

A
DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED AT

ASHBURNHAM,

JULY 4th, 1796,

AT THE

REQUEST OF THE MILITIA OFFICERS

IN SAID TOWN;

WHO, WITH THE INFANTRY UNDER THEIR
COMMAND, AND A TROOP OF CAVALRY,
WERE ASSEMBLED UNDER ARMS,

TO CELEBRATE THE

ANNIVERSARY

OF THE

INDEPENDENCE

OF THE

United States of America.

1744-1823.

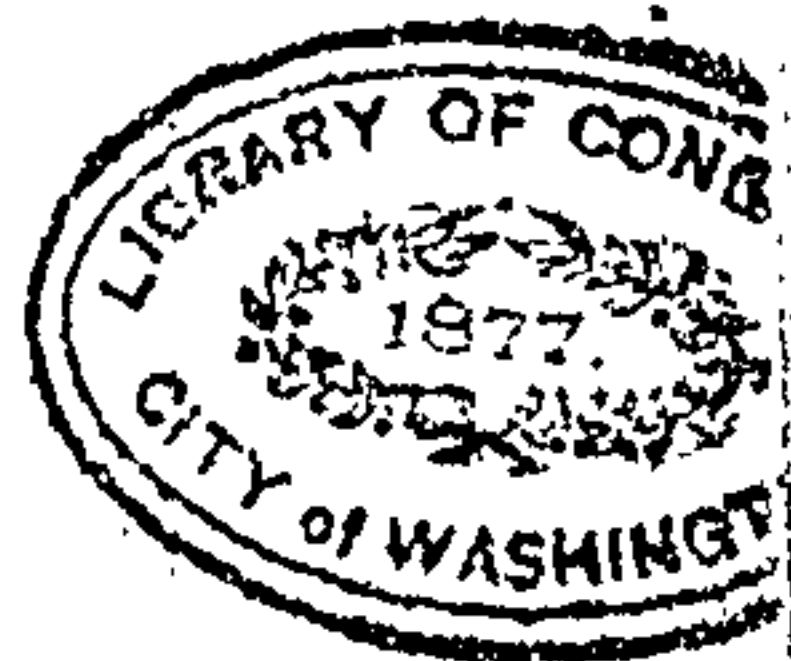
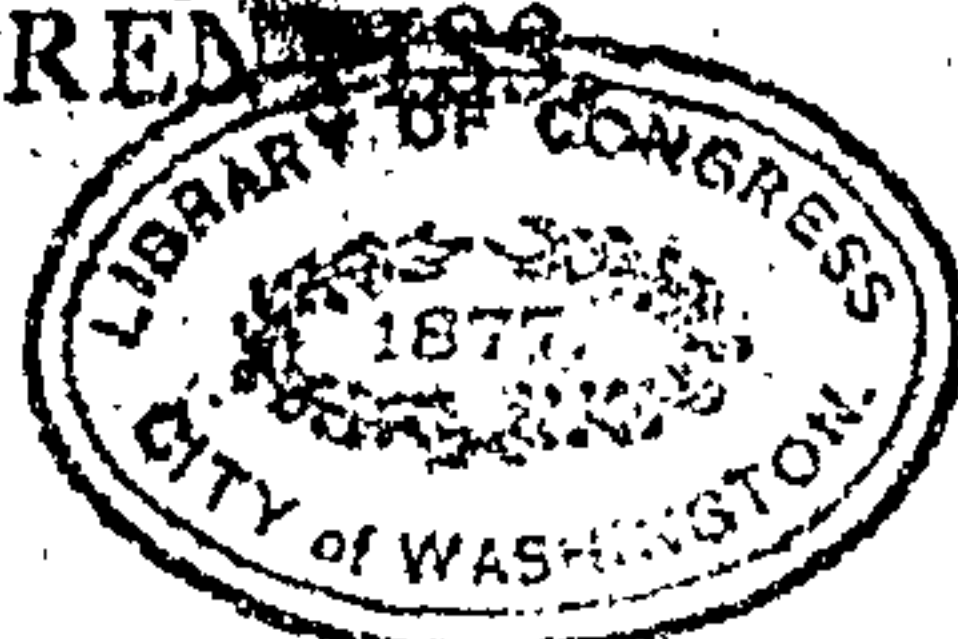
By JOHN CUSHING, A. M.

MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL IN ASHBURNHAM.

Published at the desire of said OFFICERS, and others,
to whom it is HUMBLY INSCRIBED.

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A

DISCOURSE, &c.

DOES not the unusual appearance in this house strike the mind with awe? Has the trumpet of war sounded an alarm? Are our seacoasts invaded by foreigners? Are our frontiers laid waste by savages, which occasion this formidable appearance of men arrayed in arms? Does the display of the weapons of war portend that we are soon to hear the confused noise of the warrior, and of garments rolled in blood?—No—all is peace—we sit quiet in our dwellings, and enjoy the sweets of peace and domestic happiness, while in Europe, nation is contending with nation, and others are girding on the harness, who have hitherto kept from that powerful confederacy which has been formed against the cause of liberty.

101. cast. R. 17. V. 1. 6/32.

WE are peaceably met to celebrate the 4th of July, the important day when these United States were declared free, sov'reign, and independent.

APPEARING thus in arms, ~~is~~ is an intimation that it was by them our independence was gained, and that by them it is to be preserved.

THIS is the birth day of Empire. This day completes twenty years since that important declaration was made, which, through God's goodness, has been maintained.—It is a day to be remembered throughout all generations.

SINCE that memorable era, a generation has risen up, which is entering upon the stage of action, and who ought to be told of the goodness of God, to their fathers and to them; and I can think of no passage of scripture more suitable to the present occasion, than that in

PSALM 78th, 4, 5, 6 and 7 Verses.

WE will not hide them from their Children, showing the Generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength and his wonderful works, which He hath done; for He established a testimony in JACOB and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their Children; that the Generation to come might know them, even the Children that should be

born, who should arise and declare them to their children; that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God; but keep his Commandments.

NO people ever experienced such a series of wonders as the Israelites; and their deliverance from the tyrant PHARAOH was so marvellous, that by God's particular order, the day was to be observed throughout all their generations; and it was given in commandment to them, to make known his wonderful works to their children, and they again to theirs. I need only refer you to the history given by MOSES, who had a principal hand in bringing out the people from Egypt, for the particulars of God's wonders towards them, in delivering them from slavery, in carrying them through a great and terrible wilderness, and giving them quiet possession of the promised land.

THE design of annually commemorating his wonderful works, was, that they might set their hope in God, keep his commandments, and not forget his works; which they would be like to do, if there had not been a special rite instituted, and a feast to be kept in remembrance, when their minds were to be refreshed with a recital of the deeds done in their favor.

God dealt with no people as with Israel : but in the history of the United States, particularly New-England, there is as great a similarity, perhaps, in the conduct of Providence to that of the Israelites, as is to be found in the history of any people. Truly God has done wonderful things ; his works have been great ; and it must afford pleasure to search them out, and to speak of them to one another and to our children—It is what we ought to do, to preserve a sense of gratitude, to encourage us to hope in God in future times of trouble, and to excite us to holy obedience.

God gave, as a reason for keeping his commandments, his bringing Israel out of the land of Egypt and out of the house of bondage ; and surely what he has done for us as a people, is a very powerful reason why we should keep them.

We may say, in the words of the Psalmist,
 “ We have heard with our ears, O God ; our fathers
 “ have told us what works thou didst in
 “ their days, in the times of old, how thou didst
 “ drive out the heathen with thy hand, and plant-
 “ edst them ; how thou didst afflict the people and
 “ cast them out, for they got not the land in pos-
 “ session by their own sword, neither did their
 “ own arm save them ; but thy right hand and
 “ thine arm, and the light of thy countenance,
 “ because thou hadst a favor unto them.”

