

INTRODUCTION.

It is not from any supposed novelty, on a subject that has been so often and so ably treated, that the Author consents to the publication of the following Discourse:— but merely to gratify the earnest wishes of those who heard it— And believing that it may contribute towards satisfying the natural inquiry of the rising generation; when, like the sons of ancient Israel they shall ask, concerning the celebration of our National Anniversary
“ *What mean ye by this service ?*”

DISCOURSE.

EXODUS, XII. 14.

“ This day shall be unto you for a Memorial.”

GREAT and important events in Divine Providence, are to be had in perpetual remembrance. A train of remarkable and unusual affairs in which nations and individuals are deeply interested, and in which, through the whole, the interposition of Heaven is evidently to be traced, should never be forgotten. Such memorable affairs have been found to occur in almost every nation that has existed on earth. The text leads us to something of this kind in ancient Israel, concerning whom it is said, God had not dealt so with any Nation. They were a people peculiarly favored of the Most High. A brief history of what God wrought for them, is thus recorded by an inspired writer: “ Israel came into Egypt, and Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham. And He increased his people greatly, and made them stronger than their enemies. He sent Moses his servant, and Aaron whom he had chosen. They shewed his signs among them, and wonders in the land of Ham. He spread a cloud for a covering, and fire to give light in the night. He brought quails, and satisfied them with the bread of Heaven. He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out. He brought forth his people with joy, and his chosen with gladness: And gave them the lands of the heathen; and they inherited the labor of the people.”

It will be recollected by all who are conversant with their Bibles, that the Nation of Israel, when

first planted in Egypt, were but few in number. They rose from very small beginnings. They multiplied and prospered exceedingly ; for the Lord was with them. They were nourished and brought up as children under the Divine hand. Pharaoh, king of the land, soon became jealous of their growing numbers, power and opulence. To check their rapid progress in these respects, his treatment towards them became severe and cruel, and his exactions most unreasonable and rigorous. " Come on, said he, let us deal wisely with them, lest they multiply : and it come to pass that when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us. Therefore they did set over them task-masters to afflict them with their burdens. And the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried ; and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning, and God looked upon the children of Israel and had respect unto them." As it was the will and purpose of Heaven that this oppressed people should be free and independent, so by a remarkable Providence was a Deliverer raised up unto them from among their brethren : A deliverer divinely qualified and commissioned for the arduous work. But before their deliverance is effected, the king under whom they served must be petitioned again and again, to grant them enlargement, the rights and privileges of freemen. When the tyrant is found deaf to all entreaty and remonstrance, although accompanied with a series of astonishing miracles, the supreme Arbiter of events directs to the decisive measure. The memorable period was pointed out with all the circumstances that

Ex. 1.

should attend it; the period of Israel's freedom, when the haughty oppressor should be constrained to let them go. The circumstances were these: All the congregation of Israel were to take to them, every man a lamb. This lamb they were to kill on the fourteenth of the first month, in the evening. The blood of it they were to sprinkle on the door and side-posts of their houses. The flesh of it they were to eat. "And thus shall ye eat it, saith the Divine word, with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste; it is the Lord's passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods in Egypt, I will execute judgment: I am the Lord. And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. And this day shall be unto you for a memorial." It was to be to them for a day of remembrance, in which they were to call to mind the remarkable kindness of God towards them as a people. On this divinely instituted season, they were doubtless to recollect their former situation in Egypt; all the bondage and oppression they there endured, and the wonderful deliverance wrought for them: how signally the Most High appeared in their behalf, and confounded all the stratagems of their numerous and powerful enemies.

