

OUR COUNTRY : STRONG IN HER ISOLATION.

A DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED IN THE

SIXTH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, NEWARK, N. J.,

ON

THANKSGIVING DAY, NOVEMBER 27, 1851.

BY

WILLIAM AIKMAN,

PASTOR OF THE CHURCH.

"LO, THE PEOPLE SHALL DWELL ALONE."—*Numbers, 23 : 9.*

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NEWARK, Nov. 27th, 1851.

REV. MR. AIKMAN—

DEAR SIR:—The undersigned, a Committee appointed for the purpose, beg leave respectfully to solicit for publication a copy of the very instructive and timely discourse which we have had the pleasure of hearing from you to-day.

Believing that its publication at this time would be of essential service to the community, we sincerely hope that it will be consistent with your feelings to grant our request.

With sentiments of esteem,

Yours most truly,

H. J. POINIER,

J. SANDFORD SMITH,

GEO. C. WHITNEY,

Committee.

NEWARK, Dec. 2d, 1851.

GENTLEMEN—

The approbation with which my people listened to my discourse cannot but be gratifying to me. I cheerfully place the manuscript at your disposal.

Very truly yours,

WILLIAM AIKMAN.

H. J. POINIER, J. SANDFORD SMITH, GEO. C. WHITNEY.

DISCOURSE

“Lo, the people shall dwell alone.”—Numbers xxiii : 9.

WE are here in the house of God as citizens, called together by the Executive of this State. With the many thousands of our countrymen throughout the land, we appear before Him, and in His temple offer up our praise for the mercy and the grace of the past year.

There is something very glorious and exhilarating to the christian mind, that to-day almost every State in this Union is engaged in a like service. As the sun rolls up from the Atlantic waves, and pursues his golden path from meridian to meridian, now lighting up the Alleganean hills, now streaming his rosy beams over the Mississippi's valley, now gilding the hoary heads of the Rocky Mountains, now glancing on the dew span-gled grass of the Prairie Land, and now gleaming with morning rays on the softly playing waves of the Pacific, he ushers in one common day of thankfulness and

praise. He has never shone on a day the like of this before. Never before has a country, stretching over so vast a portion of earth's surface, engaged in one united act of homage to Almighty God.

As we contemplate a fact so peculiar in its grandeur, we may well, as christians, make our first offering by looking upward with gratitude and joy, that God has given our eyes to see such a dawn. It is the earnest of a day more glorious, when His kingdom shall be exalted over the whole earth, and He shall be honored and adored with more than formal service, when a world shall send up a heartfelt and sincere tribute to His praise.

We praise God to-day as individual men. We praise Him for life, that we have a being, creatures of God in a world made blessed by His reconciled smile; we praise Him for health, that we are not now wasted by disease, nor tossing on weary beds of sickness and pain; we praise Him for reason, that we are not raving maniacs; we praise him for our homes and families, that still the fire-side is sweet with the presence of loved ones; we praise Him for food and raiment, for the innumerable comforts which make us glad; we praise Him for His preservations amid dangers and disasters; we praise Him for His Sabbaths, which have dawned in blessedness, and closed in holy quiet; we praise Him for the communion of saints, for the privileges of a life giving gospel; we praise Him more than all for the gift of His SON, that gift which angels wonder at, which is the channel and the purchaser of all

our other blessings, without which no thanksgiving day would ever dawn, without which the long years would wear away in helpless grief; we praise Him for our hopes of Heaven, that the grave is not all dark, that death is not all terrible, that we can look beyond death and the grave and see life immortal; we praise Him for the gift of His HOLY SPIRIT, who has not been grieved away by sinfulness and ingratitude, but has made personal these hopes, and still lingers with us to guide and teach us, and bring us onward to glory and to God.

But we praise God especially to day as citizens of a common country. We are filled with thankfulness that peace has smiled upon us, that no sound of booming cannon, nor echoing trumpets have startled and made us tremble, that plenty has blessed our land, that no famine has stalked in ghastly horror abroad, that the pestilence has been kept away, and we have not mourned its wide spread desolations; that the framework of our State exists in all its integrity, that mad faction has been rebuked, and the bands of brotherhood have been strengthened; we praise Him that we are, in one word, a free and happy people. All these things we acknowledge as gifts of His hand, and for them all we have praised Him, and we praise Him still.

