

THE AGENCY OF GOD, ILLUSTRATED IN THE ACHIEVEMENT
OF THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE UNITED STATES.

A

SERMON,

DELIVERED AT NEW-PRESTON, CONNECTICUT,

JULY 4, 1826,

BEING A RELIGIOUS CELEBRATION OF THAT DAY.

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SERMON.

PSALM CXXIV. 1—7.—*If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, now may Israel say: If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us; then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us: then the waters had overwhelmed us; the stream had gone over our soul: then the proud waters had gone over our soul. Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped.*

IT is not known to what particular event in the history of the nation of Israel, this language directly applies. It contemplates a deliverance from oppression, in which the writer and the nation saw the right hand of the Lord stretched forth for their help. Indeed, so entirely was that nation indebted to God for its existence, that in every period of its prosperity; its princes, its priests, and its poets, had occasion to ascribe glory to the Lord for their own elevation, and their country's deliverances and glory. So numerous and manifest were the interpositions of the Most High in their favour, that on more than one occasion the sons and daughters of Zion might, with singular appropriateness, adopt the language of the text.

But clearly as we trace the indications of the Almighty hand in the history of the Israelites, it was not on that nation, that God exhausted the might of his arm, or the benevolence of his heart. It is not in the history of that nation alone, that we are to look for the developement of his counsels in his wonderful works. In that of our own country, he has drawn the evidences of his agency so legibly, that we cannot misinterpret them, but by an imitation of the sin and perverseness of Israel, which caused

his glory to depart, and ultimately made him a hissing and a shaking of the head among the nations. Indeed there never was a nation whose history was so perfect a parallel to that of the Israelites, as is that of these States. The Israelites were thrust out by the hand of oppression; and so were our fathers:—When thus thrust away from the protection and favour of a prince whose land they had blessed, “the Lord took them up;” so did he for our fathers in similar circumstances:—For them, he cast out the heathen and planted them; for our fathers, he wrought in the same manner:—He broke for them the bands of their oppressors; and for us he has broken the bands of colonial subjection:—By a series of merciful interpositions he raised the Israelites to a standing among the nations, and while he made their glory the envy, he made their name and that of their God, terrible to the princes of the earth; and by a series of like interpositions he has raised us up, upon the land of our fathers’ sepulchres, to similar eminence among the nations. And with equal propriety may we, standing to day at the distance of fifty years from that great event which threw our political and national destinies most emphatically into the hands of the God of Israel, while we compass his altar with songs of deliverance, in commemoration of that event, sing as once *they* sung; “If it had not been the Lord who was on our side when men rose up against us, then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us: then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul: then the proud waters had gone over our soul. BLESSED BE THE LORD who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped.” Let us then trace the indications of divine agency which are found in the achievements connected with the independence of the United States, the declaration of which this day commemorates.

In pursuing this course of illustration, I shall notice these indications as manifested,

I. In the preparations necessary for the independence of these States; and

II. In the actual achievement of that independence by the revolution.

I am to notice

I. The indications of divine agency which appear in the preparation for the independence of the United States.

These appear,

1. *In the circumstances under which the early colonists fled from England to this country.*

These were circumstances of a fierce and bloody religious persecution:—a persecution which filled England with the terrors of the High Commission and the Star-Chamber: which, while it shut up the churches against an enlightened, beloved, and devout ministry; and hunted to prison, flight, or death, scores “of the best men and most glorious ministers of the gospel, that ever blessed a nation, or adorned a church;” placed in the pulpits of England under the protection of the royal favour and prerogative, a clergy, many of whom were too ignorant to preach, and too corrupt to pray; and drove some of her best sons and most loyal subjects into everlasting exile. A few of these first fled to Holland, where they were still under the ban of the English court and hierarchy, and in the midst of a corruption which they could neither purify nor endure;—placing themselves under the protection of the God they served, they fled to the then New World in America. They fled, to enjoy in an unexplored wilderness, at the hands of the sons of the forest, a blessing which a King who claimed the appellation and prerogative of the Head of the Church of God, and a bench of Christian Bishops, denied them in the land of their birth—the privilege of worshiping God unmolested in a pure conscience, and of training up a generation to serve him, when they should descend to the grave. They fled: and in 1620, after the sufferings of a

voyage of four months, laid, with prayers and tears, the corner stone of the independence of America, and of the enlightened freedom of the world.

