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MR. EATON'S

THANKSGIVING SERMON.

1799.

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S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT *BOXFORD*,

NOVEMBER 28, 1799.

THE DAY

OF

ANNIVERSARY THANKSGIVING

IN THE

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS.

BY PETER EATON, A. M.

MINISTER OF A CHURCH IN SAID TOWN.

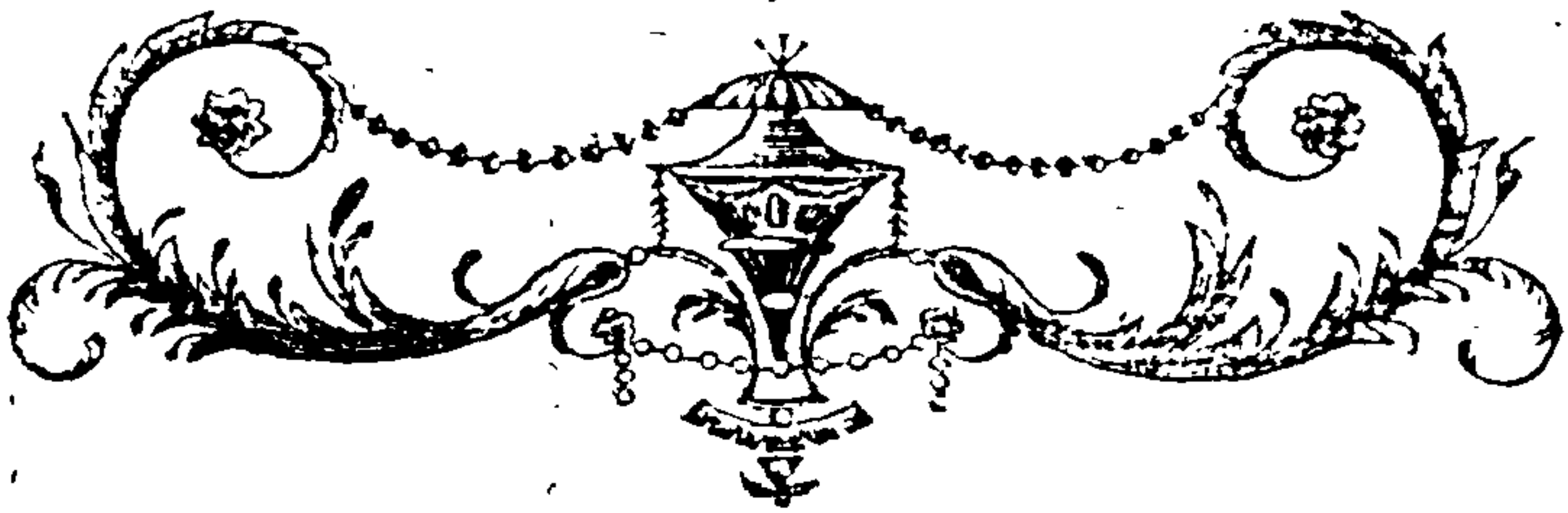


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THANKSGIVING SERMON.

PSALM CVII. 22.

LET THEM SACRIFICE THE SACRIFICES OF THANKSGIVING, AND DECLARE HIS WORKS WITH REJOICING.

THE Psalms of David are calculated to afford the most pleasing entertainment to the serious mind. The pious author breathes such a spirit of elevated devotion, as can scarcely fail, usefully, to impress those who attentively examine his writings. This good man, by the providence of God, was called to pass through varying scenes. Health and sickness, joy and sorrow, prosperity and adversity, he alternately experienced. Not only were outward scenes shifting with him, but the state and exercises of his mind were various. Sometimes, "*the comforts of God delighted his soul.*" He enjoyed all those divine consolations, which our holy religion imparts. At other times, he was in a state of darkness and depression. His particular

particular feelings and exercises of mind at those different seasons, gave rise to a number of his Psalms. Every christian, therefore, in all the vicissitudes of human life, will find some part of David's writings adapted to his own circumstances. Are health and prosperity your happy lot, or are you in trouble and adversity? Do you lament the want of fervent piety, or do you feel the exercise of ardent love? In the writings of holy David you may find meditations suited to either state.

