

The Agency and Providence of God
acknowledged, in the Preservation of
the American States.

Rev. Dr.

A

Wm. Miller

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ANNUAL THANKSGIVING;

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A S E R M O N.

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He disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprize. He taketh the wise in their own craftiness: and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong. They meet with darkness in the day-time, and grope in the noon-day as in the night. But he saveth the poor from the sword, from their mouth, and from the hand of the mighty. So the poor hath hope, and iniquity stoppeth her mouth.

WHEN we consider the works of God, composed of the material and intellectual systems, with their varying orders, constitutions and operations of being; they give us a most grand idea of the immensity and infinite perfection of the creator. Universal nature is constituted with such wisdom, and adorned with so many glories, that the Father of it must be a Being, in himself glorious and wise infinitely above our comprehension.

LOOKING

Looking back to the time of creation, when divine council brought forth, and completed the birth of nature, we are apt to conceive it a period the most filled with divine glory of any which hath happened; containing more bright discoveries of the God-head, than any which have succeeded; and that there was in that work some more immediate exertions of his power and wisdom, than have since been generally exercised. Doubtless that period and work did contain discoveries of such immense perfection, as will forever delight and astonish all his rational and virtuous creatures; but then, I imagine, we ought rather to conceive the time of creation, as the beginning of a new æra, of which every succeeding part is as glorious, and as much filled with marks and displays of God's infinite perfection, as the first was. When supreme power, wisdom and goodness had given existence to created nature; the way was prepared for the same perfections to be exercised in preserving, governing and determining its several parts and powers, to the purposes for which they were designed, both in his natural and moral government.

THE universal and constant providence of Jehovah, is as bright a display of himself as creation was. Inattention and irreligion are the principal reasons it is not thus conceived. The universe, the material and intellectual systems, with all their parts and all their powers, are under a constant direction of the Deity. He not only upholds the
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secondary powers or second causes which are operating ; but points them to the ends which he hath in design, in such a manner, that an attentive and pious mind cannot overlook his agency.

COULD we comprehend the divine plan---could we look through the scheme of Heaven, we should doubtless see that all natural events, all political events, and all the wisdom of this world, are permitted and designed by the Most High, for the benefit of his moral government, to display his own glory, and bring eventual perfection and blessedness to the universe. The doctrines of the Holy Scripture confirm these ideas---they teach us that those natural events, which in our view have the smallest possible influence, even the falling of a hair from our heads, do not happen without a divine ordering ; and if there be a particular direction of heaven therein, infinite wisdom means thereby to accomplish some important end. If there be a divine direction in all those most minute events, how glorious, and of what infinite energy must be the constant exertions of Godhead ! which operate upon the whole, keeping all the parts in order, and directing them to the greatest final perfection. This view of divine providence gives us as venerable an idea of the GREAT SUPREME, as we can have from considering him the self-existent God, and creator of the universe. This view of the subject teaches us, that a study of divine providence is one of the most important and improving Christian duties ; one of the best means

means for acquiring just apprehensions of the divine character and will, and for exciting adoration, Christian reliance and gratitude. Men's lusts are so opposed, not only to God and truth, but to the happiness and most essential privileges of human nature; that if there were not a constant *superior influence*, controuling the whole, all order, peace, improvement and civil and social rights would be lost in the confusion and violence of iniquity. These providential influences are meant in the scriptures, when they speak of the Lord bringing light out of darkness, and order out of confusion --- the wrathful exertions of men, which he permits, are over-ruled to praise him and promote his cause, the remainder of wrath he restraineth.

THE MOST HIGH hath exercised a special agency, through every age of the world, for the preservation of his church; which is the reason that the gates of hell, and the designs of wicked men, have never prevailed against it. Many events happen in so singular and extraordinary a manner, that it is impossible a devout mind should not see in them the hand of a God. The ordering of things is often such, though we cannot call it miraculous, as to carry evidence of a divine interposition, nearly equal to any miracle which could be wrought. A people or individuals experiencing such interpositions in their favor, ought publicly and fervently to adore, the wisdom and goodness by which they are preserved.

