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REV. DANIEL DANA'S

ANNUAL ELECTION SERMON.

A
S E R M O N

DELIVERED AT THE
A N N U A L E L E C T I O N

ON WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 4, 1837,

BEFORE

HIS EXCELLENCY EDWARD EVERETT,

GOVERNOR,

HIS HONOR GEORGE HULL,

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR,

THE HONORABLE COUNCIL,

AND

THE LEGISLATURE OF MASSACHUSETTS.

BY DANIEL DANA, D D.

^{VA}
Pastor of a Church in Newburyport.

Boston:

DUTTON AND WENTWORTH, PRINTERS TO THE STATE.

.....
1837.

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Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

IN SENATE, JANUARY 5, 1837.

Ordered, That Messrs. KIMBALL, CHILDS, and H. WILLIAMS, be a Committee to present the thanks of the Senate to the Rev. DANIEL DANA, D. D. for the discourse yesterday delivered by him before the Government of the Commonwealth, and to request a copy for publication.

Attest,

CHA'S CALHOUN, *Clerk*.

S E R M O N .

Revelation, xxii. 2.

AND THE LEAVES OF THE TREE WERE FOR THE HEALING OF THE NATIONS.

THIS is a great and auspicious day. It beholds the Fathers of the Commonwealth assembled to exercise its sovereign powers ; to devise the means to perpetuate its liberties, and promote its order, and its happiness. It sees them bending before the throne of the Supreme Being, in grateful acknowledgment of his past protection and beneficence, and in humble supplication for his continued guidance and care. No attitude could be more suitable. None more truly dignified. Where is the community on which the sun looks down, equally pressed with the delightful debt of gratitude, as ours ? Where is the community distinguished by the Almighty Governor of the world, with such an immense aggregate of privileges ?—privileges to be continued and extended by his favor, or blighted and lost by his frown.

Does the question arise ; How may the first of these issues be secured, and the other averted ? This question has already received its response from the HEAVENLY ORACLE. The passage which has been recited, points, indeed, directly at the spiritual and immortal salvation of man ; and this, as effected by the religion of Christ. Still, as this religion, the only hope of man for eternity, looks with the kindest aspect on his present state of being ; since it sheds an influence not less benign on his social and political, than his individual condition, I shall be permitted, on the present occasion, to consider the subject principally in this view.

I invite, then, the attention of my respected audience, to RELIGION, AS THE SUPREME BLESSING OF COMMUNITIES ; as the most powerful of all agents in effecting their best prosperity, and in eradicating or controlling the evils to which they are liable. The discussion, though somewhat general in its aspect, will keep in particular view our own Commonwealth and Country.

In contemplating the elements of national prosperity, we pay a first and marked attention to *liberty* ; a theme ever grateful to the sons of the pilgrims ; and never uninteresting to the members of the only genuine republic on earth. Whether civil and political liberty is a blessing attainable by man, or

only one of those splendid illusions destined to mock his hopes with disappointment, is considered by many as a problem yet unsolved. By many, the experiment which our own country has been making, for somewhat more than half a century, is considered as promising the long desired solution. One thing is certain. That liberty which frequently bears the name, is a thing neither practicable nor desirable. I mean a liberty consisting in the absence of all restraint, and the contempt of all control. No such curse as this has all-bounteous Heaven ever designed to inflict on the human family. No evil more unmitigated, and more intense, could be emitted to our earth from the very regions of despair. Man was not born to be independent, either of his Maker, or his fellow beings. Nations were not created to be independent, either of the Sovereign of the world, or of one another. The genuine happiness, and the genuine liberty of all finite beings depends on a portion of restraint. Who that has entered a family, governed with a due mixture of kindness and energy, has failed to perceive the fact, in the calm and happy countenances of its members? Who that has entered a school, misgoverned and insubordinate, has not found its pupils as far from enjoyment, as from peace and decorum?

We believe there is a liberty in communities and states, which is rational, chastened, guarded, salutary and practicable; a liberty the nurse of genius; the parent of great designs, and noble enterprises; the friend of order, of justice and humanity. We trust in God, that a liberty of this exalted character is yet to diffuse its nameless and exuberant blessings throughout the globe. And where is the patriot bosom which does not beat with intense desire that, on this subject, America may become the instructress of the world; that her original and successful experiment may every where send terror to the hearts of tyrants, and hope and joy to subjugated and despairing nations?

Yes; we will cherish this inspiring hope. But for its accomplishment, we look, as we frankly confess, not to the boasted perfectibility of man; not to the dreams of philosophers, nor to the sanguine and plausible calculations of politicians. We do not look to the great modern discovery of the doctrine of *checks and balances*; a discovery of which, with all its pretensions, and all its real merits, it may be too truly said, that, like many other discoveries, it has performed materially less than it promised. Nor do we look, for the consummation in view, to the superior general illumination of the present age, or of ages to come. All observation, all experience, all

history prove to demonstration, how feeble is the resistance made by mere knowledge, to the progress of moral corruption; that corruption which is death, inevitable death, to the liberties of any people. If any of the nations of the ancient world may be pronounced free, they were the republics of Greece and Rome. And when did these boasted republics lose their liberties? At the very period when their improvements in art, in science, in eloquence, in the splendors and luxuries of living, rendered them the gaze and admiration of the world.

