

A

**DISCOURSE,**

THE

SUBSTANCE OF WHICH WAS DELIVERED

IN WOODBRIDGE, DEC. 25, 1811.

THE

DAY OF PUBLIC THANKSGIVING AND PRAYER,

APPOINTED BY THE

GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF NEW-JERSEY.

BY M. BRUEN.

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## DISCOURSE

PSALM CXLIV. 15.

*Happy is that people, that is in such a case ; yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord.*

A CENTURY has wrought a mighty change upon the land we inhabit. It is scarcely more than three score and ten years, since a Christian missionary travelled around the district where we live, to instruct the wretched Indians in the knowledge of God our Saviour. At no great distance from our dwellings did he labour, whose pious spirit and flaming zeal have made his name revered in the farthest limits of Christendom, us, by the grace of our divine Lord, they have added to the abundance of his entrance into the kingdom of heaven ; where *Braised* shines as one of the brightest stars in the firmament of light.

It may prepare our hearts for the grateful services of this day, to consider the difference between the scene we now discover, and that which met the eyes of our holy countryman, in the se-

verity of those labours, which are yet so recent, that, perhaps, the parents of some whom I have the privilege to address may have listened to his ministrations.

In this very parish did the commissioners assemble, and thither did that revered man come, whose example now animates Christians, in all parts of Europe, and missionaries in the extremest Indies.\* If this were the place, I could, with a full heart, dilate upon the benefit of his high example, since we have it carried out in the history of Henry Martyn, a son in the faith most worthy of his sire: religious sympathy and admiration might dwell upon that devotedness which unrolled the sealed book of our Scriptures in India and Persia, and confounded the priests of Mahomet at Shiraz and Ispahan.

These heroes of our Christian faith, with a thousand others, have felt themselves soldiers in the noblest war, and cared not what they endured. And good reason why: for even the Roman legionary who slept on the earth in the fastnesses of the Black Forest, or on the border of the Euxine, had his spirit sustained by the re-

\* A. D. 1743.—These ministers were the correspondents of "The Society in Scotland for Propagating the Gospel," by which Mr. Brainerd was supported while he instructed the Indians.—*Brainerd's Life—Edwards's Works*, vol. 3. p. 138.

fection, that he was an integral part of the power which was vanquishing the world, and expected soon to march back in triumph to the gates of what was proudly styled, the eternal city: but these men, occupying outposts fixed by the Captain of salvation, knew they were soon to be relieved from duty, and admitted, with immortal honours, into that dwelling place of the redeemed, whose pavement is of diamonds, and whose wall is of sapphire.

But the purpose for which we are assembled is, gratefully to acknowledge God's abundant kindness: and what fervour should the force of contrast give to our expressions! Now, instead of a people scattered here and there, without the delights of neighbourhood, or the conveniences of civilization, which was the condition of our fathers, we have every comfort brought to our very firesides: instead of being fearful of the inroads of a savage enemy, we dwell "under our vine and fig-tree, with none to make us afraid:" instead of scanty means of knowledge, the sources of intellectual light are numerous as our springs of water: instead of a sermon at distant and uncertain intervals to excite our languishing Christian virtues, we have the ministration of the word and of the sacraments at frequent and stated seasons. Our individual happiness makes

up the sum of our national prosperity; and public blessings require public commemoration.

It is to the honour of those who administer the government of our state, that we have been invited to unite in supplications and thanksgivings upon this day. God himself has set apart his holy Sabbath to give us continual occasion to be mindful of his benefits; but such a thank-offering as the present is doubtless acceptable in the eyes of the Lord of Sabaoth.

I shall attempt briefly to suggest some reasons for public thanksgiving, which arise from our connection with the commonwealth,—our alliances in private life,—and our knowledge of immortal truth.

But it is needful to preface the enumeration with a caution, that we do not pervert it into an occasion of pride and vain glory; and, above all not of boasting in our superiority over other nations; for what have we, that we have not received? and what good gift of heaven's mercy do we not habitually abuse? Let us then fear, lest our exalted privileges give us a sad pre-eminence in guilt, when the "sign of the Son of Man" shall be hung out in the heavens, and the knell of the world be rung.

