

*God the Author of Promotion.*

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A

S E R M O N

PREACHED IN THE

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ON THE 4th JULY, 1794,

AT THE REQUEST OF THE

**Democratic Society**

AND THE

**MILITARY OFFICERS.**

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BY JOHN M'KNIGHT, D. D.

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

*THE following Discourse is published precisely as it was prepared. The latter part of it, especially, was more concisely delivered than it was in the notes, owing to the want of time, occasioned by the late arrival of the procession at the church.*

*Conformably to request, it is submitted to the candor of the public by its well-wisher,*

THE AUTHOR.

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# God the Author of Promotion.

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PSALM LXXV. 6, 7.

*For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But GOD is the judge; he putteth down one, and setteth up another.*

**T**O-DAY, my brethren, we recognise this truth as verified in our own happy experience. On this the birth-day of AMERICAN LIBERTY and INDEPENDENCE, whilst, with gratitude and joy, we commemorate the great deliverance which has been wrought out for us, and survey the innumerable and inestimable blessings which we possess, or have in prospect; we acknowledge the Great Sovereign of the universe as the Author of them all; renouncing their imputation to the influence of any second causes farther than as instruments in his hand for the accomplishment of his purposes.

I SHALL, I presume, fully comply with the design of the day, and, I hope, not entirely disappoint your wishes, in the service to which you have called me, in endeavouring to illustrate the declaration of the Text with a particular reference to ourselves.

“PROMOTION,” saith the inspired Psalmist, “cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south;” that is, not from any human instruments, or second causes.—The children of the east were wealthy and wise. The isles of the Gentiles, which lay to the west, possessed a strong naval force. And Egypt and Arabia, which lay to the south, had numerous and powerful armies. But, saith David, the reputed author of this psalm, promotion is not to be imputed to any, or all of these:—neither to the wisdom and wealth of the one, or to the maritime or land forces of the others.

THERE may be a reference here to the idolatry then prevalent in the world. All men supposed the origin of power to be from heaven, or from above, but they were much divided in sentiment respecting its source there; the Gentile nations, who were much addicted to astrology, supposed it came from the sun, which they made the object of their worship, or from some of the stars. No: saith David, promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south: not from the rising

or setting of the sun, or any planet or constellation, or from their elevation or declension. It is not to be ascribed to any of these, or to any power or influence which they possess.

THE north is not mentioned as the source of promotion; either because there were none who supposed it originated from thence; or because the same word which, in the original, signifies the north signifies also the secret place, and from the secrets of the Divine council it doth proceed; or from the oracle in Zion which lay on the north side of Jerusalem.

“ God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another.” There is an Almighty Sovereign, whose kingdom is over all, who is the original author, and real first cause of all promotion and disgrace. “ The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he pleaseth.” From the depths of obscurity and sufferings he raises some to the summit of honor and happiness: and from the heights of honor and happiness he reduces others to the lowest state of poverty and distress—And this he doth in the capacity of a judge, and according to the strictest rules of righteousness. “ Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?”

If we attend to this proposition either with reference to David, or the people of Israel,

it is, at once, both illustrated and confirmed in the most striking manner. "Who," saith David, "am I, O Lord God, and what is mine "house?" They were both inconsiderable in Israel when God called him from the sheep-folds to be king over his people. And God expressly assures the people of Israel, that he had not chosen them because they were more in number than any people, for they were the fewest of all people when he set his love upon them. The historic page would also furnish us with innumerable instances for the illustration and support of the same truth, both as it respects communities and individuals.

BUT my design is, to consider it with a particular reference to ourselves: and that in a public capacity. With this view, let us briefly, look back to what we once were—contemplate our present condition—and look forward upon the prospects which are unfolding themselves to our sight.

Two centuries ago what was America? Little else than an howling wilderness, the habitation of savages and beasts of prey. The first settlers sought, in this wilderness, that liberty, both civil and religious, which those who tyrannized over them would not suffer them to enjoy at home. Small were their numbers, their labours great, many the difficulties which they had to encounter, many the discouragements which they had to struggle against.

many the dangers to which they were exposed. Oft-times have our frontiers been laid waste, many of the inhabitants murdered, or carried away captive, and whole settlements threatened to be over-run. Had not the Lord been on our side, and his gracious providence our protection, often had the heathen tribes, combined together, swallowed us up.

