

A
S E R M O N,

DELIVERED IN THE

Second Presbyterian Church in the City of

PHILADELPHIA,

ON THE 19th OF FEBRUARY, 1795,

**BEING THE DAY OF GENERAL THANKSGIVING
THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES.**

BY ASHBEL GREEN, D. D.

ONE OF THE PASTORS OF THE AFORESAID CHURCH.

PHILADELPHIA:

PRINTED BY JOHN FENNO, No. 119, CHESNUT-STREET


MARCH, 1795.

PSALM CVII, 21st AND 22^d VERSES.

“Oh that Men would Praise the Lord, for his Goodness, and for his Wonderful Works to the Children of Men!—And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of Thanksgiving, and declare his Works with rejoicing.”

TH E inspired Psalmist appears to have been filled with unutterable emotions of gratitude to God, when he composed the sacred hymn from which these words are taken. He recounts numerous instances of the divine interposition and benignity manifested to men in the dispensations of providence and grace. His heart, warm with the subject and with a sense of the duty which this multiplied goodness so tenderly urges, repeatedly pours forth this natural and pious exclamation—“Oh that men
“ would praise the Lord for his goodness and for
“ his wonderful works to the children of men.”
After contemplating the peculiar obligations of those who had been delivered from great distress

and danger he amplifies his common repetition or chorus by adding—" and let them sacrifice " the sacrifices of thanksgiving and declare his " works with rejoicing."

In the circumstances and under the impressions, my brethren, which brought these words from the lips of the Psalmist, the chief magistrate of our country, has, he assures us, invited his fellow citizens to discharge, on this day, the duty which they recommend. Having recited the various and peculiar favours which Divine Providence hath lately conferred, and is now conferring, on those over whom he presides, and remarked " that in such a state of " things, it is, in an especial manner, our duty " as a people, with devout reverence and affectionate gratitude to acknowledge our great " and many obligations to Almighty God, and " to implore him to continue and confirm the " blessings we experience," he declares, that " *deeply penetrated with this sentiment* he recommends to all religious societies, and to all " persons whomsoever within the United States, " to meet together," at this time, " and render " their sincere and hearty thanks to the Great " Ruler of nations for the manifold and signal " mercies which distinguish our lot as a nation."

Called, then, by the concurring voice of God and of the magistrate to this duty of thank-

giving and praise, let it occupy our most serious and engaged attention. Let us consider

I. Its reasonableness.

II. The numerous and peculiar circumstances which demand it, at this time, from the American citizens.

III. In what manner our sincere compliance with its dictates, may best be expressed and evinced.

I. Let us consider the reasonableness of offering the sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise to God. "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness—Let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing." Here, you observe, the inspired penman delivers, both a pathetic wish and a positive precept, in behalf of the duty we contemplate. The wish, I affirm, proceeds from one of the best sentiments which can influence the human heart, and the precept is founded on one of the plainest principles of propriety, which can be offered to the human understanding.

Gratitude to a benefactor, from whom we have received numerous, unmerited and inva-

loable favours, is a sentiment, in favour of which the suffrage of the world is unanimous. If there be any principle of morals so interwoven with our nature, as in no age or nation to be disputed or denied, it is this—that we ought not to return evil for good ; and this will ultimately resolve itself into the position that gratitude is a duty. Gratitude, sincere and ardent, is the distinguishing characteristic of a generous and amiable mind, the want of it is the sure indication of a base and detestable spirit. Towards whom, then, I ask, ought this emotion to be directed in its greatest purity and fervour? Towards him unquestionably to whom we are most indebted—towards God our Creator from whom we have received all that we enjoy.—Were man simply a dependant being, he would still owe this tribute to his Maker, for the gift of existence, and for all the pleasures to which it gives birth. But considering him as he is, not only dependant, but sinful—considering that he has ten thousand times forfeited every claim to the Divine favour, and yet that innumerable mercies crown his life, and that eternal happiness is proposed to his acceptance, his debt of gratitude must be seen to exceed all estimate. The most miserable circumstances of an external or temporal kind in which any of the human race can be placed, do not dissolve their obligations to this duty. Their sufferings are

still infinitely less than their demerits, and “ why should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins.” He has still an infinite balance of unmerited kindness to acknowledge: Nay, his afflictions themselves, if it be not his own fault, shall work together for his good. Hence says the author of our text, “ I will bless the Lord *at all times*, his praise shall *continually* be in my mouth.”

But in an especial manner is this a duty when every circumstance conspires both to promote our present comfort and to favour our future happiness. When the beneficence of God is so made to abound towards us as that our transgressions are not only, not requited by his judgments, but his various goodness is made to meet all our wants and even to exceed our expectations; when we have scarcely any thing of which we can complain, and but little more in the present life that we ought to desire;— when we are *thus* singled out as the distinguished recipients of the bounty and smiles of Heaven, then indeed ought our hearts to overflow with humble thankfulness to our Great Benefactor, then ought we in the liveliest and most ardent emotions of the soul, to “ praise the Lord for his goodness,” and for his wonderful manifestations of grace to us his unworthy children. None can refuse to admit that these

are sentiments peculiarly suitable to men in the situation we have considered, and that to be destitute of them, is to exhibit the human character sunk to the deepest grade of baseness and depravity. From these sentiments, the pious wish in our text, evidently arose, and the fervour with which it was uttered and reiterated, is worthy of him whose high characteristic it is, that he was “a man after God’s own heart.” To feel in this respect, as he felt; must be our highest excellence, and our most valuable distinction.