I. The benefits which we derive from our connection with the commonwealth.

No nation, since the period that the children of Israel marched under the immediate guidance of God from Egypt to Canaan, has been the subject of more manifest deliverances than our own. History will speak of us collectively, as the Psalmist, when he says, "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread."

Our fathers were driven out from their homes beyond the ocean by political and religious tyranny; and what was the diminishing of them, has been our increase. God has endowed us with a large and fertile land, and spread over it an increasing and healthful population. To descend to particulars, as excitements to national gratitude, look for a moment at

#### 1. *Our Constitution.*

We hazard nothing when we affirm, that, never since the sons of Noah were scattered after the building of Babel, has any form of government been devised by men, so admirably accordant with its subjects, as our own. And for it, we are, in the first place, to be grateful to the supreme and most wise providence of God. The streams of all kinds of knowledge descend from the uncreated fountain; and it is our duty, at once, to trace them up to their great original. We will not pour out our incense upon altars

erected to the manes even of the patriots of the revolution, nor yet upon that of their chieftain, Washington; lest He that sitteth in the heavens should laugh at our folly, and punish our impiety.

But after this acknowledgment, we will honour those who so well understood the genius of our countrymen, as to frame a constitution which is at once the propelling and regulating power in the temporal destinies of more than ten millions of people. We, who have not made the matter our study, cannot comprehend the complex movements of this mighty machinery, though we perceive the admirable play of some of the parts. So long as it works well, it is not needful for us curiously to superintend all its enginery: but there is one thing we can well understand; that to maintain its movement costs us little money: large tracts of our forests do not suddenly disappear to supply it with fuel; nor are our purses emptied to keep up the repairs. We have not our birthplace where the tax-gatherer consumes the substance, and he is the richest man who collects the king's revenue. Let us gratefully recognize His kindness whose will fixes our lot, and the bounds of our habitation.

Our fathers brought with them from England a noble spirit of independence, infinitely removed

alike from the ordinary licentiousness of revolution, and the systematic oppression of ancient and settled authority. They abandoned their native country, when the second Stuart restrained Hampden from finding a refuge in our forests, and kept him at home to be a principal agent in the overthrow of despotism. They retained in this new land a devoted regard to the place of their fathers' sepulchres, and have transmitted to us a just veneration for the noble institutions of that great kingdom. Doubtless without such an exemplar as is to be found in the English constitution, the fabric of our government had not been raised; nor could any other than the children of parents long since free, have discriminated so dexterously between what is necessary and what is adventitious in the august model. That system of rule has been the work of ages; and time has, in a manner, sanctified its very defects. It stands, like some mighty tower with its scaffolding around it, scarcely finished,—all mantled in ivy; and the wisest may dread to remove the least part of it, for fear the edifice should crumble. The circumstances of our legislators have been incomparably more happy; and they have raised a monument, by line and measure, which may protect our people in all coming generations. Let it stand their mausoleum!

2. In connection with this, consider our *elective franchise*.

It is doubtless the natural right of every man to choose his legal protectors; and when he locates himself upon the soil, and becomes a tangible, immovable person—a part in the living system, ministering a return of comfort and sustenance to the mass by which he is supported, it is his right to elect his governors. Yet it is a nice question in Christian casuistry, how far resistance to established authority is legal, and when it becomes duty to break through the control of arbitrary power. It was under Nero's bloody domination that the apostle wrote the precept, "let every soul be subject unto the higher powers;"\* and under the usurped military violence of imperious Rome our Lord meekly bowed himself and paid tribute, and commanded honour to be rendered to Cæsar.†

We are happily saved the necessity of agitating any of these doubtful questions, having already, upon this point, all that we should seek. It is a singular privilege. It was never possessed by the citizens of the ancient republics; and even in the freest cantons of Switzerland, as the Helvetic confederation is at present organized, it is

doled out with a most unjust hand. In that Alpine land of freedom, which we ever honour as the asylum of truth and liberty, do the burghesses of the towns retain their antiquated superiority over the commoners of the country.