If, in New England, and in these United States, the experiment of liberty has been hitherto more successful, we know the cause. The settlement of New England was a religious settlement. The United States are a Christian nation. Through the length and breadth of our country, are enjoyed, in a greater or less degree, the instructions and ordinances of that gospel which teaches man to *govern himself*, and thus renders him fit to be trusted with a generous portion of civil and political liberty. Christianity is the only religion which the world has yet seen, which renders it at once *practicable* and *safe* for a people to be free. Laying all men prostrate on one common level, as sinners; proffering to them all a part in one common and great salvation, and summoning them all to one common

bar of impartial judgment, and eternal retribution, it inculcates a species of universal equality. It teaches, at least, that all secular and civil distinctions are mere trifles, compared with the relation in which every member of the community stands to God, and to eternity. Thus it prepares the way for as equal a participation of rights and privileges, as reason demands, or the case admits. In the mean time, it eminently favors the *preservation* of liberty. It reminds every member of the community that his civil privileges are a sacred trust, involving a high responsibility, and succeeded by a solemn account. It presents him, in every step of his path, with a holy and all-surrounding Deity. It occupies the mind with great and ennobling thoughts. It fills the heart with pure and purifying sentiments. It inspires universal conscientiousness of conduct. It connects time with eternity, and earth with heaven. These are some of the methods in which Christianity tends to restrain the excesses of liberty, and prevent its degenerating to absolute licentiousness.

But Christianity, while it promotes and restrains and perpetuates the liberties of a people, is not less decisively favorable to the *energy of government*. It reminds the citizens that civil rulers, duly elected or appointed, are ordained by God; and that to

resist them in the proper exercise of their authority, is to resist the ordinance of God. This, surely, does not invest rulers with omniscience, or infallibility. Still less does it justify or palliate any misuse of their powers. The sacredness of their office renders its prostitution but the more criminal. And it would be at once absurd and impious to suppose that the God of heaven will sanction their acts, when they contravene his own authority. Still, the fact, that in the regular and right exercise of their high functions, they act in the name, and by the authority of God, is a fact of great significance. Conscientious and reflecting men will beware how they oppose such an one in the discharge of his duties ; how they vilify his character, or sport with his sensibilities, or mar his just influence. And while they exercise an independent judgment, and a just discrimination, concerning rulers, they will beware of inflicting on their reputations or feelings a wanton injury. The reckless and inhuman severity with which public men are sometimes treated, is in every view unjustifiable. As it regards those who are honestly devoting themselves to the good of the community, it is ungrateful and cruel. And the injury done to the public may be greater still. The direct effect of such severity is to drive from office the best men,

and fill the places of trust and honor with men of callous and vulgar feelings. On the other hand, the just honor and gratitude which is paid to the upright and meritorious ruler, recoils, with a medicinal effect, on the community. While it soothes the cares of office, and rewards virtuous exertion, it gives a healthful tone to the public morals, and secures to the government the affections of the people.

There is another method in which religion contributes its influence to the energy of government. It forms rulers to the very character which is calculated to command the confidence and veneration of the community. It is true, there are other paths to public honor, than those of virtue and merit. "In the corrupted currents of this world," ambition, selfishness, artifice, may find their way to the very highest places of the state. Still, the world is not yet so bad, but that there is one meed which virtue alone can purchase; I mean, the honest esteem and love of the community. And how truly venerable the ruler whose character is formed on the model supplied by the Sacred Volume. Entering on office with diffidence, perhaps with reluctance, he still makes a cheerful consecration of his faculties, his affections and solitudes to the public good. Acting as under the eye of God,

and leaning on his arm; imploring his aid, and anxious only for his approbation, he calmly pursues a plain and straight-forward path. Not the dictates of ambition, or of interest; of party feeling, or state chicanery; not the ever changing opinion of the multitude; but *his Maker's law; the eternal, unchanging principles of truth and rectitude*; these, these are evermore the guides and measures of his conduct.

Who does not see that rulers of this description are the strength, the riches, the glory of the state? Their characters command universal respect; their measures, universal confidence. They are enthroned in the hearts of the virtuous portion of the community. The influence which they send abroad through society is most precious and salutary. It strengthens and unites the good. It appals licentiousness and vice. It paralyzes faction. It refines the public sentiment. It elevates the tone of public morals. It dries up a thousand sources of evil, and purifies society to its very fountain. Thus firmness, consistency and energy are secured to the government, and real happiness to the people.

