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MR. BUCKMINSTER'S

S E R M O N,

DELIVERED JUNE 7, 1787,

BEFORE THE

GENERAL-COURT

OF THE STATE OF

NEW - HAMPSHIRE.



A
SERMON,

PREACHED BEFORE HIS EXCELLENCY

THE

PRESIDENT,

THE HONORABLE

COUNCIL,

AND THE HONORABLE THE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

OF THE

STATE OF NEW-HAMPSHIRE,

JUNE 7, 1787.

BY JOSEPH BUCKMINSTER, A. M.

PASTOR OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN PORTSMOUTH.

GIVE ME NOW WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE, THAT I
MAY GO OUT AND COME IN BEFORE THIS PEOPLE.
KING SOLOMON.

PORTSMOUTH:

PRINTED, AND TO BE SOLD, BY
ROBERT GERRISH.

M.DCC.LXXXVII.



STATE OF NEW-HAMPSHIRE.

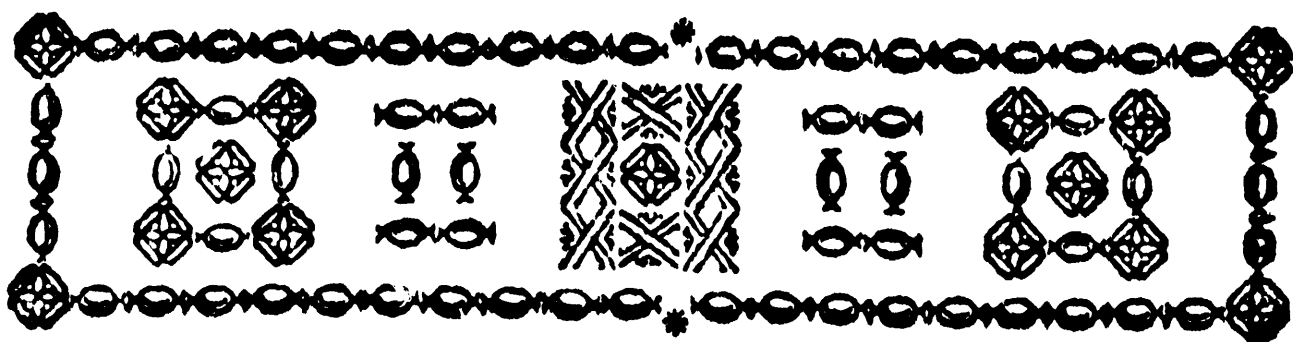
In the HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

JUNE 7, 1787.

VOTED, *That Mr. Pickering, Mr. Gains, and Mr. Emerson, be a Committee to present the Rev. Mr. Buckminster with the thanks of this House for his publick performances, and request of him a copy of the discourse delivered before the General-Court this day, that the same may be printed.*

THOMAS BARTLET, *Speaker P. T.*

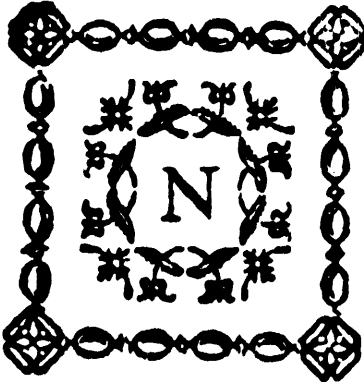




A
S E R M O N,
PREACHED BEFORE HIS EXCELLENCY
THE
P R E S I D E N T, &c.



Men, Brethren, and Fathers,

 O Princes of any people, or representatives of freemen, were ever chosen to higher or more important business than what will, probably, come before those who are honoured with these titles in the United States the present year.

THE

THE General-Assembly of this State was, perhaps, never convened at a season that called louder for the wisdom of the wise, the understanding of the aged, the speech of the trusty, or the guidance of him who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working.——No, not in those trying hours, when, in the face of the hostile power of Britain, the arm of America was lifted to Heaven, and she declared sovereign and independent. If to recover the bewildered traveller is as interesting as to point him his way at first——if to extricate from embarrassments require as much wisdom as to prevent them——and if to save a kingdom is as important as to found one, the truth of those declarations will be readily conceded.

THE fair morning that dawned over this infant empire, promising a serene and glorious day, is soon changed: the curtains of the heavens are spread, murmurs are heard in every region, “darkness covers the land, and gross darkness, the people.”

