

A

S E R M O N,

DELIVERED UPON THE LATE

NATIONAL THANKSGIVING,

FEBRUARY 19th, 1795.

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PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE HEARERS.

B O S T O N :

PRINTED BY SAMUEL ETHERIDGE.

No. 9, NEWBURY STREET.

1795.

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I CONGRATULATE you my hearers on the present joyful occasion.

Few Countries have experienced more or, reater changes, especially for the last twenty years, than our own. Clouds and darkness have often overshadowed our political Hemisphere ; they have been constantly dispersed by the Providence of God, and what threatened our ruin has served to further our interests. A late instance of this nature taken in connection with the general prosperity of our States at the present period, has induced our supreme executive Magistrate to invite us to assemble this day, and in our respective places of worship, unitedly to ascribe thanksgiving and praise to the great and gracious Ruler of the world.

As adapted to our purpose, we shall improve those words of the prophet Daniel,

DANIEL 2d Chapter, 20th & 21st Verses,

“DANIEL answered and said, blessed be the name of God
 “ for ever and ever; for wisdom and might are his, and
 “ he changeth the times and the seasons; he removeth Kings
 “ and setteth up Kings; he giveth wisdom unto the wise and
 “ knowledge unto them that know understanding.

GOD had been graciously pleased in answer to his earnest prayers to reveal to the Prophet the interpretation of that mysterious dream which had greatly perplexed the mind of the King of Babylon, and the meaning of which he had sought from his wise men in vain. This vision presented to the view of the Prophet such admirable changes in the kingdoms of this lower world as filled him with grateful astonishment. He saw mighty Empires gradually rising and declining in succession; and the events of each intimately connected with, and bringing forward an illustrious kingdom, small indeed in its commencement, but eventually embracing the world; superseding every other dominion; producing the greatest glory to God and happiness to man.

FULL of this grand and pleasing prospect the Prophet expresses the feelings of a truly pious and devout heart in the sublime language of the text. “Blessed be the name of God, for ever and ever, &c.”

We are not indulged as Daniel was with the visions of God, but when we reflect on past events, when we attend to the present circumstances of our Country and mark the many

Strong symptoms of her future greatness, may we not feel in a degree the same pleasing gratitude to Almighty Providence. And from the anticipation of the encreasing prosperity and happiness of our country, adopt with great propriety the language of the Prophet. "Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever; for wisdom and might are his, and he changeth the times and the seasons."

WITHOUT a very minute attention to every part of the text the words will lead us to observe,

1st. THAT National changes are under the direction of an infinitely wise and gracious Providence, "who changeth the times and the seasons; who removeth Kings and setteth up Kings." To which we shall add,

2d. THAT a good government, such as our country now enjoys, is an invaluable national blessing for which we owe the warmest gratitude to the Ruler of the world. We shall conclude with such remarks and exhortations as suit the occasion.

1st. THEN we observe, that national changes are under the direction of an infinitely wise and gracious Providence. "He changeth the times, &c."

If there is a God who ruleth and judgeth in the world he must respect those large portions of the human race which constitute the distinct nations of the earth. If individuals nay, even the falling sparrow is an object of his attention, much more will he attend to those great national changes

with which the welfare and happiness of millions of his rational creatures are closely connected.

BUT however national changes may be ascribed to the providence of God, there are certain principles in nature, agreeably to which they are generally produced and regulated.—Thus different forms of Government may be traced to the natural character and passions of men, operating according to the circumstances in which they are placed, as the prosperity and decline of particular nations may with equal certainty be derived from their moral character.

To reverence old age ; to respect a father, are dictates of nature. Hence arose the most ancient of all governments the Patriarchal ; the only government, probably, which existed previously to the general deluge—when the long-lived father, many centuries before his death might find himself the natural ruler of a nation more numerous than any one now inhabiting the face of the earth.

THIS species of government continued after the deluge in the Hebrew Patriarchs. Abraham was distinguished in this character. It is indeed common to all mankind in their most simple and unimproved state, who generally unite in bestowing the honors and devolving the weight of government on those who are supposed to have derived wisdom from age and experience.

BUT this kind of government is incompatible with that insatiable desire of power and property, which is the certain con-

sequence of an improved state of society, or of what is called *civilization*, which by extending our views and enlarging the sphere of our enjoyments, supplies fuel to the passions of the human heart.

NIMRON began the race of Monarchs. He founded the first great Empire recorded in history. From the concise character given in scripture of this founder of Monarchy, he appears to have been a bold, enterprising, but turbulent man, who probably united artifice with strength in establishing his despotism. His empire lasted for many ages ; but for many ages it has been so perfectly destroyed that the situation of its vast capital *Nineveh* cannot be determined, even from its ruins. Thus transient is the glory of the world !

