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A S E R M O N,

PREACHED ON THE DAY OF

*GENERAL THANKSGIVING,*

DECEMBER 19, 1797.

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DELIVERANCE FROM ENEMIES, A GROUND FOR  
THANKSGIVING.

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A SERMON,

PREACHED ON THE DAY OF

*GENERAL THANKSGIVING,*

DECEMBER 19th, 1797,

IN THE CHAPEL OF THE

ASYLUM FOR FEMALE ORPHANS,

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By *WILLIAM AGUTTER*, A.M.

CHAPLAIN AND SECRETARY TO THE ASYLUM.

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Thine, O LORD, is the Victory. 1 Chron. xxix. 11.

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1798.

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A SERMON, &c.

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*Send down thine hand from above, rid me and deliver me out of the GREAT WATERS; from the hand of STRANGE CHILDREN; whose mouth speaketh of vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of iniquity.*

Ps. 144. 7, 8.

**G**RATITUDE to God is at once the duty and the happiness of man. Divine blessings may be showered down in abundance, yet without this temper of mind we cannot enjoy them. They are either received with cold indifference, or only administer to inflame our passions, or to encourage our pride. What God intends for the greatest good, men may pervert to the greatest evil. He delighteth to bless; is wise to save, and bringeth good out of evil. Whereas they who are not guided by his Law, are rash or ingenious to destroy; to pervert the means of happiness into sources of misery. This must ever be the case, when men have “*forsaken the Fountain of Living Waters; and hewn unto themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, which can hold no water.*” They may make specious promises of splendid happiness which the world never saw before;

but what do they really produce?—violent passions without restraint—life without virtue—death without hope.

As a Nation, we have great cause to be thankful.

Our *climate* is temperate and healthy; favourable to the exertions of labour and industry at all seasons of the year.

We are exempt from those *convulsions* of nature which suddenly involve whole kingdoms in tremendous ruin—We see the peculiar comfort of our *insular* situation; for although engaged in a most alarming and extraordinary war, though the kingdoms of the earth have been deeply convulsed, terrified by alarms, astonished by defeats and reduced by plunder, yet war has not been in our gates. We have slept secure. A vain, a mighty and determined foe has scarce ventured to approach our extensive coasts.

Our *Laws* are founded in wisdom and executed with mercy, justice and integrity, by some of the first characters that ever adorned the Bench.

The different *ranks* and *orders* in society ultimately tend to the comfort, the security and protection of the whole.

Our Religion is founded on the revealed Will of God; the Holy Scriptures, translated into our own language, are the basis of the Protestant Church; but while we

hold fast that which is excellent, we respect even the scruples of others; we force no man's conscience. The door of Toleration stands open, that every man may worship his Creator and Redeemer in the way he most approves.

Our commerce, although in some particulars it may be carried to too great an excess, yet affords employment, support and comfort to vast numbers, from the cultivator of the raw materials to the mariner and the merchant.

I have not indeed enumerated all our national blessings: These may suffice, in general, to prove our obligations to God; to shew what He may require at our hands.

I do not now stay to enquire how these talents have been improved—what influence they have had on our lives—but this day's solemnity directs your attention to one particular instance of God's mercy.

*The wicked are a sword in the hand of the LORD, to punish themselves, and to humble and oppress others.— This sword is gone forth. It hath devoured much flesh. The numbers of the slain; the enormities committed; the miseries endured, seem to exceed all that is recorded of the sufferings of the Jews at the last siege of Jerusalem. The floods have lift up their voice, the floods have lift up their waves, the waves of the sea are mighty and rage horribly\*.*

\* At the siege of Jerusalem by Titus, it is computed 1,100,000

*Great Waters*, in the language of Scripture, represent the violence of temptation, the diffusion of false principles which desolate all truth, and the risings of the multitude.

As the devouring flood sweeps all before it, so a deluge of false principles has broken in upon the world, and sapped the foundations of morality and religion, and threatens the existence of happiness and peace.

Behold! the *antient land marks* are overthrown—the barriers between virtue and vice are swept away or confounded—the obligation of the marriage vow treated as an imposture—the best principles of parental affection counter-worked.—The King of France was flattered with the most obsequious respect, while his throne was undermined. They bowed before his mild sceptre who were preparing for him insult and imprisonment—The seats of the nobles were burnt—the houses of the religious were plundered—the churches were profaned with the most abominable rites of heathenish idolatry.

*The troubled sea casts up mire and dirt*; so in civil

perished.—During the commotions in France, on a moderate computation, Three Millions have been destroyed. These distresses in France have continued much longer than those in Judea. In their lowest state, the Jews had some respect for Religion; they venerated their Temple; But the world has seen a new monster: Atheism adopted in principle, reduced to practice, and propagated by violence.

commotions the basest of the people must finally bear rule. The first movers were astonished, when it was too late, at the desolating flood which they had let loose; and when they found themselves circumvented by the treachery which they had taught\*.

