

Mr. Lathrop's Thanksgiving Sermon.

A
S E R M O N,

PREACHED IN THE
FIRST PARISH *in* WEST-SPRINGFIELD,

DECEMBER 14, MDCCLXXXVI,

Being the DAY appointed by AUTHORITY for a
PUBLIC THANKSGIVING.

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A

THANKSGIVING SERMON.

ISAIAH I. 19, 20.

IF YE BE WILLING AND OBEDIENT, YE SHALL EAT THE GOOD OF THE LAND : BUT IF YE REFUSE AND REBEL, YE SHALL BE DEVoured WITH THE SWORD ; FOR THE MOUTH OF THE LORD HATH SPOKEN IT.

WHAT was spoken by the prophets to the ancient people of God, is written for our use, that we, through the warnings of scripture, might be moved with fear ; and, through the comforts of scripture, might have hope.

OUR relation to God, as a people redeemed by his hand and preserved by his care, as a people enjoying his oracles and professing obedience to his laws, is so similar to *theirs*, that we may justly apply to ourselves what was here spoken to them. I shall therefore consider my text in accommodation to our own case : and shall observe,

I. That the land, in which we are placed, is a *good* land : and,

II. That our *enjoyment* of the good of the land depends on our *obedience* to God.

I. It may as truly be said of *us*, as of ancient *Israel*, that God has given us a *good land*.

WE lately thought it worth defending by our *arms* : it is still worth securing by our *virtue*.

IT is an *extensive* land. Few empires on the globe are so large, as the territory claimed by these states. It will admit a vast increase of numbers ; and probably distant generations will not find themselves straitened for room.

IT is a *pleasant* and *fruitful* land. As it lies in the midst of the temperate regions, no part of it is afflicted with intolerable heat, or rendered uninhabitable by eternal frosts and snows. With proper culture it yields us, not only the necessaries, but the delicacies of life, in such plenty and variety, that we need to be but little indebted to foreign trade.

GREATER *industry* may be necessary here, than in some other climes : but this is no unfavourable circumstance ; for industry contributes to health, virtue, freedom and security.

WITH regard to *commerce*, nature has given us every advantage that can be wished. We have an extensive coast, convenient harbours, navigable bays and rivers, materials of all kinds for shipping, a rich and inexhaustible fishery, and a variety of exportable produce, which may be exchanged for the riches of other climes. Late experience shews, that we are in greater danger from the *excess*, than from the *want* of commerce. Moderate trade contributes to polish and enrich a people ; but when it is carried beyond its proper limits, it produces contrary effects, dissipation, poverty and vice.

THIS is a *healthy* land. Those direful pestilences, which have ravaged other countries, are unknown here. A considerable proportion of the people live to old age ; fewer die in infancy than in most European nations : Our natural increase is supposed to double our numbers as often as once in twenty five years.

IT is a land of *liberty*, and has been so, with little interruption, from the days of our fathers.

THE royal charters first granted to the American colonies, particularly to those of New-England, were of the most liberal kind, and fully agreeable to their views and wishes. No attempts hitherto made, to subvert our liberties, has been successful. They will probably be preserved, until the people themselves, sunk in vice and corruption, destroy them with their own hands. How near we are to this fatal period, Heaven knows !

THE freedom of these colonies was first invaded by James II, who, with a design to establish an absolute monarchy, seized their charters, together with those of the corporations in England. But by the revolution which took place on the accession of the prince of *Orange* to the throne, the freedom both of Britain and America was restored and established.

THE late encroachments of the British court on our charter-rights awakened a just and general concern. Though we were but an infant people, and our enemies were an ancient, rich and powerful nation, we ventured to resist their claims ; and, by a series of wonderful interpositions, our resistance defeated their designs, and terminated in the establishment of our independence.

WE are now under a government of *our own fram-*

ing and chusing. There is perhaps scarcely another instance of the kind on earth. It is a privilege, which few nations ever enjoy, and which the same nation probably can never enjoy more than *once*.

