

A

DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED AT

MEDFIELD,

IN COMMEMORATION OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE,

JULY 4, 1799.



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A

DISCOURSE, &c.



IN his fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians, at the first verse, the Apostle Paul, thus addresses those Christians :—

“ Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”

THE words have particular reference to the Jewish ritual, the Law given by Moses. This our Saviour had abolished as a dispensation attended with difficulty, and inconvenience, by reason of its numerous, its complicated, its burdensome rites and ceremonies.

CERTAIN judaizing teachers, attached to the ancient, the long accustomed system of their fathers, were desirous to restore it to its former influence and authority, and accordingly enjoined it, as a matter of essential obligation and importance.

JEALOUS for their truest interest, the Apostle would have them feel, the superior worth, and excellence, of the state to which they were brought by the Gospel, and stand fast in the Liberty wherewith they were made free.

THE obligation is by no means confined, to the religious liberty, which by the Gospel, Christ has secured to his Disciples ; it extends equally to the civil rights, and advantages, which flow from him, as the constituted governor among the nations.— In his exalted state, Jesus the Son of God, has all power, in heaven, and on earth—he is made head, over all things, for the Church—he conducts, the various events of providence, with a view to the final establishment, and glory of his kingdom,—by him kings reign, and princes decree justice. All the kingdoms of the world are under his command, tho many of them are, as yet, wholly unacquainted with, and others, proudly, refuse to own and submit to, him, yet the time is coming, when the kingdom, and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given, to the people, of the saints of the most high, and all nations shall serve, and obey him. Then he shall reign over a willing, and obedient people. In the mean time, for that universal prevalence of his kingdom, he is preparing the way, by many, and surprizing revolutions, in human affairs ; and in opposition to all the designs, and combinations of his enemies, he will establish an universal dominion,

of truth, righteousness, and peace in the earth. He will put down all rule, and authority; break every oppressive yoke;—the world of mankind, will be united, as one family, in the most cordial affection; nation, will not lift up sword, against nation;—wars and desolations will cease;—each portion of the human race, independently free, from the dominion, and controul, of all others, in the full possession, of the most valuable rights, and liberties, both civil, and religious, will sit under their own vine, and fig tree, and none, shall make them afraid.

To such a happy state of things, the prophetic pages of divine revelation assure us, the world is progressing, under the constituted government, of the Prince of Peace.—In such quietude, and happiness, the commotions, and tumults, the disorders and confusion, which have hitherto, so generally prevailed on earth, will terminate, when Christ shall take to himself his great power, and reign king of nations, as he is king of saints.

THE wise, observing Christian, cannot but discern, in the mighty events of providence, the fulfilment of prophecies; and from their conspicuous accomplishment, in past, and passing scenes, will derive high confirmation to his faith, and hope, respecting those, which time, has not yet illustrated.

AMONG the great, and interesting events, which have passed under the moral government of God, the American Revolution, holds a very conspicuous place.

THE Day we celebrate, has formed a new, and important Epoch, in the history of the world; an Era, memorable, not only in the annals of our own, but, almost equally, distinguished in the computations of other countries.

THE yoke of bondage, from which, by that happy event we were set at liberty, together with the subsequent blessings, and advantages, of our interesting situation, have just claim, on the present occasion, to our grateful recollection.—Nor will it be unsuitable, to suggest a few thoughts, on the best adapted means, of securing and perpetuating, the liberty, with which we were made free.

THE Yoke of Bondage, was a foreign Government, at the distance of three thousand miles:—A government in which our country was not represented; in the councils, and decisions of which, it had no voice; over which it had no influence.—The claim of that foreign government was nothing less, than the absolute and unlimited right, to “enact laws, binding upon us in all cases whatsoever.”

It was not so much the rigor, with which that claim had hitherto been exercised, or the actual burdens, which its operation had then produced, as its principle, which excited alarm, and called forth a determined spirit of opposition, for the principle, once admitted, and established, would preclude all complaint of subsequent evils.