Now nothing is plainer than, if the population of this portion of the new world were, at the time it did, to occupy a place among the independent nations of the earth, it must previously become an enlightened, hardy and brave one. It must previously become a race of men who have rights, who know what they are, and feel their value;—a body of men who should be able to assert these rights under the frowns of royalty, and to defend them, be willing to look power in the face. Such a race England found spread over these colonies, when she arose to humble and reduce them. But whence had the asserters of American independence derived this character? From an ancestry who had felt the grasp of oppression and had writhed under it;—an ancestry who had been forced to discuss and settle a question which involved the great principles of civil liberty;—the question of royal supremacy in religion:—from an ancestry who had learned by a painful experience, how far submission to intolerant exaction and ungodly domination was dutiful or expedient;—who had learned in the same school of personal suffering, to think, to plan, to execute, for future generations. They wished to send down to their children of remote generations, a pure gospel and a pure worship; an intellectual vigour and independence, associated with a love of God and an exalted morality, which should, on the one hand, guard their rights and privileges from licentiousness, and on the other, defend them against the encroachments of arbitrary power. For this purpose, they first dedicated themselves and their offspring to God: and then, in the provision they made for the support and efficiency of an enlightened and pious ministry; in the structure of the government they formed, the schools they instituted, the colleges they founded, and the habits they pursued, laid the foundations deep, broad, and strong, for the perpetuity

and onlargement of the church of God. and for the enjoyment and protection of their political rights. On these foundations the pillars of the independence of the colonies were reared; and on these, to this day rests the temple of our liberties.

I have said that such an ancestry was necessary to prepare the men of mind, and heart, and force, to assert and establish our independence; and the assertion is supported by the analogy of fact. The colonies of Spain in South America were planted by another class of men, and under different auspices. They were men whose *minds* were enslaved:—they were planted *under the royal favour*. They could fawn to oppression, and worship an image. They could cringe under exaction, and buy the pardon of sin with the avails of the mines they wrought. And what was the consequence? Generations have risen up and passed away with just energy enough to be servants, just light enough to be contented with the house of their bondage, and just debasement enough to be the minions of an ignorant and cruel priesthood. For two hundred years they wore contented the shackles of despotism, and for the last fifty under the light of our own example. France furnishes another instance in point. The revolution of that country succeeded the termination of our struggle, and the attainment of our independence, at a distance of eight years. There had been no persecuted Puritans laying, in prayers and faith, the foundations of an enlightened and enlightening church of Christ, and of institutions adapted to produce a free and jealous peasantry.* And

* The author is aware of the striking similarity in the character of the Huguenots and the Puritans; but the former arose and lived in a country which had already formed its institutions, and in circumstances in which they had no power to change the order of things, so as to favour the cause of civil or religious liberty. They exerted a holy influence; but the national character was already formed, and their task was rather that of purifying existing corruptions, than of laying foundations of institutions which should prevent their future existence.

what was the consequence? I answer, in the language of a distinguished statesman of our own country and time: "The great wheel of political revolution began to move in America. Here its rotation was guarded, regular, and safe. Transferred to the other continent, from unfortunate but natural causes, it received an irregular and violent impulse; it whirled along with a fearful celerity; till at length, like the chariot wheels in the races of antiquity, it took fire from the rapidity of its own motion, and blazed onward, spreading conflagration and terror around."* There, the influence which the fathers of America here exerted, had not been known sufficiently early to impart light and health and vigour to the national morality; and there was therefore no preparation for a revolution in their government. There, the God of the Puritans was known, by the great body of the nation, only to be insulted and denied; and the people, after drinking blood to their fill, sat down at length under a despotism as dreadful as that which they had vainly endeavoured to shake off. More recently, Spain partially awoke and talked of liberty; but the character of her sons, formed under the influence of an ignorant and superstitious ancestry, was unequal to the work of accomplishing the emancipation of their country.

In these facts, we trace the necessity of a preparation for the American revolution, and its success, to just such an ancestry as our Puritan fathers. Let us now look at the indications which mark the presence of the hand of God in giving us such an ancestry. And, who gave the fathers of New-England their piety? (For here was the secret of their power.) Theirs was not that piety which lives on the favour of the great, and dies when that favour is withdrawn. It was a stern and holy integrity of conscience, springing from a love to God and men, which could neither be bribed by the luxury of royal favour, or ecclesiastical patronage, nor awed into listlessness or inaction by the terrors of the Star-

* Webster's Address.

