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# SERMON,

ADDRESSED TO THE

SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CONGREGATION

IN ALBANY,

ON THE FOURTH OF JULY,

1830.

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BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D.D.

MINISTER OF SAID CONGREGATION.

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# SERMON.

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PSALM CXLIV. 15.

HAPPY IS THAT PEOPLE WHOSE GOD IS THE LORD.

THERE has been a disposition in every age, and so far as we know, among all civilized nations, to set apart particular days in commemoration of great events. To say nothing of the fact that the work of creation itself was from the beginning commemorated by divine appointment in the institution of the sabbath, who does not know that not a small part of the days in the Jewish calendar were required to be observed, and were actually observed, in remembrance of some signal event connected with their history? The heathen too have discovered the same disposition; no inconsiderable number of their festivals and other religious rites, having reference to some real or imaginary distinction conferred upon them in preceding ages. The same propensity is to be found among all christian nations: nor is there any thing in it, in itself considered, that deserves reprehension. It is not indeed right that nations should commemorate great events in their history in the spirit of self-idolatry, thus burning incense to their own pride; but they should do it in such a manner as to deepen their impression of the providence of God in ordering their lot; to inspire them with gratitude to their great Benefactor; and to cause them to understand and apply the lessons of counsel and warning, which the dealings of God with them may be fitted to inculcate.

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In accordance with this universal sentiment, the anniversary of our country's independence, has, from the beginning, been observed as a day of jubilee ;—a practice which Patriotism approves, and Religion does not condemn ; though both Patriotism and Religion have bled at their own altars, in consequence of the fierce and unhallowed political rites which have often constituted this celebration. The man who makes use of this occasion for any other purpose than to render the fabric of his country's liberty more stable in its foundations, and to carry it upward in goodly and magnificent proportions toward heaven ; especially the man who assails this noble fabric by inflammatory harangues, designed to cherish party spirit ; is guilty of a sort of political sacrilege ; and his name deserves to be set down in the foremost list of his country's enemies.

It happens that this national anniversary, for the present year, has come on the sabbath ;—a day which commemorates an infinitely more important event—the redemption of man by Jesus Christ. Think not that I am about to prostitute this sacred day to a mere secular purpose ; or to forget the greater in the less ; as if the deliverance of a nation from political thralldom were an event to be compared with the deliverance of the world from the curse of God. Nevertheless, the one, in some views, may be said to run parallel with the other : in other words, Religion has its temporal as well as its eternal bearings : it extends its claims to nations as well as individuals ; and neither the pulpit nor the sabbath is ever prostituted by a fair exhibition of any of these claims or bearings. For, rely on it, it is the very same Religion which ministers balm to the wounded conscience, and softens the pillow of death, and secures to the soul a passage through the gate of glory, which promotes, in the highest degree, all the temporal interests of man, and is the main pillar of national prosperity. I trust, therefore, I shall not be considered as violating the sacredness that belongs to the place or the day on the one hand, or as leading you into a train of thought inappropriate to this anniversary on the other, while I endeavor to illustrate the proposition that

RELIGION IS THE GREAT SOURCE OF NATIONAL HAPPINESS. This is clearly implied in the declaration, “ Happy is that people whose God is the Lord.”

In illustrating this proposition, I observe,

1. That *Religion purifies the elements of society.*

I assume it here as a fact, that sin is the original cause of all the evil that exists in the world: a shock which I will not here attempt to explain, has been experienced in the moral constitution of man, which has introduced sad derangement into this part of his nature, and opened in his breast a fountain of wo. To say nothing of the operation of a guilty conscience, which every sinner finds to be a fearful reality, there is the operation of evil passion—discontent, pride, envy, revenge, which renders the breast of the wicked man like “the troubled sea, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.” Now this disorder that reigns in the human heart it is the province of Religion, and that only, to rectify; and just in proportion as its influence prevails, the bosom becomes the dwelling of peace and joy. As Religion produces this effect in every individual case, in which it is suffered to operate, and as communities and nations are composed of individuals, is it not manifest that the amount of national happiness is increased just in proportion to the prevalence of pure Religion?