THE duties to which we are particularly directed this day, are the most devout GRATITUDE and THANKSGIVING to the GOD of HEAVEN, both for public and private blessings. No subject of meditation is more proper to quicken our devotion, than a recollection of that kind and constant providence, by which our land and its interests have been preserved, in the midst of great dangers; and at sundry times, in such ways as have demonstrated a divine interference. *The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein; and he hath made his wonderful works to be remembered.*

OUR text points us to a particular consideration, of that providential agency, which bringeth down the proud feelings and high looks of men, and destroyeth the designs of the wicked, who are powerful, crafty, and wise to do evil. *He disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprize.* The highest wrought policy of men is stopped in its course---the gradual and irresistible execution of the divine counsel arrests their measures, by enfeebling their hand, and enervating the instruments on which they depend. *He taketh the wise in their own craftiness, and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong.* The policy they use is often overruled to baffle itself, or to take themselves in the snare, which was layed for others; so that their highest expectations fall headlong into ruin. *They meet with darkness in the day time---* where they did not expect it. Thinking their designs wisely

wisely concerted, and so powerfully supported that they cannot fail ; the Almighty interposes at an unexpected time, and by unexpected means shews that the weakest instruments, under his direction, are more powerful than the craftiness, wisdom and strength of man.

In this way, *He saveth the poor from the sword, from their mouths, and from the hand of the mighty--- So that the poor hath hope, and iniquity stoppeth her mouth.* So that those who are engaged in a righteous cause, whatever difficulties assault them, ought notwithstanding to trust in the Lord, who can deliver in his own way, by his own instruments, and in his own time.--So that those who contemn the superintending influence of Jehovah, and despise divine and human obligations are compelled to stop their mouths ; being convinced by his glorious works, that there is a God who protects such as trust in him, and holds in his hand the reins of universal government.

You remember, my brethren, the extraordinary instance of Ahitophel's counsel being turned into foolishness.---King David in circumstances almost desperate, striving against the rebellion of an ungrateful son, and accompanied by a faithful, but small band, was flying from place to place, for his own personal safety.---Ahitophel was a politic man, full of stratagem, and renowned for the soundest wisdom ; *so that his counsel, which he counselled in those days, was as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God.* Had the traiterous Absalom, who was at this time in great force, adopted his advice, and followed

followed hard upon his royal father, while his numbers were small and fatigued, they must in all probability have fallen an easy prey. By a particular influence of heaven, Absalom was inclined to adopt other counsel, which was given on purpose for his destruction. A short delay afforded time for the country to rise, and save their injured and beloved sovereign, from an unnatural destruction. Thus Absalom's affairs suddenly sunk from the fairest prospects, into irretrievable ruin----this was the work and influence of God!

PERMIT me to remind you of another instance, which is likewise recorded in the scripture---the deliverance of Israel by the elevation of Mordecai, and the fall of Haman. Mordecai was a Jew, and the only one who was capable of being the patron of his people, who were then in captivity, subjected to the severest bondage--Haman was a proud, tyrannical favorite at the Babylonian court, maliciously designing to destroy the Jews, and planning the most cruel means for their total extirpation--He had even built the gallows, upon which he designed Mordecai their chief man should be hanged, so sanguine were his expectations! What he esteemed a private affront was the ground of his enmity against the whole nation; and as a means of revenge, and to dispossess them of the royal favor, he accused their religious laws and institutions, which distinguished them from all other people, and which they observed for the honor of Jehovah, even in their captive state. The Lord, whose eye

feeth all things, beheld and determined to vindicate himself, his institutions and his people, and he disconcerted the infernal design by a concurrence of events, apparently uninteresting in themselves, but in the connexion his infinite wisdom arranged them, sufficient for the great design. It so happened on a certain night, that the king could not sleep—for his entertainment and probably to invite repose, he ordered the book of records to be read---It was found recorded, that in former time Mordecai had detected and disclosed a treason against the life of the king; and upon enquiry that he had never been rewarded. God inclined him to reward this instance of fidelity, though it had been long forgotten. It was proposed to Haman, *What should be done to the man whom the king delighted to honor?* He proposed the most extravagant honors, proudly thinking to receive them himself, and was ordered immediately to confer them on Mordecai—this turned the balance, and from that hour, every event concurred for Haman's destruction, until he died in the place prepared for Mordecai, who succeeded him in the royal favor, and the Jews were delivered. That one sleepless hour of the king, was a necessary link in the chain of means for Israel's deliverance. Who may not see the hand and counsel of the LORD in all this!----Human life is full of such interpositions; whereby the counsel of the froward is carried headlong, those who cannot defend themselves preserved, and iniquity obliged to stop its mouth.

