

THE
WORKS

OF THE

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TO WHICH IS PREFIXED

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DELIVERED AT A PUBLIC THANKSGIVING
AFTER PEACE.

A
S E R M O N.

PSALM iii. 8.

Salvation belongeth unto the Lord.

MY BRETHREN,

WE are met together in obedience to public authority, to keep a day of solemn thanksgiving to God, for the goodness of his providence to the United States of America, in the course of a war which has now lasted seven years, with a powerful and formidable nation. We are particularly called upon to give thanks for the signal successes with which it hath pleased him to bless our arms and those of our allies, in the course of the last year, and the campaign which is now drawing to a close. I need say nothing of the importance of the great contest in which we have been so long engaged, or the interesting alternative which depends upon the issue, as these seem to have been felt in the fullest manner by all ranks in this country from the beginning. The language even of the common people will convince every man of reflexion that they are universally sensible how much is at stake. My proper business therefore is to engage every pious hearer to adore the providence of God in general, to offer with sincerity

and gratitude the sacrifice of praise for his many mercies, and to make a wise and just improvement of the present promising situation of public affairs.

Many who now hear me are witnesses that it has never been my practice, for reasons which appear to me to be good, to intermix politics with the ordinary service of the sanctuary, on the weekly returns of the christian sabbath, further than fervent supplications to the Throne of Grace for divine direction to the public counsels, and assistance to those who are employed in the public service. But on days of this kind it becomes part of a minister's duty to direct the attention of the hearers to events of a public nature. This you know I did with great concern and at considerable length six years ago on a public Fast Day. I would therefore willingly in this more advanced period, take a view of what is past, and endeavor to direct you in what remains of your duty to God, to your country, and to yourselves.

For this purpose I have chosen the words of the Psalmist David, now read which are part of a psalm generally thought to have been composed by the royal author before the war with Absalom his unnatural son, was wholly finished, but when he had such presages of success as made him speak the language of faith and confidence. "I laid
 " me down and slept: I awaked for the Lord sustained
 " me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people that
 " have set themselves against me round about. Arise O
 " Lord, save me, O my God; for thou hast smitten all mine
 " enemies upon the cheek-bone: thou hast broken the teeth
 " of the ungodly. Salvation belongeth unto the Lord;
 " thy blessing is upon thy people. Selah."

In discoursing upon this subject, I propose, through the assistance of divine grace,

I. To explain and state the proper meaning of this expression or sentiment of the inspired psalmist, "salvation belongeth unto the Lord."

II. To lay before you a succinct view of what the United States of America owe to divine providence in the course of the present war.

III. To make a practical improvement of the subject for your instruction and direction.

First then, I am to explain and state the proper meaning of this expression or sentiment of the inspired psalmist, "salvation belongeth unto the Lord." This I mean to do by adhering strictly to what appears to be the mind of the spirit of God, in the passage before us, as well as in a manner agreeable to the analogy of faith. As religion is the same in substance in every age, the reflexions of pious persons in the course of providence arise from the same examples and lead to the same end. The words may justly be supposed to contain the psalmist's thankful acknowledgment of the past mercies of God, as well as the foundation of his future security. They carry in them a general confession of the influence of divine providence upon every event, and in particular with respect to *salvation*, or deliverance from impending danger. In this view when he says "salvation belongeth unto the Lord." It seems to imply the three following things,

I. That "salvation belongeth unto the Lord," as distinguished from human or created help, and therefore all confidence in man stands opposed to the sentiment expressed by the holy psalmist in the text. It is not opposed to the use or application of, but to an excessive or undue reliance on human means, or second causes of any kind. It implies, that success in any attempt is to be ultimately attributed to God. That it is he who by his providence provides outward means, who raises up friends to his people, or causes *their enemies to be at peace with them*. That it is he who in cases of difficulty and danger, directs their hands to war and their fingers to fight, and finally crowns their endeavors with success. Whether therefore the outward advantages are great or small, whether the expectation, or the probability of success has been strong or weak, he who confesses that salvation belongeth unto God, will finally give the glory to him. Confidence before, and boasting after the event, are alike contrary to this disposition. If any person desires to have his faith in this truth, confirmed or improved, let him read the history of mankind, in a cool and considerate manner, and with a

serious frame of spirit. He will then perceive that every page will add to his conviction. He will find that the most important events have seemed to turn upon circumstances the most trivial and the most out of the reach of human direction. A blast of wind, a shower of rain, a random shot, a private quarrel, the neglect of a servant, a motion without intention, or a word spoken by accident and misunderstood, has been the cause of a victory or defeat which has decided the fate of empires. Whoever with these facts in his view, believes the constant influence and over-ruling power of divine Providence, will know what the Psalmist means when he says, "Salvation be-
" longeth unto the Lord."

2. In this sentiment, the Psalmist seems to have had in view the *omnipotence* of Providence; that nothing is impossible with God; that there is no state so dangerous, no enemy so formidable, but he is able to work deliverance. He has not only the direction and government of means and second causes, but is himself superior to all means. The word *salvation*, when it is applied in scripture to temporal danger, generally signifies a great and distinguished deliverance. Thus it is used by Moses, Exodus xiv. 13. "Stand still and see the salvation of God;" and in the same manner, 1 Sam. xiv. 45. "Shall Jonathan die, who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel?" When, therefore, a person or people are threatened with evils of the most dreadful kind: when they are engaged in a conflict very unequal; when they are driven to extremity, and have no resource left as means of defence: then, if the cause in which they are engaged is righteous and just, they may cry to God for relief. The sentiment expressed by the Psalmist ought to bear them up against despair; and they may say as the angel to the father of the faithful, "Is there any thing too hard for the Lord?" There are many instances in scripture of signal deliverance granted to the servants of God, some of them even wholly miraculous, which teach us to set our hope in his mercy, and not to suffer his mighty works to slip out of our minds. This is the exercise of faith in an unchangeable God—"the same yesterday, to-day, and forever."