UNDER these circumstances, it is matter of peculiar regret, that you are denied the learning, wisdom, and piety, of that aged master of assemblies

blies

blies* who was to have led you, this morning, to the altar of God, and brought you the message from his sacred word; and by this disappointment you are called to attend upon one, who is but a Son in the Gospel, who would not have been so early chosen to this service, could such a disappointment have been supposed probable. But taught to obey every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, "being called I came without gain-saying, and would now ask for what intent you have sent for me?" Educated in the school of the Prophets, with which politics are not necessarily connected, you must expect no direction in your civil police. It would be almost presumption in any of this description, and would be arrogance in me, in our present deranged and distracted state, when the wisest Palinurus scarce knows which way to steer, to dictate to those who have made politics their study.

I APPEAR, brethren, as a messenger from the Lord of Hosts, and as a servant of Jesus Christ,
and

* The Rev. Doctor Langdon, who for two years in succession has been appointed to preach the election sermon, but has been prevented by the infirmities of a broken bone.

and would lead your meditations to instructions that he has given, peculiarly suited to circumstances like ours. You will find them in

J A M E S I st, 5th.

IF any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.

TH E R E is a G O D — and M A N is his creature.— The sovereign, independent, and all-perfect character of G O D, and the weak, dependant, and imperfect character of M A N, are clearly seen from the light of nature, reason, and experience. He must be a fool and without excuse, who saith in his heart, there is no God; or boasts of his own powers and faculties, as though he had not received them.

W H E R E V E R we go, though among the most barbarous of the earth, we see the Temple and the Altar, the sacrifice and the oblation, tokens of acknowledged dependance upon an unseen Power.

W H A T

WHAT the light of nature dictates, revelation confirms, and teaches us, that though God made man after his own image, and gave him distinguished powers and capacities to be his subordinate guides and directors, in the duties of his elevated station; yet he communicated but his image, not his nature. He retained man dependant upon himself, and in his best state man needed habitual instruction and direction from his all-wise Creator.

THIS golden age ~~is~~ past, the powers of man have suffered an humiliating shock in the sad apostacy of our race from God. "The understanding is darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in us, by reason of the blindness of our hearts," and though man would be wise, he is born with very little pretension to the exalted character.

MANY are the instances, in private life, in mere personal concerns, where the wisdom of the prudent fails him, and he knows not what to do; well may we suppose it will not be more adequate to the complicated affairs of civil government, which involve the duty and interest of many individuals, or that those who are honored with the

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important

important charge of guiding and directing these will feel themselves in less need of a superior influence.

THERE is an instinctive propensity in our natures, in scenes of perplexity and distress, especially if they are become sufficiently pressing, to look out for foreign aid; and the light of reason leads us ultimately to him who teacheth man knowledge and giveth him understanding.

PRAYER to God for wisdom is a duty of natural religion; and perhaps no nation can be named that has not sought, in some expressive way, to the Deity it acknowledged, for help in trouble, and guidance in important affairs of government. The Heathen mariners, with whom Jonah fled to Tarshish, applied to this duty in the hour of their distress, and thought him a miracle of stupidity that he could sleep and neglect it. The Romans, no less renowned for their wisdom than their valor, paid a very assiduous attention to this duty; they consulted their auspices at the appointment of their civil and military officers, and at the determination of every design of consequence. What they did from the unassisted light of nature, we are directed

rected to do by the light of divine revelation, and that glorious Being from whom alone help comes, says, " If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God." And he not only points us our duty, but enjoins it under the highest encouragement; for he assures us, *he gives liberally*. He is the all-wise and infinitely good God, and never said to any, *ask ye me in vain*.

THE words of the text seem to be designed for the direction and encouragement of an individual in his private concerns, but they apply with higher energy and encouragement to those that are entrusted with the concerns of thousands of individuals, in proportion to the greater dignity of their station, the more intricate perplexity of their affairs, and the more extensive influence of their measures. And he not only gives liberally, but *he upbraideth not*: he does not, as is too often the case with human counsellors, censure the weakness or ignorance of his supplicants, the triflingness of the occasions upon which they apply, or their past neglect of him. He is not wearied with the frequency of their addresses, nor with the earnestness and perseverance with which they pursue them. *He upbraideth not*, but closes his encouragement

agement with a promise of success to him who asks aright, it shall be given him. The meek he will guide in judgment; the meek he will teach his way.