MANY of the governments, now subsisting in the world, were established by the conquering arms of a powerful invader ; some were introduced by the usurpation of princes ; others have been fixed in consequence of a civil war, in which one party prevailing has by arms given law to the rest. Governments, which owe their existence to such a birth, must, you know, in their very nature, be *tyrannies*. The *British* constitution was settled in a more liberal manner, by an explicit compact between the king, the hereditary nobles and the representatives of the people ; and it is undoubtedly more favourable to liberty, than most other forms of government in Europe. But the constitution of these states, and particularly of *this*, was framed and ratified in a manner still more liberal. It is not, in any sense whatever, a compact between the rulers and the people ; but it is a solemn, explicit agreement of the people among themselves. It was constructed by a convention of wise men, whom the people deputed solely for that purpose, and who, at that time, could have no share, and no appearance of a future share in the government they were framing. It was then remitted to the people at large, and competent time allowed for their deliberate examination and discussion ; and it was finally adopted and confirmed in consequence of their *general* approbation. So happily was it adjusted to the views of the people, at a time when the spirit of liberty was at the height, that not a *single* article was found in the *whole*, but

what met the approbation of more than *two thirds* of the inhabitants assembled in the several towns to give their voices upon it. It is therefore, in the most absolute sense, **THE CONSTITUTION OF THE PEOPLE**; and, in this view, it is more sacred than any form of government in Europe. Being framed by the people, it never ought to be changed or altered without their *general* consent *fairly* asked, and *freely* given. There may undoubtedly be defects in it: nothing human is perfect: but still it is *our own*; not imposed, but *chosen*. And whatever imperfections attend it, yet it is acknowledged by all, to be formed on the highest principles of liberty. The administration of it is committed to men appointed by, and from among *ourselves*; to men who are frequently to return to *private* life; to men who are subject to the *same laws* and *burthens*, which they impose on their fellow citizens. The people have it in their power always to influence the measures of government by *petition* and *instructions*, and often to change their rulers by *new elections*. Nations, whose government is absolute, may be under the sad necessity of submitting to oppression, or of repelling it *by force*. *This* is a dreadful alternative, and usually terminates in the increase of the evil. We are un-
der such necessity. Our government is so constituted, that publick oppressions may be soon removed without *force*, either by *remonstrances* against the measures of rulers, or by a *change* of the rulers themselves.

you will ask, ‘What if our new-chosen rulers pursue the measures of the former?’ In this case candour will lead us to suspect, that possibly *they* may judge better than we. If their measures meet with

general approbation, the *few* who are dissatisfied must submit, until, by speaking and publishing their sentiments, they can give general *conviction*. If we should ever be so unhappy as to fall under a *succession* of wicked rulers, we must censure our *ill choice*. We have still wise and good men among us. If the time should come, when there is not a man to be found, who will execute judgment, and seek the truth, how will God pardon us for this ! Nothing, but immediate reformation, can prevent the fatal consequences of such woful depravity. *These* follow by a *divine* establishment, and it is not in the power of *human* government to guard against them.

PERHAPS it will be asked, "Is there no case in which a people may resist government ?" Yes, there is *one* such case ; and that is, when rulers *usurp* a power *oppressive* to the people, and continue to support it by *military force* in contempt of every *respectful remonstrance*. In this case the *body* of the people have a *natural* right to unite their strength for the restoration of *their own constitutional* government. And, for the same reason, if a *part* of the people attempt by arms to controul or subvert the government, the rulers, who are the *guardians* of the constitution, have a right to call in the aid of the people to protect it. If the people may use force to suppress an armed *usurpation* of unconstitutional authority, rulers may, on the same principle, use force to suppress an armed *insurrection* against constitutional authority.

CIVIL liberty is a very valuable blessing. It was the professed object of the late dangerous war. It is secured to us, as far as success in the prosecution of the war, wisdom in the settlement of the peace, and

deliberation in framing our government, *could* secure it. Our own virtue and prudence, under providence, must do the rest.

