

THE

PROVIDENCE OF GOD

IN

Raising up under our Republican Institutions,

GREAT AND GOOD MEN

AS OUR RULERS:

A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED

BY REV. G. W. SAMSON,

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ON THANKSGIVING DAY, NOV. 25, 1852.



BOSTON:

TICKNOR, REED, AND FIELDS.

M.DCCC.LIII.

Boston, Nov. 27, 1852.

Rev. and Dear Sir,

We enjoyed great pleasure in listening to your sermon on Thanksgiving Day, on the providence of God in raising up great men to direct the affairs of our nation; and we would respectfully request of you a copy for publication.

The principles you discussed and the suggestions you offered relative to the providential events which have transpired in our country's history, seem to us well calculated to arrest the attention and impress upon the minds of the community those practical truths which will best enable them to form a correct estimate of the services and characters of the distinguished men who have shone as guiding lights in our national councils.

With Christian regard, respectfully and truly your friends,

N. P. KEMP,
JOSEPH H. CONVERSE,
L. J. BRADISH.

Rev. G. W. SAMSON, }
Jamaica Plain. }

Washington, D. C., Dec. 18, 1852.

Messrs. N. P. KEMP, JOSEPH H. }
CONVERSE, L. J. BRADISH. }

My Dear Sirs,

I have yielded, with much hesitation, to your request, though expressed in terms so flattering and urged on me at the time of your personal visit with so much kind regard. Sermons, almost without exception, are written for an occasion; whose circumstances give an interest and an apparent value which on after perusal is disappointed. My distant removal immediately after your request, has, as I anticipated, delayed and almost entirely prevented any subsequent revision of the manuscript. It is sent to you with this distinct understanding, that if on reading the sheets, the discourse appears to you in a different light than at the first hearing, you do me the sincere courtesy to leave it unpublished.

With sincere and lasting attachment, your friend and brother,

GEORGE W. SAMSON.

DISCOURSE.



Judges, 2:18.

“AND WHEN THE LORD RAISED THEM UP JUDGES, THEN THE LORD WAS WITH THE JUDGES, AND DELIVERED THEM OUT OF THE HAND OF THEIR ENEMIES ALL THE DAYS OF THE JUDGE.”

We do not, as a people, appreciate our rulers. We especially forget too much that God makes great and good men, and inclines the people of a nation to yield to their influence. It is God who “raises up the Judges,” the Presidents and the Statesmen; and it is he who is “with the judge,” and who blesses the people “all the days of the judge.” Just as he makes worlds and trees so God makes men; and just as he controls every movement of the planets and of the growing plants by his laws, so he governs every successive stage in the development of a great mind, and every advancing attainment it makes in influencing other minds.

In their early system of government, the tribes of Israel were a confederated Republic; in form much like that in which we live. The republican form of government, indeed, that form of social and civil organization in which communities of men choose their own rulers, make their own laws and band together in confed-

eracies for mutual aid and protection, seems to have been appointed by our Creator for our race ; since it appears to have been suggested generally to the families of man in all ages. It is found entering into the early history of Persia, Greece and Rome ; and it is seen existing permanently in its primitive simplicity in the old and changeless customs of the Arab tribes of Asia and Africa, and of the scattered and uncultured Indian tribes of our Western continent. Certainly it seems the dictate of common sense, the natural suggestion of intuitive reason, that, when a community of men have grown up so as to need framers and judges and administrators of law, they should select for themselves, from time to time, men fitted for their work ; rather than that a particular family or class in society should be called to this responsible employ, whose descendants must rule, be they idiots or wise men, be they reprobates or good men. A hereditary succession of rulers is as unphilosophical as is a hereditary succession of mechanics, merchants, artists, physicians or preachers.

