

Wm. J. Keith
THE FRIENDLY INFLUENCE OF

RELIGION AND VIRTUE

ON THE PROSPERITY

OF A NATION,

A SERMON,

PREACHED TO THE INDEPENDENT OR CONGREGATIONAL

CHURCH, IN CHARLESTON, SOUTH-CAROLINA,

JUNE 14, 1789.

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ONE OF THE PASTORS OF THE SAID CHURCH.

PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THOSE WHO HEARD IT.



CHARLESTON:

PRINTED BY MARKLAND & M'IVER, No. 47, BAY.

MDCCLXXXIX.

DEUTERONOMY, XXVIII. I.

And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments, which I command thee this day; that the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth.

THERE is no truth which seems to be more clearly written in the history of nations, than that their prosperity and decline are not only intimately connected with the systems of policy by which they are governed, but still more affected and influenced by the manners or moral conduct by which they are characterized. As long as religion and virtue have been generally honored and practised among a people they have continued safe, flourishing and happy. When their morals have become generally vicious and dissolute, they have been soon involved in various calamities, and unless prevented by a timely reformation, have finally sunk into irretrievable ruin.

In the Jewish history in particular, the proofs of this are exhibited with the strongest and most convincing evidence.

The Jews were indeed a peculiar people, and the interpositions of divine providence, in the direction of their affairs, were more than ordinarily particular and remarkable; yet, in the main, their conduct, and the prosperous or adverse events which befel them under the divine administration, are only more conspicuous instances of what we may discern in a light sufficiently clear and striking among every other people. In them God seems to have intended to give the world an illustrious

trious example of the general method of his procedure with the various governments or societies of mankind in every age and country. So that whatever is recorded of them, should be considered as "written for our admonition," and the general declarations which God made to them on the subject of their national affairs, should be heard by us with the same attention and application as though they had been immediately addressed to ourselves.

In this view, the words before us are deeply interesting to us, in our political capacity and social connexions, at all times and in all situations; and at the present period, and in the present circumstances of our country, you will probably concur with me in thinking them peculiarly worthy of our attention, and entitled to our very serious consideration and careful improvement.

And as the institutions of the sabbath, and of the gospel ministry, are no less friendly to the temporal than to the eternal interests of mankind, I trust I shall be regarded as engaging in a service not unsuitable to the sacred time which we now employ, or to the sanctity of the office which I sustain, while I attempt to assist you in the improvement of this subject, with a view chiefly to the advancement of your political prosperity as citizens of America.

These words contain a most gracious and encouraging promise made to the Israelites, at the time when they had at length completed their tedious march of forty years, varied with many astonishing scenes of divine mercy and judgment, through the wilderness, and were now on the point of entering into and taking possession of the long promised and long expected land of rest. In this important situation, and with this animating prospect before them, Moses, their divinely inspired leader and law giver, addresses himself to them in the several solemn and pathetic discourses which fill the present

present book. In these he recapitulates to them the most signal events of their memorable history from their deliverance out of the servitude of Egypt to the present interesting period, when the object of their hopes was in near and full view before them; and he repeats to them a comprehensive summary of the laws, which under divine direction, he had ordained for their government. In this chapter he proceeds to set before them, on the one hand, a multiplicity of blessings and felicities which would attend their obedience to these excellent laws; and on the other hand, a variety of curses and miseries that would follow upon a contrary course of conduct.

The words of the text collect into one point of view the whole of that private and public happiness which is afterwards more largely specified in particular instances.

The sentiment which it obviously conveys is, that a willing subjection to the authority of God, their supreme governor, and a careful compliance with the obligations of those sacred laws of morality and civil polity, which he had instituted for their observance, would prove the certain means of raising them to the highest stage of personal and national prosperity, of advancing them to an enviable pre-eminence in wealth, power and glory among the nations of the earth.

The hope set before them belongs equally to us; and we may with humble confidence lay claim to the same or similar blessings that were ensured to them by special promise, if we only consent to the terms on which they are offered.

We, my brethren, as citizens of the United States, have certainly been the subjects of a divine providential care, not less friendly and beneficent than that which was extended to the ancient people of Israel; though it may not have appeared in instances strictly miraculous, or in events of a nature altogether so extraordinary.

