

A N  
O R A T I O N,

DELIVERED AT

WINSTED, JULY 5th, A. D. 1802.

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE DECLARATION OF OUR NATIONAL INDEPEND-  
ENCE, ON THE MEMORABLE FOURTH OF JULY, A. D. 1776.

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BY ASAHEL MORSE.

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“ Wherefore should the Heathen say, Where is now their God ?”  
THE PSALMIST.  
“ Through God we shall do valiantly : for he it is that shall  
“ tread down our enemies.” DAVID.

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John Babcock, Printer, Hartford.

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1802.

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P S A L M CXXVI. †

THE LORD HATH DONE GREAT THINGS FOR US.

**T**HIS text abstracted from its prophetic reference to the return of the Jews, from their Babylonish captivity; and its application to the gospel church, emerging from its corrupted state of apostacy, to the glorious liberty of Christ;—affords a pleasing field, for investigation of the blessings of God conferred on our nation.

As in this passage the Psalmist, was addressing himself to his nation, so he observes, Psal. cxlvii. 25. that the Lord had not dealt so with any other nation: so we may say when taking a retrospective view of our nation and country—that modern history affords no manifestations of the divine favor to any people, comparable with the history of our own. And first, taking our text as a motto—The Lord hath done great things for us: His infinite goodness was gloriously displayed in reserving our country as an asylum for oppressed humanity: For ages had tyranny reigned and error prevailed on the eastern Continent: at length a ray of light gleamed in the west of Europe; and our ancestors, animated with the thoughts of liberty and equal rights, fled from British tyranny, oppression and superstition, to the hospitable shores of Virginian shores and Massachusetts land.

Here then we may behold the great doings of the Lord in his kind protection from a savage foe, and in his disposing them to be peaceable neighbors, till our fathers had cultivated the soil, and acquired strength to repel their invasions.

And on the other hand, the depravity and ingratitude of the human heart ; for no sooner were our fathers settled as a colony than they became unmindful of the goodness of God to them ; and disregarding the natural inalienable rights of their fellow-men, proceeded to exercise the same spirit of religious intolerance as that from which they fled, by establishing an aristocratical hierarchy in religion.

The great source of human knowledge is experience ; and from that we are taught, those who are bred in slavery become the greatest tyrants when possessed of power ; but those who are early educated in the true principles of liberty and equal rights seldom fail to promote, as far as circumstances will admit, the same through life. But the spirit of intolerance has greatly subsided ; and the true principles of liberty and equal rights are better understood ; for the Lord hath done great things for us.

The rapid increase of our nation raised the jealousy of a powerful enemy, whose dominions lay upon our northern and western frontier ; and forming a chain of hostility from the Gulf of St. Lawrence to the Mississippi, and like a flood determining to sweep all before them to the sea. But the Lord who hath done great things for us, heard our cries, and afforded relief—He led forth our undisciplined troops to battle ; taught their hands to war and their fingers to fight ; and crowned their arms with victory and success.

And when the great, the important crisis drew near, that this growing empire should rise to freedom and independence, the Lord was pleased to raise up the favorite sons of liberty, to espouse our injured cause. Amongst the renowned and venerable characters which adorned our illustrious revolution, we beheld a Franklin, whose talents were unrivalled as a philosopher, a moralist and statesman ; who boldly stated our rights, and nobly defended our cause before a court of chaplains, the cringing peers and flattering parasites of George III. of Britain.

Also, a Randolph, a Hancock, and a Laurens, who led the way to our freedom and independence. The sage of

America, the hero of the world, the friend and defender of the rights of man, the illustrious WASHINGTON, appeared in the circle of American patriots.

His wisdom and patriotism, his energy and fortitude constituted him at once the man and the general; under the direction of a superintending Providence, he led forth our infant armies to the field, where by his policy and skill he disciplined his troops, and defeated his enemies. And when we saw that no accommodation could take place, consistent with the honor, dignity and rights of the people, we were as a nation called to repel force by force, and by our representative council to declare our national independence.

This great event which we are this day met to commemorate, together with our revolution, which was accomplished by so many astonishing interpositions of divine Providence, invites our attention; for surely, the Lord hath done great things for us.