THIS is a land, not only of civil, but *religious* liberty. The enjoyment of gospel-privileges was a grand motive with our ancestors to enterprise on emigration to this distant world. They brought with them the sacred scriptures, early formed churches for divine worship, diligently instructed their children in the knowledge of religion, erected private schools for their education, and, as soon as the abilities of the country would permit, they established larger seminaries, in which youth might be trained up for publick employments, especially for the ministry, that this important office might not become useless and contemptible by falling into the hands of illiterate men. Care was taken to secure to the churches the privilege of chusing their own teachers, and of worshipping God according to the dictates of their own consciences ; a privilege which these churches now possess in the amplest manner, and which is happily confirmed by the civil government under which we are placed. In consequence of the pious zeal of our fathers, we still, through the divine goodness, enjoy the gospel of the Redeemer, and the offers and means of eternal salvation. The word of God is dispensed, his ordinances administered, his sabbaths continued, churches are maintained and religious worship preserved in them, and, we have reason to hope, that the gracious influences of the divine spirit, are not wholly withdrawn, but are still vouchsafed to render the gospel successful.

Is any thing now wanting to make this a *good land*?
 —Nothing but our own virtue and wisdom in the improvement of these advantages.

THIS thought naturally introduces our other observation,

II. That our *enjoyment* of the *good* of this land depends on our *obedience* to God.

External advantages, without wisdom and virtue to apply them, will make neither a people, nor a person happy. A man, surrounded with all the means of wealth, will be indigent, if he knows not how to use them. One possessed of the amplest fortune, without a capacity to enjoy it, will suffer all the miseries of real poverty. The best natural constitution of body will soon be ruined by excessive indulgence. So a people, blest with all imaginable circumstances of national felicity, may be enslaved, and even destroyed by their own vices and follies.

There is a connection between virtue and happiness ; between vice and wretchedness, in social as well as private life. From the justice and goodness of the supreme Governour, we may naturally conclude, that he will protect and prosper a virtuous people, while he leaves corrupt and irreclaimable nations to suffer the fatal effects of their own perverseness. This natural conclusion from the divine character is confirmed by the declarations of scripture, and the usual course of providence. The threatening and the promise in our text are most explicit and peremptory ; and to give them the greater solemnity, it is added, *The mouth of the Lord hath spoken them.*

IT will be proper for us particularly to consider, what those virtues are, on which our national happiness principally depends.

1. The first thing that here meets our thoughts is *internal peace and union.*

CAN a man be happy, whose breast is the seat of contending passions ? Can a family prosper, whose members continually oppose and counteract each other ? Can the harvests of your fields stand secure amidst a war of conflicting elements ?—No more can a nation flourish, while it is distracted with intestine broils. ‘Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation.’ A small people united will be strong and respectable : the largest community broken and disjointed becomes impotent and contemptible. It was our union in the late war, that gave us strength to bear up against the power of a superiour enemy. Had we been divided, we must have fallen. The union, which was necessary to an effectual defence, is still necessary to our enjoying the good of the land.

IT is not uncommon, that when the burthens arising from a long war press hard on a people, and the terrour of the invading enemy, which for a while animated and united them, is intirely removed, they lose their patriotick zeal, and fall into dangerous contentions. This is an event which our enemies predicted for us ; which our friends forewarned us of, and which, to our disgrace, we now begin to realize.

WHATEVER oppressions we suffer, or seem to suffer, our measures of redress must be only such, as may consist with our internal peace ; for being divided against ourselves, we shall become an easy prey to foreign invaders ; or rather, shall fall a contemptible prey to one another. Contentions, once begun, may proceed to, we know not what, dreadful lengths ; and may terminate in, we know not what, direful events. While, with a watchful eye we guard against every *real* invasion of our rights, we

must place a *reasonable* confidence in our rulers, and study and pursue the things which contribute to peace, both in our smaller societies, and in the community at large.

A general distrust is inconsistent with government and subversive of all security. Confidence joined with circumspection tends both to peace and liberty. Let not Ephraim envy Judah, nor Judah vex Ephraim, and their common adversaries will be removed.