But each individual sustains relations of various kinds to his fellow-men; and each of these relations is a channel through which his influence goes out into the various departments of society. Suppose now that he be a man of corrupt principles and vicious habits; suppose that he be contentious, or revengeful, or dishonest; how much harm will he be likely to inflict in one way and another upon those with whom he associates; and how much to be deprecated will be the general influence which he exerts upon the world around him! Especially, if he occupy an elevated station, who can calculate to what extent he may sow the seeds of unhappiness, or how many fair hopes may be withered through his baleful influence? Suppose, on the other hand, that the sanctifying and controlling power of Religion be exerted upon that individual—each of these various relations which he sustains, becomes a channel of benign and healthful influence to society; and in a thousand ways, he is the minister of good to his fellow-men. Suppose that instead of a single individual, there be many, in

whom Religion has its genuine operation, bringing them to engage actively in promoting the best interests of society, how extensively must the effect of their exertions be felt, and how large a contribution must they make to the happiness even of a nation! Is it not manifest then, that Religion is the grand source of national happiness, inasmuch as it not only renders men happy in their individual capacity, but renders them the instruments of communicating important blessings to others? If it exerts a propitious influence on the very elements out of which a community is formed, surely that influence must extend to the character of the community itself.

2. I observe, secondly, that Religion is the great source of national happiness, *as it quickens and directs a nation's intellectual energies.*

To the capabilities of the human mind, even in the present life, it were not easy to assign a limit. How much has been accomplished by the persevering industry even of an individual, in many of the arts and sciences! To what an eminence in intellectual acquirement, did Newton, or Bacon, or Locke, or Edwards, reach, during the brief period of their earthly existence! But notwithstanding man is gifted with the power of making exalted attainments in knowledge, such attainments he will never make, unless his powers are brought into vigorous exercise; and whether they are or not, must depend on the degree of motive which urges him to exertion. Now I do not say that a man may not be impelled to the most powerful mental efforts, by considerations which have nothing to do with Religion; for I well know, that there always have been, and still are, men, who unite the character of giants in learning with that of giants in guilt: but I do say with confidence, that there is no influence which tends so naturally to bring the intellectual powers of an individual into operation, as that of Religion; for, in the first place, that state of the affections which it induces—a calm, undisturbed state of the soul, is most favorable to the exercise of the intellect; and then again, he who is under its influence, recognizes the obligation that rests upon him to glorify God in the faithful use of all his powers, and this involves the obligation to cultivate his powers, so far as

God, in his providence, may give him the opportunity. And what is true of an individual, is true of any number of individuals—is true of a nation: the more the obligations and the influence of Religion are felt, so much the more, other things being equal, will there be, of active, intellectual energy.

But Religion does more than bring out the energies of the mind: it gives them a right direction. An individual may be, in his intellectual character, an angel; in his moral character, a fiend. So also a nation may have in it many gifted, and powerful, and accomplished, minds, and yet, as at least one example has proved, may be a nation of atheists. Now I assert that it is Religion, and that only, which secures to the intellect of a nation such a direction, as shall prevent it from being a national curse. Banish Religion from a community, and with it you annihilate the influence of moral obligation; and where that has ceased to operate, ignorance can scarcely be considered a calamity; for intellectual power, in such circumstances, is only another name for the power of doing harm. Let Religion prevail, on the other hand, and in the same proportion, science and learning, under the controlling influence of moral obligation, will become the hand-maids of public happiness.

Apply these remarks now to the establishment of public institutions of learning. That such institutions may be established under other than religious influences, far be it from me to question: on this point we claim nothing more for Religion than that she is always favorable to such institutions, and gladly takes them under her patronage; but we claim for her the exclusive honor of rendering them fountains of public blessing. Let our public seminaries be as numerous as they may, and let them offer as rich advantages for intellectual culture as they may, and let as many of our youth be assembled in them as there be, and if there be no religious influence to control and direct their operations, each of them will be a prolific source of evil; a worm at the root of the nation's prosperity. The young men who are trained up in them will go forth, not to lead on their country to an exalted destiny, but to shed mildew upon her rising hopes; and the torch of science, which ought only to enlighten and to bless, will be used

for nothing but to blast and consume the very elements of public happiness. But let christianity maintain a controlling power over these institutions, and each of them becomes a radiating point of benign influence to the whole community. The intellectual energy which is here brought into exercise, guided by moral principle, is a powerful means of sustaining and directing benevolent operations, of prosecuting the work, not only of moral but political reform, and thus of helping forward the cause of human happiness, and of course, promoting the prosperity of a nation.