We too, my brethren, have a season for grateful recollection. This day is unto us for a memorial. Much have we to call to remembrance.

on this joyful anniversary. Most certainly is this day supereminently memorable in the annals of our country. It is a day which all true-hearted Americans have long welcomed with transport, and delighted to celebrate as the day of our national nativity ; the day which gave birth to our public freedom ; that freedom which was bought with the blood of an illustrious band of intrepid heroes, and cultivated by the fostering care of renowned statesmen and patriots. Yes, with heart-felt pleasure, with gladsome emotion of soul does this day remind us of the dawn of our national existence, our liberty, our independence. It would have us remember that on the fourth of July, one thousand, seven hundred and seventy-six, the greatly to be revered the truly patriotic Congress of these United States displayed to the astonished world the fullest proof of their firmness, their magnanimity and fortitude. On that day gloomy and trying as it was, did that collected body dare to proclaim America free and independent ; although called to do this at the greatest hazard, while all the enemies' artillery were levelled against them.

Notwithstanding the declaration of American independence in due form may be in the hands of multitudes of our fellow-citizens, and the recollection of it may readily occur to most present, yet the speaker presumes, it will not be thought impertinent to repeat the substance of it at this time

“ We, therefore the Representatives of the U. States of America, in General Congress assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the name, and by the authority of the good people

of these colonies, solemnly publish and declare, that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States ; that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British crown ; and that all political connection between them and the State of Great-Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved. For the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other, our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor."

Of the circumstances which led the people of this favored land to make this declaration ; of our situation at the time it was made ; and of what it cost to support and establish it ; should this day be unto us for a memorial.

It has long been remarked, that " a frequent recurrence to those causes, whose effects terminate in mighty political revolutions, is the best means of perpetuating liberty !" Hence with a spirit of joy truly laudable have the nations of the earth often commemorated those events, which under Providence have served to restore or secure to them their liberties and privileges. In a practice like this, if suitably conducted, the speaker believes there is a fitness, a propriety, and even a duty after the example of Israel, in the passage before us. Let us then take a transient review of some of those things, which led to dissolve the political union, that had existed between this and the mother-country.

Like Israel we had arisen from small beginnings : and like theirs our growth was rapid. In numbers and importance we fast increased. We soon became a considerable people ; we established extensive and flourishing colonies.

The good hand of our God was upon us, and all seemed to conspire to our welfare and happiness. But in the midst of all, the Court of G. Britain, as though jealous of our increasing strength and consequence, was not wanting in measures towards us at once oppressive, unjust and rigorous; measures to which none could calmly submit, who had the least spirit of freemen.

I cannot but observe here, that when the Most High intends a people shall be distinct, free and independent, He leaves their Rulers to be blindly infatuated in their councils and rigorous in their government. Thus it is said concerning his people Israel, that "He turned the heart of their Rulers in Egypt to hate them, and deal subtilly with them." It appears, that had Egypt's king dealt prudently and gently with Israel, as sound policy in all respects dictated, he might still have retained them in his service and as his loyal subjects. And had the British government treated the good people of these Colonies with that clemency and affection to which they were entitled, and which every principle of prudence and policy suggested; did it not appear, that the political connection and good understanding between the two countries might long have subsisted? but Heaven would have it otherwise. Israel must be a people by themselves. And our American Israel must be a distinct nation. Means and ends are inseparably connected in the Divine plan or scheme of things.

It is not my present purpose to mention particularly the injuries of which America complained. Already has this been done in different forms and in the ablest manner. Suffice it to say,

that in vain were the king and parliament of Britain again and again petitioned for redress. All entreaty and remonstrance proved ineffectual. Such were the circumstances, which led to the declaration of our independence. And what was our situation at the time this declaration was made? Were we an old and experienced people? Had we long been trained up in arts and in arms? Were our public coffers full, were our national resources abundant; so that we felt well able to cope with the power that should dare to dispute our right to independent freedom? Entirely the reverse of all this was our case. We were then but an infant people in all respects, when compared with the nations of Europe. The power under which we were, had cautiously kept from us for a considerable time, all necessary means of defence. We lay open and exposed to any that might invade us. What could lead a people thus situated, thus destitute of experience in the achievements of war; destitute of an army and a navy, and almost all warlike implements, and in this view feeble and defenceless as the child of a day, to venture on asserting their independence? Well was it known that this assertion was made in the face of the strongest opposition; that the most powerful nation on earth whose fleet rode empress of the main, and whose armies were renowned in war and in conquest, was concerned and inclined to crush our claims to freedom. Surely at that eventful period, nothing could have influenced the fathers of our country to the daring enterprize, but a firm confidence in the rectitude of their cause, & an unshaken reliance on the kind patronage of interposing Heaven. But animated by such confidence, en-

