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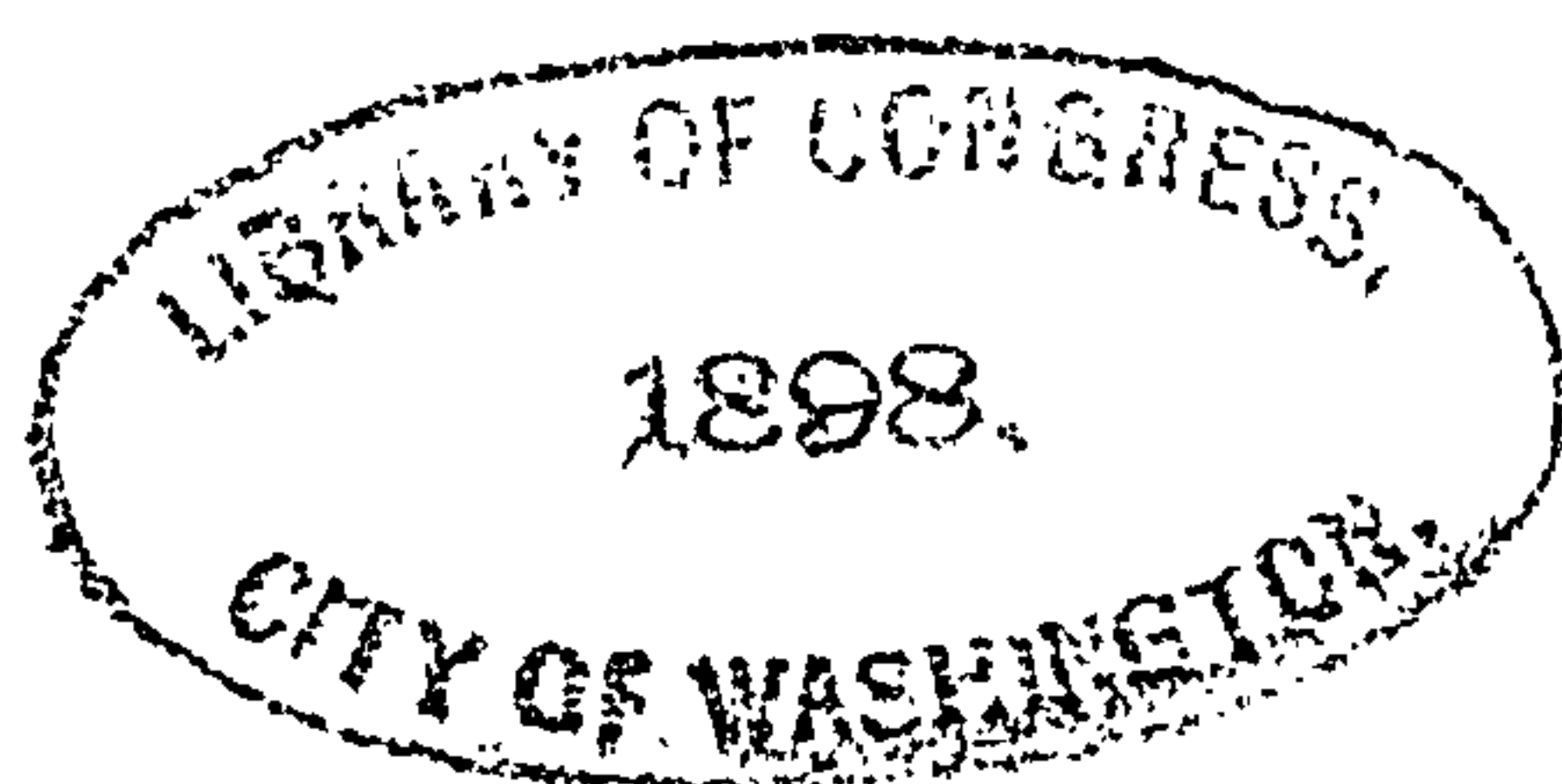
W. C. Taylor 1882



MR. LYMAN'S
Thanksgiving Sermon.

NOVEMBER, 7th. 1793.





