



# 200 Years of History . . .

## *What of the Future?*

by Ray L. Straub

**W**hat may we expect from the aged?

Should they have amassed wealth? Not necessarily.

Shall they have gained substantial knowledge scholastically? It's good if they were able to, but many fared well without having spent much time in the classroom.

Do we expect them to be wise? Yes, we do!

It's amazing how much wisdom we expect to flow from the elderly! We overlook their poverty, and we hardly expect them to have had opportunity to attend class, but we expect them to speak sensibly and knowingly. A head

crowned with silky white hair is one we expect to be wise.

Those who know the most have the right and responsibility to be the teachers. For this reason the parent has an obligation to teach and guide his children. Knowledge is power. The mind is only equal to what it knows.

Some disagree that experience is the best teacher. That is because on occasion this teacher gets the point across a bit slowly. None can deny that experience can teach! Living is experiencing, suggesting that those who live the longest, experience more and know more. For this reason, almost all older people,

despite prejudices, fables, and eccentricities, are wise and it is worth our paying attention to their council.

The oldest living citizen of the United States is 133 years old and lives in Florida. For one to live that long seems a miracle. What a wealth of experience, knowledge and wisdom he should be able to share!

Our nation is 200 years old. That is not an unusually long life for a nation. This milestone has exposed U. S. citizens to much history about their country. Birthdays produce nostalgia. Our nation's history is not only interesting, but it instills

pride. We live in a country that had good beginnings, high ideals, strength, abundance, and a vision.

Societies older than ours have not accomplished as much. They have not extended their influence as we have. They have not become wealthy. We have the audacity to think that if everyone could live in the United States, that would be their first choice.

To celebrate our mere existence as a nation is inadequate. It's no special achievement for a nation to *exist* that long! We need to think about what *kind* of nation this is that has been here on earth for two centuries. So, we are looking into our past.

We review the values upon which this great society was structured.

We are proud of the rugged courage of those who got us started. They dared to think of being free from European rule. They saw the possibility of gaining independence and growing as a nation on their own. They fought and paid dearly, but none questioned whether the high cost was worth it.

They wrote laws to govern the infant nation. The writings were intelligent and surprisingly workable. A main concern was that the government would not enslave the people, but that it would be responsive to them.

A Bill of Rights was appended to the constitution. It assured the dignity of persons living in this great land. Older societies were skeptical of the ability of common persons to determine their own destinies. America proved they could!

Courage took men westward. They pressed through painful barriers. It is a story of faith and vision. Every new acquisition provided new resources. Trails were blazed and roads opened for the adventurous. The great nation eventually stretched from coast to coast. She was young, vigorous and hopeful. She had a future, and she had a God.

The courage of her leaders was God-given. This is not to suggest that the young nation was free of sin, but her ideals were largely

religious. Lapses in discipline did not compromise the values of the goals. Her early settlers sought religious freedom. It's true that those seeking such freedom were not always ready to allow it, but the motives were honorable.

Few could look at our nation's past and ignore the influence of a religious faith in the lives of her people. It was an active ingredient. To please their God meant that all of God's children must be served. Whom God loves, His children must love and care for. These ideals are proudly recalled in a review of our nation's past.

For a nation such as ours, it's not nearly good enough just to have an illustrious history! Reminiscing is good, but it does not offer complete adequacy even for the dead. Our 200th birthday should appropriately review our milestones, but it must also provide a look at who and what we are. It should be a stimulus for us to shape a brighter future.

Man is much greater than animal because he has more than the enjoyment of the moment. He can savour his past and look hopefully forward. He has latitude to shape his destiny. He can behave badly and ruin all, or he can courageously struggle for good and find satisfaction. His moods and attention can range from depraved to angelic, often without fully knowing to which he is nearest.

The gift of freedom is both wondrous and dangerous. It suggests the reality of sin and punishment, while it upholds worthy goals. Only the possibility of sin can add any meaning to doing good. The free exercise of choice is a liberty distinctive to man. It is also a responsibility he cannot escape.

But, we try. Our entertainment received through television and movies is an endless series of fantasies depicting those who can sin and get by. It is as though the endless viewing of irresponsible behavior allows sinning by proxy without suffering the results in reality. Thank God that while our appetites could be improved, our

behavior is still not entirely as reprehensible!

