

THE
DUTY OF THANKSGIVING,
FOR
NATIONAL BLESSINGS;

A ²
SERMON,

PREACHED

On TUESDAY, DECEMBER 19, 1797,

Being the Day appointed for

A GENERAL THANKSGIVING.

BY *WILLIAM MAYOR, LL.D.*

VICAR OF HURLEY, BERKS,

AND CHAPLAIN TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE THE EARL OF
DUMFRIES.

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1798.

TO THE
RIGHT HONOURABLE
LORD LAVINGTON,
KNIGHT OF THE BATH,
ONE OF THE REPRESENTATIVES IN PARLIAMENT
FOR THE BOROUGH OF NEW WOODSTOCK,
&c. &c.

THIS SERMON,
THE OBJECT OF WHICH IS TO UNITE US IN GRA-
TITUDE TO GOD, AND ATTACHMENT
TO OUR COUNTRY,
IS MOST RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,
BY HIS LORDSHIP'S
MOST FAITHFUL, MOST OBLIGED, AND
VERY HUMBLE SERVANT,

WILLIAM MAVOR.

WOODSTOCK, *December 20, 1797.*

Published by the same Author,

Vindiciæ LANDAVENSES; or Strictures on the Bishop
of Landaff's Charge, in a Letter to His Lordship.

CHRISTIAN POLITICS; a Sermon, preached to a
Country Congregation, on Friday, April 19, 1793; being
the Day appointed for a General Fast.

A

S E R M O N, &c.

ISAIAH, Chap. xlii. Ver. 10.

SING UNTO THE LORD A NEW SONG, AND HIS PRAISE FROM THE END OF THE EARTH: YE THAT GO DOWN TO THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS THEREIN; THE ISLES AND THE INHABITANTS THEREOF.

DID we hear the voice of the Prophet at this instant, speaking in those energetic terms; did we see his venerable form and his persuasive manner, should we not be impressed with awe and reverence, and conclude that he was sent on a solemn mission to us; to call to our remembrance the favours we have received, and the duty of thanks which we owe to our Almighty Benefactor?

And do we not still hear him in his sublime invocation, and can we refuse to apply it to our

own particular case and nation? The sacred Penmen are now no more; but their commands are of perpetual obligation, because they flow from the spirit of truth, and are inspired by that God, who is everlasting. Let not, then, the distance of time or place weaken the force of the Scripture precepts, nor lead us to suppose that we were not equally in the contemplation of the Prophets and Apostles with those to whom they immediately addressed themselves, and equally called upon to profit by their promises, their invitations, and their threatenings.

Lightly as the comforts of religion may be esteemed by a giddy world in general, and superciliously as the Divine Oracles are treated by some who are wise in their own conceit, but want the wisdom that is from on high, may it, to the end of time, be the pride and the happiness of this nation, to refer all to God—to have a holy reliance on him for support in trouble, and a grateful sense of all the mercies he has vouchsafed to us, which not only “our Fathers have told us of,” but which “we have seen with our own eyes.”

Happy the people, who in the hour of calamity can lay hold of an Almighty friend, who can say of their enemy, in the words of Hezekiah, “with
 “ him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the living
 “ God,

“ God, to help us, and to fight our battles.”
 Happy the people, who, having witnessed the interposition of heaven in their defence, give God the glory; and while they honour the instruments of his power and his bounty, with a firm faith, repose their future trust “ on the rock of ages.”

Under the Jewish dispensation, we have frequent instances of public and private thanksgivings for signal mercies. Moses sang praises to God, with the Israelites, immediately after the great deliverance from the Egyptian bondage, and the passage of the Red Sea. The song of Deborah and Barak is full of the noblest sentiments of gratitude to God, to whom the victory over Sisera was justly ascribed. The pious David, in the sublimest strains of devotion, celebrates the goodness of the Lord on a variety of interesting occasions; and even Nebuchadnezzar, who, for pride, had been degraded to the vilest condition, when he found his understanding restored, “ blessed the Most High, and praised and honoured him, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom from generation to generation.”