It were easy to prove that Christianity is friendly to the best and wisest legislation, and to the purest administration of justice. We contend not that it

prescribes to mankind any particular forms of government, or any codes of civil or criminal law, or any rules of judicial proceedings. The Sacred Volume was given to us for far different purposes. Finding the human family in a state of revolt from the Father and Sovereign of the world, it discloses a method of return and reconciliation. In this disclosure, it brings to view the great principles of the divine administration as they regard our world; and thus communicates instruction important to the best temporal interests of man. Admit the simple and undeniable truth, that the government of God is perfect, and it follows with the certainty of demonstration, that that human government is best, which in its principles and spirit, makes the nearest approach to the divine. Here, then, is a pattern, a guide, a test, for earthly legislation. Can it be doubted, a moment, that the legislator who, in simplicity, brings his mind and heart to the Sacred Volume; who makes it his daily study, and his nightly meditation, will find, in this process, the happiest preparation for his arduous and responsible work? In this Volume are embodied the profoundest principles of truth, the most exalted maxims of justice, the most delicate shades of morality, the most accurate distinctions between right and wrong; and all presented with an inimitable sim-

plicity, all rendered comprehensible to every intellect, and all commending themselves to every conscience. Let these characteristics be transfused into the laws of a community ; let these lovely features be instamped on its statute book ; and will it not be a highly favored, will it not be an excellently governed community ? Will not every individual composing it, be led to feel that his submission is required, not so much to the wisdom and authority of earth, as of Heaven ? And will not every requisition of the law find a response of approbation in his own bosom ?

It is confessed that human legislation is, from the very nature of the case, imperfect. Often it can take but a very partial cognizance of the intentions and motives of men. Yet should it not at least attempt an approximation to this point ? And will not its excellence and utility be generally proportioned to this approximation ? If, in many cases, its animadversion on crimes be predicated less on their moral turpitude, than their tendency to the public injury, should it not beware lest a distinction and a contrast of this kind be sometimes found factitious and false ? And if its principal object be to form citizens, rather of an earthly, than a heavenly community, should it not remember, how

often there will be found, in the two cases, a strong analogy, if not an entire coincidence ?

We wish for no state religion ; no legal prescription of articles of faith, or liturgies ; no governmental preference of particular sects or denominations. We shrink from every approach to such abuses. Our puritan fathers, with the best and holiest of motives, instituted a connexion somewhat too intimate, between church and state. We have seen their error, and have discarded it. Yet is there not an opposite extreme ? And is there no possibility, no danger, of plunging into it ? Grant that religion can subsist without the state ; does not the question still remain ; Can the state subsist without religion ? If the state has little to *give* to religion, still may it not *receive* from it the most substantial benefits ? If Christianity embraces institutions and usages which constitute the surest basis, and the best cement of human society ; shall the fact, that these institutions and usages came from heaven, deprive them of the countenance of government, and exclude them from the pale of its protection ?

“ The *sabbath* was made for man.” And scarcely has the munificence of Heaven itself bestowed on man, or on society, a kinder, richer gift. Well may New England glory in the sabbath ; for it has made New England what it is ; the fairest spot on

earth. Well may our country glory in the sabbath ; for with the sabbath, its most valued distinctions, its most ennobling characteristics, have arisen and continued ; and with it, they will expire. It is appalling to think how surely and how rapidly a community, long blest with the light of revelation, may, in the absence of the sabbath, sink into a species of heathenism ; sink, indeed, into a depth of depravity and licentiousness at which ordinary heathens and savages would blush. That the sabbath has still a name and a place in the statute book of our Commonwealth, is consoling to the patriot heart. And every patriot heart wishes, in its behalf, that substantial and efficient protection, and that only, which its own importance claims, and which is demanded by the best interests of social order, of public virtue, of the rising youth, and the whole community.

The churches of Christ are likewise recognised by our laws, as real *entities* ; as possessing a distinct existence, and important, inalienable rights. We trust that they will rise from their present depressions. We will not resign the hope, that these powerless, harmless societies will yet, under the auspices of Christian legislators, and under the protecting ægis of impartial law, enjoy and exercise their sacred rights, and just privileges.

It is a subject of satisfaction that our civil and criminal code contains so much that is excellent, and so little that is exceptionable ; that it furnishes to the citizens such effectual security for their rights, and such ample redress for their wrongs ; and that in the punishment of crimes, it so generally unites mercy with justice, mildness with vigor and effect. I will not, for a moment, compare it with the codes of nations the most informed, in ancient times or modern, on which the sun of Christianity has never shone. The difference is immense and indescribable. And when this religion shall have breathed into our laws a still greater portion of its own pure, benevolent, exalted spirit, there will be little left for patriotism or philanthropy to desire. We shall be, in this regard, the most favored community on earth.

Nor may we omit the tribute of gratitude due to the Legislature, for its provident care in furnishing to the citizens of the Commonwealth, a revised edition of its statutes, condensed into a single volume. It was just what the public exigencies required. Next in importance to the justice of the laws, in a community, is the extent of their diffusion, and the facility of their comprehension. By the recent measure, both these objects will be greatly subserved. And may it not be confidently pre-

sumed that good laws, the more they are known, will be the more commended to the consciences and hearts of the citizens ; and that their violation will be proportionably disreputable and infrequent.