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This will, I think, be readily confessed by all “who are wise to observe those things” which have been done for us, and who have a heart “to understand the loving kindness of the Lord,” as it has been displayed in the great events that have taken place among us. From an attentive review of these, we must surely be led, with adoring gratitude and praise, to acknowledge—that it was “the good hand of our God” which conducted us through the vicissitudes and perils of a long and grievous war, to the triumphs of a glorious peace; that it was his guardian care which secured to us the final and full possession of that freedom and independence, to which the law of nature, and the circumstances of our country, gave us the clearest and justest claim; that it was his favor which exalted us to a station among the sovereign powers of the world, and crowned with so much glory our arduous exertions in a cause upon which many of the most essential and valuable rights of human nature depended. And when all the desirable fruits of victory and peace, of independence and empire were in danger of finally failing us, through the deficiency of the principles on which the states were connected in their first federal compact, his wisdom and goodness have appeared no less conspicuously in over-ruling the events, and directing the measures which led to the formation and adoption of that system of united government, under the operation of which we now begin with better hopes to promise ourselves the complete attainment and lasting enjoyment of all the important objects to which the American revolution in its first commencement was directed.

In all these instances the divine and benevolent agency of the great Ruler of the universe has certainly appeared with the brightest evidence and lustre, and must constrain us to confess that the accomplishment of a revolution so extraordinary and important, is as certainly the work of the Lord, as “it is marvellous in our eyes.”

Would we now wish that the divine favours which we have so richly experienced may be sanctified into real and permanent blessings? Would we wish that our past labours and sufferings in the cause of our country may not be in vain? Would we wish that the dangers and the fears which have been so mercifully averted from us may return no more? Would we wish to see the light of those pleasing prospects which are now ~~dawning~~ ^{shining} afresh upon our land, “shining brighter and brighter unto the perfect day?” Would we wish to behold our infant empire growing up by rapid advances to that honorable distinction, to that superior glory and happiness, to which the promise in the text directed the ambition and the expectations of Israel? Let it be our earnest study and endeavour, and O! that the concern and care were universal, to render those acknowledgements and services which we owe to the God of our salvation, to cultivate those sentiments and habits of piety and virtue to which his holy laws are intended to form us; and all these important objects will be infallibly secured, and these flattering hopes fully realized. If we truly believe the word of God, if we understand any thing of the methods of his administration, we must be persuaded that it is only on the condition of our approving ourselves “a willing and obedient people,” that we can reasonably hope “to eat the good of the land,” and to rise high in prosperity and honor among the nations of the earth. May our persuasion of this be accompanied with a correspondent practice!

In discoursing further on this subject, I shall be naturally led,

I. To point out some instances of that religious and virtuous character and conduct which are essentially necessary, and will be found most conducive to the prosperity and happiness of a people.

II. To

II. To shew on what grounds a people, distinguished by such a character and conduct, may hope to become eminently prosperous and happy.

I am 1st. To point out some instances of that religious and virtuous character and conduct, which are essentially necessary, and will be found most conducive, to the prosperity and happiness of a people.

The present time will allow me to take notice only of these following:—

1st. It becomes us devoutly to acknowledge the superintending Providence of God in all our affairs, and especially in all the great events of a public nature and general concern which take place among us.

“ To the Lord our God belong the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and the earth is his; his is the kingdom, and he is exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come of him, and he reigns over all; and in his hand is power and might; and in his hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. ” “ He is the most High, who rules in the kingdoms of men, and gives them to whomsoever he will: ” and according to his sovereign and righteous decrees, “ are nations and kingdoms builded and planted; or plucked up, pulled down and destroyed. ” It is therefore, obviously the duty and the interest of a people “ to set the Lord ever before them; ” to reverence his high authority as “ the great governor among the nations; ” to adore his supreme agency in the management of all their affairs, and in the direction of all the events that befall them; in the day of their adversity, to humble themselves with confession and penitence under his mighty hand; in the day of their prosperity, with affectionate and joyful hearts to thank and praise his glorious name; and in all times and circumstances, “ to hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord, and

and to observe and to do all his commandments." For "then that thus honor him" with their grateful regards and chearful obedience, "he will also honor" with his special protection and favor. On this principle and in this hope, we are certainly deeply concerned to hear and observe the words of that persuasive exhortation, in which Moses addresses the ancient people of God, when from the consideration of his distinguishing favors conferred upon them, he says, "And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul?" This we surely owe to him "who is our praise, who is our God, and who hath done for us all those great and terrible things which our eyes have seen:" and this we equally owe to ourselves, as all the homage, which he requires of us, is manifestly "for our good."

