



THE HAPPINESS
O F
A FREE GOVERNMENT,
A N D
THE MEANS *of* PRESERVING *it* :
ILLUSTRATED IN A
S E R M O N,
DELIVERED IN WEST-SPRINGFIELD,
ON JULY 4th, 1794,
IN COMMEMORATION OF
AMERICAN INDEPEND-
ENCE !

BY JOSEPH LATHROP, D. D.



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1794



THE HAPPINESS

O F A

Free Government, &c.



JEREMIAH, XXX. 21.

THEIR NOBLES SHALL BE OF THEMSELVES, AND
THEIR GOVERNOR SHALL PROCEED FROM THE
MIDST OF THEM.

AMONG the various forms of civil government, which exist in the world, monarchy is the most common ; and yet, in theory, it appears the most irrational. That a people should resign their persons and properties to the arbitrary disposal of a single man, without any regard to natural or moral qualities, as he may happen to offer himself in the line of hereditary succession, seems incredible in speculation, but is realized in fact.

FROM the prevalence of monarchy, some have inferred, that this form must be most agreeable to reason, and most conducive to social happiness. And will they also say, that the worship of idols is the most rational and edifying devotion ; and that vice is better adapted than virtue, to the general good ? These, as well as monarchy, have in all ages been common.

MONARCHY has taken place from various causes ; and these not the most virtuous ; such as conquest, usurpation, gradual encroachment, the secret combination
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of a few against the credulous, unsuspecting multitude. From its general prevalence arises another cause for its continuance and increase, which is precedent and example. The Jews were fond of monarchy, for the same reason that they were fond of idolatry. They would be like the nations round about them.

WE are informed of only one government, which was framed under the immediate direction of heaven ; and this was a *republick*. Monarchy was permitted, but never was instituted, by divine authority. The Jews had it, because they *would* have it. God prescribed for them a better government. The form which he prescribed was well adapted to their genius and circumstances ; and, in its fundamental principles, was equally suitable for any other people. Among the privileges secured to them by their constitution, there was one, which might be considered as the foundation of all the rest ; and is, indeed, the basis of all free government—*That their Rulers should be chosen by, and from among themselves.*

MOSES was immediately ordained by God to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt, and to communicate to them the divine ordinances and laws. But he claimed no authority to command them, until, by exhibiting evidence of his divine commission, he had obtained their consent to follow him. Much less did he claim for his family an hereditary jurisdiction over them. When he found the burden of government too heavy, for him to sustain alone, he laid the case before the people. He never presumed, of his own prerogative, to create officers under him ; but he proposed to them, that *they* should choose proper persons to assist him. He said to them, ‘ Take wise men and understanding and *known among your tribes* ; and I will make them rulers over you.’

you.' They approved and adopted the proposal. They answered, 'The thing which thou hast spoken is good for us to do.' The people were to choose the men, and present them to Moses ; and he, as God's minister, was to instruct them in their duty and give them their charge.

GOD foreseeing, that in process of time, they would incline to a kingly government, expressly provides, that their king should be one of their brethren. Moses says, 'When that art came into the land, which the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will have a king over me, like as all the nations, which are about me ; Thou shalt, in any wise, set him king over thee, whom the Lord shall choose ; *One from among thy brethren shalt THOU set king over thee* ; thou mayst not set a stranger over thee, who is not thy brother.' Again he says to the people, 'Judges and officers shalt THOU make thee in all thy gates ; and they shall judge the people with just judgement.'

JOSHUA was nominated by Moses to be his successor. And tho' this nomination was by the special command of God ; yet, before Joshua entered upon his office, he was presented to the whole congregation of Israel, that they might acknowledge him ; and he received a charge in their sight, that they might be obedient.

THE Judges, or Governors, who ruled Israel after the demise of Joshua, took upon them the powers of government, not by their own motion, but by the invitation of the people ; as appears from the case of Jephtha, who, being requested by the elders of Gilead to take the command of an army and fight against the Ammonites, accepted the post, on condition, that, if he prevailed, he should be their head. And accordingly the elders and the people made him head and captain over them.