2. In order to our enjoying the good of the land, there must be mutual *justice* and *benevolence*.

These are necessary to internal peace, and branches of the obedience recommended in the text. *Seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, plead for the widow.*

OUR first obligation to mankind is *justice*. This is rendering to all their dues, in opposition to every kind of fraud, oppression and violence. The great law, which ought to govern our social conduct, is *to do to others, as we would, that they should do to us ; to owe no man any thing, but to love one another*. This law, written in the heart, will prompt us to the *voluntary* exercise of equity, integrity and righteousness. It is the want of *this*, that makes the *coercion* of *human* government so absolutely necessary to the subsistence of society. ‘The law is made for the lawless.’ Every man can easily judge of himself what is right, by asking his own heart, what, in a similar case, he would expect from another.

OUR next obligation is *goodness*. The poor we have always with us : and there are times when their number is increased. The late war, as might naturally be expected, has made a considerable change of property. It has reduced many to absolute po-

verty, and others to an incapacity of sustaining any great share of the common burthen without leaving their families to want. Government, at such a time, ought to adjust their demands to the common ability ; and this, we hope, is their *aim*, for *they* bear a part of the burthen with others. But it should be considered, that the *general* rules, by which the measures of government *must* be directed, will often operate with *some inequality*. This is an *unavoidable* imperfection of human society. In such cases, instead of charging government with cruelty, it would be proper for the more strong to assist the weak. *Bear ye one another's burthens*, says the law of Christ. The law of reason says the same.

No community ought to leave her prudent and industrious members to struggle in vain under an insupportable load. By mutual succour in times of distress we increase the common strength. Reciprocal support and protection is one end of society. ' Two are better than one, for if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow ; but wo to him that is alone when he falleth, for he hath not another to help him up. And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him, and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.'

A community, in which an opposite spirit prevails, cannot be happy. Mutual fraud, injustice and oppression cause perpetual animosities, and frequent litigations, discourage industry and enterprize, destroy all confidence, and obstruct every measure proposed for the common good.

3. The happiness of a people farther depends on *industry and frugality*.

THIS, though a good land, will not support us in

idleness and profuseness. If it would, it must soon cease to be a good land. In a country, where every man could grow rich with little labour, almost every man would in fact be poor ; for there being no spur to industry and few examples of it, the body of the people would sink into idleness, luxury and wretchedness. All the wealth, and all the power would be engrossed by the provident and enterprizing few. The rest would be slaves, or little superiour.

AT a time like this, when the expenses, incurred by the late contest for independence, are lying as a burthen on the country, diligence in our callings, and prudence in our manner of living, are of peculiar importance. While the object of the war appeared precarious, we thought no sacrifice too great to obtain it. Since we have obtained it, let us submit to some self-denial, that we may secure it. Tho' our burthens are heavy, yet we may hope, that by those smiles of heaven, which will always attend a virtuous people, we shall soon, in a way of prudence and industry, find relief : without *these*, miracles could not make us happy. Idleness and luxury brings on poverty ; *this* multiplies the temptations to injustice ; injustice breeds contention, and this makes confusion and every evil work.

4. Our enjoyment of the good of the land will depend on the *regular administration* of, and a *peaceable submission* to civil government.

MANKIND cannot subsist without society, nor society without government. If there was no way to controul the selfishness, check the passions and restrain the vices of men, they would soon become intolerable to each other. Government is the combination of the whole community against the vices

of each member. The design of it is not meerly to provide for general defence against *foreign* power, but to exercise a controul over every individual, to restrain him from wrong, and compel him to right, so far as the common safety requires. The best form of government will not make a people happy, without a *just administration* of it, and *cheerful obedience* to it; and both these very much depend on the virtue of the people. We must commit the administration of our government to our wisest and best men: not to those, whom we would not dare to trust in our private affairs; but to those, whose known ability and integrity intitle them to our confidence; for 'he that is faithful in the least, is faithful also in much; and he that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much.'