But to feel in silence, or as individuals, tho’ we really, rightly and deeply feel, is not the whole of our duty. We have before us a precept to “sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and to declare his works with rejoicing.” This refers plainly to an external expression of the internal and grateful disposition of our hearts, and to our uniting with each other in rendering praise to God. The sacrifices of the ancient Jewish dispensation, to which the sacred writer alludes, were visible and social manifestations of reverence to the Deity, and to “declare his works with rejoicing,” must intend a public and general exhibition of our sense of indebtedness to him. Distinctly then, the statement is this—fervent *gratitude* is the *inward* feeling, public *thanksgiving* is the *out-*

ward expression of that feeling, and *both* are required of those who would suitably praise the Lord for his goodness.

I have said that the latter part of this proposition is founded on one of the plainest principles of propriety; because, if gratitude be so noble a quality, can any reason be assigned why it should never be exhibited? or why men should not unite in the exhibition of it? No, my brethren. A valid objection can never be found against public thanksgiving to the great Author of good, for blessings which he publickly and profusely showers down upon us. Yet objections have been offered against this by impious men, to whom all thoughts of God and of their obligations to him were painful and unwelcome. It has been said that our praise cannot be necessary or grateful to the Almighty; and in proof of the assertion, it has been alledged that it is no part of the character of a good man to delight in hearing himself extolled, and therefore that we cannot suppose that it is acceptable to him who is perfect goodness. If there be something specious there is nothing solid in this remark. Should those who make it, extend it so far as to deny that we ought to cherish in our minds a sense of gratitude, it has received its answer in what has already been offered on that topic. Let me, however, further observe,

In direct reply to the objection, that we do by no means suppose that any disposition or action of his creatures is necessary to the essential happiness or glory of the Creator ; for in these respects he is unchangeable and far exalted above all their praise. But still, considering man as a moral agent and allowing, as we must allow, that the Deity is invariably pleased with virtue, it will inevitably follow that our gratitude must be grateful to *him*, because it is, as we have seen, a virtue of the highest order. The Supreme Being, therefore, though he needs not our dispositions or service for the promotion of his own felicity, must, from the very goodness of his nature, necessarily delight in seeing us possess this temper and act this part, which our character and state render so becoming and important to us.

The parallel between man and his Maker is directed immediately against the public giving of thanks. Let us examine how far it is really a parallel. A good man is imperfect, and therefore praise may elevate him unduly. God is perfect, and consequently incapable of this inconvenience. A good man is but the instrument of good and has nothing, not even the disposition to confer a benefit, which he did not receive. He realizes therefore, that to him, high applause is not justly due. But God

is the original and infinite fountain of all goodness, and no praise can ever transcend or reach his worthiness. A good man in performing his best and most generous services, discharges only the obligations of duty, and frequently renders no more than in similar circumstances he would wish or need to have returned. But the favours of God flow from his own self moved goodness, and are not only incapable of recompense, but often bestowed on those who had merited his severest displeasure. In the respects now mentioned, there is no parallel between the two cases, and consequently to reason from one to the other is unfair and inconclusive. Is there, then, no point in which the cases are similar? There is only one, and that extremely abstract and general. It is this—that a good man, in common with his Maker, delights in seeing a moral being, who has received favours, act as he ought to act. And does not such a man desire that those on whom he has conferred benefits should make some manifestations of a grateful temper? Does not a tender and rightly disposed parent expect these from his children? Does he not rejoice when he receives them? And is he not grieved and offended when they are withheld? These inquiries must be answered in the affirmative. In like manner, then, must the Benefactor and Parent of all be pleased, when he beholds the

pensioners of his bounty, and the offspring of his power and goodness, bringing their grateful acknowledgements to him; and his righteous displeasure must rest on those who refuse so reasonable a duty. It appears therefore, that a *due degree* of praise is expected both by God and Man. Man should not covet a *high degree* of it, because it is neither his due nor safe for him to receive. God may require it in its *most exalted ascriptions*, because he is perfect, and because it is his rightful claim. Our reasoning then from the creature to the Creator is found, when fairly conducted, to inforce, and not to oppose, the giving of thanks to the omniscient Jehovah. Or will it be said, after all, that it is only because man cannot discern the heart otherwise than by external expressions, that he desires them as the necessary evidence of a right disposition; but that God looketh immediately to the inmost soul, and therefore neither needs or desires them. There is fallacy, also, in this remark. It is a law of our constitution, that whatever we sensibly, deeply and habitually feel, we should be prone to express and with difficulty conceal. It invariably belongs to a strong and permanent affection of the mind, to seek for utterance. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Men, therefore, do actually look for the expression of gratitude, as something connected

with its *existence*, and suitable exercise; and to say that they would not do this, if they could scan the heart, is no more than to say that if our capacity, nature and laws of action were different from what, in fact, they are, we should then regard them differently. God views our nature as it really is, and every thing that is proper to it, every thing that is connected with or favourable to the exercise of its powers in his service, he demands. He requires the heart in every transaction with himself; and I would not deny but inculcate the idea, that without this all exterior pomp and professions of reverence or thankfulness are but solemn mockery and an abomination in his sight. But he requires the *lips* as well as the heart, because the lips help the heart. Words and actions often serve to augment and give energy to the ardours of the soul. They serve, also, to awaken others to a sense of duty, and to kindle in their bosom the warmth that we feel in our own. Devout affections, like all others, are increased by sympathy and communication. It is moreover an important part of gratitude itself, to let others know, when circumstances do not forbid it, who is our benefactor, and what he hath done for us, that they may

esteem him as he deserves for his goodness. This is, and ought to be, a special and constraining motive with those who truly feel their indebtedness to the Father of mercies, to speak his praise before the world. They can scarcely forbear to cry out in the language of the text and of its author on numerous occasions—"Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness and for his wonderful works to the children of men—Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul—Praise ye the name of the Lord; praise him O ye servants of the Lord. Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good; sing praises unto his name for it is pleasant—Oh give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endureth forever—Oh bless our God ye people and make the voice of his praise to be heard: which holdeth our soul in life and suffereth not our feet to be moved—Praise ye him, all his angels, praise ye him all his hosts; praise ye him Sun and Moon; praise him all ye Stars of light—Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him for his mighty acts; praise him according to his excellent greatness—Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord."