So long as we were dependent on Great Britain, we were, necessarily, subjected to her feelings, and views, and subservient, to her interest: all our public measures, must be of such complexion, and tendency, as to suit her convenience, and accord with her advantage: our laws, must be sanctioned by the royal assent, before they could operate; our navigation and commerce, were under restrictions, which regarded her own, rather than our emolument.—Through her hands alone, were we allowed, to receive the productions, or manufactures, of any other nations; and the articles, in any instances, obtained from them must be carried to some one of her ports, however difficult, and circuitous the voyage, before they could be brought to ours.

MANUFACTURES, of various, and important kinds, were either totally prohibited, or carried on under restrictions, by which their advantage was greatly diminished.

In addition to these evils, it was a peculiar unhappiness, that our connexion with Britain, rendered us, necessarily, sharers, in all the wars, in which, on any account, she was engaged, with different nations of the earth. We were not at liberty to judge of their necessity, expedience, or justice, but, upon her declaration of hostilities, were immediately involved in all the calamitous effects, and subjected to the full weight of all the consequences.

So long as we were an acknowledged part of the empire, to dispute her authority, or disobey her orders, was denominated treason; and rebellion, and subjected us, to her indignation, and resentment. If, indeed, she had a right to command, she must have, an equitable claim, to punish every act, of disobedience, to her authority.

THIS was a yoke of bondage, from which nothing but the independence of our country could set us free.

To dissolve the ties by which the two countries had been held in connexion; was not the original design, of the patriotic leaders in our revolution. An amicable adjustment, of all matters in dispute, was attempted, by repeated petitions, and the most solemn assurances of cheerful subjection, to an equitable, just, and constitutional exercise of authority. Hence, for more than a year, preceding the declaration of Independence, a defensive war, was carried on by our country, in hope of accommodation.

BUT when all prospect failed; when unconditional submission became the evident, the only alternative, with manly firmness, the galling yoke was disdained, and the edict, of perpetual separation, passed and signed.

ON that interesting occasion, it is said, HANCOCK, then President of Congress, appeared in their hall, with his pen, in one hand, and a sword in the other.

HEAVEN, by its smiles, appeared to approve the deed, and by remarkable interpositions, gave it full effect: all nations acceded to it; and by a peace, as honorable, as it was advantageous, all disputes were terminated, and amity restored, between the now, dismembered branches of the empire.

MANY, and great, are the subsequent advantages, of our independent rank among the nations.

To act for ourselves; to say how we will be governed; who shall rule over us; by what laws and regulations, we will be restricted; to regulate our own commerce; to establish such manufactures, as we may judge the state of our country to admit; to form such connexions with other nations, as we think proper, and useful; to deliberate freely, and without restraint, on all important national questions; to consult our national interest, and prosperity, and adopt all such measures, as in our estimation, are conducive to the great end.

We are at liberty, if we please, to extend our commerce to every part of the globe; and in all seas, the flag which displays the sovereignty, of our confederated republick, has been waved:—among the nations in the four quarters of the earth, it has been generally respected. To almost every land inhabited by human beings, savage or civilized, have been wafted the fruits of American industry, or the products of American art and ingenuity.

In the original compact or confederation, was soon found, a want of energy and authority, sufficient to carry into effect the resolutions, which were conceived important to the national security, and happiness.

WHILE each state in the union, by refusing to comply with the views, and wishes, of the general government, could obstruct, or defeat the object in view, nothing could be, certainly, effected——for that inefficient system; the federal constitution, became a happy substitute. No sooner was it adopted, than it gave a new complexion to the union, producing a measure of prosperity unknown to ourselves, and, almost to any other country. Those who, at first, had their doubts, respecting the expediency or utility, of some of its branches, by its operation, and effects, were soon convinced, and heartily approved it. An higher evidence cannot be given, or desired, of the excellence of any system of government, than the prosperity of the country, which is under its administration.

SYSTEMS in theory, may make a pleasing, and promising appearance, but those systems, are certainly best, which, in their operation, produce the greatest share of national enjoyment, and happiness. In this respect our nation has not as yet, and we have reason to believe, will not in future, find occasion, to regret its adoption. One of its peculiar excellencies, which may justly secure it the confi-

dence of every American, is, that it carries with it provision, for such amendments, and alterations, as the state of the union, or the wishes and views of the people, shall at any time require.