But his demands upon us are far from being limited to these expressions of direct homage to himself. For, besides our cultivating these sentiments of piety, "and walking thus humbly with our God," it is further necessary, in order to recommend us to his favor, and to promote the interest and happiness of the community to which we belong; that towards our fellow men we should "do justly and love mercy."

This leads me to observe,

2d. That in order to maintain that virtuous conduct, by which the prosperity of a people is eminently promoted, we must be careful to exercise mutual justice and benevolence towards each other, in all the instances of our commercial and social intercourse.

A sacred regard to the principles and rules of equitable and honest dealing, and a ready exchange of offices of kindness and charity, are so indispensably necessary to the common welfare, that they may be

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considered as lying at the foundation of society, and forming the strongest bonds by which mankind are united in communities. In a due performance of these social duties, therefore, consists a very essential and important branch of that national character which we should zealously study to cultivate and support, in our respective spheres, relations and engagements of life.

Now, in order to the general practice of righteousness among a people, the foundation for it must be first laid in righteous laws. For, though the effects of laws are not universally correspondent to the principles and views with which they are framed, yet they have certainly a powerful influence, in forming the general manners and moral habits of those for whose government they are provided; and especially when they are calculated to favor rather than to restrain any species of iniquity or vice to which the human heart is in itself too strongly inclined. Legislators then are deeply concerned to beware, that in the laws which they frame, the claims and obligations of strict justice and equity, be never sacrificed to any political consideration whatever. Because such laws, however they may seem to promise some present temporary advantages, are invariably found by experience, from their baneful influence upon the morals of the people, to be the sources, the fruitful sources of general and lasting mischief. The great objects of all wise and good laws, will be to protect every unoffending member of society in the possession of every essential right and interest, to encourage the practice of whatsoever things are "true and just, pure, honest and praise-worthy," and to call forth into action every principle in the human mind that is fitted to adorn social life, and promote the public good.

When equitable laws, those necessary and powerful guards of the political and moral interests of mankind,
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are ordained, it then becomes the peculiar duty and concern of those who preside over them, to see that they be faithfully observed, and to execute them, in distributing rewards and punishments, as they are found to be respectively due, with an impartial hand. For then alone do they answer the important ends of their appointment, which are “for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well.”

On these topics, many useful hints of exhortation might be suggested to those who are honored with the weighty trust of legislation, and with the executive powers of the state. On these, however, I shall not at present further enlarge, as I here address but few in those public stations, compared with the numbers in the private ranks and relations of life who now hear me.

To all such I may with unquestionable propriety, and with the greatest freedom, renew the admonitions so often given by the apostles, and dictated by the general spirit of the pure, gentle, and peaceable religion of the gospel, to be subject to the righteous rule of the laws, and to the powers by whom they are faithfully administered; and not only “for wrath,” or through fear of punishment, “but for conscience sake,” and with a truly christian temper, to fulfil as far as possible the obligations of every duty of justice due to mankind. As fellow christians, and fellow citizens in particular, “you are members one of another: wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour.” And in the correspondence of your actions with your words, let it appear that you are governed by the laws of truth and sincerity, approving yourselves true to your promises, and faithful to your engagements in all practicable cases; and holding the various arts of falsehood and unrighteousness in the utmost abhorrence: let “that only be followed” in every instance “which is altogether just and right.”

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In a word, let that most excellent rule, which the wisest of lawgivers, and the best friend of mankind, even our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, has prescribed for the government of social life, be written on all your hearts, and guide all your conduct towards your fellow men : “ All things whatf ever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them, for this is the law and the prophets.” How much fairer would have been the character of our country, and how much greater its felicity at this day, if these things had been heretofore duly regarded by all in public and in private life!

