

A

DISCOURSE

ADDRESSED

TO THE

FIRST PARISH IN HINGHAM,

ON THE

DAY OF FASTING,

April 5, 1810.

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“**I**N conformity with the invariable usage of this Commonwealth,” and in compliance with the request of the supreme executive of the same, we are this day assembled.

The design of this occasion is deeply interesting and solemn. The usage of our revered ancestors of devoting a day annually to public “humiliation, fasting, and prayer,” having been so long established, seems like the call of God to follow their example.

A sense of duty, whose authority is most sacred, calls us to acknowledge “our absolute dependence on the beneficent parent of mankind,” and to confess “our numerous and aggravated offences against his holy will and commandments.”

And now, in this ancient sacred place of public worship, where our fathers bowed with humiliation, prayed, and were heard on high, do we “in the presence of Almighty God devoutly implore with deep contrition, his merciful forgiveness of our manifold sins and transgressions, through the merits of our blessed Lord and Redeemer.”

Let the same profound reverence of God and religion, which led them to erect and defend their sacred

altars, and the same inviolable attachment to “Freedom and Order” which enkindled the fervor of their prayers, mingle in our devotions.

Filial love and gratitude remind us of their supplications and tears, not only to obtain blessings for themselves, but for their unborn descendants.

They beheld in prophetic view, with affection and solicitude that words cannot describe, succeeding generations blest for their pious care in laying a foundation for the best institutions.

Happy people ! To possess the land crowned with the plenteous gifts of providence, and under the peculiar smiles of heaven, redeemed by our fathers from bondage and oppression.

Our ancestors have left us an illustrious example of piety and patriotism. They established and defined their principles of religious and civil liberty, and defended and illustrated them with ability, valor and sacrifices, which have excited the admiration of the world. They accomplished more than the greatest conquerors could ever boast. The brave, and good, and great, had for ages ardently desired, but in vain, to see the “freedom and order” which we enjoy.

We cannot worship in the place of our fathers on this occasion, educated and fostered by the beneficent institutions they founded, and, as it were, sitting refreshed under the vines and fig-trees from which they expelled those who would molest and destroy us, without indulging our gratitude in recollecting their immortal deeds.

These things should be remembered that *they* be not charged with blame. The causes for humiliation and fasting are all our own. *They* stand honorably acquitted, unless we complain that they did not live longer to defend our inheritance, to lead us by the hand in "Piety and Order," and to instil into our minds the principles and spirit of genuine patriotism!

Had we confidence that we are worthy to be called the descendants of such ancestors, and the possessors of the unparralleled blessings we enjoy, should we not be greatly relieved of causes for humiliation?

Let us this day listen to the exhortation addressed to Israel:

JOEL II. 12.

"Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning."

THIS prophet is thought to have written his book after the kingdom of Israel was destroyed. The text favors this idea, as fasting and humiliation appear to be terms on which the restoration of the kingdom was proposed. We have an affecting description of the judgments inflicted on that renowned people. Their history is held up for a warning to all nations. The causes of their overthrow must produce ruin wherever they exist.

On the conditions proposed to Israel we are led to look for the merciful forgiveness of God, and for the continuance of public prosperity. Our land and

nation have been often compared with those of Israel as to their peculiar blessings. The names of our statesmen, generals, and presidents, have been enrolled with those of Moses, Joshua, and others, illustrious in sacred history. As we resemble others in our blessings, we must expect similar judgments will meet us in our decline from public virtue. But we hope our nation has not yet arrived at the summit of her prosperity, and that the day of her decline is far distant.

Like the faithful prophet, I would portray the judgment and desolation that await a sinful people. This is the duty of my office. And is not a day of humiliation and fasting, a suitable time to consider the fate of nations, which history has handed down for our admonition ?

Thus he began his animated address : “ Hear this, ye old men, and give ear, all ye inhabitants of the land. Hath this been in your days, or even in the days of your fathers ? Tell ye your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation. For a nation is come up upon my land, strong and without number. The field is wasted, the land mourneth ; the harvest is perished, the vine is dried up ; joy is withered away from the sons of men.” Hence he recommended this measure as most suitable to be adopted. “ Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders, and all the inhabitants of the land, and cry unto the Lord. Alas for the day ! for the day of the Lord is at hand, and a destruction from the Almighty

shall it come. Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain ; let all the inhabitants of the land tremble. A day of darkness and of gloominess.”

This description exhibits a deeply solemn scene, affecting not only to the pious, but to the heart animated with patriotic feelings.

Who secretly thinks this warning does not apply with any pertinency to us ? Look into history. What nation has existed long, and has not been visited with mournful wasting judgments for their degeneracy ? Yea, an alarming pestilence is at this moment within our borders, perhaps approaching the seat of violence to make inquisition for satisfaction to atone for the shedding of innocent blood, and for wrongs perverted justice has not avenged.