By the recurrence and exercises of such a day as this, we have our minds directed to things connected with our country, and it is therefore natural that subjects which are *National* should engage our attention. In this way it has become the custom of the pulpit on these

occasions to dwell upon such themes. It is a good custom. In accordance with it I invite your attention to some thoughts on a subject which is just now exciting considerable attention—*The relative political position which this nation ought to hold with the nations of the old world.*

It was the early, and it has been the settled policy of this nation to keep itself aloof from political entanglement with foreign states. Washington defines the great principle upon which our affairs have thus far been conducted. I quote some of the familiar words of that document, whose wisdom, and seemingly more than human forecast have made it a chart which has guided this country through many a danger, and saved it from many a disaster. In this he says: "Against the insidious wiles of foreign influence (I conjure you to believe me) the jealousy of a free people ought to be constantly awake, since history and experience prove, that foreign influence is one of the most baneful foes of Republican governments. * * * * The great rule of conduct for us, in regard to foreign nations, is, in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little *political* connection as possible." These words of parting counsel sunk down into the national heart, and it has been affected by them ever since.

Of late, however, there has been gradually growing up among us a spirit which would depart from this long determined policy. Full of a chivalrous sentiment about diffusing the principles of freedom, men are restless not only to extend principles, but more,—to engage

this government in the actual work of emancipating the crushed victims of European despotism.

There have been many influences which have gradually extended these ideas. Temptations have risen out of the peculiarities of the age. One of the most potent of these has been the increasing facilities of intercourse between this country and the old world. In other days Europe was very far removed from us, and its very distance was calculated to preserve a healthful feeling of isolation. The exciting causes which might keep foreign states in disorder, the occurrences which might hold their absorbed attention, lost their interest during the months which intervened before the information of them reached us here; the wide waste of waters, while it separated the continents, sundered their sympathies. It is different now. Steam has narrowed the ocean and brought the old world close to our doors. The European nations are now our neighbors, and while we hear of their affairs day by day, and know that but a week has gone by since the events of which we read occurred, we cannot but feel an interest impossible a little while ago. We are thus tempted to intermeddle with matters of which we have so constant a knowledge. And a present watchfulness is demanded, lest the boon of rapid intercommunication become a snare and a curse to us.

Another temptation grows out of the peculiar state of the old world. It is a state of perpetual and turbulent restlessness. The great ideas of social and political liberty have diffused themselves abroad, and the contest between the spirit of freedom and of despotism, is con-

stantly carried on. The times are full of popular struggles. This ceaseless activity is calculated of itself to interest us, and the more, when the manifold sufferings of the people are seen and their smothered groanings heard; and still the more when we know that they are struggling after the same freedom which we hold so dear. We look upon them, just at our door, almost beneath our eyes, engaged in a strife which seems the same as that in which we were once engaged, and our sympathies are enlisted and we are tempted to embark in active efforts to deliver them.

The feeling with which the old world regards this nation is another cause calculated to lead us to forsake our great principle of non-intervention. The eyes of all men are directed toward us. The advocates and supporters of despotism regard us with ill-concealed hatred: this provokes a corresponding emotion in us. The struggling people look toward us for sympathy, while they long after the liberty we enjoy. When we remember that these very upheavings have been produced in a great measure by the force of principles going out from this land, that our example has made the oppressed restive in their bondage; when we see them stretching out their hands to us, it seems an ill return from us to remain calmly at home doing nothing for their help.

These causes, the frequent intercommunication, the excited state of the old world, and the peculiar feelings of it toward us, among other things, which time will not permit me to mention, all have a powerful influ-

ence upon this country, and have induced a state of feeling, to which it becomes every patriot to give careful heed. When we see how every minute circumstance of political interest is recorded, and how diligently and carefully it is read; when we see how constantly our attention is directed over the Atlantic; when many seem quite as well, and some better, acquainted with the affairs of foreign nations than with their own,—it is time we were reminded that there may be danger in all this.

We have especial need of thoughtfulness on this subject at the present juncture. We are called upon in a peculiar manner to understand what the best interests of this nation demand, and to take a firm and intelligent position in reference to our relations with other states. We are soon, it is probable, to receive to our shores an exile of no mean distinction, a man of large mind, and disinterested patriotism; a man of very great intellectual force, and of wonderful ability to move the popular mind; a man of tireless activity, of prodigious executive power, of far reaching political wisdom; a man, moreover, who has staked all on the great principle of popular liberty, who considers himself as the apostle of freedom, specially designated by Providence to deliver the old world from its bondage. After having had concentrated upon him for a length of time the gaze of the civilized world, claiming its sympathy, he has been brought from his prison, and now challenges its admiration. He has made a visit to the shores of England, and his progress from point to point has been like the

march of a conquerer ; his clarion-toned eloquence has wakened a wild enthusiasm wholly without example. He is now probably on his way to this country, and will soon be the nation's guest.