Yet should we not think it sufficient merely to practise strict justice in our commercial or civil transactions with each other. That admirable law of social life to which your attention has been already turned, would further lead us to cherish in our hearts the principles of an enlarged benevolence and charity, and to express them on all proper occasions, in acts of generous beneficence to all around us. It would dispose us to allow, in its fullest extent, the same liberty of opinion and practice, especially in matters of religion, to all others which we claim for ourselves, and to consider every attempt made by individuals or public bodies to abridge this liberty, or subject it to any political inconveniences, when it is exercised consistently with the peace and safety of society, as a violation of one of the most important and sacred rights of human nature. And it would prompt us, according to our abilities and opportunities to do good to all men, and especially to defend the rights of the injured, to relieve the wants of the necessitous, and to share and sooth the sorrows of those who are mourning under any of the various afflictions and distresses of life, whatever may be the nation, sect or party to which they belong. This temper of tender sympathy and humanity, of exalted
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and diffusive charity, as it is founded in the law of nature, so it is eminently recommended by the general spirit and precepts of the gospel; and particularly with the most persuasive elegance and force by the blessed author of our religion, in the beautiful parable of the good Samaritan. But when we are not only connected as brethren in the great family of mankind, but more intimately united in any particular religious society or civil community, the obligations of the great law of love are then no doubt proportionably increased; and where the duties, which it prescribes, are generally practised among a people, they give a peculiar lustre to their character, and will be found to contribute eminently to the increase of their strength, and the advancement of their mutual interests and happiness.

I shall only add under this head,

3d. That industry in the proper occupations, and moderation in the various enjoyments of life, form another branch of that virtuous character and conduct which are necessary to the common welfare, and excellently adapted to raise a people to a happy and honorable distinction among the nations of the earth.

These are unquestionably among the leading virtues which will ever distinguish a people that are rising to wealth and greatness. And from the prevalence of contrary habits, from a dissipation of business, inactivity in profitable and laudable pursuits, and a free indulgence in the vanities and pleasures of a dissipated life, arise the greatest dangers which a nation, especially in its infant state, has to fear. The pernicious effects of these habits upon individuals, are immediately felt by those who indulge them, and abundantly obvious to every observing eye. The voice of the royal preacher is the voice of general observation and experience: "He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man;" poor at least in the improvements of the mind, and most commonly

commonly in the possessions of the world. How can it be otherwise, when the seasons of study and business are wasted in inglorious ease, and character and property sacrificed to the enjoyments of a sensual life? Considered as members of society, men of this description will generally be found to live not less unprofitably to others, than reproachfully and injuriously to themselves. To their families, their connexions and friends, what good example or instruction, what honor or comfort are they likely to give, in whose breasts almost every worthy disposition, every refined sentiment, every elegant feeling is extinguished by the love of sordid pleasure? From such, what can the church expect? The interests of Christianity can be dear only to those who cordially believe its doctrines, and feel those regards for its divine author, which will inspire them with resolution to pursue that "glory and virtue, that honor and immortality," to which he calls his followers, in the same course of self denial, active service, and patient suffering, in which "he has left them an example that they should follow his steps." But as to the men of pleasure, resolved to live entirely to themselves and only for this world, having no pleasing prospects, and therefore unwilling to indulge any serious thoughts for the world which is to come, in what other light can they view the gospel and all its most sacred institutions, laws, privileges and hopes, than as objects of indifference, if not of contempt and ridicule? To their country, what aid can they afford? In circumstances of difficulty, trial or danger, let it not look to them for wise counsels, vigorous resolutions, or active exertions; they are destitute of wisdom; they are enervated by soft indulgence; they are dead to all the noble and generous sentiments and feelings of patriotism and a public spirit. Should they be entrusted with the powers and the cares of magistracy, what blessings can be expected to result
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to the community from their administration? Can virtue have cause to rejoice and hope to flourish, or will iniquity be compelled "to stop her mouth" and hide her head ashamed; will not rather the worthy and the good alone be depressed and mourn, and the wicked be encouraged to walk boldly on every side, when the vilest men are thus exalted?" And when "wickedness ascends to the place of judgment, and iniquity takes possession of the place of righteousness," and the examples exhibited in the seats of power and authority, give the highest sanction to vices which the sword of authority should be employed to suppress and extirpate, what calamitous consequences may not be expected to follow? "If the head be sick, will not the whole heart also be faint?" If the rulers be corrupt and profligate, will not disorder and licentiousness soon begin to diffuse themselves through the body of the people? And if the corruption of manners should once become general, can liberty, peace or happiness long exist when the great principles of public and private virtue are wanting to defend, support and enjoy them? Can a people in such a situation continue to prosper? Must not even their national existence rest on the most precarious grounds? From the nature of things, or the general correspondence of effects to causes, and from the administration of a righteous Providence, which stands engaged "to punish the nations for their ways, and to reward them according to their doings," such a people have certainly every thing to apprehend. "But we are persuaded better things" of our country, "though we thus speak." It cannot, however, be improper to suggest these things by way of caution, that we may be excited to consider how deeply we are concerned as Christians and as friends to our country, to maintain against these evils a strict and constant guard. And as we value our private interests, as we regard the
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public good, let us accordingly learn to consider an idle and a dissipated life as a reproach to him who leads it, and as a nuisance to the community with which he is connected, and to deny to ourselves, and to discourage in all over whom we have authority or influence, every species of expensive, useless shew, or luxurious indulgence, which is inconsistent with that simplicity of manners, purity of morals, and economy in affairs, by which we must grow up to national greatness and glory, if ever we reach these enviable objects.