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LET us next take notice of God's dealings with us his people. We ought piously and gratefully to recognize the divine influence, and ordering of events, since the commencement of the war in which we are now engaged. The God of heaven hath marvelously wrought for us! Sometimes by darkening and infatuating the counsel of our enemies--- Sometimes wonderfully interposing to derange their measures and break their force--- Sometimes by inspiring our people with an irresistible enthusiasm, which dares to attempt and execute the greatest enterprises--- Sometimes by affording us supplies in an extraordinary way, which no ordinary means could procure--- and often by discovering the snare which was laid in darkness, and observed only by his eye which seeth in the darkness, as in the light.

It seems that divine counsel hath some great designs to accomplish in this land. The pious observer of his providence may see, that from the time of its first discovery, he hath been preparing the stage by the energy of unerring wisdom, for some very grand exhibitions, which will probably display his glory to all the nations of the earth, and improve social happiness and rights to a higher degree of perfection than hath yet taken place in the world. The manner of its settlement is one of the most extraordinary events recorded in history; religion was the motive, and though piety is now much decayed, may we not hope that the interests of Messiah's kingdom, which influenced the first adventurers, shall be yet most gloriously

gloriously advanced thereby. Our rapid population is viewed with wonder, wherever it is known; there is not an instance equalling it in the history of the world. The commencement of the present war, was the opening of a new æra, every part of which is filled with wonders, discovering that there is a God, who ruleth and doth his pleasure among the kingdoms of the world. When this controversy began, not a mind among us anticipated the length to which it would run, nor the great political changes it hath produced.---We viewed it as a family quarrel, which must and would be accomodated---in this we judged from our own feelings, being ignorant of God's design. It now appears, that the Lord designed it for a compleat separation of the British empire. And considering it as fixed by God's appointment, that a separation should take place; may we not see his wisdom and goodness to us in determining the time. The event hath been generally esteemed premature, as hastened, unhappily for us, by the necessity of self-defence.---But is not this a mistake? We had received every possible benefit from the connection, and were beginning to be endangered---we had learned the British arts---had drank at her fountains of science---made her most valuable improvements our own---were rich enough for a virtuous and free State;---and were beginning to import her luxury, effeminacy and irreligion. Had the national connection continued longer, a familiar intercourse
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would have introduced into this new country, that declension of morals, which hath usually been produced in an old empire, by their luxury and pride; and the arts of a corrupt court, might have seduced so many of our own citizens, as to render an emancipation more difficult, even though we had increased both in riches and numbers. Thus we see the goodness and the the care of God, exercised for the preservation of our virtue, even in appointing the time for this separation. And let us not measure the councils of Heaven, upon the narrow scale of self-regard; the Most High is governing the world for the advancement of virtue, and may not this event be propitious to the interests of morality in Great-Britain, by drying up some of the sources of that luxury, which through a great part of the nation, hath effaced almost every impression of revealed religion, and of a superintending providence. The Most High had the means in readiness, and in order for the accomplishment of his own purpose... He often raises up wicked men as instruments to execute what he hath decreed; and in the present case permitted those, whom we called our fathers and brethren, and whom we revered and loved as such, to entertain evil designs against us... designs fraught with impolicy, injustice and oppression.