Our good behavior is not adequately holding its own. An honest look at ourselves is hardly encouraging. What we are today is not what we were. Few are blazing trails for the benefit of those who follow. We are rapidly becoming self-indulgent, greedy, and uncaring about what lies ahead.

The wealth of our country is in the hands of a small percentage of our citizenry. Those who can earn little more than a living are called upon to carry the financial load of government. The wealthy will not allow an obligated political system to close up tax loopholes. Without the support of the wealthy, it is impossible to reach high political office.

There is constant bartering among the economically and politically powerful who jockey for position while the voter and consumer are given only the choice of which leader will bleed them and their environment of their resources.

More recently, it is revealed that indulgence has produced its disgraceful by-product, a libertine attitude. The moral fiber of this country is being slashed by leaders who win, then betray the nation's trust.

Political speeches, once a means by which one could learn about a candidate are now laughable exercises in puffy, unsubstantive verbosity. They are calculated, not to spell out a position as they should, but to develop a charisma. Instead of provoking the public and giving adequate attention to honest doubt, they strain to prevent irritation.

A continued list of national spiritual ills would offer only discouragement. To understand that improvement is necessary is to responsibly exercise our freedom of choice, and to enliven our hopes. We need more of the nutrition that fed our growth to greatness.

Jesus observed, "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matthew 24:12). This cause and effect is

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God. He can walk with God in the true sense only if this walk continues through the front door and goes all the way through to his favorite lounge chair.

Here at home — in such a home as God instituted — the person's heart is enriched and made to grow fonder of God and His way. In the quietness of home the person meditates upon God's Word and finds it more strengthening to him than the food he eats at the table.

With the encouragement of a proper home, he grows more like the Master day by day. Above all else, his communion with the Lord while at home is the most meaningful and refreshing.

Jesus suggested that each of God's children has a guardian angel with him always. "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 18:10). And the writer of the Hebrew letter, in referring to angels, said, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14).

Therefore, home ought to be a place where even angels will not feel they are out of place, where they will feel that they are not afield from the heavenly element so common to them.

This can be realized only if God is sought after as the most important element in life. He must be desired above money, above position, above social recognition, above everything else! Only if He is really wanted will God make Himself felt.

Geometrically it may be impossible for a circle to have three sides; but, practically, this is what the home must be. It is commonly referred to as the "family circle," meaning those bound together by the ties of family love and relationship. However, this circle is really three-sided.

It is as if a perfect circle were drawn around an equilateral triangle (one with all sides of equal

length) that touches the circle at every corner. The three sides could be thought of as father, mother, and children — all enclosed in the presence of God. This, indeed, is a circle!

Such homes are the need of society today. Religion has little meaning or value unless it is lived in the home that is so established. Unless a person can live his religion at home, it has not made the impression upon his life that is necessary for Christ-likeness.

Home is not only the seat of religion for the adults, who demonstrate the quality of their Christianity by the way they live at home; but it also is the seat of religion for boys and girls. Here is where the first impressions are recorded upon the conscious factors of their little minds. They learn to be what they are; and most of this learning is done at home.

Paul's advice in I Timothy 5:4 is good for all. "... Let them learn to shew piety at home. ..." Here is where religion begins. The home is the seat of every truly religious experience. — *Reprinted.*

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## 200 YEARS OF HISTORY

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simple and believable. Those who love do not injure. On the other hand even the charity of a greedy man breeds contempt. Our nation experiences this.

The cause and effect could be reversed. Where love abounds, iniquity is scarce. This lofty principle is threatened because man cannot place faith into programs dictated by love.

Jesus would not be a successful political figure in our country, because He was not aggressive. He gave to whoever asked, and He expected nothing for His services but gratitude. He forgave His enemies, but of His followers He demanded discipline and offered a cross.

The characteristics of Jesus which would assure His failure on our political scene represent the classic choice that our freedom imposes upon us as citizens in-

dividually and collectively. Paul called it a wisdom of this world, contrasted to the wisdom of God.

God has chosen the base things of this world to confound the wise and the weak things to confound the mighty. That which is looked down upon by the indulgent becomes precious to those whose values are intact.