THEY who are unacquainted with the great truths of the Gospel, may be accepted in their immediate application to the throne of the divine Majesty; but they who have heard of Jesus the mediator, as advocate and intercessor at the right hand of God, must approach in his name as they would hope for audience and acceptance; for no man cometh to the Father but by him, and there is no other name in which we can be heard. The apostle suggests as much in the words immediately following the text, when he says, "Let him ask in faith nothing wavering," for Christ is the author, the object, and the medium of faith; and "whatsoever we ask the father in his name, believing, we shall receive."

I AM sensible there are those who, from the glorious perfections of the Deity, endeavor to derive an argument against prayer; and improve the glory of the divine character as a reason for withholding all explicit homage. Their argument is, that

as God is an omniscient and infinitely benevolent Being, he must know all our wants, and be ready to supply them ; and as he is the unchanging God, the most fervent addresses can be of no efficacy. But the argument mistakes the end and design of prayer, which is not to inform God, or influence him to change, but to render us proper objects of divine mercies, and fit us to receive them ; and nothing can be plainer, from the word of God, than that prayer is the enjoined duty of those that need mercies, and the usual pre-requisite of Heaven to their bestowal. “ Ask and ye shall receive, I will be inquired of to do it for them. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God.” If this be true, the omniscience and unchangableness of God afford the strongest arguments for prayer ; for without it he must, in an ordinary way, see us unfit to receive mercies, and must change his usual method to bestow them.

In answer to our prayers for wisdom and direction, we are not to expect any oracular responses, or miraculous communications ; but a secret divine energy attending the exercise of those faculties that heaven has given us to improve, directing their use, strengthening them in exercise, removing

removing darkness and difficulties out of the way, and fixing in those resolves which he will approve, whose counsel shall stand, and who will do all his pleasure. Shall such communications be thought impossible or improbable, from him who is a spirit? Who is the Father of our spirits, acquainted with all their powers and principles, and who cannot but have intimate access to them? Are they not communications that are consentaneous to the glorious character of God, as the all-perfect spirit, and to the character of man as a rational, moral, and yet dependant creature? "Man's heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps. He giveth understanding to the simple, and taketh the wise in their own craftiness." The objections to this duty, the scruples concerning it, originate in infidelity and ignorance of God.

I HAVE already suggested the supplications and sacrifices of the Romans for wisdom in the fairest era of their commonwealth; farther to enforce the duty, as incumbent upon those that are intrusted with the affairs of states and empires, let me call your recollection to the attention paid to it by the renowned leaders of that people whose history is handed down in the sacred pages. Moses, their
 lawgiver

lawgiver and deliverer, was a man of prayer, and though he had the special tokens of the divine presence with him, in the pillars of cloud and fire, to be his general directors; yet, on various emergencies, we find him prostrate before Jehovah, seeking special guidance and direction, and deprecating evils that impended his people, and the effect of his prayers, not once nor twice, was the averting of those evils, and proved the lengthening of their tranquility. David, no less distinguished for his valor than his piety, asked counsel of the Lord in a great variety of instances. Solomon, his son, the wisest of men, when he was about succeeding his father in the throne of Israel, most earnestly besought the Lord for a wise and understanding heart, to guide him in his kingdom. And in what attitude did he ever appear more dignified and exalted! God granted him his request, and what nation ever enjoyed greater power and prosperity, or rose to more exalted heights of national glory, than this, under his administration, 'till he forsook the Lord, and called upon Gods that could not save? Hezekiah besought the Lord for a way of escape, in a most critical and threatening situation, and the Lord opened it for him, and restored prosperity. Jehosaphat, in like circumstances,

stances, fell prostrate before the Lord, and in these expressive laconic terms, poured forth his heart: Our God—we know not what to do: but our eyes are upon thee. And he stood still, and saw the salvation of God. What need I more say?—the time would fail me to mention the instances that might be adduced from the rulers of Israel and Judah. Let it suffice to observe, that in them was verified that observation of the wisest of their kings, that when the righteous were in authority, the people rejoiced; but when the wicked bore rule, the people mourned.