couraged by such reliance, like the stripling David, with hardly a weapon for the attack or a shield for their defence, they met without dismay the gigantic force of Britain. Yes, at that trying moment, while an invincible fleet surrounded our coasts, and a numerous veteran army invaded our territories, did our brave countrymen proclaim the sentence of perpetual separation from British usurpation and rule.

Amazing scene ! an infant nation nobly rising to defend that liberty which is nature's birth-right : a widely extended country firmly uniting to protect all that is dear and important to man ; assuming arms, not with designs of ambition, not to contend for glory or for conquest, but for the security and protection of freedom and peace, life and safety !

Having thus viewed the situation of our country, when she ventured to declare herself free ; we may already have anticipated what it must cost to support and confirm this declaration. It may readily be concluded that much blood must be spilt and treasure be expended for this purpose. But so great, so interesting was the object, that the greatest expence was not accounted too much to obtain it. Life and property are freely exposed rather than part with life's dearest enjoyment.

Unto us, as unto ancient Israel, did Heaven raise up one to be our leader, the instrumental deliverer of his oppressed brethren. For us a Washington was born ; for us was he singularly qualified to lead our scattered forces to the field of battle. But how inexperienced, how undisciplined were his troops at first. And for a long season was he pained at beholding his army great-

ly straitened through want of provision, of ammunition, of clothing and of arms ; while himself was sharing in the common necessity. Often did he find in the course of the arduous contest, that nothing but the mildness, the patience, the tenderness and affection with which he addressed his soldiers, and the cordial esteem and veneration they had for his person, could have preserved his little band from total dissolution. But knowing in whom he confided, and resting on the justness of his country's cause, our renowned Chief never fainted nor despaired amidst numerous discouragements, difficulties and dangers. Like a firm rock in the boisterous ocean, he stood unmoved, while surrounding surges threatened to overwhelm him on every side.

Would we know more particularly what it cost to establish our Independence, we have only to turn our eyes to the crimsoned plains of Lexington and Concord ; to the heights of Charlestown, stained with human blood ; to the memorable battles of Trenton, Princetown, Monmouth and Yorktown ; where so many of America's true-born Sons gloriously fell in the high places of the field, struggling for the defence of our dearest rights. Of all those scenes of blood and carnage, my brethren, in our revolutionary war is this day to be unto us for a memorial. These should feelingly remind us at how dear a rate our freedom was purchased, and learn us to prize and improve it accordingly.

One who carefully noted the leading or most important events of the American war, states them to us in the following truly affecting language " We have seen our cities besieged, our sea-ports blocked up, our fortresses reduced, the

capital of every state where they came we have seen fall before the hostile invaders ; the inhabitants held in duress, or compelled to flee to the caves of the mountains, and seek an assylum in the remote wilderness : We have been stripped by our enemies of every moveable property that fell in their way, plundered of every necessary of life, on which the foe could lay their hands ; of the fruit of our labors, and the produce of our fields, our houses rifled and many of them burnt. We have seen the aged and infirm slaughtered in cold blood, the innocent babe clasped in a dying mother's arms, yielding up its last breath to the conqueror's force. We have seen Indian savages let loose by British commanders on our brethren, when they had surrendered and been disarmed, (and can humanity support itself to hear the horrid tale !) these tawny sons of the forest have scalped and tortured them, torn out their hearts, drank their blood, and danced around the mangled heaps of human flesh. We have seen officers of high rank refuse quarters, and putting to the bayonet a surprized militia, throwing down their arms and begging their lives. We have seen sixteen fair towns wantonly laid in ashes, and many more partly destroyed ; seven colleges demolished or broken up ; some hundreds of churches ruined, defaced and profaned ; the worship for which they were reared made the subject of open ridicule, and the great Jehovah, to whom they were dedicated, publicly defied in his own temples. We have seen thousands of our ships of various sorts taken or burnt, many fortunes lost in them, and many wealthy owners ruined. We have seen fifteen sieges, thirty-three important battles, and bloody

