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A
DISCOURSE,
ON THE
ANNIVERSARY
OF
AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE,

DELIVERED

At ALBANY, July 4, 1798.

THE
DEALINGS OF GOD
WITH
ISRAEL AND AMERICA:

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D. D. S. C. O. U. R. S. E.,

DELIVERED

ON THE FOURTH OF JULY, 1798.

BY JOHN B. JOHNSON,
ONE OF THE MINISTERS OF THE REFORMED DUTCH CHURCH,
in the City of ALBANY.

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At a Meeting of the Committee of Arrangements, for celebrating the late Anniversary of American Independence.

RESOLVED, That Messrs. JOHN D. P. DOUW and ABRAHAM VAN VECHTEN, wait on the Rev. JOHN B. JOHNSON, and request a Copy of his excellent DISCOURSE, delivered Yesterday, in order that the same may be published.

By order of the Committee,

K. K. VAN RENSSELAER, Secretary.

ALBANY, July 5th, 1798.

The DEALINGS of GOD, &c.

P S A L M CXLVII, 20.

HE HATH NOT DEALT SO WITH ANY NATION.

TO celebrate events of uncommon magnitude has, in every age, been a frequent and laudable practice. Sometimes, a stately monument records the actions of the brave, the triumphs of liberty, and the dear bought independence of nations. Sometimes, the day which has been signalized by important blessings, is consecrated by the public voice, to a distinguished and splendid remembrance; and on its annual return witnesses the demonstrations of universal joy.

WHATEVER institutions may be instrumental to perpetuate the knowledge and cultivate the principle of those events which are intimately connected with the happiness of a nation; they cannot but receive greater dignity, and a more impressive solemnization from an union with religious observance. What can be more consonant to reason, than, on such occasions, to repair
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to the Temple of DEITY, and recognize him as the great and liberal benefactor, from whom all the comforts, relative both to this life and a future, descend? What more becoming, while we rejoice in the gift, than to acknowledge and adore the bountiful Giver?

THIS sentiment warmed the breast of the inspired poet, when he uttered the grateful language of the text. He indulges himself throughout this psalm, in the most solemn and delightful reflections on the general government, and the particular providence of JEHOVAH. His eye rolls rapturous over the magnificent scene of the divine operations. He views the stupendous arch of heaven, and, his mind expanding at the idea of Him, whose glory is above the heavens, he cries out, *great is the Lord and of great power; his understanding is infinite. He telleth the number of the stars, he calleth them all by their names.* He then reflects on the multitude, the diversity and the wants of irrational animals; and, viewing their appointed daily supply, acknowledges, that *God covereth the heaven with clouds, prepareth rain for the earth, and maketh grass to grow upon the mountains; that he giveth to the beast his food, bears and relieves the young ravens when they cry.* Nothing that exists is unworthy the continual care of the CREATOR. The cattle that feed upon a thousand hills, and the fish that play in a thousand streams, are his—his, not only as objects of power, but of never-failing bounty.

AFTER having noticed these instances of divine superintendence over the inferior orders of creation; it was natural and easy for the psalmist to rise to the more interesting sphere of rational beings, and to contemplate the providence of God, exercised over the nations. But, without fully expressing his own sentiments, or descending to particulars, on this great subject, he just glances at the situation of the heathen; and drawing in his mind, a comparison between them and the Israelites, gratefully acknowledges, that *God hath not dealt so with any nation.* He knew that the wise and merciful CREATOR, had not thrown the world from his hand, to be tossed at random, or propelled by dire necessity, but that it was essential to his nature, to uphold, direct, pervade the amazing whole. Hence, he infers, that a nation illustrious above others, by the purity of its religion, by the wisdom of its government, by just and beautiful order in all its civil departments, must be indebted for the possession of these inestimable blessings, to that Sovereign Disposer of events, *from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift.*

WHAT then were the distinguished favors, which God had conferred upon the Israelites? Can the expression of the psalmist be applied, with any propriety, to our own country? If we as a nation do enjoy great and peculiar blessings, are there any sources of evil, which may endanger or destroy them? How shall we best secure, improve and perpetuate our national advantages?—and what duties does the possession of them
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urge us to cultivate and practice?—See thus, my hearers, the subjects and the scope of the present discourse; subjects highly interesting to Americans, suitable to the purpose of this day, and correspondent to the situation of the present time; but sufficiently copious and weighty, to employ the pens and exercise the talents of an assembly of statesmen.