THE ADMINISTRATIONS OF PROVIDENCE FULL OF
GOODNESS AND MERCY.

A
S E R M O N,

DELIVERED AT HATFIELD,

NOVEMBER 7th. A. D. 1793.

BEING THE DAY OF
PUBLIC THANKSGIVING.

BY JOSEPH LYMAN, A. M.

PASTOR OF THE CHURCH IN HATFIELD.

“ He loveth righteousness and judgement : the earth is FULL
“ of the GOODNESS of the LORD.”

PSALMS XXXIII--5.

N O R T H A M P T O N :

PRINTED BY WILLIAM BUTLER,

M,DCC,XCIV.

BV 4305
L.B.
Office

14252

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A Thanksgiving Sermon, &c.

PSALM CXXXIX. 17, 18.

“How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God ! how great is the sum of them.

“If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand.”

THIS Psalm is a song of praise to God, for his allseeing and watchful Providence, over his creature *Man* ; for his innumerable mercies, freely, dispensed to our unworthy race.

DAVID begins with an acknowledgement of the divine Omniscience. God knows all that is in man, even in his most secret thoughts. Nothing is hidden from Him : We can, no where, escape the notice of his allseeing eye. The divine presence is with creatures in heaven, earth and hell. The gloom of darkness and the deep shades of night cannot cover us from His view ; or set us free from his holy and righteous government. His care over us begins with the first moment of our existence, and follows us through every stage of our future being, during the long ages of eternity.

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IN consideration of this agency of God in our creation, and of his providence in our preservation, the Psalmist resolves to spend his days and his strength in praising and extolling his great and holy name, and in ascribing thanksgiving to *Him*, who had formed him, so curiously and wonderfully, and had extended the care of his watchful providence over him, through the whole progress of his existence. In contemplation of what God had wrought for him, he breaks out in pious extasy, “*How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God ! how great is the sum of them ! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand.*”

THESE are the words selected to guide our meditations and to enkindle our devotions upon this day of our Thanksgiving and Praise to God. This passage expresses the infinite love and compassion of God to men : He is constantly employed in devising and executing counsels of peace and good will towards them.

ALTHOUGH man is a creature so poor and vile, yet, the Universal Parent is, continually, engaged to preserve him and do him good, to redeem him from his low estate and set him in a place of safety and honour. His mercies, towards us, are new every morning, renewed every evening and fresh every moment : great is his faithfulness.

THE unwearied Sun, who, from day to day, rolls round the earth, to cheer and enlighten it, with his gladsome rays, is, but, a feeble emblem of the uniform and uninterrupted care of God, to sustain, to comfort, and to dignify his creature *Man*. Those thoughts of peace and good will towards us, which, he hath purposed are precious, beyond all estimation :

tion : the sum of his mercies is great, beyond all comprehension. One might, as well, undertake to number the stars and to count the particles of sand, as to reckon the number of divine benefits, which, in copious, ceaseless streams, are flowing forth to worthless man. That stream, which, continually, flows to make glad the city of our God, is boundless, as the ocean and vast, as eternity. As well may we attempt to fathom the mysteries of God's incomprehensible nature and attributes, as to measure the extent, and to count the numbers of his benefits to his creatures.

SUCH is the purport of the Psalmist's language in our text and it should excite us at this time,

FIRST, To recount the number and the greatness of Divine benefits to us, and to our fellow men : And then,

SECONDLY, To improve these recollections, as motives, to enkindle, in our breasts, the graces of humility, gratitude, praise and thanksgiving to Almighty God, the Fountain and Author of all these benefits. And

FIRST, We are to recount the number and the greatness of divine benefits to us, and to our fellow men.

IN contemplating the mercies of our God and Saviour, we cannot hope to recollect their infinite multitude. Their numbers will grow upon us, continually, beyond all our powers of computation. The more, vigorously, we exert ourselves, to reach the sum and extent of divine benefits, the more limited and feeble will our faculties appear; the less able, shall we find ourselves, to comprehend the height and the depth, the length and the breadth of that

that wisdom and love of God, which is, daily, exercised over us : Soon shall we be lost in the immensity of divine mercies. And, yet, there is no subject so worthy of our attention, as this ; none which can, so effectually, convince us of our obligations to the Great Preserver of men ; and so highly, exalt Him, in our veneration and gratitude.