My christian brethren, I appeal to your own experience—When favoured with strong and lively perceptions of the divine excellence—when melted with a sense of the goodness, mercy and condescension of your God, do you not long that others should perceive and admire it? Can you forbear to commend it? Do you not feel yourselves constrained to engage others to “taste and see that the Lord is good” and to join with you, that you may “magnify and exalt his name together?” Nay, I appeal to the common sense of all. Imagine a collection of individuals, each with his mind engrossed and his heart expanded with emotions of gratitude to a common benefactor, yet each concealing his sense of the favour and burying in silence the praise which is ready to break from his lips. Can you conceive of any thing more unnatural, monstrous and absurd? No. To affirm that such an event *may* be expected, is to discover an utter ignorance of human nature: to say that it *ought*, is to manifest a hatred of its best tendencies. The truth is, that man is a social being, and delights in social acts. He ought, therefore, and if rightly disposed, he will, unite in social praise to him who hath made him what he is—to him who hath indued him with this capacity.—That thanksgiving to the Creator, should be

the only thing in which men should not employ their social powers, is a thought, which the soul of pious sensibility will ever abhor, and which no sophistry can ever render plausible. On no account is the gift of speech so much to be esteemed as on this—The propriety, therefore, of the precept “to sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving,” results immediately from our nature, and from a regard to our own benefit in the discharge of an important duty.

If it be inquired then to what *extent* men ought to unite in this duty; the answer is, in all that extent, certainly, in which they receive favours that are *special* and in which union is easy. Special mercies bestowed on a family, on a congregation, on a city, on a state, and on a nation may ever with great propriety be made the subject of social thanksgiving: And if it were possible that the whole earth should unite in one concerted jubilee of praise to God for his *common* goodness, who could say that it would not be the sublimest spectacle that ever our world exhibited! The present occasion, however, calls me to consider the duty only as it relates to a nation. In this capacity we ought certainly to perform it, for in this capacity we may in a peculiar manner receive favours or frowns from

him who ruleth over all. At his command empires rise and fall. He setteth up and pulleth down at his pleasure. He prospers or blasts a nation according to his Sovereign will. In all respects we depend upon him as absolutely in this relation as in that of individuals. Shall we never, then, as a community, acknowledge our dependance and give him thanks for the distinguishing favours which he may have conferred on us? Is it not fit, is it not important, that in every relation which he hath instituted, which he sustains, and which he crowns with his kindness, we should confess his sovereignty, acknowledge his power, and praise his goodness? Yes, my brethren. We have a *national character* to support in our carriage and demeanour toward Almighty God, a character which he observes, and according to which he will treat us. The history of the whole world is a confirmation of this truth. The history of the nation which was governed by the author of our text illustrates it in a most striking manner: And it requires no gift of prophecy to foresee and foretel, that if we are not thankful to God as a *people*, he will withdraw his unnoticed benefits and teach us by adversity to enquire after him whom in our prosperity we had forgotten.

But if a nation unite in public thanksgiving its public functionaries must designate the time.

To this, again, the malignant hatred of infidelity to all that bears the appearance of piety, has stated an objection. The magistrate, it cries, ought not to interfere in matters of *religion*. In matters of *conscience* we allow that he ought not; but if we acknowledge a God at all, it is the magistrate's duty to lead the people to adore him. Say that he recommends a day for this purpose, leaves every one to his own mode of worship, and to his own inclination as to the observance—is any man's conscience wounded by this? It is nonsense to affirm it. My conscience can never be touched by the actions of others; its sanctions refer only to my own. To what does the act of the magistrate in this concern amount? only to this—availing himself of the eminence on which he is placed, he gives the signal for a *willing people* to prostrate at once before the eternal throne and to unite their praise to him from whom they derive their all. I repeat it therefore, for it is a fact which you ought to mark and remember, that it is only from those who hate all religion, who hate the very thought that there is a God, that you will hear this objection seriously and understandingly urged. Never did men cherish a more sacred and jealous regard to human rights, never did men better understand them, never did men treat them more tenderly or less infringe them, than that illustrious band of patriots who com-

posed the American Congress in the early stages of our late revolution. Yet numerous were the religious solemnities which they proclaimed. Ah my country! then didst thou, in very deed, feel thy dependance on God—He wrought deliverance for thee—and wilt thou now forget him!

My brethren, I speak thus! and have gone so deeply into this subject, and deduced the duty I recommend step by step from its foundation principles, because the day in which we live is “a day of blasphemy and rebuke,” in which the boldest attempts are made to subvert the whole fabrick of morality and religion;*—because I count it among the national sins of this country that there have not been more frequent acknowledgements of the providence and favours of heaven; and because I do most sincerely rejoice that we are now called to this service—It is assuredly “a most reasonable ser-

* How lamentably this has been the case in France is known to all. In England a publication has appeared and attracted much notice, the professed object of which is, to show that all social worship is irrational and unscriptural. In this country, the progress of licentiousness in principle is demonstrated by the public taste demanding one edition after another of the book entitled “the Age of Reason”—a book in which the most contemptible ignorance, the grossest falsehood, the most vulgar buffoonery, the most unblushing impudence, and the most daring profaneness are united and make up its contents.