But the best and wisest laws must be comparatively valueless, unless *soundly interpreted, impartially applied, and faithfully executed*. Immensely important, then, to a state, is the character of its courts of judicature. They constitute the medium through which justice or injustice finds its way to the bosoms and fire-sides of the people. They are signally the blessing or the curse of the community. No words can describe the withering, blighting influence on the public morals, order and happiness, exercised by a single judge who fears not God, who prostitutes, perhaps, talents and learning, to confound the immutable distinctions of right and wrong ; whose decisions are the dictates, not of truth, justice and law, but of caprice, prejudice, or even gross corruption. His guilty life may be short ; but he may poison the fountain of justice for future ages. Behold now the contrast. Mark the upright, the incorruptible judge. Hear him say, in the consciousness of integrity, and in the beautiful language of Job ; “ I put on righteousness, and it clothed me ; my judgment was as a robe and a diadem. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to

the lame. I was a father to the poor ; and the cause which I knew not, I searched out." Well may he add, in the words of the same distinguished man ; " When the ear heard me, then it blessed me ; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me ; because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy."

Such judges, blessed be God ! have been found, in former, and in recent time. Illustrious men ! Worthy to be had in everlasting remembrance. Judges, the terror of the wicked ; the hope and consolation of the oppressed ; the light and ornament of their country, and their species ; humble representatives, on earth, of the righteous Judge of earth and heaven ; and honored instruments of diffusing his justice and his beneficence among their fellow-men. Yes ; such blessings have been found ; yet rarely, except in a Christian community.

We have seen the auspicious influence of Christianity on liberty, on government, on the laws, on the administration of justice. But the principal mode in which it blesses a community is yet unmentioned. I refer to its influence in forming the character of its citizens.

Here I might speak of its *intellectual* aspects. Nor would it be easy to do full justice, even to this part of the subject. Rarely have the capacities of the human mind received their full expansion, or its sublime faculties their entire development, in regions unvisited by Revelation. In the absence of this heavenly light, the intellectual powers languish; the mental faculties become torpid and inactive. Man vegetates, and breathes, and supplies the wants of a mere animal existence, and gratifies his sensual appetites; and this is nearly all. Turning from this humiliating spectacle, let us mark the wonders achieved by the gospel of Christ. This divine visitant speaks to man of the Being who made him; of his works, and his laws; of his boundless power, his exuberant goodness, his forgiving love, his universal presence. It speaks to him of his own immortal destiny; of his moral ruin, and his recovery; of the present moment of life, as stamping his whole eternity; of worlds beyond the grave, inconceivable in their joys, and in their woes. These are the objects, these the disclosures, which break the slumbers of the intellect, and rouse the torpid faculties to exertion. Conscious of their influence, the mind walks abroad in its energy, and seizes with a firmer grasp on the variety of objects which surround it. Creation it-

self, viewed as the workmanship of God, is invested with new attractions. Earth, air and sea, thus contemplated, disclose new beauties, and new wonders. While the secrets of the animal and vegetable and mineral kingdoms are explored with new ardor, and almost with new sagacity. By the same general impulse, even the inventions of art are quickened; and every improvement connected with the comfort, or the ornament of human life, advanced.

If, with a map of the world before us, we survey the existing condition of different nations, we shall find, that with the progress of Christianity, the progress of every species of human knowledge, useful and ornamental, has held an accurate correspondence. Where this heavenly light has shone, there science, art and literature have diffused their rich and varied blessings. Where its rays have never penetrated, there ignorance, gross ignorance, has generally held an undisturbed and iron empire.

But the *moral* influence of Christianity is still more powerful, and more invaluable. It enjoins, and it inspires those virtues which, while they form the good man, form, too, the good citizen, and secure the peace, the order, and the happiness of the community. Scarcely any other system of morals or religion has even correctly told us what virtue is. The ancient Greeks and Romans had no other term,

in their respective languages, by which to express it, than a word which signifies *courage*. The fact very significantly informs us that they considered courage as constituting the essence of virtue. What was that *patriotism*, so extolled and adored among the Romans, but a blind and bigoted attachment to their own country, which prompted them to trample on the rights, and waste the happiness of all others? It would be difficult to find any system of ethics, ancient or modern, not based on Christianity, or borrowed from it, which does not laud, or at least tolerate, a variety of spurious and false virtues. I might instance in *pride, ambition, military glory, literary vanity, admiration of wealth, contempt of the depressed and suffering, jealousy of personal honor, revenge*. But Christianity impartially frowns on all these aberrations. Nor does it admit to its catalogue of virtues, a single mental quality or disposition which is so much as doubtful. All its distinguishing tempers and affections go to constitute a character the most pure, lovely, venerable and sublime, the most benevolent and useful, that can be conceived. What a paragon of all moral excellence, of all personal, social and divine virtue, was the great Author and Exemplar of this religion. And who does not see that it needs nothing but the universal diffusion of his *spirit*, to render individuals

amiable, families harmonious, communities tranquil and happy, and the whole world an abode of pure and sublime enjoyment.

All the truths, the precepts and prohibitions of Christianity shed the kindest influence on the best interests of human society. As far as they prevail, the tone of sentiment, and the standard of morals are elevated. The public taste is refined, and the public manners are purified and softened. Imagine to yourselves, my hearers, for a moment, a community in which the sublime and lovely virtues of Christianity should be generally practised, and its meek, benevolent, forgiving, self-sacrificing spirit generally diffused. Is not the spectacle most delightful? Do you not see all those discordant elements which ordinarily agitate society, hushed into peace? Do you not see all those passions banished, which have so often wasted the comforts, and embittered the calamities of life, and poisoned the fountains of social enjoyment?

