

A THANKSGIVING MESSAGE

What have we to be thankful for? For health? All do not enjoy this blessing; let those be thankful who, by inheritance or by their own care, have escaped a chronic or constitutional disease. For friends? No one need be without these, for nothing is easier to secure. The world is full of love and sympathy, upon which drafts can be made without limit by those who show themselves friendly. No one is so humble or obscure that he can not attach to himself a circle of friends if he will but be a friend to others. The little acts of kindness that flow from an unselfish interest in humankind, and especially in neighbors, can not fail to win grateful appreciation. If one is alone in the world, it is usually because he repels friendship by his selfishness.

Is it for happiness that we should be thankful? That is largely in our own keeping. Death may sadden for a time; sickness may discourage; calamities may cripple; misfortunes may overwhelm one; but still it may be asserted that whether one's life is happy or not depends more upon the man within than upon the circumstances without. With some, grinding poverty imparts to life a gloom that can not be entirely dispelled, but it is scarcely more of a bar to happiness than idleness. Between the two extremes is the great middle class, whose members labor with hope, feed themselves with food convenient to them, and escape alike the despair of the destitute and the ennui that follows in the wake of luxury.

But let us turn to those causes of thanksgiving which we share in common. Each individual must decide for himself whether he is more or less fortunate than those about him, and whether his good fortune or misfortune is due to himself alone or to others, but there are benefits which have come to all the members of this generation which are worthy to be enumerated.

THE CONVENIENCES OF MODERN LIFE

The present generation is blest beyond any preceding one; the conveniences of life contribute, as never before, to health, comfort, and progress. This article is written in a sheltered nook on Snake river, in Idaho, just below Shoshone Falls. Within the memory of man, the trip across the desert was a toilsome one, attended by many dangers and hardships. Even ten years ago to reach this place we had to drive twenty-five miles in a stage over a barren waste that gave no promise of future cultivation. Now the place can be reached in less than two days from our Nebraska home; the railroad runs to the very bank of the river, and irrigation has scattered oases throughout the desert. This is but an illustration of the improvement in transportation. Not only has the fast express taken the place of the stage-coach, but electricity has accelerated urban and interurban travel, while the ocean greyhounds make it possible to circumnavigate the globe in less time than it required to cross the continent in the days of our grandparents.

The telegraph, by making quick communication possible, has not only facilitated business, but it has relieved suspense when members of the family are separated by vast distances, and the telephones, scattered throughout the rural districts, have shortened by one-half the time between sudden illness and the physician's arrival.

The pine-knot and the tallow candle have retired before the oil-lamp, and this, in turn, is being supplanted by gas and the incandescent light.

Inventions have so cheapened production that the luxuries of the past generation are the necessities of today; books have multiplied; publications have increased; and the rural delivery gives as prompt service to the farmer as the letter-carrier has brought to the inhabitant of the city.

There is no golden age in history that equals the present in opportunities for service. All the achievements of the past and the knowledge of all the years—these are our heritage and our inspiration, and it is easier today for one to become a benefactor to the world than it was a few centuries ago to leave his impress upon a single community.

With commerce that is world-wide, with instantaneous exchange of thought, with intellectual development, with the spread of popular government, and with the moral progress of the race has come a peace propaganda which is

destined to make war obsolete and substitute reason for force as the arbiter between nations. Even now we are, by arbitration, adjusting international differences which, a generation ago, would have been regarded as sufficient cause for war.

But while all now living enjoy advantages denied to preceding generations, those who live in the United States have additional reasons for thanksgiving—reasons which should make them more grateful than any other people upon the earth.

First among these special advantages may be mentioned our educational system. By the wisdom of our forefathers, provision was made for the teaching of every child born in our country. While our parochial schools and denominational colleges furnish instruction for those who desire to combine religious training with the elementary and higher branches of learning, the public schools bring education within the reach of all. One has only to compare the mental development of our people with that of many of the peoples of Europe and of all the peoples of Asia and Africa to appreciate the intellectual superiority of our population. While everywhere an increasing interest is being taken in schools, the people of southern Europe are far behind us and those of the Orient immeasurably so. Though Japan has undergone an intellectual revolution in the last half century, she still has considerable distance to travel before she catches up with us; in China the alphabet is so long and the written language so difficult to learn that but a small fraction of the people can be classed as literate. In India less than one per cent of the women can read and write, and less than eight per cent of the total population. Much of the educational work in the Orient is done by outside nations, and our nation leads all the others, as it should, in this altruistic effort.