“vice”; a service to which we, of all the people on earth, are most loudly and tenderly called. This will fully appear, when we consider

II. The numerous and peculiar circumstances which demand it, at this time, of the American citizens. These circumstances, you will remember, are all to be considered as “the wonderful works of God”—the works of his providence who “doth according to his will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth.” Second causes, or suitable means and instruments, have no doubt been concerned in these works. But the most high God hath been the original cause and author of all. He has given direction to every favourable circumstance, he has formed and brought forth and tempered every instrument, which has been employed to preserve our country and to render it prosperous. These instruments let us highly esteem, and in the proper season, give them the praise which is their due. But let me remind you that *this* is not the *place* nor the *occasion* for such a business. To blazon or to blacken the characters of men, to commend or to censure the systems of party politicians, is far beneath the object for which I should appear in this desk, or you assemble in this house. We come here to worship and praise the God of

heaven ; and miserably, indeed, do we forget our errand if instead of fixing our thoughts and affections on him we suffer them to be engrossed by worms of the dust. As far as human characters or actions form *the gift* for which we ought to be thankful, or the *scourge* which we ought to deprecate, we must, in this view, glance a thought upon them. But to make them the full and direct and principal object of our contemplations, is to put them in the place of that great and glorious Being in whose temple we are met, and whose works and worship we should here regard. I do, therefore, beseech you to raise and fix your attention on the ever blessed God, and let it be occupied in considering every favour I shall mention as flowing immediately from his hand.

1. He hath mercifully distinguished us by our religious privileges. These ought to stand foremost in every enumeration of the divine favours because they are the greatest of all. The glorious gospel of Jesus Christ contains the plan of that "work" of salvation which is the most "wonderful" of any that the deity hath ever exhibited to mortal view, and into which even "the Angels desire to look". This precious gospel the inhabitants of these United States enjoy, with every advantage for receiving benefit from it. Great, indeed, is the blessing to be

delivered from Pagan darkness, and to have “the lively oracles of inspiration as a light to our feet and a lamp to our path,” in any degree. But the kind providence of God hath given them to us with circumstances which greatly enhance their value and augment our obligations. Cast your eyes over the nations of the earth. How many do you observe who, while they know of the gospel, are deprived of some of its most inestimable advantages and benefits? They either cannot read it or are not permitted to examine it for themselves. They are the prey of the most gloomy superstition and of the most perverted and abominable priesthood. Nay, where do you find the people among whom this treasure of divine grace is dispensed with equal regard to all who desire to receive it? You find them only in your own land. In other countries, even the most free and enlightened, you discover some remainders of civil oppression or of ecclesiastical tyranny. You observe one sect of christians endeavouring to controul or dictate to the consciences of another, and striving to support their creed and their influence by the arm of power; or, you see christianity itself publicly discountenanced, ridiculed and despised, by those who possess authority. Among us alone is this heaven descended guest, left to her own proper and native influence. Our consciences are unembarrassed by

any imposition and our worship unincumbered by any establishment. In the manner most agreeable to the conclusions of his own mind every individual permitted to pay his homage to God and the Saviour on the ground of common and equal privilege. This is a blessing the value of which we can scarcely estimate unless we had been deprived of it; it is a blessing for which millions sigh in vain, and for which our sincerest praise ought now to ascend to the "giver of every good and perfect gift." Especially are we bound to this, when we recollect not only that we, have the gospel in its purity and free from embarrassments, but that its instructions and consolations are afforded to us in the richest abundance. The voice of divine mercy is continually sounding in our ears and pleading with our hearts. Truly it is to us "line upon line, line upon line, precept upon precept, precept upon precept." Every mean of information, persuasion or reproof, every institution and ordinance of religion, presses itself on our attention and regard. He who remains ignorant must guard himself against instruction. He who perishes must force his way to destruction over the strongest barriers and the most powerful opposition of sacred truth—These then are favours for which our hearts ought this day to swell with gratitude, and

our lips to be employed in the liveliest praises to God who hath bestowed them on us.

2. Our thanks are also due for the blessings of that civil government under which we live—a government which unites and establishes liberty with order. Here I might bring to your recollection the leading circumstances of that revolution which terminated in the freedom and independence of the United States: I might mention the prowess of the nation against which we contended; our own defenceless and unprovided state for war; the difference of interests and habits in a country composed of people from all quarters of the globe and running through an extent of fifteen hundred miles, and that wonderful glow of liberty which like an electric shock pervaded and melted these dissimilar materials into a common and congenial mass—I might make the scenes of the war pass before you; and then you would see that at the very time when our cause seemed on the point of expiring it suddenly revived and assumed its most favourable aspect: you would see an army enduring every imaginable hardship without losing or relaxing its attachment to the service which produced its sufferings: you would observe our hair-breadth escapes from treachery and traitors when human sagacity and power could no longer avail;

the repeated mistakes and almost infatuated blindness of our enemies ; the providential advantages which, without being sought for, were often thrown in our way ; the alliance of one of the most powerful nations of the earth on terms of unexpected advantage ; the cordiality which subsisted between the allied troops ; the wise appointment, continued preservation and uninterrupted health, of the commander in chief ; the harmony of the military with the civil authority ; a peace exceeding in its advantages our most sanguine hopes, and the patriotic and quiet return of veteran and unrewarded soldiers to the condition and occupations of citizens—These things I might mention, and considering them aright, you would confess that if ever the Almighty arm was made bare and visible in the protection of a nation it was for our defence and salvation. But we cannot at present enter so wide a field. We must confine our attention to the formation and effects of the government under which we now live. Compare these, for a moment, with what has happened to almost all the world beside. Think of the actual state of mankind in general, in regard to their political and civil rights. By far the greater part are held in a state of the most oppressive bondage. Like the beasts of the field they live and labour only for their task-masters. The heart of benevolence bleeds

