

A
THANKSGIVING
SERMON,

DELIVERED

NOVEMBER 27th, 1800.

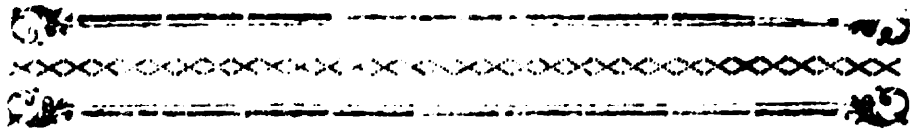
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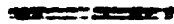


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1800.



A Thanksgiving Sermon.



PSALM XVI. 4. 5. 6.

THEIR sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another God : their drink-offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips. The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup : thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places ; yea, I have a goodly heritage.

PIOUS David wrote this psalm in the high exercise of gratitude and confidence in God. He said " O God, in thee do I put my trust. Thou art my Lord," and afterwards celebrated divine goodness in the blessings he received. From the happiness and preservation he experienced, he determined stedfastly to cleave to his divine benefactor ; and in the verses I read to you, plainly intimates the folly and danger of change when the Lord we have worshipped, and the institutions under which we live have given us all the happiness, that this world is capable of affording. He says, " their sorrows shall

be multiplied that hasten after another God.”—Although they flatter themselves with some benefits, and rejoice in the prospect of freedom from many restraints, they are deceived and will find many sorrows and unexpected disappointments from their folly. As for himself he said “thou art my God.” He found, that the lines had fallen to him in pleasant places, and that he had a goodly heritage, and therefore determined not to go after strange or new Gods. Experience had taught him, that no better situation could be expected in this world, and he resolved not to risk a happiness in possession, for the fancies of imagination, or through that restless spirit of change and innovation, which hath plunged myriads of men from a comfortable situation into the depths of evil.

I THINK something may be extracted from the verses, which I have read as a text, that is very applicable to our present condition ; and which leads to a train of contemplations, suited to the occasion of this day. We are met to recognize before the Lord our manifold mercies, and to praise the author ; and it is, also, fit to guard ourselves against the loss of them by following strange gods, and by chusing new institutions, and new opinions concerning the important obligations and duties of life and society. New opinions of God and religion, have an extensive influence upon every thing that relates to morality ; and, whatever affects morality, hath a general influence upon society, in its powers, orders, privileges, duties and happiness. Change is dangerous, lest it should be for the worse. Many customs and opinions, which are safe for mankind and for their religious and temporal well-being, are sanctioned more by experience than by any abstract reasonings, of which the human mind is capable without experience. A thousand ideal systems for social perfection, and for ameliorating the condition of mankind, and for making the way to Heaven easier,

have been invented by the fanciful, the self-confident and the idle theorist, which, on experiment, have been found the fruitful sources of affliction. Habits of thinking and acting are one of the chief bonds in society ; and let them be broken, there is no sufficient principle in weak and sinful men to preserve order ; but every man's hand will be against his neighbour, and the noble creature man, as he calls himself, in seeking the perfection of his nature and of social relations, sinks to the deepest imperfection.—Change, therefore, should be viewed on every side before it is adopted, and the constitutions of our fathers, in sentiments and practice, which made them happy, should be revered until by very cautious attempts in experience, we obtain a demonstration that we are wiser than they.

THERE are two general truths in the text, which it behoves us seriously to consider.

I. THAT by having the Lord for the portion of our inheritance, the lines have fallen to us in pleasant places, and we have had a goodly heritage, for which we ought to praise God this day.

II. THAT if we hasten after another or new gods, new institutions, and new opinions concerning religion, morality, and the highest perfection in society, which this world admits, our sorrows will necessarily be multiplied.

THE ensuing discourse is not meant to be pointed against any denomination of professing Christians, who seriously believe in God, the divine Redeemer, the holy Spirit who renews and sanctifies the hearts of sinners, and the sacred scriptures which contain a perfect rule of faith and practice ; but against that dangerous infidelity which attempts the subversion of Christian faith, and a godly conversation.

I. By having the Lord for the portion of our in-

heritance, the lines are fallen to us in pleasant places and we have a goodly heritage.