As we have examples of attention to this duty in the wisest and best characters, and of success following it, so we are not destitute of instances of unwise administration, and foolish resolves, ascribed to the neglect of this duty. The children of Israel, imposed upon by the craft and subtilty of the Gibeonites, entered into a league with them, which was injurious to their interests, and led them to violate the express injunctions of Jehovah; and this their rash and unwise procedure is ascribed to their neglect to ask counsel of the Lord. They that honor God he will honor, and they that despise him he will lightly esteem. The moral reasons

sons of God's government are ever the same, and they who neglect to ask counsel of the Lord must expect to have their councils turned into foolishness, to meet darkness in their paths, see confusion in their measures, and find themselves entangled in the maze of their own errors*. Humble application to God for wisdom and direction, is a duty incumbent upon all, especially upon civil rulers; it has been practised by all nations; the most dignified human characters have honored themselves by their attention to this duty: it is expressly enjoined by the all-wise God, and has been followed with desired success. May I, then, be permitted, instead of those particular addresses to the several branches of the legislature, which are common on those occasions, to address to that honorable body, in their collective capacity, the direction of the text.

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* Job speaking of the Great God in his providential government, says, "He leadeth counsellors away spoiled, and maketh the judges fools. He taketh away the heart of the chief of the people of the earth, and causeth them to wander in a wilderness where there is no way. They grope in the dark without light." *Job* xiiith,—17, 24. "But they that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength."

IN a dark and threatening day, you are called to an high and honorable station. You have the most flattering testimonies to your wisdom and abilities in those suffrages of freemen, which have placed in your hands their most important temporal concerns, in their present perplexed and embarrassed state. Yet I should pay but an ill compliment to your heads or your hearts, to suppose you felt yourselves equal to the arduous task ; or were unconscious of your needing superior instruction and guidance. Unable to afford any direction myself, I have endeavored to point you to him who teacheth man knowledge, and giveth him understanding ; and to refresh your memories with a direction that he has given to them that are embarrassed. His ministers you are, as well as representatives of freemen : all civil rulers stand in this elevated station, and are clothed with a delegated power from the King of Kings. This is an additional reason why they should wait on God for instruction. The foreign minister of an earthly monarch, would soon meet the frowns of his royal master, who, in affairs important and perplexed, should neglect to ask instruction, when there was an opportunity of obtaining it. And shall the minister of the King of Kings be more excusable in neglecting

neglecting his divine master, who is infinite in wisdom, and has enjoined him in his commission, If he lack wisdom, to ask of God.—You have worthily commenced the business of the year, by appearing in the most exalted attitude in which mortals can appear, bowing at the Altar of the Lord for his instruction and blessing. It is only to be regretted that you have not had a more skilful master of assemblies to lead your devotions.—You will, doubtless, commence the business of every day with humble prayer to God, and in those addresses be careful not to repeat the folly of God's ancient people, of drawing nigh with the lip and honoring with the mouth, while the heart is far from him. Praying to God i. presenting the *desires* of our hearts, and saying amen to him that giveth thanks. You will not content yourselves with a public address to God for general direction, but will carry every important subject to your closets, and beg of God to shew you the safe and the right way.

CONCERNS of the highest moment will, doubtless, come before you, in the course of the present year, and your decisions may greatly affect the interest of the present and succeeding generations.

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This heightens the importance of the offices that are to be filled by your suffrages, and shews your need of a divine influence to guide you in your choice. Let nothing be done through prejudice or partiality, and remember that those are not, in general, most worthy of offices who seek them, but those who are sought by them. If you lack wisdom, ask it of God : imitate the example of the **Apostles**, who, though poor in this world, were under a divine guidance, and say, "Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all, shew whether of these thou hast chosen."

BEFORE the year expires you will, probably, have laid before you the resolutions of the Convention for revising the Confederation, by whose determinations and the consequent conduct of the States, it is supposed, the interests of this new empire will be greatly affected; and a way opened for her rising into greatness, or closed against all her future prospects. In an affair of such magnitude seek instruction from him whose ministers you are, and give your suffrages as those that feel the fate of millions hanging on their hand. Who, that was to decide the fate of an individual, but would most devoutly pray to be directed aright? How much more important will be your decisions!