3. This sentiment has respect to the mercy and goodness of God, or his readiness to hear the cry of the oppressed, and send deliverance to his people. This circumstance is necessary to be taken in, to make him the proper object of faith and trust; and it must be combined with the other, to give us a complete view of the influence of Providence. Power and wisdom alone, give an imperfect display of the divine character. It would give little support under the pressure of affliction, to have a general or theoretical persuasion, that all things are possible with God: but if we believe his readiness to interpose, and see our title clear to implore his help, we have that hope which is justly called, "the anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast." In this sense, salvation belongeth unto God; it is his prerogative; it is his glory. The promise so often repeated in the same or similar terms, is addressed both to nations and particular persons. "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him. I will be with him in trouble, to deliver him, and to honor him. The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth and delivereth him out of all his troubles. Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivereth him out of them all."

Having briefly stated these known and general truths, I proceed to the second and principal thing proposed, which was to lay before you a succinct view of what the United States of America owe to divine Providence, in the course of the present war. On considering this part of the subject, a difficulty presents itself as to the manner of handling it. I am desirous of doing it some measure of justice, and at the same time of avoiding excessive prolixity, or a tedious enumeration of particular facts. To unite these two purposes as much as possible, I will divide what I have to say into distinct branches; and after a few words of illustration on each of them, leave it to every hearer to add such further examples as may have fallen within his own observation. The branches I would separately consider, are the following: 1. Signal successes or particular and providential favors to us in the course of the war. 2. Preservation from difficulties and evils which seemed to be in our

situation unavoidable, and at the same time next to insurmountable. 3. Confounding the councils of our enemies, and making them hasten on the change which they desired to prevent.

I. Signal successes or providential favors to us in the course of the war. Here I must mention what happened at the beginning of the contest, and prevented us from being crushed in the very outset, although it is now in a manner wholly forgotten. Let us remember our true situation, after we had made the most public and peremptory declarations of our determination to defend our liberties. There was a willing spirit, but unarmed hands. Our enemies have all along charged us with a deliberate concerted purpose of breaking with them, and setting up an independent empire. The falshood of this accusation might be made to appear from many circumstances; as there being no pre-contract among the states themselves, nor any attempt to engage allies or assistance in Europe, and several others. But though there were no other argument at all, it is sufficiently proved by the total want of arms and ammunition to supply us even during the first stages of resistance. The nakedness of the country in this respect is well known; and our enemies endeavored to avail themselves of it by taking every measure to prevent their being brought to us. This difficulty was got over by many providential supplies, without the care or foresight of those who were at the head of affairs, and particularly by many unexpected captures from our enemies themselves.

How contrary to human appearance and human conjectures have many circumstances turned out? It was universally supposed at first that we should be able to do nothing at all at sea, because of the great naval power of the enemy; yet the success of our private vessels has been one of the most powerful means of distressing them, and supporting us. I cannot help in particular taking notice, that the eastern states which were the first objects of their vengeance, were actually in their possession, and seemed to be devoted to pillage and destruction; yet in a short time they were delivered, and have in the course of the war

acquired a greater accession of wealth and power than it is probable they could have done in the same period of security and peace.

It falls to be taken notice of under this branch of the subject, that our most signal successes have generally been when we had the weakest hopes or the greatest fears. What could be more discouraging than our situation at the close of the year 1776? when, after general Howe's arrival with so powerful and well appointed an armament, our army enlisted but for a few months, was almost entirely dispersed? Yet then did the surprize of the Hessians at Trenton, and the subsequent victory at Princeton, raise the drooping spirits of the country, and give a new turn to our affairs. These advantages redounded greatly to the honor of the commander in chief who planned, and the handful of troops with him, who executed the measures, as is confessed by all; yet were they of still greater moment to the cause of America in general, than they were brilliant as military exploits. This place and neighborhood having been the scene of these actions, cannot but make them and their consequences fresh in the memory of every one who now hears me.

The great victory over general Burgoyne and his army, (weakened at Bennington, and taken prisoners at Saratoga,) which opened the eyes of Europe in general, and in some degree even of Britain, happened at a time when many were discouraged. It happened when after the losses of Brandy Wine and Germantown, the British were in possession of Philadelphia, and the Congress of the United States were obliged to fly to a distant part of the country. It happened not long after our disgraceful flight from Ticonderoga, and the scandalous loss of that post, which was every where said and thought to be the key of the continent, and the possession of it essential to our security. We must not omit to observe that this victory over a numerous army of British regulars, was obtained by an army composed in a great measure of militia suddenly collected, and freemen of the country who turned out as volunteers.

In the same manner our late astonishing success in the south began when our affairs in that part of the continent wore a most discouraging aspect. The year 1781 which began with mutiny in the northern army, and weakness in the southern, produced more instances of gallantry and military prowess than all the former, and was closed with a victory more glorious to us, and more humiliating to the enemy, than any thing that had before happened during the course of the war.

It was surely a great favor of Providence to raise up for us so great and illustrious an ally in Europe. This Prince has assisted us as you all know in a very powerful and effectual manner, and has granted that assistance upon a footing so generous as well as just, that our enemies will not yet believe, but there must be some secret and partial stipulations in favor of himself and his subjects, although no such thing exists.