The wisdom of God could hardly be described more clearly than in I Corinthians 1:30, "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." What more could any man of any nation on earth want? The wise know how to use their liberty to pursue what's worth having!

"Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him shew out of a good conversation [behavior] his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy" (James 3:13-17).

Two hundred years after the birth of this nation, we enjoy freedom and wealth which undoubtedly surpasses any of our forefathers' dreams. We have them because they chose to live responsibly. They held to values, religious in nature, that were worth pursuing, living and dying for.

What quality of future are we in the process of providing? Each of us may be only one person among many, but we are at least one. Perhaps we cannot do everything, but we can do something. We need to embrace and speak up for what is right. We can be godly and provoke good. It is within our power to live faithfully to the divine laws and principles we know to be pleasing to our Maker.

*During Drought and Crop Shortages . . .*

# WHO CAN BE THANKFUL?

by Ray L. Straub

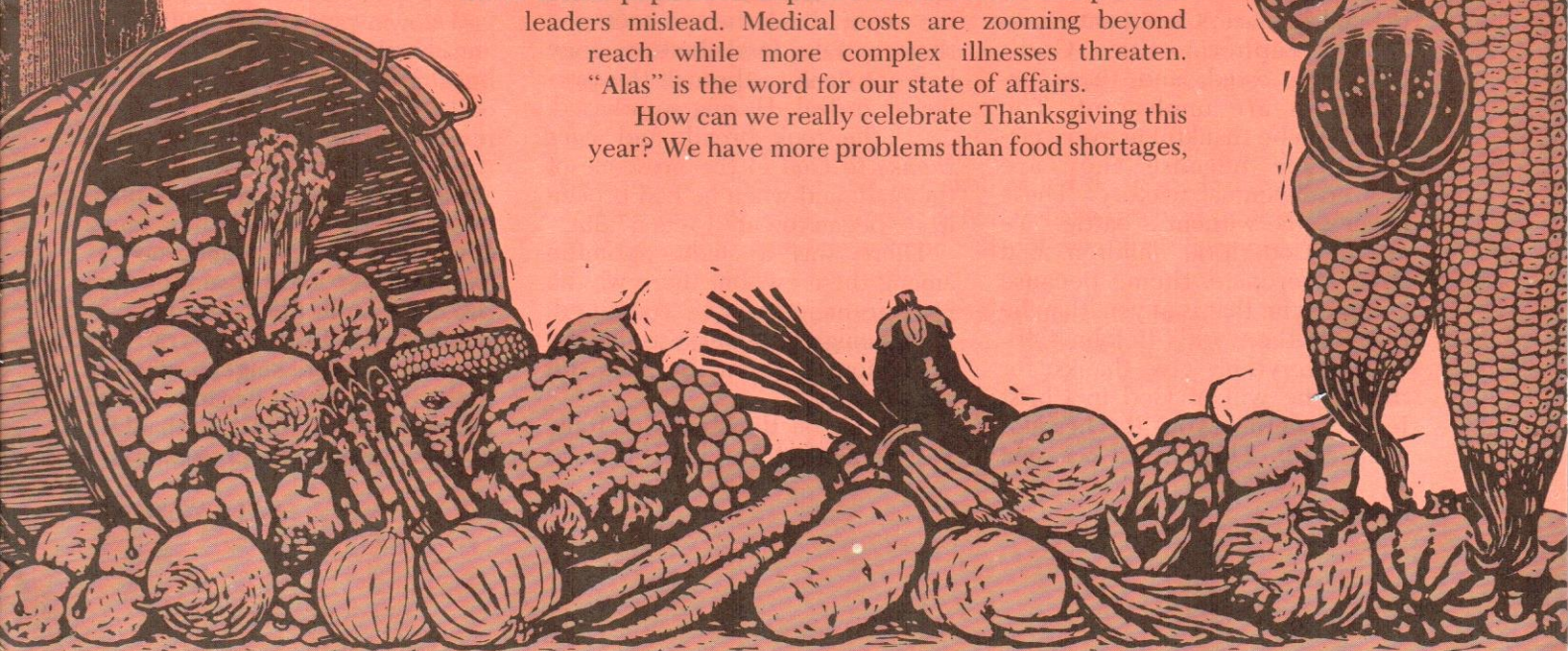
Concerning problems, a man said, "Everyone either has a problem, is a problem, or lives with one." It was not meant for us to enjoy uninterrupted comfort. Into each life some rain must fall.