THE embarrassed state of our finances ; the pressure of public and private debts ; and ways and means of relief ; will, probably, employ many of your hours ; and it is not impossible that the subject of paper-money will again call up your attention. And will you not need wisdom to guide you in this labyrinth ? If the circulating medium could be increased, it would probably afford some relief in our present exigencies ; and, if the legislature of New-Hampshire are in possession of the fancied philosopher's stone, or the fabled transmuting touch of Midas, they might listen to a proposal of paper-money ; but if they are not, reason and experience reprobate the measure, as having a direct tendency to put out of circulation every shilling of hard money, as a mean of further embarrassment, and an engine of oppression, fraud, and cruelty, and no wisdom, human or divine, can dictate a measure that leads to such evils. As in divinity there can be no faith contrary to reason, so in politics there can be no wisdom contrary to righteousness. " Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is the reproach of any people." Righteousness is the rule of God's administration, and ought to be the rule of theirs who reign or decree justice by him. Maxims of convenience, or even of supposed

posed necessity, as rules of legislation, to the disregard of justice, righteousness, and truth, must ever involve in perplexity, and lead on to ruin. *Fiat justitia, ruat Cælum*, is a motto that ought to be inscribed over the door of every house of legislation, and engraven on the breast of every legislator. * When Darius, king of Persia, lay a dying, his son asked him by what art he had so happily managed the government, and so long preserved himself in it, to which he received this memorable answer, “*That it was by doing in all things that which was just both towards God and Man.*”

“The righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and his countenance doth behold the upright, but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.”—

The direction of God to his ancient people, repeatedly recorded in the book of God, which speaks its importance, is worthy the serious consideration of every legislator. “Thou shalt not
 “ have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a
 “ small: thou shalt not have in thy house divers
 “ measures, a great and a small: but thou shalt
 “ have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and
 “ just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may
 “ be lengthened in the land which the Lord
 “ thy

* Prideaux, Vol. II. page 194.

“ thy God giveth thee: for all that do such
 “ things, and all that do unrighteously, are
 “ an abomination unto the Lord thy God.”—
 If weights and measures are to be of a fixed and
 invariable standard, most certainly the medium of
 commerce, or trade, ought to be fixed and inva-
 riable, for that is the weight and measure of every
 interchangeable commodity. “ That which is
 “ the rule of justice must itself be just, if it be
 “ otherwise it is a constant cheat.” And a great
 writer* of ancient date, whose passions could not
 be heated by the experiences of our day, has said,
 “ To have an uncertainty in weights and measures
 “ is like a corruption in judgment, it cheats un-
 “ der color of justice, and thus to deceive a man
 “ to his damage, is worse than picking his pocket
 “ ets, or robbing him on the high-way.”

THE only probable way of increasing the cir-
 culating medium, to the benefit of the public, is
 by giving up, forever, the idea of paper-money ;
 and by a strict regard to justice in all public mea-
 sures, restoring to men of property in the govern-
 ment a confidence, that when they have parted
 with

* Henry on Leviticus, 19.

with their property they may, some time or other, realize it again. This, I have no doubt, would soon afford a sufficiency of circulating cash, for all the purposes of mutual intercourse, and internal commerce.

THE time would fail me to particularize the important matters that will engage your attention, but whatever they may be, in them all acknowledge God, and he will direct your steps; deliberate upon them in his fear; and if you lack wisdom, ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not. This habitual application to God, for guidance and direction, will not only secure you the secret influence you need, as it is God's appointed method of bestowing it, but it will have a natural tendency to bring coolness and candor into your debates, to form your minds to that serene and placid state, which, like the unruffled surface of the water, reflects the images of objects just as they are, and it will suppress that prejudice and partiality, those heated passions and prepossessions from which the greatest minds are not free, but which form as false a medium of vision as the agitated surface of the troubled deep. The mind that has reached the Throne of Grace in
 elevated

elevated devotion, in retiring from that place of serenity and calmness, will bring a tincture of the region into the legislative areopagus, and spread a lustre all around him, resembling the lustre of Moses' face when he came from Mount Sinai from immediate converse with God.

LET me, then, again recommend to you the direction of the text, ask counsel of the Lord, call upon him, not only upon set and formal occasions, in public and in secret, but whenever your decision is called for, upon any important matter, let the devout breathing of your heart, to him that teacheth man knowledge, prepare you to judge for him who is with you in the judgment; nor need you say who shall ascend to Heaven to bring God down from above: he standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the Gods. Nor are such ejaculatory addresses without precedent or precept.