while it contemplates their situation. Yet when roused to a sense of their injuries and the redress of their wrongs, what misery and carnage of the human race do they, in their turn, unavoidably produce? and how unnecessarily and awfully are these calamities sometimes increased, by wicked and designing men taking advantage of the popular indignation and turning it to their own purposes of revenge or interest? How often does the enthusiasm of liberty produce tumults and disorders which incroach on the property and safety of individuals and prevent the public happiness? How frequently does it drive a community, tired with incessant agitations and contentions, to seek an ignoble tranquillity under the yoke of a new master? Considering that we have been exposed to all these dangers and that we have, as a nation, escaped them all—that without bloodshed or contention we have dissolved one government and established another which secures the most perfect and equal liberty, without opening the doors of licentiousness—we ought to acknowledge that the finger of God has marked out our way, and that his providence and spirit have guided us in the paths of safety and happiness. Let the most jealous eye examine this country, and fix, if it can, on an instance which really deserves the appellation of civil oppression. If any law

be thought unequal or impolitic, do we not possess all the means, of which a state of society will admit, to obtain its repeal or admendment? To require more than this is to require an impossibility. It is to demand that the social state should be something which, from the nature of things, it can never be. Do not all classes of men enjoy an unexampled degree of advantage and prosperity? Do they not pursue their several occupations with every prospect that can cherish industry and every reward that can sweeten its toils? Is any citizen in the union necessarily precluded from the highest station which the laws or constitution create? Nay, is any thing more than capacity, enterprise, diligence and virtue necessary, to give him the probability of reaching it? Was there ever a nation which so nearly resembled a great and happy family, of which every member was considered and treated with affection, the rights of each consulted, and all made to contribute to the common good? Verily the God of nations hath in these respects most highly distinguished us, and to him should our cordial thanks now be rendered.

3. It deserves our grateful remembrance that the blessing of peace has been preserved to us,

while so many of the nations of the earth have been involved in war. Who can turn his thoughts on Europe—travel in imagination over her bloody plains, behold myriads of men lying dead on the fields of battle, see these battles succeed each other in quick and awful succession, recollect into how many living bosoms each of them must convey the keenest distresses,—murdering “all the charities of husband, father, son and brother,” view cities wrapt in flames, survey large regions of country depopulated or filled with all the miseries with which war, like an enraged demon let loose from hell, forever marks his footsteps—Who, I say, can think of these things and not burn with gratitude to heaven that we have been preserved from sharing in such horrors! Who, in contrast with what you have just contemplated, can look through this happy land, and see its busy inhabitants pursuing, without interruption, alarm or apprehension, all the beneficial employments of human life; lying down and rising up in quietness and safety; urging forward their various businesses with alacrity and success; tasting all the sweets of domestic enjoyment “each under his vine and under his fig-tree while there is nothing to hurt or to destroy”—Who can view this pleasing contrast and not wonder that any should wish to destroy it—wish to involve us in the broils and bloodshed of the old world. Yet

such a wish appears to have been formed : and imminent was the danger, at a certain period, that we should become a party in these shocking contentions. But the good providence of God has warded off the danger. To the good providence of God we owe it, that circumstances favourable to the continuance of our peace and safety have taken place. To him we owe our thanks, that he inspired the President of the union with wisdom to discern, and with firmness, calmness and resolution, to pursue, at the most trying moment, the true interests of our country. To heaven therefore let our warmest aspirations of praise arise for this fortunate escape, this happy and important deliverance.

4. It merits our grateful notice on this occasion, that an unreasonable and dangerous insurrection, among a part of our own citizens, has lately been effectually suppressed. It is, indeed, matter of regret and humiliation, both before God and man, that in a country like ours where, as we have seen, every thing is enjoyed of which society will allow, such an instance of ingratitude and folly should ever have occurred. But its occurrence, nevertheless, has been overruled, by him whose prerogative it is to bring good out of evil and who has hitherto seemed to make us his favourite charge, to strengthen the

government and to encrease the hopes of its friends. It has demonstrated that the great mass of the people are inviolably attached to the authority established : It has proved that they are determined to support it : It has manifested that they understand its principles : It has discovered that they have confidence in their rulers and are swayed by reason : It has shewn to the enemies of order that the people here are not to be led blindfold to ruin by ambitious demagogues. It has also evinced, by the manner in which it was opposed, that there is a disposition in the executive magistrate to combine with energy and decision the mildest and most accommodating methods of securing the public safety. In a word, when, on the one hand, we reflect on the dangers which have threatened us from this quarter,—the reproach and injury which our country would have sustained if the infant insurrection had grown up to strength and maturity, the blood of citizen fighting against citizen which must have been shed, and the whole host of evils which must have arisen out of intestine discord and divisions; and, on the other, recollect with what readiness and zeal every description of citizens flocked to the standard of the laws, the alacrity

and perseverance with which they sustained a long and difficult march, the small number of deaths that took place among them—unaccustomed as they were to fatigue and the hardships of a military life, and the complete extinction of the rebellious spirit without the shedding of human blood; surely we have reason to say with gratitude that God hath been with us, and prospered us in this whole concern. In this place, speaking of military operations, I may also mention the victory over our savage enemies with which heaven has been pleased, during the year past, to crown our arms. Having experienced repeated and total defeats, the loss of some of our most valuable citizens, the effusion of much blood and the expence of much treasure, in our unavoidable warfare with this subtil and cruel foe, the success which we have at length obtained deserves to be esteemed as a peculiar favour. Its value is the greater in as much as it seems to be the harbinger of peace to our brethren on the frontiers, who, for a length of time, have been precluded from several of the advantages resulting from that inestimable blessing, and which have been mentioned as the possession of the nation in general. Let them praise the Lord for this his goodness, and let us join our voice with theirs, and give thanks to him who hath gone forth with our armies and clothed them with victory and triumph.