OUR fathers were few in number and feeble, when they first landed in this American wilderness, and would easily have fallen a prey to the savages, if God had not restrained them. But what led them into this then howling wilderness? To enjoy liberty, civil and religious, the greatest boon of a temporal nature.

PERSECUTION is a very great evil; yet infinite wisdom brought good out of it; for it proved an occasion of the settling of this part of America.

VARIOUS attempts for lucrative purposes had been made to establish settlements; but all proved abortive.—It seems as if the Almighty reserved this spot of the globe on purpose as an asylum for our persecuted ancestors; and what is very remarkable, but a little time before their arrival, some pestilential disease swept off the natives to such a degree as to make sufficient room.

SUCH was the spirit of the high church party which ruled in England, that dissenters could have no quiet dwelling in their own land—They must conform to all the ceremonies of the episcopal church, or submit to fines and imprisonment. Rather than be deprived of the liberty of worshipping God according to the dictates of their conscience, they chose to sacrifice all the delights of their native land, and cross the wide Atlantic,

which at that day, for want of experience, was thought to be a very hazardous voyage.

AND indeed when we think of it, it is a matter of wonder that our ancestors should be so adventurous.

THE march of Israel out of Egypt, and thro' the wilderness, was ever esteemed a wonderful thing: but they had MOSES and AARON to lead them—they had the cloud to direct their course, and bread from Heaven in plenty.

OUR Fathers had no miracles wrought for them, but they experienced many mercies—in so good a cause as they embarked in, they trusted Providence, and God preserved and fed them. They suffered many hardships, for want of the knowledge of cultivating a wilderness. Had they understood as well how to turn it into a fruitful field, as their descendants at this day, there would not have been left on record such dreary accounts of the barrenness and hardships of a wilderness.

BUT worldly interest was not what was uppermost with them; religion was the principal thing they had in view. They requested of their king, JAMES I, leave to transplant themselves into America, where they might enjoy liberty of conscience unmolested, that they might also bring the natives to embrace Christianity, and enlarge

his dominions. They obtained their request. Grants of land of such and such extent were made to them. They had a charter which they really thought secured to them those rights, for the sake of which they left their native land.

IN the arbitrary reign of king JAMES II. it was, without sufficient reasons, taken from them :—altho it must be confessed that they did things unjustifiable ; which were one principal reason of the first charters being vacated, viz, persecuting those who dissented from them in religion. It ill became those who fled from persecution, to become persecutors. But this may be said in extenuation of their conduct ; the rights of men and of Christians at that day were not well understood. They believed that they maintained the pure doctrines and discipline of the gospel ; and that it was their duty to support them at all events. Toleration and the rights of private judgment for all, were reserved for their descendants. They meant well, but good intentions will not justify wrong actions. They show that they were but men, imperfect men. I take no pleasure in making our ancestors appear to disadvantage. I venerate their memories ; for they laid the foundation of this American empire, by the early care and pains they took to diffuse knowledge, by founding an university, and requiring every town to settle a learned minister,

and to maintain schools for the diffusion of knowledge among every class of people,

THEY could not obtain the restoration of their first charter : but with much difficulty and expense they obtained a second, which on some accounts was preferable to the first. Under it they flourished, and thought themselves safe ; for it was said the plighted faith of things might be depended upon ; but this was found to be a mistake.

OUR fathers were at the expense of transporting themselves, purchasing the soil of the natives ; (for they did not consider the Pope's grant of the land of Heathens to the king of England, and then his to them, as giving a just title.) They were at the expense of defending themselves against the natives ; and they thought it hard * to be obliged to help bear the expenses of the mother country. They were willing to bear true alle-

* IN 1640, a modest computation then made of the whole charge of transportation of the persons, their goods, the stock of cattle, provisions, until they could support themselves, necessaries for building, artillery, arms and ammunition, amounts to £ 192,000 sterling. A dear purchase. If they had paid nothing afterwards to the sachems of the country, and before to the council of Plymouth, well might they complain when their titles to their lands were called in by
SIR EDMUND ANDROSS.