HAVING arrived to some degree of populousness and wealth, the parent became jealous of her off-spring, and envious of its growing prosperity. The iron hand of tyranny and oppression was stretched forth over us. A dispute took place between the colonies and the mother country. The great principle which was the hinge, upon which the controversy turned, was, the right claimed by the British parliament to bind the Colonies in all cases whatsoever. Attempts were first made to enforce this principle by a stamp-act: and afterwards renewed in a duty laid upon tea. Our humble petitions were either refused a reading or disregarded. The controversy became still more serious and alarming: the parties flew to arms; and the appeal was made to God as judge.

LET us, for a moment, endeavour to realise our situation at this period. With whom were we about to contend? with a nation haughty and powerful: who gloried in being mistress of the ocean: who professed to hold the balance among the powers of Europe: abounding in

men: and amply furnished with all the implements of war.

WHAT had we to oppose to all this? Had we a numerous and well disciplined army? A large fleet and well equipt? Able and experienced commanders? A sufficiency of arms and military stores? Were our coasts and harbours in such a state of defence that we were in a capacity to bid them defiance? Had we formed alliances with any of the powerful kingdoms of the earth, under whose protection we might be safe, and by whose assistance we might hope to succeed?—Scarcely in one instance was this the case with us.—Nay more. Many among us were feint-hearted: some were avowed enemies to our cause; and others, under the mask of friends, proved the worst of enemies.—What then was the ground of our hope? Confiding in the justice of our cause, we put our trust in God, from whom promotion cometh: who putteth down one, and setteth up another.—Our harbours were blocked up: and our charters taken away. Our political horizon was overspread with darkness, the clouds were heavily charged, the lightnings flashed, and the hideous thunder rolled, threatening destruction. Some of our towns were reduced to ashes. Others were in possession of the enemy. Their armies traversed various parts of the country, and left behind them, wherever they went, the vestiges of devastation and cruelty. I speak to many wh



have these things still fresh in remembrance. You have seen the standard of British tyranny set on American ground. You have seen those fleets and armies which were destined to enslave us, riding at anchor in our harbours, and spreading desolation through our country. This very city where we now dwell, was for years possessed by the enemy, whilst the distressed citizens wandered far from hence in quest of a safe retreat. Many of our brave men fell on the high-places of the field, fighting bravely in defence of our just rights and privileges: whilst jails, dungeons, and prison ships were the merciless graves of many more.

FOREVER sacred, on this day, be the memory of those brave men whose lives were voluntarily offered as a sacrifice to the liberty of their country, and in vindication of the rights of men. Grateful be the remembrance of those who through many toils and dangers have lived to share, with their fellow-citizens, the blessings of independence and peace. Whilst, at the same time, we lament that from want of confidence, occasioned by the inefficiency of government and the derangement of our public affairs, the hard earnings of the war-worn soldier were, in many instances, transferred, for a trifle, into the hands of speculators, the leeches and drones of society.

NEED I tell you the issue of the contest? No:—you all know it. “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory.

“ O sing unto the Lord a new song, for he hath  
 “ done marvellous things: his right hand and  
 “ his holy arm hath gotten him the victory.  
 “ The Lord hath done great things for us  
 “ whereof we are glad.” He infatuated and dis-  
 tracted the councils of our enemies. He gave  
 wisdom to our counsellors. He raised up com-  
 manders for us. He united and inspirited our  
 people. He provided a sufficiency of arms and  
 military stores. He taught our hands to war,  
 and our fingers to fight. Throughout the dif-  
 ferent stages of the war, from the valiant de-  
 fence of Bunker’s Hill, to the glorious reduc-  
 tion of York, his interpositions for our pro-  
 tection and success were frequently evidenced.  
 And, in process of time, through the assistance  
 of that generous and powerful ally whom he  
 raised up for us, he gave us Victory, Indepen-  
 dence, Liberty, and Peace.

THESE is another event, in the period we  
 are now considering, which deserves our par-  
 ticular remembrance. The formation and a-  
 doption of the FEDERAL CONSTITUTION is an  
 instance singular, and unrivalled in the annals  
 of time. It was deliberated upon, and debated  
 with all the powers of eloquence and argument.  
 It was peaceably ratified. Agreeably to the  
 provision made in it, it has been amended.  
 It is still in our power to amend any faults or  
 defects which may be discovered in it. And  
 under it America has prospered, and risen ra-  
 pidly to eminence.