This past spring and summer had many wondering! Lack of precipitation ruined crops in both the United States and Europe. The harvest ran from poor to dismal. There will be adequate storage facilities this winter!

The concern over crop shortages belongs to more than the farmer. A bumper sticker reads, "Don't complain about the farmer when your stomach is full." That's perceptive. We can afford to complain about the farmer only after a satisfying meal. When our appetite nags, we are inclined to look kindly and wistfully toward the suppliers of our food. When this supply diminishes all are affected. We need to eat, and our food comes mostly from crops.

We have, are, and live with problems. The populace is braced for and experiences increasing rebellion and decreasing respect for authority. The young seem untamed, and the older are too engrossed in competition to offer guidance. Economies are inflating, crime rates are rising, shortages are becoming more widespread, and technological achievements threaten our environment. Dense population depletes our resources and political leaders mislead. Medical costs are zooming beyond reach while more complex illnesses threaten. "Alas" is the word for our state of affairs.

How can we really celebrate Thanksgiving this year? We have more problems than food shortages,



and there seems to be so little cause for optimism.

Thanksgiving Day in America was originated in New England when Governor Bradford made provisions for a day of thanksgiving and prayer. The weather had been severe, many lives were lost, and spirits were down. The occasion was connected with the tardy arrival of ships from England bringing urgently needed supplies.

Two years later, while fasting and praying in the midst of a draught, rain came and turned that prayer session into an occasion of thanksgiving. Gradually, the custom of giving God thanks after the harvest season prevailed.

President Lincoln proclaimed Thanksgiving a national holiday in 1864. It was during the distress of the Civil War. The country was divided, weak, and suffering heavy casualties. In one week at the battle of Gettysburg 54,807 lives were lost. This holiday grew out of times of difficulty. During testing it isn't easy to give thanks, but it's most helpful.

"Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 5:20). How broad and sweeping this advice is! We are *always* to give thanks, and for *all* things. Can we really give thanks for leukemia, apostasy, declining health, dishonesty in high places, excessive charges, losing a lawsuit, a dead local church program, car accidents, advancing years, and crop failures?

It is hardly expected that God's children must be delighted with all that takes place. Christianity is no spongy euphoria. Even God's family is tested, and these experiences are unpleasant. The saved can be thankful in every circumstance because they are assured eventual victory. These never come without a battle. "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (I John 4:4).

"In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (I Thessalonians 5:18). There is no occasion

when the forces of God must bow to evil powers. God is always in control. He is never baffled, compromised or shut out. Where He abides, He overthrows threatening assault. When God is in us, we can be thankful before, during and following trials. His will prevails, and when following that Divine Will, we prevail!

Paul gives adequate witness to this. On his way to Rome he and his shipmates ran into a storm that threatened their safety for no less



than 14 continuous days! Finally, they neared land and put down anchors. Some began to escape in a lifeboat, but Paul warned that such a tactic would threaten the lives of all. They waited fearfully through the night. Paul then encouraged them to take food, because they had not done so through the two-week ordeal. Having so advised, "... he took bread, and *gave thanks to God* in the presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat" (Acts 27:35).

There was a slight optimism among the crew, but there was no reassurance. Danger remained. Paul, being a prisoner, was not in a prestigious position. But, he still gave thanks.

Arriving on the shores of Italy, Paul traveled by land toward

Rome. He had been imprisoned unjustly for several years. His voyage to Rome was taxing and disastrous. He was still a prisoner on his way to plead his case before Caesar. Upon meeting the brethren who came from Rome to receive him, Paul thanked God and took courage (Acts 28:15). Amen!

This expression is uplifting. It is not only possible to give thanks amid problems, but we have reason to take courage. Greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world.

Archaeologists digging in ancient ruins of the mid-East came upon some potsherd fragments that were difficult to decipher. Calling in language experts, they found the message to read, "Alas, alas, things are not what they used to be." It seems this "tune" is not so new!