LET our tongues, then, utter the memory of his goodness, and his praise be, continually, in our mouths. Bless the Lord, O our souls ; and forget not all his benefits. And, where shall our lips begin his praises ? Where shall the growing numbers end ?

THE first thing, which, in this exalted theme, strikes our mind, is a sense of our own vileness, and the guilt of our depraved character. What are we, worms of yesterday, that, we should attempt to scan the glories of the divine Majesty ? That, we should utter the praises of the eternal King ? We are sinners before Him ; we are vile, as the beasts, which perish. We have been nourished and brought up as children, but we have sinned and rebelled against him. We have merited every manifestation of his displeasure ; to be excluded from the slightest tokens of his love. Had he been strict to mark, against us, our iniquities, long e'er this, we must have perished under the vials of his wrath ; we must have sunk down to hell, with all the nations who forget God. He is God and not Man, therefore, is it, that, we, the sinful children of men, are not consumed. How unsearchable the mercy of an holy God, that such guilty offenders, upon whom, he might have forever glorified his justice, should be redeemed from the curse ; and of heirs of wrath should become the subjects of saving mercy !

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THE first and greatest instance of divine goodness, which should meet the recollection, and enkindle the thankfulness of sinners, is the gift of a Saviour to redeem them from the deplorable ruins of their transgression and to reinstate them in the favour and compassion of their heavenly Father. *Blessed be God for his unspeakable gift: That he hath so loved the world, that he hath spared his own Son, and, freely, given him up for us all, that, with him, also, he might, freely, give us all things.* That blessing, which lies at the foundation of all divine benefits to this fallen world, is the appointment of our Lord Jesus Christ, to mediate peace, between heaven and earth. He has appeased the Father's anger: He has turned, away, from men torrents of Almighty wrath: He has opened the door of mercy, and brought down gifts for the *rebellious*.

ON his account, alone, are any favours and privileges derived to the children of Adam. Every benefit, conferred upon individuals, upon communities, upon the church of God, and upon the world of men, is given in the name of Christ, and on the sole account, of what he has done and suffered in our nature, and in our room and stead. Gratitude, then, demands, that the appointment and work of Christ, our Saviour be, at this time, and at all times, first, in our recollection and, uppermost, in our hearts, while, we are recounting the mercies of heaven towards us. Christ must be acknowledged, not only, as the first and greatest gift, but as the sum of all favours enjoyed by us, children of the dust.

IN this view of our subject, we are led to speak of all our relief from pain, all suspension of the extremes of misery and punishment, as bountiful acts

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of divine goodness and forbearance through a Redeemer. Let us record it, as a sovereign blessing of heaven, that we are, in any degree, exempt from pain, anguish and despair ; that we are out of hell, and a space of repentance and a moment's reprieve remains to us, from the depths of that misery, into which, we are plunged by our fall.

NOT, only, are the favours enjoyed, by the sanctified children of God, the fruits and effects of Christ's mediation ; but, the ease and rest, the joy and consolation, which is, any where, and every where, experienced among men, is his sovereign gift and the reward of his purchase. Let us, then, in recounting the benefits of providence and grace recur back to Christ, as their sum and their Author. Let us say, with others, his believing children—*CHRIST is my ANCHOR and my ALL.*

AND, now, let us turn our attention to those *secondary* favours of God's providence and grace, which, we enjoy in and through Christ. And were we to dwell, merely, upon personal benefits, which, we, as individuals, enjoy, their number and magnitude were sufficient to engross all our time and far exceed the strength of our gratitude, in making due returns.