Moreover, Religion directs the intellectual energies of a nation, as they are exerted through the medium of the press. This, none can doubt, is one of the most powerful auxiliaries of national prosperity, or one of the most formidable engines of national ruin. It were scarcely too much to say that, let the press have its free operation, and it can cast the character of a nation in whatever mould it pleases ; and hence you will find that the character of a community, at any given time, may be safely judged by the character of its literature. What, for instance, was the literature of revolutionary France, but a record of the most powerful efforts of the human mind to free itself from every moral restraint, and to efface, if possible, even the last vestige of natural religion. And how much, think you, was done towards bringing about that great moral convulsion—the French revolution—by the intellectual efforts of a few individuals, put forth by means of the press? Nevertheless, on the other hand, the press is influenced, in no small degree, by public opinion. Let there be a high standard of moral feeling in a community, which is the product of Religion and nothing else, and those who write for the public will be encouraged to write such books only, as will be of a useful, to say the least, of a harmless tendency ; and in such a state of things, it may ordinarily be presumed that they will be disposed to write no other. But let the moral taste of a community begin to decline, and it will be the signal for the coming in of a corrupt literature ; and presently the press will groan under a burden of trash, and if public opinion should sink so low as to tolerate it, of absolute infidelity and atheism. Yes, I repeat, Religion, and that alone, is a security, especially in a free country, against the perversion of the press ; against its being wielded in opposition to

the best interests of man, both in his individual capacity and in his social relations.

3. Religion is the grand source of national happiness, *inasmuch as it secures the end of civil government.*

It accomplishes this object, in the first place, by causing the nature of civil government, or the relation which exists between the magistrate and the subject, to be correctly understood. Who that knows any thing of the history of governments, does not know that, in countries in which Christianity has not prevailed, or has prevailed only in name, there have been the most false and absurd notions on this subject; and that instead of operating to *secure* to man his social rights, it has been made the grand instrument of *depriving* him of them? A single individual, or it may be, a few individuals, have wielded the rod of oppression, while the multitude have tamely submitted to be trampled in the dust; knowing indeed that all was not right, but knowing too little of the theory of government to decide exactly where the evil lay, or how it could be remedied. But just in proportion as the gospel has prevailed in its power in any country, mistakes on this subject have been corrected, and the true nature of civil government has been understood. I do not mean that the gospel prescribes any particular form of government for all nations; but it *has* decided that the object of *every* form should be, to guard and maintain the rights of the whole community: it has given a faithful exposition of the reciprocal duties of the magistrate and the subject; describing the one as the minister of God for good to the people, and requiring of the other that he should be subject to the powers that be, for conscience' sake. Now is it not manifest that where this scriptural view of civil government is understood by a community, there the first step, at least, is gained toward the attainment of its end?

But Religion secures the design of civil government still farther, especially in a free country like ours, by securing the elevation of good men to office. I know that this is too often made a field for the operation of party spleen, and the conflicts of personal feeling; and the danger is, that the candidates for office will be selected,



rather in obedience to the dictates of an ambitious or selfish policy, than from a sober conviction that they possess the requisite qualifications. But let Religion operate upon a man to produce in him a lively sense of moral obligation and accountableness to God, and he will not, he dare not, under such an influence, give his vote for one whom he firmly believes to be too weak or too wicked to be entrusted with the public interests. Such a man will not indeed stop to ask whether the candidate for office belong to one denomination of christians or another : the inquiry will be, not whether he be a Baptist, or a Methodist, or a Presbyterian, or an Episcopalian ; but whether he be a man who will be faithful to the interests of his country and of the world. It is easy to see that in the same proportion in which this conscientious adherence to principle gains ground, the high places of power will be occupied by the wise and good.

