

J. Moore

AN

Anniversary Address,

DELIVERED

At Middletown-Point Church, on Monday the fifth of July, 1802, to the inhabitants of that place, and its vicinity, on the subject of

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE,

with inferences from that event.



By the Rev. BENJAMIN BENNETT,

PASTOR OF THE ANABAPTIST CONGREGATION NEAR MIDDLETOWN, MONMOUTH COUNTY, N. JERSEY.

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Hail Independence! vast design;
The efforts of the brave were thine
When doubtful, all, and dark....
It was a chaos to explore,
It seem'd all sea without a shore,
Nor on that sea an ark.

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.....
1802.

ANNIVERSARY ADDRESS, &c.

Friends and Fellow-Citizens,

I RISE with peculiar diffidence to discharge the duty you have assigned to me on this day ; but, relying on the plenitude of your candour ; and supported by a conscious rectitude of my own views, I will endeavour to fulfil the appointment in the best manner I am able ; and at the same time take the liberty to remind you of an animated portion of divine truth recorded in the nineteenth chapter of *Revelations* ; verses *sixth* and *seventh* :

“Hallelujah! for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him.”

This portion of divine truth I would recommend to your serious attention on this occasion, and will beg your indulgence, while I carry it along with me as the motto of the sentiments I would convey to you, in the address I am to make.

Under the various impressions of joy and sorrow incident to this constantly varying state, the virtuous and reflecting mind finds irresistible motives to gratitude; and a fruitful source of relief, in contemplating the divine government, and its dispensations to man, in particular, as represented to us in the consoling page of inspiration.

In the gloomy day of adversity, when the clouds of impenetrable darkness encompass us on every side, and

the billows of trouble dash impetuously against us, a recollection of the important truth suggested in the words just mentioned, restrains the excesses of grief, and converts the destroying deluge into a harmless stream.

Thus, also, on occasions of extraordinary joy, recognizing the great Jehovah as the fountain of all happiness, and ruler of all worlds, the heart dilates with sentiments of gratitude and affection, and awfully adores the wisdom, power, and beneficence of the Creator. Much, therefore, of that portion of happiness, for which we have any foundation to hope, in the present and future state of things, depends on the established belief in that leading *truth*, the existence and controul of a superintending providence, and a careful observance of the ways of God to man.

Toss'd on the ocean of uncertainty, and subject to continual disappointment, the mind unestablished in this supremely interesting truth, is perpetually tortured with corroding anxiety and painful suspense. Forlorn and miserable must be the person, who wandering confused in the bewildering paths of infidelity, vainly imagines the universe, with its vast concerns, is solely under the influence of a blind fatality, a sportive chance, or a fortuitous concurrence of things. Destitute of virtuous sentiment, and strongly prejudiced against the character, perfections, and attributes of the infinite HOLY, he strives to obliterate from his mind the very remembrance of his Creator!...Happy would it be for him, were he incapable of effecting his wishes! But, alas! he succeeds in the attempt. He accomplishes his dread-

ful, his detestable purpose. God is not in all his thoughts. Prepared for the perpetration of every crime, his heart is resolutely set to do evil; and, to complete his guilt, he glories in his shame. But, mark his end, his fearful end!... With imperceptible precipitation he is hastening into ruin...

“ On slippery rocks I see him stand,

“ And fiery billows roll below.”

Justice, inflexible in its demands, and steady in its pursuit as the course of time, will suddenly overtake him, and an inundation of horror will overwhelm his soul for ever.

To the guilty wretch who views in his omnipotent Creator an omnipotent enemy, the consideration of his universal dominion must be painful indeed. But let the righteous be glad and rejoice, for the Lord God Almighty reigneth, that Being of beings,

who (as an ancient Philosopher* said) has his centre every where and his outline no where.

Over all things in heaven, over all things on earth, over all things in time, and all things in eternity, he reigns unrivalled in perfection, power, and glory. Enthroned in unapproachable effulgence, he sits on the circle of the universe; nor can the united efforts of wicked men, leagued in eternal opposition to the cause of truth and righteousness, frustrate his glorious purposes or retard their execution.