HIS lifegiving word has called us into being, and raised us to a rank of existence, above the beasts of the earth. He formed our body from the dust, and the inspiration of the Almighty hath given us understanding. He breathed upon us, and we became living souls. As saith the Psalmist, "*For thou hast possessed my reins : thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made ; marvellous are thy works and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid*"
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*“ from thee, when I was made in secret ; and curiously
 “ wrought in the lower parts of the earth. Thine eyes
 “ did see my substance, yet being unperfect, and in thy book
 “ all my members were written, which, in continuance,
 “ were fashioned, when as yet, there was none of them.”*

THUS, by the power and care of God, are we brought to the light of life and are borne by him, from our nativity, through all the perils of feeble infancy and unheeding youth. When multitudes have languished and dropped around us, He hath been our health and salvation. When the arrows of death have flown around about us, He hath covered us from destruction : He hath upheld our souls in life and our bodies from the dust.

IN addition to these benefits : How hath he crowned our years with favour and loving-kindness ? In conferring upon us Parents to nurse and guide us, Brethren and Sisters to participate and augment our joys, Guides to teach us, and Rulers to protect us. Look over the world of thy fellow mortals ! See the hard lot of humanity, when compared with thine own ! Do they live and gain strength ? It is, in general, that they may become the base slaves and drudges of haughty and imperious Taskmasters and Oppressors ; that they may, like the strong Ass, couch down between two burdens, the burdens of civil and religious oppression, the prey of an impious and idolatrous Priesthood and of a cruel and insolent Magistracy. Their Prophets are as evening wolves, ravening for their prey ; their Princes are, as roaring Lions, seeking whom, they may devour.

BUT, our tongues shall tell of the goodness of the Lord, who hath appointed us our lot in a pleasant place and given us a goodly Heritage ; Where no
 hireling

hireling Shephard can devour the fat of the flock, no hungry Wolf can lay waste the fold ; where the Law is made supreme, and every man may serve God according to his own conscience. Here we sit, quietly, under our own Vine and under our own Fig-tree and eat the fruit of our labours, and none plucketh the bread out of the mouths of our Babes. None is permitted to make a prey of our corn, our cattle, or our increase ; but all may reap and enjoy the precious harvest of their own industry and forecast. *“ Happy is that people, which is in such a case ;*
“ yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord.”

HERE, ye blessed favourites of heaven, planted, by his hand, and redeemed, by his right hand, out of dangers and tribulations ! Here, ye dwell in this good and large land, under a civil government, free as your Will can make it ; possessed of all those religious privileges which an unrestrained conscience can dictate.

LATELY, invaded, by one of the most insolent and oppressive Powers of Europe, you were in great distress, neither knew ye what to do. You cried unto the Lord and he heard you and delivered you with a great and astonishing salvation. He hath brought you into such a state of national prosperity and glory, as no people, since the age of Joshua, has, ever, experienced. It is, emphatically, true, that, in our nation, things go *well*. The Lord is, evidently, in the midst of us, for *good*.

THE pass'd year brings its testimony for God, that, he is gracious and merciful, unto his People. He has, in general succeeded the labour and employment of our hands. And, however, some places have been visited with drought, yet, by affording a competent

petent supply to the country at large, God has showed us, that, this token of his corrective power was an exercise of his mercy ; that, his design, in it, is love, to prevent a fulness, which shall generate pride and luxury and lust.

WHILE, our eyes have seen his glittering tokens and the sword of the destroying Angel has been drawn over the Metropolis of our nation, may we not, also, read the kindness of God, mingled with his wrath. This voice of God crieth to our nation in the midst of its joy and prosperity, That our lives are in his hand ; that, our mercies are his gift ; and in this way, he is warning us to make more suitable returns to the Author of our salvation, to live to Him, and to give the tribute of our praise and obedience to him, who hath delighted in us, to do us good and who would, with this rod of discipline, recall our forgetful and wanton hearts to himself. May not the love of God be seen in this sore affliction ; that, he would humble our pride, destroy our sinful security and teach us to rejoice, in his mercies, with trembling ?

BLESSED be his holy name ! That, he hath had compassion upon his people in, greatly, mitigating the malignancy and rage of that pestilential sickness ; and given to our Brethren, to hope, in his returning mercy ; that he will, yet, be to them the health of their countenance and their God. Adored be divine compassion, in rebuking the mortal sickness in Philadelphia, and in, uniformly, preventing the spread and progress of it in all other parts of our country.*

AND,

* *In the months of August, September and October of this year, the Yellow Fever became epidemical in the city of Philadelphia,*

AND, with these returning smiles of Health to our languishing and desponding Brethren, let me summon your attention to those blessings of civil government, which, you so richly enjoy, under a most excellent constitution, administered with such general integrity and wisdom, through our various tribes.