I proceed,

II. To shew on what grounds a people, distinguished by such a character and conduct, may hope to become eminently prosperous and happy.

I. There is in the very nature of such a character and conduct as I have been attempting to recommend, a peculiar fitness and tendency to promote the prosperity and happiness of a people. For as sin, or the prevalence of vice is in itself "a reproach to any people," and in its consequences, if persisted in, will finally be the means of their ruin; so, on the other hand, the general practice of righteousness, of that righteousness which includes the genuine fruits of piety, and the various virtues of private and social life, will naturally exalt a nation to distinguished honor and extensive power and influence. After what has been already suggested under the former head, little need be added here in illustration of this sentiment. There is nothing, I think, can appear more clearly to every person of attention and reflection, than that the strictest honesty is in every point of view, to nations as well as to individuals, the wisest and best policy; and that the virtue of a nation, as well as of an individual, will ever be found the richest and most permanent source of happiness, or rather the only source from which true and lasting happiness can flow. This is without controversy,
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the only foundation on which the strength and glory of a people can be built so as to stand long unshaken. So that if we would cherish the justifiable and laudable ambition "to rise high above all the nations of the earth, in praise, and in name, and in honor," we cannot devise a more certain and effectual method for the attainment of this desirable pre-eminence, than by becoming "an holy people to the Lord our God."

If we were such a people; if "holiness to the Lord" were inscribed on all our public measures and private transactions; if all to whom the offices and honors of government, in every department, are committed, were not only "able men," eminent for their superior talents, but "such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness," and actuated in all their public conduct by the principles of a pure and disinterested patriotism; and if all the people of every rank in society, and of every denomination in religion, were united in the spirit of a christian zeal towards God, and charity towards each other, and knew no other emulation than that of excelling each other in the practice of piety, righteousness and benevolence, in the habits of industry and economy, and in the love of peace and order; if we were thus gloriously distinguished by our virtues, how brightly would our character shine among the nations, and how happy should we be among ourselves? "With such a righteous people it would not fail to be well" indeed, not only as "they would eat the fruit of the land," but as "the Lord would be their God," "and upon all their glory create a defence," and shower down the richest blessings of his favor upon them.

And therefore I observe,

2. That divine providence ever stands engaged to make a holy and virtuous people happy. Of this we have the fullest assurance given us in those sacred oracles of truth "which are given by inspiration of
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God, and are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the people of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Innumerable are the declarations and promises of the same nature with that in our text, delivered at different times, and by various inspired messengers to the Jewish nation. And to all other nations the voice of God speaks by one of his holy prophets to the same purpose: "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; 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, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them." As we have therefore, on the one hand, no cause to presume that our degenerate manners, when they become generally prevalent, will escape merited punishment; so we have on the other hand, every reason to hope that our national virtues will meet with a most liberal reward in the divine protection and favor. Of this we cannot doubt, while we believe that the same righteous God still continues to rule and judge in the earth, and that he will, according to the declarations of his word, "punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity," but "that he will defend and bless the righteous," "and set an obedient and holy people on high, above all the nations of the earth."

