

SERMON,

DELIVERED

AT

John A. Fur

CATSKILL,

On Thursday July 30, 1812.

BEING A DAY OF

Fasting, Humiliation and Prayer.

—*:*:*—
BY THE REV. PETRUS VAN VLIERDEN.
—*:*:*—

[TRANSLATED FROM THE DUTCH.]

Second Edition.

ALBANY:

PRINTED BY JESSE BUEL,
Store-Lane.

1813.

PREFACE.

THE author of the following Discourse composed it without any view to its publication.—A polite request made by some of the members of the Consistory in the Congregation of Catskill, immediately subsequent to the delivery, prevailed with him to send it out into the world. Without any material alteration of the sentiments, it is published as it was delivered. The person, who assisted in the translation, suggested the disadvantages in which the work would appear, if attempted to be clothed in an English dress. The author has no difficulty in admitting that the peculiar phraseology of the Dutch language, may have occasioned unavoidable inelegancies of style, which, he hopes a generous public will overlook. The work, as now translated, is committed to the blessing of God and the prayers of the pious.

PETRUS VAN VLIERDEN.

A SERMON, &c.

LUKE III. 9.

And now, also, the axe is laid unto the root of the trees ; every tree, therefore, which bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down and cast into the fire.

BELOVED BRETHREN,

ASSEMBLED (as we trust) in the name and fear of God, in deep humiliation, and with sentiments of soul adapted to this solemn occasion, Grace be to you and peace be multiplied.

In the preceding part of the chapter from which our text is taken, Luke the Evangelist gives us a description of John the Baptist, who, in his public ministrations, was the forerunner of the Messiah. First, he informs us when and in what manner the Prophet was divinely called and set apart in the wilderness, and then describes the particular service he was called to perform: It consisted “in preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.” This was the proper characteristic of the forerunner of the Messiah. It corresponded with the prediction recorded in the fortieth chapter of Isaiah, which, as it received its completion in John the Baptist, is here quoted by the Evangelist.

He further confirms what he had said concerning John the Baptist by the spirit and manner of his preaching. His discourses were delivered by way of exhortation and admonition. And how faithfully doth he administer reproof! He reprimands the Jews for their folly in flattering themselves that their “external privileges” would exempt them from threatened wrath. How powerfully doth he enforce his exhortation! He declares the nearness and certainty of a terrible judgment, which (without true repentance on their part) would overwhelm them with complete destruction: “and now, also, the axe is laid unto the roots of the tree. &c.

The expression of the text is metaphorical. It is borrowed from the manner in which fruitless trees of the vineyard are rooted out and cast into the fire. It represents the near approach of those terrible judgments, by which the Almighty would speedily bring on the wicked and ungrateful Jews a total and remediless ruin. This destruction was denounced by John the Baptist, for the purpose of impressing upon the minds of the multitude his earnest exhortation to a speedy reformation.

The suitableness of the subject to the present occasion will appear, if, in the first place, we illustrate the literal sense of the words; and, secondly, investigate the important matter contained in them.

1. The literal sense of the passage requires but little illustration. We know the dresser of a vineyard condemns the tree which, notwithstanding all his labor and the application of his fostering hands, uselessly cumbereth the ground. He demands its extirpation. He preconcerts the necessary means. His axe, the necessary tool to effect his design, he places at its root. The earth which conceals its root he carefully removes. The moment of extirpation draweth near. He hesitates not, but by vigorous strokes of his heavy instrument, he cuts the roots in sunder. The result is, the tree is deprived of its support, removed from its place, and doomed to the fire, as the award of unfruitfulness.

2. Having thus attended to the literal sense of the passage, we proceed to investigate the important matter it contains. And here we premise, that the Jewish nation, in their ecclesiastical and political state, are often compared to a vineyard. "My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill, and he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a wine-press therein—The vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant." (Isa. v.) God is the Lord or proprietor thereof, who in his conduct with mankind resembles the master of a vineyard. Those who abuse his mercies, by their unfruitful and un-

grateful lives, he condemns and extirpates. This awful procedure of the Almighty in the vineyard of Israel, the precursor of Jesus announces to the people, saying, "the axe is laid unto the root of the trees."