If invited to join in the pleasant duty of thanksgiving, we can hardly follow him in this part of devotion, without receiving some useful impressions. Sacred history does not present us any character, except the Savior who appears to have been so deeply impressed with the goodness of God. How often was he engaged, in the duty of thanksgiving? In what a feeling manner does he recount divine mercies? With what warmth of gratitude does he render praise? While he had the most admiring views of divine goodness, and his heart was under the influence of the most grateful sentiments, he would lead others to the same views, and impress them with the same sentiments. This appears to have been the design of the psalm, from which the text is taken. That he might, in the most successful manner, excite love and awaken gratitude, he recapitulates some of the manifold providences of God. While employed in the review of past benefits, the mercies
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of heaven appeared so numerous and great, as filled his heart with love and thankfulness, and he gives vent to the pious feelings of his soul in the following language. “O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endureth forever.” Having enumerated many of the kind providences of God, he closes the description, with an animated and devout aspiration: “Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! Let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing.”

The present day being set apart for the express purpose of commemorating the blessings of heaven in the passing year, O that God would give us, that devout spirit and thankful heart, which holy David possessed.

That I may assist you in your meditations this day, I shall endeavor to describe the manner, in which we may acceptably sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving. Then propose several considerations as incentives to the duty. Shall I be permitted,

First, to describe the manner, in which we may acceptably *sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving.*

The form of expression in the text is conformable to the Jewish religion, and is used with a manifest allusion to their mode of worship. Their religion, you are sensible, consisted, in a considerable part, of sacrifices. For sin they must bring a sin offering; for mercies the thank offering. In the blood of beasts God no longer taketh pleas-
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ure. The worship under the gospel is purely spiritual. Accommodating the language of the text to the gospel, it may imply,

That, we meditate on the goodness of God. Serious meditation has a happy tendency, to prepare the heart for devotional exercises. Innumerable are the blessings, which we have received from God. “*If I would declare and speak of them,*” said the Psalmist, “*they are more, than can be numbered.*” How many are the personal favors shown us? How valuable are the blessings which have been conferred on our families? Some can remember the bed of sickness, from which they have been raised; others kind preservation, when in the most imminent danger. From the review of past life, we perceive that the goodness of God has ever followed us. His favors have been new, every morning and every night. If with one hand HE has afflicted, with the other HE has done us good. If HE hath deprived us of some valuable comforts, HE hath bestowed and continued others. In the midst of affliction HE has ever remembered mercy, and when HE has corrected, it has been with a father’s hand. Let it then be a part of the employment of this day, to refresh our minds with past benefits.

It was the practice of Moses, while leader and lawgiver to the Hebrews, to recapitulate the great events of Providence, to refresh the minds of the people with the past wonders of God’s goodness, in order to excite their gratitude, en-

gage their confidence and secure their future obedience. How happily were such means adapted to produce those desired effects? When retracing the past events of human life, can you point out the day, which has brought no favor from God, or mark the hour, or moment, when you were not under growing obligations to heaven? If our lives have been crowned with loving kindness and tender mercy; if the stream of divine goodness has never ceased to flow; then it must be proper that we should meditate on the past course of providence, which, through the blessing of God, will be an hopeful means of preparing us to render the sacrifice of thanksgiving.

That we may present an acceptable thank offering, we must make mention of the loving kindness of the Lord. *“The works of God are to be declared with rejoicing.”* How pleasant was this part of worship to the devout Psalmist! *“I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth. O magnify the Lord with me and let us exalt his name together. Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the Lord he is God, it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise; be thankful unto him and bless his name.”* Though there is little virtue in rendering praise to God with the lips, unless this praise is the incense of the heart; yet, praise flowing from a grateful heart, is very acceptable to him.

Which leads me to add, that a *grateful heart* is necessary to present an acceptable thank offering. We may meditate on past mercies, we may express praises with our lips, yet our offering not be accepted of God. The thank offering must be presented on the *altar of the heart*. A prosperous and successful train of events ever inspires us with joy and gladness ; still we may be destitute of those grateful sentiments, without which no professions of thankfulness will be accepted by heaven.