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WHEN the form of Government was changed, in the time of Samuel, from a *judicial*, to a *monarchial*, it was at the request of the people. Samuel remonstrated against the proposed change, as what would be fatal to their liberties. They persisted in their resolution. Samuel yielded to it, and, by divine direction, anointed Saul to reign over them. The prophet says, ‘God gave them a king in his anger.’ But Saul, after his unction, remained in his private station, until the people assembled, and, in a formal manner, made him their king.

SAUL, by his misconduct, alienated his subjects, and forfeited the kingdom. David, by God’s command, was anointed to succeed him. But David lived in his former capacity, until the men of Judah came, and anointed him king over them. Their example was afterward followed by the other tribes.

AFTER the death of Solomon, all Israel came together, to make his son Rehoboam king. He had no hereditary right, or divine appointment, which would warrant his assumption of kingly power, without the national consent. The people stated the terms on which they would serve him. The young prince, fired with ambition, despised the advice of his aged counsellors, and consulted with the young men, what answer to return. They gave him such advice as their high notions of government dictated. It corresponded with his own pride and vanity. He answered the people haughtily, and threatened to rule them with severity. Thus he thought to intimidate them into submission.

THE nation had not lost the spirit of liberty. Ten tribes revolted, and made a king of their own. They are never blamed for the revolt. On the contrary, when Rehoboam was raising an army to reduce him, he was by
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a prophet ordered to desist, because the revolution was from God.

FROM these observations it appears, that the civil constitution, which God appointed for the Jewish nation, was designed and adapted to secure their liberty ; and that any encroachment upon it warranted them to put the powers of government into new and better hands. But what ought especially to be remarked, is, *that their rulers were to be taken from among themselves, and appointed by general consent.* This consent was not always given by the whole nation assembled ; but usually, at least frequently, by the elders, and the heads of the families and tribes, who were deputed by the people to act for them.

IN the time of the Babylonian captivity, their constitution was dissolved. They subsisted as a distinct people ; but, being in the land and under the power of their enemies, they enjoyed nothing worthy of the name of government or liberty.

IN the chapter, where our text is, God promises to restore them, from their present condition, to their ancient country and privileges. ‘ I will save you from afar, and your children from the land of their captivity ; and they shall return, and be in rest and quiet.’—‘ I will bring again the captivity of Jacob’s tents, and have mercy on his dwelling places. I will multiply them, and they shall not be few.’—‘ Their children shall be as aforetime, and their congregation shall be established before me, and I will punish them that oppress them.’ i. e. I will restore their commonwealth to its ancient free and happy condition ; and will punish the Assyrians their proud oppressors. Accordingly the Assyrian empire was conquered by the Persians under Cyrus, about fifty years after the captivity began. This revolution made way

for the return of the Jews. It is added, ' Their Nobles shall be of themselves, and the Governor shall proceed from the midst of them ; ' as was the case in the first establishment of their commonwealth, and before their government had degenerated into monarchy.

WITHOUT recurring to the history of nations, we have good authority to say, that the happiness of a people, in their social and political capacity, greatly depends on their being governed by their brethren—by men freely chosen from among themselves.

THE end of government is the general happiness. It is not that a few may riot in affluence at the expense of the rest ; but that all may enjoy equal security and liberty. The idea of ' many made for one,' is an ' enormous faith.' ' When the heart of the king, who sat on the throne, was lifted up above his brethren, he was not to prolong his days in his kingdom ; neither he nor his children, in the midst of Israel.'

IN a state of nature, one man has no authority over another—all are on a common level. When the people, in a particular place, become numerous, it is necessary to associate for mutual assistance and defence. Society cannot subsist without government, to restrain outrages, adjust differences, redress wrongs, protect the innocent, and encourage the virtuous. In large societies, government cannot be *perfectly* democratical. It cannot, in every part, be conducted by the whole body, without more expense and trouble, than is consistent with the common peace and happiness. There must be some deputed to manage the publick concerns. The power committed to such, is for the common good. This object will ordinarily be best understood, and most steadily pursued by rulers,

rulers, who are chosen by the people, and from among themselves.