Let it also be previously observed, that the Almighty, as a good and faithful master, had furnished his vineyard, (the nation of the Jews) with whatever was necessary and useful to render it productive. Nevertheless, there were barren trees, which (seeing they were not worthy to occupy their place) he righteously concludes to fell and cast into the fire. And as his purposes are unchangeable, and cannot fail of execution, the Jewish nation are apprized, by the voice of the Prophet, that the preparatory measures were already taken to carry into certain effect the firm decree. This decree of certain desolation and ruin, which was already passed in heaven, and which the ingratitude of the nation had provoked, the Prophet expresses by the language of the text.

Trees, in the language of inspiration, are emblems of men; particularly those who excell in power and respectability; under the protection of whose name and authority, as under the shadow of extended trees, those of inferior rank and fortune retreat with safety. The godly man is, by the Psalmist, compared to "a tree planted by the rivers of water that bringing forth his fruit in his season, his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doth shall prosper." "His branches shall spread," saith the Prophet Hosea, "and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon.—They that dwell under his shadow shall return. They shall revive as the corn and grow as the vine." (Hosea xiv. 7.)

Wherefore, "these trees" must be viewed as emblematical of the Jewish people, and especially of the most respectable and powerful among them, who managed their religious and political concerns. Truly, they were as trees planted by God's own hands on Canaan's "faithful hills." From a small and contemptible beginning, as tender plants, they were reared up into trees whose aspiring tops were encircled by the clouds. By innumerable bles-

sings, favors and privileges, they became a great and respectable nation.

By the "root of the trees," we understand the foundation on which they stand, and the sources from which they derive their strength, firmness and growth. Here it must be emblematical of whatever contributed to the support and prosperity of the Jewish church and commonwealth. We refer to their worship with all its ceremonial rites as they were observed in the temple, and to their precious political institutions, established in conformity to divine injunction. To these the Prophet Isaiah seems to allude, when he says, (chap. v. 24) "Their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust, because they have cast away the law of the Lord of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy one of Israel." In fact, the city and temple of Jerusalem, their religious worship, and the Divine presence and superintendence, formed the very basis of their national existence. As long as these were preserved they were "a peculiar people." These were the "roots on which all their prosperity and strength, their beauty and their glory, rested. On these depended their safety and their danger, even as the standing or falling of a tree is attributable to the preservation or destruction of its roots. And surely, it argues nothing favorable to the Jewish church or political establishment, when we are taught, that "unto the root of the tree the axe is already laid."

The axe is an instrument the use of which may be traced to remote antiquity. It served for pruning, felling and extirpating trees. Once it was the armor of soldiers. Kings, also, were armed by it, instead of the sceptre. Among the Romans, the military axe was in use, which was enclosed in a truss of twigs, and was an emblem of the highest authority. Wherefore it may here be considered as emblematical of secular power, appointed to punish infractions of the law; and indeed of any instruments of desolation of whatever kind. Secular power is often, like this weapon of destruction, an instrument in the Almighty's hand of inflicting his vengeance on a sinful nation.

This is exemplified in the king of Assyria, to whom was transferred the very name of that destructive weapon of which we speak. He was the “axe which boasted itself against him who hewed therewith.” (Isa. x. 15.) But that instrument of desolation which is spoken of in the text, represents particularly the Roman empire, to which, in future, the Jewish nation should be compelled to bow. Is the axe a weapon whose efficacy depends on the action of a living agent? In the hand of God the empire of Rome was the axe of his vengeance to inflict on the Jewish nation the judgment threatened. Does the instrument serve to clear and root out? It was the purpose of God to employ the Roman people to subvert the commonwealth of the Jews, to exterminate fruitless professors of religion, and thus to purify the vineyard of his church. Is it a powerful weapon, by which may be inflicted the most tremendous strokes? It is a representation of those tremendous judgments which God would bring upon the Jews, by the imperial power of Rome, the dreadful instrument of his anger.

