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**AN OUTLINE**

**OF THE**

**POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE BIBLE.**

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**A SERMON,**

**DELIVERED IN THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF OXFORD,  
ON THE ANNUAL THANKSGIVING DAY OF THE STATE  
OF OHIO, DECEMBER 14th, 1837,**

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## A SERMON.

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ACTS xiv. 17—Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.

PSALM lxxv. 11—Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness.

THESE two passages present very distinctly, one of the distinguishing differences betwixt the situation of the people of a heathen and of a christian land. In the one passage, the people of Laconia appear to have known and felt that they were indebted to some Superior Being, for all the mercies which they were daily enjoying. But they had no accurate conception of the nature and character of that Being. Yet they had hearts overflowing with gratitude, and were ready to express their gratitude in the form of worship to the men, through whom they had received a particular favor. "The gods, said they, are come down to us in the likeness of men. Then the priests of Jupiter brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people." But the faithful and self-denying missionaries of the Cross, refused to take any advantage of their ignorance and good feeling, and turned their attention directly to the proper Object of all worship,—the never-failing Source of all good. "Why, said they, do you propose to do these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you, that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and sea, and all things that are therein: Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." Acts xiv. 15, 16, 17.

The other passage is a part of the stated public worship of the Old Testament Church, and is given and preserved by the Spirit of Inspiration, to be the authority and directory of public and private worship till the end of time. "Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it. Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly: thou settlest the furrows thereof: thou makest it soft with showers: thou blessest the *springing* thereof. Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness. They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness: and the little hills rejoice on every side. The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing." Psalm lxxv. 9—13.

The BIBLE is a wonderful book. Could man only know it, he would find it in all things exactly adapted to his nature and present state. It presents almost in every page, the very objects upon which the hearts and the plans of worldly men are continually set; and directs them how to acquire and enjoy them. They are all the good things of this life. Fruitful fields, thriving stock of every kind, numerous and healthy children. And it encourages us, and commands us, to bring these earthly objects and make them the subject of our meditation in the house of God,—and even at the communion table, and connect them with all our devotions.

Let us then at this time, look at some of the many good things of this earth; and let us now, and if possible, ever afterwards, consider them as they are invariably presented to us in the Bible. Good things—exceedingly good and desirable things—made and given to man for his enjoyment,—not indeed his portion or inheritance, but as one of the many links in the great golden chain, which ought at all times, to bind the heart of every man to the throne of God.

1. Let us look at the great variety of the productions of the earth. Survey your gardens. What varieties of roots, and vines, and plants, and berries, &c. are upon a few square yards of surface. Look at your orchards. How many different

kinds of apples, and peaches, and pears, and cherries! Look abroad upon your fields, from the beginning of harvest till the last week of corn gathering. What crops of rye, and wheat, and barley, and oats, and corn, are every where presented to the eye! And these are only a small portion of the earth's productions, for the benefit and the support of the creature, Man. He is lord also of the fowl, and the fish, and the cattle, wild and tame. He finds every distinct species of vegetable and animal possessing some distinct and specific qualities, which are adapted to his infinitely-various and ever-changing wants and desires and situation.

Nor is your range of observation on this part of the subject, to be confined to the limits of your visible horizon,—nor even to the small extent of the surface of the earth, which you may have personally travelled over. Man was at his creation, the lord of the whole globe,—land and water—continents and islands; and lord of the productions of all. And not only every element, such as land and water and air, but every latitude and climate, has some varieties of productions peculiar to itself; and while this vegetable and this animal—this species of fish or fowl—is to be found in its natural and perfect state, only in its particular situation, MAN, as lord of all, takes up his residence any where, and is comfortable, and fully develops all the powers of his mind and his body, every where,—and in the present improved state of society, and of commercial intercourse, can enjoy the productions of every portion of land or water or atmosphere, at any particular spot, or at any particular time, at which and from which he may issue his command. Consider, for instance, what a variety of food and of furniture, is presented to our appetites and tastes and different states of body and mind, at one of our ordinary breakfast or dinner tables. See also, the man and the family under the equator, enjoying as a luxury, the native productions of the polar regions; and, *vice versa*, see the man and the tribe within the arctic circle, revelling upon the productions of the tropics.