5. The measure of health which at present prevails throughout our country demands our gratitude to the bestower of it. For more than a year past the Deity has, indeed, been showing us the rod of his displeasure, in the infliction of unusual and mortal sickness. Several places have been forely smitten, and this, especially, has smarted severely under the stroke. Yet mercy has been mingled with judgment and has rendered the correction short and partial. Infection has not been permitted greatly to extend its baneful influence; but when our fears have been highest the danger has ceased and returning health has visited our habitations. "Like as a father pitieth his children so the Lord" hath pitied and spared us. He hath set before us an example of correction, but he has forborn a general chastisement and sought by kindness to lead us to himself. To him let us go with penitence and with praise—"Bless the Lord, O our soul and all that is within us bless his holy name—who healeth all our diseases, who deemeth our life from destruction, who crowneth us with loving kindness and tender mercies."

6. Lastly. The smiles of Providence on our agriculture, commerce, manufactures and arts, invite us to give thanks to him from whom we have received them. Notwithstanding some

unfavorable indications toward the close of the preceeding year, that which has just terminated, has continued to yield us the increase of the earth in such abundance that "the poor of our land have bread to eat." It may with truth be affirmed that in no other country are all descriptions of people fed to the full as they are in that which we possess. Occupying a territory which extends thro' several climates, if scarcity exist in one part it can usually be supplied by the plenty of another. But in the season which we have last finished there has been, in every part, food in profusion both for man and beast.

Under the influence, likewise, of many providential circumstances, favourable to such an effect, but principally from those which result immediately from the federal government, not only the agriculture, but the commerce, manufactures and arts of our rising republic are in a progressive and flourishing state. They have received as it were life from the dead. A few years since all was stagnant and languishing. Commerce declined and seemed on the point of expiring. For labor there was little demand and for the fruits of industry no adequate return. The situation of those who were obliged to depend for subsistence on these resources was hard in the extreme and their prospects were still more gloomy and disheartening. But now there is both a pressing

demand and a generous recompence for every effort of enterprize and for every product of labour or of art. Over all ranks of the community prosperity seems to be casting her smile. Seldom, if ever before, has the husbandman reaped such wealth from his harvest, or the mechanic derived such profit from his manufacture, or the merchant received such gains from his trade, or the ingenious such a reward for their skill.

The advantages of education and useful instruction are, also, more generally diffused than heretofore, and a spirit seems to have gone forth which promises to impart them effectually to those who, thro' want or carelessness, have not hitherto felt their influence. That we should have the ability and the inclination to extend the principles of knowledge and virtue to the poor, and those who would otherwise remain the prey of ignorance and vice, deserves to be reckoned among the choicest blessings which can rest on our country. For the people the government is instituted, and never can it incur trouble or expence in promoting their interests more properly, than in taking care that all classes of them have their minds enlightened by information, and formed to habits of honesty, industry, and a reverence for virtue. It is the high honour of the eastern states of the union that establishments for these invaluable

purposes have been coeval with, their existence. The states of New-York and Pennsylvania appear to be now starting in the pursuit of the same objects, and others, it is hoped, will follow their example.

These then, are the numerous and peculiar circumstances, which call the citizens of the United States on this day “to praise the Lord “for his goodness” remembering that it is he who by his kind and overruling Providence hath so remarkably prospered and distinguished them as a nation—Let us therefore enquire

II. In what manner our sincere compliance with this duty may best be expressed and conceived—It will be by unfeigned repentance for our sins; by truly and unitedly lifting our souls to God in the acts of thankful devotion and cherishing a sense of our entire dependance on him as a people; and by a grateful use and improvement of the favours conferred upon us.

1. If we would truly feel and express our gratitude to God we must truly repent of our sins. Some, perhaps, may wonder that on an occasion appropriated to praise I should inculcate penitence. I might not have done it, my brethren, if I had only proposed to show how we might make *professions* of thankfulness,

but having engaged to speak of the *sincere* expressions of it, I am compelled to mention penitence, because no sincere acknowledgments of the divine goodness can ever be made without it. Take a familiar illustration of this point. Imagine that you had a benefactor to whom you were most deeply indebted and who was continually loading you with benefits; imagine that while this was taking place you should indulge in every thing that you knew to be most disagreeable to him—violate all that he held most sacred, and league with his inveterate enemies in deadly hostility against him; imagine that you should, nevertheless, make warm professions of your gratitude to him and declare that you had a heart-felt sense of his kindness. Who can hear such a representation without exclaiming—“the wretch who should act thus would be guilty of the most detestable falsehood and the basest hypocrisy.” Who, if he had the opportunity, would not say to such a man—“Show your gratitude by your actions or cease to declare it in words. Your pretensions are all false and hollow. Had you one remnant of a grateful temper you could not thus basely treat him to whom you owe so much. Did you feel as you ought, your conduct would be the reverse of all that it is.” Shall I say, beware how you thus judge? No, for this judgment is just. But