Do you not see *Paradise regained*? Do you not perceive an *air of heaven* breathing on such a favored region, and ready to waft its inhabitants to a better world?

All the institutions of Christianity, stamped as they are with profound wisdom, indicate, in the Deity, a most merciful regard to the social, as well

as individual exigencies of his human family. Of the truth of this remark, the sacredness attached by the gospel, to the *marriage bond*, is a striking instance. On this simple arrangement, depends no small portion of the order, the peace, the comfort and the virtue of human society. Let it be discarded, or materially modified, and an army of evils is let loose upon the community, to deform its beauty, to corrupt its purity, to waste its enjoyments, and undermine its very existence. Human legislators have sometimes opposed their enactments to this divine institution. But in doing this, they have trifled not more with the authority of God, than with the dearest interests of human society.

The weekly assemblages required by Christianity, for the purpose of divine worship, and of religious and moral instruction, constitute one of the most prominent and delightful characteristics of this religion. The enlightening, purifying, peace-breathing influence of the practice is generally acknowledged. Nor ought it to be forgotten, that to a considerable portion of the community, these seasons afford the only refuge from care; the only solace for the calamities and miseries of life. Surely that man must be a monster of cruelty, as well as impiety, who, by blotting out the idea of a God, and his worship, would deprive the poor and

the suffering of this precious relief. "We could not," says one, "avoid feeling a compassion as painful, as well founded, if, in considering the fate of the greater number of men, we supposed them all at once deprived of the only thought which supported their courage. They would no more have a God to confide their sorrows with. They would no more attend his ordinances to search for the sentiments of resignation and tranquillity. They would have no motive for raising their looks to heaven. Their eyes would be cast down; fixed for ever on this abode of grief, of death, and eternal silence. Then despair would even *stifle their groans*; and all their reflections preying on themselves, would only serve to corrode their hearts." Such are the sentiments which were uttered by a French writer,* about half a century since. And have they not received a most affecting comment in the unparalleled prevalence among that nation, of the crime of *suicide*; contemporary, as it has been, with a correspondent prevalence of infidelity and atheism? †

* M. NECKER. See his volume on *the Importance of Religious Opinions*.

† Of the value and importance of the sabbath to *public men*, we have an emphatic testimony from a British Statesman, who was an ornament to his country and his species—MR. WILBERFORCE. A respectable clergyman, who was honored with his intimate acquaintance, declares: "I have often heard him assert that he never could have sustained the labor and the stretch of mind required in his early political life, if it had not been for the rest of his sabbath; and that he could name several of his contemporaries in the vortex of political cares, whose minds had actually given

It may be inquired, perhaps, what is the proper influence of religion on a people, in regard to its foreign relations? What dispositions does it inspire? To what course of conduct does it prompt? What attitude will a nation truly and consistently Christian, maintain with regard to foreign powers; and what treatment may it expect from them?—The answer to these questions is at hand. Such a nation, in its intercourse with every other nation, will be simple, sincere, dignified, magnanimous. It will neither basely cower to the most powerful of foreign states, nor wrong the feeblest. Aloof from the dark designs of ordinary cabinets, and spurning the chicanery of vulgar diplomacy, it will speak as it thinks and feels; and will act as it speaks. All its engagements will be literally fulfilled, and while it firmly vindicates its own rights, it will as scrupulously regard the rights of others. *War* it will consider as the last dire resort; to be avoided by many a sacrifice; to be met only in self defence, and in defence of essential rights. It may be thought that such a pacific disposition and policy will but invite insult and injury; perhaps, even hostile aggression. But no. The nation whose

way under the stress of intellectual labor, so as to bring on a premature death, or the still more dreadful catastrophe of insanity and suicide, who, humanly speaking, might have been preserved in health, if they would have conscientiously observed the sabbath."

abhorrence of blood proceeds, not from tameness and pusillanimity, but from regard to the laws of God (and surely *nations are not above the laws of God,*) will make itself respected, and will make itself *feared*. “When a man’s ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.” So says the wisdom of Heaven; and we bow to the wisdom of Heaven. And we believe that this inspired declaration is just as true of nations, as of individuals. While there is a God in heaven, and a conscience in the human breast, it will be found that the nation which courageously and uniformly acts the part of virtue and integrity, acts the part of wisdom and sound policy. In this age of experiments, who does not wish that America might stand forth to the world, and declare that her allegiance shall be paid to the Sovereign of the universe; that spurning the wretched policy which has hitherto governed earthly states, she takes the laws of Heaven for her standard and her guide? The experiment would at least attract attention; for it would be as original as great; and as great as original. Would it not command universal respect and awe? Is its complete and ultimate success at all doubtful?

The view which has now been given, of the influence of religion on the welfare of a state; on liber-

ty, on the energy of government, on the laws, on the distribution of justice, on the intelligence, the habits and manners of the people, and on the character of the nation abroad—is, I am sensible, extremely imperfect. Still, that it is an influence most auspicious and powerful, I cannot but hope, has been made too evident to be denied, or doubted. It remains that we notice, more distinctly, the tendency of religion to remove or control some of the principal evils to which communities are liable. This will be attempted with great brevity, and with particular reference to the state and aspects of our own beloved country.