There were helots in Sparta, and slaves in Athens. Our state is becoming happily delivered from the sad inheritance left us on our soil; the proportion is now very small, of those who are held in involuntary service; and the time is at hand when our laws will no longer recognize any other than free inhabitants. Possessed, then, of these elective privileges, it becomes us wisely, conscientiously to exercise them, remembering that we, as well as our governors, must speedily answer at the bar of the King of kings.

3. Another ample theme for gratitude is, the general *spirit of submission to the law* observable among all our citizens.

It has long been a theme for declamation against republican institutions, that they cherish a restless, changeful temper in the people. The business of the Athenians was to meet in the market place and inquire after the news; the populace of Rome assembled in the forum to demand bread and public games:—but why compare our enlightened and christianized population with the mob of pagan cities? Among us,

\* Romans xii. 1.

† Matt. xxii. 21.

we find none so strong as to break the web of the law when it is cast over them, none so small as to creep between its filaments. Justice here is blind only when she is seated on the bench to pronounce her sentence: at all other times, she is quick-sighted to discover, and strong armed to seize and punish every one who has contravened her statutes. With laws not so severe as to excite a general desire that the guilty may escape, nor so numerous as to appear to be made only to increase crime, nor so obviously unjust as to intrench upon necessary freedom, our people are contented, and anxious to aid in the execution of penalties which are inflicted only for the public safety. We need no soldiers to enforce the edict of the magistrate; while the crowded city, and the remote desert, are alike under the control of law.

We have come into possession of a sum of ancient wisdom in the English common law; and by new statutes have adapted it to our situation, or extended the principles it contained, till the great objects of both have been achieved, and we are protected in "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." And we have what crowns our enviable lot—a spirit of contentment. The children of Israel were dissatisfied with the equitable rule of their judges, who were delegates

of God—they anxiously desired something more imposing than magistrates elevated from among themselves, though of God's own designation—they demanded a king to rule over them, and go out before them, and fight their battles—they desired the splendours of royalty and the honours of a throne—"God gave them a king in his anger." May we be ever guarded from fickleness, and that love of change to which our nature is propense when superabundantly happy; and may each father deliver to his son, through numerous generations, the Roman caution, "take heed that the Republic receive no injury."

4. Another source of gratitude is, *the equal disposition of property*. When those who framed our constitution annulled the law of entail, they secured to us a vigour of political health, and to our institutions a permanence, not to be derived from any other source. It were in vain to annihilate patents of nobility, or declaim against aristocratic superiority, if the real aristocracy of heritable wealth had been left in our land—if it followed necessarily from the laws of primogeniture, that one in each family succeeded to his father's right in the soil, and that his possessions were to go down an accumulating mass until the line of descent run out. But with us there can

be no overgrown fortunes to stand and defy the ravages of time and the inroads of prodigal expense. We have here the encouraging spectacle of the same persons scattering the seed and enjoying the harvest. If we lose some of the advantages of a privileged class, who are necessarily opulent, we gain infinitely, when we exchange polish for independence and the activity always engendered among a free and intelligent people. Wealth is power—it is, in all climates, a sovereign stimulus to human exertion. In our country, it is like the electric fluid in a wholesome atmosphere—every where diffused, no where in dangerous proportions: in the countries of Europe, it is collected as this same fluid in tropical climates, and often extends its destructive influences to the cottages of the remotest hamlet. Happily, we see in the aristocracy of England, that hereditary wealth and rank do not always enervate; we find the cause of the Bible and of God sustained by those who are thrice noble. But these are accidents in the regular course of cause and effect; and we are willing that our state of society should lose in beauty of perspective what it gains in real force. All classes of society are productive here, for none are too high or too low for culture.