Moreover, Religion secures the end of civil government, by influencing rulers to the faithful discharge of duty. A bad man occupying a post of high authority, is justly a terror to the community in which he lives ; and as the case may be, even to the world. And though he be not distinguished for wickedness—if he be only chargeable with that degree of caprice and waywardness, which we see every day in the world ; in short, if he be any thing else than a man of exemplary firmness and incorruptible integrity, you can never be sure that he will not be bribed, or flattered, or induced, in some way, to betray the interests committed to him. But let a ruler have the fear of God before his eyes, and the people whom he governs have nothing to dread. Such a man, especially if he holds an exalted place, can hardly expect to receive the unqualified approbation of all ; but he will deserve it. He will faithfully and impartially consult the interests of every class, and of the whole community over whom he is appointed to rule ; and though, as a man, he may have his private friendships and partialities, yet as a ruler, he will have none. And suppose it devolve upon him to regulate in some measure the relations of his own country to other countries, here again, he forgets not that other nations have rights as well as his own ; and he respects them. In relation to war, he will not indeed adopt the principle of a passive non-resistance ; but he will regard it as one of the greatest of all evils, and

will do his utmost to prevent its approach, and to exterminate it from the earth. In short, whether it be the domestic or the foreign relations of his country that come immediately under his eye, he will endeavor to forget all private considerations, and shape his conduct by the principles of undeviating rectitude.

And to crown all, Religion secures the end of civil government, by forming good subjects, and cherishing a spirit of obedience to the constituted authorities. Is it not a lamentable fact, that a restless spirit of insubordination is often exhibited, where the individuals who are appointed to rule, happen to be unacceptable to a part of the community ; a spirit, which, if there were any prospect of its being armed with power, would presently ripen into rebellion ; a spirit which will not excuse in a ruler the common infirmities of a man, and which watches opportunities to embarrass his efforts for the public good, and even to bring his administration into contempt. Need I say that this spirit, and the spirit of Religion, or even a common degree of moral principle, cannot dwell together in the same bosom. Let a religious influence go abroad through a community, and the consequence will be a spirit of respectful subordination toward those in authority, and a disposition to co-operate with them for the accomplishment of all the good ends of government. There will be a general compliance with the exhortation of the apostle—"Render therefore to all their dues ; tribute to whom tribute is due ; custom to whom custom ; fear to whom fear ; honor to whom honor."

If then Religion alone inculcates the reciprocal duties of magistrates and subjects ; if it secures the elevation of suitable men to office ; if it is a pledge for the integrity and fidelity of rulers ; and if it forms a proper spirit of obedience in subjects, is it not manifest that it secures most effectually the great end of civil government ?

4. I observe, once more, that Religion is the great source of national happiness, as *it is a pledge to a nation of the special blessing of God.*

That God has promised to reward, and that he actually does reward with special tokens of his favor, in the present life, indivi-

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duals who are obedient to his commandments, no one can reasonably question : and as individuals are the component parts of a nation, the greater the number of individuals who are thus blessed, the greater is the actual amount of national happiness. But his providence extends to nations not only in their component parts, but in their collective capacity. Look, for instance, at his dealings with the Jewish nation. All his promises and threatenings to that people were conditional ; that is, they were to be fulfilled or not, according as they were obedient or disobedient. And we find from their history that, just in proportion as they obeyed the commandments of God, they enjoyed the divine blessing ; and in the same degree that they departed from the path of duty, they were visited with divine judgments. I know the Jewish government was, in its constitution, peculiar : it was administered by Jehovah, in a higher and more direct sense than any other government ever was : nevertheless, the providence of God extends to other governments as well as that ; and it is a uniform rule of the divine administration towards nations, that, if they obey Him, He blesses them ; if they forsake Him, He withdraws from them his favor. And why should it not be so ? A nation, though composed of individuals, is, in an important sense, one body : it performs acts either immediately by itself, or by its representatives, which imply a national responsibility ; why should it not then, as a body, incur the favor or the frown of Him who sitteth king among the nations ? Be it so, that nations will not be known in their collective character before the throne of final judgment ; that every one there will be tried in his individual capacity ; but here manifestly it is otherwise : nations are punished or rewarded for their conduct as nations ; and every individual feels, in a greater or less degree, the influence of the great controlling measures which are adopted, even though he may have had directly no part nor lot in the matter. When France abjured allegiance to the Most High, and made a desperate effort to rid herself of all the restraints of religion, He whose throne is in the heavens, caused a dark cloud to settle over that devoted country, which discharged itself in thunders, and lightnings, and tempest, till even infidelity stood aghast, and acknowledged tremblingly that Jehovah was in that cloud. So it always has been—so, we venture to predict, with all the analogies of providence to sustain us—it always will be :—the righteous nation will enjoy the special

benediction of God ; the sinful nation will smart under the rod of his displeasure.