What has now been said on this subject will, I hope, prove in some measure subservient to the design with which it was chosen; that is, to awaken and strengthen in us a resolution to conduct ourselves by those rules of piety and virtue, which have been shewn to have so powerful

powerful a tendency to secure and advance, together with our own interest and happiness, the prosperity and glory of our country.

The cause, my brethren, which produced the memorable revolution that has taken place in our country, and in our day, involved in it a variety of rights and interests, which can never be held too dear by those who wish "to stand fast in that liberty wherewith the God of nature, and the author of our religion has made us free." After a long and arduous struggle, it was, through the blessing of heaven, finally crowned with a success, which perhaps exceeded the most sanguine hopes of its warmest advocates, in the first stage of the contest. When the dark and delolating tempest of war ceased to rage, by his command "who maketh the storm a calm, and stilleth the tumult of the people," we were, under his smiles, made to rejoice in the return of a glorious peace, as "in the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds." But we glorified not our divine deliverer and benefactor, neither were we thankful and obedient in any degree proportioned to the obligations which his signal mercies had laid upon us. His providence then frowned upon our land, and soon the clouds arose to obscure the bright prospects which were opened to our view: and they continued gathering into a thicker and deeper gloom, threatening ere long to pour down upon us all the dire calamities attendant on disunion and anarchy, and a general disregard of the principles and laws of public faith and private morality. We were not, however, left to suffer in their full extent, the merited consequences of our ungrateful abuse of his mercies, and criminal neglect of our own interests; but through the tender mercy of our God, still disposed "to rejoice over us to do us good," the light of a brighter day has again broken forth upon us, and beg n

to diffuse its cheering beams over our land. By the evils which were felt, and the distresses which were fast accumulating upon us under our former defective system of federal government, the wisdom of America was awakened; her councils assembled, and a new constitution for the united states was framed, on principles, better adapted, we trust, "to form a more perfect union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity." This system of united government, we have now the happiness of beholding completely organized, and commencing its operations under auspices apparently favorable to its success. And with the pleasing hopes of its success, which we willingly allow ourselves to cherish, our fervent prayers should continue to be offered up for those to whom the administration of it is committed, that their measures may be so directed and prospered by the divine wisdom and blessing, as to prove effectual to revive and strengthen the languishing principles of public and private virtue; to promote, together with the love of liberty, a respect for good government, and obedience to its authority and laws; to encourage, with the habits of frugality and industry, a spirit of enterprise and improvement in every laudable pursuit of genius and labour; and to recommend, together with a pious regard to the institutions of the gospel, the cultivation of pure morals among every rank and class of the people. By measures like these, wisely adopted and steadily pursued, every reproach which our enemies might wish to see fixed upon our national character, would be soon wiped away, we should be united, and flourish in peace and prosperity among ourselves, and enjoy the pleasing elevated satisfaction of seeing our country become the terror of all its envious foes, "and command the respect

spect of the world." And in these circumstances we might further hope for what is infinitely more important and desirable than any temporal good, to see glorious days of Zion's prosperity in our land. We justly consider it as one of the happiest and most important circumstances of the American revolution, that it has been the means of establishing, not only our civil liberties, but the freedom of religion in particular, in the fullest extent, and on the broadest basis. It is at this day the peculiar glory of America, and especially under the present constitution of the united states, that in matters of religion, the sanctions of government are no longer given to impositions of human authority, too generally calculated only to corrupt the purity of the gospel. Here we no longer see spiritual power armed with the secular sword, by which so much violence and outrage have been committed upon the sacred rights of conscience and humanity, in almost all other countries. And here, we trust, that in no future times shall we have cause to apprehend those dangers to good morals, as well as to religious liberty, which usually result from a political alliance of the church with the state. In these respects "the Lord hath doubtless done great things for us, whereof we are glad;" and for which we can never be sufficiently thankful. And in this situation, we may, I think, rationally indulge the persuasion that ours is the hallowed ground which "pure and undefiled religion" has chosen for her favorite residence, and encourage the pleasing hope, that here the church of Christ, restored to her native simplicity and beauty, will, according to the sublime description of Solomon, "Look forth as the morning, fair as the moon, and terrible as an army with banners."