WHAT peculiar favors had God conferred upon the Israelites, that would justify the strong language of the text?—It is unnecessary to lead you back to that obscure and remote period, when Abram, the Hebrew, was called by the divine voice to leave his kindred and his father's house, and received for himself and his children the promises relative to a temporal and heavenly inheritance. The time would fail us to accompany the patriarchs, Isaac and Jacob, through all their wanderings and their sufferings, until the latter settled in the land of Egypt. While resident in this great empire, the family of Jacob increased into a nation: But the religion and the policy of the Egyptians, neither favored their growing power nor cherished their common comforts. Pharaoh, a king who knew not Joseph, and regardless of the essential services, which he had rendered both to the people and the crown, looked with a jealous eye upon the inhabitants of Goshen, and resolved, by whatever means, to retard their rapid population, and break their spirit by severe oppression. The heart of a tyrant is a stranger to tenderneis. His eye never swims in the bright suffusions of pity. His voice never pleads for

suffering, expiring innocence. The royal mandate, conceived by suspicion, and matured by the most savage cruelty, is proclaimed. New-born babes are torn from the embraces of their agonizing mothers ; are plunged into the waters, and devoured by the monsters of the Nile. Their feeble cry makes no impression upon the rocky heart of the king, but it ascends to heaven and pleads for vengeance before the eternal throne. Despots may think themselves protected from attack and secured against ruin, by the armed bands, which surround their persons and support their power ; but the LORD GOD of Hosts hears the plaint of suffering humanity, and arises at the appointed time, to execute exemplary justice upon his enemies.

DURING this bloody period, Moses, the future deliverer of his people, is born, and through maternal affection, concealed a considerable time. But he also must at last be exposed on the river. Here, among the flags, he is discovered by the royal princess, who pleased with his beauty and affected by his tears, snatches him from impending death, and adopts him for her own son. This was the beginning of Israel's redemption. The monarch not only made them dreadfully sensible of that principle, which enjoins "passive obedience and non-resistance," but purposed to fix them in the lowest degradation of slavery, and make them *bevers of wood and drawers of water*, throughout all their generations. But the designs of cruelty are frustrated by the counsels, and perish at the rebuke of mercy. That peo-
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ple, who had been oppressed for ages, with intolerable burdens; that people, who were totally ignorant of the art of war; whose residence was in the midst of another nation, greater and mightier than they; whose only hope was in the promise made to the fathers, and who, through delay and grinding oppression, had almost exchanged that hope for sullen despair; that afflicted people were redeemed from among their enemies, not by human wisdom or prowess, but by the high-hand and out-stretched arm of the Almighty; by a series of the most dreadful and alarming miracles, which terrified the Egyptians, brought contempt upon their idols, and threatened the utter devastation of their country. The same miraculous interposition guarded the interests and directed the journeyings of Israel, from the time of their emancipation, until they took possession of the promised land.

You may form a judgment of their new country, from this description of Moses. *The LORD thy God bringeth thee into a good land; a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of vallies and hills; a land of wheat and barley, and vines, and fig-trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil-olive and honey; a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass.†* BUT

† Deut. 8.

BUT if the fertility of their country, justly claimed the gratitude of Israel, how much greater was their obligation to praise God, for their government? From him they received its principle and its plan. He communicated precepts to regulate the conduct of their judges, their priests and their kings. It was a theocracy, and from the peculiarity of its form, is not exhibited as a model for imitation. Enquiry by Urim and Thummim, and the divine responses from the mercy seat, have long since ceased. But the unalterable principles of justice and equity; the rights of persons and the inviolability of property; that necessary subordination, without which there can be no authority and no obedience; that order which is equally distant from tyranny on the one hand, and licentiousness on the other, are all found in the Jewish civil constitution. It inculcates nothing favorable to the views of despotism, which, "while it makes one, more than man, makes the rest, less;" and nothing favorable to anarchy, which subverts the foundations of society, and introduces a confusion, which is both felt and seen.