THERE were at that time, wise men in the British Senate who foresaw the consequences, and prophesied the tragic effects, as they have since happened, urging their opinions by the united weight
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of good policy, justice and mercy---but in vain! As in the case of Pharoah, so in this; the Lord permitted those who held the reins of government, to harden their hearts, and shut their eyes against wisdom; probably it was, that he might bring us out from under their dominion with a high hand, and so as to display his glory before the nations of the earth. Had not an infatuation been permitted it is impossible they should have remained so long ignorant, of the state, feelings, and united sentiments of the people in this country, as is evident from their measures, they did---had it not been determined by the Most High, that they should believe a lying spirit, it would have been impossible to give such credit as they did, to a few evil persons, who escaped from among us, and whose own private interest led them to deceive. This infatuation and delusion for several years retarded the vigorous efforts of our enemies; and was permitted lest the storm should gather more fast, or in greater force, than we were prepared to receive it---this permission of divine providence was kind to us, but fatal to them---thus the *Lord destroyeth the wisdom of the wise!* By viewing the subsequent schemes of British policy, we may see, *how be carried the counsels of the froward headlong;* for it is certain, that most of their counsels have turned upon their own heads, and hastened the events, which they wished to retard. Their menaces, instead of intimidating, made us united and determined---their rashly blocking up and annihilating
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the privileges of our ports, suspending the rights of legislation, and annulling by their own sovereign acts all the barriers of freedom; set before us at once in glaring view, the horrors of tyranny, and taught us that liberty was worth contending for, through the greatest severities---Their haughty rejection of our suppliant, patient and long-continued applications for redress, erased from our hearts those filial feelings towards them, which it would have been their highest wisdom to cultivate; and opened our eyes to see, that *there is none good but one, that is God*, and that we had, in time past, implicitly trusted in them for justice and protection, as we ought to have trusted in him alone---Their pronouncing us out of the protection of their laws, taught us the necessity of seeking it, in an *Independent Constitution* of our own---Their employing a foreign mercenary force, gave us good grounds for applying, and other European nations for interfering in the controversy, and assisting us---Since they deigned to make overtures for conciliation, every proposal hath been so marked with insidiousness and pride, as to unite us more firmly instead of dividing, which they wished; and teach us that there is no hand, beside that of the Almighty, in which we can trust ourselves with safety.

I MENTION these instances, to exemplify the providence of God in carrying the counsel of the froward headlong, and permitting them to adopt measures, which hastened what they meant to prevent.

NEXT

NEXT let us view the events which have happened in our own country, and see in them both the wonderful influences and interposition of the MOST MERCIFUL. To what cause, but the immediate influence of Jehovah, can we impute the astonishing union, both of sentiment and feeling, which pervaded through the whole American empire, though of prodigious extent, and divided into many provinces; each of which had its separate legislature, its own ideas of law and government, and its own peculiar manners, customs and jealousies. A sympathy unfelt before, instantaneously and reciprocally circulated, by which the injuries of every part were felt and resented through the whole---when some of the first ministerial measures were speciously covered and designed to be enforced by our own luxury; the whole body of the people seemed to have an intuitive view of the consequences which would follow, if they received the alluring bait, and determined to deny themselves any gratification, rather than admit a precedent which might be drawn into dangerous practice hereafter. When such wisdom, foresight and union, are found in the whole body of a people, circumstanced as we then were; they must be imputed to the extraordinary influences of the Most High.

THE same energy of heaven, which had before given union and the most sympathetic feelings through the whole; when the time for enterprize and action was come, waked up a most astonishing enthusiasm

enthusiasm in the minds of every order, class and condition of people ; by which many things were attempted, and many performed, which in some measure supplied our deficiencies and want of antecedent military preparations. It was the Lord who raised up and inspired the country with confidence in a commander, who was formed by his own infinite wisdom, on purpose for the great design of vindicating American freedom.---Our eastern coast was most impregnable, both by its natural situation, and position of ground, and the unanimity of its inhabitants, and could by no means be esteemed a key to the country ; on all which accounts it was the most improper place, the enemy could have chosen to open the bloody scene : And had they instead of that occupied the position they now hold, where a naval force may co-operate with and defend one on the land, a single campaign in the unprepared situation we then were, might have decided the whole contest.---The LORD directed where they should attempt, that they might be baffled ! Some of the first military rencounters, though bloody, were ordered by infinite wisdom to check the rage of the enemy, and shew them that they had undertaken a serious task ; and at the same time teach us our own consequence in the field, and that we were able, under God, to defend ourselves.