2. Let us look at the abundance of all these various productions. In each of them, the principle of multiplication or

increase, is literally infinite. One single grain, or one single root, or one single scion or bud, or one single pair of any kind of animals, may, in a given time, and that a very short period, be made to fill any given space. Hear the original charter: "And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit-tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good." Gen. i. 11, 12. "And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth." v. 20, 21, and 22. "And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so." v. 24. Once more; "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." v. 26, 27, 28.

3. Let us attend to the simple, but extensive and permanent arrangement by which the continuance of all these and similar productions, is secured. Generation after generation of vegetables, and of the lower animals, and of man, has passed away. Cities, and castles, and towers, and palaces, and highways, and bridges, and other monuments of human greatness, which in

the days of their splendor, were styled eternal, have for ages been in ruins. Empires, which counted their years of prosperity by the thousand, are known no more. Extensive and efficient plans and modes of doing business, and of applying human power, which for generations outlived the names of their authors and projectors, have become inefficient and are forgotten. But the sun and the moon and the stars stand in the same relation to one another, and have the same kinds of influence upon our atmosphere and upon our earth, at this hour that they had at the beginning—five thousand years ago. The crops of 1837 have been substantially the same all over the globe, that they were in the days of Adam, and of Moses, and of Julius Cæsar, and of our grandfathers. No part of this extensive and efficient arrangement has ever been out of order. Thus sings the Psalmist: “Forever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven. Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth. They continue this day according to thine ordinances: for all are thy servants.”

Terms, it is true, equivalent to our words famine and scarcity, are in all languages; and every generation in every district have occasionally known and felt their meaning; but universal famine or even general scarcity never was known. In our own country, for instance, if one kind of crop fail, or be but scanty, another kind and coming to perfection at another period of the year, is generally abundant. If the rain or the dew or the heat are partially withheld, from this or the other township, during a certain portion of the year, they are almost invariably bestowed in abundance on the adjoining township or county. And so it has been all the world over and in every generation. Nor ought we in this connexion to pass over the prominent fact—that times of scarcity of food for man or beast, are very often, if not always, preceded or followed by seasons of more than ordinary abundance. It was so in the days of Joseph, and it has been so more or less in the experience of every farmer and of every master of stock, again and again, in the course of every life of ordinary length.

“Nevertheless,” says the Apostle preaching to heathens, “he left himself not without a witness that he was good.”

**NEVERTHELESS**—though the human family nearly all the world over, had for generations and ages forgotten him and were giving their homage to those who by nature were no gods—**NEVERTHELESS**, he continued to give them “rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filled their hearts with food and gladness.”

Much more may it be said of many in Christian lands, and of many who are proud in bearing the Christian name—**NEVERTHELESS**, though they have forgotten their dependance upon him—though they have been sacrificing to their own net and their own drag, and saying by our own hand and by our wisdom we have gotten us all this wealth—though year after year, they and their families once and again and a third time every day eat and drink abundantly of the good things of this earth, with as little devotion and as little sense of their dependance upon the God who made them, as their own oxen have, while feeding in the adjoining stalls—*notwithstanding of all this continual neglect and ingratitude and abuse of good things*, he has not left himself without a witness that he is good, but has continued to give to believers and unbelievers, to professors and non-professors, “rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness.”

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A very slight review of the facts thus stated or referred to, will lead every reflecting mind to the following important conclusion, viz—that there has in all ages, in all generations, and at all times, been enough of the good things of this life to supply all the wants of every individual of the human family; and that all the distress and anxiety connected with poverty, or the fear of want, which ever has been or now is, have been and are the result of some great mismanagement on the part of man himself. The Father and Protector of all has given to his creature man, a rich inheritance, and it has year after year been inconceivably productive. Every year from the beginning has been crowned with God’s goodness, and all his paths have been dropping down fatness.