WILL you think a man capable of being a *patriot* whom you see to be dishonest, unfaithful, dissolute, and profane? You may as well judge him a *saint*. As well may your *charity* send him to heaven, as your *prudence* prefer him to be a leader in the affairs of state. We must also contribute our aid to carry into effect the *good* laws of the state, especially those which relate to virtue and morals. If we discover errors, we must endeavour to rectify them; but let us not, under pretence of redressing wrongs, destroy what is right; nor in our zeal to amend the state, forget to amend ourselves. The more virtue there is among the people, the more there will be among rulers, because better men will be elected to power; and they, who are elected, will be more strongly influenced to a right use of their power. If we indulge in ourselves the faults that we condemn

in rulers ; if, while we complain of publick oppression or profuseness, we are prodigal in our expenses, or unjust to our neighbours, we are grossly inconsistent. We shew, how government *would* be administered, if it was committed to *our* hands.

ZEALOUS for a good government, let us be zealous of good works, maintain them ourselves, encourage them among others, and, as far as our influence extends, give efficacy to wholesome laws, that they may be a terrour to evil doers and a protection to them who do well.

5. Another thing necessary to our national happiness is *a diligent attendance on the instituted means of religion.*

THE gospel inculcates those virtues, which immediately conduce to publick felicity, such as peace, justice, charity, industry and temperance ; and therefore our attendance on its institutions, which are designed for the promotion of these virtues, is a principal mean of national prosperity. The observance of sabbaths and of social worship is, in this view, of vast importance to society, and of still higher importance to each individual in regard to his future salvation. It much concerns us therefore as members of civil society, and more as christians, to maintain the publick dispensation of God's word and ordinances, to attend on it ourselves and encourage the attendance of others, and to be likeminded one toward another, that we may with one mind and one mouth glorify God.

6. As we wish to transmit to our children the *goodness* of our land, we must train them up in such a manner, that they may be *capable* of enjoying it.

WE have generally professed, that the happiness

of *posterity*, rather than our own, was our object in the late war. This was our *language*, 'The present generation will suffer much in the conflict ; but we cannot be reconciled to the prospect of leaving our children slaves. *We* suffer to purchase freedom for *them* ? The war has ended as successfully as we wished, and we have suffered no more than we professed to exert. If the good of posterity was our aim, let us not lose sight of it now. Let us educate them in knowledge and virtue, and teach them to be willing and obedient, that they may eat the good of the land. What benefit will all our labours and sufferings in the cause of *liberty* transmit to them, if we leave them to grow up slaves to their own lusts and to the evil manners of the world, and thus to bring down on themselves the fatal judgments of an angry Deity ?

POLITICAL liberty depends on national virtue. Prevailing vice sooner or later introduces national slavery. Under almost any form of government a virtuous people will be free and happy. But a people sunk in corruption must be wretched. Their government, however liberal in its principles, will be severe in its administration, because they can subsist under no other. If we would convey to our children the greatest possible freedom, we must train them up in virtuous sentiments and manners.

HAVING illustrated the observations contained in the text, let us now seriously apply them.

WE see what obligations we are under to God for his goodness to our nation ; and how we may enjoy the continuance of his goodness.

HE has placed us in a land of health, plenty, freedom and gospel light ; defended us in the enjoy-

ment of our privileges ; prospered us in a dangerous war ; granted the sweet return of peace ; allowed us the independence which we fought ; settled us under a government of our own choosing ; given us abundance of health ; made the seasons peculiarly favourable for several years, and especially in the year past, and smiled on all the labours of our hands.

IT becomes us, under a thoughtful sense of his great goodness, to praise and exalt his name, and to resolve that our future conduct shall be correspondent with our present professions of gratitude. ‘ They who offer praise glorify God , and to them who order their conversation aright, ‘ he will shew his salvation.’

LET us, as becomes a people professing their dependence on God, deeply humble ourselves for our sins. One principal design of his goodness is, to lead us to repentance.

LET the restoration of peace, after a bloody and distressing war, influence us to peace and union among ourselves. How provoking, in the sight of the God of peace, would be intestine divisions and animosities, after such recent experience of the calamities of war, and of the divine goodness in our deliverance ! Would he not be angry with us, till he had consumed us ?

LET the bounty of our divine Benefactor, in supplying our various wants, excite us to do good to the needy. The best expression of gratitude to God, is an imitation of his beneficence. We are to offer the sacrifice of praise continually, and especially to do good and communicate, for with such sacrifices he is best pleased.