But it is superfluous to cite more proofs of this grateful disposition, from Jewish or Pagan history. All nations, in all ages of the world, though they

might be ignorant of the true God, have entertained some notions of a superior power, and have gladly paid their acknowledged deity the tribute of praise, when they participated in blessings, or experienced deliverance from ills. And shall Christians be unmindful of a superintending Providence, and of the greater obligations they are under, to return the homage of love and thanksgiving when they receive favours, and cannot but confess to whom alone they owe them? We are favoured with all the illumination of divine knowledge, with all the prospects that can elevate the human mind, and fix it on the author of good: we have promises to animate our hopes, and to excite our best endeavours; and if we neglect our duty, we have neither the plea of ignorance, nor want of encouragement. “Sing,” then, “unto
 “the Lord a new song, and his praise from the
 “ends of the earth: ye that go down to the sea,
 “and all that is therein; the isles and the inhabi-
 “tants thereof.”

Assembled this day under the pious auspices of our earthly Sovereign, let us fervently join with him in the duty which he has recommended by his authority, and enforced by his example, of paying our vows to the King of Kings, for his late gracious assistance, and for all the mercies we enjoy; and that we may perform this with a more lively
 zeal,

zeal, and a more perfect sense of its propriety, let us briefly review some of the distinguished blessings we possess, not only as men, but as a nation; and thence be led to prove ourselves worthy of their being entailed on us and on our latest posterity.

As men, we owe the warmest praise and thanksgiving to the Almighty, at all times and seasons; because he is the author of our being, and has endowed us with knowledge to trace out his ways, and to meditate on the wondrous operations of his hands. The breath he hath given us should be spent in his praise, and every faculty should be devoted to his service. Mere existence however, the use of reason, the food and raiment with which he vouchsafes to nourish and to clothe our frail bodies, in common with the generality of the human race, are not the singular blessings, great as they must appear to every intelligent mind, which claim our peculiar thanks.

We have many advantages as a nation, which tend to sweeten the enjoyment of life itself, and to endear our country to us. This consideration ought to furnish a new source of habitual thanksgiving, and to inspire us with a resolution to maintain the possession of our happy lot, and to transmit it to our descendants, unimpaired. And
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this can only be done by a due improvement of our temporal blessings, and by making them subservient to the honour of God, and the good of our fellow creatures.

By the indulgent dispensation of the Almighty, we have the good fortune to inhabit a land of riches and plenty, “where the harvests yield their increase,” and the peasant rejoices in the fruits of his labour; where the climate is equally remote from the extremes of heat and cold, where we are neither annoyed by savage beasts nor venomous reptiles, and where every thing that can embellish life, or render it desirable, is diffused with a liberal hand. How are we to evince our thankfulness for this? Not by vain boasting or arrogant pride, as if we were the arbiters of our own destiny; but by enjoying the blessings of our situation with reason and moderation, and imparting of our abundance to the necessitous.—By avoiding luxury, profligacy, and sloth, and an oblivion of Him, who has benignantlly granted us such good things to enjoy.

That learning and knowledge, the elegant and the useful arts, have been cultivated among us with the utmost success; that the human mind has, in this happy island, made the greatest possible advances to perfection, are truths incontestible,
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and exalt us as a nation above all others on the face of the globe. But in the pride of science, let us think and act with humility; and if God has been pleased to shed a brighter illumination on our minds, let us not confine it within our breasts, but let us strive to communicate it to the ignorant: and instead of tyrannizing over the weak, or scoffing at the simple, let us be grateful for our own superior understanding, and study to become wise in matters of universal importance, and to the utmost of our abilities to make others so. Thus will our acquirements be truly honourable to ourselves and advantageous to others; and the spirit of knowledge will be shewn to be under the influence of the spirit of God.

While many nations sit in the darkness of Pagan ignorance, or under the delusion of Mahometan superstition, it is our felicity to enjoy the glorious light of the Gospel, and the knowledge of our Redeemer Jesus Christ, unmixed with the deceptive glosses of artful and designing men. Let us shew our gratitude for this inestimable blessing, by walking in the truth with purity and circumspection ourselves; and by leading those who are astray, in the spirit of love and meekness, into the right path that conducts to eternal salvation. Let us, while we congratulate ourselves on the happy effects of our reformation from the gross errors

errors of popery, and from a humiliating dependence on a foreign priest, be careful to maintain our principles, and to follow the Scriptures, as the guide of our conduct and the rule of our faith. And at the same time that we are animated with the love of truth, let us avoid that intemperate zeal, which favours more of a spirit of contention than a sense of Christian duty. Taught by our Church to believe nothing as an article of faith, except what may be proved from holy writ, let us neither wrest it from its plain and obvious meaning, nor allow tradition to supply the place of gospel demonstration. But above all, let us apply its pure and unerring precepts to those practical purposes of which they are so universally susceptible—"to do good, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God."