Soon after the commencement of hostilities, when we were upon the brink of destruction, through want of military stores and the habiliments of war : Providence threw into our hands,

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by the capture of a store-ship, the very necessaries which we most wanted---An interposition of Heaven, which ought never to be forgotten! Several times since we have had supplies, both of cloathing and provision, sent in the same manner, at the time when, and to the places where they were needed.-- The prodigious number of captures made from the enemy upon the seas, hath generally afforded us a comfortable supply of foreign articles; which appears surprizing when we consider the greatness of their naval force, and the smallness and inexperience of our own; and shews us that the Lord directeth in all these things. In the second year of the war, a formidable naval and land force was sent against one of the most southern States in the confederacy: As things were then circumstanced with that country, any considerable success of the enemy, must have detached several States from the union, and been much more fatal to our cause, than their late success in the same parts can be.---He who directeth the events of war, determined that the design should be defeated for that time, in a most surprizing manner, by a body of men hastily drawn together, and whom they viewed with contempt.--

THERE have been several gloomy periods, in which the arm of the **LORD** and the counsel of the **ALMIGHTY**, have wrought salvation for us, in a wonderful manner.

WE remember the time, after the conquest of a considerable part of the States of New-York and New-Jersey, when our **land** force,

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flushed with victory, and aiming towards the capital of our councils---Our army, except a brave handful, was disbanded, and every thing in a state of distraction.---In this hour of great decision, when, as the country was circumstanced, a few weeks of vigorous action must have determined the fate of America; our enemy were not permitted to discern the importance of the moment! Thinking the work done, and sitting down to eat and drink the spoils of cruelty, they were taken in their own craftiness.

PLEASE to turn your attention to the succeeding campaign. The British force in America was then very great; composed of two grand armaments, the northern and southern. One of the most fortunate events we could then wish, was such a destination of those two formidable powers, that they might not act in concert, and bring their united efforts to a point, and thus form a separation between the northern and southern States. By some influence their councils were darkened! Providence led their southern armament from the most important place of action, by a lengthy rout through the waters of Virginia, where more than a year was spent without any thing decided, and that great force was finally obliged to quit its conquests, and return with ignominy.

In the north, appearances were more gloomy, for a season a cloud rose so black that all countenances gathered paleness---every thing that had happened in that quarter, for a long time before, was calculated to inspire the enemy with precipitation
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and a rash confidence---they possessed themselves of those fortresses on which we depended, in such a manner as wrought their pride and presumption to the highest pitch—the Lord was preparing them for a fall ! He allured them into a snare from which they could never escape ! By means the most different from human concerting, he delivered their whole armament into our hands, and brought wonderful salvation to our country. This was the Lord's work and marvelous in our eyes ! and prepared the way for our being known and acknowledged among the nations as brethren.

THERE has been at many times, and in divers ways, a surprizing interposition of providence, in the discovery of treasons and conspiracies against the state, and its most important servants. I shall mention only one, which is a recent instance of deliverance, and ought to be remembered this day, with the most devout gratitude. The discovery of a traiterous plot which had been for a long time concerting and maturing in the cabinet of darkness, under the nurture of instruments vile enough for the perpetration of any crime, however repugnant to the laws of God and nature--this conspiracy was so ripe for execution, that a day or two more intervening before the discovery, might have sealed the doom of America, by the massacre of our brave and virtuous commander, and many others who have distinguished themselves in defence of the country ; and the key to our territories, our magazines, our arsenals, our soldiery in the hands of an insulting foe,

Was it not the God of heaven who preserved us in this danger? surely it was. The treason was arranged--it was ripe for execution--the principal instrument of treachery, was one prepared for any wickedness, and placed by the unsuspecting confidence of his country, in a situation, and with full power to accomplish his design--the whole was hid from man--how awful is that hour in retrospective view! The Lord saw, and he wondered that there was no deliverer, therefore his own arm brought salvation, and his wisdom saved us! He directed the steps of a triumvirate of virtuous young citizens, to an unfrequented station--His providence placed them as a centry, to take the man, who had been a principal emissary in concerting the plot; and thus the discovery was made, which saved our country from a destruction in prospect of which the enemy already exulted. Let us praise him who directeth the times and the seasons-- he liveth forever, his dominion is from everlasting to everlasting--all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing before him--He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can say to him what doest thou. The instances I have mentioned, are only a few from among many, in which the kind direction, influence and interposition of providence might be observed--the subject is far too copious for the limits of a single discourse, and to treat it justly, requires much greater discernment than I feel myself to possess--

The works of God's providence, are immense as
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his nature ; and happy are those, who by a knowledge of his operations, are led to adore and love his being, and rejoice in his government--we ought, my brethren, to review the great events which have taken place within a few years past, not so much to gratify curiosity, as that we may see in them the greatness, holiness and loving kindness of Jehovah.