In the beginning it was not so. From Jehovah the confederated tribes of Israel received this as their form of civil organization. Looking carefully through all their tribes and families for the man whom God himself, by conferring special endowments on him, seemed to have made for the office, the people chose him for their leader ; and God disapproved their course when by installing a king and establishing a hereditary monarchy they put forever out of their power the privilege of having select rulers. No nation on earth has there been, probably, which has not commenced thus, with rulers elected by the people. Unfortunate are those great nations of men, who, on account of the corruption and consequent hazard attending popular elections in communi-

ties growing in numbers but not in virtue, have been led to depart from God's select and only rational plan ; and thrice unhappy is that people where the mass of society are intelligent, and desire a return to the Divine right of self-government, but who find that " the old man," once saddled upon their shoulders, cannot be thrown off. Fortunate are those little isolated tribes which have always been able to preserve incorrupt that primeval form of social organization ordained of God ; and thrice happy is this our great confederated Republic, that distance from intriguing monarchical neighbors, and, above all, that intelligence and virtue among our great people, have preserved to us thus long the choice heritage of our fathers,—the Heaven-ordained privilege of having our own select, and, therefore, trustworthy rulers.

There is a great practical truth presented in the brief but general statement made as to the history of the Judges of the Israelite confederacy, which we have just read. Its consideration is not only important as a principle of general value and interest, but it seems to be specially timely for us, met as we are on this annual Thanksgiving Day, just on the peaceful close of another great Presidential election, and so soon after the sudden death of one of the people's chosen candidates, a statesman such as our country probably has not, and perhaps will not see the like of again, the last and greatest of the second generation of our nation's leaders. Shall we ponder then this truth, which, in the history of His once chosen people, God here offers for our contemplation.

IN A POPULAR GOVERNMENT GOD'S HAND IS SPECIALLY SEEN IN RAISING UP AND DIRECTING GREAT AND GOOD MEN FITTED FOR THEIR TIMES.

In a monarchy even, where there is a family succession of rulers, it is, of course, true as Daniel declared,

that "The God of heaven removeth *kings* and setteth up *kings* ;" and as Solomon wrote, "The *king's* heart is in the hand of the Lord ; as the rivers of water he turneth it whithersoever he will." Only in a *popular* government, however, can all the power and worth of great and good men be called forth and rendered available. In the days of the Judges of Israel, the *best man* was at the head of the nation ; whether he were a warrior, like Gideon and Samson, or a mere civilian or even a religious teacher, like Samuel. But, under the monarchy, as they had their David and their Solomon to gather and give stability and prosperity, so they must have their Rehoboam to divide and impoverish and corrupt the nation ; whose folly and wilfulness, armed as he was with power, all the wise and good old statesmen that had grown up around his father could neither control nor counteract.

Most instructive is this truth, traced in the history of our Republic. A venerated father in the gospel, well known in our city, was some years ago discussing with a circle in England the promise of stability witnessed in our popular institutions, when he was led to suggest this consideration in confirmation of his confident opinion. "It would be very difficult to find in the history of England, or of any other country, nine successive kings at all to be compared with our nine successive Presidents." We may now number *thirteen* in our challenge ; and we may safely allow to the patriot of England, or of any other land, 700 years against our 70, forty to four, in which to search for, but not to find, monarchs to match in ability and worth our chief magistrates. Surely "God has raised up the judges" among us ; and he has "been with the judge," and has "delivered the people all the life of the judge."

Even more striking is it to remark the succession of men, who, though they have nominally occupied a subordinate place in the councils of our nation, have yet been the great leading and ruling spirits of their times. What a galaxy of brilliant and pure minds arose during our Revolution, and shone like stars each with its own peculiar glory. There was Washington with his clear, calm, well-balanced judgment ; who by practical action in the field, and by close study in the tent and chamber, had measured every inch of ground in the States with his mind's eye, and had beforehand studied all its capabilities for military supplies and defence ; who with patient toil could plan the campaign of a whole year for each division of his widely spread army, and during Spring, Summer and Autumn, could carry through all his Winter's plans as systematically and surely as a farmer in his field ; so that, though never brilliant, the world have since acknowledged the justice of the judgment of Frederic the Great of Prussia, when, even before the war was finished, he sent to Washington his portrait, with the inscription, " The greatest General in Europe to the greatest General in the world." Then there was Hamilton among Washington's aids, more brilliant and quick-sighted than his chieftain, who in the heat of an engagement would suggest movements which the cool sagacity of the General would at once approve and execute ; and there were also valiant Captains rather than Generals, who, with more daring and energy than the Commander-in-Chief, fought the battles he had planned. And while this rare talent was found in the field ; what peculiar diversity and combination of needed genius and learning, of fire and coolness, was seen in the Congress and among the people ; where there was found an Adams to speak and a Jefferson to write, a

Henry and an Otis to harangue, and a Franklin and a Madison to consult.