With equal ease he can sink the earth into nothing, or bid it rise from chaotic confusion. He can, and does, at will, debase the proud or elevate the humble, reward or punish, save or destroy an individual, a nation, or a world. The unoriginated source of

* Plato.

power, wisdom, life, and good, what he designs he is able to accomplish, in our little circle of time, or when time shall be no more. Independent of all created beings, he is accountable to none, nor has any of the sons of men, or adoring seraphs above, a right to question his supreme authority, to scrutinize his councils, or censure his ways. Infinitely wise, he cannot be mistaken, he cannot err. Infinitely holy, he can do no injustice. When he rides in the winged tempest, when he speaks in thunder, and moves in the storm and whirlwind, if his path lie hid in impenetrable obscurity, and we are not able to follow him, yet righteousness and equity are the habitation of his throne, mercy and justice characterize his proceedings.

“ Deep in unfathomable mines
 “ Of never-failing skill,
 “ He treasures up his bright designs,
 “ And works his sovereign will.”

Fellow-Citizens, who are met to celebrate the joyous anniversary of Independence,

The age in which we live is eventful, prolific in a mutation of things, and interesting in an extraordinary degree. Almost every succeeding day, furnishes us with new occasions of astonishment and wonder. Truth, so far as it respects the rights of man, is uttering her voice with confidence, and pleading with irresistible energy. She has erected on high her fabric of liberty, and has elevated her standard in the face of tyranny. All nations are rallying and gathering around it. She is proclaiming an universal jubilee. The Lord God omnipotent, although in terrible dispensations, is fast

accomplishing the predictions of his word. He is, indeed, performing wonders. Those seemingly impregnable fortresses founded by the hands of cruelty, of fraud and violence, to oppose the progress of human happiness ; which had acquired a sanction by time, and threatened an everlasting duration, are tumbling to the ground, never...never to rise again ! The sun of liberty shines bright. His beams warm and illumine the universe. The times ordained by high heaven to liberate the world from bondage, are rapidly approaching. The earthquakes, the seas are in commotion, the nations of the earth are in a tremor. Tyrants, the day of your humiliation is come ; the cries of suffering innocence and the groans of burthened humanity have pierced the skies and moved the pity of the Lord of Hosts. Eternal

justice has risen up to plead the cause, to plead the cause of the oppressed and redress his wrongs. The reign of unfeeling despots, those destroyers of the human race, with accelerated rapidity, is hastening to an end. The bands of tyranny are bursting. The proud towers of despotism are tottering. Afrighted monarchs, with all their mercenary legions, cannot sustain them. Their ruin is decreed ; their destruction is inevitable. Truth is victorious, liberty triumphant...

“ Others exult that God forever reigns ;

“ Clouds, which around him hinder our perceptions,

“ Bind us the stronger to exalt his name,

“ And louder shout his praises.”

From various considerations we are induced to believe there are happier days to come than any the world has yet seen. Reason encourages us to hope. Revelation confirms our ex-

pectation. And among all the steps ordained by the Lord God omnipotent to introduce the days of felicity to man, while a sojourner on this human stage, the American Revolution claims deservedly our particular attention. Excepting *the introduction of Christianity* to a benighted world, an *event* which admits of no competition, the American Revolution, in point of magnitude, has probably never been exceeded, and, in the annals of human affairs, I may presume to say, has scarcely been equalled. Indeed, it is hardly possible to attach too much importance to that glorious event. The powers of an angel would fail in calculating its value. I think I see an endless train of consequences arising out of it, all contributing to the accomplishment of one grand design, the elevation of man to his true rank.

on the scale of rational existence, to that dignified station for which he was designed by eternal wisdom.

It has thrown more light on a variety of interesting subjects than whole ages had done before. Opening the avenues to information, it has unbarred the gates of freedom to imprisoned kingdoms, and poured the balm of hope into the hearts of enslaved millions. Dispersing the darkness of former generations, it has enlightened the eyes and unloosed the bands of an immense multitude long held down by the fetters of superstition and intolerance. It has broken the sceptre of delusion, and exposed its fascinating wiles. It has prepared the way for the adoption of forms of government, conducive, in the most eminent degree, to the happiness and improvement of human nature; and must

eventually, in defiance of all opposition, lead every nation under heaven sooner or later to see, and inspire them with firmness to advance and assert, that grand principle, MAN'S EQUALITY WITH MAN. It has provided an assylum for the persecuted and oppressed of every clime....Strangers from a thousand shores, driven by the scourge of despotism from their native land, must in these distant regions share in common with ourselves, the rich provisions Nature and Liberty bestow.