And for the accomplishment of this terrible purpose, the necessary arrangements were already made. “Now the axe is laid unto the root.” Hereby is signified, that the total subversion of the Jewish government would be speedily effected. Antecedently to this, the Almighty had indeed employed his instruments to prune and to dress the trees of his vineyard, and to lop off the luxuriant and fruitless boughs. By the preaching of his prophets; by means of the captivity of Babylon; by the instrumentality of Antiochus Epiphanes, and of Herod the Edomite, God had occasionally promoted their religious and political purity. But now, another “axe was laid unto the root of the tree”—the last and fatal stroke was now to be inflicted. The empire of Rome was to rise up against that people, and sap the very foundations of their republic. God would certainly deprive them of their city and temple, their religious worship and political power.—He would destroy all the sources of their national strength and glory. The root of their political tree was already un-

covered—Their city and temple were exposed to the assaults of the Romans. In the person of Pilate, the Roman governor, they had a clear indication that their liberty and safety were coming to a period. Nevertheless, by persevering in iniquity and unfruitful conversation, they were ripening more and more for ruin.

It must farther be observed, that in the text there is a very emphatical expression, which strongly denotes both the nearness and the certainty of that tremendous judgment. God was prepared to bring the affairs of that people to a full and complete termination, to destroy both “root and branch,” (according to Malachi iv. 1.) and to cut off their priests, scribes and rulers. These the Prophet had in view when he said (Mal. ii. 12) the Lord will cut off “the master and the scholar, out of the tabernacles of Jacob, and him that offereth an offering unto the Lord of Hosts.” The time approached, when “the Lord should cut off three shepherds in one month, because his soul loathed them, and their soul abhorred him. (Zach. xi. 8) The time of utter desolation was indeed nigh. Already the nation experienced the beginning of sorrows. Where was the glory of their commonwealth? They were already tributary to the Roman empire, subjugated under her yoke, and subjected to her laws. The great Sanhedrim, or supreme council of the nation, was little more than a putrifying carcase! And what was the condition of their church? In consequence of the contiguous position of the Roman castle, the holy temple was already at the mercy of the Romans; the priestly robe was at their disposal: they sold the sacerdotal dignity according to their pleasure.

The approach of awful desolation was as certain as it was near. This idea seems also to be conveyed by the phraseology of the passage. In the seventh verse preceding, the Baptist had denounced the Almighty's wrath. But how great the vanity of that devoted nation, to predicate the faintest hope of deliverance on the consideration that they had Abraham for their father!! This, however, as appears from the eighth verse, was the high prerogative of which they boasted. The Prophet, therefore,

declares, not only that this external privilege would prove unavailing, but even that their overthrow was a point already determined. The axe was already placed at the root of the tree, in order, with dreadful violence, to bring it prostrate on the ground.

Both the nearness and the certainty of the approaching calamity are further confirmed by the expression of the Baptist. He speaks not in the future tense, but in the present; (not that the axe shall be laid) “it is laid,” laid already unto the root of the tree. Already an angry God, in the execution of his purpose, was pouring out his wrath. It was, therefore, extremely necessary to the vigilant and cautious, in order, by sincere reformation, and a fruitful behavior, to avert the fatal stroke of heaven’s indignation. God was infinitely righteous. His judgments were extorted from him by the base unfruitfulness, ingratitude and manifold iniquities of that devoted nation.—The great Lord of the vineyard said, “cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground.” Still, Jesus, the compassionate Savior, could intercede and say, “Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: and if not then, after that thou shalt cut it down, (Luke xiii. 8). Repentance and reformation might still ensure deliverance. Without these, to escape was impossible: for, saith the Baptist, “every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire.”

With respect to this last proposition, we would remark, that an external profession of Christianity, however necessary and useful, was by no means deemed sufficient. Often it resembles the withered leaves, which before the season of fruit, fall to the earth. Neither would fair promises suffice. They are like the beautiful blossoms, which, not unfrequently, without producing any fruit, or answering our expectations, fade and wither, and terminate in nought. It is “good fruit” which the master of the vineyard demands; fruit of real excellence, meet for divine acceptance. By its essential properties it must be distinguished, not only from the vile, the bitter, the degenerate; but also from the deceitful sort, which is appa-

rently, but not really, good. The form of godliness is often possessed, while the power of it is denied. John the Baptist explains the good and necessary fruit. He says "bring forth fruit meet for repentance." Not the fruit which may be supposed to precede repentance, and render the sinner worthy to receive converting grace; but that which is the evidence and necessary consequence of sincere repentance, which corresponds with the nature and the unspeakable worth of that divine gift. That which is here required, is an indiscriminate loathing and avoiding of all unrighteousness; sincere faith in the Lord Jesus, as the only Saviour, in contempt of every other; evangelical affection for God in Christ, accompanied with a relish for all righteousness, true holiness and humble thankfulness.