Chamber, or the Gatehouse. Who gave them this piety, and maintained it while the king frowned on, and his clergy punished it? Can a cause be found, adequate to the production of such a piety in such circumstances, which is not identified with the direct and efficient agency of God? It was the Spirit of the living God, poured out on England, which raised up these men, to free her from the shackles of papal superstition and misrule; to proclaim liberty to her captives; and to lay in the new world the foundations of a free and mighty nation. We might with equal reason doubt that God's hand wrought the Reformation by the instrumentality of Luther and his coadjutors, as doubt that his agency produced the piety, stability, and elevation of character of our fathers. But what, or who brought them to this land? Did the love and hope of gold bring them hither? No. Company after company was formed in England to explore these territories for the gold which was known to have been found in South America, but they sunk under their hardships, and abandoned their enterprise. Their object was too low, and their love of it too feeble to give permanence and utility to their undertaking. And had this been the object which brought the Puritans across the ocean, if they had lived to plant the colonies, we should have worn the chains of colonial dependence to this day. Neither was their flight hither the result of disappointed ambition, expressing the alienation of their affections from the land of their birth, or resentment for the injuries they had received. They came reluctantly, with the pure love of their country beating strong in their hearts; weeping to the billows which bore them forever from their heritage and their home. They came, because the hand of oppression had closed every other door of hope against their free enjoyment of the rights of conscience in the worship of God. Like the Israelites they were thrust out by the instrumentality of oppression, and for a similar purpose,—that of worshipping God, and preserving his institutions. And now did not God send them? Did not God send out the Israe!

ites from Egypt? Was it with a high arm that he brought them forth? Look now over the record, and point me to an indication of divine agency in the exodus of Israel, miracles only excepted, which does not shine forth in the history of the formation of character, flight, and settlement, of the Pilgrims.

Indications of the agency of God in preparing the way for the independence of these States appear,

2. *In the preservation of the colonists after their arrival in this country.*

If to the establishment of our independence such an ancestry as God gave us in our Puritan fathers was necessary, it was equally necessary, not only that God should transport and plant them here, but *preserve* them in the land to which they fled, till they could lay the foundations of institutions which should foster and strengthen the spirit of freedom which they possessed, and transmit it, with the enterprise and firmness necessary to maintain it, to future generations. All might, and probably would have been lost if the Plymouth colony had been cut off within the first twenty years of its existence. Other men, in other circumstances, probably would have ultimately succeeded them, who would have left their children of distant generations, an inheritance of submission to royal authority and perpetual bondage.

I have said this would *probably* have been the result of the early destruction of the Plymouth colony; and the circumstances of the case show this to have been almost the *only* probability. The jealousy of the British court was early excited against the colonists. In 1635, only fifteen years from the landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth, at a time when that colony had acquired just strength enough to hope for the perpetuity of its existence, and show a front to aggression, a royal commission was issued to the high officers of state and some of the nobility, for the purpose of overthrowing their whole system of government, and binding them for the sacrifice. By this commission, absolute

power was given to the Archbishop of Canterbury, (the inflexible enemy of the Puritans,) and others, "to make laws and constitutions concerning either their (the colonists) state public, or the utility of individuals." The commissioners were authorized to support the clergy, (belonging to the church establishment,) by assigning them tithes, oblations, and other profits, according to their discretion; to inflict punishment on those who should violate their ordinances; to remove governors of plantations, and appoint others; and to constitute tribunals and courts of justice, ecclesiastical and civil, with such authority and form as they should think proper. They were also constituted a committee to hear complaints against a colony, its governor, and other officers, with power to remove the offender to England for punishment. They were further directed to cause the revocation of such letters patent, granted for the establishment of the colonies, as should upon inquiry be found to have been unduly obtained, *or to contain a grant of liberties hurtful to the prerogative royal.** Two years after the issuing of this commission, that is, in 1637, Charles I. issued a proclamation, directing that none should be transported to New-England, who had not the special license of the government, and that this should be granted *to those only who had taken the oaths of supremacy and allegiance, and had conformed to the church of England.*† In the same year, the commissioners before referred to, issued a writ by which judgment was given, *that the liberties of Massachusetts should be seized into the hands that conferred them; and the privy council ordered the governor and company to send their patent to England to be delivered up.*‡ But during these seventeen years, the colonies of Plymouth and Massachusetts had acquired some strength; and neither was the proclamation of the king complied with, nor the judgment of his court executed. Either probably, and certainly both, would have bound

*Vid. Marshall's Washington, Vol. I. p. 106.

†Ibid. Vol. I. p. 114.

‡Ibid. Vol. I. p. 115.

America to the foot of the throne of England for ages. In such a state of things, who can doubt, that if the first colonists had been early swept away, another, and a widely different class of men would have succeeded them;—that the institutions of America would have been moulded by hearts which could have conceived of no liberty beyond the limits of royal patronage, and hands upon which any chains would have set easily, provided they were fastened by their ‘Gracious Sovereign Charles I. assisted by their lord, his Grace of Canterbury;’—and, that the liberties of America would have been ‘conveyed in fee-simple, and beyond all recovery to the King of England, and to his heirs and successors forever.’