It becomes us to understand well the character of the business which brings him here. Let no one think of him as a fugitive seeking a home among us, a disappointed, heart broken man, coming here to mourn in our western lands the desolations of his own ; his giant mind, full of volcanic fire, does not think of it ; his great heart could not abide it.

His position is altogether unique, unlike that of any one before him. He every where proclaims himself to be the embodiment of a principle ; he emphatically disclaims the reception of personal honors ; he will receive none but such as are rendered to him simply as the representation, the embodied form of the great idea of popular liberty. He has boldly and with little reserve, with great sagacity announced his mission as that of leading on the hosts of freedom against the thrones of despotic monarchies. He has declared his great plan to be that of uniting the powers which seem to be the conservators of the freedom of the world in one grand alliance. He speaks, indeed, of that alliance as simply one of uttered policy, a mere consentaneity of expressed sentiment ; but he has not crossed oceans for that alone. *No one better than he understands what that necessitates*—it is the shadow of a mighty, yea, a terrible *substance* behind it. He has devoted his time and energies to this end while he has been in the country

whose shores first received him. He therefore comes to this land for the avowed purpose, not of making a formal visit to return grateful acknowledgments, nor to satisfy an awakened curiosity, nor to find a home ; but to advance the great cause to which he has nobly devoted his life ; to advance it by enlisting this nation in that alliance which he contemplates. He will come with all the prestige which a great patriot will and should ever have with this people ; he will receive demonstrations of popular favor, and he deserves them, greater perhaps than he has yet received.

His coming will give a new momentum to the sentiment which is greatly upon the increase among us, that it becomes us, as Republicans, to make our influence felt in more open ways, and by movements aggressive upon the powers of the old world.

We ought just here to pause, review our history, listen to the voice of the past and look at the future, so that we may with precision understand what wisdom would have us do. We are now called upon openly and emphatically to forsake the policy under which this nation has prospered so long, to reject as obsolete the parting words of our Country's Father and enter upon an untried path, whose end however fair its opening may be, is all uncertain. Through what dangers, near what precipices it goes, we know not. Before we take it, we may well stand awhile and ponder our way.

The policy of this nation hitherto in respect to other states may be stated in a word as that of SEPARATION. Our fathers, considering that they had the great problem

of self-government to work out, chose to solve it alone, away from the helps or the hindrances of other powers. In this same course I believe that now the providence of God and the dictates of human wisdom direct us. The words of far-reaching wisdom which in the infancy of our state said to us: "It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world," I believe to be eminently appropriate still.

To this line of policy it would seem that the providence of God from the first called us. This providence has been peculiar and is worthy of our careful thought.

When Jehovah called His chosen people that they might do a great work for the world, he separated them from it. As Balaam stood on the high which overlooked the encampment of Israel and cried in the words of my text—"From the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him; Lo, the people shall dwell alone," he proclaimed the grand policy by which they were to be governed throughout the whole development of their state. To this end every law was framed—to keep them distinct and separate from all the world beside. They were to work out a great problem for the world, even this—the operation of the religion of the true God upon a nation; they were to solve this so that all men should see clearly what a divine and holy religion could do for men. Jehovah willed that they should do this under the most favorable circumstances. He therefore took them apart, so that they were not "reckoned among the nations." They were to work out that design by themselves. They did it to

a certain extent; had they obeyed God and kept themselves distinct they would have done it fully.

It has seemed to me that we might discern an analogy in this thing in respect to our own country. We believe that God has committed to us a trust, a problem to solve such as never was given to a nation before; we are to work it out in these last days for the race. The hopes of mankind rest upon us as they never rested upon a nation before; *we are to show, if it be ever shown, that a people are capable of self government.* We consider this, in common phrase, our mission. The world seems to have believed it too. With this conviction upon our minds, I can see an evident design in the course of providence toward us hitherto.

When the fulness of time for this great experiment came, all the arrangements appear to have been made so as in the best manner to ensure its success.

It is apparent, that for such an experiment to be conducted well, the people who were to make it should be separated from adverse influences as far as possible. This was done with the Jews. So was it done with this nation. A new theater was selected, a continent was brought to light, severed by a wide and stormy ocean from the old world, a position geographically isolated, a country new, without an institution or a single trace of anything which, by the force of time honored usage, could stand in the way of the development of the new principle. It was the creation of a world expressly for the experiment.