CONSIDER, also, the means of moral and religious instruction, with which, we are furnished, by which, our youth may be formed to political and literary knowledge, and, especially, by which, they may, early imbibe the saving principles of virtue and christianity, under our institutions of learning and religion. What people ever, so generally and so amply, enjoyed the means both of moral and religious improvement? In our houses, we have the lively oracles of divine truth, which reveal to us the doctrines of the grace of God. These doctrines are, publicly inculcated upon us, by the administrations of the everlasting Gospel, in our christian assemblies. What people hath been, so highly, exalted, by di-
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delphia, and raged with an uncommon malignancy. Nearly, one half of the inhabitants fled their dwellings and retired into the adjacent villages, to escape the awful pestilence. Of those, who remained more than 6,000 fell victims to the distemper. What was most singular, the disease was contagious in no other part of the country; although numbers who had taken the fever in the city sickened and died in the neighbouring towns. This scourge of heaven, upon our unthankful nation, is calculated to remind us of our dependence and frailty and to quicken us to an amendment of life and to a more close walk, with God, in the duties of filial and christian obedience. It served this valuable purpose, That, it afforded opportunity, to many pitiful and charitably disposed persons and societies, to open their hearts and hands in the exercises of liberality to the distressed sufferers. A laudable example! which, it is to be hoped, will in any future corrective visitations of an holy Providence, become more extensive and general.

vine ordinances as the people whom God hath planted and redeemed in this American Continent ?

LET me extend your reflections, in contemplation of other distinguishing favours of Providence to our privileged, though, unworthy nation.

NOW, are unto us times of great and unusual tranquillity. After the troubles and perplexities of a most threatening and distressing war, a war as important, as are all the civil and religious rights of men, the Lord our God hath given us rest in most parts of our country* and has commanded our land to dwell in peace and safety. Far removed, from the contending nations and jarring interests of Europe, he gives to us, the opportunity of cultivating the arts of peace, of wealth, of industry and virtue ; while, that wretched continent is distracted and wasted with all the horrors and devastations of a most cruel and bloody war, a *war of Tyrants* against the rights and happiness of the human race.

THOSE seeds of liberty and free enquiry, which had taken deep root in America, were, in the wise providence of God, sown in the Kingdom of France. That soil, long, vexed with the briars and thorns of slavery and persecution, which had been a field of misery and blood under the horrid oppressions and cruel exactions of the relentless and sanguinary House of Bourbon, was, at first, but little fitted to bear the sacred plant of civil and religious liberty. The inhabitants were little skilled in cultivating and nourishing, that noble plant. Hence in their pursuit of their great and good object, *equal liberty and a free government,*

* We should, however, remember with humiliation and fervent applications to heaven for deliverance, the cruel and predatory incursions of the savage Indian tribes, north of the Ohio, upon our Brethren, on the Western Frontier.

government, we have heard of many follies and excesses, which, a people accustomed to freedom would have, readily avoided. Those follies and excesses, many as they have been, while, they meet our disapprobation and censure, cannot fail at the same time, to excite the candor and the pity of all those, who wish well to human nature and realize the difficulties, the prejudices and the ignorance, with which, they were called to contend, in a controversy, to them, so new, and to their national happiness, so, infinitely, important.

TRACE the mercy of God, in the midst of his judgments, upon the French nation: Behold him awakening their attention to a subject of such astonishing magnitude and with which the downfall of mystical Babylon* is so closely connected! Judgments dreadful to human feelings, usually, attend those ways of heaven, which bring down its richest mercies to men.