What deportment becomes us, my brethren, on the present occasion ? How far have we been accessory to the public evils which exist ?

The prophet, whose words we have quoted, aware of the disposition of man to pervert the design of such an occasion, by ceremonies merely ostentatious, exhorted the people to “rend their heart and not their garments.” A splendid humiliation is but mockery. God speaks to the heart.

We are called, to turn our heart unto the Lord, and not, as hypocrites, to “hang down our heads like a bulrush for a day, with disfigured faces :” God saith of such, “I hearkened, and I heard, but they spake not aright ; no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done ? but they turned every

one to his course, as the horse rusheth into battle.” The prophet Ezra puts the true language of humiliation, becoming each individual, into our lips. He exclaims, “O my God, I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: For our iniquities are increased over our heads, and our trespasses grown up into the heavens: Since the days of our fathers, we have been in a great trespass unto this day.”

In the measure that every individual has, directly or indirectly, participated of the causes for public humiliation, should he this day exercise unfeigned contrition. Let every individual seriously apply this question to his own heart, “WHAT HAVE I DONE? Let the magistrates, let the private citizens, faithfully apply the same.

If our nation sink under an accumulation of guilt, not only the people collectively, but individuals, must be responsible. Neither the citizen, nor the individual State, is absolved by criminalizing the Commonwealth or the Union. And let none of us attempt this vain expedient of clearing ourselves by asserting that we have done our duty, lest it be more than we can assert with truth.

We will proceed to a more particular discrimination of the causes for humiliation, fasting and prayer.

I. The cause for humiliation most prominent to my view, is the prevailing looseness of morals.

People so gradually and smoothly glide into this evil, that many are probably almost unconscious of it. Who has not in any degree participated of this

evil either personally, or by giving countenance to others? This is not deemed a cause of a political nature, yet it is like an infection that spreads and circulates in every vein of the body politic; and its pernicious effects are traced in public laws, in eminent examples, and in the common intercourse of men.

This cause does not belong exclusively to any party or class of people. It is not to be found in Europe or other quarters of the globe only, nor at the seat of our own government, but abounding throughout the community and operating in every individual. He must be an ignorant political bigot who pretends that in this country morality or immorality, or any good or evil exclusively belongs to either party. Such pretence furnishes refuge for evil-doers, and discouragements to the virtuous.

The people of this State, and of this country generally, more especially the generation who have been educated in the golden period of peace and prosperity since the revolution, are bound to be the purest in morals of any who ever lived. Their vices should be fewer and their virtues more splendid than those of their fathers, as their advantages have been incomparably better. But when people become immoral they are unreasonable. Could our fathers who are past off the stage visit us and hear our murmurs and complaints, would they not blush for their sons?

Are not these symptoms of mournful degeneracy deeply humiliating, that a spirit of malice and discord among friends and brethren so much prevails;

that slander is become so fashionable ; that institutions have been established, purporting to be designed for public good, but employed as engines of fraudulent monopoly to extort from the industrious their honest earnings, not leaving them the possibility of redress ; that justice has been perverted and her sacred temple polluted to spare and protect the noon-day murderer ; that profaneness, intemperance and licentiousness of every name have spread their deplorable influence ? And will not the following reflection of a prophet apply to the class of men who should furnish least causes of unfavourable suspicion ? Affected with the deepest sorrow he exclaimed, “ A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land ; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means, and my people love to have it so ; and what will ye do in the end thereof ? ”

From corruptness of morals a spirit of insubordination to the most salutary laws of the land arises, and liberty to trample on human and divine authority is asserted as a right. Hence it becomes more and more difficult to make and maintain good laws, since the base love of popularity must consult the *passions* of the people rather than the eternal *principles* of rectitude.

Order and soundness constitute the beauty and durability of the lofty edifice of religious and civil liberty.

The people who sustain the foundation must preserve pure principles and morals, and the superstructure, the government, will afford protection in the

enjoyment of our dearest rights. They who are free must be also firm. May the humiliation of the people this day, lead to a general reformation of public morals.

II. It is cause of humiliation when the confidence of the people is misplaced, and men of dangerous principles and character are promoted to offices of high trust. How far this is the case in this Commonwealth, I leave others to judge.

I lay this down as a maxim, that when rulers consult the passions of party more than the public good, or sacrifice principle to secure popularity, the consequences to the community must be sorely felt. Passions make men tyrants and slaves.