OUGHT we not likewise this day to recognize divine goodness, in providing us with plenty of food--our stores are filled with good things ; and though some part of the season was such as excited our apprehensions, the event hath taught us they were groundless, and that the Lord can direct the seasons better than man--It is very common, that we sinfully suspect and are jealous of Providence, while God is ordering nature, in the best manner, to give us a rich supply.

LET us remember with gratitude, the extraordinary health, which hath attended us through the year past. I presume the oldest person in this place, cannot recollect an instance of so little sickness and so few deaths. Some of our friends have been taken from us, but the proportion, compared with our numbers, is small ; and so far as I have heard, the like extraordinary health hath prevailed both in our armies and among the people in general. While we rejoice in the preservation of life and health another year, let us not wax wanton and forget our mortality. Sickness and death must come--the solemn decree, *dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return*, must be accomplished--the
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Lord grant that we may all live in readiness for the change.

THE blessings which have been mentioned, great as they can be represented, are but temporal and worldly favors---they are only the smallest of God's benefits, and only valuable as they assist us to glorify him, serve our fellow men, and prepare for eternity. With what fervent gratitude, we ought to adore the wisdom and mercy which hath brought life and immortality to light ! Which pities us under a most awful condemnation and death, and offers pardon through the atonement which Jesus made by the shedding of his own blood---which invites us to become parties to the covenant of grace, and receive the remission of sin and the sanctification of our natures, and the indwelling influences of the HOLY GHOST---which hath given us many great and precious promises, offering to make us partakers of a divine nature, and heirs of glory together with CHRIST---which sets before us the blessedness of heaven, the Lord himself to be our portion. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel who hath visited and redeemed us---who hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David. Let us therefore serve before him in holiness and righteousness all the days of our lives.

I CONCLUDE with some very brief remarks by way of inference.

1st. WE are taught to adore GOD's providence, and consider his government of the world as a most illustrious display of his glorious nature. The events which take place before our eyes, are parts of a plan most highly wrought, by
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infinite wisdom, goodness and justice. By reason of the depth of his designs and works, and the scantiness of human understanding, we know but a small portion of his ways. But that his agency might not be forgotten, some instances are so ordered as to flash conviction upon the mind, that nature in its minutest operations, is under the direction of a God, who by small causes is producing great events, and accomplishing most important purposes in his moral kingdom.

2d. We are taught to whom the glory of every salvation is to be attributed. We have considered some instances of deliverance, which are manifestly the effects of a divine interposition and the special ordering of heaven. These instances were designed by God to bear testimony for himself, that he is the author of every salvation; and tho' we do not see his hand so clearly in all, they are nevertheless his work. On the other hand, we should remember that calamity cometh not out of the dust, but was appointed and is accomplished by all searching wisdom, to answer the purposes of his own council.

3dly. We are taught not to trust in ourselves---not to depend on our own wisdom and strength. To exercise our own power and wisdom for preservation, and for obtaining all needed blessings, is an indispensable duty, and the sluggard hath no reason to expect God will save him; but when this is done we should look to the Almighty to give efficacy to our endeavors, to preserve, bless and prosper.

IF we trust in the arm of man, or the wisdom of a creature, the Lord will confound them; for it is his usual course to bring low the proud and exalt the humble, that all the earth may know the Lord reigneth.

IF, my brethren, we design to invite the divine protection, let us rejoice that the Lord reigneth, and commend ourselves and the public to his holy protection and keeping---let us be just, and merciful, and honest, and humble adorers of God's providence---let us do our duty to our country ourselves and posterity, and then look to him who hath so often wrought gloriously in our favor, for the continuance of his goodness--that he would make our land glorious and a praise through the whole earth, and that he would finally receive us to his blessed kingdom. A M E N.