BUT, the most distinguished advantage which this peculiar people enjoyed above others, was derived from their religion. To this the text immediately refers, as is evident from the preceding verse. *He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and judgments unto Israel.* It was this, which inspired the hearts and tuned the lips of the old-testament saints, to utter the loftiest language of praise. Other nations could spread
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their numerous inhabitants over an extensive territory ; could boast of their climates or glitter in their wealth ; could marshal their vast armies, and pride themselves in their warlike fame ; but, they had never acquired the knowledge, nor learned to chant, the praises of JEHOVAH. The sound of the harp and the melody of the viol, accompanied their feasts, not to celebrate their Creator, but dumb idols, the work of men's hands. Upon their mountains, no feet appeared beautiful, bringing the glad tidings of peace ; no voice in the desert, proclaimed the joyful news, *prepare ye the way of the Lord, the Saviour, make his path straight.* But, in Judah, was God known, his name was great in Israel ; in Salem also was his tabernacle, and his dwelling place in Zion.† To this chosen people, pertained the adoption and the glory and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises ; and of them, as concerning the flesh, CHRIST came, who is over all, God blessed forever.* Thus, while thick darkness covered the nations of the aliens, the Sun of Righteousness gilded the horizon, and enlightened with his cheering rays, the favored land of Judea. Hence, in the old testament, we meet with the most just and sublime ideas of the nature and perfections of God—a strict and pure morality—a holy law with adequate sanctions—and a plan for the restoration of our race from depravity and ruin, through a Mediator. Rejoice, O inhabitant of Palestine ; let praise resound along thy happy vales, and be answered by the echo from all thy mountains ; *for the Lord hath not dealt so with any nation.*

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† Psalm, 76.

* Romans, 9.

BUT, with what propriety have we selected a subject so peculiarly suited to the Israelites? Are we also a chosen people? Can it be said of us, *God hath not dealt so with any nation?* Such a distinction we do not claim in its utmost amplitude: Yet, when we recollect, what he hath already done for our country; when we cast an anxious eye over the scenes of successive and deepening horror, which appear in other parts of the world; when we take a view of our internal situation, and the advantages which in our national capacity, we enjoy, surely our blessings are extraordinary, and we have reason for the highest gratitude.

LIKE the descendants of Abraham, we also have a land flowing with milk and honey. Our mountains are covered with grass, or shaded with forests. Our vallies are rich with corn. Numerous flocks and herds enliven our plains. Our abundant produce floats on a thousand streams to the bosom of the ocean. Different climates shed their benign influence over our extensive soil, and qualify it for the cultivation of various productions. *It is indeed a good land wherein we shall eat bread without scarceness, and shall not lack any thing in it.*

LIKE the Israelites, we also possess the knowledge of the true religion, revealed with greater clearness, and strengthened with additional proofs. The Sun of Righteousness, beheld by them, only in prophetic vision, *has risen upon us with healing in his wings.* On other nations also

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so the light of the gospel shines, but still, in religion, we may boast of peculiar favors. Christianity is indeed generally professed by the civilized world, but in many places, its beauty is tarnished, and its purity polluted, by an illegitimate connexion with the state. The precious deposit we may examine for ourselves, and worship God agreeably to the precepts of his word, and the dictates of our own consciences, unawed by the terrors of an inquisition, and unseduced by the charm of exclusive privilege.

AMERICANS ! Glorious is the inheritance received from your God, and handed down by your fathers. Free not only as men, you are free as Christians. Watch then, with an eagle's eye, and defend with a holy valor, this two-fold liberty. The Almighty, has indeed *not dealt so with any nation*. Manifest your sense of this unspeakable benefit, by accepting his salvation, by honoring the SAVIOUR whom he hath sent, and by preserving your religion free from any foreign or unhallowed admixture.