To this new land a chosen people were led. Here

they were nourished for a time from the old world. But as soon as this assistance could be dispensed with, Providence allowed a strange and unnatural alienation to grow up. This was permitted to increase more and more, until the people, once chained with links of filial affection to their old home, now became not only totally severed in heart, not simply alienated, but at open enmity. They were widely sundered, though politically united. But this was not enough. The insulation must be complete. So by a course of policy, at once peculiar, and not to be expected, they were driven first into rebellion, then into war, and this a war so conducted as finally to result in open and perpetual severance of them from all political connection with the foreign world. Thus the way was prepared. But more, a land was given them to develop, whose resources demanded all their energies, so that they had neither time nor opportunity to attend to the affairs of other nations. There were no bordering states with whom they could mix, or whose policy could perplex them. The circumstances demanded, and they were able to give, a concentrated attention to the formation of the institutions which they were set to establish.

These things have a significance. The founders of our government pursued a line of policy which accorded with it. We, who believe in the overruling hand of Providence, as we look back on these things, not fully understood indeed at the time, but very plain now, may well in the facts find a deep meaning and an instructive lesson. I think that they have a peculiar meaning for us at the present time.

This insulation had a purpose, as I have said, to enable this people to work out the great problem of self-government. To do this well they were to be alone. *But this problem is not solved yet.* Many indeed, seem to suppose that it is all determined, that the experiment has been fully tested. But it is not so; no greater or more dangerous mistake can be made. Seventy or eighty years are as nothing in the life of a state; they are years of infancy. The experiment is being carried forward now, we are not certain how it shall result. It has been wonderfully successful thus far, it gives most glorious promise, *but it is not finished yet.*

The question then comes up, with no weak emphasis. Shall we, when by a certain policy results great in present and greater in prospective good have been obtained, step out from the path which God has thus far marked out and finish the experiment under circumstances wholly novel? No: looking back on all the way in which He has led us, we may safely, at least, tell the world that we shall still follow the old path.

But I am reminded that this nation is to do a work for the world, that it is to solve the problem *for the race*, and it is bound to do what it can for the oppressed abroad. I receive the admonition, and echo the truth. It is a thought ennobling to the Christian freeman that his country is doing just this work. I would that every American felt that his country is laboring not for itself alone, but for all mankind. Holding and glorying in this idea, I assert that our policy hitherto is the very

policy best adapted to secure the universal freedom of all nations. With this simple end in view—the propagation of free principles—the highest wisdom calls upon us to pursue our old plan of procedure.

The Jewish state was for the world, not for itself, and the nation was secluded so that it could best affect the world. There, in its retirement, it was to complete the grand, the glorious edifice, the model building for the race; the race was to gaze at its proportions and build like temples for God. In this way it was best to influence the whole race. Had it preserved its seclusion, it would not have defeated the wise designs of Jehovah.

Our country is for the world. How then shall it best affect the world and hasten the day of universal freedom? I answer—*by the moral spectacle of its life*. Moral effects are ever similar. How shall a man, in the surest way, propagate his principles, but by his *life*? The life of a christian is his greatest element of influence, for it shows what his religion *does*. The strong christian is one whose life is strong. The life of the church is its power. So the life of a nation is its power. It is not theories, nor words, nor half tried experiments which convince men and actuate their conduct, but *developed facts* and *working models*. To extend the principles of human freedom, we must have something to show the world as an example of what they have done. We must be able to exhibit the embodiment of these principles in a well ordered and prosperous and happy state. The state

must be *living*, and its life must tell, nothing else will, upon the world.

The church affects the world, because her life is in contrast with it, and this life is the visible form of her doctrines. When then she would increase her efficiency and extend the principles of the religion she possesses, she *intensifies her life*; she kindles up within herself the elements of holiness and devotion to God. These elements glow within, shine outward, and so her life becomes radiant, quickening like the solar influence. So with a nation. It affects the world, by being the manifestation of its own principles; if it would increase its power and extend its influence, these principles must assume a new vitality, they must give a new sharpness of feature, and a greater vividness of outline to the life which embodies them.

The power of this people is a *moral* power. These are times when moral forces shake the world, and our country was born for such a time as this. The enslaved nations are to be made free by becoming incapable of being slaves. While then we never forget that we are to extend liberty to the oppressed, we must remember that that end is secured only by those means which best develope, elevate, and ennoble human mind and character. In vain, while the soul is abject, may a strong arm break the shackles off the limbs. These last years have taught this to the world.