giance to the king of Great Britain, and they submitted to the Navigation Act in the year 1664,† tho with reluctance. They looked upon the king as their king and head of civil authority, who ruled here by his governor ; but when attempts were made by the Parliament to lay an internal tax, the whole continent was alarmed ; and so mighty was the opposition, that the Stamp Act, which was the first experiment, was repealed as inexpedient ; at the same time they declared that they had a right to make laws binding upon the Colonies in all cases whatever. This declaration contains the essence of despotism. If they had the right, they would use it, when they saw best, and nothing but opposing arms to arms could prevent it. This right which the Parliament claimed, they exercised in a few years

† It was hard parting with a free open trade to all parts of the world, which Massachusetts carried on before the new charter. The principal acts of Parliament were made many years before, but there was no custom-house established in the Colony, nor any authority anxious for carrying them into execution.

Idem. Vol. 2, Page 447.

In the 332d page of the 1st volume, Gov. HUTCHINSON gives us the sense of our ancestors upon the Navigation Act. After giving an account of the Court's compliance with several orders from the incensed king CHARLES II. he adds—
 “ But it was a more difficult thing to conform to the acts of
 “ trade, i. e. laying duties upon merchandize to be paid in

by laying duties upon a number of articles for raising a revenue. This alarmed the Colonies again, and such opposition was made that at length the duty was taken off of all the articles but tea.

IN consequence of a non importation agreement, and procuring teas from other nations besides the British, the East India Company, who used to supply America with nearly all that were consumed here, were embarrassed by having vast quantities on hand for which they had not a market.

THEY applied to Parliament for relief. The Parliament passed an act, taking off the duty that was paid in the Colonies, and empowered the company to ship their teas directly to America; appointed commissioners or factors in each Col-

“ America. They acknowledge in their letter to the Agents
 “ they had not done it. They apprehended them to be an
 “ invasion of the rights, liberties and properties of the sub-
 “ jects of his Majesty in the Colony, they not being repre-
 “ sented in Parliament, and according to the usual sayings
 “ of the learned in the law, the laws of England were
 “ bounded within the four seas, and did not reach America;
 “ however, as his Majesty had signified his pleasure that
 “ those acts should be observed in Massachusetts, they had
 “ made provision by a law of the Colony that they should
 “ be strictly attended from time to time, altho it greatly dis-
 “ couraged trade, and was a great damage to his Majesty’s
 “ Plantation.”

ony to sell it for them. This was monopolizing an important article of commerce, and there was no knowing where it would end. Upon the same principle they might have sent other articles and every article to the ruin of our merchants. As it might be expected, all the Colonies were alarmed, and came to a determination that the Teas should not be landed,

IN some of the Colonies the consignees were prevailed upon to return it—what was sent to Boston you know was all emptied into the sea.

THIS Tea Act laid the foundation for the war, which was the occasion of our independence.

THE British government were highly enraged; they viewed this as rebellion;—they soon passed an act to shut up the port of Boston till compensation should be made for the loss.

By this cruel act the innocent suffered with the guilty—hundreds were thrown out of employment, and were dependent on their fellow citizens for subsistence. They were well supplied—contributions from all parts, and from all the Colonies were made, and sent, to encourage them to endure their sufferings which were considered as in a common cause.

THE British did not stop here—they passed an act which in effect destroyed all our charter

rights, and would have reduced us to as abject a state as Ireland was then in ; for no town meeting, except the annual march meeting, could be held but by applying to the governor for leave, and every article to be acted upon, was to be specified. This was considered, and justly, as an intolerable grievance.

By another, passed about the same time, it was ordained, that any person indicted for murder or any other capital crime committed in aiding the magistrates in executing the laws, might be sent by the Governor either to any other Colony or to Great Britain for his trial ; or rather, as was justly observed upon it, to be acquitted. So that had hundreds of our people been murdered by the British troops, the chance of obtaining justice was small indeed.

THE Judges were made wholly independent of the people, as they were to receive their salaries from the king out of the revenue raised here.