Whosoever bringeth not forth such fruit; who fails to persevere in constant and reiterated exertions to promote his Master's glory; whose heart is not delightfully engaged in this blessed work; who does not with a voluntary mind employ all his skill in order to be "filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are, by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God; (Phil. i. 11) but, on the contrary, leads a pernicious life, by devoting himself to the pleasures of sin, and the gratification of the flesh, must abide the indignation which is here expressed, he shall be cut down and cast into the fire."

As the tree which is "rooted out" is removed entirely from its place, robbed of its vital juice, and consequently becomes withered and hard: So the calamities with which the Jewish nation are here threatened are most serious and alarming. That people shall be torn from their foundation, and driven from the blessed country of Canaan. Their habitation shall be wasted, and they shall be scattered among the heathen. This corresponds with the divine threatening recorded in Deut. xxxii. 26: "I said I would scatter them into corners, I would make the remembrance of them to cease among men." The Psalmist appeared to acquiesce in this righteous determination of heaven, when he said (Ps. lxxix. 28) "let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous." They

were to be deprived of all their “peculiar blessings” and prerogatives, and exposed to wretchedness, to famine, and other evils innumerable. Their kingdom was to be taken away and given unto others; and, which is the most deplorable of all, they were, in the just judgment of God, to be given up to an uncommon hardness and impenitence of heart. The expression in the text certainly conveys the idea of violence; and what can it represent but the power of the Divine anger, by which the work of destruction should be carried on, the thought whereof was sufficient to fill the mind with horror.

The unfruitful tree is not only “cut down,” but “cast into the fire.” Without interruption, or restoration, it is utterly consumed.—What can this denote, but a total and most terrible desolation? The fire of God’s wrath is conspicuous in all his desolating judgments.—It was displayed by that elemental fire which was destined to consume Nadab and Abihu, Sodom and Gomorrah; and it was in consequence of his burning wrath that the fire of war was at length to be kindled by the Romans in the midst of Judea. The expression farther denotes the fire of infernal punishment, which was to consummate the destruction of the impenitent and unbelieving Jews. That, through the boundless duration of eternity, shall, without interruption, continue to burn, and yet will never annihilate. Why is “fire” chosen to represent the calamity which threatened the Jews? Was not the metaphor intended to signify that the most intolerable misery, the most excruciating terrors and torments awaited them? torments similar to those of elemental fire!! And what can be meant by their being “cast into the fire,” but their actual suffering, their descent into the burning abyss, without the privilege of having “Abraham for their father,” and without the hope of restoration or relief!

The threatening under consideration extends to “every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit.” This is an evidence that God is no respecter of persons. He makes no difference between the small and the great, the high and the low, in the vineyard of Israel. He is determined to

recompense every one according to his works. In conformity to the rules of perfect justice, he determined to assign a due proportion of punishment to that unprofitable and ungrateful nation.

The tremendous judgment, denounced against every unfruitful tree, is the subject of an inference drawn from what was said in a former clause of the verse. The laying of the axe unto the root of the tree, was a prelude, a preparatory step, on which the terrible calamity must unquestionably follow. It was not in vain that the axe was placed at the root. God was not trifling with that unfruitful and ungrateful nation, when he threatened them.—Nevertheless, the threatening was confined to the fruitless tree. From this we may infer, that the fruitful one shall be preserved in the constant fruition of its benefits and privileges; nay, that the barren tree (afterwards bringing forth fruit) may yet be exempted from burning, though the axe be already placed at its root.

John the Baptist could not possibly have enforced his exhortation to a speedy repentance with more energy or success, than by urging the consideration contained in the text.

Finally, it demands our notice, how remarkably the prediction contained in the passage has been fulfilled! No person who is versed in the history of the Jews, will deny that the dreadful judgments with which the nation were threatened, have been fully inflicted.—Josephus, who was an eye witness of the calamities which befell the Jews, and whose credit as an historian is generally acknowledged, establishes the belief that in his day the last fatal stroke of Divine vengeance was inflicted by the power of Rome on the Jewish church and commonwealth. The tree was cut down and cast into the fire without root or branch remaining. Jerusalem, the metropolis of their country, where their civil concerns were transacted, and their temple where their religious worship was conducted, were given up to desolation and burning. The most horrible scenes of murder and destruction prevailed there.—According to the calculation of the Jewish historian, the

number cut off by violent deaths must have exceeded eleven hundred thousand souls. It is not surprising, therefore, that he describes the scenes of carnage and destruction, by declaring, that the streets of the city, on account of the dead bodies, were impassable; that human blood flowed in such abundance, that in many places it quenched the violence of the fire—fire and blood engaging (as it were) in conflict with each other.