UNDER this branch of discourse, we shall consider some of the invaluable blessings given us by a most gracious providence. You observe that the Psalmist, in celebrating his mercies calls them an inheritance and a heritage. The proper meaning of these words, is a patrimony or possession derived from our ancestors and fathers. The thought of these mercies being an inheritance, heightened his thanksgiving and made him more tenacious to retain them. The same God had been the covenant Lord of his pious ancestry—had given them an excellent portion both of earthly and heavenly blessings, and transmitted down the rich inheritance to him. We ought to consider this subject in the same point of view. Among all our blessings, the richest are those, which we received as an inheritance from our fathers, furnished by their labour, consecrated by their prayer, defended by their blood, and arranged and modified in the best manner that human wisdom could teach, to be handed down as a blessed patrimony to their children.

THIS inheritance contains both temporal and spiritual blessings, each of which are worthy of our most grateful notice.

WE have received, as an inheritance, temporal blessings in great abundance.—A land, which, but a few generations past, was found by our fathers a deep wilderness, being cultivated by the sweat of their brows, and replenished by the labor of their hands with the comforts, conveniences and arts of life, is given to the present generation of inhabitants.—A land filled with all the substantial good, which the earth affords, and by the multitude of its productions and the regularity of its seasons, under the blessing of Heaven, perhaps, hitherto more uniformly preserved from want and famine, than any other in the world.—A land salubrious and favorable to the lives and health of men. Excepting a late epidemic, in some of our great cities, which

must happen without the greatest care of prevention in the most favorable climes, where multitudes are crowded together, New-England and the adjoining territories, have been extraordinary for healthfulness and increase.

OWING to the plenty of our country and the institutions of society, there is scarcely such a thing as poor people among us, in the sense that the word is used in almost all other lands.—We are sensible that rich and poor are comparative terms, and, consequently, do not mean exactly the same condition, in all places. We also know, that by the operation of many causes in civilized society, there will be an inequality of property. Some will possess more than is really necessary for their comfort, while others must, as they go along, expend their whole earnings. But even these last are not poor, in that deplorable sense of the word, in which millions are found in other lands. Except a few, who are unfortunate by sickness and other extraordinary causes, our poor, with common industry, may be decently clad, can eat their wholesome meat and cleanly bread, and have some share in the comforts, as well as a sufficiency of the necessaries of life.—In the common course of things, industry will give a competence to every family, and the scanty meals, and total want of bread and meat, which are spoken of as the lot of millions elsewhere, are here unknown.

IN consequence of this plenty all are free. Freedom is an invaluable right of all who are born among us. If there be no force applied to enslave, and even if there be a civil constitution, in its letter, favorable to the liberties of men; yet the abject poverty, of a great part of the human race, obliges them to make, in fact, a pledge of their freedom to obtain the necessary food of life. This also with us is unknown. Our civil constitutions, which are favourable to freedom—our customs in society which

have a force equal to law—the competence, which may be obtained by industry, together with public sentiment that is formed in childhood and carried through life, permit all grades in society to speak, think and act, with the independence of freedom; and no man's sentiments are a crime, until they evidently corrupt society, and produce a licentious practice.

THE universal diffusion of knowledge among all ranks of men, is not only a rich blessing in the inheritance we have received, but peculiar to us beyond any part of the earth.—Our fathers were careful to found public institutions of science. The spirit of inquiry, and the advantages flowing from those early foundations of science, together with the public freedom that is enjoyed by all orders of men, have made the people and even the government careful, to encourage common schools of instruction, in every neighborhood. The consequence is, that the children of the poorest understand letters and figures, so far, as is necessary for the useful arts and business of life. The common school education of New-England, with industry and a sound constitution, will make the young family happy, and if they persevere in good conduct, wealthy in their old age. Every planter has his little Lordship, and there are neither public nor private powers, which can make him afraid.

To preserve their civil and religious freedom, was a principal motive, with our forefathers, to transmute a great ocean and settle in a wilderness. They found the object they sought, though in a place then dreary and uncultivated.—They joyfully embraced and welcomed the freedom they had found, and giving themselves up to contentment with the hardy fare of a new settlement in the wilderness, they erected the temple of civil and religious freedom, and with their prayers consecrated it to divine preserva-

tion, and the honor of Heaven, and transmitted it as the best patrimony to their dear children.—We have received the dear bought possession entire. Whenever attacked, through the blessing of God, it hath been defended. My hearers you now possess civil and religious freedom, in the greatest perfection that it is enjoyed on earth ; and I do verily think, to as great perfection, in all essential matters, as the depraved state of human nature admits.

