

**CHRISTIAN PATRIOTISM :**

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**A SERMON,**

**ON OCCASION OF**


**THE**

**Death of John Adams, 1735-1826.**

**PREACHED**

**IN CHAUNCEY-PLACE, BOSTON,**

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BY  
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**MINISTER OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN BOSTON.**

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This sermon, prepared in extreme haste, is reluctantly yielded for publication to the request of many of its hearers, and respectfully dedicated to them by their friend and servant, the preacher.

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## CHRISTIAN PATRIOTISM.

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GENESIS XLIX. 29.

—BURY ME WITH MY FATHERS.

THE old patriarch Jacob, who had spent many of the best days of his life in exile, and was now finishing the poor remnant of it in a foreign country, turned his last thoughts towards the place of his birth. Circumstances had long ago made him a pilgrim to other lands, and a stranger in his own. He was now dying, of extreme age in one of the

pleasantest provinces of Egypt, but he was unwilling that his bones should rest in that distant spot. It might seem nothing to him whether the Nile or the Jordan was flowing before the eyes that would close in a few hours upon all earthly objects. Here he had every thing that could comfort his decline, and do honour to his grey hairs. Joseph, the royal favourite, was his son, and all his children were about him. But his heart went back to the past, to the scenes of his first love, to the home of a thousand endearing recollections, to the north country of Judea. The text is a part of his dying injunction to those whom he left behind. “I am to be gathered unto my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah. There they buried Abraham, and Sarah his wife ; there they buried Isaac, and Rebecca his wife ; and there I buried Leah.”

“Bury me with my fathers.” The feeling that dictated these words enters largely into the sentiment which we call patriotism. That sentiment is mainly dependent on early remembrances and habits ; it dwells on the hallowed names and services of individuals ; it is drawn towards our fathers’ deeds and sepulchres. Thus, the love of one’s country has its foundation in some of the first principles of human nature. It is connected with many of the secret, but ineffaceable impressions of the human heart. The Scriptures both of the Old and New Testament abound with fine examples of its spirit ; and though they nowhere enjoin it, they yet contain frequent indirect testimonies in its praise. The old prophets were the patriots of their times. The great prophet himself declared that he was sent peculiarly to the house of Israel, and he wept when he thought of its coming desolation. The sacred songs of the

Hebrews are eminently national. The fragments of their history offer us here and there the most beautiful expressions of attachment to the places in which they first drew their breath. Where, indeed, has there ever been a people of any cultivation, whose gifted men have not thrown out in eloquence and song those sentiments of this kind, which were felt and responded to by the humblest of their countrymen? Where was ever a generous and susceptible mind, that did not number among its warmest affections a fondness for its native land, cherishing many tender and sacred associations with the thought of it, and interested personally in its well-being?

There have been some, however, to deny that patriotism has any thing morally estimable in it. It ought not, they say, to be encouraged ; because it is a partial and narrow principle ; because it coun-

teracts that spirit of universal benevolence which we should endeavour to excite in men's hearts. It has even been mentioned among the high commendations of the Christian religion, and as an evidence of its divine origin, that it neither inculcates nor countenances a fictitious virtue, which is said to come of pride, to engender rivalries and hate, and to disunite by one strong passion more the different tribes of the earth. But fortunately we have here but a description of false patriotism ; the lessons of our holy faith are most at variance with this, while they recognize and sanction that which is true.

It is one of the glories of the gospel, one of the signs of its divine character, the proofs of its divine source, that it does not favour, but plainly opposes that exclusive and party feeling, which passes so freely in the world under the name of

love of country ;—which filled the Jew with detestation of the heathen, and the Greek with scorn of all other nations whom he called barbarian ;—which makes men boastful, and keeps them prejudiced ;—which spirits up unfriendly dispositions towards those who live under different institutions, or use a different speech ;—which perpetuates hostility between one people and another, and, because a mountain intervenes, or a river or a sea separates them, alienates them from good will and good offices. Christianity has come, not to loosen in any respect, but to strengthen in all, the bands of brotherly kindness, not to contract but to expand every generous sympathy of our nature. It does not present itself as the privilege of a nation or a class, but as the common friend of mankind. It does not found its promised happiness on social advantages or public prosperity, but on truth and holiness. It has in



view no political reforms, but only those of personal character ; no civil establishments, but the universal kingdom of God. If this were not its temper and scope, it manifestly could not have come down from the Father of all. The legislator, the teacher, the reformer, the Saviour of a race, could have had little to do with geographical lines, and national distinctions. Though he devoted his whole ministry “to his own, who received him not,” he yet lived and spoke for all. It was for him to dispense, with impartial hands, his light and his joy, the whole fulness of his blessings.

But there is a species of patriotism,—the true, —which finds itself nourished by the instructions, protected by the beneficent genius of the faith we profess. That faith commands us to think and

act for the general welfare ; to do good to all, but especially to those who are the nearest ; to be interested in whatever concerns the improvement and happiness of man, but chiefly in the scenes that surround us, in the objects on which we can most readily act, in the persons with whom we stand anywise connected ; not to be disheartened at dangers, nor reluctant at sacrifices, nor slow in endeavours, but to fulfil all the duties of the social state with a zealous devotedness, and at whatever cost. Does it not thus lay the foundation principles of genuine patriotism ? It would have us susceptible, grateful, thoughtful of times past, venerating the memory of the worthy men who rendered services to the community in former generations, and alive to its best interests in the generations that are to come after. Are not these the very affections, that kindle and keep alive the love of one's country ? When it en-