In consequence of this desolation, the remnant of the nation, until the present day, are scattered over all the earth. As exiles, they wander abroad in strange and distant lands.—They have become an “astonishment and a proverb, and a bye-word among the nations.” “They still abide without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without a seraphim.” Nevertheless, this divine promise rests upon the nation: “they shall return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days” (Hosea iii. 5.)

We would now address you by way of improvement.—Contemplate, Brethren, the mournful situation of the Jews, on whom the Almighty threatened to inflict his righteous judgments; whose vineyard he hath accordingly destroyed; and whose civil and religious institutions he hath levelled with the dust, as the just reward of their fruitless conversation and base ingratitude. If we enter the American vineyard, and cast our eye over the United States, we will trace a resemblance between them and ancient Israel, particularly with respect to their original insignificance, and their subsequent respectability and greatness. How contemptible was the vineyard of America at the first settlement thereof! How small were its beginnings! Was it not a wild and trackless wilderness, “without form and void,” covered with rocks, hills and woods impervious! possessed by a race of beings, rude, barbarous and uncultivated as the country they inhabited! We mean the native tribes, a people entire strangers to all the arts and habits of civilization. No public edifices for the administration of justice: no buildings consecrated to the worship

of God; no regular systems of jurisprudence; no rational forms of religious worship, nor christian schools, nor any institutions of a similar description, were visible among them. Who could have anticipated the conversion of this wild and uncultivated wilderness into a vineyard, in which the Lord of hosts would take delight? Must it not have been more natural to suppose, that it would remain the "habitation of dragons, the hold of every foul and devouring beast." But the time was born, when, with respect to this wild wilderness, God would fulfil the prediction recorded in Isaiah (ch. xxxii. 15, 16) "the wilderness shall be a fruitful field, and righteousness shall dwell in the wilderness." For the conversion of these wild regions into a fruitful field, he employed very feeble instruments, that, "the excellency of the power might belong unto him." These instruments were men taken from distant lands, where the habits of civilized life, and the institutions of christianity prevailed. We refer particularly to Holland and Germany. Poor feeble men, without rank or riches! Such were the first emigrants. They were destined to narrow and contemptible habitations. They lived in huts and tents, "the labor of an hour." They resided among the rude barbarians, perpetually and fearfully exposed to assassination and death. The God of mercy, however, blessed their toils, and through their instrumentality converted the wilderness into the "land of Immanuel," "the vineyard of the Lord." From time to time he drove out the heathen before them. The extent of country which the first proprietors cultivated increased, and emigrations multiplied. The number of inhabitants increased, their dwellings became more convenient and numerous, and their situation, in many respects, more enlarged and eligible. The more contemptible our beginnings were, the more effectually should we be induced to reverence the hand of God. He hath planted our vineyard on a fruitful hill. From small beginnings, he hath, by his fostering hand, reared the tender plants and caused them to grow and rise like "cedars in Lebanon." He hath made us a great and respectable nation.

Contemplate the progress of our country to power and eminence, since the termination of that revolutionary struggle which gave us independence. No sooner were the forces of G. Britain, under the command of Cornwallis and Burgoyne, captured by our armies, than the American government rose to eminence and fame, and attained the glory of a free and independent nation. The independence of the country was soon acknowledged by foreign powers; and henceforth rivers of blessings flowed upon our nation from the pure fountain of Divine benignity. Is it not an unspeakable blessing that we have never been embroiled in the actual wars of different foreign nations, and till lately have enjoyed all the advantages of peace? Truly our deliverance was divine. The utmost prudence and circumspection often fail to keep aloof from such long and universal wars as have distressed the continent of Europe. Is it no blessing that we are possessed of an independent government—a government founded on a basis which hitherto nothing has been able to unsettle? Is it no blessing that the prosperity of all classes of citizens in our country has perpetually augmented! that the interests of commerce, navigation and agriculture have from time to time been extended? Is it no blessing that this wide and extensive country, even those mountains, hills and vallies which were apparently uninhabitable, have, from time to time, received new and increasing population? How many cities and towns, and how many thousand dwellings, have within a few years been built, and are still building, in our country! Is not the multiplication of seminaries for advancing the various branches of science, and the vast increase of mechanical inventions, to be regarded as a great national blessing? And finally, is it no blessing to live under the propitious smiles of an equal government? In the vineyard of America, the larger and taller trees are not permitted to injure those of inferior growth and eminence. Those of superior respectability and power are not allowed to oppress the common class, not even those of the lowest standing in society. Aliens, driven from distant