Liberty founded on order, the bliss of blisses below, has, by the kind providence of God, been secured to us, and is the birth-right and unalienable inheritance of every native of this favoured kingdom, whatever may be his rank, his possessions, or his abilities. It has been preserved and handed down to us by our valiant ancestors, in spite of the frowns of tyrants and the machinations of policy. It is founded on the adamant column of reason, by making the interest of the sovereign and the subject the same; and is guaranteed to us by
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a mild and well tempered government, which is equally inimical to illiberal restraint and savage anarchy. While the just and equitable laws under which we live, guard our own persons and property from violation, they are equally careful to prevent us from injuring the persons, or infringing the property of others. Without this reciprocal action and re-action of legal institution, the best framed plans of human policy cannot ensure happiness, and freedom itself becomes a dangerous poison.

In a neighbouring nation, we have seen the most execrable tyrants that ever disgraced or degraded human nature, and who have committed atrocities under the mask of liberty, at which despotism would have revolted, tantalizing and deluding the ignorant multitude with a prostituted name, while the vital principle is lost.

“ They call it freedom, while themselves are free;”—

free to ravage and destroy—free to break through every barrier that the policy of man, or the injunction of the Supreme, have established as a safeguard from crimes. From such freedom, that sports with life—that violates property—that tears asunder every tie that binds man to society, or links him to heaven, God Almighty preserve us! May we never taste the bitter

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ter fruits of democratic licentiousness, nor mix the cup of blood. May we reflect on our own well-balanced constitution with conscious pride; and while we contemplate the dreadful consequences of unbridled licence, which has overrun a great part of Europe, form the steadfast resolution, never to be seduced from our duty to the best of kings, and to that government which assures us all that is compatible with the real welfare of man, in a state of polished society*.

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* To the reflecting mind, the awful scenes that have passed on the continent will not be destitute of improvement. Providence, which "from seeming evil still educes good," may probably have intended that we should profit at the expence of our rival France, and that we should reap experience from her errors and her crimes. Indeed moral instruction was never communicated in a louder voice, or written in more legible characters. The dreadful effects of national convulsions are here portrayed in attitudes that cannot allure, and in colours that cannot deceive. The mad infatuation of the lower classes, in that devoted country, who only served as a ladder for the demagogues to rise, and then were thrown aside like useless scaffolding, when the fabric was supposed to be reared, may teach the people of every nation to avoid the snares which the artful spread to entrap them; and convince them, that their fate will ever be the same, when they presume to lay unhallowed hands on the constitution of their country. That they now enjoy no more than a *nominal* liberty in France, is a fact too apparent to deceive the most prejudiced. The impossibility of establishing a government, purely representative, has been proved by those who first adopted the chimera,

Have we not just reason for thanksgiving on this subject too? Ought not “the isles and the inhabitants thereof” to be grateful to God, for ordering their lot, where no proud oppressor can do them wrong—no restless innovator escape the contempt of the wise, and the reprobation of the virtuous? Insensate must that heart be, that would wish to endanger the public security for the attainment of any visionary good; and criminal must he be, who would not unite in repelling insolent aggression and vindictive rage, to rob us and our posterity for ever, of all that has raised us to eminence in the scale of nations, of all that sweetens the fruition of life, and renders us the objects of envy to our very foes.

chimera, and who speedily saw its futility. What influence have the primary assemblies on the deliberations of government? Little or none. They who are destitute of property will ever be at the beck of such as possess it; and they can only be used as engines to promote the interest or wishes of their superiors, by returning them or their friends as electors.

The elective franchise is unquestionably an invaluable privilege, when placed in independent hands; but should it ever descend to the mass of the people, in this or any other country, it would only exalt the consequence of the ambitious and artful demagogue, without conferring a single benefit on themselves. It would even render them obnoxious to insults, perplexities, and losses, of which, fortunately for themselves, they have now no idea, and which I trust they will never know by dear bought experience.

If

If each of the advantages I have enumerated, which belong to us as a nation, and I might easily have increased the catalogue, deserves our gratitude to heaven, and binds us in indissoluble bands to our country, how much ought the aggregate to affect us? How thankful ought we to be, that hitherto we have not lost one of them, and that the machinations of our enemies have been turned to their own destruction, whenever they have aimed to deprive us of our rights, or to invade our territories.