LET us use the bounties of his providence with temperance and moderation. This is a moral duty at all times ; it is a political duty at such a time as this. As christians we are required to be temperate in all things, and with quietness to work the thing that is good, that we may eat our own bread, and have to give to those who need. As members of society we are now under additional obligations to industry and sobriety, that we may relieve ourselves and our country from the peculiar burthens of the day, and may enjoy the good of the land.

LET us remember our obligations to God for continuing to us his glorious gospel, and pray for its general success, and for a divine power to accompany it in our own souls.

LET us attend on the instituted worship of God, cultivate peace in the religious societies of which we are members, and avoid all such divisions as tend to obstruct the influence of the gospel and to defeat the end for which churches are formed.

LET us bring up our children in the knowledge, and inculcate on them the duties of religion, teaching them to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and piously in the world, and thus to look for the blessed hope which the gospel sets before them.

WORLDLY prosperity, however desirable, is not an object of the first importance. We are soon to quit this mortal state ; let us be chiefly solicitous to secure a title to a better country.

WE have here no continuing city. In a few days we shall make our final remove, and another set of mortals will succeed in our places. Every year makes considerable changes ; a few years produce vast al-

terations in the inhabitants of this dying world. Though the past year has been generally healthful, yet the number of deaths in this society has been greater than usual.

GOD'S providence utters a warning voice to people of every age.

CHILDREN and youths are solemnly warned of their mortality, and urged to give an immediate attention to their everlasting concerns. Let this day, be with you, my children, not a day of thoughtless levity, wanton mirth and wild dissipation ; but a day of serious recollection, fervent prayer, and humble dedication of yourselves to God. While you praise him for his goodness in preserving you another year, repent of the sins and follies of the year past, consecrate your spared lives to his service and enter on a speedy preparation for the changes, that may await you in the year to come.

HEADS of families, and persons in the midst of life, are taught the uncertainty of their continuance here. While the death of a neighbour and friend awakens in our minds a grateful remembrance of God's sparing mercy to us and our families, let it also impress us with a sense of the changes to which we are exposed, and excite a serious concern to maintain religion in our hearts, and promote it in our houses.

THE *aged* have been repeatedly warned. My fathers, a greater number of your contemporaries have been removed in the year past, than has been common in preceding years. God's voice to you is, *Be ye also ready.* You stand on the borders of the eternal world. Soon you must go the way, whence you will not return. Within the ensuing year, it is probable, some of your small number will make

their last remove. You ought to examine your state, to be instant in prayer, to live in the daily exercise of faith and piety, and by a holy and blameless example recommend religion to those who are coming after you. May you, and may we all, when the time of our departure is come, be able to rejoice in the reflection, that we have finished our course well, and in the hope that there is laid up for us a crown of righteousness.

THIS, though on many accounts a day of rejoicing, is, in other respects, a day of danger and darkness.

THE general indifference to the instituted ordinances of the gospel, threatens the discontinuance of them; the prevalence of wickedness forbodes divine judgments; and our civil commotions and disturbances give cause to apprehend a troublous scene approaching. Should they spread and prevail so far as to involve the state in a civil war, what have we to expect as the consequences, but general poverty, bondage and wretchedness?

THAT the people are under great burthens, all are agreed. Whether there are *grievances*, I leave with others to determine. Admitting there are, undoubtedly there may be methods of redress more safe, and more effectual than *arms*. If any of you have thought this a necessary measure, I only ask, that you would calmly review what I have said on the nature of our government, and seriously consider what may be the consequences of drawing the sword; and possibly you will see reason to alter your sentiments.

I have spoken with freedom, because I am anxious for my country; and without fear of offending, because I know the candour of my audience.

LET us all be solicitous to prove what is acceptable with God. Let us study the wisdom which is pure and peaceable, full of mercy and good fruits. Let us humbly implore the interposition of that being, who has all events, and all hearts in his hand, to avert the evils that threaten us, to awaken our drowsy hearts to a sense of the importance of religion, to lead us to repentance and amendment of life, to prepare us for his mercies and make us a happy people.