lands, may here obtain a safe asylum, as the land of liberty and plenty.

And with respect to the American Church—Has not the Great Proprietor of the vineyard successively sent forth faithful laborers therein? Their work is to plant and water, by publishing the gospel of salvation; to feed and nourish, by promises, exhortations and admonitions; to prune and purify, by the powerful application of gospel truth and Divine threatenings. Have not some tender plants, in different places and at different times, been inserted in this vineyard of our Lord? Have not some been born in our Zion, and by means of evangelical conversion been brought into communion with the Redeemer's Church? Have not such young and tender plants, by the kind influence of heaven, been made to "grow as the Palm-tree and to flourish like cedars in Lebanon." The Great Proprietor of the vineyard tolerated no spiritual tyranny nor compulsion here. He favored us with liberty of conscience, and permitted us, in our own way, to conduct the exercise of religious worship. He allowed no interruption or molestation of our religious privileges. Our temples were not destroyed, nor our sanctuaries defiled. There was none to disturb or make afraid in all God's holy mountain. We were permitted to animate each other, and say, "Come ye, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob." (Isa. ii. 3). Such are the invaluable rights and privileges, to which, notwithstanding their feeble and contemptible origin, the people of America have attained. Truly it was the hand of God that made them a great and respectable nation. He gave to them a "good land and a large." He dwelt in the midst of them by his Holy Spirit, by the word of his grace, and the holy seals of his covenant. He fixed on us the eye of tender pity and protection. His arm was our defence. "He created upon every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night, and upon all the glory thereof a strong defence." (Is. iv. 5.) Wherefore, with infinite propriety, he may say, "Judge, I pray you, be-

twixt me and my vineyard ; what could be done more to my vineyard that I have not done it." (Isa. v. 4.) Besides the benefits which we have enumerated, and which have been conferred on the nation at large, O how desirable that individuals and families would piously remember the particular blessings with which they have been so frequently favored, that thus individuals and families, and all the people of this favored land, might collectively, pour forth the voice of thank giving and joy to the praise of the exceeding riches of Divine Goodness.

But alas ! the woeful change I perceive in the aspect of America ! Instead of hearing the voice of joy, my eyes behold in her the aspect of grief ! Her countenance is changed, as tho' her heart were smitten by sudden and death-like terror ! Surely there is a cause ! Not only doth the word of inspiration teach, but a voice from the seat of government hath proclaimed, that " the axe is laid unto the root of the tree." War is publicly proclaimed against the crown of England. By this indeed the country of our enemy is threatened, but hereby also our own is endangered. At the root of the tree of Liberty, planted in our hemisphere, the weapon of destruction lies. My earnest prayer is, that by the overruling power and superintendence of Divine Providence, a happy adjustment of the differences between the two nations may be speedily effected. Without this, we have reason to apprehend that the drawn sword will devour the flesh of men, and " be drunk with the blood of the slain." The instrument of desolation is placed at the root of both the American Republic and the Kingdom of Britain. The " root," or basis, of the American government, is, her dearly purchased independence, her piety and virtue, her state governments, the confederative union of the several states, her flourishing commerce, and the like. And is the instrument of destruction placed at its root, by which the vengeful stroke may soon be given, and shall we not be alarmed at the " signs of the times !" How miserable will be the fate of Americans, when the very roots of their happy government shall be cut in sunder, her vital principles extin-

guished, her foundations torn away, her strength and beauty lost, and her existence "blotted out from under heaven." How soon may scenes of misery and desolation open to our view? Preparatory means are already devised and employed! Detachments of soldiery are already summoned to march to the "fields of battle and of blood."