CONSIDER, first, your civil freedom. The necessity of some laws in society will be acknowledged by all, who are not delirious through licentiousness. These laws are the same for all. There are no distinguished classes of citizens exempted from an obligation to obey, as is the case under arbitrary governments. There are none of the people, through their poverty and meanness, cast out from the protection of the law. There is the same rule, the same judgment for the high and the low—the rich and the poor—for the law makers and the rest of the inhabitants. Although these laws are made by a selection of men, the choice of them is made frequently, and by the whole body of the people. In such a case, it is improbable that there will be unwise laws, in any matter of momentous consequence, because the interests of the law makers and of the electors are the same ; and it is to be presumed, that no man will knowingly ordain a law, that is against the true and highest interests, both of himself and of his neighbor.—Still, as we know, that it belongs to human nature some times to err, if any unwise ordinances be made, through inexperience or party spirit, the freedom and frequency of elections is a certain remedy, and the venerable public, in the exercise of this right will soon do away the evil, unless prevented by an external force.—This will always be the case, while general knowledge is preserved among the people.—There may be occasional

commotions, and ambitious men may, for a season, seem to shake the public interests ; but the native common sense of the people, and that dependance and union of interest, which necessarily take place, in society, will prevail in the end to restore tranquillity.

FURTHER we have the highest degree of religious freedom. There is nothing for which a great part of mankind do more zealously contend, than liberty of conscience in matters of faith and religious practice, and this for two reasons ; it regards the happiness of both worlds, and they alone must share in the consequences of obedience or disobedience. Also, as it is supposed, that God hath specially directed men's religious faith and practice, he is to be obeyed according to their own conscientious understanding, and they can be answerable to no other. To obtain liberty of conscience, was a principal motive, which brought our fathers hither ; and millions of the human race have died martyrs, to vindicate the truth and this natural right of man. This freedom we enjoy in the highest perfection. We may all profess in matters of faith as we please, and worship God with such rites and ceremonies as are thought best. Even among good Christians, there will probably be a variety of sentiment in non-essential things, and all denominations are allowed to follow their own opinions and rites.

FARTHER, we have received the christian religion and sacred scriptures, as part of this inheritance to all, who will accept and obey them. This is, in fact, the richest part of our inheritance. Earthly blessings, great as they are, bear no comparison with the blessings which relate to eternity. The providence of God, through the hands of our fathers, hath delivered to us the oracles of truth—the holy law which is to be obeyed for our present and eternal good—the gospel of reconciliation, with all its divine

doctrines and institutions—a system of means for religious instruction, and all the advantages which men can possess for securing an inheritance to come, that is incorruptible, undefiled and fadeth not away.—How full of knowledge we be, concerning a multitude of points, both in belief and practice, of which men, in many other lands, are deeply ignorant! The day star hath shined from on high—the son of righteousness, of peace and eternal glory, hath arisen upon us. We have christian knowledge; christian friends and comforts; and if we are obedient, may stand and look joyfully upon a heritage both temporal and eternal.

I MAY add, that we ought to rejoice in the christian religion, as being in the highest degree propitious to civil freedom and civilization in manners.

ALTHOUGH it be an indisputable fact that our blessed Redeemer disclaimed all temporal authority and emoluments, and did not intermeddle with the civil constitutions of nations, yet his religion struck a most fatal blow to the tyrannies of the world. Freedom will prevail, and tyranny and oppression cannot reign, among a people, who are all animated with a love and obedience to Christ's laws. While the christian religion is favorable to government, and represents it as a divine institution, absolutely necessary for men in this sinful state; it also denounces the highest displeasure of God, against all injustice and oppression. It gives rules, for the conduct of those who have power, which, if observed, would banish unrighteous government from the earth. It gives rules to those who are under the authority of others, which will make them obedient to all righteous institutions, render them peaceful citizens, and prevent all popular and licentious commotions. If a man, who is a christian indeed, in heart as well as in profession, hath any discretionary powers in his hands, he will use them for the good of society and of individuals. If any human laws are expressed

without caution, so that they may be speciously wrested from their true intent, he will dread such an action, as among the greatest of evils. He will be a father as well as a governor and judge to his people, and seek the public good in all his thoughts, words, and actions. Hence the history of mankind will attest, that the christian religion, whenever believed and practised in its purity, hath ameliorated the condition of men.

