

Rev. Mr. Buckminster's Sermon,

DELIVERED ON THE

22d February, 1800.

RELIGION AND RIGHTEOUSNESS THE BASIS
OF NATIONAL HONOR AND PROSPERITY.

A
S E R M O N,

PREACHED TO THE

North and South Parishes

IN

P O R T S M O U T H,

FRATERNALLY UNITED IN OBSERVANCE OF THE

22d February, 1800;

The day appointed by Congress to pay tributary respect

TO THE MEMORY OF

Gen. Washington.

By JOSEPH BUCKMINSTER, A. M.

PORTSMOUTH, NEW-HAMPSHIRE,
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A

S E R M O N.

BRETHREN, AND FELLOW-CITIZENS :—

THIS day is rendered illustrious in the annals of our country, by giving birth to a citizen, whom it has pleased God to honor with distinguished honors, and to render uncommonly acceptable to the multitude of his brethren.

The early presages, which he gave of martial bravery, skill, and prudence, have been more than answered, in his successfully leading the armies of his country to repel her aggressors, secure her rights, and establish her in the enjoyment of peace and independence. The country that he defended, at the head of a band of heroes, he rescued from confusion and imbecility, at the head of a band of patriots, by conciliating their affections, and combining their interests, in a constitution of government, which, in its operation, has justified the eulogies of speculation, and rendered our country, probably, the freest and happiest in the world.

Nobly

Nobly divesting himself of all civil or military distinction, he retired to the walks of private life, obtaining a triumph in self conquest, that few mortals have obtained. But the unanimous suffrages of his country drew him, reluctant, from his retreat, and placed him at the head of the administration of our government. In this novel station, during an eight years presidency, at an epoch, most momentous to America, in its foreign relations and internal interests, he proved himself the wise politician, the discerning, firm, and disinterested patriot, the inviolable friend of his country, and guardian of her rights.

National gratitude and affection have for several years influenced the citizens of America to distinguish the birth-day of so illustrious a Benefactor, by festive celebrations and sentimental tributary acknowledgments. But, alas ! this mode of celebration is no more ! Neither dignity nor usefulness exempt from death. The Sovereign LORD of life, a few weeks since, summoned from his intercourse with mortals, this Father of his country, our shield in war, our pride in peace.

The supreme council of our nation, in token of respect to the memory of the deceased, and to quicken our attention to the voice of Providence, have separated this anniversary to national mourning,
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and devotion. In obedience to their summons, we are assembled to mingle our tears and condolence, to humble ourselves at the feet of unerring wisdom and righteousness, to unite our supplications and thanksgivings to Him who gives and who takes away, earnestly begging that the hand that has broken, would bind us up, and cause a harvest of national blessings to arise from a nation's tears.

I have sincerely hoped that some municipal arrangement would have excused me from a part in this day's exercises ; that we should have been favored with the efforts of other talents ; this I have rather hoped, as I have already mingled my mite with the offerings of the rich, which the partiality of friends has drawn from its obscurity.

In contemplating the duties of the day, I have been utterly at a loss as to what would be proper or expedient. The voluntary tributes of respect, that have flowed from the highest sources, have left scarce any thing to be added on this anniversary ; 'and what can the man do that comes after the king.' My first resolution was only to have read on this occasion, that admirable address of our late worthy President, poured forth with such parental affection and solicitude, in the dignified attitude of disrobing himself of the insignia of office, and retiring to the
rank

rank of a private citizen. My resolution is changed, not from an apprehension that any thing can be offered you so worthy your attention, but from the reflection that this is already in the hands of most, and will be perused and reperused, with leisurly attention, while a spark of enlightened patriotism warms our bosoms. Relying upon your usual, candid and patient attention, I have concluded to attempt an illustration of a subject at all times interesting, at the present, peculiarly so.