MAY not (would to God, it prove so, in the issue) may not the internal convulsions, the bloody passions, the base treacheries and gloomy disasters, which prevail in the territories of France, be the wisest and most effectual means, in the system of providence, to purge, to humble and to reform, that guilty, sinful people? May not these storms and tempests, as was the issue of late in these States; usher in a happy constitution

* *The Preacher supposes, That mystical Babylon is nothing more or less, than that union and coalition of civil and ecclesiastical Power which has obtained in the European Kingdoms, now, for more, than a thousand years and which has been uniformly employed in divesting the people both of their civil and religious privileges and in making merchandize of the souls and bodies of men. The head of this dreadful beast is the court of Rome; its members are most of the European Kingdoms, both Popish and Protestant.*

constitution of government, and the free enjoyment of civil and religious liberty, throughout that great and populous Republic ?

IF, our power and strength should not be called to aid an event, so advantageous to mankind and so glorious to our Universal Parent, yet, our prayers offered up to the Supreme Arbiter of events, in the name of Christ, may ensure an issue, so happy and so devoutly, to be wished.

DO you see the insolent and overbearing Briton, marshalling his armies and equipping his proud navies, to demolish the cities and to subvert the government of France ? Are all the intrigues, the gold and the corruption of that venal Court employed to seduce her own citizens and those of France from the love of liberty and virtue ? Are there leagued, with them, in this hostile and wicked confederacy, the unfeeling Dutchman, the avaricious German, the imperious Russian and the bigotted Spaniard ? Do all these mighty nations of slaves, draw, together, their armies, like Gog and Magog, and go up and cover the breadth of the whole earth ? That they may lay waste the Republic of France ? and quench the fire of liberty, which begins to burn in the bosoms of their own subjects ? These dreadful terrors ought never to drive a Frenchman to despair nor to extinguish the joyful hope of Christians ; that, God will pity his creature man ; that, he will soon break the yoke of bondage, which has, so long, galled the necks of his rational creatures ; that, he will enlighten, reform and save the French nation ; that, he will unite their affections, guide their public councils and inspire them to persevere, until, in their behalf, he shall bring forth judgement unto victory.

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How easy is it with God ? how, often, have we experienced it, in our days ? That when terrors arise, on every side, and the heart is ready to fail, in looking and longing for deliverance, then, salvation shall come out of Zion ? In those things, in which, the mighty exalt themselves, against the designs of Providence, God will shew himself to be higher than they and will turn them, backward, with shame and confusion.

soon, may the convulsions in Great-Britain and the ruin of their internal affairs compel them to desist from their cruel and wicked purpose. Soon, can all the strength and force of combined tyrants and their armies be, utterly, broken by God's almighty arm. *“ God hath spoken once ; twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God. Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy ; for thou renderest unto every man according to his work.”*

AND, now, may we not be allowed modestly, to conjecture, what will be the merciful events of a gracious Providence, flowing from the present tumults of the European nations.

THOUGH, we have seen the ambitious and despotic Courts of Russia and Prussia, by the terror of their arms, spread misery and despair through the Kingdom of Poland ; and, with perfidious baseness, divide between them, that extensive country, upon which, the beams of liberty began to dawn with its first cheering rays : Though, we have seen the combined armies of Europe make inroads upon the territories of France : Though, we have seen them beginning to conquer some of her cities and to besiege others for themselves and, thus, to threaten the dismemberment of that great Empire: Though, such
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be the gloomy aspect of affairs, in Europe, may not events issue in a manner, totally, different from the expectations of wicked oppressors and from the anxious fears of those, who wish the happiness of the human race.

INTERFERING claims of hungry tyrants may divide their counsels and breed jealousies and contentions favourable to the cause of freedom and righteousness. The ruin of the finances of the combined Courts, the disquietudes of their own subjects, under the yoke of intollerable oppression, may, soon, totally, stagnate their operations and confound all their mischievous enterprizes. With infinite ease, God can perplex the measures of those wicked oppressors and, raise up a spirit of unanimity and unconquerable fortitude among the free citizens of France, which will blast the hopes and baffle the attempts of their cruel invaders. And, if God's time have come, and oh ! that it were nigh, at hand, he can cast down those Thrones of Tyrants, and break those Horns of the Beast, which, now, for more than a thousand years, have goaded the inhabitants of Europe and made their condition vile and deplorable, beyond the conception, of every one, who has not been the partaker of their woes.