What will our constitutions, our voluminous laws, and the proclamations of our magistrates so fair in the letter, all avail, without, at least, a general adherence to their spirit? If the framers of laws ever so perfect, countenance the violation of them by their example, they destroy their own work. The conduct of magistrates, legislators and judges is a commentary that will have most influence upon the public mind. What good can be expected of the people, when those exalted to seats of honor as the ornaments of their country, are mere creatures of vanity and corruption? The charms of splendid vices are delusive and draw away those who are not veterans in virtue. All good governments are instituted "for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well;" and that rulers by well doing may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. If the

cause of humiliation which has now been described exist in this Commonwealth or the Union, we offer our fervent prayer that it may be removed far from us.

III. Foreign prejudices and partialities are causes of humiliation as they endanger the welfare of the nation.

They tend to create an alienation, injurious to our own country, and to involve us in the fates of others.

Partialities are insinuated into the public mind by the customs, maxims and merchandize of other nations, although there be nothing in them intrinsically worthy of estimation.

Undue partialities or prejudices make people blind to the real causes of their suffering, and to those which advance their best interest. They attribute their evils, however unjustly, to those with whom they are displeased, though they be of their own household. If partizans, instead of magnifying the beauties and deformities of other nations would manifest a more genuine attachment to their own, our rulers would be less reviled and the lives of the citizens more peaceable.

I cannot think that a true American covets the religion, morals or government of any other part of the world.

We have the sacred volume for our basis and our guide in religion and morals. And has any nation adopted a constitution or form of government preferable to our own? Nor can we consistently deem any man of foreign principles and partialities worthy of the high trust of administering our laws.

Alienation from our own government prepares our necks for the yoke of a tyrant. He who is not truly a patriot cannot be brave.

What greater judgment could be inflicted on any people? Who that loves his country would not guard it from such a mournful destiny? May the fruit of humiliation this day be an exemption from the evil now described. Before the throne of our Almighty Sovereign, let us reverently bow and plead for his kind interposition. To him may we be reconciled, and with him may we form an inviolable alliance.

A consideration of the blessings for which we are called to supplicate, next claims our attention.

Blessings for us and our beloved country would we humbly and most sincerely ask; and to our prayer would we add all suitable measures to obtain the important object.

The patriot, no more than the religionist, can expect his supplication to be heard without a correspondent course of conduct. Our words may be fair, but our actions will illustrate our real meaning as to the kind of blessing we ask. Only a real friend of his country can hope to be heard. The true patriot is a good man, a favorite of God.

In this supplication we would cordially unite, "That he would alike preserve us, from the pestilence that walketh in darkness and the destruction that wasteth at noon-day."

A sweeping mortal sickness, like that of which we have lately had melancholy accounts from a section

of this State, is an afflicting judgment. “Shew thy people, O God, wherefore thou contendest with them,” that they may turn to thee, and thy judgment in mercy be averted.

That God “would graciously smile on the labors of the husbandman” is an article of supplication deeply interesting to all classes of people. Having been accustomed to a land peculiarly favoured, do we not almost presume to think we are not liable to the calamities with which others are visited ?

To the bounteous Source of Good may we look that he may “cause to come down for you the rain, that the floors may be full of wheat, and the fats overflow with wine and oil, and ye eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God.”

“That our commerce may be relieved from the embarrassments with which it is burthened, and prosperity again distinguish our navigation and fisheries,” a great change must be effected in the political state of Europe. And are not invectives against our own general government unreasonable, while such change is beyond their power to produce ? By entangling our country in foreign causes of contention, do we not involve our best interests, without the least prospect of gaining an equivalent ? Why should a nation be ruined in a hopeless struggle for commerce ? The return of great nations to a sense of justice alone can “relieve our commerce of embarrassments,” which event, I apprehend, our interference cannot accelerate.

Hence necessity may teach us to look to an important interest which has been greatly neglected, that

“success to our manufactures” may be afforded. Various are the works of our hands and the sources of national wealth and prosperity. May they prosper and be mutually beneficial to the great body of the people. Permit me to recommend to every class a judicious consideration and choice of pursuits, that their friends may consistently hope and pray for their success.

None can be encouraged to calculate on permanent or ultimate success in any employment or enterprise, which is not in its nature and tendency conducive to public and private benefit.

It is a subject of grateful reflection, that if the people of this country should be brought to the expediency of abandoning the ocean, they possess a land of vast resources. But unless the degeneracy and licentiousness of the people be checked, all the resources of the whole earth cannot secure the “true interests of the country.” Neither manufactures, nor any of the useful arts, can be prosperous amidst confusion, strife and evil work. The experience of ages proves that the richest country, which unites all advantages, cannot preserve a corrupt and profligate people from ruin.