It was a favorite method of instruction with the Jewish fathers and prophets, to recur to the history of their nation, to ancient events, and also to such as took place in a period coeval with themselves, in order to excite a correspondent gratitude, and a spirit of religious obedience in the breasts of the people. The present time will not admit of a full and extensive discussion of the many important events by which our revolution was accomplished; but we shall attend to something of that nature, as a subject of present investigation.

The divine conduct towards America has made a very distinguishing figure in the history of providence. With what a surprising progress did we step up to rank and importance, amongst the nations? The mere man of this world may confine his attention in this matter to our freedom and independence, with all their consequent advantages; while the man of real religion entertains more noble thoughts, he views it as designed by the Lord to advance the cause of Christ in the world; and as an important step towards bringing in the glorious millennium. Early did the American revolution extend its salutary influence to distant

nations, and awaken their attention to their civil interests, and made the principles of liberty better understood than ever.

Therefore it may be considered by us, as one capital blow at the kingdom of the beast. A great degree of light soon breaks on the minds of superstition and ignorance; and as light or sacred knowledge shall be diffused, tyranny and aristocracy will be destroyed. Thus are we taught by the inspired Apostle, "whom the Lord shall destroy by the spirit of his mouth, and shall consume by the brightness of his coming." As learning and truth prevail, ignorance and error shall decrease: and prevail they will, till the whole earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, and all false religion totally absorbed.

It follows then that the best way of destroying error in opinion is not to use the civil sword, but to propagate the truth as it is in Jesus. To this end a free intercourse amongst the nations was necessary.

The discovery of the magnet and art of navigation, have not only been a means of enriching the commercial world, but of spreading the blessed gospel through the earth. It is highly probable then, that America is reserved in the mind of Jehovah to be the grand theatre, on which he will accomplish the most glorious events.

But when we take a retrospective survey of the difficulties and dangers in which we were involved, in the late contest with Great Britain; when we reflect on the disasters and perils we experienced, when surrounded with scenes of horror, and devastation—our towns laid in ashes by a barbarous foe—our fathers, brethren and sons slaughtered by the sword, and starved in prisons—and our whole nation treated with the basest insults, treachery, and contempt; when our liberties, our country and even life itself might be said to hang in doubt—and contrast it with the glorious blessing of peace, we must acknowledge the gracious interference of God; and say, the Lord hath done great things for us. I may be deemed enthusiastic, but am strongly persuaded that, He who sits at the helm of his own moral government, and sways the sceptre of the universe, over-

ruled our affairs, in the council and in the field, for the purpose of spreading light, increasing knowledge, and diffusing the true principles of liberty in the world: and that the divine conduct towards America is held up in providence to all nations as a specimen of the kind regard of the Lord to the liberty of man. For we beheld a tyrannical and merciless enemy, encroaching on our frontier, and sometimes penetrating almost to the heart of our country, brought to sue for peace, and ask our pardon.

Amongst the various blessings which the Lord hath conferred upon us as a nation, we may state our independence and peace, as first in rank of temporal mercies. Our anniversary this day brings to my mind the prophetic observation of *Isai. lvi. 5.* "Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day; or shall a nation be born at once?" By asserting our independence, we threw off a foreign yoke of tyrannical oppression, and by maintaining the same, we obtained peace at home, and commanded respect abroad.

Another favor which we received from the kind hand of the Lord, is that which few nations ever enjoyed, which was the privilege of taking up government upon its first principles, and of choosing that form which was adapted to our situation, and most productive of our public interest and happiness. The government of the United States, says Paley, approaches nearest to the social compact of any that history can furnish. Upon an impartial examination of our constitution, we find it the best calculated for promoting the happiness, and preserving the lives, liberty and property of the citizens of any yet recorded in history. Liberty is here preserved in the custody of the people. It wisely guards against anarchy and confusion on the one hand, and against tyranny and oppression on the other. It is framed upon an extension of civil and religious liberty, unrivalled in any other country. The sacred rights of conscience are so secured, that no citizen can be hurt, molested or restrained, in his person, liberty or estate; for worshiping God, in the manner and season most agreeable to the dictates of his conscience—or for his religious profession or sentiments. It is much to be desired that the constitution and statutes of

every state were strictly conformable in all ecclesiastical affairs to the federal constitution.