But the first colonists were preserved. They first gave themselves to the Lord, and then formed their system of civil government. This, for the first nineteen years, was a pure Democracy, and thenceforward, a Representative Republic, modified by its connexion with the English court.* Twenty-three years after the landing of the fathers at Plymouth, they drew, in the confederation of the New-England colonies, the perfect miniature of the present union of the states composing this republic. Within forty-three years then, from the landing at Plymouth, that form of government was devised and put into operation, which one hundred and thirty-three years afterwards (when it had planted itself, deeply and immovably, in the hearts of the children of those who formed it) was to be established and acknowledged as the basis of the civil liberty of these states at the point of the bayonet; and that system of combining the strength of independent sovereignties adopted, which instrumentally gave success to that mighty struggle on which was staked the temporal destinies of all the millions of America. Where then, would have been the materials for that band of patriots, one of whom (Adams) in giving utterance to his own glowing emotions, spoke the language of his associates, when he said, on the morning of the 19th April, 1775, while listening

* Vid. Marshall's Washington, Vol. I. p. 92.

to the report of the British musketry which shed the first blood in the contest, which gave a nation birth, "Oh what a glorious morning is this!"*—Where would have been the materials of that Continental Congress which fifty years ago to-day, in the face of a mighty empire, appealing to the God of their fathers for the rectitude of their intentions, could declare the United States FREE AND INDEPENDENT? where would have been the materials for the army of '76;—where the government for which that army fought;—where the union and the heart that gave its battle strength;—where the independence of these states, if the Puritan colonists had been swept away within the first twenty years of their dwelling in the wilderness? All would have been lost.

But they *were* preserved. And their preservation will be an everlasting paradox to that man who sees no hand of God in it. A little band—few—poor—enfeebled by a voyage of four months—defenceless, set down upon the margin of an unmeasured wilderness; surrounded by a thousand savages; with a dreary winter before them, and the ocean dashing at their feet, to hold them eternal prisoners from the home of their fathers; are preserved! And while struggling to maintain a being in the world, and the pure worship of God, lay the foundations of a mighty nation! Open now the volume of history, and tell me of a parallel to this wonderful preservation, that of Israel only excepted, in the history of nations. What potent spell has bound the war spirit of the Indian, that the tomahawk lies rusting at his feet, while our fathers and their little ones sleep quietly in his power? Or, to adopt language more appropriate: Who was that mighty agent, who, when our fathers in this land "even but few men in number, yea, very few, and strangers in it; when they went from one nation to another, from one kingdom to another people, suffered no man to do them wrong; yea, reprov'd kings for their sakes: saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm?" Who

* Vid. Everett's Oration at Concord, p. 31.

was it that "drove out the heathen and planted them?" Who watched over the rising interests of these colonies, and when the long dispute between Massachusetts and Connecticut arose, which threatened early destruction to that confederation of the New-England colonies, which was so essential a preparation for the independence of the States, when every effort of the parties for settlement resulted in only increased asperity; suddenly, mysteriously, and effectually healed the contention by the destruction of Fort Saybrook in 1649?* Now, I can perceive no evidence that the hand of God defended the land of Israel from invasion when three times in the year, all their males repaired unarmed to Jerusalem, which I do not see, that God's hand defended the Puritans, through all the early periods of their settlement in New-England. And I see almost as clearly, in their preservation, the preparation that God was making for the independence of these States, as I see, in the preservation of Israel in the land of Canaan, the preparation which God was making for the coming of the Son of Man.

The indications of the agency of God in preparing the way for the independence of the United States, appear,

3. *In the wars which the colonies were called to wage.*

Nothing is more obvious than, if the colonies were ever to dissolve all connexion with the government of England, they must previously be furnished with arms;—have some practical knowledge of their use;—feel the necessity, and understand the means of providing munitions of war, and possess, at least, *some* practical knowledge of its details. But how were the colonies to be armed and furnished with the knowledge requisite to maintain such a struggle as that which secured our independence? Had perpetual peace smiled around the dwellings of the fathers, with their peaceful habits and dread of war, they would have felt no necessity for arms, and made no exertion to procure them. They would have left their children a brave, but an unarmed peasantry. Beside, had they dwelt in perpetual peace, and *been ana-*

*Vid. Marshall's Washington, Vol. I. p. 146.

iously desirous of arming themselves, it would have been utterly impracticable. To the manufacture of arms they were long incompetent; and application to the mother country for munitions of war, when threatened with no sword upon themselves, would, most assuredly, at any time, have met with refusal, if not with overwhelming resistance. Such an application, during any period of our colonial history, in all probability, would have so inflamed the jealousy of the English Court as to have produced the utter subjugation of the colonies, and thus crushed in its bud, the independence of America. But one door then, could have been opened for this martial preparation of the colonies for the contest through which they could take a place among the independent nations of the earth. That door, the hand of God opened; but it opened only into the arsenals of the enemies of the colonies. They must march to battle, that they might be armed. The wars which they were early called to wage with the natives of the soil prepared them to receive arms at the hands of the mother country. With these, the war was long and bloody. Sufficiently so, to train the colonists to the peculiar modes of Indian warfare, and to proper means of defence against it. But the enemies with which they were ultimately to contend were not Indians alone. And if the great battle for independence was to issue in the triumph of freedom, the colonies must not only be armed and trained to all the arts of savage war, but they must also learn it in its European form. For, it was both European and Indian troops that they were destined to meet in the conflict for independent national existence.

