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Morse, Asahel, 1771-1838.

An Oration, Delivered at Winsted.

Hartford, [Ct. ], Babcock, 1802. 15 pp.

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A N  
O R A T I O N,

DELIVERED AT

WINSTED, JULY 5th, A. D. 1802.

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE DECLARATION OF OUR NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE, ON THE MEMORABLE FOURTH OF JULY, A. D. 1776.

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BY ASAHEL MORSE.

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“ Wherefore should the Heathen say, Where is now their God ?”  
THE PSALMIST.  
“ Through God we shall do valiantly : for he it is that shall  
“ tread down our enemies.” DAVID.

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John Babcock, Printer, Hartford.

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1802.

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A N  
O R A T I O N.

P S A L M CXXVI. †

THE LORD HATH DONE GREAT THINGS FOR US.

**T**HIS text abstracted from its prophetic reference to the return of the Jews, from their Babylonish captivity; and its application to the gospel church, emerging from its corrupted state of apostacy, to the glorious liberty of Christ;—affords a pleasing field, for investigation of the blessings of God conferred on our nation.

As in this passage the Psalmist, was addressing himself to his nation, so he observes, Psal. cxlvii. 25. that the Lord had not dealt so with any other nation: so we may say when taking a retrospective view of our nation and country—that modern history affords no manifestations of the divine favor to any people, comparable with the history of our own. And first, taking our text as a motto—The Lord hath done great things for us: His infinite goodness was gloriously displayed in reserving our country as an asylum for oppressed humanity: For ages had tyranny reigned and error prevailed on the eastern Continent: at length a ray of light gleamed in the west of Europe; and our ancestors, animated with the thoughts of liberty and equal rights, fled from British tyranny, oppression and superstition, to the hospitable shores of Virginian shores and Massachusetts land.

Here then we may behold the great doings of the Lord in his kind protection from a savage foe, and in his disposing them to be peaceable neighbors, till our fathers had cultivated the soil, and acquired strength to repel their invasions.

And on the other hand, the depravity and ingratitude of the human heart ; for no sooner were our fathers settled as a colony than they became unmindful of the goodness of God to them ; and disregarding the natural inalienable rights of their fellow-men, proceeded to exercise the same spirit of religious intolerance as that from which they fled, by establishing an aristocratical hierarchy in religion.

The great source of human knowledge is experience ; and from that we are taught, those who are bred in slavery become the greatest tyrants when possessed of power ; but those who are early educated in the true principles of liberty and equal rights seldom fail to promote, as far as circumstances will admit, the same through life. But the spirit of intolerance has greatly subsided ; and the true principles of liberty and equal rights are better understood ; for the Lord hath done great things for us.

The rapid increase of our nation raised the jealousy of a powerful enemy, whose dominions lay upon our northern and western frontier ; and forming a chain of hostility from the Gulf of St. Lawrence to the Mississippi, and like a flood determining to sweep all before them to the sea. But the Lord who hath done great things for us, heard our cries, and afforded relief—He led forth our undisciplined troops to battle ; taught their hands to war and their fingers to fight ; and crowned their arms with victory and success.

And when the great, the important crisis drew near, that this growing empire should rise to freedom and independence, the Lord was pleased to raise up the favorite sons of liberty, to espouse our injured cause. Amongst the renowned and venerable characters which adorned our illustrious revolution, we beheld a Franklin, whose talents were unrivalled as a philosopher, a moralist and statesman ; who boldly stated our rights, and nobly defended our cause before a court of chaplains, the cringing peers and flattering parasites of George III. of Britain.

Also, a Randolph, a Hancock, and a Laurens, who led the way to our freedom and independence. The sage of

America, the hero of the world, the friend and defender of the rights of man, the illustrious WASHINGTON, appeared in the circle of American patriots.

His wisdom and patriotism, his energy and fortitude constituted him at once the man and the general; under the direction of a superintending Providence, he led forth our infant armies to the field, where by his policy and skill he disciplined his troops, and defeated his enemies. And when we saw that no accommodation could take place, consistent with the honor, dignity and rights of the people, we were as a nation called to repel force by force, and by our representative council to declare our national independence.

This great event which we are this day met to commemorate, together with our revolution, which was accomplished by so many astonishing interpositions of divine Providence, invites our attention; for surely, the Lord hath done great things for us.