Let me add to all these the providing for us a person who was so eminently qualified for the arduous task of commander in chief of the armies of the United States. I must make some apology here. None who know me, I think will charge me with a disposition to adulation or gross flattery of living characters. I am of opinion and have often expressed it, that the time for fixing a man's character is after death has set his seal upon it, and favor fear and friendship are at end. For this reason I do not mean to give a general or full character of the person here in view. But in speaking of the kindness of Providence to the United States, it would be a culpable neglect not to mention that several of his characteristic qualities seem so perfectly suited to our wants, that we must consider his appointment to the service, and the continued health with which he has been blessed, as a favor from the God of heaven. Consider his coolness and prudence, his fortitude and perseverance, his happy talent of engaging the affection of all ranks, so that he is equally acceptable to the citizen, and to the soldier—to the state in which he was born, and to every other on the continent. To be a brave man, or skilful commander, is common to him with many others; but this

country stood in need of a comprehensive and penetrating mind, which understood the effect of particular measures in bringing the general cause to an issue. When we contrast his character and conduct with those of the various leaders that have been opposed to him, when we consider their attempts to blast each others reputation, and the short duration of their command, we must say that Providence has fitted him for the charge, and called him to the service.

This head can hardly be better closed than with the extraordinary interposition of divine Providence for the discovery of the black treachery of Arnold, who intended to put one of the most important fortresses, and the general himself into the enemies hands. This design was ripe for execution, and the time of execution was at hand. As there was no suspicion of the traitor, no measures were, or could be taken for preventing it. The meeting of the spy with two friends of America, which was entirely casual, the unaccountable embarrassment of that artful person, when with a little address, he might easily have extricated himself; and indeed, the whole circumstances of that affair, clearly point out the finger of God.

I might have added many more instances of the favor of providence in particular events, but what have been mentioned, I think are fully sufficient for the purpose, for which they are adduced, and will lead the hearers to the recollection of others of a similar kind.

The second part of my observations, must be on the difficulties and dangers, which seemed to be in our situation, unavoidable, and, at the same time, next to insurmountable. The first of this kind, which I shall mention, is dissention, or the opposition of one colony to another. On this our enemies reckoned very much, from the beginning. Even before the war broke out, reasoners seemed to build their hopes, of the colonies not breaking off from the mother country, for ages, upon the impossibility of their uniting their strength, and forming one compact body, either for offence or resistance. To say the truth, the danger was great and real. It was on this account,

foreseen and dreaded, and all true patriots were anxious to guard against it. Great thanks, doubtless, are due to many citizens in every state, for their virtuous efforts to promote the general union. These efforts have not been without effect; but I am of opinion, that union has been hitherto preserved and promoted, to a degree that no man ventured to predict, and very few had the courage to hope for. I confess myself, from the beginning, to have apprehended more danger, from this, than from any other quarter, and must now declare, that my fears have been wholly disappointed, and my hopes have been greatly exceeded. In the public councils, no mark of dissention, in matters of importance, has ever appeared; and I take upon me further to say, that every year has obliterated colonial distinctions, and worn away local prejudices, so that mutual affection, is at present more cordial, and the views and works of the whole, more uniform, than ever they were, at any preceding period.

Having mentioned the union and harmony of the United States, it will be very proper to add, that the harmony, that has prevailed in the allied army, is another signal mercy, for which we ought to be thankful to God. It is exceedingly common, for dissention to take place, between troops of different nations, when acting together. In the English history, we meet with few examples of conjunct expeditions, with sea and land forces, in which the harmony has been complete. Our enemies did not fail to make use of every topic, which they apprehended, would be inflammatory and popular, to produce jealousies between us and our allies. Yet it has been wholly in vain. Not only, have the officers and soldiers of the American and French armies, acted together, with perfect cordiality, but the troops of our allies, have met with a hearty welcome, wherever they have been, from the people of the country; and indeed, just such a reception as shows they were esteemed to be of the utmost importance and utility to the American cause.

Another difficulty we had to encounter, was the want of money and resources for carrying on the war. To remedy this evil an expedient was fallen upon which I do

not look upon myself as obliged either to justify or approve. It was, however embraced by the plurality as necessary, and upon the whole, less hazardous than any other, which in our situation was practicable. The difficulty of raising, clothing, paying and supporting an army with a depreciated currency, which its own nature, the arts of interested persons, and the unwearied attempts of our enemies were pushing on to annihilation, may be easily perceived. Yet the war has not only been supported, but we have seen the fall and ruin of the money itself without the least injury, to the public cause. Without injury did I say, it was to the unspeakable benefit of the public cause. Many private persons indeed, have suffered such injury as not only merits pity, but calls for redress, and I hope the time will come, when all the redress shall be given that the nature of the thing and the state of the country, will admit. In the mean time, when we reflect upon what is past, we have a proof of the general attachment of the country to the cause of liberty, the strongest perhaps that can well be conceived, and we see a circumstance from which we feared the greatest evil, adding its force to many others in blinding our enemies, misleading their measures, and disappointing their expectations.

Another difficulty we had before us was the being obliged to encounter the whole force of the British nation, with an army composed of raw soldiers, unacquainted with military discipline. The difficulty was increased by our own conduct, viz. filling our army with soldiers enlisted for short periods. The views of those who preferred this method was certainly very honorable, though the wisdom of it is at least very disputable. They hoped it would make every man in America a soldier in a short time. This effect indeed, it has in a good degree produced by the frequent calls of the militia, wherever the enemy appeared. They also apprehended danger from a standing army, unconnected with civil life, who after they had conquered their enemies might give cause of jealousy to their friends. The history of other countries in general, and in particular that of the civil wars in England against Charles the first, seemed to give plausi-

bility to this reason, though from several circumstances there was less cause of fear in America, than would have been in one of the European states. However the measure was resolved upon by the plurality at first, and we felt the inconvenience of it very severely; but is pleased God to preserve us from utter destruction, to set bounds to the progress of our enemies, and to give time to the states to make better and more effectual provision for their final overthrow.