HERE, I am sensible that Infidelity will make its outcry, and inquire—Hath not the church been full of tyranny? Hath it not enslaved even kings and emperors, and aided the greatest civil tyrants to oppress and slay millions of their people? Certainly this can be said with truth, only with reference to the church of Rome in its days of prosperity? But do not those, who say and write thus, with a most insidious design against our religion, know that the true christianity condemns all these things? Do they not know, that our scriptures call these things anti-christian instead of christian? That the rise, progress, and fall of this antichrist were matter of early prophecy in our sacred writings? Do they not know, that our christianity hath been as much opposed and hated by this anti-christian power as it now is by infidelity? Do they not know that our fathers and we have fallen under the anathemas of that apostatized body, and that by setting the authority of general councils, and human reason and tradition above the authority of the scriptures, it bears a much greater resemblance to modern infidelity than it doth to our christianity? Do they not know, that the fathers of this country, who formed all our civil and religious institutions, were the most of all men opposed to such a false church—that they and their posterity, in every succeeding generation, down to this time, have opposed it by argument, by scripture, by a most watchful policy in every thing, and by every means, except it be by persecution, which is in every case

unlawful? Do they not know, that the professors of christianity in this land believe, that the tyrannical body, which hath falsely called itself a church of Christ, and which were guilty of the tyrannies alluded to, is by the express word of prophecy devoted to an utter and most awful destruction, and that the threatening is now marvellously executing by the hands of infidelity? Those, who have not knowledge enough to understand these facts and truths, ought not to speak or write on the subject; and if they do know them, to represent our christianity or any of its institutions as dangerous to human liberty, is a most insidious and false charge. Let all Christians bear it with meekness, knowing that they must pass through bad as well as good report. But we do not think, that those, who say such things concerning the christianity of this land, dare to believe themselves; and that it is a love of licentiousness and a dislike of the purity and duties of religion, which opens their lips to defame the christianity of New-England.

It is further known, that the religion we have received from our forefathers, is most friendly to civilized manners. The fact is, that civilization and christianity are so intimately connected, that the latter can neither be introduced nor exist among the most savage people; and whenever it hath been introduced among nations partially civilized, it hath completed the cultivation of their minds and manners. I have given you some outlines in a description of the blessed inheritance we have received. Truly the Lord is the portion of our inheritance, the lines are fallen to us in pleasant places, and we have a goodly heritage! What wise man would wish an exchange! What man of sound knowledge can point out a change for the better, unless it be by more tenaciously adhering to the institutions that have been received, and living in better obedience to our holy religion! Or what good man, in reviewing the rich-

ness of our heritage, can refrain this day from praising the name of the Lord. But men do sometimes appear to be infatuated in their error. Therefore for our admonition and safeguard let us consider,

II. THAT if we hasten after another or new gods, new institutions, and new opinions concerning religion, morality, and the highest perfection in society which this world admits, our sorrows will necessarily be multiplied.—There are many more considerations rise in proof of this than I have now time to mention.

I. LET us consider, that this world was never designed, by its glorious author, to be a state of perfection. He hath assured us there will be many imperfections, many disappointments, and many evils to be borne. This arises from the imperfection, in which human nature will always be found, on this side the grave.—When we look around on the nations of the whole world, in their present condition; and cast our eyes back on the page of history to the beginning, and find that there is not, and never hath been a people, to whom, in all respects, the lines have fallen in more pleasant places, or had a more goodly heritage, it is a high presumptive argument against changing our God and our institutions. It shows the wisdom, the penetration, the virtue of those ancestors, who delivered to us this inheritance. It shows that the God they served was able to protect them.—That the religious doctrines and practice, which they embraced, were sufficient to make men as happy and prosperous, as they can be in the present state of the world. Indeed, if we will attend to the history of our ancestors, in their several generations, since their settlement in this country, we shall find that all their attention and policy were turned to the establishment of the most perfect system of civil and religious freedom; and they managed this matter, with wonderful skill, to have the joint reign of law, government and civil and religious liberty, and we

find, that they were as much guarded against the licentiousness of the multitude without government on one hand ; as they were against the tyranny of a few on the other.—Now my hearers what wise man, knowing these things, would follow strange gods and change our institutions.—A change in such a case must be for the worse, and many sorrows would hastily follow in its train.

2dly. If we look to the present state of the European nations, it affords a most solemn argument against needless changes and going after another God.