FROM a government thus subjected to revision, and an administration liable, by the suffrages of a free and enlightened people, to be periodically, and frequently changed, there is nothing to be feared. While its praises are resounded thro the nations of the earth, justly may it be expected from the citizens of our own country, to receive cheerful, and zealous support. On this one bottom, Americans are all embarked. However diversified in opinion, respecting particular measures, the independence, the liberties, and constitution of our country, it is presumed, all must wish to preserve. The means most conducive, under providence, to this great and desirable end, let us now briefly suggest.

THE first, obvious, and interesting idea, which presents to our minds, is, a firm belief, and devout acknowledgment, of GOD, and Providence, with a consequent humble regard, to the dictates, and duties of religion.

MODERN philosophists, renouncing the idea of a God, and Providence, have substituted the names "Nature, Fate, and Fortune." They suggest, that the idea of a monarch above, as inconsistent, with the preservation of a republick below, that nature is the only supreme being; and the

only providence, the association of mankind, in liberty, and equality; that man when free, wants no other divinity than himself: that reason dethrones, both, the kings of the earth, and the king of heaven; that every other republick, than that of atheists, is a chimera. It rejects divine revelation; reprobates the institutions, and ordinances of religion; abolishes the Christian sabbath; sets men at liberty, from all the obligations of piety, and morality; opens wide the door to every species of licentiousness, vice and folly; a philosophy "falsly so called," which teaches the gloomy idea, that "death is an everlasting sleep."

THOSE licentious principles and opinions, which are "subversive of the foundations of all religious, moral and social obligations; which have a tendency, to promote profanity, and irreligion; degrade the character of man, and deprive him of his hopes of felicity in a future, and better life"—these are a source of greatest danger to our country. The artful and industrious dissemination, of such principles, and opinions among our citizens, is believed to be, a political engine, in high operation at the present crisis, against our republican constitution:

WOULD we stand fast in our liberty, civil and religious, it concerns us carefully to watch, and firmly to withstand, those baneful principles: for should we renounce the God of our fathers; should we give up the system of religion, the institutions,

and worship, for the free enjoyment of which, they suffered every hardship, in the original settlement of our country, what could we reasonably expect, but that he will forsake us, and give up this fair inheritance to reproach?

ATHEISM, infidelity, and vice, may, under the righteous government of God, be suffered to prosper for a time; but it is the declaration of eternal truth, which the events of ages have confirmed and illustrated, that "righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is the reproach of any people." By prevailing impiety, and irreligion, a holy God may be provoked to withdraw his protection, and guidance; he may give up our councils, to blindness and delusion, or our citizens to a spirit of jealousy and disaffection, until the insidious arts, of secret disguised enemies, involve us in the "incalculable mischief, and misery, they have brought on other countries."——Let the breast, then, which is fired with a patriotic ardor, for the independence, and liberty of our country, for the preservation of its privileges, civil and religious, be impressed with the great idea, of a God, and Providence, and be actively engaged, in the cause of pure religion.——The truly good man, is the best friend of his country, the most energetick supporter of its independence and happiness. A wise, virtuous, and religious people, cannot be miserable, because God will never forsake them • he may visit their "trans-

gressions with stripes, and their iniquities with the rod, but his loving kindness he will not take from them, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail."

In subordination to what has been now remarked, I add—

To the preservation of our Independence, and Liberty, it is of high importance we should possess, and cherish, a truly independent spirit, and act, with independent views, and feelings.

The idea, that a free, and independent people, should be subjected to the will, or devoted to the political views, and interests, of any other nation, is preposterous, and absurd.