in passing it you pass sentence on every impenitent sinner who professes to be truly thankful to Heaven. I called the statement an illustration, but it is rather a strict description of the case. God is our greatest benefactor. "Sin is a transgression of his law," and his "very soul abhors it." The commission of it is an attempt to subvert his government of the universe. It is to join with his enemies in opposing the will and authority of the Most High, and explicitly to say "We would not have thee to reign over us." This is the language of every act of disobedience to the divine law, and those who unrestrainedly indulge in disobedience adopt this language, in its highest tone of impiety. Some, I am aware, are ignorant, and more are unmindful, of this solemn truth. Let the crime and absurdity of such receive all the allowance which can arise from their circumstances, but still it will be true that till they know the crime and avoid the absurdity, they will never offer any sacrifice acceptable to God. Till true repentance, and its inseparable concomitant, thorough reformation, take place in their hearts and lives, all their professions of gratitude will only number them among those of whom it is said—"this people draw near to me with their mouths and with their lips they honour me, but their heart is far from me." But, my brethren, whether peni-

tent or impenitent in our general character, we are, one and all, sinners before God. We continually offend against him and come short of his glory. Let us, therefore, be melted into genuine sorrow under a view of our offences against him from whom we have received such unspeakable benefits, that thus we may go to his throne with that disposition which is essential to gratitude and to acceptance. Remember the awful interrogatory of the word of life—"Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long-suffering, not knowing that *the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?* With all urgency ought I to inculcate this duty of repentance, when it is one to which the goodness of God directly *leads* us—into which it is specially calculated to dissolve us. Yes, my brethren, this is the most essential ingredient of genuine thankfulness. There is no proof which we can give that we are truly sensible of our obligations to God equal to this—that we avoid every thing which we know to be offensive to him. The most unequivocal evidence that we are really touched and influenced by a sense of unspeakable indebtedness must arise from our being seen to renounce and sacrifice whatever is displeasing or contrary to the known will of our benefactor: And this he will receive as the most acceptable testimonial of our grati-

tude. Let us then “turn every one from his iniquities;” and let us pray that from this day a general reformation may take place throughout our land, as the natural and necessary sign that we are impressed, as a nation, with the apprehension of divine and distinguishing goodness, and make the return which it demands. But in another view is penitence connected with suitable praise. It is necessary to give us a right apprehension of the *extent* of our obligations, and to teach us to set that *relative* value on the favours we receive, which is just and necessary. He who truly estimates his character as a sinner, which is the case with every real penitent, will see that he has deserved nothing but everlasting misery at the hand of God. He will therefore be so far from viewing any thing he hath ever received, or can ever enjoy, as a matter of *merit*, that he will accept and consider it as an instance of forfeited favour and the fruit of the freest and richest grace. It is plain that this will give him the highest and most affecting views of the Divine goodness in every instance in which it is manifested, and make him feel in the most sensible manner the weight of every benefit. It will also teach him to consider the Saviour as “God’s unspeakable gift,”—the first and greatest of all, both in itself and as being the medium of every other. Through the merits of the Saviour

he will perceive that sin is pardoned and all the blessings of eternal life secured to the believer, and for him, therefore, he will be *supremely* thankful. He will likewise see that all temporal benefits are the purchase and fruit of his Saviour's work, and he will receive and enjoy them as flowing from this source. Thus will he estimate the Divine favours in *that manner, order and degree*, in which they are estimated by God himself, and which must of course be most pleasing in his sight.

2. We ought, on this day, in the most *direct* manner truly to lift up our souls to God, in the acts of social thanksgiving, and to cherish and promote a sense of our entire dependance on him as a people. Having shown, in its proper place, the reasonableness of this duty, having enumerated the special circumstances that call us to it, having mingled throughout the discourse many admonitions and exhortations to discharge it, and having just explained the temper and views on which it ought to be founded, little it would seem, remains to be added here. With propriety, however, I may add a description of the manner in which the day will have been contemplated and treated by those who shall have regarded it aright. If thus you have regarded it, you viewed it in prospect with pleasure, as a day on which a

great and happy nation might bring their offering of worship and praise to Almighty God, and give him the thanks which are due unto his name. You entered upon it, this morning, rejoicing in his mercy, and your hearts arose to him in grateful aspirations of praise. You called to mind, in private, and you were truly affected with those favours which you have heard recited. You bowed down before him and with fervent and affectionate devotion you acknowledged his goodness to you and to your country. You bore it in mind, as you came to this house, that you were coming to offer your social homage to the God of nations.— You were elevated with the thought that you were to do it in concert with many thousands of your fellow christians, who, like a band of grateful children, would at once approach the footstool of their Heavenly Father, and present to him their united thanks. In the prayers and songs of praise which have already been offered here, your souls have ascended on the wings of devout affection, and carried their thank offerings to the mercy seat on high. As I recounted the favours of Heaven to our country you said, truly *this* and *this* was a singular and wonderful expression of the Divine mercy and regard ; and much oftener than I admonished it did you, in the ejaculations of your minds, praise the Lord for his goodness. At

this moment you are viewing and feeling obligations which you are sensible I have not expressed, and which exceed expression. In this manner have you hitherto spent and will continue to spend much of this day, if you have been, and shall be, rightly disposed and affected. How much of this has actually taken place in your hearts is known only to God and to yourselves. But oh! if he whose presence pervades our souls, shall have beheld these sentiments and emotions filling the minds of the millions of people who inhabit this land, it will indeed be incense before him, and this will be in truth a day of thanksgiving in his sight. Yet this is not all. From this day forth we must preserve a lively recollection and realizing sense of our entire dependance, as a nation, on the great Governor of the Universe. We must, each in his place, endeavor to cherish and widely to disseminate this important sentiment. In discharging my own part of this duty, I think it behoves me to proclaim, from this place, to those who rule over us, that they are peculiarly bound to instil as deeply as possible into the popular mind a persuasion of the universal government of God and of the accountability of all to him. No fanciful theories or political refinements will ever furnish a substitute for this sentiment or demonstrate that it is useless. Not only reason but the unvarying ex-