The *lust of wealth* is one of the most powerful, and most degrading propensities of the human mind. This passion, which has been congenial with every age, and every region of the world, finds peculiar nutriment in our own land, at the present time. The vast resources of our country, the freedom of our government, the wonderful improvements of the age, with a variety of other causes, as they facilitate the acquisition of wealth, are found to stimulate its desire. Speculation, in a thousand forms, has become the very *mania* of the age. Nor do any ordinary acquisitions suffice. Men must become rich on a new and extraordinary scale. But in all this, there is danger ; danger if they succeed, and dan-

ger if they fail ; danger to individuals, and danger to the community. This moment, our country is deluged with crimes, and wounded in its vital interests, and convulsed to its very centre, by the rage of thousands to be rich. And what shall arrest these enormous evils, and save the nation from ruin ? Nothing can do it effectually, but the counsels of religion, and its enlightening, exalting, purifying power. It is an irrevocable law of the human mind, that a strong passion, once possessing it, can be expelled only by a stronger. The heart of man knows but one principle stronger than the love of wealth ; and that is, the love of God. Who does not wish, for the wretched devotees of gain, an exchange like this ? Who does not wish them to quit a momentary and fancied good, for a happiness real and enduring ; a happiness large as their desires, and immortal as their spirits ?

Our country exhibits a spectacle new to the world ; a treasury overflowing, in despite of every attempt to exhaust it. Its greatest and most oppressive burden is its wealth. Might not benevolence, genuine, Christian benevolence, devise some effectual methods of relief ?—Thousands of individuals, too, are groaning under the same intolerable load. They have brilliant mansions, splendid equipages, luxurious tables, every thing, indeed, that

heart could wish—except *happiness*. And who does not wish them, instead of the “gildings of their woe,” the solid, real enjoyment of becoming the almoners of Heaven’s bounty, in succoring the distressed, in sheltering the houseless, or in circulating the volume of life through a dying world. Indeed, unless such a system of *depletion* be set on foot, must not the overgrown wealth of thousands in our country inflict the most fatal maladies on themselves, and the community ?

Ambition is another malady incident to communities, and especially to republics. Here, the highest honors and offices being open to all, there is no want of aspirants to the highest honors and offices. As most men, too, are not uncandid judges of their own qualifications, the tone of solicitation will be proportionably elevated. The object being so dear, the means of its attainment are not scrupulously selected. Appeals are made to every interest, and to every passion of the people ; to their love of money, to their love of change, to their envy of superior excellence, to the rancor sometimes felt by the poor against the rich. Thus men’s judgment is blinded, their moral sense broken down, their worst feelings excited to action, the spirit of party exasperated, and fatal divisions spread through the community. Who can doubt that one principal

cause which has agitated and convulsed our country for years, is ambition ?—an ambition which, as our great public offices have something to bestow, beside care and labor, is stimulated and strengthened, not unfrequently, by avarice. And where shall an evil so complicated, and so fatal, find its cure ? The reply is obvious. Things must be seen in the light of reason and eternal truth. Men must take counsel of common sense and the Bible, and *not think of themselves more highly than they ought to think, but think soberly* ; soberly of their own talents and powers ; soberly of their merits, and soberly of their claims on the attention and confidence of their fellow citizens. Public offices must be viewed, not as mere honorary distinctions, or personal benefits, but as *sacred trusts*—places of care, and labor, and responsibility. Let those who may wish for office imitate the modesty and magnanimity of the Spartan patriot, who, on finding himself an unsuccessful candidate for the Council of *three hundred*, rejoiced “ that Sparta had found three hundred citizens better than himself.” Let the public, too, remember that its confidence is due, not so much to those who *seek*, as to those who *need to be sought* ; and that important places will be best filled by those who are least anxious to occupy them. Let them remember WASHINGTON ; the man who never sought

an office ; the man who never accepted an office, but with reluctance ; and who yet gave to every office which he filled, the ardor, the solicitude, the unshrinking, persevering toil which most men give to their personal concerns alone.

In speaking of national aberrations which Christianity is calculated to correct, it was my purpose to remark on the treatment which our country has, for some years, exhibited to many of the Indian tribes. But on reflection, I shrink from it. Alas ! *the Rubicon is past !* We have expelled those unhappy beings from their hunting grounds, and their improvements, from their beloved schools, and their Christian temples, to the wildernesses of the distant West. We have had the power ; and we have exercised it. They have had nothing on their side, but justice, and the pledged faith of our nation ; and they have succumbed. I have no wish (let me solemnly declare) to cast reproach on my country, or its government. But as the humble minister of a just and merciful God, I may be permitted to grieve—deeply, inexpressibly to grieve—at this (I fear) indelible stain on our nation's character and annals.