To confirm or illustrate this proposition still further, you may, if you please,

1. Fix your eyes upon any given portion of the surface of the earth—Oxford township, or Butler county, for instance—and say if there is not at this time, a large abundance for the full supply of all the wants of every individual residing in that district. And in this way, you may travel round the globe; and all the differences betwixt one district and another in this respect, will be that some will be a little larger than others. A county, for instance, in which such a city as Cincinnati stands, does not in any one year furnish food for all the inhabitants; but then the adjoining counties, and these at no great distance, and of easy access, have the necessary surplus. Add to this,

2. That as yet but very small portions of the surface of the earth, and that at great distances from one another, have been cultivated and improved to any thing like the extent to which they are capable. The maximum of the earth's increase is in fact, as yet utterly unknown.

Yet notwithstanding all this abundance, poverty and the fear of want abound and have abounded more or less in every generation and in all lands. In our own rich and fruitful and rapidly improving State of Ohio, thousands are at this hour in this situation. How has this happened? and what is the remedy? These are the two great questions which the modern science of Political Economy proposes to answer. Let us at this time look into the Bible, and see what information on these important subjects, it affords.

The great and leading proposition, which runs through the Bible on this subject, is—That poverty and want and all the anxiety and labor connected with these, are the results and concomitants of sin.—That it was only when man threw off the authority of God, and attempted to gratify his appetites and secure his happiness by schemes and devices of his own, in opposition to the declared will of his Maker, that the ground, and all its productions, and the labor of man, were laid under the curse. And the counterpart of this proposition is—that the plan of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, revealed



only in the Bible, proposes to deliver man and this earth and all its productions, from the curse—and to restore man and all that belongs to the earth, to their original state of purity and fulness and happiness.

Let us glance at some of the details in this great and comprehensive plan. And,

1. We have been taught from our infancy to say every day, Heavenly Father, give us day by day, and this day particularly, our daily bread. Do we know the meaning and the value of this prayer? A child has full confidence in the good will and ability of its father. The child knows nothing of the cares and anxieties and labor of the father and mother. All that it knows is, that if it is good and obedient, it will at the appointed hour, receive from the hands of its father or mother its daily food in abundance. Now, it is thus that those who are redeemed and made partakers of a new nature, if they act any way in character, live day after day and year after year. See more fully on this subject, Ps. xxiv. 6—22. Matth. vi. 24—34. Ps. cxii. 1—10. cxliv. 12—15. and Ps. cxlv. 13—21.

There is certainly a meaning in these passages; and that they all refer directly to temporal mercies—to the manner in which the good things of this life are enjoyed, or may be enjoyed by those who are reconciled to God, is very evident. These and similar passages are certainly misapplied, when they are so explained as to mean chiefly spiritual mercies.

2. Whether it is generally known or not, this subject is again and again brought up in the Bible, not as a mere doctrinal subject, or a mere theory or speculation, but as a solid matter-of-fact. Nay as a matter confirmed and put to rest by a long series of facts and experiments. The Creator and Governor of the heavens and of the earth, has been faithful in carrying out his purposes of mercy to our apostate race; and example after example of the efficiency of the system, is found in every page of the Bible, and in every period in the history of the church of God. Poverty, or the fear of want, is no where in the Bible represented as a blessing. They are every where represented as a curse. They are no where represented as concomitants of pardon and reconciliation and progressive sanctifica-

tion: but they are every where represented as the results and concomitants of sin and depravity and rebellion. Hence temporal prosperity and the full enjoyment of the good things of this life, are uniformly in the historical portions of the Bible, noticed as having been bestowed upon God's people, in proportion to their faith and piety and unreserved obedience to his authority. The details in the lives of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph and Moses and David and Daniel, and his companions, may be studied in proof and illustration of this position.

But farther—God has in the history of the Jewish nation, made the matter clear as day. That nation through the whole of the old Testament dispensation, held their land and their civil as well as their religious privileges, upon the sole tenor of unreserved obedience to Divine authority. To go into details here, would require a series of discourses. You may therefore consult at your leisure the xxviiiith chap. of Deuteronomy, the whole of the book of Judges, the reigns of the good and the bad kings, in the books of Kings and Chronicles, the xxivth chap. of Jeremiah, and the ixth and xth chapters of Nehemiah.