Awful, Brethren, is the judgment which awaits the guilty: Every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. Terrible is our condemnation if we lead unfruitful lives. We have long been planted on a fruitful hill; long has our land been the habitation of peace and plenty; long have we been loaded with blessings and privileges innumerable. Would it, then, be surprising, if the Divine patience were at length exhausted; if our land should be swept by desolation, and "the places which know us now should know us no more for ever?" Would it be surprising if we were at length extirpated by violence, dispersed in foreign climes, robbed of our possessions, our rights and our liberties; if poverty and famine should meet us, hardness and impotence overtake us, and fit us only to feed the fire of war, and finally to burn in the abyss of unquenchable torment! No! In such a case the procedure of Divine Providence would not be extraordinary. Behold the fate of God's ancient covenant people. Take warning from the nations and countries of the East! How deplorably are they, by their recent and present wars, harassed, impoverished and consumed! Where, when, what shall the end of these things be! We, who are at a distance, hear and know but a small portion of their misery, but *they, they* actually suffer it and perish! O my native country! my native country! O the bitterness of my soul!

And why should we, more than *they*, be exempted from disaster? Are we more virtuous, more religious, more influenced by the love of God and man? No: God has the same reason to expostulate with us which he had with ancient Israel: "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner and the

ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider" (Isa. i. 23.) If then the Heavens should blacken with indignation against us, would there be unrighteousness with God! No: He is not unrighteous. Repeatedly has he chastised the people of America, but they "would none of his chastisements." Repeatedly hath he entered into his vineyard to dress and purify. Numerous already have been his warnings, his threatenings, and the strokes of his anger. Alas! The insensibility of our hearts! "To the Lord righteousness belongeth, but to us shame and confusion of face." God is just; but we and our people are wicked. We have abused his mercies, despised his forbearance, and trifled with all the threatenings and monitions of his providence. What declension of piety, what corruption of doctrine and morals, what licentiousness and luxury, do daily obtain ascendancy over our guilty nation! Were we to mention all the crying sins of our land, where should we begin, and where end? Pride, unconcern, extravagance, surfeiting, intemperance, lasciviousness, fornication, adultery, theft, rapine, murder, and other iniquities, have lost their criminal character, and appear no longer sinful. A Spanish arrogance, a Gallic ostentation and parade, a British thirst of dominion, and innumerable foreign customs and fashions, have prevailed over the morality, frugality, gravity and simplicity of our fathers. Where are now the sincerity and faith of our ancestors? Is it not a fact, that declarations and promises, oaths and covenants, are often insufficient pledges of fidelity? To deceive the ignorant and, oppress the indigent, is, with many, a matter of sport and pleasantry. What contemptuous expressions are often made with respect to the book of inspiration, the sacred seals of the covenant, and other institutions of the kingdom of heaven! What shameless indifference is evinced with regard to the public worship of God, as though it were a mere secular invention, intended as a restraint upon the ignorant and vulgar. How low the estimation in which we hold the free exercise of religious worship, under the auspices of a happy government—a privilege of which so many na-

tions are unfortunately destitute, and which, like Esau's birth-right, sorrowful deprivation only will teach us properly to prize. We have indeed some who resemble the godly Jehosephat, and the pious David. We have in the midst of us some priests of the Lord, and a holy seed, who are the pillars of church and state: but "who can wash his hands in innocence? Who can say, "I have cleansed my heart: I am innocent of the great transgression?" Have we not reason to say, "our princes are rebellious, our prophets have backsliden, the people is a wicked people, a people of great transgression, a seed of evil-doers?" Is this the fruit the vineyard of America yields to its divine Lord and proprietor, in return for his innumerable and undeserved blessings? Shame on thee, America—thy fruit is corrupt—it is bitterness to the taste—it is evidence of thy vile ingratitude. What hast thou to expect but the desolation of thy vineyard? Shall not thy trees be violently cut down and cast into unquenchable fire? Let not thy privileges flatter thee. External professions and promises, and a superficial morality, will not avail thee. The Master of the vineyard will not be satisfied with the foliage, the blossom and the untimely fruit thereof. Nothing but "fruit meet for repentance" can enable thee to fly from the wrath to come. External privileges, ungratefully abused, tend only to aggravate thy ruin.