5. Our last topic is a consequence of the preceding, viz. *the energetic and enterprising disposition of our people.*

There is a hardihood of exertion, a wisdom of design, a reach of project, which marks our population, and ministers wonderfully to the comforts of our life. We were half a century ago without a name among the nations; a ship, at uncertain intervals, brought to our few sea-ports a scanty supply of foreign luxuries. Now our thousand ships are found under every sky, and it is an ordinary enterprise to circumnavigate the globe. From Archangel to Ceylon, and from the islands of the Pacific to those of the Archipelago, the world is ransacked to supply our real and our acquired wants.

We shall be aware of this advantage, if we cast but a slight glance at the actual position of the inhabitants of the southern part of this mighty continent; where we see, that a country more fertile than our own, a climate more genial, commercial advantages more rich and abundant, are all of no avail, in the keeping of an ignorant, superstitious, enslaved people. Their very revolution assumes the air of a massacre, so unrelenting has been their cruelty; and while we deplore their political and moral condition, the darkness is so thick, that we almost despair in offering

any aid; and may despair, unless God be pleased to bless our efforts, and himself shine in to disperse the gloom which broods over the chaos. Iceland, with its Christian population, buried in its snows, where the sun's visits are rare and short, is infinitely happier than Mexico, with its tropical fruits and golden mines. We are never to forget, that it is the people that makes the country; and it should be our earnest endeavour, so to train up our children that we may leave our land in the possession of an enlightened, virtuous, religious posterity.

I have carefully abstained, in what has been said, from looking at the reverse of the picture I have drawn, and showing the dangers of our prosperous position; leaving it to the activity of your own consciences to discover how often you have abused your privileges. But I should be justly chargeable with unfaithfulness, did I not here enter my caution against the great error springing out of the enterprise of our people, and which threatens to be a blot upon our national character. Those ships that sail fast, need to be well ballasted; but, alas! there is often no measure in our pursuit of wealth. The laws of God scarcely temper our activity; religious objects scarcely have place, much less reign, in our affections. We fail in "looking up to the eternal providence

and divine judgment, which often subverteth our imaginations. This incessant and sabbathless pursuit of a man's fortune leaveth not that tribute which we owe to God of our time; who, we see demandeth a tenth of our substance, and a seventh, which is more strict, of our time; and it is to small purpose to have an erected face towards heaven, and a perpetual grovelling spirit upon earth, eating dust, as doth the serpent."<sup>a</sup>

To cite the highest authority against this most dangerous perversion of our energy, we have only to add,—“they that will be rich, fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.”

II. The discussion of the benefits we derive from our alliances in private life, may be quite brief.—You do not need my aid to discover how full they are of causes of thanksgiving to God. Whether you look at your fields, your children, or yourselves, you have reason to bless God, “who setteth the solitary in families,” and “giveth meat unto his people,” and “maketh his sun to rise upon the evil and the good, and sendeth his rain upon the just and upon the unjust.”

<sup>a</sup> Lord Bacon: Adv. of Learning, B. II.

1. Chief among the happy circumstances of our temporal lot is the blessing of *general health*. With a body so curiously framed, and so fragile, each living being is a wonder of God's preserving providence. But we have enjoyed more than an ordinary share of this great benefit; no epidemic disease has ravaged our state—no destructive pestilence been scattered among our people. Our fellow-citizens, in some distant districts, are obliged, periodically, to desert their homes or endanger their lives. We dwell the whole year in safety. The Mississippi, which bears its burden of wealth towards the ocean, at the same time carries down the seeds of sad distempers, and has its shores annually lined with the victims of an unwholesome climate. We cannot too often repeat that it is God who has fixed our lot and "the bounds of our habitation;" "the lines have fallen unto us in pleasant places; yea, we have a goodly heritage."

2. We have *abundance of food and raiment*; "our garners are full, affording all manner of store; our oxen are strong to labour; there is no breaking in, nor going out;"\* and no complaining in our streets."