But where, and how should the humble peasantry of the American colonies learn European tactics? Go back to England, and join her regiments against Holland, or Spain, they could not. Into what school of blood then, must they enter? War must be kindled between England and France; America must be the theatre of its operations; and the soldiers who were to achieve the independence of

the colonies must learn to subdue Britons, by fighting by their side, in a common cause.

Now, could the battle of the revolution possibly have been fought without arms? Could the colonies have been armed without that train of wars through which they were conducted previously to the day when England stretched forth her hand to strangle in blood the spirit of liberty which in 1775 scowled on her oppression, and in '76 threw down the gauntlet to her generals and her armies?

To some extent the colonies were armed;—they had learnt to measure strength with their enemies in the field. They stood the shock of the onset of a mighty nation, and rose weary, but triumphant from the conflict. But who gave them this preparation? He who led them through all their former wars, is the answer. For, did the colonists themselves seek through this method, this essential preparation for the battle of independence? It is notorious that nothing was further from their thoughts. Did Britain seek, through this method, the object of preparing for her own defeat? Certainly not. Without the forecast of either party in the contest which established our independence, this essential preparation was made. Now, if God did not most emphatically make it, who did? If God's hand is not visible here, where is the evidence that he rules the nations or governs the world?

Indications of the divine agency in preparing the way for our independence, appear,

4. *In the revivals of religion which God granted to the colonies previously to the revolution.*

To the successful issue of a revolution, having for its object the security of the privileges of freemen, a vigorous and healthy tone of morals is almost as essential as men and arms. The revolution of France lost every thing for want of this. Naples lacked this preparation, and she fell. South America still wants this to settle her government; and Greece—poor Greece, for want of this, has bled almost to death. Without this, it is probable our own

independence could not have been achieved; or, if achieved, it is morally certain that the blessings of civil and religious liberty, which it has brought along with it could not have been perpetuated. For with all the morality and piety which existed in the country at the close of the war, it was scarcely that we were saved from immediate anarchy and ultimate despotism. And God, as if he had some great purpose of mercy to answer through the medium of the emancipation of the colonies,—as if determined to show that here he would establish the place of his rest, took early care to imbue the minds of the people, to a then unparalleled extent, with the morality and grace of the gospel. In the early periods of the history of the colonies, he left not himself without witness of his power and grace. In the years 1629, 30, 37, 77, 80, 83, 96, 1712, 18, and 21, powerful and somewhat extensive revivals were bestowed on many of the churches of New-England. But, as if in anticipation of the eventful period embraced between 1776 and 1783, God began to pour forth his Spirit remarkably in 1735, and brought on in 1740 and 1741 the most extensive and powerful revival of religion which New-England had then ever witnessed. The influence of this revival would be felt through the entire period of the war, and probably has not even yet entirely passed away. Now although but few comparatively of the subjects of these revivals may be found to have been in the ranks of the army, or in the councils of the States, yet they may have had, and no doubt actually did have, an important influence in forming the public moral character, and in adapting that character to the exigences of the revolution. Without them, our statesmen and heroes, who never felt their sanctifying influence, might have been very different men from what they actually were, and the cause they espoused might therefore have been conducted to a very different, perhaps to an inglorious, issue.

For how much of the acquisition of our independence; for how much of the privileges and blessings which we have reaped from it; and for how much of our national character

and renown, we are indebted to the revivals of religion which preceded the revolution, another day will disclose. But now they stand out upon the pages of our history, witnessing the preciousness of the inheritance which God reserved to himself in this land; illustrating His agency in preparing the colonies for the assertion of their independence, and throwing over the conflict which achieved it the sanction of His own Great Name.

Let me now briefly trace,

II. The indications of the divine agency which appear in the actual achievement of our independence.

Among these I notice,

1. *The division in the English counsels on American affairs.*

In looking over the history of the first years of the war of the revolution, I have frequently been led to wonder at the tardiness of the movements of the British armies. At the commencement of this struggle,—when there was no organization of the military force of the colonies; the militia poorly equipped for service, in comparison with those with whom they were called to contend; without discipline and without forts; when almost no public stores were collected,—it would almost seem that a vigorous and continued effort on the part of the invaders, might have ravaged the land; prevented the formation of the Continental Army; and, by the achievement of a single campaign, buried in the dust the high hopes of the patriots of America.