*When the sea and the waves thus roar, the deepest deceit, the most consummate villany, the most determined cruelty must finally prevail.*

The throne was overturned; the altar stained with blood; the seats of justice became the means of oppression—the comfort and the confidence of social life were no more—every species of property, from the estate of the noble to the labour of the farmer, were marked for violence.

Ofttimes the mere forms of law were disregarded, and unoffending multitudes dragged from their habitations, and crowded into loathsome prisons, without knowing their crimes or their accusers.

\* It would afford a curious and interesting speculation to the attentive mind to remark the quick transitions in the French revolution, and the sudden and calamitous events which have closed the lives of several of the chief actors. The triumphing of the wicked is short: amidst the confusion of human events, and the short sighted views of men, we may often overlook the conduct of divine Providence, and perhaps begin to question the justice of Heaven, because we may see vice triumphant for a time, or our ideas of retribution disappointed. See on this subject a Sermon by Dr. CRADDOCK, preached in the last century, which has been esteemed, by no mean judges, the best Sermon in the English language.

Some were imprisoned because they were nobly born ; others because they once possessed riches ; or were distinguished for talents. To enquire for a banished friend, to pity a murdered relation, to deplore the miseries of a devoted country, were crimes not to be pardoned.

Where no shadow of guilt could be alledged, even by unrighteous judges, vast numbers were involved in the general charge of being *suspected* \* ; and this vague plea was to gratify every malignant passion which could rankle in the heart of fallen man, or degrade human nature bowed down in the slavery of fear.

*The mystery of iniquity* first worked in secret, and then manifested itself openly. *The abomination of desolation stood where it ought not ; even in the holy place.* The Gallican Church has been *weighed in the balance and found wanting.* It once was the glory of that kingdom, it could boast of its antient establishments, its vast revenues, its splendid hierarchy, and numerous priests ; but it is *overthrown, that not one stone is left upon another.* Her appearance was splendid, but the vital principle was wanting. *The carcass is given up to be devoured of the eagles. They that hate her have dominion over her. She sitteth as a widow bereaved of her children.*

\* At one time it was computed that more than 300,000 persons were imprisoned in France only because they were suspected, or suspected of being suspicious. See a Residence in France during the years 1792—1795, in a series of letters, Vol. I. p. 406. Nov. 1793.



Let us take warning—*the ax is laid to the root of the tree.*—No substitute can be admitted for real personal religion; if this is gone, all is gone: *the foundations are out of course*; the throne and the altar tremble; the security of the Prince and of the cottager are alike endangered.

The *fear* of GOD is the real support of all true regard for man. When the one is weakened and abolished, the heart becomes callous. Whatever pretensions are made to benevolence are but the masks of hypocrisy. They who boasted most of the rights of man, of fraternizing with all nations, are the men whose *hands are imbrued with blood*; who add mocking and insult to cruelty; and who deny those who are condemned to die the last consolations of piety and hope.\*

The enemy were ready to pour in upon us, like a devouring flood: they envy our prosperity, they seek our ruin and are provoked at our resistance. These are to men who attempt to make us as deceitful, as guilty and wretched as themselves. Well may they be called STRANGE CHILDREN, *whose mouth speaketh of vanity*;

\* Every burial place in France exhibits this melancholy motto, DEATH IS AN ETERNAL SLEEP. All rites of sepulture are forbidden; they who die a natural death are committed to the grave in a manner that must add bitterness to grief and insult to degraded humanity. See a Residence in France, Vol. II, p. 334.

*their talking is against the Most High:† their right hand is a right hand of iniquity: their feet are swift to shed blood: destruction and unhappiness are in their doings; and the way of peace they know not.*

The nations of the earth have been terrified, oppressed and spoiled by this devouring scourge; some, who have made the experiment, have found that their friendship was more to be dreaded than their enmity.

As a Nation, we have felt in a degree the sad shock—we are involved in a long and tremendous war; yet, through the divine mercy, the enemy has been driven from our gates; we have not been subject to their rapine; or what is much worse, I hope, that we have not been corrupted by their principles, or misled by their example.

† “Invincible reason will teach every one, that the SUPREME BEING, the Eternal Being, is no other than *Nature uncreated and uncreateable*—Reason dethrones both the kings of the earth and the kings of heaven—No monarchy above, if we wish to preserve our republic below.