The Psalmist says, "I have been young, and now I am old; yet have I never seen the righteous forsaken or his seed begging bread." Nor has any other man, either righteous or wicked, in any land, or generation, or in any state of society, seen any result of a different character. Cases which may be brought up as exceptions, will be found on examination, only to confirm the rule; and any doubts or objections connected with any of these, may be safely resolved into our own ignorance, and left to be explained in the great day when the secrets of every heart, and the genuine state and character of every man, will be fully unfolded. The general principles of Jehovah's moral government of man and of nations, are as stable and uniform, though of a very different character, as the general principles upon which the sun and the moon and the stars diffuse their influence through our atmosphere upon our earth.

3. All the doctrines and all the institutions of the Bible, are in their nature, remarkably well adapted to direct men and to form their character with respect to the right and profitable use of the goods things of this life.

The great and leading moral precepts of the Bible, have evidently this tendency. Thou shalt not kill—nor steal—nor commit adultery—nor bear false witness—nor covet any thing that is thy neighbor's,—are precepts of universal and daily application—all having a direct reference to the requiring and using of property, and all striking at once at the root and source of all the abuses which ever have existed respecting the holding and management of property, in all the numerous and various ramifications of society.

The Bible also every where brings up the common sense maxim, that the command of a thing and the enjoyment of a thing, are two very different things, and frequently do not coincide. A man may command a large and a great variety of the good things of this life, and yet have little or no enjoyment. "When goods increase," says the wise man, Ecc. v. 11, 12, "they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes? The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep." See also to the same purpose, Prov. xxx. 7—8, 1 Tim vi. 7—10, James iv. 13, 14.

A friend who it is believed is still alive, and who has been remarkably active and prosperous in the world,—who has farms and mills and shares to a considerable amount in some of the most productive speculations of the day, and who is supposed to be worth at least half a million of dollars, was one evening talking over with another friend, some of the details and results, and flattering prospects connected with his ordinary business, and closed by putting the question—"Now, Mr. W——, would you oversee and manage and assume all the responsibility connected with these concerns, for your bare food and clothing?" "I would not," was the reply. "Well," says the other, "that is all I have, and all I can expect to have, from the whole." You may see a similar case stated upon better authority, and acted out upon a larger scale, with the same results, in the iid chapter of Ecclesiastes.

All church associations, particularly if they are, as they are in this country, voluntary, are in their nature and in all their opera-

tions, extremely favorable to the equal distribution and right use of the productions of the earth. The amusements and the vices and many of the modes of living, which all acknowledge to be inconsistent with the Christian character, though not inconsistent with a respectable standing in what is called good society, are all in their nature and tendency, destructive of the comfortable enjoyment of the good things of this life. In the whole history of the settlement of these United States, very few instances, if any, can be produced where a city, or a neighborhood, or even a village, has been allowed to be in a thriving, prosperous state, till one or more churches were organized and exerting their influence upon the old and the young. Take the influence of christian institutions, this day, wholly from our population, and there is not a man of any reflection or experience, who would not be filled with horror at our prospects, with respect to the holding and enjoying of property.

The man who experimentally understands and feels God's plan of salvation, holds and uses the good things of this life from higher and more elevating principles, than any with which the mere man of earth is acquainted. Even the bread and the water of the redeemed man is intimately connected with a sense of pardon and acceptance and eternal glory. He holds and uses his share of the good things of life of whatever kind, or of whatever amount they may be, not as his portion—not as his all—not as his own—not as depending upon contingencies; but as a trust committed to him under the security and control of the Lord and Master of all—as the means by which he is, in the present state of existence, to serve the God who gave his Son to die for him—as a continued evidence of his being at all times and under all circumstances, under the protection of his Heavenly Father—and as an earnest of his being in due time prepared to enter into the full possession of that inheritance which is incorruptible and undefiled and that passeth not away. See more fully, Ps. xxxvii. Heb. xi. 24—40, 2 Pet. i. 4—9.

