all hearts; sometimes indeed faint; sometimes strong and exultant; yet felt everywhere, that this Revival-state is to become the permanent condition of the

Church's life—these arguments, and purposes, and prayers, and humble, yet God-relying and steadfast determinations, that Christianity shall not sink again from this quickened vitality to the old frames of formal and dead Pharisaism—all these things I say seem, must seem, the results of no local and accidental causes, but the direct inspiration of the Divine Spirit, pouring a new life through the old ecclesiastical being—quickening the steady, onward, majestic march of God's redeemed people, to gather into one great garner the harvests of the world!

In respects then, like these, Political, Intellectual, Religious, we live in times of unexampled blessedness. We have come up to Zion from hills purple with vintage, and valleys golden with corn, *in the rapturous Harvest-home of the Mortal!* And it becomes us to keep festival before God, as the old Jew kept his Pentecost. As men, as patriots, as philanthropists, as Christians our cup of joy mantles brightly. What more could God have done for us that he hath not done? What people can be happy before God, if we are not happy? The spirit of *unthankfulness* that, in an hour like this, presents itself before the Lord, must have come from wandering up and down in the Earth, like Job's Satan. It is the monstrous Demon of discontent that drove the poor Gadarene from the fair face of nature, and the loving voices of his home, to cut his flesh with stones, and abide in the tombs; and it ought to be cast out into the wandering swine and the roaring waters.

Oh how happy we ought to be before the Lord to-day! The man who complains now, must be that

very Goliath of unrest, whose discontent feeds upon God's mercies—whose eyes are like the owls' pained only by life's brightness—and who grumbles the most grandly, just, and only because *he hath nothing to grumble at?*

We do not say that there may not be troubled hearts here. Oh, no indeed! For we know too well how life's roses have thorns, and life's music its undertones! We know how some of you have come up to God's house, from homes made sad by bereavements. Your stream in the desert hath been embittered like Marah! Your garden of life, darkened like Gethsemane! And yet we know as well, that even unto you, God hath not forgotten to be gracious. There was a sweetening branch by the desert spring; and a strengthening Angel in the garden's shadow! And the pulses of your stricken hearts bound in grateful love unto your sustaining and comforting Redeemer!

Sure I am, there should be no thankless heart to-day in the assembly of God's people. Unto no creatures out of Heaven, hath there ever been accorded a lot like our lot. Living here, in this Nineteenth century, free men, free Christians—we seem to stand on the very mount of God, flung up in the waste of Ages, for the enthronement of His great MAN-CHILD! We look *backward*, and lo! all the past has been working together for our national and individual beatitude.

Patriarchs, prophets, bards, sages, mighty men, conquerors, have all been our servants. Generation after generation, that have lived and died—great Empires' that have risen and flourished, and trod im-

perial paths, and passed away for ever, seem to rise from their old death-dust, and march in vision before us, laying down all their accumulated thoughts, and arts, and honors—all the trophies of their mighty triumphs in homage at our feet! We look *forward*, and the eye is dazzled with the vision of the glory about to be accorded to God's kingly creature, MAN! when standing upon this redeemed world, he shall assert his birthright—*a child of God here! an heir of God forever!*

Verily, we have cause for Thanksgiving. "*The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad.*"

Nor is this all. Here, as elsewhere, there is perceivable an exact harmony between God's *Providential* and His *Gracious* economies—a beautiful adaptation of outward conditions to inward character. As the shell ever breaks around the young bird's sprouting plumes and strengthening pinions, so the sphere of life, ever enlarging with the life's growing strength!

How strikingly manifest is this in the Church's present experience. How wonderfully has God widened her fields of labor, in exact proportion to her roused energies for labor! That moving back of the iron gates of China to the march of Christian civilization—that lifting of the black curtain from Africa, which had so long concealed from the Church's gaze her benighted millions—that fearful Sepoy revolt, wherein, amid the agonies of God's martyrs, ancestral heathenism severed the sinew of her own strength, and rocked into dust her own impregnable fastnesses—that wonderful movement in the old northern Slavonic Despotism of intellectual and moral life, toward that

full and free manhood which the truth makes free—that marvellous co-operation in our day, of the great national powers of the earth, arrayed and advancing in companionship for Christianity against the old Pagan Despotisms. Verily, I say, these things, and such as these, look like the widening of fields around and enlargement of energies! Seem like the comprehensive plan and preparation of an Omniscient Husbandman! The fall of the latter rains and the genial summer suns, bringing the corn to its earing; and meanwhile the preparation of implements, and opening of garner, as the roused reapers make haste to gather for God the Great Harvest of the World!