The only other danger I shall mention, was that of anarchy and confusion, when government under the old form was at an end, and every state was obliged to establish civil constitutions for preserving internal order, at the very same time that they had to resist the efforts of a powerful enemy from without. This danger appeared so considerable that some of the king of Great Britain's governors ran off early, as they themselves professed, in order to augment it. They hoped that universal disorder, would prevail in every colony, and not only defeat the measures of the friends of liberty, but be so insupportable to the people in general, as to oblige them to return to their subjection, for their own sakes, and to be rid of a still greater evil. This danger through the divine blessing, we happily and indeed entirely escaped. The governors by their flight ripened every measure, and hastened on the change, by rendering it visibly necessary. Provincial conventions were held, city and county committees, were every where chosen, and such was the zeal for liberty, that the judgments of these committees was as perfectly submitted to, and their orders more cheerfully, and completely executed, than those of any regular magistrates, either under the old government, or since the change. At the same time, every state prepared and settled their civil constitutions which have now all taken place, and except in very few instances without the least discord or dissatisfaction. Happily for us in this state, our constitution has now subsisted near seven years, and we have not so much as heard the voice of discontent. I speak on this head, of what is known to every hearer, and indeed to the whole world; and yet I am persuaded that to those who reflect upon it,

it will appear next to miraculous. Although so much was to be done, in which every man was interested, although the colonies were so various and extensive, and the parliament of Great Britain was threatening, and its army executing vengeance against us, yet the whole was completed in little more than a year, with as much quietness and composure, as a private person would move his family and furniture from one house, and settle them in another.

The third branch of my observations shall consist of a few instances, in which the councils of our enemies have been confounded, and their measures have been such as to hasten on the change, which they desired to prevent. As to the first of these, nothing can be more remarkable, than the ignorance and error in which they have continued from the first rise of the controversy, to the present time, as to the state of things, and the dispositions of men in America. Even those at the head of affairs in Great Britain, have not only constantly given out, but in my opinion, have sincerely believed, that the great body of the people were upon their side, and were only misled into rebellion, by a few factious leaders. At the same time, the very same persons, without being sensible of the absurdity, have affirmed, that this country was groaning under the oppression of its rulers, and longed to be delivered from it. Now these things could not both be true. If the first had been true, these leaders must have been popular and acceptable in a high degree, and have had the most extensive influence. If the last had been true, they must have been inwardly and universally detested. But how many circumstances might have convinced them of the falsehood of both these assertions. The vast extent of the states, and the concurrence of all ranks and classes of men, which was so early, so uniform and so notorious, plainly prove, that no such thing could have happened, without a strong and rooted inclination in the people themselves, and such as no address or management of interested persons could have produced. Besides, those who know how fluctuating a body the Congress is, and what continual changes take place in it, as to men, must perceive the ab-

furdity of their making or succeeding in any such attempt. The truth is, the American Congress owes its existence and its influence, to the people at large. I might easily show, that there has hardly any great or important step been taken, but the public opinion has gone before the resolutions of that body; and I wish I could not say, that they have been sometimes very slow, in hearing and obeying it.

As to the other assertion, it was still more manifestly false, and they had greater opportunities of perceiving it to be so. If Congress, or those in public trust, in any state, had tyrannized over the people, or wantonly oppressed them, the usurpation would, in the nature of things, have come to a speedy period. But what if I should say, that this pretence of our enemies, in an equivocal sense, is indeed true; and yet this truth, doth but the more clearly demonstrate their error and delusion. It is true, that Congress has, in many instances, been obliged to have recourse to measures, in themselves hard and oppressive, and confessed to be so; which yet, have been patiently submitted to, because of the important purpose that was to be served by them. Of this kind, was the emission of paper money; the passing of tender laws; compelling all into the militia; draughting the militia, to fill the regular army; pressing provisions and carriages; and many others of the like nature. Two things are remarkable in this whole matter: one, that every imposition, for the public service, fell heaviest upon those who were the friends of America; the lukewarm or contrary minded, always finding some way, of shifting the load from their own shoulders: The other, that from the freedom of the press in this country, there never were wanting, the boldest and most inflammatory publications, both against men and measures. Yet neither the one nor the other, nor both united, had any perceptible influence in weakening the attachment of the people. If this account is just, and I am confident it is known to be so, by almost all who now hear me, what less than judicial blindness, could have made our enemies so obstinate, in the contrary sentiments? Such however we know has been the case,

and as the whole of their proceedings have been grounded on mistakes, it is no wonder that they have been both injudicious and unsuccessful.