\* "What numbers of faithful and free-born Englishmen, and good Christians, have been constrained to forsake their dearest home, their friends and kindred, whom nothing but

Indeed our complaints arise from an excess of these comforts, since the staples of our produce are the necessaries of life. But how much happier are we than if veins of gold and silver were dispersed like streams of water under our soil; for these are only exchangeable commodities, useless without the intervention of a foreign people. We have within ourselves all the means of personal enjoyment and national independence.

the wide ocean, and the savage deserts of America, could hide and shelter from the fury of the bishops? O Sir, if we could but see the shape of our dear mother, England, as poets are wont to give a personal form to what they please, how would she appear, think ye, but in a mourning weed, with ashes upon her head, and tears abundantly flowing from her eyes, to behold so many of her children exposed to ease, and thrust from things of dearest necessity, because their conscience could not assent to things which the bishops thought indifferent? What more binding than conscience? What more free than indifference? Cruel, then, must that indifference needs be, that shall violate the strict necessity of conscience; merciless and inhuman that free choice and liberty that shall break asunder the bonds of religion!

Let the astrologer be dismayed at the portentous blaze of comets, and impressions in the air, as foretelling troubles and changes to states; I shall believe there cannot be a more ill-boding sign to a nation, (God turn the omen from us!) than when the inhabitants, to avoid insufferable grievances at home, are enforced by heaps to forsake their native country."—Milton. *Of Reformation in England. Works, vol. 1, p. 37, 38.*

In this connection, it is sad to touch upon a harrowing chord; but I must not omit to ask you to deplore, with me, one monstrous abuse of our abundance. Is it not a crying crime in the sight of the world and of Heaven, that we cannot look at our fields burdened with the harvest, or the trees loaded with fruit, without reflecting that intemperance, like some foul demon, is soon to scatter poison, gathered even from these choicest gifts, upon multitudes of our people? This is an offence at once so flagrant and so debasing, that we have a right solemnly to call upon every man who has a voice in the commonwealth, above all, upon every man who holds a place in the church, carefully, by precept and example, to oppose the stream of such corrupting, damning influence.

It is in unison with the duty of thankfulness to God, to which you are urged this day, to consider also the importance of your exhibiting gratitude by communicating of your abundance to your needy neighbours, "The poor ye have always with you." Although the proportion be smaller amongst us than in any other nation, so small as not to form a class of our population, yet there are those whose limbs should be covered with the fleeces of your flocks, and whose hearts should rejoice in your bounty. Hear what the Lord says of the fasts of his ancient people, (and

surely the doctrine is much more applicable to a day of thanksgiving.) "Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thine house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward."<sup>\*</sup>

3. Among our personal advantages, the general diffusion of the *means of knowledge* is never to be forgotten. What would the wide world be to us without the sun? What is man without the cultivation of his intellect? His immortal, towering genius is instantly reduced to the mean office of animating organs, which differ only in structure from the ground on which he treads. What are we without the accumulated knowledge of past ages? the subjects of a few animal instincts, whose sagacity scarcely extends to a most lame provision for our present wants. Happily, in this

<sup>\*</sup> Isa. lviii. 6-8.

country there is such a general thirst for intellectual improvement, and such sources every where opened, that the humblest are not uninstructed in the elements, and the highest need not be deficient in the accomplishments of literature. Besides the common schools, which are matters of prime necessity, our native state is honoured by being the seat of a College, one of the most ancient in this hemisphere; which, though it has never received the patronage of the legislature in such measure as it has well merited, cannot cease to be regarded by us with the kindest feelings. The world is indignant that the Turks should sit upon the ruins of Athens. The Romans, because they carried their literature with their conquests among barbarous nations, have removed some of the odium from their lust of power. It is by our intellectual greatness that we are to acquire a national character, and exercise a strong influence on the destinies of the world. Our station demands that we acquire this character, and exercise this influence, in order to vindicate our right to it. To attempt this great enterprise is the best augury of success: the eagle looks at the sun, and then fearlessly mounts, and floats in its meridian splendours. But this point can never be obtained unless we derive energy from the concluding theme.

III. Our knowledge of immortal truth. This opens the widest field for intellectual cultivation, and gives the most effective stimulus to the human faculties, and offers the highest reward to the development of powers indefinitely expansive. It is, then, the chief subject of national and individual thankfulness, that we have heard the good news of the coming of Christ our Saviour.