Must not our minds receive a deep impression from the severe reproof administered by our Savior to the Jews ? “ *This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips : but their heart is far from me.*” Our worship is a mere show of religion, a vain pretence, a piece of formality and ceremony, if our hearts be not engaged in the duties of devotion. It is the thankful heart, which gives a value to the offering.

An instructive lesson we learn from the example of Cain and Abel. “ *Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and the fat thereof.*” The one was accepted, the other was rejected. Must this be imputed to the difference in the offerings, or the temper of the offerers ? Was it not “ *by faith, that Abel offered to God, a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain ?*” Would it not be useful to remember, when we engage in worship, that an omniscient, omnipresent BEING is the witness and spectator of our conduct, who cannot be deceived
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and will not be mocked? Did we consider this, how would it solemnize our spirits? And how concerned should we be, that the temper of our minds be right?

I shall only observe under this branch of our subject, that a good man will be solicitous that he offers praise, in the manner which has been described. He approaches the altar with solemn reverence. He looks up to the fountain, from whence streams of goodness have continually been flowing. He remembers a thousand mercies, for which he ought to be thankful. To him it is pleasurable to survey the past blessings of his life, and to pursue the course of divine providence towards himself. His mind is employed in devout meditations. He is not the formal, but humble, sincere, and engaged worshipper.

I would now propose some considerations, as incitements to the duty of thanksgiving.

First. The continuance of the gospel is a blessing, for which we ought, especially, to be thankful. The efforts of infidelity have been unremitting to destroy Christianity. We are not generally apprized of the exertions, which have been made, (to use the language of one of its professed adversaries,) “to place religion in the back ground.” The enemies of revelation could not have been more persevering, had it been one of the greatest curses, ever inflicted on a nation.

The opposition made to it, has been systematically pursued. It may be affirmed on unquestionable

able authority,* that a combination has been formed among infidels in different nations, to subvert Christianity. There is little reason to doubt, that persons in our own country are engaged, in the prosecution of this scheme. Frederic of Prussia and Voltaire of France were patrons of this infidel philosophy. This confederacy of infidels has accomplished their object in France. Their philosophy, like latent poison, had long been operating on the body politic before the revolution. It prepared the way for the awful explosion. It was this, which abolished the sabbath, which burned the bible, † which banished the clergy, which guillotined the monarch, and riveted the chains of slavery on the people.

The excesses in France have not been the result of the enthusiasm of the moment, but of principles long established. They naturally grew out of that corrupt, demoralizing system, which had been spreading through the nation. The minds of some, in every kingdom, have been contaminated.

Thanks be to God, only a partial success has attended their enterprises in this country. We still enjoy our holy religion. The wisest and best men “*glory in the cross of Christ,*” and are not ashamed to profess their faith in, and look for salvation through a crucified Savior. O may we prize that system, which is supported by the best
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* Professor Robinson's Proofs of a Conspiracy. Abbe Barruel's Memoirs of Jacobinism.

† The Bible was burned in the public square at Havre.

of evidence and holds up the only hope to the guilty. Let us declare with rejoicing the goodness of God, in disappointing the views of those, who would wrest it from us. Though the prevailing infidel philosophy has corrupted some in this country, it has been the means of rendering others, more open and decided friends of religion. Many, who were wavering, have been established in the belief of Christianity; and, from witnessing the pernicious fruits of modern philosophy, have been led to avoid it as a most dangerous poison.

Let the infidel reject revelation and glory in his superior discernment; we will prize that Savior, whom God in his love hath provided. In his cross will we glory, believing, that God through him, is "*reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.*" We are informed by an Apostle, that "*the preaching of the cross, is foolishness to them that perish; that the world by wisdom knew not God, yet that it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*"