This matter may be explained in the following manner. They supposed that they had only a few discontented particulars to apprehend and punish, and an army to conquer in no respects comparable to their own; but in addition to this they had the lost affections of a whole people to recover. The first which was almost of no consequence at all, they bent their whole force to effect in council and in the field. The other they supposed was already done, or not worth the doing; and therefore every measure they took had a quite different intention, and a quite opposite effect. In all this they were fortified and confirmed by the sentiments, discourse and conduct of the disaffected in America. These unhappy people, from the joint influence of prejudice, resentment and interest, were unwearied in their endeavors to mislead their friends. Their prejudice deserves to be mentioned first. This was great indeed. They had generally such an exalted idea of the power of Britain, that they really considered it as madness to resist. I could mention many sentiments uttered by them which could hardly fail of making the hearers to smile at their gross ignorance, and more than childish timidity. Resentment also joined its force. They were sometimes roughly handled by the multitude at the beginning of the controversy. This led them to wish for revenge, and as they could not inflict it themselves, to call for it from their friends in England. To these two circumstances we may add that the road to favor was plainly that of flattery; and therefore their opinions and intelligence were generally such as they supposed would be most acceptable to those who had it in their power to provide for them, or promote them. Such was the effect of these circumstances united, that time will constrain everybody to confess, that the partizans and friends of the English in America, have done more essential injury to their cause, than the greatest and boldest of their enemies.

The above distinction between overcoming the armed force of the states, and regaining the people's hearts, is

the true key to explain the proceedings, and account for the events of the war. Every measure taken by Great-Britain, from the beginning, instead of having the least tendency to gain the affections of the people of this country, had, and one would think must have been seen to have, the most powerful influence in producing the contrary effect. Without mentioning every separate particular, I will only consider a little the cruelty and severity with which the war has been carried on; because I am firmly of opinion, that the spirit and temper of our enemies in this contest, has been the principal cause of the disappointment of their attempts. In this the cabinet and counsellors in Great-Britain, and the officers and soldiers of their armies in America, have nothing to reproach each other with. If the barbarity of the army has ever equalled, certainly it has never exceeded the cruelty of several of the acts of parliament. I will not enumerate these acts, which are so well known, and which some years ago were so often mentioned in every publication; but shall only tell you with what view I desire you to recollect them. Every one of these acts, on their being known in America, served to increase the union of the states, to fill the heart of the citizens with resentment, and to add vigor to the soldier's arm.

After the example of their employers at home, the commanders of the British armies, their officers and soldiers, and indeed all their adherents, seemed to have been animated with a spirit of implacable rancor, mingled with contempt towards the Americans. This is to be understood of the general run or greatest number of every class, always admitting that there were particular exceptions, whose honor and principle controuled or overcame the national prejudice. Neither perhaps is it in any of them to be ascribed so much to the national character, as to the nature and subject of the quarrel. It has been long observed, that civil wars are carried on with much greater fury, and attended with acts of greater barbarity, than wars between independent nations. The fact, however, of their barbarity is certain; and no less so is the powerful

influence which this conduct has had in defeating their expectations either of reconciliation or submission.

The barbarous treatment of the American prisoners through the whole war, but especially at the beginning, when their enemies were confident of success, is a melancholy subject indeed, and will be a stain upon the British name to future ages. No part of America can be ignorant of this, having witnesses in every state, in the few that returned alive out of their hands. But we in this state, through which they passed to their homes, can never forget the appearance of the emaciated spectres who escaped or were exchanged from British dungeons or prison-ships. Neither was it possible for the people in general not to be struck with the contrast when exchanges took place, and they saw companies of British prisoners going home hale and hearty, bearing every mark of their having been supplied with comfortable provisions, and treated with humanity in every other respect. I am not to enlarge upon these known and fertile subjects. The only reason of their being introduced is to shew the effect which spectacles of this kind must have had upon the public mind, and their influence in rendering the return of the people of this country to submission to the parent state altogether impossible.

The inhuman treatment of the American prisoners by the the British, was not more remarkable than their insolence and rapacity towards the people of the country wherever their power extended. The abuse and contempt poured upon the inhabitants in discourse, and the indiscriminate plunder of their property, could not but in the most powerful manner alienate their affections. Many who hear me at present, have had so full conviction of this truth in their own experience, that it is unnecessary to offer any proof of it. It is of importance however to observe, that this impolitic oppression was the true and proper cause of the general concurrence of the inhabitants of this state to the American standard, in the beginning of the year 1777, and their vigorous exertions ever since against the incursions of the enemy from New-York. I confess I was not so much surpris'd at such conduct when

they possessed this part of the country; because they were then flushed with victory, and had scarcely an idea that they would fail of final success. But when we consider that their conduct has been the same, or even worse, in the southern states, we can hardly help wondering at their infatuation. Surely there was time enough before the year 1780, to have convinced them that insolence and cruelty were not the means of bringing back a revolted people; and yet by all accounts their treatment of the inhabitants in Georgia, South and North-Carolina, in that year, was even more barbarous than had been experienced by the people here three years before.

I shall only further mention, that it seems plainly to have been not by accident, but in consequence of general orders or a prevailing disposition, that they treated wherever they went, places of public worship (except those of the episcopal denomination,) with all possible contempt and insult. They were in general used not only for hospitals, but storehouses, barracks, riding schools and prisons, and in many places they were torn to pieces wantonly and without any purpose, to be served by it, but wreaking their vengeance on the former possessors. What influence must this have had upon the minds of the people? What impression must have been made upon the few who remained, and were witnesses to these acts of profanation, when in those places where they had been accustomed to hear nothing but the word and the worship of God, their ears were stunned with the horrid sound of cursing and blasphemy. This was done very early in Boston, and repeated in every part of the continent with increasing rage.

I have chosen on this part of the subject to insist only on what was general, and therefore must be supposed to have had an extensive influence. It would have been easy to have collected many particular acts of barbarity, but as these might be accounted for from the degeneracy and savage disposition of the persons who were severally guilty of them, they would not have been so conclusive for the purpose for which they were adduced. I shall therefore omit every thing of this kind, except one of the earli-

est instances of their barbarity, because it happened in one of the streets of this place, viz. massacreing in cold blood, a minister of the gospel, who was not, nor ever had been in arms, and received his death wound, while on his knees begging mercy.