THESE acts irritated the people beyond measure. This Commonwealth, then Province, seemed to be aimed at alone, by the last mentioned act. The king and Parliament viewed them as the ringleaders of sedition. The snare was artfully laid—as complete a plan of despotism was contrived as can be conceived ; and several regiments of regular troops were sent over to protect

the Governor and the king's friends, and to enforce the acts of Parliament.

BUT they found a set of men to deal with that would not tamely submit to the acts of a venal Parliament. A love of liberty had descended from Father to Son, and an hereditary aversion to aristocracy prevailed. Here the greater part were freeholders, had property of their own, which they chose to have the disposal of themselves.

HAD the king and Parliament recommended to the Colonies to raise certain sums in proportion to their wealth, and left them to have taken their own way, they would at once have done it, and cheerfully have contributed towards the expense the nation had been at in conquering Canada, &c. But they thought if strangers had the liberty to open their purses they would be too free with them. They chose to give and grant in their own way.

FROM the time the tea was destroyed, matters became serious. It was greatly feared that the controversy would end in bloodshed and war. It was judged best to make all the preparation in their power against what might be. A Congress in 1774 advised to break off all commercial intercourse with Great Britain; hoping *that* would

Bring them to terms. People readily complied, and great sacrifices were made—The Congress petitioned, but in vain.

BRITAIN hearing of our warlike preparations, which were only on the defensive; gave orders to their commander in chief to destroy all the military stores he could. On the 19th of April, 1775, he attempted to execute his orders. Then did he “cry havock, and let slip the dogs of war.” A dreadful day it was, when we heard the sound of the trumpet and the alarm of war. We were pained at the very heart. The thoughts of fighting against the mother country, which we had so long venerated, caused such a struggle in the minds of many, that they did not know what to do; but the great body of the people were determined to stand upon their defense to the last extremity. Altho the blows were at first all directed at Massachusetts, all the Colonies made a common cause of it, and came to our help.

YET independence of Britain was not aimed at, but by a few. The Congress, even after blood was shed, were determined once more to see what effect petitioning would have. They petitioned for “peace, liberty and safety”—but a deaf ear was turned to the petition; tho conceived in terms of loyalty and respect.

THIS Colony was not alone in her complaints ; the others had just reason to be dissatisfied ; but the treatment that Massachusetts met with from the British, was alone sufficient to alarm the whole. The union among them was surprising, and an evidence of an overruling Providence.

It appeared then to the most discerning that the time was come to cast off allegiance and dependence upon the mother country ; and it appears now by the event, that it was the design of Providence that we should no longer be subject to Great Britain—INDEPENDENCE was declared.

CONGRESS in their declaration say, “ We hold these truths to be selfevident, that all men are created equal ; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights ; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness ; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed ; and that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute new governments, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall appear most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence indeed will dictate, that gov-

ernments long established should not to be changed for light and transient causes ; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing forms, to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their security." &c. And after enumerating the many grievances which led to the war and to the declaration of Independence, they conclude thus ; " We therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America, in general Congress assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the name of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, that these united Colonies are, and of a right ought to be, FREE and INDEPENDENT STATES : that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British crown, and that all political connections between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be totally dissolved." &c.

Thus was a nation born in a day. We have tried the experiment of a republican government,

now ~~about~~ 20 years, and are satisfied—there is no hankering after the leeks and onions of Egypt, i. e. after returning to our dependence upon Great Britain. We have the vanity to think and believe, that we can manage our own concerns, better than people can, who are 3000 miles distant from us.

We think it every way better to have Governors of our own choosing, and laws of our own making, than to have Governors and laws sent from England. And we have prospered so well under republicanisin, that other nations are following the example, and have cast off monarchical governments, and are proceeding upon the same plan. God prosper them, and in his time give all the nations of the earth liberty and good government!

THE revolution in America, in a political view, will prove to be the stone cut out of the mountain without hands, which will fill the whole earth.

THESE States are convinced of this truth, which Congress said is self evident, that all men are created equal. Is it not strange that nations have not discovered the same truth? How simple is the idea when known! Will not the nations

of the earth when they come to see it, be amazed at their former ignorance, and wonder that they so long passively bore the yoke of slavery?