But of all the institutions of the Bible, the SABBATH, and the peculiar and appropriate exercises of the Sabbath, hold the most distinguished place. All men and in all lands—young and

old—high and low—rich and poor—and all the laboring domestic animals, by the very constitution of their nature, need the bodily rest of the Sabbath. The intellectual and moral and religious instructions of the Sabbath, are of still higher importance to every man and woman and child, as individuals and as members of society. And the domestic enjoyments and sociabilities of a properly kept Sabbath day, in a rising and numerous family, exceed all our conceptions of enjoyment of things on earth or of things in Heaven below the enjoyment of angels and the spirits of just men made perfect, spending and enjoying an eternal Sabbath in the immediate presence of Him, with whom there is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures evermore. Nor is there any great difficulty in establishing from a few acknowledged general principles, and from well authenticated facts, almost without number, that six days' regular and moderate labor, with the seventh day regularly as a day of rest and refreshment, is of far more value to the laborer and to the employer, in the course of one year, and much more in the course of seven years, or during the space of an ordinary lifetime, than to labor through the whole year incessantly without any thing like the rest and enjoyment of the Sabbath. And what holds true in cases of this kind, of one individual or of one family, will hold equally true with respect to a nation and with respect to the great family of nations. All circumstances duly considered, there is in fact perhaps no one thing more destructive to the wealth and to the efficient force of any community, than the neglect of Sabbath sanctification.

One thought more on this part of the subject; and let it be made the connecting and binding link of the whole argument. The man who studies the Bible on this or on any other subject, will find and feel, that there is a clearness, and a precision, and a force, and an authority, in the statements of the doctrines and facts of the Bible, and particularly in presenting the motives to action, from reward or penalty, that as much excel the most correct and lucid statements and deductions, in the very best systems of merely human science, as the light of the sun, and the thunders of the heavens, and the movements of the

Ocean, and the order and the harmony and the efficiency of all the operations of nature, excel the most extensive and the most splendid exhibitions of human wisdom and human power.

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May I now request my reflecting readers or hearers to pause a little, and review the principles and facts stated or referred to, respecting the natural tendencies of the doctrines and institutions of the Bible; and while he reviews them, let him find for himself some additional facts from the Bible, or from his own observation and experience, and then let him ask, What would be the character and situation of society, with respect to the enjoyment of the good things of this life, were these Bible principles and Bible institutions universally enjoyed and universally felt?

1. Injustice, and oppression and fraud, and indolence, and want of foresight and economy, and every species of dissipation and waste, would cease to be known in private life, and the opposite of all these would form the habitual character of almost every man and woman and child.

2. All preparations for war, whether in the form of peace or war establishments, among the nations of the earth, would be unnecessary. Hence all the physical force and wealth and intellectual talent, which has been and now is consumed in unproductive and destructive military operations, would be devoted to productive and profitable labor.

3. All that we call crime in civil society, would be in a great measure unknown. Hence nearly all the expense of legislation and of judicial investigations and decisions, connected with the criminal code of any nation, and all the private losses and sufferings resulting from crime, would be saved for the use of the community, to be applied by individuals or by government, to the productive labor of opening up and making the right use of the natural resources of the country.

No man can calculate the amount of wealth and of happiness, which would be commanded and enjoyed by nations and by families and by individuals under such a state of things.

But, my friends, you know that the Bible again and again announces in the most express terms, that a period shall arrive in the history of man on earth, when something like this shall be actually realized all over the globe. Nor can such a desirable state of things appear either impossible or improbable to any man who shall for himself either carefully examine how the institutions and doctrines of the Bible have been preserved and have had influence during the generations and ages that are past—or who shall attend to the present state of the world—or who shall with the humble believer, take Jehovah at his word, and rest secure and confident that Jehovah's great plan respecting our earth, shall without doubt be fully accomplished. In this confidence, the church has long sung and prayed, as you also may do, in the words of the lxxiid and ciid psalms. Or you may open your Bibles and read the prophetic description of the ultimate triumph of the Redeemer in the xixth chapter of the book of Revelation.