In the present state of our country, we hear it often alledged that part of its citizens, are acting under the influence, and with a view to the interest of Britain, and part as guided by affection to, and interested in, the measures of France. The idea, on the one side, and on the other, is probably produced, rather by the prejudices, and suspicions of party, than by the real views of either.—But if any are actuated by such foreign attachments, on the one hand, or on the other, I scruple not to dissent from both : both are wrong. The interest of our own country, ought to be the united object of its citizens. We can be no otherwise interested in the politicks, or convulsions of Europe, than, as men, and Christians, to feel for the miseries, in which misguided councils, and ambitious views, involve

them: Placed at the distance of a thousand leagues, why should we, be guided by their politicks; or embroiled in their contests ?

It is, indeed, desirable, and impottant, to have a friendly, commercial, intercourse with all, but political ties with none : to vindicate, and maintain, our constitution, government, and liberties, against the interfering claims of every power on earth ; to admit no foreign influence into our councils ; to have no national attachments. This, it is presumed, is characteristick of the great body of the people thro the United States : in principle, as well as in name, they are Americans, attached to their country, and their country's cause ; engaged in defence of its government, its constitution, and the authorities, which are sanctioned by the public voice ; disposed to render to all, the honour, respect, and subjection, which their stations justly demand ; and, under the steady administration, of the government they have chosen, to " lead a quiet and peaceable life."

SUCH an independent spirit, and conduct, must have a happy tendency to secure our national dignity and happiness ; for when the body of the people, are actuated by such patriotick concern, for the prosperity of their country, it will have a salutary influence on their election of men to the high and important stations, in government ; it will lead them to fix their attention on the able and faithful

of the land—on men of known and approved principles—on men of religion, and integrity—on men “who fear God, and hate covetousness;” who will not sacrifice, the cause entrusted to them, to the intrigues, or menaces of any foreign power.

UNDER the contrivance and management of men, a government, perfect in its system, or administration, is not to be expected: in point of principle, and execution, ours has, probably, the fewest imperfections of any now existing.

A CONSTITUTION, formed under all the advantages of cool deliberation, adopted after the fullest discussion of its principles, its excellences and defects; and since its adoption, committed, by the very united suffrages of a discerning people, to the administration of men, highly distinguished for talents, and integrity.

FROM his chosen retirement, a WASHINGTON, who had successfully led its armies, was first called to preside over the councils and interests of his country. When *he* wished, again to relinquish the cares of publick life, ADAMS, was designated to the high, and important trust. The repeated suffrages of a well informed people, constitute their highest eulogy. The world has, long since, known and proclaimed, their worth. Under their steady pilotage, the American bark, has been hitherto conducted, with such prudent caution, amidst threatening tempests, and dangers, as to have escap-

ed the convulsions of Europe. Their tried patriotism, their approved wisdom, and firmness, entitle them to the confidence of their brethren: and may justly inspire the pleasing hope, that by the guidance of the mighty Councillor, they will yet be enabled, in the high places they respectively fill, to lead us in paths of peace, and safety.

A good degree of confidence in those, who by the public voice are placed in any distinguished stations, is of high importance, to the operation, and continuance, of free republican governments. A spirit of distrust and jealousy, leads directly to anarchy; while the miseries resulting from popular commotions, and tumults, tend naturally, to arbitrary government.—To the preservation of our independence, and peace, it is then, peculiarly important, that our civil guides, should possess the confidence of the people.

Union and harmony may be justly considered as another eminently important means, of preserving our independence, and liberty. A divided people must be always unhappy, always in danger. It is a maxim of eternal truth—“A kingdom divided against itself, cannot stand.”—There may indeed be diversity of opinions, and yet the commonwealth receive no detriment; but if opposition of opinion, be suffered to produce alienation of heart, to issue in rancorous feelings, to break forth in hard names, severe invectives, in animosi-

ty, strife, and contention, the best cause will be injured.

SHALL I be excused, if, on this occasion, I take the liberty to suggest an apprehension, that on both sides of our political disputes, a spirit of party has been much too warm, and carried too far. On both sides, probably, many things have been said, and done, more from an opposition of feelings, than of opinion.