Secondly. I mention, as a motive to gratitude, the past fruitful season. We believe in the doctrine of a superintending Providence; that the seasons are particularly ordered by that Being, who decreed, that summer and winter, seed time and harvest, should not cease. It is literally true, that "*Paul may plant, Apollos water, but God must give the increase.*" The Psalmist, beautifully describes the goodness of God in respect to the season. "*Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it: thou greatly*

greatly enrichest it, with the river of God, which is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it: Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly: thou settlest the furrows thereof: thou makest it soft with showers, thou blessest the springing thereof. Thou crownest the year with thy goodness, and thy paths drop fatness." In reference to the season, Providence has remarkably smiled on us, in this part of the country. We were favored with the early and latter rain; the sun afforded us his cheering influence, and the year has been crowned with the goodness of God. We remember some past seasons, when the rain has been withheld; others, when blasts and mildews were sent, destroying the reaper's hope. The present year, we are favored with a rich supply of the various productions of the earth. And shall we not bless that kind Being, who has thus smiled on the work of our hands, and filled our hearts with food and gladness?

Thirdly, The success which has attended our navigation and fisheries, demand our grateful acknowledgments. We, who are in the interior of the country, are not generally sensible of the importance of these, to our national prosperity.— That a nation may be in the most flourishing circumstances, it is necessary, that success should attend the various pursuits of its inhabitants. A large number of our citizens depend on the fisheries for support. They draw their subsistence and wealth from the ocean. When, therefore, they

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have been prospered in this lawful pursuit, it furnishes cause of thanksgiving to God, whose blessing must accompany all human means, to render them successful.

The “merchant also, has prosecuted his extensive trade, with profit and advantage.” The most beneficial effects, (under Providence,) have been found to result from our navy. Previously to this establishment, our commerce suffered unlimited spoliations. The ocean was covered with pirates. Such protection is now afforded, that the merchant may pursue his lawful enterprises, with tolerable security. It has been asserted, (and with a good degree of probability) that the revenue which would have arisen from captured property, to the United States, would have been sufficient to equip every vessel now in service; and that our navy has saved more property than the whole expense of our naval armament.

A commercial nation, ought never to be without the means, of protecting their trade. In no instance, has government discovered more genuine policy, than in the attention they have given to this part of national defense. When the navy establishment was first contemplated, it met violent opposition; but this opposition was made by those who have uniformly opposed every measure, calculated to secure the honor and attach importance to the United States.

Have there not too often existed in this country a kind of rivalry and jealousy, between the agricultural

cultural and the commercial parts of our citizens? They have appeared to imagine, that they had different interests. Has not the merchant wished to see a large proportion of the public burden laid upon the industrious farmer? And has not the farmer, fearing that he should bear more, than his proportion, looked at the mercantile interest with a jealous eye, inconsiderately supposing, that an advantage would result from its depression?

This discovers a selfish spirit, as well as a narrow policy. The fact is, both are mutually dependent and of great importance to the prosperity of the nation. It is the interest of the merchant, that agriculture should be encouraged; for he needs the produce of the field, to freight for a foreign market. Trade must languish with agriculture. It is the interest of the husbandman, that commerce should be protected, for if this is destroyed, his produce must perish on his hands. Agriculture and commerce are the great sources of wealth to a nation. When the adventurous merchant makes a profitable voyage, it not only enriches the individual, but adds wealth to the community.

Fourthly. The general measure of health, which has been enjoyed, ought to be noticed with gratitude. The capital of the Union, with some other towns, have been again visited with a mortal disease. It seems as though Providence designed the destruction of that flourishing, yet ill-fated city. While we rejoice, my brethren, that the
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blessing of health has been so generally enjoyed by our fellow citizens, we of *this society* have peculiar reason to weep and mourn with those towns, which have been called to weep and mourn.*— Though we have been exempted from that alarming malady, which in some places has prevailed, we have felt the rod of divine chastisement. With the afflicted families we have sympathized. But we have reason for thankfulness, that the mortality has been no greater. Some, whom we had almost numbered with the dead, through the goodness of God, have been spared to witness this day. With what elevated devotion, with what ardent love, with what thankful heart, does it become such to unite, “ *in declaring the works of the Lord with rejoicing, and sacrificing the sacrifices of thanksgiving !*” With propriety, may you adopt the words of the Psalmist, “ *I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord. The Lord hath chastened me sore : but he hath not given me over unto death.*” O may you imitate his pious resolution and example. “ *Open to me the gates of righteousness : I will go into them and praise the Lord. I will praise thee, for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation.*”