From a review of the past, let us proceed, *Secondly*, To the contemplation of our present condition.

LIFT up your eyes, then, upon this widely extended continent, from New-Hampshire to Georgia; and from the ocean to the French Broad, Muskingum, and the Lakes. See it interspersed with innumerable, spacious, and delightful plantations and farms. See it in many places highly cultivated and improved. View the several populous, opulent, and splendid cities which crown our coasts; and the many pleasant towns and villages interspersed throughout the interior parts of the country. See planters and farmers each sitting under his own vine, and under his own fig-tree, and enjoying the fruit of their respective labour. See the merchant in his counting-house, and the mechanic in his shop, each industriously prosecuting their respective callings. See the physician attending to the health of his patient: the lawyer defending the life and the property of his client: and the divine, both by precept and example, endeavouring to conduct his flock to heaven. See commerce, with her thousand sails, crowding our harbours, transporting the surplus of our produce to distant climes, and, in return, furnishing us with the delicacies and luxuries of every part of the globe. See each state governed, internally, by magistrates of their own appointing, and by a constitution and laws framed and enacted by themselves. View the g

ral government of the United States, by the two houses of congress, consisting of delegates chosen by each state respectively, who are responsible to their constituents, and liable to be displaced at pleasure, under a constitution formed by the united wisdom of America; and all centring in the presidency of a man whose virtues and services have endeared to us, and who has been equally necessary and useful in peace and in war. Here no unnatural alliance between church and state sets the oaths and obligations of rulers at variance with the rights of mankind, and the feelings of humanity. Here the laws and government extend equal protection and encouragement to all good citizens. Here no hierarch lords it over the heritage of God: or privileged orders, of any kind, trample upon the rights of their fellow-men. No Priests here are obliged to fly their country; nor Muirs, nor Palmers, transported to Botany-Bay; nor Rowans fined and imprisoned for being friends to the rights and liberties of mankind. Here abilities and industry meet with suitable encouragement and reward. And if here there are any sycophants of power or minions of the great, it is more owing to an abject servile disposition, than to the nature of the government, or the venality and corruption of the times.

LET scenes of desolation and death be buried in everlasting oblivion. Let the found

of the drum, the whistling of the fife, the roaring of cannon, the clashing of arms, the confused noise of the warrior, the garments rolled in blood, with the groans of the wounded and dying, be seen and heard no more. Let the calm of peace, and the sunshine of prosperity which we have enjoyed, be perpetual and uninterrupted. Let the olive branch of peace, which has been extended to us, be never withdrawn. The soil of America is congenial to the tree of liberty which has been planted in it: it extends its friendly branches, and the nations of the earth are taking shelter under it. The sciences lift up their heads. The arts revive. And the concerns of our nation wear a promising aspect. Sparks of that fire of liberty which has burned so bright in America, have been transported to Europe: and kindled into a blaze.

THE revolution in France was sudden as an earthquake. Whilst we lament the disorder and confusion which have taken place amongst them, and the great effusion of blood which their struggle for liberty has cost them, we wish success to the cause. May the glorious enthusiasm spread until all the nations of the earth become free.

It is a pity there should be one cloud to intercept the bright splendours of this day.—  
But it cannot be concealed, nor can I pass it

over in silence, that in our present situation there are some circumstances alarming and distressing. Separated by the Atlantic at the distance of 3000 miles from Europe, we purposed, and flattered ourselves we should be able to avoid being involved in their politics, or embroiled in their contests. The early declaration of our purpose, by government, to observe the strictest neutrality has not availed for our security. Contrary to the laws of nature and of nations, depredations have been made upon our trade, our vessels captured and condemned, and our seamen treated with injustice and cruelty. Nay, ~~more~~, still retaining, in violation of their treaty with us, possession of the Western Posts within our territory, they have been active in stirring up the Indian tribes against us. We still hope that these grounds of difference may be removed by negociation: that the Western Posts will be given up: that compensation will be made for the damages we have sustained: and that peace may be preserved upon equitable and honourable terms.