That Religion and Righteousness are the Basis of National Honor and Prosperity, and the surest mean of National Security and Peace. Will such a subject, be deemed altogether foreign to the design of the day? It harmonizes with the principles, spirit, and letter, of our invaluable political legacy; and if our deceased patron retains a wish for his country, I doubt not it is, that it would distinguish itself as much by its piety and righteousness, as it has been distinguished by the favor and benediction of heaven. For he now perfectly knows what, while living, he sublimely taught, That "OF ALL THE DISPOSITIONS AND HABITS WHICH LEAD TO POLITICAL PROSPERITY, RELIGION AND MORALITY, ARE INDISPENSABLE SUPPORTS."

The portion of scripture selected as the theme of our discourse, is a part of the charge of
Moses,

Moses, that venerable patriot, and leader of the children of Israel ; when he viewed his dissolution at hand, and would make every effort to secure to the people whom he loved, national honor and happiness. The words you will read

DEUTERONOMY, IV. 6.

Keep therefore and do them, for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations which shall hear all these statutes, and say, surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.

THE striking resemblance, in a great variety of particulars, between this renowned leader of Israel and the venerated character whose loss we this day deplore, has been happily made the subject of tributary respect to the memory of the latter.

In nothing, does there appear a more striking resemblance, than in the disinterestedness of their patriotism, and their concern that the people of their charge should be prosperous and happy after their decease. The illusions of fancy and affection aside, the palm must be given to Moses in every respect, for he had supernatural intercourse with Heaven, was clothed with commission and power from on high, and on trying emergencies had sensible testimonies and aid from God. But if our beloved WASHINGTON, from similarity of circumstances, was lead to make this Jewish leader his pattern, he has been a most honorable and dignified copyist.

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When Moses perceived his dissolution at hand, he summoned the tribes of Israel around him, and addresses them upon their national hopes and prospects—gives a general summary of their history since they came out of Egypt, repeats the statutes and judgments that God had given, charging them to keep and do them if they would be wise, respectable, or happy. If the terms used by this Jewish Legislator are not perfectly synonymous, statutes may refer to their religious obligations, and judgments to their civil and political, in the sacred observance of which they should secure prosperity at home, and renown abroad among the nations. *For Religion and Righteousness are the surest Basis of National Honor and Prosperity, and the direct means of Tranquillity and Peace.*

To national honor and glory, a due proportion of eminent talents, and of laudible acquirments in knowledge and virtue, are necessary. And they will excel, who have the most brilliant talents, happily united to most unsophisticated integrity. Though men's talents are not originally of their own choosing, yet what they are to society, is generally the result of education.

If there were no object of religion, and no moral government exercised over the world, yet the impressions and effects produced upon the human mind.

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and heart, by the belief and contemplation of infinite perfection, have a natural, and almost mechanic tendency, to form the human character to great and noble conceptions, and to stimulate to worthy actions and achievements. The mind in contemplating elevated and enlarged objects, is, from principles inseparable from our nature, itself elevated and enlarged. The universe of being affords no object worthy to be compared, in elevation and dignity, with him whose name alone is JEHOVAH, and the only object of religious homage. The exercises and affections which the due contemplation of his adorable perfections, excite, strengthen and invigorate the faculties of the man, repress and regulate the disorderly propensities, and form a basis for distinguished mental and bodily exertions.

If to a speculative belief of the existence of a God, be added a consciousness of a state of friendship and reconciliation with him, and of interest in his perfections, the force of motive to virtuous deeds, and of restraint from vicious ones, is complete. What sacrifices have been made, what dangers have been hazarded, what feats of valor have been achieved, for the benefit of nations, in the belief of the approving smiles of heaven, and in the hope of rewards which God only can bestow? That in the nature of things, religion, as it consists in the belief of a God, and in exercises and affections that such a belief excites,

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forms instruments of national honor and prosperity, and is calculated to secure those objects so interesting and important to any people. And on the contrary, the sentence of an inspired pen upon the grosser sensual indulgencies, is, in its measure, true of every species and degree of impiety and immorality, 'They take away the heart.' They enervate and unman the body. They effeminate and debase the mind. They bring on premature decrepitude and death. In the vortex of sensuality, luxury, and impiety, most nations have first ingulphed their national honor, strength, and valor; and then their national existence.