But that generation had all passed away, and a more trying era, the *second* and transition period, always the most critical in a young nation's, as in a young man's history, came on. The stability of the institutions founded by the fathers was to be tested in a generation that knew not from personal experience how dearly they had been bought. And, surely, for that emergency also, "the Lord raised up judges" equal to the crisis. At this very juncture there came upon the stage of action a coterie of men unsurpassed for ability or patriotism by any that have ever blessed a nation. Foremost among these,—not to do discredit to other noble names,—foremost among these was DANIEL WEBSTER.

He was great among men great in *intellect*. It has been often remarked, that such minds, whether eminent in art, science, literature or politics, seem to grow together in clusters; probably *making* each other by their mutual influence in calling out each other's powers; just as the lofty trees, growing together in the dense forests of the West inspire one another's growth, while each seeks to overtop his fellow and to catch first the sun's light and heat. But, among all the statesmen of his age, Mr. Webster alone was great in every department of intellectual power. There was Mr. Calhoun, the close, abstract logician; who, always confident and sincere in his opinions, and inspired with the earnestness of sincerity, carried his hearer along in his argument irresistibly to his conclusion; whose views, however, and whose aims were rather sectional than national, confined to his native Carolina, not spreading out for the benefit of the Union. There was again Mr. Clay, the sagacious politician and winning orator; the faithful sen-

tinel, watching for approaching danger, and the skilful and valiant captain, prompt and adroit in meeting present necessity ; always looking out for some politic measure to meet an emergency and to harmonize disagreement, and able always, by availing himself of the popular current, to effect a compromise, though sometimes on a basis such as the present circumstances admitted, but such as could not be permanent. Mr. Webster was alone the comprehensive statesman ; reverencing the compact entered into by the fathers, and seeking to maintain it in its integrity, whatever section might seem to be favored or put to disadvantage ; mining and quarrying out, laying deep down, and building upon foundations eternal as the mountain rock ; rearing upon great principles of universal right, a system of laws and statutes that would *stand*, and not give trouble to the next Congress, or even to the next generation. In this respect Mr. Webster was the man of his age ; such a man as centuries only produce ; a man raised up by God, as the historian of the next age will without contradiction record, to meet the peculiar crisis in his country's history.

My hearers, I believe that in ages to come, the two great turning points in the history of our popular government will be these ;—the permanent and stable settling of the questions, 1st, “ In what relation do the States of our Union stand to each other ?” and 2d, “ In what relation do the United States stand to other governments of the earth ?” On the first of these great questions Mr. Webster held the even balance, when he replied to Mr. Hayne, of South Carolina, and rebuked nullification in the South, and when on the 7th of March, 1850, he proclaimed the reciprocal obligation of the North, and taught how God will accomplish among

his people the great ends of philanthropy and of humanity, not by our violent and denunciatory disclaiming of the compact entered into by our fathers, but by mild, manly appeals to the conscience of brethren with whom we are aggrieved, and by trusting to the gradual, certain, peaceful and blessed means he always has employed for the removing of the blighting evil of slavery. The second of those great questions was settled, for a century, when Mr. Webster wrote that masterly letter to Chevalier Hulsemann, the Austrian minister, showing the *moral* means which a free people must and will use to crush despotism; and when a few days after he took Kossuth, the Hungarian patriot, by the hand as a *private philanthropist*, and mildly showed him “That the weapons of our warfare are not *carnal*,” though “they are mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.”