perience of all ages and nations has established it as an incontestible truth, that it is this sentiment, alone, which can supply the unavoidable deficiency and limited reach of human laws. Let men be wholly free from the belief and apprehension of their accountability to an all seeing and impartial Judge, and they are prepared to violate every law which opposes their passions and interests, and the penalty of which they can hope to escape—Let this be the prevailing and popular creed, and all the ingenuity of man cannot prevent the perpetration of crimes nor govern the community in which it has obtained an ascendancy.—Magistrates and legislators of America! be sensible of this fact. Inculcate reverence to God, obedience to his laws, the superintendance of his providence, and amenableness to his bar. Inculcate these sentiments by your own example, and by framing and executing laws for the discountenance of vice. Recognise these truths by days of religious solemnity. Show especially that they are truths which govern in your own minds and which you dare not violate. Your maxims, morals and manners, form those of the people at large, and you will find, too late, that they are incapable of government, if these foundations of

it be taken away or rendered unsound. Believe it, also, that the frowns of Heaven will ever rest on a nation *openly* impious and profane. The judge of all recompenses *nations in this world*, because it is here alone that this relation exists, and because it is necessary to the purposes of his moral government—necessary to show that “verily there is a God who reigneth in the earth.” He therefore treats them *now* according to their *visible* character. In *the world to come* he will recompense *individuals*; whom his impartial justice will reward according to their *real* character. He will strip the disguise from the veiled hypocrite and cover him with everlasting confusion. He will adequately punish the impious and daring offender who has wrought out the ruin of thousands as well as of himself. He will crown with eternal and unfading honours that integrity and love of virtue which is really seated in the heart; and “those who have turned many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever.” Receive these truths from the lips of one who reverences your office and respects your character, but who, when ministering in the service of the blessed Jesus, ought to imitate his example and declare truths to you as freely as to the meanest of those you govern, remembering that without distinction “we must all appear before the judgement seat of

Christ." Let these truths then be regarded that this day may introduce an æra of real and acceptable thanksgiving to our God.

3. Finally. An important part of the expression of our gratitude, will consist in the right use and suitable improvement of the favours conferred on us. Already have you been reminded that it is by actions more than by words that our real apprehensions of things are declared; that all our professions of thankfulness for any of the favours of heaven will be false if we are seen to abuse them; that a just sense of the obligations we are under to one who has richly endued us with his bounty will ever induce us to consider the purposes which he intended to promote, and the manner of using his gifts which we know will be most pleasing to him. Let me now remind you, further, that it is by this that the *generosity* of gratitude is principally and peculiarly evinced. By this the beneficiary manifests that he regards the pleasure of his patron as well as his own gratification, and abhors to seek the latter in any way inconsistent with the former; or rather that in no such way can he be gratified at all. Ask them, how the many and special favours which have been recount-

ed may be used by the American citizen so as most to please the divine and sovereign Author of them?—Ask what is their rational, and proper, and pious use? and you will see, for yourselves, how the manifestation of gratitude which we here contemplate must be made. It will be by taking care not to abuse our religious liberty to the neglect of all the duties which we owe to God; but by showing, on the contrary, that we are rendered by it more truly and practically pious than any other people. It will be by esteeming and supporting and obeying the government under which we live, “being subject, not merely through fear, but also for conscience sake, esteeming it the ordinance of God to us for good;” by suppressing in ourselves and in others all unreasonable surmises, jealousies, murmurs and complaints against it; by rendering due obedience to all who are set over us—“honour to whom honour, tribute to whom tribute, fear to whom fear;” by cherishing public spirit and the love of real liberty, truly desiring to promote the general welfare and striving with each other who shall be the best citizen; by our legislators taking care to enact laws which are equal and just, and our magistrates to execute them with fide-

lity and discretion. It will be by rightly valuing and endeavouring to preserve the national peace which we enjoy—abhorring the thought of plunging our country into war for the sake of gain to individuals, or the gratification of private revenge or ambition ; by maintaining inviolably the principles of good faith and strict justice in all our connections and intercourse with other nations ; by treating with equity and humanity the Indian tribes with whom we have peace, and seeking it sincerely and honourably with those with whom we are at war. It will be by activity, industry, frugality and economy in our several stations and callings, and a cheerful contentment with our lot ; by honesty, integrity, and fairness in all our dealings and transactions with each other, doing to others as we would wish that they should do us ; by punctuality in the discharge of all contracts and obligations “ owing no man any thing but to love one another.” It will be by adorning the various relations of domestic life by faithfulness, tenderness, watchfulness and care ; by shewing mercy to the poor, compassion to the friendless, and hospitality and kindness to the stranger. It will be by flunning all oppression—by endeavouring honestly and conscientiously to extirpate slavery from our country, in such a manner as shall not be injurious either to him who has held

or to him who has been the slave. It will be by remembering our brethren in captivity and bonds, and doing every thing lawful and suitable for their relief. It will be by avoiding avarice on the one hand and prodigality on the other ; by abstaining from luxury, dissipation, and criminal pleasures—“ using the world as not abusing it ;” by countenancing sobriety, order, and decency, and encouraging enterprise, learning, and the useful arts. It will be, especially, by the establishment of schools to which all may have free access, and by which the rising generation may be prepared for serving both God and their generation—
 Oh my country ! if the eye which looks on all should see thy children faithfully doing these things, it would behold the most acceptable sacrifice of praise which men can offer unto God. These things therefore let us do, and we shall be happy as individuals, and happy as a nation, happy in time, and happy throughout eternity. Amen.

F I N I S.