The signal victories which we this day commemorate, gained on our native element, ought to inspire us with the well grounded hope, that they are only the earnest of that complete success which will crown our endeavours, whenever our adversaries attempt to put their malignant threats in execution.

But to prove ourselves worthy of the mercies we have received, and to assure a continuance of them, till the present awful contest is at an end, let us seriously reflect, that it behoves us to conduct ourselves, as those who are conscious, “ that
 “ the Lord is nigh to all that call upon him, to
 “ all that call upon him in truth, that he will
 “ fulfil the desire of those that fear him, that he
 “ will also hear their cry, and will save them.”

While

While we feel it our bounden duty to be thankful and to express our gratitude with our lips, let us remember that we cannot really honour God, unless we study to make our hearts and our ways right before him. Our devotion is then only genuine, when it flows from a love and obedience to his laws; and the momentary impulse of praise should be kept awake and made a fixed principle of our lives, if we hope to render ourselves objects, deserving the continued favour and protection of the Most High.

At this stage of the contest, I trust, I need not labour to make you sensible, that the war we now wage is the most awful and important of any in which we were ever engaged. After a generous but ineffectual struggle to rescue other nations from the overwhelming torrent, we now combat solely for ourselves. We do not fight for glory, for conquest, for ambition, self-interest, or revenge; we are only contending for our existence as an independent nation;—for our laws, liberty, religion, and homes;—for the dearest pledges of our affection; and for that property, be it small or great, which we legally possess, and which our enemies wish to wrest from our grasp.

Whatever burdens the necessities of the state impose upon us, and great and unexampled they undoubtedly

doubtedly are, let us bear them without reluctance, to the best of our abilities. To keep the horrors of war from our borders, is the sole aim of government; to gain us permanent security is the object to which all its exertions are directed. In this view, who can withhold his personal or pecuniary assistance, who does not avow himself a traitor to his country, and the abettor of its inveterate foes! The adversary we have to contend with is not actuated by common motives of hostility, nor carries on war by common means. The die is now cast—the mask is thrown off—the subterfuges of cunning are no longer resorted to. We are told in explicit terms, that our constitution, our glory, our power must fall;—that we must submit to unconditional terms, and resign our long acquired empire over the seas;—or in other words, that Britain and France cannot exist in the same hemisphere, and that the destruction of the one must be the pledge of the other's security.

Much as we must deplore that we are obliged to combat with an enemy, “who,” to adopt the language of the inspired Daniel, so applicable to the present times, “through his POLICY shall cause
 “CRAFT to prosper, and by PEACE shall destroy
 “many:” still we ought to derive some consolation from the reflection, that we have less to dread
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form his open violence than his insidious friendship. The fate of the rest of Europe, which has unfortunately been cajoled by vague but artful professions, reads an awful lesson to us “not to put our trust in man but in the living God.” “Trust ye,” then, “in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.”

Justly as we honour the agents in the hands of God, who have been the happy instruments of our deliverance from impending dangers, let us not from thence be vainly induced to depend “on the arm of flesh,” but on Him, who can defeat the best laid plans, discomfit the strongest force, render wisdom, folly, and courage, rashness. “The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.” An omniscient eye sees all the relations of things; an Almighty arm directs events as it pleases; and natural causes are only emanations of His will who orders all for the best, though short-sighted man cannot always pierce the impending gloom, nor trace the power that manages the storm.

But while we profess to believe in a Sovereign Ruler, who alone can render our efforts propitious, it is nevertheless incumbent on us to use those means which Providence has put into our

power—to guard our coasts from annoyance, and to be vigilant to repel the first attempts against our quiet and independence. In short, while we in all things retain a humble reliance on the Divine favour and protection, not to be wanting to ourselves nor slack in our endeavours.

And nothing can more effectually frustrate the designs of our foes, than a cordial co-operation of all parties in the defence of our common country. To sow dissension between the rulers and the ruled, the government and its subjects, has been the too successful policy of our adversaries; and by this means one half of the nation they have overrun, has been armed against the other.

Pestiferous, however, as their principles may be, and soothing to the ears of ignorance as they undoubtedly are, I cannot suppose, that there is one Briton born, who would lend a helping hand, a favouring voice, to the destruction of his country; who would not, on the contrary, forget the little animosities which disturb men in the best ordered state of society, and zealously join in protecting his native soil from the devastation of war, from the pillage of property, from the pollution of virtue, and the destruction of those sacred

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cred rights, which his ancestors have sealed with their blood*.