joins the duties of the citizen and encourages the worthiest sentiments of the man, does it not imply all that is needed to form the virtue of which I am speaking? It does, or we are only disputing about a name. For what is it to be patriotic? It is not to conceit that "we are the people," and there are none like us. It is not to give vent to a foolish exultation, as if no others have ever been so great, so enlightened, so free, so happy. It is not to be clamorous on political high days. It is not to canvass with swelling words for a vulgar popularity. It is not to abuse or despise the institutions of foreign countries, to cavil at their peculiarities, to turn over with satisfaction the darker leaves of their annals, and to eye their movements and manners with a jealous dislike. If it were this vapouring, turbulent propensity, nothing need be said to recommend it. Nothing could recommend it. It is as far below the standard of good morals

and an intelligent mind, as it is of the Christian faith. We might leave the defence of it, with its practice, to the violent, the uninformed and the designing. But it is in truth an entirely different thing. It is a rational love of the land, in which God has marked out the lot of our habitation, in which we first saw the light, by whose usages we have been formed, at whose bosom we have been nourished,—where our kindred and friends dwell, and where are the low dwellings of our fathers ;—a rational love of this land, not a blind partiality, or a heated fancy, or a proud pretension. It is a principle of attachment to it as our own. It is the feeling of well-wishers towards it, and the resolve to do the little that we can for its service,—by obeying its laws, by aiding its good establishments, by seeking, in all the ways by which we can contribute to them, its advancement and peace. Country is a relation, in which the

Almighty Providence places us ;—as truly so as family, occupation, friendship. Patriotism is faithfulness to that relation in heart and deed.—It can be no more than this. It can be no other than this. It is then a duty, as plain as the rest. It is not of a visionary character ; it is not a mere political excellence, but a moral obligation, under which a man is laid by the necessity of circumstances and the spirit that is in him.

Shall we be told, then, that this sentiment is not akin to the precepts of Christianity ? We might answer that the charge lies only against its counterfeits and abuses. Or shall we be told that it tends to narrow the compass of human benevolence, to thwart the gloriously Christian project of universal philanthropy ? We might answer, that it will rather serve to promote that great design, for it will expand instead of check-

ing all the kind affections. Those affections do, in the course of nature, spread from parts to the whole. It is through parts that they are exercised ; and their action must begin with what is palpable and near, and gradually reach out to what is abstract and distant.

“ Self-love but serves the virtuous mind to wake,  
 As the small pebble stirs the peaceful lake ;  
 The centre moved, a circle strait succeeds,  
 Another still and still another spreads ;  
 Friend, parent, neighbour, first it will embrace,  
 His country next, and next all human race ;  
 Wide and more wide, the o’erflowings of the mind  
 Take every creature in, of every kind.”

That metaphysical benevolence, which professes a general interest in God’s creatures, and yet passes over the most natural objects of regard, and makes no account of the obvious relations of society, is either a dream, or a deception. There



has never been so much heard of it as during the triumphs of a cold-hearted philosophy, and, in those wild times of political fanaticism, when the sweetest charities of life were trodden under foot.

We must advance from particulars to a great result. That which is the most perfect is the last to be produced. The good man must first win the qualities of a good son, a good friend, a good citizen, and these will lead him up to be worthy of that higher name. It is an inconceivable abuse of language to speak of the philanthropy of one, who is held by no moral ties to his brethren, and the community to which he belongs.

I have been led to speak on this topic by the death of an illustrious patriot, who joined to the noblest endowments of that character, the virtues that adorn common life. A champion of his

country, a student of religious truth and a devout friend of our religious institutions,—more than a patriarch to the tribes of our Israel,—we have “buried him with his fathers.” It is little to say that his memory is fresh in all our minds to-day. This great nation is doing it honour, as fast as the tidings can be conveyed that he has ceased from among us. A long posterity will treasure it up, and call it blessed. Such a wide-spread sensation, as is now making its way from border to border of our continent, has seldom attended the death of a private individual, retired long from the cares of state and the busy parade of life, with no titles but his services, no opulence but his worth, no power but his fame, and no honours to crown his head but those which ninety useful years had scattered upon it. We have no occasion to say one to another, with David at the funeral of Abner,—“Know ye not that a prince and a great man has



fallen in Israel?" Every one acknowledges it.— Every one feels that he had the nobility of desert, and that he was great among the sons of men, alike by what he achieved at first, and by the signal blessings that followed him to the day of his death like a reward and a manifest testimony from heaven. He is gathered to his people,—one of the last of a noble band, among whom he was a leader. There is no one left, to whose exertions this land is so deeply indebted for its independence. We look round on its free institutions, its growing strength, its multiplied resources, its all but miraculous spread and prosperity, and his venerable name is associated with all its glory.

Happy man ! to have been permitted to take a chief part in events that will never be forgotten. Happy ! to have been spared so long beyond the natural term of human life, that he might see the consequences of what he had accomplished, and hear the gratitude of millions breathing through

the shades of his retirement. Happy ! to have retained to the end the strong faculties of his mind, instead of exhibiting that most humiliating of spectacles, an imbecile and doting age settling down on a high spirit, as if in derision of a life of renown. Happy ! after the days of his political influence were long past, to look upon his own son at the head of the counsels of this mighty confederacy. Happy to his last breath ! to have given it up on the anniversary of his greatest work and triumph, the day of a whole nation's jubilee ;—to have given it up in such an hour, as if it had waited to be borne off on the acclamations of the people, and the festival fires of liberty.

His eulogy is in the hearts of his countrymen. I have no further tribute to pay to his memory, but that of silent admiration at his character, his actions, and his fortune.