1. In review of our subject, we remark, first, that *it enables us to distinguish between true and false patriotism.*

The true patriot is the man who is sincerely devoted to the interests of his country, and who does his utmost to promote them. If it be true then that Religion is the grand source of national happiness, that man most certainly is not a patriot, in the best sense, who refuses to yield to the claims of Religion. The man who openly sets at nought the authority of God, and pours contempt upon divine institutions ; the man who profanes his Maker's name, or disregards the sacredness of the sabbath ; the man who, under the pretence of honor, goes out in cool blood to take his brother's life ; or he who is studious to undermine the authority of the gospel, and to see established the dark and terrible reign of infidelity ;—neither of these is, in the proper sense of the word, a patriot. I do not say that he may not talk much about national greatness and national glory : I do not say that he may not stand up in the hall of supreme legislation, and make eloquent harangues in favor of liberty, and seem willing, and actually be willing, to fight his country's battles, and if need be, to lay himself down and die on what he would call a bed of glory : but I do say that he may be all this, and do all this, and yet, if he outrages the authority of God, he deserves not to be called a patriot ; because there is a war between his professions and his actions, or between one part of his conduct and another ; and whatever he may profess, or whatever he may do, he is actually doing that by an immoral life, the direct tendency of which is to lay his country's glory in the dust. On the other hand, let a man stand forth the friend of Religion, and the active promoter of its institutions, and though his voice may never be heard in the high places of the nation, his benign influence will be felt in the advancement of her prosperity. And when the day of his country's trial comes, believe me, that man will show himself her firm friend ; and in addition to all his other efforts in her behalf, he will spread out her cause before the God of nations, and the God of armies ; and the intercessions which he offers may draw down upon her the blessing of God, while the vamping harangues

of an atheistical patriotism may be found to have combined the elements of a tremendous curse.

2. Our subject *furnishes a criterion by which we may judge of our own national prospects.*

If Religion is the great source of national happiness, then the grand question on which the destinies of our country are to turn, is, whether, or to what extent, Religion is to exert its influence upon us. In this view, there are signs of the times that are fitted to awaken anxiety, and there are others which are adapted to cherish hope.

In respect to the former class—I would say that it is an adverse sign that our nation is, at this moment, so much distracted by the spirit of party ; that the choice of our rulers is so much controlled by local partialities and jealousies ; that it is often conducted in a spirit of base intrigue and fierce contention, beneath whose chilling influence even the kindlier feelings of private and domestic friendship wither and die. I call it an adverse sign, and one which ought to cover this nation with sackcloth, that so many who are exalted to its high places, treat Religion with open contempt ; and manifest a spirit which, in other circumstances, would blot out the Sabbath, and burn up the Bible. I count it an adverse sign, that infidelity is coming out of its dark retreats into which it had been frowned and scourged by public opinion ; that it is lifting its brazen front in the walks of decent society ; and is breathing out its venom among us fresh from the pit. I count it an adverse sign, that a name which is associated with the brightest day in our national calendar, and the most memorable event in our national history, has, during the past year, openly taken a foremost place in the ranks of infidel philosophy ; that writings over which surviving friendship ought to have wept tears of mortification and anguish, and then consigned them to the flames, have been drawn forth to the public view on an errand of corruption ; as if a malignant star had risen up from amidst the shadows of death, to blast every plant of virtue on which its beams might chance to fall ; or as if the hand which contributed to rear the fabric of our country's liberty, had become tired of its work, and were lifting itself even from the

darkness and corruption of the sepulchre, to undermine that fabric and lay it in ruins. In fine, my brethren, I call it an adverse sign, that so much iniquity cleaves to us as a nation ; that among people of every class, there is so much contempt of Religion, so much disregard for the authority of God.

Let us look now at the other side of the picture, and see what there is in it to encourage hope.