It has originated other events of prodigious magnitude, which, while they are an admirable commentary on the page of prophecy, confirm in the strongest manner the hopes of good men in favour of the universal circulation of EVANGELICAL TRUTH, and

the triumph of virtue over immorality and vice.

That bright era begins to dawn, when heaven-robed Peace will descend in all her charms of love and innocence to humanize every heart; when nation will become the friend of nation, and man be reconciled to man; when love, the noblest passion of the immortal mind, will govern all our meaner passions, dictate all our words, and sweetly influence all our actions.

Then shall the mild principles of Christianity; the principles of humanity and benevolence, encircle the globe; and that debasing vassalage which has so long insulted the dignity of rational beings, and confined unnumbered thousands to a state of degradation and wretchedness, be excluded from the world, we humbly

hope, no more to return. Then shall millions of all languages and nations, exulting in delivering goodness, having but one common interest, and united in the bonds of fraternal amity, fill the wide earth with grateful praises, and, in the animated strains of our motto, say, "Hallelujah! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him."

When we contemplate the present situation of the world, retrace the ways of Providence for a series of years past, and look forward into futurity, we are lost in blissful amazement! Who could have imagined that events of such infinite importance had been so intimately allied with our revolutionary struggles and final victory! Contemplating the origin of our national in-

dependence, in connection with its real and probable consequences, and reviewing the progressive stages, by which our national character and happiness have been accelerated, I cannot forbear exclaiming, with emotions of inexpressible gratitude, It is the Lord's doing, and wonderful in our eyes!

But, although the actual situation of America be pre-eminently happy, although much has been done towards the elevation of man to that exalted station designed for him by creating goodness, yet it may pass for an assumption, that succeeding generations will review the present age, as we look back on the past. At that time new scenes, which perhaps never entered into the heart of man to conceive, will be contemplated with sensations of exalted pleasure, and grateful astonishment, like those we now feel.

Where, then, is the American heart that does not swell with rapture at the recollection of the ever memorable **FOURTH OF JULY**, seventeen hundred and seventy six?...when a chosen band of patriots, selected from all the American Tribes, in the determined voice of freemen proclaimed to an admiring world their country's Independence! Heaven, in smiles, approved the mighty deed, and earth in strains responsive, testified her unutterable joy. Is there a single person in this assembly so lost to virtuous sensibility and the charms of gratitude, as to remain unmoved, while retrospecting a scene so august, so glorious, so awfully important to these United States, and so replete with blessings to the great family of mankind. It cannot be! Let then the auspicious Day, endeared forever to the sons and daughters of Freedom,

be had in everlasting remembrance, and let each succeeding anniversary, to the end of time, be consecrated to the purposes of Praise, of Liberty, of Virtue, and Humanity.

Fellow-Citizens,

Your prospects are highly encouraging; your privileges incomparably great. You can scarcely appreciate them too high. Let it, then, be your study to deserve them. By the faithful exercise of every constitutional right, endeavour to transmit them to your children's children, inviolate and unimpaired. Review occasionally the path over which you have travelled. It may be of singular service. It may instruct you more effectually how to guard the fair inheritance of Liberty, which your friends, your fathers gained by their sufferings, valour, and magnanimity.

The recollection of seasons past will excite you to circumspection and vigilance. Respect the constituted authorities of your country. Obey with promptitude the requisitions of your government. Consider well the duties you owe to society, and the sacred obligations you are under to perform them. In all your conduct let temperance and moderation, decision and firmness, honesty and candour, be strictly and invariably observed. Do good unto all men ; injury to none. He that injures his neighbour, injures himself also. The eternal laws of justice are imprinted on your natures : he that violates them exposes himself to the reproaches of his own conscience and the just indignation of his Maker. Finally, there is a debt of love, of gratitude, of honour, and obedience due to that beneficent Be-

ing, from whose bounty every blessing flows; from the discharge of which no consideration or circumstances can release or excuse you.

Let us therefore by a uniform course of benevolent and upright conduct seek to promote the welfare of the whole family of mankind; and let us, while thus virtuously engaged, be glad and rejoice, in the firm hope that the period will soon arrive when Truth shall universally prevail, and boundless Freedom hold an everlasting reign!