Say not then, oh faithless heart! *“Say not there are four months and then cometh harvest, Behold I say unto you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are already white to harvest.”* The sounds that in this eventful hour startle us from earth’s valleys and hills, are sounds of the *great Autumn!* The time of the old prophetic vision draweth nigh, when the earth shall be the Lord’s and the fullness thereof; when all the energies of the race shall work together for Christianity; and upon all earth’s moving wheels, and spreading canvas, and all her power, and progress, and civilization, “Holiness to the Lord” shall be the blessed blazon—That “Time of times,” which patriarchs wept for in yearning faith, and prophets beheld afar off in their wrapt visions of God; when the Divine Tabernacle shall be visibly with men, and the New Jerusalem descend bodily to the earth—that time draweth near! Already is the eastern heaven purpling with the great Day-spring.

And coming up thus to Zion in life’s golden Autumn—when the last trumpet is sounding and angel-reapers are abroad in God’s husbandry—tell me, if in contrast with the experience of other generations, our “Thanksgiving” for what our eyes see, and our ears hear, should not be unto God—a great feast of Harvest!

Let us give then free course to our grateful emotions! Thankful for the present, trustful for the future; let us rejoice before God “with the joy of Harvest.” As the old Hebrew husbandman came with his offering of First-Fruits, forgetting, in his present moods of joy, all past disquietudes—the weary toil of the seed-time, and watching-time—the wild storm; the seething rain; the chilling blight; the devouring insect—forgetting these, or remembering them only to deepen his sense of that Divine Goodness which, in spite of them all, had brought the full corn to the earing. So let us, forgetful of all past trials and disquietudes—all shadows that darkened our sunshine—all storms that troubled our waters—all financial reverses—all political and partizan jealousies—all ecclesiastical and sectarian strife—forgetting all these, or remembering them only as new reasons for present thankfulness—turning from all shadows of old griefs; from all valleys of sadness, if thitherward have wandered our pilgrim feet; and coming up, this morning, to the serene mountain-top, where the sun shines, and the dews of heaven lie fair and sweet; only mindful of, and thankful for, the present hours of joy! Like the mariner, that with his bark anchored for a brief day, goes ashore to

his children's cottage on the hills! Like the warrior, that released for an hour from the stern bivouac and battle, unbraces his cumbrous mail and pitches his tent with the husbandman!—thus standing together on earth's high places, let us be strong and rejoice in the loving kindness of God! And when here in our chosen sanctuary, as the Jew on Mount Zion, we have paid our solemn vows, and rendered our First-fruits of love to God in a living consecration—then, as that same Jew returned to his distant heritage, filling the soft airs of Palestine with glad songs, and waking the echoes of its landscapes with bounding feet; so let us get us again to *our* homes—these earthly dwellings as truly God's gift as those possessions in Canaan—these homes hallowed by Divine goodness; by the voices, the ministries, the gentle looks of love; by memorials, tenderly sad it may be, but cherished and heavenly, of the beloved dead—to these firesides where children play; these boards where kinsfolk gather; driving out every reptile of discontent, every bird of evil omen from our bowers of peace; hanging the heavenly lamp of Hope from our lowly lintel—our hearts, like the lark that having first soared to the sky to warble its praise around the portals of the Temple of Heaven, sinks again softly and gladly to its nest of love in the dewy grass! So let us go down from our Zion, as the Jew from the Mount of God to his own humbler dwelling, in glens of vine and olive, or valleys golden with corn—peaceful, joyous, thankful for the *present*; and for the *future*, full of faith, of hope; looking forward to that hour—to some of us so near—when, in the great Au-

tumn of Time, gathered by Angel-reapers, borne by God's flaming chariot to such a Harvest-home as no husbandman ever knew! we shall take our joyous way up through these lustrous heavens, along yon starry paths, through those gates of pearl, through those golden streets, through those portals of the Many Mansions—that there—in that Eternal Temple; in those blissful homes where this mortal Love puts on Immortality—there, with the beloved dead; with the countless multitude bearing palms and white robes; with Angel and Archangel before the Throne; we may keep unto God—

A GREAT FEAST OF HARVEST!