THESE are the most competent judges of the abilities and circumstances of the people—their connections and dependences—how particular laws will operate—what arts and manufactures, what branches of commerce or agriculture it may be proper to encourage. Being of the people, conversant among them, and connected with them, they can inform themselves of a variety of matters, necessary to the administration of government, with which a stranger must be unacquainted.

They will feel for the people as their friends and brethren. They partake of the same genius, and are educated in the same manners. Their interest is connected with that of the country. Here they are to live and die, and here they are to leave their posterity. Self love will prompt them to wish their country's prosperity, unless their minds are detached from it by foreign connection.

They are under special obligations to their country, because to her favour they owe their advancement and their prospects.

A PEOPLE governed by their brethren have their privileges in their own hands. They can put a check to growing aristocracy and despotism by a seasonable transfer of their important trusts. In free states, power, at certain periods, reverts to the people, from whom it originated. If they find, it has been abused and perverted, they can redress themselves by placing it in other hands.

In such states, rulers are bound by the laws which they enact, and are subject to the burdens which they impose. They are responsible for their conduct ; inferior officers
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to superior ; these again to those, who are higher in the scale of government ; and all in the last resort to the people. This is a great security against abuse of power.

BESIDES ; When the people have a voice in the appointment of their own rulers, it may be presumed, that, till a general corruption prevails, men of approved ability, virtue and integrity, will be raised to publick honors. What motive, but their own good, can the people have in delegating power ? And to whom should they delegate it, but to those who will use it for this end ?

A PEOPLE under a free government will be happy, as long as they are virtuous and wise. They may become vicious and corrupt. They are then liable to be influenced by private connections, party spirit, bribery or flattery, promises or rewards, or the artifice and intrigue of crafty and designing men.

WHEN this is the case, they give up their security, lose their liberty, and sink into slavery.

To frame and reform their own government, and to choose and change their own governors, is the natural right of mankind ; but a right which few nations have the happiness to enjoy, or the boldness to claim. These American states are now in the full possession and free exercise of this right ; and may they ever have the wisdom to retain it.

WE were once happy in a connection with Britain. The time came, when we found we could be happy in this connection no longer. We then judged, that it ought to be dissolved, because the reason of it ceased. We claimed an independent government, and heaven has supported our claim.

THE past existence of the connection, could be no reason for its future continuances after a separation appeared necessary to the increase of happiness, or the prevention of misery. Every people have a right to be free—to judge of the proper means of securing their freedom—to determine when they ought to become independent of former connections—and to constitute for themselves such a government as they choose.

THERE is nothing in nature to fix perpetual and immutable boundaries to states ; or to determine the period of union between the different parts of the same empire. The only question in such cases is, What will tend to the general happiness ? When a people withdraw from their ancient connection, they are to regard the *general* good ; the peace and happiness of neighbouring states, as well as their own. Tho' their own safety will be the primary object, the safety of others is not to be overlooked. Benevolence is the principle, which ought to govern mankind, in their political, as well as private conduct. But still every people must judge for themselves, what is right. If neighbouring states disapprove of a state newly constituted, or newly reformed ; they may remonstrate ; they may deny her the privilege of their trade, alliance and protection ; they may withhold from her the positive benefits, which they grant to their friends, and which they once indulged to her ; they may exclude her from all intercourse, and leave her to prove, by herself, the advantages of her independence, and of her new-chosen government : But they can have no right to make war upon her—to use actual force and violence—to spread destruction among her people, and desolation over her country, in order to reduce her to their will. Such measures reason forbids : at such a scene humanity shudders.