WITHOUT mentioning other instances of resemblance between our nation and the Israelites, let us confine ourselves to that illustrious event, in commemoration of which this auspicious day is celebrated by all the millions of America. As JEHOVAH not only broke the chains and secured the liberty of his ancient people, but also gave them a name among the nations ; so we can call to mind his providential interference in those measures which led to the establishment of our
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INDEPENDENCE. This was too great a blessing to be obtained without a painful, and arduous struggle. Immense treasures must be expended, and the blood of the brave, encrimson the soil of freedom, before America can take that distinguished rank to which she was entitled by her situation and her right, and destined by the Sovereign of nature.

WHEN the trump of war resounded through our tranquil vales, and summoned to our shores the legions of arbitrary power, an army of patriots, despising danger and braving death, pressed around the elevated standard of their country. All ardent, on the "rough edge of battle when it raged," I see them led on by the American JOSHUA, and under the protection of Heaven, spreading pale consternation along the ranks of their embattled foes. Long, in equal balance, hung the unequal contest. But, He, who was for us, was more and mightier than all who were against us. He inspired our armies with courage and crowned their laborious contest with an honorable peace.

THESE things are not repeated on this jubilant day, to gratify pride, or waken resentment; but to excite our thankfulness for that Independence which is dear to every genuine American—to keep alive the true spirit of the day—to recall to our minds the wonderful interposition of the God of Battles, in our behalf—and to encourage us to a renewed exercise of trust in him, if he should again permit the flame of war to kindle and rage around us. GOD

God forbid that Americans, whose religion inculcates not only gratitude for favors, but the forgiveness of injuries, should cherish a spirit of hatred, or cultivate a principle of enmity against any nation. No; but in the temperate, yet dignified language of that important instrument,* which has just been read, let us hold all nations, without distinction, ENEMIES IN WAR, IN PEACE, FRIENDS.

We have said that there exist sources of evils replete with danger or destruction to our inestimable blessings. Shall we name *ignorance*, which prevents the people from understanding their duties or their rights, and exposes them an easy prey to corrupt and designing men? Shall we mention *standing armies in times of peace*, which create interests distinct from those of the community, and which can easily become formidable machines of ruin, under the direction of anarchy or despotism? Shall we mention a *spirit of faction*, which under the plausible pretence of protecting the rights and guarding the liberties of the people, diffuses a subtle fire thro the body politic, paralyses the arm, and deranges the most salutary operations of government? Shall we name *corrupt elections*, which poisoning the very sources of all rightful authority, pollute the streams which flow thro all the subordinate departments of the community? Shall we name *immorality, impiety and infidelity*, those three great principles of the kingdom of darkness, which induce a contempt for every thing sacred

* The Declaration of Independence.

sacred; destroy the fear of God in the heart, and discipline men to assume the mere outward appearance of goodness and patriotism, while their own interest is the secret motive; and their own glory the invariable object of all their actions? Shall we mention as most dangerous of all political evils, an *undue devotion to foreign nations*, which erects a system of unnatural and degrading influence, invites aggression and insult, enrages citizen against citizen, brother against brother; and spreads the flame of party into the wide-wasting conflagration of civil war? If therefore, the American people are anxious to preserve, and determined to perpetuate their invaluable rights; if they wish to transmit the fair inheritance, won by the valor, and endeared by the blood of their fathers, unpolluted and inviolate, down to succeeding generations; if the grand column of American Independence, appear to them worthy to stand a monument of courage, wisdom, magnanimity, and it be their ardent prayer that it may never be prostrated till it tremble by the shock of the universe;— O! let them be on the most vigilant guard against principles pregnant with destruction, against evils fraught with death! Let them cultivate wisdom, and practise virtue and religion, the best security and essential supports of republican governments. Let them learn the art of war, not for the purposes of aggrandizement or oppression, but for defence. Let them indignantly spurn the contemptible insinuation, that they are a *divided* people, on questions which involve their independence, their sovereignty, their existence;

istence ; and convince the enemy who dares to invade this soil of freedom, that they will meet “ *a firm and united band of brothers.*”