skirmishes without number ; and in the issue, we sorrowfully mourn the severe, the never-to-be-forgotten loss of twelve brave General, hundreds of excellent officers, and how many gallant soldiers my heart bleeds to recount. How many thousands of our free-born citizens have fallen victims to the barbarity of British gaols ! eleven thousand six hundred and forty-four perished in the plague-rooms of their single prison-ship, called the Jersey, in the harbor of New-York, and many thousands more in other factitious tombs of the same kind !”

Seven tedious and painful years revolved over us, while scenes of this kind distressed our bosoms. Numbers present can in their own persons, witness to these days of darkness and calamity ; and fathers can relate them to their listening sons ; and thus should they be transmitted to posterity, thus should they be remembered to the latest generation. But blessed be the God of peace who at length arose for our deliverance, and brought us to the desired shores of tranquility and freedom : Let his name have all the praise

The speaker, my brethren, standing as he does in the sanctuary of the Most High, with the book of God in his hand, and as a minister of his religion cannot close the present discourse, without freely declaring in what manner he thinks, this day of memorial should be observed. I feel happy that I stand among you at this time, not to sow the seeds of discord, not to cherish the spirit of party, nor increase the distance of land, who are so busy in your questions of duty, but to show, plainly and impartially the duty of all, by whatever name they may choose to be called.

Let me then remark, First, that this day should be kept in the exercise of fervent gratitude to the Supreme Benefactor of nations, and of individuals. Never was there a nation under greater obligation than ours for pious thankfulness, nor a nation in whom the opposite temper of ingratitude would be more highly or aggravatedly criminal. "Not unto us, but to the Lord alone is all the glory to be given." Not to our wisdom, nor to our skill; not to our swords nor to our bows, is the establishment and security of our independent freedom to be ascribed: the finger of God hath done it. This was seen and acknowledged by all the serious and observing, through every step and circumstance of the American Revolution. Hear the language of our venerable, our greatly beloved, and truly christian Hero, when first seated in the Presidential chair of this distinguished nation: "No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the invisible hand, which conducts the affairs of men, more than the people of the United States. Every step by which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation, seems to have been distinguished by some token of providential agency." Nothing short of the agency of that God, in whose hand are the hearts of all, could harmonize the views and resolutions of a people so numerous, dispersed and various; direct them to one and the same end, and induce them to espouse one and the same common cause. It was the same supreme Director, who inclined all ranks of men to fly with such alacrity to the field of battle, to rally round the same standard, and pledge their lives in defence of their country's rights. It was the sovereign Lord of all, who directed our Congress at the beginning to fix

their eyes upon the illustrious Washington, as commander in Chief of the American forces, and who so signally fitted and disposed him to fill that important station. In a word, it was a kind superintending Providence that guided our country by unthought of steps, and through almost insurmountable difficulties to an exalted rank among the nations of the earth; to glorious independence, freedom and peace. And shall not a people so highly favored of God feel and manifest towards Him the most unfeigned thankfulness! Surely it may be said of us, as of Israel, "He hath not dealt so with any nation: Praise ye the Lord." When we consider our independence with all its advantages, and remember the astonishing scenes through which we passed, in order to the quiet possession of these advantages, the warmest gratitude to the great giver of all mercies should always enliven our bosoms.

Again, In observing this day for a memorial, does not deep humility before our Maker greatly become us as a people? While independent as to other nations of the earth, have we not been ready to feel and conduct too much as though we were independent in all respects, even of the Power above us? Have we not been too unmindful of the rock of our salvation? Have we not too much forgotten, that we are entirely and constantly dependent upon the same Almighty Hand, which wrought our deliverance at first, for the continuance and defence of all our privileges and blessings? Has not this forgetfulness of God too strongly marked our National and individual character? And has not the great Disposer of events, in the course of his providential dealings towards us for some years past, been evidently showing his displeasure,

the frowns of his countenance, for this our criminal neglect? If these things be so, which it is presumed, none will deny who believe in the God of Providence, then certainly it becometh us, and is our immediate duty, to be deeply and penitently humble before the offended Majesty of Heaven. It is the language of inspiration, "Before honor is humility; but a haughty spirit is before a fall."