MONARCHY always has been, and is to this day, the most prevalent form of government among mankind. Shall we infer from thence that it is best adapted to human nature, and most conducive to peace, order and the general good of society ? The inference would be false, and might as well be applied to any other effect of the restless passions of men, which are not governed by a view to the general good, but aim at their own gratification.

COULD we indeed be sure of wisdom and goodness in the Monarch, reason would prefer the uniformity of an individual ruler, after the example of the Government of the Universe. But when we consider the weakness and depravity of human nature, and the very critical situation of the man vested with sove-

reign rule, it appears to be folly in the extreme for a people to subject themselves to the caprice of a man, who, unless he is something more than we have a right to expect from humanity, will be dazzled with his exaltation ; forget himself, give loose to his passions and become the scourge of those who have foolishly trusted themselves to his power.

It is surprising how abject the minds of men may be rendered by a long course of slavery. However, in some instances, oppression has produced proper resentment, injured nations have been roused ; have felt their own weight ; resolved to vindicate their natural rights ; and to throw the yoke of oppression from their weary necks. But too often alas ! they have been intercepted by the pride and artifice of their popular leaders, who have abused the confidence which the people have reposed in them, to accomplish their own wicked purpose, transferring the sovereignty from the Monarch to themselves. In consequence of which the people have only exchanged one tyrant for another, or for many. Multiplying their burdens in proportion as they have increased the number of their rulers. In the same proportion strengthening the chains of their slavery and lessening the probability of obtaining that freedom which was the object of their wishes.

BUT to the honor of human nature, this has not always been the case. People have in some instances found leaders to conduct them through such revolutions, who, to consummate wisdom, firmness, and perseverance, have added the greatest moderation ; and who, like the Deity, have estimated

their glory from the happiness which they have procured for others. Who, the conflict being over, have retired to enjoy in the bosom of peace, the affection of their fellow citizens, and the blessings with which they have been instrumental of enriching their country, by exposing themselves to the danger and toils of war.

SUCH to the praise of Almighty God be it mentioned, has been the case with United America ; in consequence of which, she has had the almost unexampled happiness of forming a constitution of government for herself ; the production of the united wisdom of her chosen sons, and the most invaluable blessing, of a temporal nature Heaven could bestow on our favoured country.

As particular forms of government result from the natural character and passions of men, so the prosperity and decline of states may with still greater certainty be traced to the moral character of nations. The state of morals and religion, which we would always connect, is the natural pulse of a nation ; which will invariably rise or fall as public virtue prevails or declines ; it being an immutable maxim, that " righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."

It has been said indeed, that as in nature there is a regular progress, increase and decline, so nations have their helpless infancy, active youth, vigorous manhood and feeble old age, followed with inevitable dissolution. But the simile, however beautiful, is far from being just. Nature is governed by fixed

laws ; agreeable to which changes take place with inevitable necessity ; such as no power or wisdom of man can controul. Thus what power has man either to shun the enfeebling effects of old age, or that death to which it certainly leads him. Whereas the prosperity or decline of nations depend on moral causes, which are always capable of being varied. In consequence of a change of character, or reformation in morals, a nation may be rescued from ruin, when in the most critical situation ; this is precisely the language of God himself by the mouth of the Prophet Jeremiah. “ At what instant I shall
 “ speak concerning a nation, or concerning a kingdom, to pluck
 “ up and to pull down and to destroy it ; if that nation against
 “ whom I have pronounced turn from their evil, I will repent
 “ of the evil that I thought to do unto them.”

THE decline of states then appears to be no further connected with their duration than as pride, luxury, and immorality, are too often the consequences of such duration ; these are the seeds of national ruin ; the diseases, which unless corrected, must terminate in the dissolution of the state. How powerful a motive in the breast of every lover of his country to stem the torrent of vice, by making every exertion in his power to promote christianity, that divine religion, the progress of which, equally tends to advance the prosperity of nations, and the happiness of individuals.

We proceed to observe,

2dly. THAT a good government, such as our country now enjoys, is an invaluable blessing, for which we owe the warmest gratitude to the Ruler of the world.

· If the great God changeth the times and the seasons, removeth Kings and setteth up Kings, then the nation which has eminently experienced the changes here referred to, must consider her present happy government as a blessing for which she is peculiarly indebted to the good providence of God.

THAT good Government is of the greatest importance to national prosperity and happiness, is abundantly evident. The effect may be strikingly illustrated from what takes place in particular families, which may be considered as states in miniature. How wretched is the family where vice and folly preside, how happy where wisdom dwells with prudence, and both conspire to promote domestic order, prosperity and peace. With equal certainty does the folly or wisdom of government determine the condition of nations. When the righteous are in authority the people rejoice, but when the wicked bear rule the people mourn.