THE VALUE OF COMPARISON

It is an excellent preparation for Thanksgiving day to travel through other countries and compare the school facilities with those of our own—the millions of children (yellow, white, brown and black) growing up with no thought of books—with the children of the United States, trooping to school, each assured of an opportunity to pursue his studies as far as he wills.

A second special advantage is found in our industrial development. The natural resources of the country are so diversified that one can consult his own tastes in choosing a vocation. We have every variety of soil and climate that the farmer could wish. The wheat fields of the north, the cotton fields of the south, and the corn belt between the two and overlapping both—all these call for laborers, while the horticulturist has his choice between the fruits of the temperate zone and the fruits of the tropics. So varied are the conditions that each farmer can follow his preference and trust the natural rainfall or rely upon irrigation.

If one has a bent for mining, he can indulge it in the gold fields, the silver lodes, the copper mines, the lead and zinc deposits, or the collieries.

Our manufacturing represents every industry, and our internal trade is so enormous that full play is given to the commercial instinct, while mechanical engineering is vying with the professions in attractiveness. Surely America illustrates what can be done when the ingenuity of man makes intelligent use of the generosity of the Creator.

Our form of government gives us a third cause for special thanksgiving. It was fortunate that this experiment in self-government was reserved for a new continent and a new people. In older communities each generation is more or less hampered and restrained by existing institutions and by traditions. These are changed slowly and only with great effort. Every reform of any moment causes an upheaval in old countries because the crust of society has to be broken. Those, however, who settled at Plymouth Rock, at Jamestown, and at New Amsterdam found not only virgin soil for their plowshares, but a place where new ideas of government could be developed. Their very surroundings taught self-reliance and, too far from home to rely upon Europe for protection, they naturally began to assert their right to shape their own destiny. They recognized the inability of Europeans to understand the needs of the col-

onists, and saw that it was only a question of time when they must assume control of their own affairs. It was natural, too, that, having shared together the hardships of pioneer life, they should rebel against the artificial distinctions which had classified and stratified the society of the old world. Companionship in struggles and in dangers had given them practical lessons in the study of the science of government, and made it easy for them to accept the doctrine of equal rights.

TWO FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF GOVERNMENT

In the Declaration of Independence and in the federal constitution, which gave legal expression to that declaration, two fundamental principles of government were enunciated; and to these two principles we are largely indebted for the success which we have achieved in government. The first is the right of the people to rule, and the second the recognition of the advantage of local self government. The first dethrones the king and abolishes the theory of divine right in one or a few to exercise authority over the many; the second insures the intelligent administration of government by committing to each community the custody of its own affairs.

The right of the people to govern themselves seems to us so indisputable that we wonder how it could ever have been questioned, and yet for the establishment of this doctrine millions have given their lives. It is the vital point of difference between republics and arbitrary governments. There are but two theories of government: the theory of republics and democracies; namely, that a government is a thing created by the people for themselves and administered by them for the advancement of their own welfare, and the theory of monarchies and aristocracies; namely, that a government is a thing imposed upon the many by the few and administered by self-selected agents who maintain their position by the exercise of force and who assume to decide without appeal what is best for the ruled as well as for the rulers. The doctrine that "governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed" did not originate in this country, but it has found here its clearest statement, its strongest defense, and its largest application. It had been the boast of kings that popular governments lacked the unity necessary to give strength, and were too slow in action to secure efficiency, but our nation has vindicated those who trusted the people, and justified the assertion made by the historian Bancroft about three-quarters of a century ago that a republic is, in truth, the strongest of governments, because, discarding the implements of terror, it dares to build its citadel in the hearts of men.

Experience has shown that our government, resting securely upon the will of the people, is able to repel attacks from abroad and to survive even civil war, and now we can watch with gratification the spread of our ideas of government as they march, triumphant, around the world. They are few countries with any degree of civilization which have not, to a greater or less degree, adopted our fundamental principles of government. In most of the countries of Europe constitutions have been secured, and the power of the monarchs is being more and more restricted. Within a decade the king of Denmark has conceded the right of the dominant party in parliament to name the ministry; within two years Austria and Sweden have made the popular branch of their governments even more popular, and within three months the house of commons of Great Britain has begun a movement for curtailing the power of the house of lords, while Russia is even now in the throes of a political revolution which has for its object the early establishment of a constitutional government in that unhappy land, where despotism is unquestionably making its last stand.

It is a cause for thanksgiving that we have so long enjoyed here the blessings of free government for which many are still contending with heroic effort and immense sacrifice, and with free speech, a free press, and freedom of conscience we are in a position to maintain the liberties which have come down to us from the fathers.

The dual character of our government has played an important part in its perpetuity—a more important part than many suppose. Can-