Once more : At all seasons, but especially on this day which is unto us for a memorial, should we send up ardent supplications to the throne of the great Supreme, that He would still mercifully be our God, our guide, and our defence. It is certain that we have been, and still are, a free, an independent, and distinguishedly favored people. But is it equally certain that we shall always be so? Is it not possible that we may forfeit, the blessings of freedom which we now enjoy; that we may lose our rights and privileges through abuse or misimprovement of them? Who will say that our mountain stands so strong, that it cannot be moved? It is confessedly with us in this land a day of political probation. It must fare with us in years to come, according as the prevailing moral complexion of the great body of the people shall be. If America should follow the devious path of other Republics; which may Heaven forbid : if iniquity and impiety in their various forms should be found to prevail among all ranks of our citizens : if throughout the land we unthankfully forget God, and trifle with his holy religion : if we disregard the sabbaths of the Lord, forsake the ordinances of his house, and shut family worship out of our dwellings : if churches should allowedly violate their covenant with God, or the members of

them become regardless of their mutual engagements to walk together in love, and to watch over each other for good : if delusion and error of different kinds, should universally spread, like an over whelming deluge : if infidel philosophy should be cherished and honored, while the most precious truths of God and the gospel of Jesus are slighted and left to bleed in the streets : if jealousy and disunion, if party spirit and party rage should be generally prevalent : if all these numerous evils should abound, and our liberty thus be abused to licentiousness ; we may venture to assert, without any pretension to a spirit of prophecy, that our national institutions, and of course our national freedom and independence, *will, they must* fall and come to nothing ! But God in mercy forbid that this should ever be our case. It *must, it must* not be. May this deprecated period never come. Never, we ardently hope and pray, never will the dear liberties of our country be cast out, to be trampled under the feet of unprincipled and licentious men ; or be left to be seized by the rash hand of some daring usurper.

But our eyes and our desires must be to the God of our fathers, that He would ever keep our ransomed country under the shadow of his own protecting wings : that He would excite us to a faithful and happy improvement of the day and means of grace, with which we are so richly indulged : that He would make us a humble and penitent, a truly wise and obedient people : that He would graciously draw us to a believing cordial acceptance of the gospel of Christ, and an upright firm reliance upon his merits and righteousness. In this way, and in this alone, can a sure foundation be laid for the lasting en-

joyment of our dear-bought blessings. It is only righteousness that really exalteth a nation. In the sincere cultivation of true virtue, and the zealous promotion of vital godliness, are we to seek and expect our establishment. On this ground the peace of America may be secured ; its liberty be enjoyed, and its independence preserved, as long as the hosts of Heaven shall endure. Most fervently and unceasingly should we pray, that the God of love and peace would strengthen the bands of our national union, and draw more closely than ever, the cords of amity around these privileged States : And may generation after generation in constant succession, while considering the great events which led to their country's independence and freedom, remember that they are not their own, but bought with a price, and therefore under greater obligations than any other people, to glorify God with their bodies and spirits which are his.

To God, the Saviour and Upholder of our country, may ardent and unceasing prayers and praises unfeignedly ascend from ten thousand tongues : In Him alone is our hope ; He is to be sought as our present and our future help and salvation.

“ High exalted, firmly seated,
Independent, sovereign, free,
May Columbia's grateful millions
Glory, glory give to thee :
Might, dominion, praises blessing,
All the glory, Lord be thine.

Every nation, all the kingdoms,
Bless, Oh bless, Eternal Sire !
Men adoring, Angels hymning.

Sweep as one the golden lyre.
Rapture feeling transport shouting,
Hark! they cry, Amen, Amen."
And let all the people, say Amen.

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