What then? Must we, under the weight of Divine threatenings, sink into despair? Shall the horrors of war depress our spirits within us? No! At the helm of government we have discreet directors, provident statesmen, whom the Lord hath hitherto blessed for the preservation of our peace and rest; and the blood of our ancestors still flows in the veins of their present numerous progeny. Moreover, that which richly contributes to our own encouragement and hope, is the recollection of those tender mercies, that aid and deliverance, which the Almighty formerly bestowed. In the former American war, when we were vastly inferior in might and military skill, His arm interposed for our relief. His merciful providence hath also delivered us from the rage of that pestilence which,

best copy available

for a succession of years, in the cities of New-York, Philadelphia and New-Haven, effected such prodigious slaughter, that those populous towns were, by the death of many, and the flight of others from year to year, deprived of a large proportion of their inhabitants. Notwithstanding these, and other disastrous times, we are permitted at the present moment to say, "hitherto hath the Lord helped us." Why then may we not hope for Divine mercy and preservation still?

In order that we may build our hopes on good and solid grounds, it is absolutely necessary that we abjure the spirit of party, and with combined strength, as the citizens of a common country, and with warlike vigor, avail ourselves of those "weapons of warfare" which Providence hath placed in our hands.—We must also, without confidence in our own strength, take refuge in devotion, and fervently supplicate on our arms the blessing of the Lord: for "he is the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle." It is also requisite that the spirit of patriotism so nobly predominate in our breasts, that we cheerfully resign (if necessary) our blood and treasure in vindication of our dearly purchased political and religious freedom. But above all, it is required, that our iniquities excite repentance; that the blessings of heaven awaken our gratitude; and that impending judgments create unfeigned humiliation. These must terminate in our sincere conversion unto God, and a total reformation of our guilty and sinful lives. This is the "good fruit" which our Lord demands, and on account of which he had planted the vineyard of America. And O that the unspeakable price at which he purchased and planted it, might be expended in vain no longer, lest, at length, he consign us to endless desolation.

Ungodly and unprofitable mortals, who, hitherto, in vain have occupied the ground! strive with the Lord of the vineyard that he may make you fruitful in all good works. Revere his displeasure; justify his judgments; acknowledge your transgressions whereby you have transgressed against the Lord your God; confess that guilt by which

you have merited the calamities which an angry God prepares to inflict; exercise a holy penitential shame, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God. O that you had known, even in this your day, the things which belong unto your peace! Break off your sins by righteousness. Seek the Redeemer Jesus. Sue for reconciliation by his blood, and turn to the Lord with all your heart. "Take with you words and turn unto the Lord. Say unto him, take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips" (Hosea xiv. 2.)

Who knows but God may turn, and repent of the evil he thought to do unto you. Bring forth fruit meet for repentance, and there is ground on which you may build the hope of deliverance, though "the axe be already platted at the root of the tree." The instrument of punishment is in the hand of a merciful and sin-forgiving God, who may yet defer the final fatal stroke. "Let then the wicked man forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and turn to the Lord, for he will have mercy, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

And O ye righteous! Contemplate the mighty deeds of the Lord of hosts. Behold and tremble. Your iniquities, also, have provoked the Holy One of Israel to anger. Your lives also have been too unprofitable. Let this consideration fill you with holy and humble shame, and operate within you the deepest humiliation. Remember, also, that for the sake of a few righteous men, a country may be saved. This is evident from the case of Sodom. But as the axe is laid unto the root of the tree, and total extirpation and destruction are threatened, it becomes you to be very thoughtful and diligent. By being more fruitful in all good works, seek to promote the preservation, and prevent the destruction of your country. Forget not the tender mercies of the Lord. Give glory to his name. It is only the fruitless tree which God has threatened. Therefore, whatever be our country's fate, those who lead holy and profitable lives, will not be ultimately included in the general destruction. "All things shall work together for good to them that love God, who are the called according to his purpose." Pray ye for the prosperity of the American church and nation, for the rulers and inhabitants of this land. Pray, also, for the peace of Jerusalem. Then shall God "be with us and bless us." "He will cause us to dwell in peaceable habitations, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places." With the language of God himself, by which he offers to penitent transgressors pardon and deliverance, we conclude this discourse (II. Chron. vii. 14) "If my people which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." AMEN.