BUT are the United States thus happy in a good form of government wisely administered? Yes, this is the language of the present solemnity; it is for this we are invited to offer unto God thanksgiving. But in order to satisfy ourselves and to warm our hearts with gratitude on the occasion, let us take a transient survey of our government and the present state of our country, compared with the governments of other countries, and our own situation at some former periods.

ONE great advantage which we enjoy both as united, and individual states is fixed forms of government, concise and de-

finite, which are, or may be in the hands of every citizen, and are easily understood. History furnishes nothing equal to this previous to the American revolution, what has taken place in France since, engages our devout wishes and fervent prayers ; but we wait until time shall unfold the sequel. What was called the constitution of the ancient Grecian Republics, was too indefinite to deserve the name ; it served to unite them against a foreign enemy, but left them to perpetual broils among themselves. The Roman Republic was such in name rather than reality. In modern times while the greater part of the world is subjected to arbitrary rule, those nations which lay claim to fixed and liberal forms of government have derived them from incidents taking place at distant periods ; they are the work of different hands, and are essentially deficient in uniformity of design and harmony of parts ; are too complex and unconnected to afford either pleasure to those who contemplate, or security to those who possess them, they are not therefore to be compared with the beautiful temple of Liberty which has been erected in America ; of which every part discovers unity of design, and adds strength and beauty to the whole.

In most governments there is a competition between the rulers and the ruled ; they are considered as having separate interests, not always consistent with each other. In the American constitutions this is effectually destroyed ; the rulers and the ruled are the same ; the people govern themselves ; and the poorest freeman (and I would to God there were none but free-

men in the United States) feels a conscious dignity, while he holds in his hand, on the day of election, his proportion of the government of his country. Suitably to estimate and wisely to improve this privilege, is the best security of public freedom. In fact, our government happily unites the two grand objects of all political institutions, freedom with energy.

When we look back on the history of our country, we may collect from thence many circumstances to strengthen our gratitude on the present occasion. At an early period after the settlement of our fathers in this country, an unhappy jealousy, excited by their rapid growth, took place in the breasts of their British rulers, and the American Colonies were suspected of entertaining a disposition to independence long before any such disposition existed. This produced continual efforts on the side of the British government to restrain, and on our side to preserve our civil liberties, till finally, an attempt to violate our charter, essentially to change our government, render us more dependent on Great Britain, and to tax us without our consent, led to the late revolution. In the progress of which we could mention many circumstances in our favor which approached nearly to miracle, and marked in the most striking manner, the interposition of divine Providence. But we must content ourselves with observing what we believe will be readily admitted, that scarcely an event took place, which however threatening at the time, did not eventually lead to the furtherance of our great design INDEPENDENCE and PEACE.

AFTER a long and painful struggle our views were accomplished, our independence was established, and we flattered ourselves that we might now enjoy, peaceably, the hard-earned fruits of our toils. But alas ! danger is often nearest when least expected. Never were the American States in a more critical situation than at the period now referred to.

THE comparatively lax compact which had served to hold us together while pressed by a foreign enemy, soon appeared to be insufficient for that purpose when the pressure was taken off and the States were at peace. Congress wanted power and their laws energy ; they could recommend, but could not enforce. All were not disposed to comply. We had contracted a debt, a revenue must be had and there appeared no other expedient for obtaining it but a direct tax levied by individual States. The taxes were heavy ; many parts of the country were distressed ; discontents arose ; designing men took advantage of popular complaints, an insurrection was the consequence. But how admirable are the ways of Providence ; instead of essentially injuring us, it terminated in the adoption of that constitution of government, in the happy effects of which, we this day rejoice, and may say with peculiar propriety, “ blessed be the
“ name of God, for ever and ever ; for wisdom and might are
“ his, and he has changed the times and the seasons.”

If the excellency of any government may be estimated by the prosperity of the people who are under it ; the general prosperity of all orders of men in the United States, will give to our government the loudest encomiums. And this, let me ob-

serve, extends to the administration, as well as to the constitutions of our government. Indeed, the admirable wisdom and prudence by which we have been conducted through the threatening appearances of a foreign war, and the alarming circumstances of a domestic insurrection, demand our warmest gratitude to our National Rulers in general, but especially to that venerable Father of his country, who has been raised up, qualified and supported by the FATHER of the Universe, to be her glory and to promote her happiness. But here let our gratitude and our praises terminate on Him "who giveth wisdom to the wise and knowledge unto them that know understanding."

AN Indian war seems to have been entailed on our country; it commenced early and has continued with little intermission, it recedes from us as our frontier extends. But we flatter ourselves that the wise and liberal policy adopted by our National Rulers, as it has nearly extinguished that war for the present, will prevent its ever being equally distressing in future, as in former periods.