How should this consideration of perfect freedom and equal privileges in religion, endear our constitution to our citizens, and induce them to reverence it; and not only to submit to it, but to love it in its nature and administration, and regard it with a veneration and affection like that which prevailed at Sparta, and at Rome. We may then say, happy people, whose lot is fallen to them in pleasant places, and who have so goodly an heritage.

Happy people! if we have wisdom and virtue to improve aright the advantages we now enjoy.—Blessed be the most high God, who hath visited and redeemed his people, who hath called them to liberty, and granted them the blessing of peace and of a free government.—We are constrained to say, surely this is the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes. With the profoundest gratitude let us as a people, bow the knee to the great Arbiter of nations, who has given us such a distinguished lot among the inhabitants of the earth. “Since the world first existed, says an ingenious traveller, speaking of America, no people ever had a more solemn charge committed to their hands, as the welfare of millions for ages to come, rests on the persevering virtue of the present generation.”

America stands, in the earth, like the sun in the heavens, the center of light, and the wonder of an admiring world feel the influence of its rays. Here oppressed humanity will find rest—tortured virtue and exiled worth, will take refuge from every quarter of the old world.

Another favor I will mention, is our national prosperity. One blessing generally introduces another, and this is the consequence of peace and a free government. Our swords are now turned into implements of husbandry; and our spears into pruning hooks. Our ships instead of carrying the engines of destruction, are now fraught with the bounties of Providence, and convey to us from various parts of the world, the peculiar treasures of kings and their provinces. The wealth of the earth, and the riches of the seas, are profusely poured into our laps. But, gentle-

men, are we not by an abuse of these, in danger of being deprived of them? While some are screening themselves under the banner of republicanism, who would run into anarchy and confusion, others are manifesting the base Jewish temper, and are for going back again into Egypt, to put their necks under the galling yoke of British tyranny.— If having eaten and become full; having built goodly houses, and dwelt therein, and having our silver and gold, and all that we have greatly multiplied and increased— instead of being thankful for these blessings, and temperate in the use of them, we become presumptuously lifted up, and forget the Lord our God: if while we enjoy the highest degree of political liberty, and temporal prosperity, we are not a virtuous and religious people, shall we not provoke the most HIGH to withdraw these favors, and pour out his judgments upon us, and empty us from vessel to vessel? If instead of practising that righteousness which exalteth a nation, we indulge a spirit of discord, pride, popularity, and self exaltation, what an army of evils will of consequence follow; and those very blessings, become the greatest judgments.

There is doubtless no greater external blessing enjoyed by a republic than that of civil government, founded upon just and impartial principles: but we must remember that to manifest our attachment to a republican constitution and government, is to love a republican administration. I esteem civil government as a legacy bequeathed by God to man; it is the guard of our lives, the security of our properties, and our protection from fraud and injustice, from rapine and violence. The advantages of a free government peaceably and harmoniously enjoyed, are blessings so rich as to exceed calculation—but these blessings are often soiled, and our best enjoyments of this nature corrupted and spoiled, by the factious and tyrannical spirit of man; as we often find from history and experience, that many are possessed of a jealousy which is ungrounded, petulant and unreasonable, and the bane of public happiness. And this is most generally found among two classes of men. One is disappointed seekers or office hunters, who are ever finding fault with



government, because they are not in place; no public measure is right, because they had no hand in adopting it. The other sort is found among persons in the lower walks of life, men of honest minds, but uninformed in affairs of government, they become prejudiced by the incessant declamations of the former class, who take advantage of their ignorance and blow up their minds with a jealousy that their rights are in danger—that their rulers are plotting to aggrandize themselves upon the ruin of the liberties of the people. It is evident that such a spirit is productive of great mischief to a community.

We often experience the great mercies of the Lord in affliction, to punish our nation for their pride, haughtiness and popularity. God suffered us, for a little while past, to feel the weight of heavy taxes, and the burden of a standing army, which was imposed upon us in a time of peace; to experience the evil of a sedition law, and an alien bill. But the Lord who hath done great things for us, hath reversed the scene; the overruling hand of his providence hath regulated and so disposed the great council of our nation, to act upon the calm and peaceable spirit of republican principles, that our country will yet shine as the glory of the world, the ensign of peace, the nursery of arts and sciences, the theatre of freedom and liberty, and a refuge of protection for oppressed humanity.