There is an evil abroad in our country, which has been manifest for years, and is perhaps increasing still ; *a wonderful excitability of the public mind,*

Almost no subject of human thought meets, in these days, a cool investigation, a calm and philosophic discussion, and an unwarped, impartial decision. The old and safe method of submitting *opinions* to the test of *principles*, has been deserted as needless and useless. Indeed, so long has there been pursued, in respect to every thing deemed fixed and unquestionable, a species of *undermining* process, that a great portion of the community have no settled principles at all. What a precious field is this, for sanguine theorists, bold projectors, and restless innovators to range in. How abundant the harvest which they may naturally hope to reap. And truly, the field has neither been unoccupied, nor has the harvest been scant. So rapidly have plausible theories, and glittering novelties, and specious, but impracticable projects succeeded each other, that the minds of men have been absolutely overborne, their imaginations dazzled, and their passions kindled into flame. The consequences have been disastrous to the cause of piety and humanity, and to the dearest interests of our common country. A state of collision and confusion has arisen, grievous for the present, and boding tremendous evil for the future.

What friend of God and man does not deeply regret the religious animosities and divisions which

have recently infested so great a portion of our land ? They have given delight and exultation to sceptics, and to infidels ; to all the enemies of piety and virtue. We fear they have inflicted a wound in the vital interests of our country. These divisions, be it remembered, are not the proper fruits of religion, but of the errors and delinquencies of its professors. “Heaven and hell are not more distant than the benevolent spirit of the gospel, and the malignant spirit of party.” And when this gospel, and this religion shall have completely imbued their votaries with their own meek, benign and heavenly spirit, then, and not before, will these deplorable evils vanish, and the church will stand forth in its majesty and beauty, the glory of our country, and the light of the world.

There are likewise excitements of a different kind prevailing, which, on the present occasion, would be passed in entire silence, were they not viewed as constituting some of the principal dangers of the time. I allude to the subject of slavery. Here I shall speak with great brevity, and with great caution. In my judgment, it would be madness to apply a spark to that great mass of combustibles which are found in almost every region of the land.

That slavery is an immense and incalculable evil, I may safely take for granted. In the language of

the great Orator of the West, it is "a *curse*—a curse to the master; a wrong, a grievous wrong, to the slave. In the abstract," he adds, "it is *all* wrong, and no possible contingency can make it right." If there be meaning in words, the whole system of slavery is solemnly repudiated, both in the Declaration of our national Independence, and the Constitution of our Commonwealth. Where is the patriot, or the philanthropist, who does not ardently wish that the evil were blotted out for ever from our country? Where is the good man in New England who would withhold any practicable and justifiable effort to effect the consummation?

What then is to be done?—To attempt a full answer to this question, before this assembly, would, in me, be the height of arrogance. It is a question which, I verily believe, perplexes the strongest and most sagacious minds. Without indecorum, however, I may perhaps suggest, in reply, a few *negative* hints.—We may do nothing morally wrong. We may do nothing inconsistent with our national Constitution, or with solemn arrangements and pledges well understood. We may do nothing calculated to exasperate, and to prolong the evils to be removed. O, the wound is deep. Let us not, by our rashness, make it deeper still. The

disease is malignant and vital. Let not folly and empiricism undertake its cure.

In a word; if, as is contended, the evil, though partly political, is chiefly moral, let moral means and appliances be the grand resort. Let religion, with her deep-seated wisdom, her assuasive power, her *omnipotence* of meekness and of love, be brought to bear upon it. It is religion which must open the eyes, and soften the hearts of the masters. It is religion which must soothe and sustain the spirits of the slaves while in bondage, and prepare them for a freedom worth enjoying. It is religion which must impart a right and salutary direction to public opinion, and to the course of legislation, in the states where slavery exists. And we firmly believe that in those states religion is, at this moment, exerting a noiseless, but powerful influence in favor of the slaves; and that when the *wind*, and the *earthquake*, and the *fire* shall have spent their desolating rage, her *still, small voice* will be heard with most precious effect.

And what but religion can becalm the agitations which pervade our own distant Commonwealth? Surely, it is not a small evil, when the good are arrayed in hostility against the good; when groundless jealousies and bitter animosities are spread abroad; when the peace of families, of neighbor-

hoods, of churches, of towns, of the whole community, is disturbed and destroyed; when society is convulsed to its centre, and its component elements almost dissolved. And where shall we find the remedy? It is found in that *wisdom which comes from above*, and which is *pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated*. It is found in that heaven-descended *charity which suffereth long, and is kind; which envieth not; which vaunteth not itself; which is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly; seeketh not her own; is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things*. If, in the great mercy of God, this spirit may once more visit our community, our wounds may yet be healed, and our peace restored. If otherwise, all the evils we have seen and felt, may prove but the casual drops of a cup of yet untasted bitterness; the first fruits of a harvest of woe.

But the evil which, more than all others, menaces our public peace and welfare, is yet to be declared. I refer to the awful, and, it must be feared, increasing prevalence of impiety and licentiousness. If, to the most superficial observer who looks abroad upon our country, there is presented a state of morals and of manners which is truly