Is it not high time that bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, and evil speaking, together with all malice be laid aside, and that as imperfect beings, sensible we are alike subjected, to error, and mistake, we be kindly affectionate, one towards another, candid and forbearing; that if we differ in opinion, we may at least agree unitedly to refer the public cause, in which we are equally interested, to the decision of Providence, under the management of those, who are providentially entrusted with its guidance and direction.—The right of government, we must all agree, is vested in the constituted authorities, in those who are selected to that particular business, by the voice of the people; nor can there be reason to suppose, other classes of men are more competent to judge of our national interests, or more likely to guide them with wisdom, and fidelity.—The right to inspect the conduct of rulers, and with decent freedom, remark on public measures, will not be denied; it is of high importance to a

free government. But if under this idea, men in office are misrepresented, defamed, and reproached, the principle of liberty is certainly lost, in an odious, and criminal licentiousness.

THE liberty of the Press, every true American will advocate : but no sober minded and intelligent person can suppose, that liberty to consist in the right of publishing, indiscriminately, truth, and falsehood ; of casting abroad fire brands, arrows, and death ; or giving vent to turbulent and resentful passions. As well might we suppose true liberty of action, to consist, in doing to those whom we dislike, whatever our resentments may dictate ; in dealing about our blows, to the wounding, and injury of their persons.

THE distinction between liberty, and licentiousness, is of the utmost importance, and ought to be sacredly regarded.—I add, for the preservation of our independence, and liberty, it may become necessary, to make occasional provision, for national defence.

SUCH is the moral state of the world—such the corruption and depravity of the human character, that disputes will arise. Misunderstandings, motives of national interest, honor, ambition, and pride, will foment disputes, and contentions. The most pacifick, and inoffensive people, will not always have it in their power, to give satisfaction to surrounding nations ; to act a part, so confessedly im-

partial, especially in seasons of prevailing contests, and jealousies; as to secure them from the displeasure, and resentment, of one, or other, of the contending nations.

In all subjects of difference, to have recourse to amicable negociation, is wise, and virtuous, and eminently becoming Christian nations. But unhappily, this desirable mode, is not always successful.

WITH regret, we have found, repeated overtures, from our Government, to fail. Such, however, is the ardor of the Supreme Executive, for peace, that Envoys are, *a third time*, appointed for the important purpose. Joyful will it be to every American, should it issue in the termination of all unpleasant feelings, and disputes, in cordial reconciliation, and friendship. But what is so likely to produce successful negociation, as vigorous preparations to repel hostile aggressions, and put our country in a respectable state of defence?

ON that divine Being, who has raised us to the rank of an independent nation, should be our supreme, and ultimate reliance, for the preservation of our most precious interests. But we are not called, like Israel of old, on an extraordinary occasion, to “stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.” It is the duty of our civil rulers, to be attentive to the dangers which may threaten us; to act as faithful guardians of our liberties, civil and religious. Much easier is it, to put off the

barnets, to lay aside the means of defence, when it shall be manifest they are unnecessary, than to provide them in the exigency of a moment.

The faithful watchman, standing on the summit of a tower, may espy a cloud, no larger than a hand, collecting with storm, and tempest, while those who are in the vallies, and plains below, engaged in the common business, and occupations of life, may be insensible of the danger, until it is ready to burst upon them.—Watchman, what of the night?—is a question proper to be addressed to civil, as well as religious guides; the warnings of either, should not be disregarded.

LET us, especially, hear the voice of God, addressing us by his word, and providence, as a people who have been highly favoured, with penitent hearts, let us return unto him from whom we have revolted. Let the celebration of this day, as it has been begun with religious and devout acknowledgment, of the God of our Fathers, be throughout, observed with decency, sobriety, and temperance; that while we advocate a Christian obedience, and subjection, to the laws, and institutions, of our country, none may have occasion to reproach us with any irregularity, or disorder, in violation of the commands of God.—Let us venerate the institutions, and ordinances, of Christ; be deeply impressed with a sense our obligations to him for our civil, and religious privileges.—These are

closely connected ; they will stand, or fall, together.—As Christians, therefore, we are deeply interested, in the prosperity of our country. For our brethren, and companions' sake, we should say, “Peace be within thee.” “Because of the house of the Lord our God, we should seek her good.”