Gentlemen, we have now a bright star in the presidential chair, which arose in the time of British tyrannical darkness in our country, whose brilliant rays of republican light dawned over our land, and illuminated the minds of our citizens, and inspired them with the love of freedom, and with ardor and zeal for our independence and liberty—whose eminence has been displayed as a state and federal counsellor, as a foreign envoy—a secretary of state—a president of our senate, and now as the supreme executive of our nation.

We have then the happiness of seeing at the head of our federal government, a gentleman of whose abilities in the arduous and important science of government—of whose patriotism and love of liberty, of whose integrity and up-

right intentions, we have had long experience. That display of wisdom, fortitude and magnanimity, joined with the most unremitting attention and perseverance, manifested in the virtuous struggle, to obtain and secure our independence, must place his excellency in the rank of those worthy patriots who have distinguished themselves as the defenders of the rights of man, and the eminent services he has rendered to our country over which he now presides, as well as his virtues and liberality, add a lustre to his character.

Blessed be God, that we have such a man at the helm of our national government, who like a wise and well informed mariner, with fortitude and skill, calmly steers our political ship safe, as we cheerfully hope, through the convulsive storms of calumny envy and reproach, avoiding the gulf of anarchy, and sailing far from the fatal rock of tyranny and despotism. Who, when he is reviled and insidious attempts are made to sully his private character, and loads of scurrilous abuse and imposition are thrown upon his public administration, he does not return the compliment; but like the steady sun in the firmament continues to shine, and dispel the mists of error, and smoking fogs of aristocracy, generated by the devotees and satellites of tyranny and despotism.

May the benevolent Being who presides over the universe, endue our worthy president with wisdom from on high; give him knowledge and discretion,—and enable him faithfully to discharge the important duties committed to his trust; and cover his head, in the day of battle and war, and make him a blessing in his day and generation, to his country, and the world of mankind. And so dispose him and our nation to a right exercise of mind, and to a right improvement of the great blessings we enjoy, that we may glorify the Giver,—live peaceably together,—enjoy happiness in time,—fill up the measure of our days with usefulness,—and finally receive the reward of a blessed immortality in that kingdom which is unfading and full of glory.

Another and most important blessing, which I must note at this time, which the Lord hath conferred upon our nation, is the glorious revelation of Jesus Christ. This is

a blessing of blessings, as it comprises God's word and gospel, and manifests his law.—It is a blessing as it has God for its author and supporter; truth and righteousness for its armour, and heaven for its end. It is a blessing, as it possesses that heavenly influence and power divine, which subdues the heart, rectifies the will, and renews the subjects of its divine impression in the spirit of their minds; forms men for society and usefulness in time, and is that alone which prepares them for happiness in the kingdom of heaven. When we contrast the state of many nations with that of our own, what a great difference appears? Many of them are not only destitute of revelation, but also of literary knowledge, of the arts and sciences, and are even incapable of making a nail or a hatchet. But the Lord hath done great things for us. He hath given us his revealed word for our counsel and instruction, and for the rule of our faith and practice; so that we are not left to the traditions of origin, or to the decrees of the pope, king nor parliament, nor to our own councils of state for direction in the great affairs of our souls. But we have a more sure word of prophecy, to which we shall do well to take heed. Blessed be God, his word came not from man, nor by the will of man; but holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. The doctrine of God's word is superlatively glorious. It represents the divine character and majesty beyond human conception, as a being infinite in holiness, goodness and truth; impartial and inflexible in his justice, and possessed of that wisdom which is as infinite as the moments of eternity—and that power which no obstacle can obstruct—being at once the essence of spirit and matter—the moral governor of the universe and the standard of moral perfection.