Fervently would we supplicate the Supreme Disposer of events, “That He would graciously condescend to direct the Government of the United States and give them wisdom to discern, and firmness to pursue the true interests of the country ;” and to this we would add, that he would dispose the people not to adopt measures to embarrass and perplex the

administration of the same, nor to invite and encourage the aggressions of foreign powers.

“That He would preserve us from war, and from all connections that lead to dishonour and adversity,” must we not preserve ourselves from foreign partialities?

“That He would continue to us the enjoyments of peace, liberty and religion,” shall we not be wise to keep our banner furled till a necessary cause of war arise? Must not the elective franchise of the citizens be preserved unfringed? And they who exclusively stile themselves the friends of piety and order, refrain from the dissemination of evil and false communications? for these are, literally, “the snares of insidious friends!”

“That He would influence the Governments of the several States, to do every thing, within their respective spheres to preserve the Union, Order, Tranquility, and Independence of the United States,” we cordially supplicate, with this reserve, that no State assume the province to dictate the policy of the general Government. If evils exist, our constitution provides a remedy by our elections. Popular tumults and legislative interference, unauthorised by the constitutions or laws of our country, are at all times of dangerous tendency, and peculiarly indecorous in the friends of order. It is a happy consideration that at this trying period, we have men at the head of our public affairs in our national government, in whose patriotism, wisdom and integrity we can well confide. We are satisfied of their attachment

to the best interests of our country, and that they will not sacrifice them to any foreign partialities; that under the smiles of Heaven, “no weapon formed against us shall prosper, and the counsels of those who devise mischief against us be set at nought.”

And let it be a subject of deep humiliation that the affection and obedience of the people have not been more uniformly worthy of the American name and character, of the confidence of their rulers, and of the eminent rank allotted us by divine providence.

With pious and patriotic solicitude we would implore the divine blessing on our “University, our Colleges, and Seminaries of Learning.” May the laudable designs of their original founders and patrons never be perverted, but invariably conduce to promote the best interests of Religion, civil Liberty, and all the liberal arts and sciences. May we not look in vain to those nurseries of education, for correct and enlightened statesmen, and able divines, or for any class of men useful and ornamental to society.

In the last branch of supplication the benevolent and good devoutly unite, “that he would advance all means used for propagating true religion, and promote the pious purposes of those, who endeavour to disseminate a knowledge of the holy scriptures, that all may learn his will, and obey his commandments.”

Happy is the reflection and persuasion that a free government facilitates the progress and enjoyment of vital religion. Where conscience is not shackled

with prejudices and superstitions, the pure spirit of christianity more readily gains access to the hearts of men. Therefore christians can not feel too deeply interested in the political state of their country. Our Saviour was an advocate of the rights of men. He protested against the Scribes and the Pharisees oppressing the people under the Jewish state. Thus he reprimanded them, "Saying, the Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat.—They bind heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders ; they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi."

The true christian, like his divine master, is a zealous philanthropist, and therefore contends against all abuses of the rights, God has given to men.

The knowledge of the holy Scriptures has the most benevolent end in view, that men may be pure in heart and promoters of the general welfare. The divine will is the standard by which all men are bound to regulate their lives. Though all do not agree in modes and forms of faith and worship, while they walk in the same spirit, religion cherishes the best affections, promotes order, and advances the glory of a nation.

Let it be a subject of the deepest humiliation, that the divine spirit of religion is not more general in our vicinity, our State, and our Country. My bre.

thren, wickedness not only exposes us to the displeasure of God, but degrades us beneath the dignity of rational nature, and disqualifies us to sustain the character of christians, patriots or good citizens. This adage of the wisest of men is eminently worthy our attention that “Righteousness exalteth a nation : but sin is a reproach to any people.”

May the same causes of humiliation which now exist, never again be found in individuals, in the State, or the Union. To our humiliation let us join everlasting gratitude and thankfulness that our lot is cast in a free, fruitful, and highly favored country.

And now to complete the design of this occasion, that it may be the “fast which God hath chosen,” may every individual listen to these benevolent terms, “to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out of thy house; when thou seest the naked that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh; then shalt thou call and the Lord shall answer.”

Having turned to Thee, O God, with all our hearts and with fasting and mourning for our sins, Thou wilt order fruitful seasons; they that go down to the sea in ships, shall have abundant cause to lift up the voice of praise; the useful arts will afford their aid to render life agreeable; peace will wave her lovely banner over our land; and, being redeemed and adorned by divine righteousness, the exalted “Liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free,” as well as that our fathers purchased, will crown us for thy favored people.

May the nations unhappily involved in a desolating war speedily return to a sense of justice, peace and amity, become free, enlightened, and happy, and all the people of the earth be united in the kingdom of one God, one Lord, and Saviour.

FINIS.