Fifthly. We observe, as what calls for our rejoicing on this day, the continuance of the life of our President. Certainly we must consider it, a smile of

* During the past summer and autumn, a fever was permitted to visit some parts of the County, though uncommonly, yet distressing. A considerable number were very dangerously sick. In particular, sundry few members seemed being acquainted with the disorder. Although the goodness of God the mortality was not great.

of Providence upon our country, that in the present crisis of our national affairs, so eminent a character is placed at the head of our government.— Our situation for years has been critical. The state of Europe has been such, and our connection with European powers, as required, great prudence, foresight, judgment, moderation, and firmness, advantageously to conduct the affairs of State. The wisest men must many times have been in doubt, what was best to be done. A man of rashness might have ruined us ; a man, not possessed of the wisdom of the serpent, would have been duped and imposed on ; a man, who was flexible, might have yielded the best interests of his country. Providence has been kind in giving us such a President, in such a day. His wisdom and sagacity have enabled him to discern danger, when at a distance. His moderation and calmness have preserved him from rash and precipitate measures. His firmness and patriotism, from sacrificing the honor and interests of his country. He hath faced dangers with resolution. He hath encountered difficulties with a noble intrepidity. And viewing his nation, an *independent* nation, he has looked indignantly on the interference of a foreign power.

His administration, also, has been highly pacific. Peace he has sedulously cultivated, with every nation. AMERICA did not assume an hostile attitude, “ *till the cup of reconciliation was exhausted to the last drop.*” The late arrangements for the ad-
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justment of difficulties with France, (after two unsuccessful attempts,) demonstratively prove his sincere wishes for peace. It is to be fervently hoped, that such proofs of a pacific administration may be the means, eventually, of conciliating the affections and confidence of those, who have been disaffected.

Though our present administration has been severely censured; yet the prospect is flattering, that the final issue of measures will evince their wisdom and policy. That there have been no errors in administration is not affirmed. No government on earth is perfect. The day has been difficult. Prescience belongs to God alone. The officers of government cannot determine the certain consequences of public measures. But we are bound to believe, they have been influenced, by an honest aim to serve us; and the progress of events has served to establish us in this belief.

Happy would it be for us, did we duly prize our present enviable situation. We are favored with a constitution of civil government, wise in its construction, adapted to the genius and habits of the people, administered by men of our choice, whose interest and happiness are involved with our own, in the fate of our country; who have sacredly regarded the principles of that constitution, which was designed for a rule to the governing and to protect the lives, the liberty, and property of the governed; who have manifestly consulted the honor, pursued the interest, and aimed at the sup-
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port of the Independence of the country ; who have afforded every possible protection to commerce, and studied to favor the industrious husbandman ; who, so far from wishing to secrete their proceedings from the public eye, have courted investigation ; in this government we have been accustomed to repose confidence, and hitherto have found that our confidence has not been misplaced.

Sixthly. With thankfulness and rejoicing we should this day present our offering, for being preserved from those scenes of misery and blood, which have been witnessed in Europe. The present campaign, has been marked with carnage. The finest and most beautiful countries have been desolated and cities laid in ruins. What ravages and destruction are made by war ? How distressing for those, who have lived, where the great theatre of operation has been ? Numerous armies like the locusts in Egypt, spread ruin wherever they go. The innocent inhabitants have been obliged to fly, leaving their dwellings and their fields, to be plundered by a rude soldiery. We, my brethren, never knew in this place and may God grant that we never may know, the distress of having our fields and country thus laid waste. What cause of thankfulness that while many nations are experiencing the calamities of war, we here enjoy the sweets of liberty and peace.

I may further mention, as a motive to gratitude, that the progress of events in Europe has been favorable to the interest of our own country

try. France, like Rome of old, had multiplied her victories and extended her conquests. Elated with uninterrupted successes, other governments were treated with little ceremony or respect. But she arose to greatness, by treachery and blood. Her boundless ambition has awakened other nations to a sense of their danger and produced a coalition, which have already humbled her pride. Though we wish to see that aspiring nation, reduced to their former limits, we do not wish to see it departmentized like Poland.