When Mr. Webster, after his celebrated reply to Mr. Hayne, first met General Jackson, then President of the Union, with a quivering lip and an eye speaking his soul, the veteran hero is said to have grasped the statesman's hand, exclaiming to this effect,—“Had it not been for you, Mr. Webster, we should have been carried by the board.” Not a President has filled the chair of that office during the last thirty years who has not been equally indebted to his great powers; for he has been the ruling spirit of the past generation; not always *seen* as such, but always *felt* to be such. “The Lord raised up the judge and was with him and delivered the people from their enemies during all the life of the judge.”

Mr. Webster was great among his compeers chiefly because he was eminent for moral and religious integrity. They greatly mistake who with the casual letter-writer are led to form an opinion from first glance ap-

pearances, unfavorable to the morality, if not to the piety, of our prominent public men. The plain countryman, for the first time spending a few days in our city, would go home after visiting our shops, counting-rooms, and even our churches, verily believing there was not an honest, sincere Christian to be found in Boston; so different from all his notions are outside appearances, and so difficult is it to pierce through this outside appearance and see the under-current of thought and feeling. Were the hidden life of the Christian *citizen* revealed, there would be seen a deeper-toned morality and piety than the untried, and, therefore, unstrengthened heart of the *countryman* ever can attain or possess. The plain countryman, Abraham, eminent for piety as he was, fell under the just reproof of the worldly Egyptian monarch accustomed to temptation; for the pious patriarch's virtue failed when he met the seductive enticements of the city and the Court. So, too, many a time the plain, honest citizen would need reproof from such an one as Webster, were the private man subjected to the public man's temptation. A stranger at Jerusalem for a week in David's or Solomon's day, might have carried home a sad report of the monarch's morality and piety. The faithful Nathan at Washington, sometimes has occasion to go with the parable of the ravished lamb to his guilty hearer, and to say to one whom the people honor, "Thou art the man;" yet he has much oftener hours of unwonted spiritual converse, both in the family and the sanctuary, with those, who, like David, love God and love their country; and whose virtue and piety is the deeper rooted, because, like the storm-beaten oak, it has been strengthened by resistance.

Be assured of this, my hearers; among a virtuous and pious people, immoral and irreligious rulers cannot

exist. Among the majority of our men in station, there is a control over their appetites and passions such as men of less impulsiveness and less temptation have no conception of. While no man ever had stronger propensities to struggle against than Mr. Webster, few men have deserved more credit for mastering them. Surely he could not have been a *habitually* sensual man, whose frame sustained such a mighty working intellect as that of Mr. Webster, for seventy long years. And the young man who vainly thinks, "Mr. Webster was a sensual man and yet rose, and so I can indulge myself and yet gain power and station,"—that young man may too late find his mistake. Moreover, he could not be a man given to unrestrained passion, who could say as Mr. Webster, on the decease of Mr. Calhoun, with whom for nearly forty years he had been associated, "Amidst all the strifes of party and politics, there has subsisted between us always and without interruption, a good degree of personal kindness. Differing widely on many questions respecting our institutions and the government of the country, those differences never interrupted our personal and social intercourse."

Many a man high in our offices of trust reads his Bible daily, as did John Quincy Adams, reverencing it the more, the more he reads it; and so did Mr. Webster. Very many, like Washington, bow in public, family and secret prayer; and so did Mr. Webster. Many of our leading statesmen, like Jackson and Clay, in old age, when their political life was nearly past, have made a public profession of religion; but this did Mr. Webster when he was a young man; and always were his *intellectual* convictions fixed and consistent, whatever his heart's feeling may have been, and however his outward deportment may have seemed. When in 1820–21, Maine