That England did not take this course is owing probably more to the division of her own counsels on the great question of war with America, than to any other event. There, the cause of rational liberty and American rights had friends,—friends of no ephemeral character. Pitt, and Burke, and Fox,—men whose power was terrible to the Norths, and Hillsboroughs, and Suffolks,—were there, and there pleaded the cause of civil liberty, in the face of a monarch and the ministry, with a manliness which showed that their own minds were deeply imbued with its spirit, and their hearts

devoted to its interests. It was not easy for even the majority of both houses of Parliament to go with much confidence against the opinions of this triad of political wisdom in the heart of Old England. Pitt's early prophecy that America would resist, repeated in a voice which England heard, "My Lords, you cannot conquer America," rung in the ears of the ministry, and of both houses, during all their work of preparation, and all their strife of battle for the subjugation of the colonies. They were half unmanned by it when they made the onset. Gage himself was awed by it. He saw, on the day that he shed the first blood of America at Lexington, that he had roused the mighty spirit that Pitt had told him lay sleeping in the United Colonies, and felt the danger of its energies. He moved cautiously,—slowly,—timidly. And while he wondered and waited, the voice of blood, crying from the fields of Lexington and Concord, rung through the land like a sevenfold thunder, and awoke a spirit which it was vain to resist, and hopeless to subdue. This inaction at the commencement of the struggle, seems to bear a strong relation, in the connexion of events, to the success of the cause of freedom, and to have been induced, in no small degree, by the division in the counsels of Britain. And do we not perceive here the workings of the same hand that defeated the purposes of Absalom by dividing his councils, and by a similar mode of operation giving success to a cause on which the Most High eternally designed to enstamp, in characters legible to all the nations, the names of **RIGHTEOUSNESS** and **STRENGTH**.

Indications of the agency of God in the achievement of our independence, appear,

2. *In sustaining the spirit of both the army and the country, during so long a conflict, attended with so many discouragements, till the great object was accomplished.*

There is not, I believe, on record a parallel to the American war, considering the circumstances in which it was waged, and the success in which it resulted. Other conquests have been gained by a rapid succession of victories.

This great contest seems to have issued in the triumph of freedom through a succession of disasters: and England seems defeated through the almost detailed defeat of the armies she opposed. Read over the contents of the chapters of the history of this struggle for almost the first two years, and what do you find there but notices of the repulse, retirement, or defeat, of different sections of the army which ultimately accomplished the independence of the states? 'The evacuation of forts.—The loss and destruction of stores and villages.—Arnold defeated on the Lakes.—Danbury burnt.—Washington, after a hard fought battle, defeated on the Brandywine.—Loses the victory at Germantown.—Burgoyne successful in the North:' and, with few exceptions, victory following the march of the invader till near the close of the campaign of 1777. Then, indeed, Burgoyne surrenders: but upon the heels of this success comes on the memorable winter of '77, and the extreme suffering of a starving, naked, freezing army, under the immediate command of Washington, in winter quarters at Valleyforge. Desertion, sickness, defection, reduce that army to a skeleton: soon Georgia and South Carolina lie submissive at the feet of the British general; and the same tale of woe reaches down, with almost unvarying account, to 1781. And it was not until late in the campaign of that year that Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown. Add to all these trials and distresses of the army, the poverty of the public treasury; the divisions and defection among the people; the incursions of the Indians; the depreciation of the currency; the divisions in Congress; and then, who can think without astonishment, that the spirits of the best friends of liberty had not sunk, and the army and the country had not crouched to British power for a morsel of bread! Who can think of the *termination* of this contest, at the very time when this country, although victorious over two veteran armies, lay bleeding at every pore, and the empire with which she had sustained the conflict was still mighty in strength,—and not wonder that the cause of freedom had not

found its grave on the very fields where its armies had achieved its victories.

Let it not be said in view of these wonders that mere unsanctified patriotism, unassisted valour, accomplished the defeat of Britain, and the establishment of the independence we now enjoy. The case bears so strong a resemblance to that of God's ancient people,—who notwithstanding all their discontents under the guidance of a leader which Jehovah himself had selected, and all their lustings for the house of their bondage, were still “brought forth into a wealthy place,”—that we might almost as well doubt that the Most High gave them deliverance and victory over their enemies, and with no weapon of war lifted up against the city, threw down the walls of Jericho, and bade every man go up to its possession straight before him, as doubt whether God turned to flight, at the time and in the circumstances that he did, ‘the armies of the aliens,’ for us. So clearly are drawn the traces of the divine hand, in the achievement of this victory, that when I see this exhausted country delivered from her invaders; rising from the conflict with scarcely strength enough to shout the victory, it is with difficulty that I can refrain from joining the praises of triumphant Israel, and adopting the language of Moses, say, “I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy.”