The natural tendency of religion to promote the honor and prosperity of a people, and to secure their peace and tranquility, receives infinite occasion by its securing to them the supernatural influence and benediction of heaven.

Whatever attempts have been, or may be made, to obliterate a sense of Deity, or efface impressions of his existence from the human mind, the proofs of his existence are, and ever will be, as numerous as the creatures that exist. "The invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and God-head." God's providential inspection and government are the necessary result of his existence and perfections; which gov-
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ernment must be accommodated to the nature and capacities of its respective objects. As man is a rational and moral agent, the providential government of God, as it respects man, must be of the moral kind. And as nations exist, in their social and national capacities, only in this world, so the dispensations of heaven towards them will be influenced by their religious and moral character and conduct. "Those, who honor God, he will honor, but those who despise him, he will lightly esteem." The prevalence of virtue, piety, and righteousness, in a nation, secure the favor of him, whose it is to build and to plant, whose it is to make great, and give strength unto all. His favor is life to a nation, no less than to an individual, and his loving kindness is the source of their honor, prosperity, and peace. "They, whom he blesses, are blessed ;" and none can disannul it. They, upon whom he frowns, must wither ; for none can arrest, or divert the effects of his displeasure. So just and natural are these deductions and conclusions of reason, that a most eminent, correct and judicious writer has thought it proper to put the following expressions into the lips of a heathen : " If there's a power above us, and that there is, all nature cries aloud in all her works. He must delight in virtue, and that which he delights in, must be happy."

But should a doubt remain, respecting the correctness of these conclusions, it must be wholly removed

moved by explicit declarations from the source of unerring truth, of which innumerable might be adduced, similar to these : “ The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry ; but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.” “ Righteousness exalteth a nation ; but sin is the reproach of any people.” Nay JEHOVAH himself has condescended to publish to us the rule of his administration towards nations. By the prophet Jeremiah, we hear him saying. “ At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy, if that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them.” If this rule of administration was more appropriate to the nation to whom GOD gave his oracles direct, yet the terms in which it is expressed forbid our confining it to them, and the history of GOD’s dealings with the nations of the earth ; so far as it can be collected from authentic data, justifies its universal application.

In the history of GOD’s ancient people, flowing from an inspired source, we find a scrupulous observance

servance of this rule. While they regarded the laws, statutes, and ordinances of the Lord, "He suffered no man to harm them, yea, he reprov'd Kings for their sakes ; saying touch not mine annointed, and do my Prophets no harm." "He gave them rest on every side, made them to ride upon the high places of the earth ; he fed them with the finest of the wheat, and caused them to abound with all rich treasure." Their renown went forth among other nations, and dispos'd them to say, "What nation is so great, that hath God so nigh them." "What nation is so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous." But on the other hand, when they forsook God, and bowed down to idols ; when they disregarded his statutes, transgressed his commandments, and neglected his ordinances, wild and portentous clouds darkened their political hemisphere, their strength withered, the neighboring nations exacted upon them, and the sword, the famine, or the pestilence bespoke the displeasure of heaven, and called upon them to consider from whence they had fallen, to repent, and return to the LORD. No part of the Jewish history, in any period of their existence, is destitute of illustrations of these remarks : But the times of the Judges afford the most striking comment upon the words of our text, and the fullest confirmation of the truth of our proposition : That religion and righteousness are the surest basis of national honor and prosperity, and the direct means of tranquility and peace.

Happy

Happy would it be for every nation, who, to the law that was given by Moses, have superadded the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ, to revive an attention to this subject, and regard the charge of this renowned leader of Israel, to the people, who were to him dear as his own soul. Thrice happy would it be for the people of this land, who in various respects resemble God's ancient Israel, over whom the arm of power and mercy has been marvellously displayed, to harmonize their views, sentiments, and feelings in an enlightened belief, and sacred regard of this inspired charge, this incontrovertible maxim of sound policy.