I AM well aware that different sentiments have been entertained respecting the measures prosecuted by government in this case. It is not for me to enter into this controversy. Permit me to say, in general, that a government constituted upon truly republican principles, where its administrators are chosen by the people, accountable to them, and liable

to be displaced at pleasure, is entitled to a high degree of confidence—that if ever such a government becomes tyrannical and oppressive, the people have themselves to blame—that as it is too much the disposition of persons in power to abuse the trust reposed in them, it is the business of the people to be observant of their conduct—that, as it is of the utmost consequence, especially in critical circumstances, that government should possess the confidence of the people, all suspicion or mistrust of it ought to be admitted with caution, and not entertained but upon the most satisfactory evidence—that war is a dreadful calamity, and a country ought never to be involved in it but in cases of absolute necessity—and, that a people driven into a war, having used every justifiable means to avoid it, enter into it with the approbation of their own consciences, which naturally tends to inspire with invincible courage: with the approbation of the world, whose good-will and good-wishes are, in such circumstances, desirable: and with the approbation and smiles of heaven which ensure success.

FROM the past and present, let us, for a moment, extend our views to the future.

OVER this, indeed, there hangs a veil impenetrable by mortal sight. Here we are left to deal entirely in hypothesis and conjecture.

But as God generally conducts his government by the instrumentality of second causes; and as similar causes usually produce similar effects, reasoning from analogy is, at least, highly presumptive. If then from the past and present we may form conjectures of the future, to what height of distinguished eminence may we not hope America will arise? There is not that nation upon the face of the earth whose prospects are equally promising. God doth not blast such promising prospects unless provoked to it by high instances of ingratitude and disobedience. Under heaven, it depends upon ourselves how long we shall enjoy that liberty, and how permanent and improved shall be the blessings of which we are possessed. By wise counsels and virtuous conduct we may rise to an eminence hitherto unknown among the kingdoms of the world. Vice and folly will render us insignificant and contemptible.

LET us, in pleasing contemplation, anticipate the era when those immense tracts of fertile land, which have been ceded to us, shall be peopled, and states on states added to the union. When agriculture shall have attained its highest improvements. When manufactures, in their various branches, shall be established throughout the continent, and carried on in the greatest perfection. When literature shall have reached its zenith. When we



shall have arrived to maturity in the science of government. And, in short, when we shall have made the greatest proficiency in every thing useful and ornamental.

WHILST we dwell in the pleasing and grateful recollection of the blessings which have flowed, and we would hope will still continue to flow to America, let us remember that we are citizens of the world, and the whole human race our brethren. This consideration has a natural and powerful tendency to dilate the heart with the sentiments and feelings of humanity and benevolence. Let us rejoice that the rights of man, both civil and religious, are coming to be better understood in the world,—and that some of the nations of the earth are shaking off the galling fetters of bigotry and despotism. Let us heave a sigh, and drop a sympathetic tear over those nations which are yet superstitious and inflamed. And let us, with all the ardor of enthusiastic anticipation, contemplate the period when the universal prevalence of light and truth will be establishment of universal peace, liberty, and happiness. That there are glorious days await the church and the world, the oracles of infallible truth abundantly declare. I long to see, at least, the dawning of that glorious day, when the once highly favoured nation, who have now for ages suffered under the rebukes of their offended God, shall be restored to his favour, and their acknowledg-

ment of the truth shall be as life from the dead to those nations which already believe. When the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of the invisible God, shall every where prevail in its purity and power: when nations shall be born as in one day, and all ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

LET what has been said serve to check all arrogance and presumption: to teach us our absolute and entire dependence upon God; and the obligations which we are under to him: and to excite our gratitude and praise for all the instances of his goodness and mercy to us.

PRIDE and self-sufficiency are natural to the human heart, and the source of many disappointments, losses, and sorrows. Mankind are unhappily prone to depend upon, and ascribe success to instruments and second causes, whilst they loose sight of the great first cause who directs every circumstance and over-rules every event. This self-sufficiency, this dependence upon instruments and means, is frequently the reason why the most promising means fail of success, and the best concerted schemes prove abortive. God expects to be noticed and acknowledged by his intelligent creatures in all the operations of his hands. When we either vainly and presumptuously ascribe to ourselves, or impiously and idly

atroufly impute to instruments and fecond cau-  
 les the fuccefs with which our endeavours have  
 been crowned, it is an high provocation to  
 that God who is jealous of his honour, and  
 will not give his glory to another.