NEHEMIAH, while he was cup-bearer to king Artaxerxes, and was performing the duties of his office in the presence of his royal master, lifted up his heart to God for direction and

success in what he meditated for his people, and he was heard and answered in the secret aspiration.

HONORABLE will be that civil ruler who imitates Nehemiah in his piety, and happy will he be who is so great a benefactor to his people. “ If any of you lack wisdom let him ask of God, “ who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth “ not, and it shall be given him.”

I AM not unapprehensive that many have been surprized at the choice of our subject on this occasion, and will be disappointed, that they have not been amused with a dissertation upon the nature of civil government, the character of civil rulers, the dignity of their office, and its importance to the world. They may wonder that they have heard nothing of the natural and political advantages of this country, and its prospects of future eminence and glory. These are pleasing and important subjects, and had I viewed our situation less serious than I do, and thought it an era for speculation, I should with pleasure, indulged my imagination upon some of these themes. But, if I have any discernment in the signs of the
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the times, America is approaching a most interesting crisis; and, if ever civil rulers found occasion to be serious, to lay aside all levity, and summon up manly thought and reflection; if ever they found occasion to seek superior guidance and instruction, the rulers of this year will find the occasion repeated: and by them will be decided the fate of this empire.

WHEN a beautiful edifice stands firm on its foundation, the spectator may justly amuse himself in contemplating its symmetry, proportions, ornaments, and prospects; but, if it were tottering to its fall, he would be unpardonable to be thus employed, and neglect every effort to sustain and restore it.

I HAVE predicted the future glory of America; yet nothing but an attention to the duty that has now been recommended, and a consequent conduct, correspondent to it, will verify that prediction.

OUR political situation is not less hazardous or threatening than was the real situation of the mariners with Jonah, when Heathen could exclaim,
 “ Awake,

“Awake, O sleeper, and call upon thy God!”—
Our sins, our neglect of God, and forgetfulness of him, are the Jonah that have raised the tempest, and however hard we may row to bring them to land, they must be cast over-board, or the ship will sink.

If we could be persuaded to arise and call upon God, in sincerity and faith, amend our ways and doings that are not good, and give ourselves up to his guidance in the practice of piety, righteousness, and virtue. If our civil rulers, who are in the view of Heaven, and of surrounding nations, as all the people; whose examples are of the most extensive influence, would acknowledge God in all their ways, and *sincerely* ask wisdom of him who giveth liberally, and upbraideth not,—he would cause light to arise in our darkness, bring order out of our confusion, and establish and complete the fair political edifice, whose foundation he has so happily laid; and this is the only way in which complete deliverance can arise to us, unless God should change his adorable perfections, or alter the general rule of his administrations; for “they that honor him, he will honor; and they that despise him, he will lightly esteem.”

THE infidel and libertine, who feel too self-sufficient to acknowledge their dependance upon Jehovah, will stifle all this rant and superstition; but there can be none of these characters among our civil rulers: for the constitution provides, that they should be of the Protestant religion, and he who is too wise, in his own conceit, to ask counsel of God, must be viewed too weak in the opinion of freemen, to be intrusted with their concerns; for there is more hope of a fool than of him. And that civil minister of Jehovah, who neglects his divine master, whatever reputation may attend his administration here, will have a most solemn account to give when the kingdoms of this world shall all be blotted out, and the earth and heavens be dissolved. Is there such an event most certainly to take place!—

There is something, then, more important to us all, whether as rulers or as subjects, than securing a happy state of civil government here, which is securing our hearts before God, being interested in his love and favor, that when all these things shall be dissolved we may receive a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and enter into that glorious city, the new Jerusalem, where shall be perfect liberty without licentiousness, perfect govern-
ment

ment without oppression; a city that needeth not the light of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; the glory of God enlightening it, and the Lamb being the light thereof.——
God grant, that, whatever be the fate of states and empires here, or our situation, as subjects of them, we may, in the kingdom of glory, find an end of all our sorrows, and a completion of all our joys.

F I N I S.

San

E R R A T A.

Page 6, Line 14, for *those*, read *these*.
8, --- 6, read *unto* all.
15, --- 19, for *power*, read *peace*.
17, --- 16, for *those*, read *these*.