Again, it informs us what man was when recent from the hands of his Maker, and portrays his character and heart in his depraved state of apostacy—affords us the knowledge of a Saviour, completely adequate to the divine purpose, and such a one as sinners need—teaches us our insufficiency and our dependence upon God—recommends faith and repentance, humiliation of heart, and contrition of spirit

before Jehovah, and the practice of piety and moral virtue in our lives, as the only preparation through which we shall meet with the approbation of our Judge at the last day. The glorious religion of Christ and his gospel, are blessings of a spiritual nature, and fall not under the jurisdiction of civil authority. "My kingdom saith the great Redeemer, is not of this world." It forms no alliances with the kingdoms and states of this world; but, probably contains subjects in all of them, and where its divine influence extends and operates upon the hearts of men, it takes away the bars of prejudice from dissenting minds—heals unhappy divisions—unites contending parties—effects love, peace and harmony, and shuts out every discordant note. This religion enables us while we enjoy the temporal blessings of providence, wisely to improve them, and although it does not bestow external blessings, yet it qualifies us rightly to enjoy them. O then, that this religion in its spirit, love and power, was implanted in the hearts of all our citizens. How would it humble us under a sense of our ingratitude to the Most High, for the great favors we enjoy, and enable us to break off our sins by righteousness, and our iniquities, by turning to God. Indeed sirs, there appears to be nothing wanting to complete our character and happiness, and effect peace, harmony and a good understanding among us as a people, but the spirit and temper of the gospel and practice of that religion, which is not a nominal piece of hypocrisy—a state trick—a court intrigue—or a chimerical idea, but a divine reality.

With many favors we have enumerated, we would not forget education, but view it as one of the great blessings which the Lord hath bestowed upon us, as that which cultivates the minds and distinguishes the citizen from the savage. But our limits this day will not permit us to make eulogiums on his subject.

Finally, gentlemen, permit me, as a friend to order and good government; as a well wisher to your immortal souls, your persons and characters, to address you on some important circumstances which demand our attention this day. My friends, we are members of a great republican body.

our advantages for happiness are exceedingly great; a propitious God has with a liberal profusion poured his blessings upon our land, has given us a name and distinction among the nations of the earth. We are spread upon a great continent; and, as Dr. Price observes, "We make a world within ourselves." Our national character and credit are daily rising, our resources are extensive and increasing; arts and manufactures make surprising progress. Add to all, we enjoy the divine favours in the outpouring of the holy spirit upon our land; the recent and refreshing news of the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom in our southern states, animates the christian's mind, and causes his heart to elate with joy.

We recommend to you this day a real reformation of heart, the love of religion and practice of moral virtue, as the only means of avoiding the judgment of God, and healing the unhappy divisions among us as a people. The want of this, it must be acknowledged has the most threatening aspect upon our nation. The rapid progress of infidelity, of licentiousness and scepticism--the disregard and practical contempt of the gospel of Christ--the torrent of immorality, profaneness and impiety increasing among us, exhibit a sad presage, if persisted in, of impending miseries on our land. It is in the nature of things, impossible that it should go well with a wicked people, who remain impenitent and unreformed. Truth must fail, and immutability change, before such an event can take place. For this is the language of eternal truth, "Say ye to the righteous, it shall be well with him, for he shall eat of the fruit of his doings: but woe to the wicked, it shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him."

Permit me to recommend to my fellow-citizens, as we are now met upon the important occasion of celebrating the birth day of our national independence, to let calmness, decency, moderation and a respectful behavior mark all your proceedings this day; that all your deliberations and conduct be such as will comport with the republican character, and the honor of the christian name. And let this be the object of universal concern, to render again to the great Doner of

all our blessings, according to the great benefits we have received; and let no indecent conduct profane, or lascivious behavior disgrace the character of any one present: for soon we all must appear at the bar of the triune God, "Who will render to every one according to the deeds done in the body;" and to whom we must account for this day's exercise, and for every idle word that we shall speak. A few more revolving suns, my brethren, will waft us into the eternal world, and close our state of trial forever. Our different stations here, our various social connexions will shortly all be done away. The period fast approaches, when (according to the scriptures) this world and all things in it shall be dissolved. When nature shall fall asleep, time expire, and death itself shall die. Then kingdoms, states and republics shall be no more. The only happy collective body will then be composed of the righteous and holy, to the eternal exclusion of the ungodly and the sinner: the former will be united in bands of heavenly friendship, but in a far different manner of society from those on earth: where they will shine as the brightness of the firmament in that kingdom which shall never be moved; there an endless circle of happiness and uncreated joy eternally exists; there is that inheritance which is undefiled, incorruptible and fadeth not away: which is provided by the infinite mercy of God in a glorious Christ for all who repent and believe the gospel. To which glorious and happy state, may we all through grace be admitted for the sake of Jesus our only hope.