Upon the whole nothing appears to me more manifest than that the separation of this country from Britain, has been of God; for every step the British took to prevent, served to accelerate it, which has generally been the case when men have undertaken to go in opposition to the course of providence, and to make war with the nature of things.

I proceed to make some practical improvement of the subject, for your instruction and direction. And,

In the first place, it is our duty to give praise to God for the present happy and promising state of public affairs. This is what we are called to, and making profession of, by our meeting together at the present time. Let it then be more than a form. Let the disposition of your hearts be correspondent to the expressions of your lips. While we, who are here alive before God this day, recollect with tenderness and sympathy, with surviving relations the many valuable lives that have been lost in the course of the war, let us give thanks to God who hath spared us as monuments of his mercy, who hath given us the satisfaction of seeing our complete deliverance approaching, and those liberties civil and religious for which we have been contending established upon a lasting foundation. It will be remembered by many, that I have early and constantly expressed my disapprobation of self confidence, and vain-glorious boasting. To many American soldiers I have said, seldom boast of what you have done, but never of what you only mean to do. This was not occasioned by any doubt or hesitation I ever had as to the probable issue of the war, from the apparent state of things, and the course of human events, but by a deep conviction of the sinfulness of this practice, either in a nation or person. Now therefore that we have come so far in opposition to a formidable enemy, it is certainly our duty to say that "salvati

“on belongeth unto the Lord.” This indeed is not only the duty of every person with respect to what is past, but is the way to support and animate us in what remains of the warfare, and dispose us to make a suitable improvement of the settlement which we hope is not very distant.

2. We ought to testify our gratitude to God for the many signal interpositions of his providence on our behalf, by living in his fear and by a conversation such as becometh the gospel. This is not only a tribute we owe to him for every mercy, and therefore for those of a public nature, but it is the only way by which public prosperity can become a real mercy to us, eternity is of yet greater moment than any earthly blessing. Their state is little to be envied who are free as citizens, but slaves as sinners. All temporal comforts derive their value from their being the fruits of divine goodness, the evidence of covenant love and the earnest of everlasting mercy. It is therefore our indispensable duty to endeavor to obtain the sanctified improvement of every blessing, whether public or personal. There is the greater necessity of insisting on this at present, that though a time of national suffering or jeopardy has some advantages for alarming the consciences of the secure, it hath also some disadvantages, and frequently occasions such distraction of mind as is little favourable to the practice of piety. We know by sad experience that the regular administration of divine ordinances, the observation of the Sabbath, and the good order of the country in general have been much disturbed by the war. The public service seemed many times to justify what would otherwise have been highly improper. This contributed to introduce a licentiousness of practice, and to protect those from restraint or reproof, who I am afraid in many cases, rather yielded to inclination than submitted to necessity. Now therefore, when by the blessing of God our distresses are removed, we ought to return to punctuality as to public order, as well as conscientious strictness in every part of our practice.

3. In the third place it is our duty, to testify our gratitude to God, by usefulness in our several stations, or in other words by a concern for the glory of God, the

public interest of religion, and the good of others. This is the duty of every person, even of the lowest station, at all times. Even the meanest and most unconnected hath still some small bounds, within which his influence and example may be useful. But it is especially the duty of those who are distinguished from others by their talents, by their station, or by office and authority. I shall at present consider it chiefly as the duty of two sorts of persons, ministers and magistrates, those who have the direction of religious societies, and those who are vested with civil authority. As to the first of these, they are under the strongest obligations to holiness and usefulness in their own lives, and diligence in doing good to others. The world expects it from them, and demands it of them. Many of this class of men, have been peculiarly the objects of the hatred and detestation of the enemy, in the course of this war. Such therefore as have been spared to see the return of peace and security, are bound by the strongest ties, to improve their time and talents, in their master's service. But what I have peculiarly in view, is strickness in religious discipline, or the inspection of the morals of their several societies. By our excellent constitution, they are well secured in their religious liberty. The return which is expected from them to the community, is that by the influence of their religious government, their people may be the more regular citizens, and the more useful members of society. I hope none here will deny that the manners of the people in general, are of the utmost moment to the stability of any civil society. When the body of a people, are altogether corrupt in their manners, the government is ripe for dissolution. Good laws may hold the rotten bark some longer together, but in a little time all laws must give way to the tide of popular opinion, and be laid prostrate under universal practice. Hence it clearly follows, that the teachers and rulers of every religious denomination, are bound mutually to each other, and to the whole society, to watch over the manners of their several members.

(2) Those who are vested with civil authority, ought also with much care, to promote religion and good morals among all under their government. If we give credit to the holy scriptures, he that ruleth must be just, ruling in the fear of God. It is a truth of no little importance to us in our present situation, not only that the manners of a people are of consequence to the stability of every civil society; but that they are of much more consequence to free states, than to those of a different kind. In many of these last, a principle of honor and the subordination of ranks, with the vigor of despotic authority, supply the place of virtue, by restraining irregularities and producing public order. But in free states, where the body of the people have the supreme power, properly in their own hands, and must be ultimately resorted to on all great matters, if there be a general corruption of manners, there can be nothing but confusion. So true is this, that civil liberty cannot be long preserved without virtue. A monarchy may subsist for ages, and be better or worse under a good or bad prince; but a republic once equally poised, must either preserve its virtue or lose its liberty, and by some tumultuous revolution, either return to its first principles, or assume a more unhappy form.