“Volumes have been written to determine whether or no a republic of Atheists could exist. I maintain that every other republic is a chimaera. If you once admit the existence of a heavenly Sovereign, you introduce the wooden horse within your walls. What you adore by day will be your destruction at night.” *Extract from the Report of the Committee of PUBLIC INSTRUCTION, printed by the Order, and with the Approbation of the National Convention.*

I have made these Extracts; for the charge of Atheism is of so horrid a nature, the idea of a human Being without conscience and without humanity, is so really degrading to our nature, that we feel reluctant to admit such a charge without the fullest evidence.—The impiety of Rabshakeh appears to be far exceeded in insolence, folly and blasphemy, by those who pretend to *enlighten* all Europe and to *free* all nations.

We do acknowledge that the LORD *reigneth*—We are this day assembled together *to praise His holy name, who giveth victory to Kings, and hath delivered David his Servant from the edge of the sword.* Our excellent Monarch sets us a worthy example. As the Father of his People, as the Head of the Three Estates of the Realm, *he goeth up to the house of the Lord to bow before Him, and to acknowledge that he will not trust in his bow; it is not his sword that shall save him; he will not trust in his fleets and armies, but in the living GOD.*

Let us follow his pious example. While too many of the Princes of Europe were inveigled into the snares of infidelity by artful men, who lay in wait to deceive, he resisted all the influence of power, the charms of wit, and the assumption of false wisdom, which were employed to weaken his principles, and to destroy his hopes: He judged well: The event has abundantly proved, that the enemies of God can never be the friends of Kings\*. It

\* The Duke of Orleans squandered away a prodigious fortune in endeavouring to purchase such to be his friends and supporters. He appears to have been a character most completely abandoned; a monster, *nulla virtute redemptum*. The enormity of his vices was only to be equalled by the meanness of his understanding, which made him the dupe of his own villany. I have no doubt but on that day that he combined himself with the *illuminati*, they sentenced him to infamy and the scaffold. See a very interesting work, intituled, “Proofs of a Conspiracy against all the Religions and Governments of Europe, carried on in the secret meetings of the Free Masons, Illuminati, and Reading

was better to forfeit the friendship of a mighty monarch and be ridiculed in the *seat of the scorner*, than to be *ashamed of the Gospel of Christ*, and to support a national Religion, not from principle, but from policy.

Therefore *we will offer unto God Thanksgiving, and pay our vows with gladness*—Our *vows* of gratitude for mercies received, as the only means to have these continued and increased—Our *vows* of better obedience for the time to come—of benevolence to our fellow-creatures; of submission to civil authority; of forgiveness of our enemies.

How can we better express our gratitude to God than by shewing mercy to man? Our excellence reacheth not unto the heavens, but the streams of our bounty may flow in acts of kindness to our fellow-creatures. This will direct us to visit the sick, to comfort the mourner, to remember those whom the world forgets, to raise the oppressed, to instruct the ignorant, to protect the deserted, and to sooth and cheer the evening of declining age. On this our day of Thanksgiving, let us *not appear before the LORD empty*. The mourning relicts and the fatherless

Societies, collected from good authorities by *John Robison, A. M. Professor of Natural Philosophy, and Secretary to the Royal Society of Edinburgh,* This work deserves the serious attention of every Friend of Religion and Government; and particularly suggests this caution to the young and inexperienced; how they enter into any Society under solemn obligations of secrecy, while they are ignorant what associates they may find, or what designs are carrying forward. See also *Barruel's Memoirs illustrating the History of Jacobinism.*

children of those who have lately fallen in their country's cause have a peculiar claim on our benevolence.

Another method to improve this occasion is by wisely submitting to the judgments of God. Mercy and judgment are wonderfully blended together; if we rejoice in victory, we must consider how intimately this is connected with the calamities of war. It is not for man to say *where* this scourge shall begin, *how* far it shall extend, or *when* it shall cease. Man purposes one thing, but God another; and His counsel shall stand. Man may purpose to kill and destroy, to glut his revenge or satisfy his avarice; but the purpose of God is, *that the fierceness of man may turn to His praise. The fierceness of them shalt thou restrain.* If we neglect the calls of mercy we shall hear the louder voice of judgment.

When the divine purpose is to punish, means are never wanting; the elements are the servants of His will; the earth shall quake, mountains and plains shall be overthrown and confounded, swept with the besom of destruction; the air shall be overloaded with pestilence, and death enter the vital breath. The fields shall be blasted with mildew, and the earth shall refuse to yield her increase: Storms and tempests and hurricanes shall convulse nature, and turn the fairest plantations into desolate heaps. Suppose we had nothing to fear from our enemies, should our triumphant fleets block up the ports of all our enemies,

yet would that afford us any security? Far from it.—At a time when we had nothing to fear from any outward foe, the port of the metropolis was blocked up by the mutinous revolt of our own fleet.