An unpleasant diversity of sentiment and difference of opinion have arisen in this country respecting the line of political conduct, most directly tending to secure our national honor, prosperity, and peace. National antipathy, and passionate national attachment have doubtless had their influence in originating and cherishing this state of public sentiment, the principal ground of hope to our enemies, of fear and anxiety to the disinterested patriot; which, the discerning eye of our revered President foreseeing, his faithful tongue hath thus addressed us. "Inveterate antipathies against particular nations, and passionate attachments for others, should be excluded; and in the place of them just and amicable feelings towards all should be cultivated. The nation, which indulges towards another an habitual hatred,

hatred, or an habitual fondness, is in some degree, a slave. It is a slave to its animosity or affection, either of which is sufficient to lead it astray from its duty and its interest." Upon which subject our departed sage continues to discourse in sentiments and expressions which deserve to be indelibly engraven on all our memories. While not perfectly harmonious in our views and apprehensions, which in this state of imperfection, is hardly to be expected.

It is a pleasing and promising consideration that the advocates of the respective opinions equally profess to be warmed by the fire of patriotism, to be animated by a love to their country, and a desire to secure and promote its best interest. If this be so, the unhappy division is only the result of the power of such prejudices as are consistent with integrity, and which time and reflection, candor and condescension will remove.

But however accurate our sentiments, or just our views, respecting the line of political conduct that this country ought to pursue, it is a truth, sanctioned by experience, and confirmed by the voice of God, that it is only by combining with them religion and righteousness, a sacred regard to God and his authority, that we shall be established, and preserve our name and praise among the nations of the earth : In contempt or neglect of these, no line of

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policy, can procure for us, or secure to us, the necessary requisites to national prosperity and glory. How accurately, upon this subject, thought and spake our beloved WASHINGTON. "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism, who would labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens. The mere politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connections with public and private felicity.— And let us with caution indulge the supposition, that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education, on minds of a peculiar structure; reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail, in exclusion of religious principles."

"It is substantially true that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government. The rule indeed extends with more or less force to every species of free government. Who that is a friend to it can look with indifference upon attempts to shake the foundation of the fabric."

If then our bosoms glow with the ardor of patriotism, if we are animated by a love of our country

try, and a sincere desire to promote her prosperity and glory—let us lose all party feuds, animosities, and contentions, in a conscientious veneration of the great object of worship, and an exemplary observance of all his precepts, and let the only contest among the enlightened citizens of America be, who shall excel in rational piety and exemplary virtue, and so rival his competitors in exalted patriotism. “They who thus honor God, he will honor”. “The meek he will guide in judgment, the meek he will teach his way.” And wherein any err in judgment, under the secret influence of prejudice or affection, he will in time reveal it to them.

A vicious, wicked and unprincipled man, who casts off the fear of God, and ridicules the obligations of religion and righteousness, though he may rejoice in national prosperity and peace, roils the fountain head of their existence, and poisons the channel through which they are conveyed. The pious fearers of God and workers of righteousness are the chariots of a nation and the horsemen thereof. The piety of Joseph in the house of Potipher, and in the court of Pharaoh, procured to that family and nation a train of providential blessings. The impiety of Manasseh pulled down upon the nation of Israel tokens of divine displeasure for several generations. Had there been but ten righteous persons in the land of Sodom, for their sake its awful destruction would have been averted. While

While these remarks apply to all nations of the earth, they have a special emphasis and energy with reference to our own. The manner in which America was settled; the character, principles and views of our ancestors, impose upon us special obligations to regard the statutes and judgments of God. The purity in which God has preserved his revealed religion to us, the extensive religious, as well as civil privileges that he has indulged us; the remarkable answers of prayer that he has given to his people in their exigencies, and manifestations of his power in their moments of difficulty, would greatly aggravate their guilt, should they turn from the Lord, and despise his ordinances: and our folly as well as guilt would be without a parallel, if, with the instructive admonition of the effects of infidelity upon the nations of Europe before our eyes, we should rush head-long in the career, which has pulled down such accumulated vengeance on their heads.