IN all our ways, then, let us acknowledge  
 God, and he will direct our fteps. When we  
 are about to engage in any important bufinels,  
 or in any arduous or dangerous enterprife,  
 let us look to him for counfel, and engage  
 his affiftance and protection. Is any thing too  
 hard for God? *By thee, faith David, I have  
 run through a troop: by my God have I leap-  
 ed over a wall. He giveth power to the faint;  
 and to them that have no might, he encreafeth  
 ftrength. There is no king faved by the mul-  
 titude of an hoft: a mighty man is not deliver-  
 ed by much ftrength. A horfe is a vain thing  
 for fafety: neither fhall he deliver any by his  
 great ftrength. Behold, the eye of the Lord is  
 upon them that fear him: upon them that hope  
 in his mercy. Should we, notwithstanding all  
 our endeavours to avoid it, be dragged into  
 a war, let us enter upon it with the difpofi-  
 tion and fentiments of the church of old.  
*Affur fhall not fave us; we will not ride up-  
 on horfes: neither will we fay any more to  
 the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for  
 in thee the fatherlefs findeth mercy.**

IN the procefs of any undertaking, let us  
 carefully notice, and acknowledge the divine

interposition and agency. The divine presence and agency are universal. Not a sparrow lighteth on the ground without his notice. The very hairs of his people's heads are all numbered. The hearts of kings are in his hand, as the rivers of water, he turneth them whithersoever he will. He turneth the counsel of Ahiothel into foolishness. *He taketh the wise in their own craftings: and the counsel of the forward is carried head long.* How often, in his hand, do circumstances, in themselves, the most trivial, defeat the fairest prospects, or accomplish the most unexpected events.

NOR is the divine agency, in the issue, to be less noticed and acknowledged, than in the commencement and progress of any undertaking. When our prospects are blasted, and the issue proves contrary to our expectations and wishes, let us humbly submit and adore. God is wise in heart and mighty in counsel: none ever hardened himself against him and prospered. — All things are so ordered and disposed by him, as most effectually to promote his own glory, and the best interests of all who love and serve him. To such in all circumstances, and in every event, it is matter of triumph and rejoicing, that God reigns, and doeth whatsoever he will.

WHEN the issue proves favourable, and our endeavours and wishes are crowned with

success, let us see to it that we give God the glory. He is entitled to it, and he expects it. How many, alas! fail here? How few render again unto the Lord according to the benefits which they have received. Nature will prompt men to cry unto God for deliverance in times of danger and distress: but it is grace must dispose and enable us to make suitable returns for the blessings conferred.— Ingratitude is, particularly, a sin against our own comfort and interest. By being ungrateful we soon lose the relish of our mercies. By being ungrateful we forfeit the comforts and blessings of which we are possessed. And by being ungrateful we render all our prospects and hopes liable to be blasted. Let us see to it, then, that we be not chargable with this crime. On this day particularly appropriated for the recollection of national blessings, let us take heed unto ourselves that we love the Lord our God. Let us fear the Lord, and his goodness. And let us summon up all our powers in one united and vigorous ascription of praise. *Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.*

To conclude. Let us never forget, that the present is wholly a short and transitory scene. We are beings of yesterday, and our days on earth are but a shadow. The king-

doms of this world, in all their pomp and splendor, are passing away like the pageant of a day. Shortly shall the whole human race be swept off the stage of time, and lost in the ocean of eternity. Yea, the earth itself, and the things which are therein, shall soon be burnt up. Fading and transitory as the emblems of power, and the ensigns of royalty are, they are the attainments of but a few: and they bring with them a world of danger, anxiety, and care. But there is a glorious and permanent promotion to which the most obscure on earth may aspire and reach. All the saints shall be kings and priests of the most high God, and live and reign with him forever. To this exalted felicity and glory let each of us aspire. Let us be looking for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness: that when we shall have done with all earthly things, we may go to be ever with the Lord. Into this everlasting kingdom, may an abundant entrance be administered to each of us through riches of righteousness and free grace in Jesus the Saviour. *Amen.*

F I N I S.