For benefits so important, for prospects so animating as these, it becomes us surely, with grateful and adoring hearts to acknowledge the Lord our God,
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“ who has accomplished all our works in us,” “ and from whom alone our help can come” in all future times, even the Lord, “ who made heaven and earth,” and in whom alone it becomes all the nations of the world “ to bless themselves and to glory.” But while our praise waiteth upon him, and our vows are paid to him, for the blessings and the hopes, in which, as citizens of America, we now rejoice, let us not suppose that nothing more is now wanting to complete and secure our national prosperity and happiness. Soon may these blessings utterly fail us, and all the pleasing hopes which we are now forming for our country, terminate in the most disgraceful and calamitous disappointment, if we are found generally deficient in those principles and habits of religion and virtue, which have been shewn to have so great an influence upon the establishment and advancement of our national character and interests. This is a consideration that should deeply impress, and perpetually dwell upon our minds; and it should excite us by the love and friendship which we owe to our country, to cherish and strengthen every pious and virtuous disposition and habit in ourselves, and to encourage and promote the same, according to our abilities and opportunities, among all around us. “ O that there were such an heart,” as would lead to such a conduct, in all the inhabitants of this highly favored land; “ that it might be well with them, and with their children after them:” then would our country, distinguished as it is by its many eminent natural and political advantages, be no less distinguished by the guardian care of heaven, and through the favor of a beneficent providence, rise high indeed, and maintain a glorious superiority over all other nations on earth. If you love your country, will it not be your ardent wish, your fervent prayer, that it may be thus eminently blessed and highly exalted? To this then let your aims be uniformly directed; and

to this let your endeavours in your respective stations and circumstances, be zealous, and steadily employed. And were these sentiments, with a correspondent practice, universally prevalent among us, then would it be our peculiar honor and happiness, that by all who should hear of our character, it would be said of us, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people: for what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God in all things for which we call upon him?"

But, my brethren, as it becomes the character of a gospel minister, never to lose sight of the eternal interests of those to whom he speaks, on whatever subject he addresses them, I shall now take leave, in the conclusion of this discourse, to turn your attention to infinitely higher objects, and to recommend to you the pursuit of them, by incomparably more powerful motives than any in which you can be interested, or by which you can be influenced merely as members of the civil community with which you are connected. By your Christian profession "you declare that you seek another, a better, even an heavenly country." By the revelations of the gospel, your views are opened and your hopes directed "to Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels; to the general assembly and church of the first born, which are written in heaven; and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant" There dwells the "King immortal, the high and lofty one who inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy, and whose glory is above the earth and heaven." There the eternal Son of the highest, who once humbled himself to assume our nature, and to die on the cross for the salvation of fallen man, is now, "for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor, and exalted to be head over all things to the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood." There the throne of God and the lamb is surrounded by "those ministers of his, whom he hath made a flaming fire, even his angels that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word."

word." And there all "who are redeemed from among men, are made kings and priests unto God," raised to the possession of a "kingdom of righteousness, peace and joy," infinitely surpassing "all the kingdoms of this world, and all the glory of them;" and advanced to honors and joys "which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, and which cannot now enter into the heart of man," and shall there continue in the secure enjoyment of "that inheritance which is incorruptible and undefiled, and which faileth not away, when these heavens shall be dissolved, and this earth, with all the works that are therein, shall be burnt up, and no place found for them," nor any vestiges of them remaining. Whose heart is not kindled by the prospect of that celestial state, of that blessed and eternal world? Who can hear the "glorious things that are spoken of thee, O city and kingdom of God," and not feel the most fervent desires awakened to become an inhabitant there? Is not this the first and favorite object of your aims and wishes, the one thing above all others to which your souls most ardently aspire? Let then "your conversation be even now in heaven, your affections set not on things on earth, but on things above," and all your conduct correspondent to your hopes of that elevated and everlasting happiness. Believe in the son of God, who hath purchased that inheritance for you, "not with such corruptible things as silver and gold, but with his own most precious blood," and follow him as the captain of your salvation, in that high way of holiness in which he conducts the sons and daughters of God to that glory. Through your faith in him resolve "to overcome the world, and all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life:" "And to your faith in him, labour with all diligence to add virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and charity." For if you do these things ye shall never fall; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our lord and saviour Jesus Christ."

"And now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."