From this results a double duty, that of the people themselves, who have the appointment of rulers, and that of their representatives, who are intrusted with the exercise of this delegated authority. Those who wish well to the state ought to chuse to places of trust, men of inward principle, justified by exemplary conversation. Is it reasonable to expect wisdom from the ignorant, fidelity from the profligate, assiduity and application to public business from men of a dissipated life? Is it reasonable to commit the management of public revenue, to one who hath wasted his own patrimony? Those therefore who pay no regard to religion and sobriety, in the persons whom they send to the legislature of any state, are guilty of the greatest absurdity, and will soon pay dear for their folly. Let a man's zeal, profession, or even principles as to political measures be what they will, if he is without personal integrity and private virtue, as a

man he is not to be trusted. I think we have had some instances of men who have roared for liberty in taverns, and were most noisy in public meetings, who yet have turned traitors in a little time. Suffer me on this subject to make another remark. I have not yet heard of any Christian state in which there were not laws against immorality. But with what judgment will they be made, or with what vigor will they be executed, by those who are profane and immoral in their own practice? Let me suppose a magistrate on the bench of justice, administering an oath to a witness, or passing sentence of death on a criminal, and putting him in mind of a judgment to come. With what propriety, dignity, or force can any of these be done by one who is known to be a blasphemer or an infidel, by whom in his convivial hours every thing that is serious and sacred is treated with scorn?

But if the people in general ought to have regard to the moral character of those whom they invest with authority, either in the legislative, executive or judicial branches, such as are so promoted may perceive what is and will be expected from them. They are under the strongest obligations to do their utmost to promote religion, sobriety, industry, and every social virtue, among those who are committed to their care. If you ask me what are the means which civil rulers are bound to use for attaining these ends, further than the impartial support and faithful guardianship of the rights of conscience; I answer that example itself is none of the least. Those who are in high station and authority, are exposed to continual observation; and therefore their example is both better seen and hath greater influence than that of persons of inferior rank. I hope it will be no offence in speaking to a Christian assembly, if I say that reverence for the name of God, a punctual attendance on the public and private duties of religion, as well as sobriety and purity of conversation, are especially incumbent on those who are honored with places of power and trust.

But I cannot content myself with this. It is certainly the official duty of magistrates to be "a terror to evil doers, and a praise to them that do well." That society will

suffer greatly, in which there is no care taken to restrain open vice by exemplary punishment. It is often to be remarked, in some of the corrupt governments of Europe, that whatever strictness may be used, or even impartiality in rendering justice between man and man, yet there is a total and absolute relaxation as to what is chiefly and immediately a contempt of God. Perhaps a small trespass of a poor man on property, shall be pursued by a vindictive party, or punished by a tyrannical judge with the utmost severity; when all the laws against swearing, sabbath-breaking, lewdness, drunkenness and riot, shall be a dead letter, and more trampled upon by the judges themselves, than by the people who are to be judged. Those magistrates who would have their authority both respected and useful, should begin at the source, and reform or restrain that impiety towards God, which is the true and proper cause of every disorder among men. O the short-sightedness of human wisdom, to hope to prevent the effect, and yet nourish the cause! Whence come dishonesty and petty thefts? I say, from idleness, sabbath-breaking, and uninstructed families. Whence come deceits of greater magnitude, and debts unpaid? From sloth, luxury, and extravagance. Whence come violence, hatred, and strife? From drunkenness, rioting, lewdness, and blasphemy. It is common to say of a dissolute liver, that he does harm to none but himself; than which I think there is not a greater falsehood that ever obtained credit in a deceived world. Drunkards, swearers, profane and lascivious jesters, and the whole tribe of those who do harm to none but themselves, are the pests of society, the corruptors of the youth, and in my opinion, for the risk of infection, thieves and robbers are less dangerous companions.

Upon the whole, my brethren, after we have contended in arms for liberty from foreign domination, let us guard against using our liberty as a cloak for licentiousness; and thus poisoning the blessing after we have attained it. Let us endeavor to bring into, and keep in credit and reputation, every thing that may serve to give vigor to an equal republican constitution. Let us cherish

a love of piety, order, industry, frugality. Let us check every disposition to luxury, effeminacy, and the pleasures of a dissipated life. Let us in public measures put honor upon modesty, and self-denial, which is the index of real merit. And in our families let us do the best by religious instruction, to sow the seeds which may bear fruit in the next generation. We are one of the body of confederated states. For many reasons, I shall avoid making any comparisons at present, but may venture to predict, that whatsoever state among us shall continue to make piety and virtue the standard of public honor, will enjoy the greatest inward peace, the greatest national happiness, and in every outward conflict will discover the greatest constitutional strength.



SEASONABLE ADVICE TO YOUNG PERSONS:

A

S E R M O N

ON

PSALM i. i.

Preached at the Laigh Church of PAISELEY, on Sabbath,

February 21st, 1762.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

An Authentic Narrative, of the disorderly and riotous meeting, on the Night before the Celebration of the Lord's Supper in that place, which gave occasion to the Discourse.

T O

ROBERT FULTON, Esq. }
CHARLES MAXWELL, } Bailies.
WILLIAM ORR, }
ANDREW SMITH, Treasurer.

And the remanent members of the Town-Council
of PAISLEY,

The following Sermon is humbly inscribed, by their

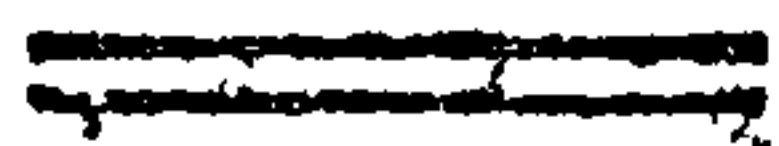
Most Obedient,

Humble Servant,

JOHN WITHERSPOON.