WITH a great sum we bought our liberty—Independence has cost much blood and immense treasure. But I hear none murmuring, and wishing they had never opposed Great Britain.

BUT when we take a retrospect of our situation at the commencement of the war, we are ready to shudder at the dangers which are passed. The interposition of Providence in our favor was wonderful. That spirit of political enthusiasm, that spread over the continent, seemed at first to supply the place of every thing. The people were lead to believe that there was a sufficiency of powder even to act offensively, but the case was quite the reverse.

BUT by good providence, warlike stores of every kind were taken from the enemy, which, with what were manufactured among ourselves, proved fully adequate to our wants. The time will not admit of much more enlargement; but I cannot but remind you of the kind care and goodness of God in preparing and raising up a General to lead our armies "who united all hearts," and who was as much beloved, and as readily o-

beyed, as any one that ever commanded an army. He spared no pains—he shunned no dangers when his country called him—he was thorough proof against bribery and corruption—he served thro the war without wages, and God preserved his life and health through the whole.

WHERE is there to be found a parallel to General WASHINGTON? he is truly a wonderful man. His name alone amongst foreign nations gives dignity to the United States. May God raise up successors who shall do as worthily!

WHAT trying scenes had he to pass through with his armies! At what a low ebb at times were our affairs! You cannot have forgotten, you who were upon the stage, and a number of you are knowing by experience. But he, who began a good work, carried it on, until it was completed in the establishment of independence, and government upon the true principles of liberty.

AND what people before ever had such an opportunity, deliberately to form and establish their constitutions of government? It was a new thing under the sun. But the example has since been followed, by the French first, then the Poles, and lately the Dutch. But the constitution of Poland has been destroyed by that female tyrant

the Empress of Russia. May God speedily restore it again.

From the sketches I have given it is evident that we have much to remember with gratitude, and to acknowledge that God's works towards us have been wonderful, and they encourage us to set our hope in him. And we should tell them to our children, and give it in charge to them to tell their children; for independence, with the blessings accompanying it, is never to be forgotten; one great good of it is, freedom from European wars; while we were in subjection to Britain, all her enemies were of course our enemies.

God's goodness in making us a free people ought to unite our hearts to fear before him, all the days of our life. He has exalted us, and given us a rank amongst the nations.

If we would expect the continuance of our liberty and independence, we must keep his commands, for it is righteousness that exalteth a nation.

Wars will continue as long as the lusts of men war in their souls.—War is now raging among the nations; but we are happily at a great distance from it. May God preserve us in peace! But we must rejoice, with trembling, and not put

off the harness. The lusts of men make it necessary to learn the arts of war; to be in readiness for it, is the best way to prevent it.

MAY you, gentlemen officers, and citizen soldiers, acquire honor to yourselves by your officer and soldier like conduct! May you make progress in obtaining the knowledge of all the manœuvres that are necessary! We hope in God that you will never be called to jeopard your lives in the high places of the field; but should you be, may you willingly offer yourselves, and be of good courage, and play the man for your people and for the cities of your God! But if you always live in peace, forget not that you have spiritual enemies to combat. Then fight the good fight of faith; have on the whole armor of God, that you may conquer all your spiritual adversaries. Remember there is a war in which there is no discharge, I mean the war of death. If you become good soldiers of JESUS CHRIST, he will give you the victory, and enable you to sing that triumphant song, Oh Death, where is thy Sting; Oh Grave, where is thy Victory? This is addressed to every one, as we all have to accomplish this warfare.

At death the righteous enter into rest and peace, and enjoy the glorious liberties of the sons of God in perfection.

May we all finally be thus free and happy,
and sit down with ABRAHAM, ISAAC, JACOB, and
all the redeemed in Heaven, where there is no
sin, no wars nor fightings, no sorrow nor
death."

"Then let each one march boldly on,

"Press forward to the heavenly gate:

"There peace and joy eternal reign,

"And glittering robes for conquerors wait."

FINIS.