WE are not intimately acquainted with the circumstances of the late insurrection in Pennsylvania; it is sufficient to observe, that every man appeared to feel proper indignation at the wanton opposition to laws of our own making, in which, if there is any thing oppressive, the means of redress are in our own hands.

THE alertness with which every one listened to, and obeyed the call of the President for suppressing the late insurrection, affords a pleasing evidence of the energy of our government, and of what is equally pleasing, that the people, though they differ in political opinions with respect to what is of less importance, are united in affection to their country, her constitution and laws, and are equally ready to defend them.

WE mention, in the last place what is much to the honor of our government, that it does not invade the rights of conscience, nor profane Christianity, by undertaking to legislate for the kingdom of *Christ*, but allows every man to think and act for himself, with respect to that most interesting subject *religion*; for his errors in which, he can only be amenable at the bar of *Jehovah*. This is rendering to God the things that are God's; and marks the progress of that light which the gospel was designed to diffuse on the world, and which, though it may be eclipsed in particular instances, will finally prevail to the production of universal knowledge, liberty, virtue, and happiness to man, and the greatest possible glory to its gracious Author.

WE might here give a loose to our imaginations, and as Daniel did, anticipate the events of future ages. We may behold this extensive Continent filled with civilized inhabitants; vast cities adorned with the monuments of art and of industry, where now all is dreary wilderness; and what is still more pleasing, from the accomplishment of unfailing prophecies, a pure worship offered to the God of Heaven from countless millions of wise, virtuous, and happy people.

BUT what is more to our present purpose, is to inquire how we may secure to ourselves and transmit to our posterity, the public blessings which we now enjoy? Evidently by promoting the cause and interests of Christianity, which, in its progress, is equally productive of public and of personal happiness.

PARTICULARLY let me recommend a serious attention to domestic education. Families are the materials of which states are composed. The nurseries from which those must proceed, who are hereafter to adorn and enrich their country. As they are now formed, such will be their future growth. Let them

be early taught to love their country, to respect her government and laws ; to feel their obligations of gratitude to those who have been instrumental of procuring our public blessings. But above all to love and reverence the AUTHOR of their being, his word and worship. Thus will they be for a name and for a praise when we shall be numbered with the dead.

CULTIVATE a candid spirit where different political opinions are adopted. It is the spirit of party, and not party itself, that injures society, and is therefore to be guarded against. Difference in political, as in religious opinions, is unavoidable, it can, indeed, hardly be considered as an evil in the present state of human nature ; it only becomes such from the indulgence of a cruel, censorious spirit. When softened by candor, it answers valuable purposes, it affords exercise for the social affections ; leads to inquiry and extends the field of knowledge. Candor does not imply instability ; a man may be perfectly candid towards those who differ from him, and yet in his conduct steadily adhere to the dictates of his own mind. It is the bitterness and turbulence of party spirit which proves the bane of social peace, order and happiness. As we all need it in our turn, so should we be ready to the exercise of candor towards others. It gives dignity to our character as men, and is one good evidence in our favor as Christians. To be severe on ourselves, and candid towards others, is the perfection of the Christian character.

We are highly pleased to find that a candid spirit prevails at present in the French Republic. They already experience its happy effects, and we have no doubt of its being one means of conducting them to the accomplishment of their object, in the establishment of a wise, liberal and energetic government, under which they and their posterity may be happy for ages to come.

INSTEAD then of bigotry to our own opinions, as if we were the men, and wisdom must die with us ; instead of indulging that party spirit which is indiscriminating as the tempest, relentless as death, and cruel as the grave, let us bear in mind that we are like those around us, weak and erring creatures, that confidence in our own opinions in disputable cases, is the result of pride and folly, the imputation of which, every man would wish to avoid ; but which we cannot escape, except by cultivating that charity which thinketh no evil, is the cement of society, the best security of public peace, the bond of perfectness.

BEFORE I conclude permit me to discharge the debt of gratitude which I owe to you. I thank you my dear people, for that liberality, candor and kindness which have marked your conduct towards me. Be assured that it is not in language to express the desire I feel, not of your approbation only, but of being instrumental of promoting your salvation and happiness.—Finally,

LET us rejoice, that “He who changeth the times and the seasons, removeth kings, and setteth up kings,” has established a kingdom which cannot be moved ; which shall survive the extinction of every other dominion, and finally unite all nations in the knowledge of, and submission to the great Redeemer ; to whom every knee shall bow. As subjects of this Universal SOVEREIGN, we may anticipate the period when sin and death shall be abolished ; righteousness and peace restored, and we ourselves may join with the redeemed world, in ascribing blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, to him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb, for ever and ever.

AMEN.