In the great political drama, now acting in Europe, Great Britain has taken a conspicuous part. For a considerable time, she appeared to be the only barrier against the encroachments of revolutionizing France. The eyes of all nations were drawn toward this power. Her successful opposition to her enemy, have produced consequences highly auspicious to other nations.

Still we may be looking for great events, in the European world. At this moment it presents us with the melancholy picture of fallen republics, blood, and carnage. May he, who ruleth among the nations, cause the present eventful period, to terminate in a speedy, safe, and happy peace.

France, making power, not justice the rule of her conduct, together with her hostile threats towards these States, has heretofore alarmed us, for our peace and safety. We witnessed her ambition and treachery; we saw other republics falling by her intrigues, and we justly feared, lest by
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her arts, accompanied by her power, we should be reduced to a state of vassalage and dependence. Shall we not render unfeigned thanks to the great Disposer of all events, for preserving us from closing the mournful train of fallen States ?

Let us love, our own country. Gratitude among individuals is an amiable and commendable virtue. When a kind neighbor assists us, with a manifest view to oblige and serve us, we ought to be grateful. Individuals may be governed, by noble and disinterested motives ; nations never are. It may be questioned, whether national gratitude is ever incumbent. Much has been said, of the debt of gratitude, we owed to France. He is greatly mistaken and does not duly consider the policy of nations, who imagines they assisted us from any benevolence or regard. They had ever looked on the increasing greatness of England with a jealous eye. That was improved as a fit moment to maintain a rival power. Their object was not so much to give liberty to AMERICA, as to reap advantage from the existing quarrel. For all services rendered us, full compensation has been made. No further debt is due. It argues perfect weakness, to talk of the gratitude we owe to France. Selfinterest invariably governs nations. A benevolent neighbor, may be influenced by the most generous motives, but nations are always selfish. This being the governing principle, it removes the obligation to national gratitude.

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Those, which have been enumerated, are some of the works, which ought on the present occasion to be declared with rejoicing. Let us express our joy, as becometh christians. While we sit at the festive board, O may we raise our hearts, in thankfulness to the Giver of all good. And from our closets may holy incense arise.

Having attempted to present to your view some events, designed as motives to gratitude; I am led to notice a rebuke of Providence on this Commonwealth, (viz.) the death of our Governor. In capacity of Chief Magistrate, he presided with honor to himself and general satisfaction. Endued with talents solid and useful, which he improved in the service of his country; these with his many virtues commanded respect, engaged confidence, rendered his life dear, his death lamented, and his memory precious.

While in the view of past mercies, we see great cause for thankfulness, it becomes us with the deepest penitence of soul to confess our sins. In attending to the course of divine Providence, we perceive that we have been a favored people; by attending to our own character, we perceive that we are a sinful people. The prevalence of vice and infidelity, and the spread of demoralizing principles, may lead us yet to fear for our prosperity and peace. How visible and great has been our degeneracy, within the compass of our own recollection! Heaven has multiplied its favors upon us; and in proportion to the increase of their
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number and greatness, have we seemed to degenerate. When seriously attending to the moral state of our country, how naturally does the prophet Isaiah's description of Judah occur to the mind. "*Ab sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers, children that are corrupters, they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel to anger, they are gone away backward.*" God has passed before us in goodness and threatened us with tokens of his displeasure, "*yet have ye not returned to me, saith the Lord.*"

Let our thanksgivings be accompanied with humble, sincere prayer, to the God and Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, that he would plead the cause of truth and righteousness, and give efficacy to his gospel. Should we witness a general reformation of manners; should we behold vital piety and genuine religion revived, the secure sinner awakened, and Zion flourishing, then may we prophesy good concerning our land. But so long as vice in all its forms prevails, we shall have reason to fear, that if one threatened calamity is prevented, another more afflictive may be sent.

Let our thanksgivings be accompanied with penitent confessions. And when we bring our offerings for the blessings of the year, may we look in the exercise of faith, to "*the lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*"

AMEN.