THE late British war against America, and the present war of the combined powers against France, are both wars against nature—against the common rights of mankind. America has been happily successful ; that France may be as successful, we have every motive to wish. As liberty tends to happiness, benevolence will desire its propagation thro' the world. If the confederated kings should effect the conquest of France ; may they not, with as fair a pretext ; and will they not, with as warm a zeal, direct their power against these American states, and extinguish the flame of liberty, where it first was kindled ?

WE censure France for many excesses, which tarnish the glory of her revolution. Perhaps, in many instances, we censure her unjustly, for want of better information. But whatever errors may attend her measures, her cause is just. Whatever cruelties she may practise on her own citizens, America cannot tax her with defect of friendship or candour. Her irregularities will not be justified ; but perhaps they may, in some measure, be excused. Her transition from slavery to liberty—from a dungeon to open day—from total blindness to perfect vision, was sudden and surprising. As she is, at once, brought out of darkness into *marvellous* light ; no wonder, if, for a moment, her organs are overpowered, and her reason disturbed. By recollection and experience, she will soon recover herself, rectify her errors, and settle her government in tranquillity and order.

WE hope, the present conflict will issue in the increase of knowledge, and in the spread of liberty and happiness. We hope the time is coming, when the kingdom of Christ will universally prevail, and the governments of the world will be framed according to its rational and benevolent pattern. In *his* government, as administered
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on earth, there are no positive punishments. Those which he has instituted are only *negative*, consisting in exclusion from the privileges of his church. When his government shall be established, and his religion shall prevail through the world ; there will be no war between nation and nation, for the adjustment of their claims, and no sanguinary penalties annexed to the violation of laws. Deprivation of privileges is all the punishment, which will then be known. Perhaps this is all, that is really necessary, or can be fully justified now.

MAY this period be hastened. May America, which has begun the work of political reformation, and has greatly liberalized her systems, and humanized her penal laws, still lead the way, till the glorious work shall be brought to its highest perfection.

THIS day completes the eighteenth year, since we renounced our subjection to foreign power, and assumed a national independence. We are assembled to commemorate the important revolution.

THE periodical commemoration of happy and interesting events is agreeable to the usage of nations, and justified by many institutions, which God made for his favoured people. The celebration of this Anniversary is of use, not only to awaken a grateful sense of God's peculiar favour, but also to preserve the great principles of the revolution, and prevent an insensible declension into aristocracy.

OUR government, in its principles, is perhaps sufficiently liberal and democratic for so large a people. But all government tends to despotism. Power, as well as property, has its temptations. No man possesses so much of either, but that he is willing to acquire more. There

is the same reason; why a people should guard their publick privileges, as why each man should guard his private property—the same reason, why they should inspect the conduct of their publick servants to prevent encroachment, as why a merchant should watch over his clerk or factor to prevent embezzlement.

OUR free government was a happy, but a costly purchase; let it not be lost by drowsy inattention, and implicit confidence.

How a free government may be preserved, is a just inquiry.

ONE thing necessary is *frequent elections*. This is a right, which the people, by their constitution, have reserved to themselves, and which they ought to exercise with unremitting care. No longer should the same persons be trusted with the powers of legislation, than while they appear to pursue the true interest of their constituents. By attempts to violate the constitution, and invade the liberties of the people, they forfeit the publick confidence.

AMONG a free people, power of any kind should never be committed to men, who are under a *foreign influence*, from whatever source that influence may arise. Power in such hands, is power in the hands of foreigners. And so far as this influence controuls our government, we lose our independence. Against this danger, the constitution which God framed for Israel, particularly guarded. They might not take a stranger to rule over them.

GREAT care should be taken, that our rulers, especially our legislators, have not an interest disconnected with, and opposite to, that of the people. While they have

have only a common interest with their constituents, they will, for their own sakes, consult the general happiness. When their interest becomes separate and independent, this security is lost ; and it is indifferent, whether they proceed from the midst of us, or are sent us from another country.