I call it a propitious sign, that there is an increasing spirit of co-operation among christians of different sects, for the advancement of the common cause ; and that there is a growing and blessed forgetfulness of many of those little differences which have too often kept the church in a tumult, and caused her light to be darkness. I regard it as a propitious sign, that our benevolent institutions are, with each passing year, gathering fresh strength and glory ; that the Bible is flying on the wings of christian zeal and effort, through the land, and is likely soon to become the inmate of every dwelling ; that the Sabbath School is gathering into its sacred inclosure children of every class, and forming them to virtue and usefulness ; that Temperance Societies are concentrating the energies of all the wise and good, and have the monster which they have been encountering already chained to their car ; and that something is doing to staunch the wounds of bleeding, suffering Africa. I count it an auspicious sign, that the influences of God's Spirit are, from time to time, poured out from on high, to accompany the preaching of the word, and the ordinances of Religion, and the various benevolent efforts of the age, and that the American church is gradually rising both in beauty and strength.

Judge then, brethren and friends, for yourselves, what proportion ought to exist between the amount of anxiety and the amount of hope, which we cherish in respect to our country. But let your judgment on this subject be what it may, sure I am you will agree with me, that there is enough in our circumstances as a community, to inspire humility in view of our national sins ; thanksgiving in view of our national mercies ; and fervent supplication to the Ruler of the world, that He will preserve us from being our own destroyers, and lead us on to that glorious destiny which, under his good providence, it is within our power to reach.

3. In view of our subject, we see *the importance of sustaining and carrying forward our benevolent institutions.*

I speak of these institutions here, not in their momentous bearings upon the immortal interests of men, but as they stand connected with the prosperity of our nation ; and I say deliberately, I say confidently, that on their success is staked our nation's welfare—nay, her very existence. Let the moral machinery which christian benevolence has put in operation in this land, once be stopped ; let there be no missionaries sent abroad to publish salvation in the distant mountains and vallies of our country ; let our Bible, and Tract, and Sabbath school, depositories be closed, and each of these several institutions abolished ; let nothing be done by christian associations to resist the current of vice, as it sets in deep and strong upon our national interests ; and I tell you the signal is given for digging the grave, and preparing the shroud, of our country's greatness : and all that you will see after that, will be a few lingering beams of her glory, just as the orb is sinking in the darkness of a perpetual night. And then Patriotism will fold her arms, and sit down in the dust, and weep ; and as she casts an eye over this once goodly inheritance, and beholds it a wide field of ruin ; as she sees written on the broad face of these Western skies, in characters of wo, “ THE GLORY IS DEPARTED ;” as the monster, Intemperance, leaping from the chains by which for a season he had been bound, insultingly laughs at her defeat, and begins anew his accursed career with fresh courage : in short, as she listens to the death groan, and looks upon the last convulsion, of American liberty ; she lifts her hands to heaven, and exclaims, “ Oh that my country had known, in the day of her merciful visitation, the things that belonged to her peace ; but now they are hid from her eyes !”

Am I not right then, brethren, in charging you, by the regard which you bear to your country's interests, to foster with special care her benevolent institutions ? Rely on it, your halls of legislation may resound with long and lofty speeches in favor of liberty, and you may have your well-disciplined troops stationed in every part of the land, and yet your country's independence will not be safe, if her moral and benevolent operations are arrested : for though there be no enemy approaching from abroad, there is a

viper warming into life in the very bosom of this nation ; whose deadly fang will diffuse poison through the whole body politic, and cause the life blood of her liberty to set back in the chill of death.

It is a thought which is most intimately and painfully connected with this anniversary, that, in this land, which boasts itself to be the nursery of freedom, there is an enslaved people ; a multitude of human beings, whom the hand of oppression hath deprived of their liberty. It is well for our country that she is waking up to this appalling calamity, and endeavoring to purify herself from this national abomination ; and it is an exercise of benevolence, than which no other could be more appropriate to this day, to contribute to the relief of this degraded people. Of the history of the American Colonization Society, of its unexpected success, of its extended operations, of its cheering prospects, I will not speak ; so confident am I that its claims are already well known to you, and have found favor in your eyes. I will only ask you, brethren, to act as consistent freemen, as wise politicians, as true patriots, as brothers of the human family—above all, as disciples of the Lord Jesus, ought to act, in view of this tremendous evil. I am willing to leave the cause in your hands, without saying a word. I ask the God of mercy to direct your charities, and give you your reward.