appalling, what must be witnessed by the omnipresent, all-seeing, all-hearing, heart-searching God? What estimate of our public and individual character must be HIS, in whose sight the heavens are not clean, nor the stainless angels pure? There is no occasion to compare the state of our morals with that which exists in Mahomedan or Pagan nations, or in the unreformed or half-reformed nations of Europe. This might promote a causeless and pernicious self-complacency. We should compare it with the law of the eternal God, and with the holy gospel of the Savior. We should compare it with that profusion of blessings which indulgent Heaven has poured around us, and with that unexampled fulness of religious light and privileges in the midst of which we live. Tried by these tests, our national and individual guilt will assume a stain of malignity unknown and unsuspected before. Is it not unnatural, is it not even horrible, that in such a favored region, the laws of God should be trampled down, his majesty insulted, his sabbaths desecrated, and the gospel of his grace treated by thousands with cold and thankless disdain? Do not infidelity, impiety, licentiousness, intemperance, and various forms of profligacy every where abound? Do not vices and crimes of enormous size assail the heavens, and bid defiance to the wrath of the Al-

mighty ? And are there not evident indications of this wrath actually visiting us ? Are not our public counsels lamentably divided ? Have not disaster and disgrace marked our unhallowed contest with the Indian tribes ? Is not real distress experienced in almost every portion of our late flourishing community ? Are not the seeds of disunion rapidly springing up throughout the length and breadth of the land ? Is it quite certain that our national Constitution, our pride and our boast, will remain through another half-century ? Is it certain that none who now hear me, may see this fair fabric shivered to atoms, and all the hopes that have rested on it, scattered to the winds ?

But amidst these evils which exist, and these dangers which threaten, is there no refuge ; no hope ? Yes ; there is refuge ; there is hope. Repentance and reformation ; individual, national repentance and reformation, may yet save us. For this we have the authority of God himself. If, says this all-gracious Being, “If my people, 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 forgive their sin.” “At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it ; if that nation against

whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them."—Here, then, is hope, and here alone. O ye whose hearts tremble for your country's crimes, and bleed for your country's woes, carry that country to the throne of God. Commit its interests to Him who is mighty to save; and all may yet be well. Let this whole nation, humbled in dust, confess its guilt, and return to the forsaken paths of truth and piety; and the days of its peace and prosperity shall be prolonged.

Let me add; It would be most happy for us, if, together with a general repentance of sin, and reformation of morals, and of manners, we should return to that public policy which marked the golden era of our republic; the era of WASHINGTON. Unparalleled, wonderful man! The ornament of his country. The admiration of the world. The blessing of his age, and the bright model of rulers of every age. For who will deny, that just so far as the principles of his administration have been pursued, it has been well with us? Who will deny that just so far as they have been forsaken, we have smarted for it?

To the Chief Magistrate of our favored Commonwealth, the remarks offered in this discourse, are,

with great deference, submitted. With scarcely the hope of having suggested any thing not familiar to his thoughts, I indulge the still more gratifying hope of his accordance with the general views expressed. May all his efforts to promote the piety and virtue, the peace and order, the intelligence, the true glory and happiness of the Commonwealth, be divinely prospered, and divinely rewarded. Long may he be continued the ornament and blessing of the community; and much may he enjoy of the delight dearest to the patriot's heart—the delight of witnessing a people happy in his administration, elevated by his example, and prospered in its most precious interests, through his wise and faithful exertions.

Permit me to express the respects and salutations of the occasion to the Lieutenant Governor, the Council, the Senate, and Representatives of the Commonwealth.

If, respected Friends and Legislators, religion, and the virtues which spring from religion, are the chief blessings of the community, then you have a holy and sublime part to act. By just and wise enactments, by laws founded in the eternal and unchanging principles of truth and righteousness, you may do much to purify the sentiments of the community, to elevate the standard of morals, and to

suppress the various forms of iniquity. Permit me to add ; you may do still more to effect these great objects, by your *example*. The wisest and best laws, if disregarded by those who make them, will prove but a feeble barrier against the encroachments of licentiousness and vice. But there is a beauty, a majesty in virtue, especially in Christian virtue, which overawes, while it attracts ; and which, while it gives confidence to truth and goodness, irresistibly frowns vice out of countenance. True it is, indeed, that after the best laws, and the purest examples have spent their force, there will remain a mass of disorder and wickedness over which the patriot heart will bleed. But you serve a kind and generous Master—a Master who will reward the intention, and the effort, though the accomplishment should fail. If you are faithful, nothing shall deprive you of his life-giving, everlasting smile. You shall live, too, in the memories and the hearts of all the good on earth ; and having been the ornaments of the present age, you shall be the blessings, even of a distant and grateful posterity.

May the Almighty Ruler of the world look down, with a benignant eye, on our beloved Commonwealth and Country.

May the land of the pious pilgrims—the land visited by their enterprise, reclaimed by their industry,

and hallowed by their prayers—the land in which they planted the tree of religious and civil liberty—remain the abode of genuine liberty, and pure religion, while the world shall stand. May the rights, the privileges, the invaluable institutions which they have left us, be transmitted, a fair and unimpaired inheritance, to the latest posterity.

May the Infinite Being encircle in his protecting arms these United States. May the soil which has been wet with the tears of patriots, and moistened with the blood of brave defenders, be fruitful in every thing which dignifies, adorns and blesses a community. May our Country attain the distinguished honor of instructing the nations in the mysteries of a chastened liberty, a well regulated government, and a pure religion. Here, may myriads and millions be trained to the joys of a brighter world ; and hence, may beams of heavenly light be reflected through the earth, till the PRINCE OF PEACE shall come, and bless the nations with his holy and bloodless sway.



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