I have a better opinion of the patriotism of my countrymen than for a moment to apprehend, that however they may differ about matters of trivial import, they will not be united in essentials, whenever the crisis approaches. I see those generous, but sometimes deluded men, who are pursuing chimeras, when danger is at a distance, and amusing their heads with fine spun theories of fancied, but unattainable perfection, in government, start at the first real insult to our shores, and laying aside the petty squabbles which agitate idle minds, rush to partake in the glory of our mutual defence.

What! Shall the descendants of those who never could brook a domestic tyrant, submit to re-

* The impolicy, the gross impolicy of dividing this nation into favourers and opponents of the French revolution, every day becomes more apparent. Call a man an "incorrigible Jacobin," and you certainly make him so. *False* principles, though they ought to be exposed, are only propagated by the virulence of misapplied invective; and I trust *French* principles will never be justly imputed to any considerable number of *thinking* men, in this kingdom. It is the duty of every good subject to conciliate, not to divide.

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ceive the law from insolent and insidious foreigners? from that very nation which they have always spurned for its duplicity, and ridiculed for its cowardice? Shall the plain integrity, the undefining honour of Britons, be duped by the artifice of those who never could conquer them by force of arms? No! I augur better things of the sense and spirit of my country. And if ever there was a period in the history of this nation, in which unanimity was more peculiarly requisite, it is the present;—if ever there was a period in which all personal resentments and all party attachments should be absorbed in the public good, it is the present;—if ever there was a period when it became a solemn duty to unite with one heart and one hand, to shew the enemy the futility of their plans, and the vanity of their hopes, it is the present.

On the present momentous crisis, the fate of ourselves and our latest posterity depends; and he who cramps the energy of government, when directed to the great object of our defence, or does not lend his active and voluntary aid to strengthen its arm, will not only be guilty in the eyes of his contemporaries, but of millions unborn.

Far be it from me to recommend a crusade against any independent nation, however deleterious its principles or criminal its internal conduct. For the follies or the crimes of other countries we cannot be responsible. Far be it from me, either in this place or in my private capacity, to exult in any victory, except what is gained on purely defensive ground, or to invoke “the God of battles” to support views of aggrandizement, even at the expence of our most inveterate foes. Aggressive war is so repugnant to the mild spirit of Christianity, that I cannot regard it without horror. I bewail its untimely victims;—I sigh for the desolation it occasions; but neither religion nor reason forbid us to be strenuous in protecting our own lives, rights, and properties, or in carrying that destruction to the coasts of our enemy, which he meditates to bring on ours. Self-defence is the first law of nature; and every law of unperverted nature, under the limitations which religion and society have established, becomes a sacred duty.

Such being our situation—while we put up our fervent prayers for success in all our lawful enterprises, both by sea and land, and return the Almighty our warmest and most pious thanks for the gracious aid we have already experienced, let us not forget, as men and Christians, to implore
Him

Him to turn the hearts of our enemies, and to incline them to listen to overtures of just and liberal accommodation, which they have hitherto rejected and despised. May He convince them, amidst the splendor of their triumphs over less fortunate nations than our own, and the insolence of usurped power over their own people, that there is a potentate above all, who by His single fiat, can “abate their pride, assuage their malice, “and confound their devices;”—who can reduce them who now lord it over their brethren, to their original insignificance; and teach those who despise his ordinances and contemn his majesty, “that they are but the creatures of a day, while “he endureth for ever and ever.”

And, O most merciful God, while we offer up our petitions for our most bitter foes, that they may be brought back to thy truth, and become inspired with sentiments of justice and humanity, grant thy blessing to our gracious king, and to all his subjects of every rank. Protect them as with a shield from the adversary; prosper their honest endeavours to defend their native land from all aggression; crown their efforts with success; and in thy good time, and by means invisible to our eyes, restore them to the sweets of peace and permanent security. And hasten, O hasten those happy days, “when nation shall no longer fight
against

“against nation, neither shall there be war any
“more,” when the kingdom of thy Son shall be
extended over all the earth; and man created in
thy divine similitude, shall bear in mind his ce-
lestial origin, nor longer deform the works of thy
hands, by baneful ambition or malignant pas-
sions!

F I N I S.