To prevent a declension of government into aristocracy, the *rewards* for publick services should be *moderate*—not so small as to be despised by men of ability, nor so large as to become an object of competition. If compensations are immoderate, the easy acquisition of wealth, will either render the publick servants too independent of, and indifferent to the people ; or present too powerful temptations to luxury and dissipation. In either case the publick business will be neglected for the pursuits of avarice and pleasure.

It is pleaded, that by high rewards we shall command the services of our best men. But our *best* men have other motives, and will be content with reasonable rewards. We should be solicitous, not only to call good men into government, but to keep them, while they are there, as good as we found them. It is unhappy, when we offer such temptations as corrupt the most virtuous.

If needless offices should be multiplied, and the publick treasures dispersed in unmerited pensions, excessive salaries, and immoderate compensations ; the liberties of the people will then be in danger.

THE preservation of liberty depends much on a state of *peace*. War will introduce a standing army, increase the number of dependents on government, and accumulate a publick debt. A large national debt tends to despotism. It oppresses the people ; affords pretexts for in-

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venting new modes of taxation, and for opening new sources of revenue ; gives opportunity for secret misapplications ; and disunites the interest of the rulers from that of the people : For rulers will usually, in two great a proportion, become publick creditors ; and, being at the seat of government, or connected with those who are there, they can make their advantage by sudden changes, or perhaps effect sudden changes for their own advantage. In any case, the interests of creditor and debtor are apt to interfere. With a free people, the first object should be, to prevent a publick debt. When one is incurred from necessity, the next object should be, to extinguish it, as soon as the abilities of the people will permit. Complete liberty, and an immense debt are incompatible. A system which perpetuates the latter, annihilates the former. Hence it follows, that not only economy in government, but frugality among private citizens, is necessary to publick liberty and happiness. If the rulers of a young republick ape the grandeur, ostentation and parade of the corrupt and luxurious courts of ancient and opulent monarchies, they bring the people under a foreign influence of the worst kind—the influence of foreign vice. Simple manners and frugal expenses are essential to republican liberty. The Jews lost their freedom by a foolish fondness to be like the nations around them.

A REPUBLICK, assiduously cultivating peace with the world, should, at the same time, assert her rights and support her dignity. While she is careful not to intermeddle in foreign quarrels, nor to provoke a war by unjust aggressions ; she should have spirit to resent, and fortitude to repel a daring injury. There is a degree of tameness, which emboldens insults—a degree of passiveness, which invites and encourages war. Little dependence is to be placed on the justice of foreign courts. Every

ry people must guard their own rights, keep themselves in a defensible state, and prevent, if possible, such gradual encroachments from envious powers, as shall deprive them of the means of self-defence. An organized, well disciplined militia is a wise institution. To such an institution a free people will readily submit ; and the calls of government for the common defence they will promptly obey.

THE freedom of election is a matter of essential importance. Under such a happy constitution as ours, where the elective power is in the great body of the people, and the periods of election frequently return, direct bribery is not easily practised. There are other ways, however, in which the electors may be unduely biaſſed. The combinations of influential men to recommend and support certain candidates, may be as dangerous, as corruption itself. The few who combine may have a particular design to serve ; and, in some instances, it is possible, they may study rather to deceive, than inform the publick mind.

PERSONAL slanders, and infamous exhibitions, are always to be disapproved, as inconsistent with the freedom of parliamentary debate, and the purity of national manners. You may hang or burn in effigy, or you may revile and proscribe in a gazette, an unworthy character ; and you may do the same to a worthy character. And, so far as you thus influence an election, you may prevent the choice of a good man, as well as a bad one. To determine whether a man is worthy of our suffrages, we must enquire, whether he is a man of ability and information, of virtue, stability and firmness—of pure, republican principles—and whether his interest is united with that of his country. Such a man, whatever aspersions may
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be cast upon him by political partizans, is worthy of our confidence. Tho' in particular instances, he may favour measures, which we had not previously expected, we are not hastily to reprobate his conduct ; but to take time for examination ; considering, that he may probably possess means of information, which have not reached to us.