TO THE

P U B L I C.



THE publication of the following sermon, is not owing to choice, but necessity. A process of scandal was carried on against the persons who gave occasion to its being preached; and they, instead of any submission or penitence, thought proper to make heavy complaints against the author of the sermon; and to give an account of what was said in it, very imperfect and unjust, as may well be supposed. In answer to this, he found it necessary to declare his willingness and resolution to publish the sermon, and to prefix a distinct narration of the proceedings, so far as they had come to light, of that impious assembly, held within the bounds of his charge, that the public might judge whether there was not more than sufficient cause given for what was then said. By the following narrative and sermon he now proposes to acquit himself of both parts of this promise.

On Saturday the 6th of February, 1762, being the day before the celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's supper in Paisley, some young men, who it is generally believed had all been at church, dined immediately after sermon in James Chambers's room. After dinner, Robert Hunter, who never was a communicant, produced one of the church tokens, well knowing what use it was intended to serve. Being asked where he got it, said he got it from Judas Iscariot; and, as one of the company declares, offered to play odds or evens with him which of them should use it. They were then invited all to a glass in William Wilson's room, which he chose that night to take possession of; and indeed to give it a very dreadful

consecration. In the interval of their meeting, Robert Hunter sent the token to a young woman in the place, inclosed in a letter. What were the contents of the letter cannot be known. Common fame said it was inviting her to their sacrament: he himself pretended it was very innocent, but took care, as soon as the rumour broke up, to get the letter and burn it. The reader will immediately reflect what could be the intention, and what might have been the effects of this conduct: it was easy in this way, to send the most notorious profligate to the table of the Lord, to the unspeakable scandal of the congregation, as well as mischief to his own soul.

About six of the clock the same evening, or soon after, they met according to appointment in William Wilson's room, the said Robert Hunter, and William Wilson, manufacturers in Paisley, John Snodgrafs, writer there, William M'Crotchet, ensign or serjeant in the army, James and David Chalmers, and Robert Cross junior, merchants in Paisley. By their own confession, and the deposition of several witnesses, they employed a good part of the time in mock-preaching, and that not merely imitating the tones or gestures of ministers in indifferent words, but the only expressions that were distinguished by the witnesses who heard them on the street, were the words of scripture. Two witnesses depone, that to the best of their judgment, they heard them praying in mockery; and when asked if they were sure it was praying and not preaching, persisted in affirming it was praying. The only uncertainty this evidence labors under, is, that not hearing the particular words used, the only way by which they distinguished it, was by the sound; but it is to be observed, that both witnesses were positive; that they agreed together as to the time when this happened, and that it was not the same time that the other witnesses depone they were preaching; but at a very considerable distance; so that there is little probability of the one being mistaken for the other. By their own confessions, and the depositions of witnesses, they were guilty of profane swearing. The noise of their meeting was such, as alarmed the whole neighborhood; but what is most tremendous of all, by the declaration of

Robert Hunter, one of themselves, William M'Crotchet, used some of the words of the institution. The same thing is declared by William Wilson, of John Snodgrafs; and upon the strictest re-examination he persisted in declaring that he was certain it was done in the company, and he thought it was by that person.

When these facts are laid together, and all the circumstances of the transaction are weighed, is it possible in words to paint the atrociousness of their crime? Is there any ground to wonder at the greatness of the scandal? Is there reason to complain, that the minister in whose bounds the offence was committed, and under whose charge almost all the offenders live, should think of preaching on such a subject as it appears he did; and now with concern finds himself obliged to publish? The very choice of such a night for such a merry meeting, and the disturbance given to the place almost to the hour of midnight, though there had been no more in it, were surely highly indecent. But when we add to this the loud profanation of the Almighty's name, and spending the most part, if not the whole of the time, in mocking the exercises of piety, how deep and aggravated is the guilt! Above all, when it is considered that this seems to have been without bounds, not sparing even the most solemn and sacred rite of our holy religion! It is true, some of them obstinately deny this last, and heaviest part of the charge. It doth not indeed appear, and we hope it is not true, that there was a formal celebration, and general or common participation in mockery, of the sacrament of the Lord's supper; but if there had been no profane allusion to it in the performances of the acting mimies, it is not to be supposed or imagined, that it would have been confessed by two of the persons present. Though this should not militate against the rest, it certainly must militate against themselves. The time of the meeting; the token produced before it; the letter with the token sent; the other things which they certainly did; and the unsuspected declaration of two of the guilty; who seemed at first penitent, though afterwards they altered their conduct, and joined with the rest in a common defence; are so strong,

that it is impossible to destroy the belief of it in an impartial mind ; the rather when we add, that afterwards David Chalmers confessed it still more fully than any of the other two. This, though it was too late to be in the process, or rather by great art and influence kept out of it, may be safely affirmed, because it was in the presence of three persons. But to cut the matter short, the use of some of the words of the institution with a solemn air as of a minister, and also some of the other words of scripture, is affirmed, by William Wilson, of John Snodgrafs, in a voluntary declaration, when he was not adduced as an evidence. Let John Snodgrafs therefore, who considers this as so injurious to him, prosecute William Wilson for slander, and get him punished in the manner he justly deserves, if it be false ; and if this is not done, he must forgive many, and particularly the author of the following sermon, for believing it to be true.