MOST certainly, this wrath of man shall praise God ; it shall hasten the downfall of European tyranny, *that Man of Sin, that Son of Perdition.*

AND, until, the indignation be overpast, God has provided a retreat for his oppressed offspring in this American wilderness. Hither, we see the wretched children of distress repairing by hundreds and by thousands to escape the rapacious cruelty of Plunderers and the fury of bigotted Persecutors. Here, may
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we hope, that, within a few generations, the seeds of liberty and virtue, planted by those, who have fled European domination, shall spring up, in a large harvest. And, here, may the *latter day* glory take its rise and, in its life giving progress, reform, and render blessed the enslaved nations of the eastern continent.

THEN, shall the set time, to favour Zion, come ; when, the infidel Jew shall adore and obey the *crucified* Jesus ; when, the blinded Mahometan shall acknowledge the *Divine Prophet* of Nazareth ; and the idolatrous Papist shall hate the *Whore*, shall give his idols and his images to the moles and to the bats and shall implore the grace of the *One Intercessor*, between God and man.

to Zion, shall Persia and India repair with their gifts. The brutal Russian and the savage Tartar shall bow to the Name of Jesus. And Ethiopia shall stretch out her hands unto God. Liberty and truth and grace shall return and dwell on earth, again, and all shall know the Lord, from the least, even, unto the greatest.

WE draw to a close by bringing to view the last object of our discourse, which is,

SECONDLY, To improve our preceding recollections, as motives, to enkindle, in our breasts, the graces of humility, gratitude, praise and thanksgiving to Almighty God, the Fountain and Author of all these benefits.

WE have recounted some few of those mercies, boundless and infinite, which, we experienced at the hands of a gracious and forgiving God. When, we reflect, how undeserving, how grossly vile, and depraved we are, and what general corruption and wickedness

wickedness prevail in the hearts and lives of men, over the face of this guilty world, we cannot fall, too low, before that sacred Majesty, who, after all our many and aggravated provocations, continues to be *gracious* and to pity the souls, whom, he hath made. The greatness and number of his benefits should influence us, more sincerely, to lothe and abhor ourselves for our negligent regards to his glory and our ungrateful rebellion against his authority.

THIS day, ought the goodness of God to lead us to repentance and to sincere and persevering resolutions of amendment in heart and in life. In view of all his grace and good will, his astonishing mercies and salvations, we should say, *“Not unto us, “not unto us, O Lord, but unto thy Holy Name be all the praise : For thou, only, hast done great things for us “whereof we are glad.”*

AND, with these sentiments of christian abasement, let us learn a lesson of true thankfulness and sincere gratitude to God, who, not for any goodness in us, but, for his own sake and for our Redeemer's sake, hath wrought wonders for us, his guilty, backsliding heritage. Let our souls be kindled into praise and thanksgiving to His great and holy Name, that, he hath not done so, for any people, as he hath done for us and our nation. Let us extol Him, for his goodness and truth and faithfulness, which, our eyes have seen and of which, our Fathers have told us. His compassions have moved towards us and he hath given us rest, from those troubles and miseries, which have overwhelmed the other nations of Christendom.

NOW, we consecrate, to his use and glory, those blessings of providence and grace, which, he has, so abundantly,

abundantly, bestowed upon us. We will humble ourselves before his mighty power ; we will supplicate his mercies, that, he may continue to us, his favours, that, he may lengthen out our tranquility, and sanctify us to his praise.

IN Him, we rejoice, for, He sitteth upon the floods ; He sitteth King, forever. To Him, we look, that, he would pity the miserable enthralled nations of Europe ; that, he would humble, reclaim and bless them : That, he would deliver the Republic of France, out of all her tribulations and appoint his salvation, for walls and for bulwarks round about her : That, he would diffuse the spirit of free enquiry, send the rays of light and truth around this habitable globe and, widely, extend the blessings of liberty and equal government, of virtue and religion, to all the Kingdoms of men, to all the Sons of Adam, in distress. And, that, he would fill the earth, with the knowledge of his Son Jesus Christ and bring every knee, to bow to Him, and every tongue to confess his Name to the glory of the Father.—Amen!