AN enlightened people will not easily be bro't under despotism. They will foresee and prevent the evil. Great attention should therefore be paid to the education of youth, to the culture and diffusion of knowledge, and to the means of publick information.

' RIGHTEOUSNESS exalts a nation.' To preserve our liberty and independence, and to increase our importance and respectability, we must attend to the interest of virtue, as well as of knowledge. This we must promote in our private station, while we expect that our rulers pursue it in their larger sphere. Industry, frugality, temperance, justice, benevolence and peaceableness, are virtues, in their very nature, essential to the happiness of every community. The promotion of these in smaller societies, will spread and strengthen their influence in the nation at large.

THE celebration of this anniversary should be conducted in subservience to piety, benevolence, peace and good order.

WHILE we address the great Governor of the universe, we should realize our dependence and obligations ; and gratefully recognize the peculiar blessings and privileges flowing from that free and happy government, with which he has so graciously distinguished us.

WHEN we sit down at the festive board, to participate
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in the bounties of his providence, we should regard each other as brethren, members of the same great family, children of the same almighty parent, all united by common interest. Feasting together is an act of fellowship : one design of it is to confirm the bond of brotherly union.

WHEN we see so many of the respectable citizens of this town, assembled from every part of it, on the present occasion ; we feel a peculiar pleasure in such a proof of the harmony of sentiment and affection still subsisting among us ; and in the presage of its happy continuance. And we anticipate the propriety, decency and order, with which all things will, this day, be conducted.

WE sincerely thank the gentlemen from neighbouring towns, for the testimony of friendship, with which they honour us ; and for the unity of sentiment which they express, by assembling with us on this anniversary. By their attendance the beauty of the scene is brightened, and the pleasure of the festivity is enlivened.

As this is the first solemnity of the kind ever celebrated in this town, we trust, it will be conducted in such a manner, that it may be reviewed by ourselves with sentiments of pleasure, and spoken of by all in terms of approbation. We persuade ourselves, that nothing favouring of impiety will be heard, and nothing inconsistent with sobriety will be seen—that good humour, cheerfulness and friendship, will inspire every heart, glow in every countenance, and animate all our conversation—that when the festivity is closed, we shall retire without any transactions, which can be reflected on with pain, or spoken of to our reproach.

WE live in a wonderful period—a period crowded with vast and interesting events. In turning over the annals of
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of history, we scarcely find a century, which exhibits such a variety of important scenes, as we have beheld within twenty years. Here is a new empire founded in America ; and established on the most liberal plan. Here are fifteen distinct states, confederated under one general constitution, and each state possessing a constitution of her own—and all these deliberately formed, peaceably adopted, and cheerfully obeyed by the people. We see this young empire growing, rising, spreading—and now embracing some respectable states, which, at the birth of our independence, had not an existence. A revolution in one of the most respectable nations of Europe has surprized the world. The un sullied rays of liberty, which first blazed in our hemisphere, have shot forth with amazing rapidity, and are now illuminating distant climes. Superstition, the support of despotism, is hastily retiring before the refulgent beams of truth ; and, struck with the intolerable light, is seeking new retreats. Arts, manufactures, agriculture and the liberal sciences, are advancing. New discoveries in the natural, and new improvements in the literary world, are making. The rights of men, and the ends of government, are more and more understood. The cause of righteousness is maintained, and the combinations of tyrants are frustrated. Their thrones are tottering under them, and their crowns are trembling on their heads.

THE day is coming, when liberty and peace shall bless the human race. But previous to this, truth and virtue must prevail, and the religion of Jesus must govern men's hearts. Then the horrors of war will cease, and the groans of slavery will no more be heard. The rod of the oppressor will be broken, and the yoke will be removed from the shoulders of the oppressed. The sceptre will be wrested from the hands of the wicked, and the pomp of
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the proud will be brought down to the dust. The whole earth will rest and be quiet : they will break forth into singing. The Lord will comfort Zion ; he will comfort all her waste places. He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness shall be found therein ; thanksgiving and the voice of melody.