It was a favorite method of instruction with the Jewish fathers and prophets, to recur to the history of their nation, to ancient events, and also to such as took place in a period coeval with themselves, in order to excite a correspondent gratitude, and a spirit of religious obedience in the breasts of the people. The present time will not admit of a full and extensive discussion of the many important events by which our revolution was accomplished; but we shall attend to something of that nature, as a subject of present investigation.

The divine conduct towards America has made a very distinguishing figure in the history of providence. With what a surprising progress did we step up to rank and importance, amongst the nations? The mere man of this world may confine his attention in this matter to our freedom and independence, with all their consequent advantages; while the man of real religion entertains more noble thoughts, he views it as designed by the Lord to advance the cause of Christ in the world; and as an important step towards bringing in the glorious millennium. Early did the American revolution extend its salutary influence to distant

nations, and awaken their attention to their civil interests, and made the principles of liberty better understood than ever.

Therefore it may be considered by us, as one capital blow at the kingdom of the beast. A great degree of light soon breaks on the minds of superstition and ignorance; and as light or sacred knowledge shall be diffused, tyranny and idolatry will be destroyed. Thus are we taught by the inspired Apostle, "whom the Lord shall destroy by the spirit of his mouth, and shall consume by the brightness of his coming." As learning and truth prevail, ignorance and error shall decrease: and prevail they will, till the whole earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, and all false religion totally absorbed.

It follows then that the best way of destroying error in opinion is not to use the civil sword, but to propagate the truth as it is in Jesus. To this end a free intercourse amongst the nations was necessary.

The discovery of the magnet and art of navigation, have not only been a means of enriching the commercial world, but of spreading the blessed gospel through the earth. It is highly probable then, that America is reserved in the mind of Jehovah to be the grand theatre, on which he will accomplish the most glorious events.

But when we take a retrospective survey of the difficulties and dangers in which we were involved, in the late contest with Great Britain; when we reflect on the disasters and perils we experienced, when surrounded with scenes of horror, and devastation—our towns laid in ashes by a barbarous foe—our fathers, brethren and sons slaughtered by the sword, and starved in prisons—and our whole nation treated with the basest insults, treachery, and contempt; when our liberties, our country and even life itself might be said to hang in doubt—and contrast it with the glorious blessing of peace, we must acknowledge the gracious interference of God; and say, the Lord hath done great things for us. I may be deemed enthusiastic, but am strongly persuaded that, He who sits at the helm of his own moral government, and sways the sceptre of the universe, over-

ruled our affairs, in the council and in the field, for the purpose of spreading light, increasing knowledge, and diffusing the true principles of liberty in the world: and that the divine conduct towards America is held up in providence to all nations as a specimen of the kind regard of the Lord to the liberty of man. For we beheld a tyrannical and merciless enemy, encroaching on our frontier, and sometimes penetrating almost to the heart of our country, brought to sue for peace, and ask our pardon.

Amongst the various blessings which the Lord hath conferred upon us as a nation, we may state our independence and peace, as first in rank of temporal mercies. Our anniversary this day brings to my mind the prophetic observation of *Isai. lvi. 5.* "Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day; or shall a nation be born at once?" By asserting our independence, we threw off a foreign yoke of tyrannical oppression, and by maintaining the same, we obtained peace at home, and commanded respect abroad.

Another favor which we received from the kind hand of the Lord, is that which few nations ever enjoyed, which was the privilege of taking up government upon its first principles, and of choosing that form which was adapted to our situation, and most productive of our public interest and happiness. The government of the United States, says Paley, approaches nearest to the social compact of any that history can furnish. Upon an impartial examination of our constitution, we find it the best calculated for promoting the happiness, and preserving the lives, liberty and property of the citizens of any yet recorded in history. Liberty is here preserved in the custody of the people. It wisely guards against anarchy and confusion on the one hand, and against tyranny and oppression on the other. It is framed upon an extension of civil and religious liberty, unrivalled in any other country. The sacred rights of conscience are so secured, that no citizen can be hurt, molested or restrained, in his person, liberty or estate; for worshiping God, in the manner and season most agreeable to the dictates of his conscience—or for his religious profession or sentiments. It is much to be desired that the constitution and statutes of