THERE was, and still continues to be much, in the state of most of these nations which needed a change. The principles of civil and religious oppression were inwrought into their constitutions, their laws, their rights of power and office. and their manner of administration in almost every department. This was an excuse for a revolution in many places, and made many excellent men join their hearts and hands to the work, who have since bitterly repented its beginning. They have found revolution a more unmanageable thing than they expected. But whatever may arise from present revolutionary principles in Europe, to advance the happiness of ages, to come ; and however infinite wisdom may overrule them for the future wellbeing of mankind, I think every candid man must own that the present generation have found misery in the extreme, and that human foresight cannot conjecture when it will end. But allow there was need of European revolution in the fullest extent, what is that to us ? If their heritage was corrupted and needed cleansing by the most painful means, doth it follow that ours, which is in a good measure unpolluted, ought to be attacked on all quarters for the sake of experiment, and to be in the fashion of destruction ? This is courting the judgments of God, and seeking happiness at the hands of misery. Doubtless God is righteous and wise,

and will, in his own time, bring a better state of things out of the present most convulsed one in the old world.—But if we do not need such convulsions, why should we tempt them? and especially, why should we embrace those demoralizing principles of irreligion, which God permits, as he did the Prince of Babylon, to punish those whom he will have to be punished? Demoralizing principles are like fire, they cease to burn when the fuel is expended. And if a better state of things succeeds in Europe, it will not probably be, until the fire of infidelity is extinguished through a want of fuel to feed upon. When the objects of men's lusts, and the wealth and honor which they are ravishing from hand to hand are destroyed, then they may return and consider that there is a law—a government in the Universe, and a God who judgeth all the earth. Why should we tempt such evils by encouraging the principles of impiety and irreligion.

3dly. As the last reason against going after another or new gods, new institutions, and new opinions in morality and religion, I may mention, the threatenings of the true and everlasting Jehovah against all who forsake him. God, in his word, speaks of heathen nations as objects of his displeasure, although they never had his character, will and laws as contained in his word; but he bears much longer with them than he will with those who have apostatized from the faith and practice of true religion. Behold! what an awful monument of judgment ancient Israel have become to the world! They had a goodly heritage, but they hasted after another god, and their sorrows have been multiplied beyond any other example; and one end of a wise providence in keeping them distinct from other people, is to shew them to the world as an object of divine vengeance. The Sadducees were infidels, the Pharisees were mere formalists in duty, and the great body of the people wholly unprincipled; and thus to degenerate

made them worthy of all God's judgments. And if we forsake the Lord—if we reject the christianity that hath been delivered to us—if we drink in a demoralizing infidelity—if we discard the former principles and opinions concerning God, or his moral government, and the duties of a pious life—if we break up our old institutions of religion, order, and government, the Lord will cause our sorrows to be multiplied, in ways more fearful, more rapid, and more desolating, than we are able to foresee. He will punish us by evils from abroad—he will desolate us by the immediate strokes of his hand, and give us up to devour ourselves.

How fervently we ought this day to praise the Lord, for preserving us so far, from those evils which are desolating the world! How solicitous not to be ensnared, by the immoral principles, which have prepared the suffering nations for war, the cup of evil which they now drink! How careful not to cast away christianity which was delivered down to us by our progenitors. A calm indignation ought to arise in our minds, when we hear those, who are ignorant of historical facts, destitute of experience, and suspected of infidel principles, defaming our forefathers as a set of enthusiasts, who are to be regarded with dishonor. We know they were men, and as men liable to frailties, and to some false opinions. But let us enquire whether we have not more of these? Many of those, who first shaped the civil and religious policy of this country, were among the greatest and best men of the age in which they lived. They were pious men. They acknowledged Christ and the holy spirit. They were luminaries in Europe in science and virtue, before their translation hither—They were brave and hardy—virtuous and wise—they loved freedom and religion, and well knew that to fear God and keep his commandments, is the road to happiness in time and eternity. Here they rested

after a fore travel, and out of the reach of power to awe them, and under the influence of love to God and the human race, they formed a system of law, government and religion, greatly purified from the corruptions under which the older countries groaned. They originated a set of habits, in thinking and acting, which have generally guided the common people of New-England to happiness and virtue. I do not say these things to represent them as perfect, or to flatter the feelings of their present posterity; but to guard them against casting away christianity committed to their care, we hope as a sacred deposit for generations to come. One of the modern means for promoting impiety hath been to represent our ancestors of whatever christian denomination they were, as a set of odious persons, who had neither knowledge nor honesty. The design of defaming the men is to obscure the religion they transmitted to us, the religion they loved; and to destroy the morality and the sabbath that have been a guard to our public virtue. But while I believe a firm government, civil and religious liberty, and the christian religion to be blessings to mankind, I shall wish you that hear me to be of the same character in all essential things, and that the world may be filled with such as love and serve God on Christian principles. Then infidelity would tremble, and those, who are corrupting the morality and faith of the world would fly to their secret places.—May the Lord bless our land—may he build up his church here and every where—and make all of us faithful to the end.

AMEN.