It is God who gives a commission to the sword to go forth, and to be drunken with slaughter; He does it to humble the pride of man, to correct him for mercies abused, to teach him his dependence.

*O Lord God of Hosts who is like unto Thee: Thou rulest the raging of the sea; Thou stillest the waves thereof when they arise. Thou alone canst say unto the swelling billows of pride, ambition, cruelty and avarice, Hitherto shall ye go, and no further. Thou hast set them their bounds which they shall not pass.*

God only knows where these calamities are to end—these may be only the beginning of sorrows. If moral improvement is the end intended, the prospect is dark indeed.

But should heavier trials await us, each one of us may have *this* inexpressible consolation, in the day of calamity, that by repentance from dead works—by perseverance in well-doing—we have done all that we could do, to save our country.—The righteous hath hope both in life and death.—The Christian must not despair.—We may adopt both the words and the sentiments of our Christian King

—“ Under the blessing of Providence (says he) I look  
 “ with confidence to the issue of this great contest;—but,  
 “ in every event, my resolution is taken. It is such as I  
 “ owe to GOD, to my country, and to myself. I will  
 “ not be wanting to my people, but will stand or fall with  
 “ them in the defence of our religion, and in the main-  
 “ tenance of the independence, laws, and liberties of these  
 “ kingdoms.”\*

It may be no unchristian wish rather to die as Englishmen than to live enslaved to France—deprived of every comfort which can cheer the man; of every hope which can elevate the Christian: of our property by military robbers, or taught by the horrid instruments of terror the more horrid system of gloomy Atheism.

*Let us fall into the hands of God and not into the hands of men, for as is His majesty, so also is His mercy.*

Our blessed Saviour has taught us to love our enemies; to forgive those who have injured us, to be ready to make every overture for the sake of peace. They who are the first to seek for reconciliation, have generally most goodness as well as justice on their side. Our enemies may *curse*, but we must *bless*. Although our overtures of peace have been perversely misrepresented, and obstinately

\* His Majesty's Answer to the Address of both Houses of Parliament, November 15th, 1797.

refused, yet whenever a prospect of reconciliation shall open, it never can be beneath a great and Christian nation to come forward again, to forget the indignities which are past, and to be more ready to be reconciled, than to retaliate injuries.

Great exertions necessarily require great expences. Distant possessions, an extensive commerce, and a wide range of coast are to be protected and defended. Our danger is great; the difficulty uncommon; and our exertions ought to be equal to these. Shall we not make some sacrifices to save our country, our religion, and our property? The burden of taxes must be borne by the great bulk of the people. Can we be so unreasonable or unjust, as to suppose that the weight is to fall upon others and not upon us? If prudence requires some retrenchments to be made in our mode of living, let us do it willingly and not of necessity; let us make them on our luxury, on our extravagance and vain appearances, being assured of this, that we shall not suffer for it either in the health of our bodies or the peace of our minds. Some will yet complain that the times are bad: but will complaining make them better? As a nation we have suffered, but we have suffered much less than our vices may call for; much less than what other kingdoms have endured. However difficult our situation may be, however reluctant we naturally are to practise lessons of self-denial, yet the path of Christian duty is a plain path, *Render to all their*



*dues; tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour.*

By these means we may improve this day's solemnity: let us be thankful for our mercies, that they may be continued to us and to our posterity. May these our public charities plead for us in the day of visitation\*. Let us ever acknowledge that the LORD sitteth on the water floods; that He ruleth the raging of the sea and the madness of the people; and supplicate Him who heareth prayer, that the calamities of war may cease, that *Swords may be turned into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks; when the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ.*

\* In the Asylum 200 female orphans are wholly maintained and educated. The children of soldiers and sailors who have fallen in the present war are admitted at an earlier age than others.

PRINTED BY THE SAME AUTHOR,

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The ABOLITION of the SLAVE TRADE considered in a religious Point of View, preached before the Corporation of the City of Oxford, February 3, 1788.

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A SERMON, occasioned by the Death of Mr. JOHN HENDERSON, B.A. of Pembroke College, Oxford.

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The ORIGIN and IMPORTANCE of LIFE considered, in a Sermon preached at St. Giles, Northampton, September 13, 1789, introductory to the Institution of the Preservative, or HUMANE SOCIETY in that County.

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CHRISTIAN POLITICS; or, *the origin of Power and the Grounds of Subordination*, a SERMON preached at All Saints, Northampton, Sep. 2, 1792.

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The SIN OF WASTEFULNESS, a Sermon preached at St. Vedast Foster, January 17, 1796, after reading the Letter of His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury, recommending a Reduction in the Consumption of Wheat.