A spirit of infidelity, displayed in a studied endeavour to loosen and dissolve the obligations of revealed religion, has long infected the nations of Europe, originating probably in high station, it has descended through every grade, and has more or less leavened the whole lump. If some nations have been more active or zealous in the attempt, yet, according to the decision of the Savior in another case, no one in this could have a face to cast a stone

stone at his neighbour. Had we an inspired historian, who, while relating and describing events as they have arisen, could also declare the secret moral and remote causes of them. I doubt not, we should hear him addressing the nations of Europe, under the awful calamities that threaten their existence, in language like this “Have you not procured these things unto yourselves, in that you have forsaken the LORD your God, and have despised his statutes and contemned his ordinances, your own wickedness corrects you, and your backslidings reprove you; know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter that you have forsaken the LORD your God.”

While we see little attempt in national humiliations, penitence, or reformations to remove the cause of the LORD's controversy, we may justly tremble at the probable issue, for when GOD contendeth, he will overcome. Nor is there any counsel, understanding or might, against the LORD. But we should be more anxiously concerned, and feelingly alive to prevent or remove a similar cause of divine controversy with ourselves.

The seeds of infidelity have been long scattered in our country, a variety of causes have conspired, within a few years past, to manure and cherish them, and they have sprung up and spread with threatening aspect. No longer confined to the retreats of speculation,

speculation, nor to the amusement, of the disputatious circle; the principles have infected almost every rank, and shed a baneful practical influence. But with so solemn an example as the dreadful state of Europe before our eyes; and with such repeated tokens of God's displeasure in pestilential desolations, heightened by the late sudden removal of eminent characters; shall we not receive warning? Shall we not be awakened to consideration, be excited to return from whence we have apostatised, and recover the pristine American veneration for God and his government, and practical regard to that glorious system of truth and duty which he hath given and preserved to us? This would be our wisdom and understanding, this would be the means of our renown among the nations of the earth; and, what is more, it would secure to our rising Republic, the guiding care, and protecting benediction of him whose it is to make great and give strength unto all.

May we not be encouraged to this duty by the fond, and, I would flatter myself, not enthusiastic hope, that God designs America as the happy instrument of supporting his banner against the flood of infidelity that has deluged so great a part of the civilized world. Do not the views and principles with which this country was settled; its situation with respect to the nations of Europe; The remarkable dispensations of Heaven towards it with refer-

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ence to her religious, as well as political interests, give rational ground for this hope? Is it not strengthened by the reflection, that GOD reserved an asylum here for rational and constitutional liberty. He honored and succeeded the bold attempt of freemen to secure their rights in a government of laws of their own making, administered by men of their own choosing, and will GOD suffer the most essential prop of such a government so soon to fail? Without a prevalence of virtue, republics cannot exist; without religion, virtue cannot prevail; and no religion affords so firm a basis, or exhibits such animating motives, to the prevalence of virtue as that which brings life and immortality to light, and holds forth rewards and punishments stamped with eternity. If we retain any reverence for revelation, we must believe that GOD will preserve his Church in the world. He may remove it from one place, but it shall settle in another. The gates of hell shall not prevail against it. "The Kings of the earth may set themselves and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his anointed, they may, presumptuously say, "Let us break their bands asunder and cast away their cords from us:" but in the inimitable language of scripture, "He that sitteth in the heavens will laugh, the LORD shall have them in derision; then shall he speak to them in his wrath, and vex them in his fore displeasure. From these considerations, may

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not the friend of religion, of good order, of liberty and of righteousness, encourage a rational hope that God will yet maintain his throne among us, and display his banner, because of truth, and may not every such dignified patriot be encouraged in every rational exertion to revive a practical regard to the statutes and judgments of the LORD our GOD.

Let it not then be thought a vain repetition, if I again exhort my enlightened and reflecting fellow-citizens, to soften all their unpleasant feelings, and embosom all their party views in a united veneration for GOD and his government ; and in a conscientious and exemplary observance of his laws and institutions. Thus shall we prove, that though we are men, and liable to err under the impressions to which humanity is subject, yet we are indeed the friends of our country, and would do every thing in our power to secure to it the shield and benediction of him, “ who can make a little one to become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation.”