Is it necessary, at the present period, to inculcate the principle of UNION, and point to it as the rock of our political salvation ? Shall we endeavor to convince you, Americans, that if any differences should arise among yourselves, ye are capable of accommodating and settling them without the officious interference of any foreign power whatever ? Shall we tell you, that such interference would be the *toxin* of civil commotion, and the signal of your departing glory—that nations, who once looked with admiration upon the valor of America, and with envy upon the brightening splendor of her name, would be astonished at her degradation, or exult in her infamy ? No ; these lessons need not be inculcated on an enlightened people. In glowing characters they are emblazoned on the conduct of every day. No sooner did they hear the threats of invasion and disgrace, uttered beyond the Atlantic, by a nation once high in their esteem, than they raised a united voice, which floating with the murmur of the wave along our extensive shores, conveyed this sublime language, **WE WILL LIVE FREE, OR DIE!** It shall be heard in Europe ; it shall pervade the habitable globe ; it shall be repeated, with *honorable mention*, even in the assemblies of France, and be our passport to future consideration and invariable respect.

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WHERE is that government or people possessed of the daring insolence to meditate a blow at the sovereignty of a just and injured, "*a great, free, powerful, and independent nation.*"* Who are so strangely infatuated, as to calculate on our division, or to expect a more abject submission? Learn, ye apostates from the cause of humanity and freedom! learn to your eternal infamy, that thousands and tens of thousands, are prepared to meet your embattled legions; that those who have already been tried in the day of danger, will maintain that independence which their bravery acquired, and in the support of which, they mutually pledged "*their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor.*"† Ye shall be opposed not only by a phalanx of veterans, but by innumerable bands of martial youth, who wait the call of their country, and burn to be led to the contest of glory.

I see the gallant warriors rush to the field of battle. They form the terrific line. Confident in their cause, and trusting in their God, a native spirit, disdaining slavery, kindles in their souls and flashes from their eyes. Indignant lightnings blaze along their ranks, and the burst of thunder proclaims the fiery onset. "As two dark streams from high rocks, meet and mix and roar on the plain; loud, rough, and dark in battle, meet the opposing legions. Chief mixes his stroke with chief, and man with man; steel clanging, sounds on steel; helmets are cleft on

* The President:

† Declaration of Independence.

high ; blood bursts, and smokes around. As the troubled noise of the ocean when roll the waves on high ; as the last peal of the thunder of heaven, such is the noise of battle. The groan of the enemy spreads over the hills."‡ The trumpet of victory recalls the soldiers of freedom. Their country hails them the protectors of innocence, the defenders of independence and liberty—entwines the laurel wreath around their brows, and invites them to the seats of honor, and the bowers of repose. Those, who have fallen, live in the eulogy of the orator, and the poets' lay—their urns are bedewed by the tears of a grateful nation and their names shine on the roll of illustrious heroes.

YES, AMERICANS ! You may speak in a high and commanding tone. United in arms, and harmonious in counsels, you may speak in the confidence of success. No invading army, insolent from victory, or panting for plunder, stands before the compacted energy of this great nation. Warriors feel their nerves unstrung, and conquerors perceive their laurels withered, when the martial trump summons against them, Independent Americans.

Let us therefore, my Countrymen, not only evince our gratitude to God for blessings past, but exercise in him an unshaken hope for the future. Let us aim at the true dignity of becoming a righteous, that so we may be an exalted people ; and, taught by the song of inspiration, let us

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‡ Ossian, with a few alterations.

with rapture look forward to those halcyon days, when the tumults and horrors of war shall be known no more ; when liberty and peace shall bless the nations ; WHEN THE KINGDOMS OF THIS WORLD SHALL BECOME THE KINGDOMS OF OUR LORD AND OF HIS CHRIST, AND HIS REIGN BE ESTABLISHED FOR EVER AND EVER. AMEN.

F I N I S.