was set off from Massachusetts, and a Convention was consequently called to revise our State Constitution, the section relating to judicial oaths was referred to a Committee consisting of Mr. Webster as Chairman, together with a Baptist, an Orthodox Congregationalist and a Unitarian clergyman, and a lawyer who was an avowed disbeliever in the Christian Scriptures. The question in the Committee was, "Shall the old provision of the Constitution, requiring a man to swear 'that he believes in the Christian religion,' be retained or stricken out?" The skeptical lawyer expressed his views very decidedly; with many a sneering remark against the Christian religion. The clergymen merely expressed their doubt as to the expediency of retaining the old provision. Last came Mr. Webster's turn, as Chairman, to speak. "Gentlemen," said he, "I entertain and therefore must express a different opinion from that here advanced. I once in youth doubted the truth of the Christian religion; but I have examined it for myself, and am convinced of its Divine nature. As to the minor points on which you clerical gentlemen differ, I am not settled; but on the question whether Christianity is true, I am settled. So satisfied am I of it, that I am in favor of retaining this provision of the old Constitution, though as Chairman of your Committee I shall report the opinion of the majority." Never, during his whole life, in his hundreds of public speeches,—never did Mr. Webster utter a word that was not in harmony with this his early expressed conviction; while, on the other hand, he often even went out of his way to express his reverence of the great truths of the Bible; and it is only a close student of the Scriptures, like him, who can recognize in the striking metaphors wrought into the glowing passages of Mr. Webster's most impressive speeches, how the spirit and

even the language of the great orator has been caught from the prophets and poets of the Old Testament. In generations to come this will be remembered in Mr. Webster, when all else of him is forgotten ; that, in his mature age, like Grotius, the great founder of the science of international law, whom he so much resembled, his wish was to leave his testimony to the truth and power of the Christian religion, and to prepare a work, like that of Grotius, on the Evidences of its truth. Surely “the Lord raised up the judge, and the Lord was with the judge, and He delivered the people all the days of the judge.”

And now the second era of our national history is past ; the second generation of our great statesmen, Adams, Calhoun, Clay, Webster, have all gone ; and the last and brightest of the stars of that age has set forever. And now, when great crises shall arise, who will stand in the place of our Webster ?

Notice we a connected thought shining out in this message of God to us, and we shall be prepared rightly to improve the truth we have dwelt upon.

It is the people that make their leaders. Daniel Webster would not have been the man he was, unless he had grown up among the intelligent, educated, virtuous and pious New England race. Remark how here we are told in the Book of Judges, again and again, “When the *people of Israel* cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised them up a deliverer ; and when the Lord raised them up a judge the Lord was with the judge.” No people can be free unless they have learned individually to govern themselves ; unless there be so much virtue and piety in the hearts of the majority of a community that they will do right without being compelled by an armed police. This is a truth self-evident ; this is the

secret of the stability of our popular government and of the downfall of all other Republics of our day. In the mass of our community there has been a love of God and love of man which have been better than a police and a standing army. The wise and good have trembled in view of the position of three millions of slaves in our borders ; but a larger proportion of them than of our white population are humble Christians. Never can the fearful scenes that have terminated the existence of slavery in the Spanish possessions visit us ; but by a peaceful concurrence of events God is surely and rapidly bringing on the freedom and social exaltation of the colored race. We have trembled for the two millions of Irish Catholics pouring in a single ten years into our population ; but one of their own agents, on a late visit of investigation to our country, has gone home with surprise to tell how the leaven of our Christian faith has reached one-half of all the Catholic population of the States ; and that one-half only of the number their lists ought to show, about two millions instead of four millions, can be reckoned as adherents to the Roman faith. We have feared for the youth of our cities ; but every year new organizations are formed, and new means are employed, to draw them into Wisdom's pleasant path ; until now, young men's *Christian* associations, the first organization of youth formed for a *religious* purpose, are spreading every where through our cities.

Plain then is our duty and our hope.

Let our *young men* early examine for themselves the truth of Christianity ; let them learn early to study and love the Bible, and to kneel in daily prayer to God ; and let them in youth possess and publicly profess the religion of Christ. Then many a Webster in moral and religious convictions if not in intellectual greatness, and

greater than Websters in life-long moral and religious consistency, we shall see.

And more. Let *all our citizens* prize good men as God's gift. I cannot but believe something is meant in the Providence which has seemed to break up the great political parties of our land at the moment when the great leaders have passed away ; just as the great Federal and Republican parties ceased to exist when the men of the first generation were no more. Surely God means that we should think more of having good men than a great party ; and He means that we, like His ancient people, should cry unto Him that He would raise up such men.