If then there is any confidence to be placed in the deductions of reason, or any credit to be given to the declarations of scripture : We learn, from this subject, who are the true friends of any country, and the mean of securing to it national honor and prosperity. They are those who, rationally and devoutly, reverence, adore, and fear GOD, who keep his righteous judgments, and conscientiously walk in
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his statutes and ordinances. I would not be understood to insinuate that men void of religious principle ; and even contemners of religious duties, may not have an attachment to their country, and a desire for its civil and political prosperity and glory ; nay, they may expose themselves to great dangers, and make great sacrifices to accomplish these objects. But by their impiety and profaneness they weaken the energy of those inspiring principles that serve to ennoble, invigorate, and enlarge the mind, and introduce practices that enervate and corrupt. They take away the heavenly defence and security of a people, and render it necessary for him who ruleth among the nations by righteous things in judgment, to testify his displeasure against those that despise his laws and contemn his ordinances. One sinner destroys much good, and may be the occasion of incalculable evil. In the present state of the world Fleets and Armies are a necessary mean of security and defence ; but they will eventually prove a broken reed to the nation that despises the God of armies, and pours contempt upon his authority. " There is no counsel, understanding or might against the LORD." He can disappoint the best concerted plans of the wise Ahithophels, and shroud their flattering prospects, in wild confusion. The true fearer of God, and worker of righteousness is the friend of his country and the mean of her defence, and when such is the character of the rul-

ers of any nation, her renown will go forth among her neighbours, and she may calculate upon national honor, and prosperity.

This subject directs the honest, independent, and patriotic citizen, in the exercise of his high birth-right as a freeman, in giving his suffrages for civil rulers. This, though a natural right of man, is enjoyed but by a very small proportion of our race. They, who are dignified by the high privilege, ought to honor themselves by a dignified exercise of it, and not carelessly despise their birth-right, much less sell it, at a less premium, than a mess of pottage, to answer the purposes of pride, or passion; of envy or ambition.

The character of a nation is justly decided by the character of their rulers, especially in a free and elective government. And they have a mighty influence in confirming or changing the character of a people. If the rulers of a people are men of principle, who fear God and observe his statutes, the nation will be owned in this approving light by him who superintends the affairs of nations, and it will give a train to his providential dispensations. Every friend to his country, in the choice of civil rulers, ought to have his eye upon the faithful of the land, upon such as fear God and regard his statutes. It is to be expected, other things being equal, that we should give our suffrages for men, whose political

views and apprehensions accord with our own. Yet scarcely could that man vindicate his claim to the meed of patriotism, who should give his suffrage for a Candidate, who had no other claim to the dignified station of a civil ruler, or who was destitute of the commanding influence of religious principle.

Jethro's advice can never be controverted in principle, nor disregarded in practice with impunity, "choose out from among all the people able men, men of truth, such as fear God and hate covetousness,"—and to them confide the administration of your affairs.

Our Constitutions of Government have happily formed no religious establishments, nor excluded any man of honorable integrity, from office ; yet by their invariably instituting oaths as introductory to offices and qualifications for them. The enlightened citizens of America loudly proclaim their sense of the importance of religious principle. For what security is there for the faithful discharge of any office, if a sense of religious obligation desert the oaths that bind the subject to his duty. It is but echoing the general voice of America therefore, to say, that as any nation would be safe and happy, it is of the first importance that they should raise to office, in their respective grades, men who reverence and adore a God, who acknowledge themselves accountable

table to him; who respect the institutions of worship, whose beneficial influence upon society, ages of experience can attest; who expect a day of judgment, and a state of retribution. For such characters we should devoutly pray, to such we should endeavor to form the rising hope of America; on such should our eyes be placed, and to them should we give our suffrages:

We live in an eventful period of the world, and the nations; who have heard our fame, gaze upon us; with peculiar advantages we are acting a great part in the scale of empires. Let us be concerned to secure his favor, who, though he has caused grief and spread a cloud upon our brightness, will have compassion according to the multitude of his tender mercies. This we can do only by keeping his statutes and judgments. This will be our wisdom and understanding in the sight of all nations, and will eventually produce this honorable testimony from them, *Surely this great Nation is a wise and understanding People.*

FINIS.