Our chief purpose, then, should be in the very best possible manner to perfect our own institutions, for in their perfection is our power for good. This we have

done, and thus have we influenced the world. In these later times freedom has made gigantic strides. The world has wonderfully changed, and we have had the greater hand in its transformation. Now, what has been the mighty element which has so moved upon the hearts of men; what the power which makes despots tremble on their thrones, and captives glad in their dungeons? Have we been sending armies abroad, have we had agents preaching republican sentiments in every land? No, no; here, in our isolation, away from the whole world, we have been steadily building up our country, we have been diligently regulating *our life*; we have attended to that alone. The nations have warred together, we have kept aloof, intermeddling not, while the wondrous fabric has risen like an exhalation, the glory and hope of the world. Our wide domain, teeming with a peaceful, intelligent, happy people, riches exceeding the fables of Indian wealth, the white sails of our winged vessels, the blue smoke of our ocean steamers, they are the mighty arguments, they the freedom-propagating armies that are making the conquest of the earth.

It becomes us to carry forward our great work just as we have begun it—in our separation—and under God perfect and perpetuate our institutions. We are separated, indeed, from the world, yet not secluded; isolated, yet touching it at every point. The nations are around us, their gaze is fixed upon us, they wait to see the great results developed; they gaze and the vision will by and by transform them. This will take time.

Great works require time; and the emancipation of a world by its own renovation is a great work. You cannot hasten it, you cannot stop it. The day of the world's freedom comes on apace; but you cannot roll onward the sun, nor quicken his steady tread. We are impatient—those who watch for the dawn are apt to be—but it will come; folly may seem to retard it, impatience may make the time longer, but it will come. A little *waiting*, a little more of calm constancy, a little more of faith in the power of embodied principles, which have already done what armed millions could not do, and more than all, a little more of faith in God, who is using these moral powers, and the day of freedom will *dawn of itself*. Let the nations learn by what they see in us how to be free, and their chains will fall off and they shall be free.

The despots of the old world understand where our mighty strength lieth. They do not fear our armies nor our war-ships, they would hail the creation of a vast standing army as the harbinger of hope to them. They fear us because we need none. They tremble not at the force of our bayonets or our cannon, but at our happiness, our domestic comfort, our wide spread intelligence; they fear not the marshaling of our million militia, but the tranquility of our realm; they fear our obedience to law; they fear our social security; they fear our repose. They watch for popular outbreaks, for declining prosperity; their hopes all rest on these. These would be worth more to them than all their hosts and fleets combined.

When, then, we are asked to engage in foreign alliances to hasten the progress of freedom, let us respond by double diligence in making our country great. Our work is not all finished yet at home. We are not united as we ought to be. We are not free as we ought to be. We must not leave our work but partly done, we must finish it, for a world is anxious that it should be complete.

Let us cultivate every thing which shall exalt our country; let us labor to have a land without a slave to shame and curse us; let us reverence the elevating power of *righteousness*; let us build up our state upon the *religious* foundation laid by our fathers, and upon that alone; let the Church of Christ, which has thus far been the hope of our land, separate herself from the world; let her clothe herself with power; let her pray for the special presence of God's spirit in the midst of her, for be it remembered that revivals have done incalculable things for our liberties; let christians be holy. So will our strength increase, we shall accomplish the work which God has given us to do, and the world shall be blessed in our greatness. Let the oppressed who seek our aid have our warmest sympathy; let them know that we help them most by teaching them what it is that makes us free. Should we in an evil day, neglecting our own life, engage in foreign alliances, and mingle our interests with those of the old states abroad, disaster and shame may be upon us.

Here then is our work. Are we to emancipate the

world? Be it so. This is the way in which it shall be done. Not by wild crusades for freedom; not by armies, nor by navies; no, nor yet by words, but by the power of our life. Let this people do this one thing—here, by ourselves, with many an acknowledgment of God's help and goodness such as to-day we give, build up and make great and good our state. Let our thoughts be most at home. Let us be earnest to remove every thing which can weaken or divide us, let us quicken every thing which can bind us together, let us extend the blessings of education and of a free religion, in one word, let us perfect a God-fearing State; thus when the insidious call is made for us to leave our own home and send our strength abroad, we may answer, "We are doing a great work, so that we cannot come down."