Like indications of the divine hand appear,

3. *In the preservation of our liberties when our armies had conquered the peace of '83.*

The men who composed the army which expelled the enemies of their country, were poor. Their wealth had been sacrificed to the common cause: they were unpaid, and an exhausted treasury threatened to send them unarmed to their homes with no recompense but the remembrance of their sufferings and the glory they had won. The officers of this army were many of them stung with a prospect of beggary,

in a land whose independence they had lavished their estates and shed their blood to establish. Under this irritation, anonymous letters urging a refusal to disband until Congress had satisfied their demands on the justice of their country, were circulated in the American camp, threatening most fearfully, to extinguish the torch of liberty in the blood of the very country to which for seven years these veterans had fought to bequeath it. At one moment, an armed soldiery posted itself at the doors of the hall of Congress. Another step and our liberties would have perished in the fury of a military despotism.

I have not forgotten the instrumentality and influence of the Commander-in-Chief, in quelling these discontents in this crisis. But a question occurs which can never be answered till the reply directs me to God. Who, and what gave to Washington on that occasion,—when every selfish interest of his own urged one way, and the still uncertain security of the country urged him another,—who, and what gave to him that decision on which was staked every thing dear to America? And who gave to that decision its effect? If God's hand is not here, in vain shall we look for it in any of those events by which he raises up or casts down a nation.

In the review of this subject, we perceive, *in what manner our fathers and the heroes of the revolution are to be regarded.*

If I do not much mistake, there is in our country, an increasing disposition to bestow upon both the fathers of New-England, and the patriots of the revolution, a distinction, which neither the history of their achievements, nor the revelation of the God the holiest of them served, demands or justifies. We do indeed owe to their instrumentality a most precious remembrance. We owe to their virtues, love; to their elevation and firmness of character, veneration; to their patriotism and valour, honour; and to their frailties and their faults, charity and forgiveness. We may and we will revere their memory. We will speak of their names and their services to our children, and tell them

never to forget, but always to do justice to their fathers. But if our praise of them go farther than this; or if here the voice of our gratitude expire, we do them injustice:—we rob God of the glory which his manifested agency in our behalf most righteously demands, and thus do ourselves and our country a disservice. Honour, and remember with high respect, and imitate the virtues of the great and good men, who through their instrumentality have bequeathed us this precious inheritance of light and liberty, we may; but deify them, or ascribe to them the honour and glory of all that we enjoy as a free and happy people, we *may not*. The reason is, they were but instruments in the acquisition of all our elevation and blessedness. God formed the character of our Puritan ancestors;—God brought them hither;—God defended them till the influence of their habits, and the institutions they established, had moulded the character of their descendants;—God ordered all the circumstances under which they instrumentally prepared the way for the declaration and establishment of the independence of this great nation;—God went forth with the armies that hunted despotism from the land;—God dwelt in their camp;—God turned back their weapons when levelled at their country's precious interests; and God has preserved to us the legacy which these patriots left us when they dropped into the grave. Not a step is found in the history of our country from its infancy, to the present unparalleled vigour and hopefulness of its youth, in which God has not left the memorials of his name and presence; and now shall we be blind to all the manifestations of his agency and goodness which appear in his gracious providence? Shall we rob him, to heap everlasting adulations on the instruments by which he has so largely blessed us? Shall we chant forever the praises of Carver, Winslow, Cotton, Mather, Quincy, Franklin, Adams, Jefferson, Lee, Warren, La Fayette, and Washington, and lay no offering of holy gratitude and thanksgiving on the altar of the Most High God, in whose hands these worthies were but the tools with which He built up the temple

of our liberties? No, my hearers. God has done too much in this mighty enterprise, to be forgotten; and men too little to inherit its praise. When we tell our children, then, the story of our father's worth, and of our country's deliverance, let us tell them too, that God wrought it all; and that by the value of all their privileges; by the precious remembrance of the blood by which they were bought; by the happiness which they enjoy, and for which their fathers wept, prayed, fought, and died, they are bound, through all their generations, to love, and serve, and exalt the Holy One who inhabiteth the high praises of Israel.

This subject also *discloses a reason, that the remembrance of this day should be perpetuated.*

This reason is not, (as has been justly said,) that "the Fourth of July is better than any other day;" nor simply, that on this day the independence of the United States was declared; but because it is a day with which is associated the recollection of a long train of astonishing events which develop the designs of the Most High, and show the operations of his wonder-working hand. This day is associated with events which bring God out from the cloud behind which he wrought all the work of preparation for our national deliverance and elevation, and *show* him guiding us in every danger; giving strength when our armies fainted, and victory when the land was wasted; inscribing his own name on all the columns of our glory, and present Him as worthy of our confidence and service forever. It is a day associated with events in which the Great Head of the Church, and the King of Zion shows himself to the nations, as the friend of the civil rights of man, in a light, joyful to the free, but terrible to despots. More for a nation than for this, God has rarely, if ever done. Indeed, that nation does not now exist, which exhibits evidence of a more intimate alliance to heaven than our own. This day revives the recollection of the evidence of this alliance, and when it shall be forgotten, its remembrance, and that of all the merciful interpositions of the Most High which evince it, will perish from the land.