"There is little doubt that the present generation of college young men and women is in serious moral difficulty. Compared with the generation preceding, they have shunned discipline and a willingness to excel in their studies. Common modesty and decency in manners and dress are apparently things of the past. The fact that evil is called good while good is called evil seems to be of small concern to them." This statement, so contemporary in sound, was written by Aristophanes in the fifth century B.C.

An ant was seen laboriously dragging a sizeable piece of straw, and he came upon a relatively wide gap on its trail. The straw was laid down, pushed across the gap and employed as a bridge. The burden carried provided for success. A winning spiritual power resides within us, so we can and *should* be thankful.

Ingratitude indicates rebellion. "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools" (Romans 1:21, 22). To be thankful is to be aware. The presumptuous

are dim of wit and compensate for their dullness through rebellion and self-assertion.

Ephesians 5:4 wisely reminds us that giving of thanks is the excellent alternative to filthiness, foolish talking and jesting which is not convenient. Those giving thanks are alert and emit wholesome words. We communicate profitably when we express gratitude.

Giving thanks is the antidote to worry. People who are thankful are not fretting. Even though our food supply is diminished by crop shortages, we need not worry. We can be thankful for the abundance we have had, and for the sufficient amount we will still enjoy. We may not have all we wanted, but we have enough. Complaints don't grow bumper crops. They breed resentment, bitterness and estrangement from God.

Perhaps our shortage at harvesttime, along with other problems, can teach a valuable lesson. A meteorologist recently observed that previous to the past summer, the weather has been much better, more consistently than we ought to have expected for an unusual number of years. The law of averages dictates that every once in awhile we should expect a shortage of precipitation. Thanks to God, it held off for several years longer than weather watchers anticipated.

How did we treat God and His precious work through the years when the weather cooperated nicely? Did we recognize the source of our gains? Did we give God thanks by returning a larger than usual amount of time, energy and funds to His Work? Did these good years find accurate reflection in the treasuries of God's church?

Quite possibly we have been providing God with "crop shortages" for a long time, even when He was supplying us with a good yield. He was generous to us. We were selfish with Him. Since this was the response of many, how can God be blamed for our present shortage?

On the other hand, there are many who have freely shared an

abundant harvest with the Creator. They also experience a financial set-back by lack of good growing conditions. None need tell them to be thankful. They already are. God has seen them through meager times, and they still depend on Him.

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul puts the propriety of thanksgiving into sharp focus. "For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might *through the thanksgiving of many* rebound to the glory of God" (II Corinthians 4:15).

God's dealings with His children are always good for them. Somehow His abundant grace shines through. It produces a gratitude in

the spiritually aware that is contagious. Others soon appreciate the value of knowing and loving God. They are attracted to Him by our thanksgiving.

For this, and other reasons, we can be thankful now. It matters not that we have less abundance. After all, to God's child there is no failure, because God makes him a conqueror.

Let all of God's family be disposed to do what is godly, what is right, what pleases their heavenly Father. Let all give thanks regardless of the amount of personal revenues. We remember that God blessed before, and He remains nearby to see us through. Truly, it is the season for Thanksgiving!

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## God is Faithful

Numbers 22-24

During the wanderings of the Children of Israel in the wilderness they came to the land of Moab. The Moabites feared the Israelites because they had witnessed the things that happened to other nations in the area. Balak, king of the Moabites, viciously plotted to get a curse placed on the people of God, and proceeded to try and bribe the prophet, Balaam, to do this evil thing.

Balaam's desire for material things prevailed over his better judgment, and he set out to do what the king of Moab had requested. After a series of frustrating experiences Balaam learned that it doesn't pay to fight against God.

Twenty-five hundred years later another man testified of this same great truth. Gamaliel, a lawyer in the time of the apostles, made this statement, "But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God" (Acts 5:39).

God doesn't always lead people to carry out His purpose as He did Balaam, but in this prophet's experience a real blessing resulted. When the king wanted to know what Balaam's message was going to be, this is what he said:

"God is not man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it" (Numbers 23:19, 20).

God's promises for good had been given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, forefathers of these people, and God would do all that He had promised them. (He is still blessing the people of Israel.) But there is a further lesson for us today. There are some very real promises for all who serve Him, and He will never fail to keep His Word.