But let not God lose, in the forgetfulness of the people, this occasion of a nation's praise. So often as this anniversary shall return, let those whom the right hand of the Lord has made free, remember his works and record their grateful remembrance of his mercy. "Let the people praise thee, O God; yea, let all the people praise thee."

The subject discloses also, *the proper mode of perpetuating the remembrance of this day.*

If Mars and Bacchus had been the deliverers of the children of the pilgrims from arbitrary exaction and foreign domination, then might we appropriate this day to their honour;—then might we celebrate it with martial pomp and revelry. But if the Lord Jehovah be our defence and preserver; if He raised up and prepared the heroes of '76 for the conflict; if "God went forth with our armies, and covered their heads in the day of battle;" if He by an outstretched arm has given to us the charter of the rights of freemen; if the Lord's hand has accomplished all the wonders which this day commemorates,—then the appropriate duty of this day is, to "go unto God as our exceeding joy—speak well of his name with rejoicing,—and compass his altar with songs of deliverance."

I am aware that this is delicate ground. I know that there are men, the value of whose opinions we are bound to appreciate, who think that, associated as this day is with "the shouts of battle and the shock of arms," no celebration is appropriate but that which brings back the music of the camp, and the thunder of the field, and the mirth and merriment that wine inflames. But what are the recollections which the celebration of this day perpetuates, which demand this martial expression of gladness? You tell me they are deeds of martial glory. You lead me to Lexington, Concord, Bunker Hill, Brandywine, Saratoga, Monmouth, and Georgetown, and bid me call to remembrance the thunder of the cannon and musketry that once echoed from the surrounding hills, and commemorate these scenes with the repetition of the same sounds of terror, and with the voice of mirth. I ac-

company you to these scenes of trial and of death. But here, conscience, and every feeling of my heart, bid me tread lightly : for here lie the ashes of the Illustrious Dead. Here lie the fathers of our liberties. Precious men ! Here you groaned and sighed for your bleeding country, and died. Yes, Precious men ! to you, under God, I owe it that these hands wear no chains ; that this spirit is not bound down to the worship, of I know not what ; that when I shall descend to the grave, I may leave my children, beyond the reach of the oppressor's rod and the despot's power—heirs to the same inheritance you bequeathed to me,—Liberty : and I cannot, I cannot here repeat the death-sounds in which you fled away.

But you conduct me to-day to Legislative Halls, and bid me commemorate the stern integrity of the men that filled them in the most perilous period of our history, with the martial ceremonies that gave effect to their decisions. But I see there indications of a deep thoughtfulness, of solitudes that balance the character and condition of unborn generations, and of a solemn judgment, as if they held the destinies of a world in their hands,—and shall I celebrate their anxieties, their wisdom, and steadiness of purpose, with the roar of cannon and the huzza of the mob ?

Turn now with me and contemplate the movements of a mightier agent ; the designs of a loftier intelligence ; the interposition of infinite power and love. Behold the King of kings, by a thousand wonders proclaiming himself OUR FRIEND : selecting a little band of his own followers, and leading them forth with a father's tenderness to the possession of this goodly land ; defending them with his own omnipotence as the apple of his eye ; by them establishing a church on the gates of which He has written Salvation, and on the walls of which He has inscribed Praise, making the place of their refuge the lot of his inheritance, saying by a thousand tokens of mercy, “ This is my rest forever ; here will I dwell ; for I have desired it ! ” Behold Him pouring his Holy Spirit from on high to sanctify the people ; raising up

and forming the character of that illustrious generation who have won so much glory for themselves, and so much blessedness for us,—and then say, if the day which revives recollections of such solemn, such holy interests, is appropriately celebrated when devoted to martial display and tumultuous joy. Let the memory of this day never be lost. But let it be preserved by a celebration which shall bring a nation's homage and a nation's honours and cast them at the foot of the throne of our Mighty Deliverer, Jehovah-Jesus. Thus let the memory of this day be perpetuated, and annually as it returns, while the sun shines on Independent America, let a chorus of praise to the Holy One of Israel, breaking from the lips of all the millions of her freemen, ascend like one great cloud of incense to heaven. Then, angels may take part in the joy of our anniversaries, and God will look down and smile.