The minister of the Gospel is forbidden to be a respecter of persons; but I should be deficient in obedience to the precept, "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's," if I neglected to speak, with peculiar approbation, of the open, forcible expression of belief in our divine religion, which the proclamation of our first magistrate contains.\* For ever perish that paltry prudence, that calculating foresight, which would restrain political men from risking the avowal of their religious sentiments! This covert disloyalty to the Highest King and only Saviour is near akin to positive infidelity. We would be far from desiring to intermingle politics and religion: the fine gold would indeed lose its lustre in this base alloy; but it is certainly no subject of eulogy in a Christian community, that a day of thanksgiving should be appointed for all lesser mercies

\* See this admirable State paper in the Appendix.

without an expression of devoted acknowledgment for Christ's salvation.

We are far from wishing to force any man by political expedients to change his religious belief; we would give toleration to Jew and Mahomedan: but what height of unreasonableness would it be in them to seek to silence us upon this mighty theme? The Christians at Constantinople do not expect that the crescent shall not flame in the sun upon the highest turret of Santa Sophia; and it would comport little with the august majesty of Christ's kingdom not publicly to acknowledge, that it is set up amongst us. Yet sometimes even a Christian allusion is as carefully avoided, as if our laws, framed from the time of Alfred upon the supposition that we are a Christian people, would immediately judge our chief magistrate weak or disloyal.

Chiefly and lastly, then, my hearers, be thankful that you are born where the true light shineth; that you are not left to lose the path of duty amid the disputations of philosophers, and the path to heaven amid the glimmerings of natural reason. Certainly, if there be any one question worth discussing—any principles most imperiously demanding decision, they concern our souls rather than our bodies, and our immortal more than our earthly lot. Allied to the brutish

that perish in the material organs by which we now live, we have a nobler relationship to the inhabitants of the spiritual world in the souls which are the glory of our frail tabernacles. Our choicest civil privileges do but evolve the rules of our being for a short and most uncertain term. It is the office of religion to disperse the clouds which hang over the remote horizon, and to bring down the light of heaven upon a distant and endless futurity. But what power have we to unlock the stores of light, which are in God's treasure-house of knowledge? What on earth has power to attract down any part of the peculiar glories of the celestial world? The sun, the moon, the stars revolve in ten thousand varied orbits through "heaven's wide hollownesse," and emit such light as their Creator pleases upon this low and darkened globe.

We are then to be thankful, Christian brethren, that our Creator and Judge has taken occasion, from our very darkness and misery, to exhibit his infinite perfections; that when our race had voluntarily left their high estate of rectitude, and fallen into indiscriminate ignorance and overwhelming misery, he repeated the announcement of his law, with all perspicuity, and under the most imposing sanctions: that when men had so far lost the effects of traditional knowledge, as to

set up idols of their own formation, and worship the works of their own hands, he sought to reclaim them by a perfect revelation; that when the burden of sin was upon every son of Adam, and there could be no remission without the shedding of blood, then God sent his own Son to seek and to save that which was lost; that in the history of Jesus Christ, we have a perfect example,—in his deeds, when he was made under the law, a perfect righteousness,—and in his death, a full and glorious atonement. Now “God may be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.”

It is the continual purpose of the ministers of the Gospel, and the great object of their lives, to bring your hearts to a devout feeling of gratitude for “God’s unspeakable gift,” and the unequalled sum of blessings contained in his covenant of peace. The present occasion will, therefore, the less permit an enlarged discussion upon this head. It seems rather to require of us some remarks upon the external condition of our church. It is seldom desirable to stand in the outer porch of the temple: we have, happily, access at times into the inner sanctuary, and enjoy “a gale of peace from the wings of the cherubim that fan the mercy seat.” But there are seasons when we ought to “walk about Zion, and go round

about her; tell the towers thereof; mark well her bulwarks; consider her palaces; that we may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death.”

1. Among the external causes of the prosperity of the church in our land, and for which we are grateful to Him, in the line of whose providence causes are only effects of his will, one is chief—that the state does not interpose its edicts between our consciences and God; that the civil power has not selected its favourite system, and added secular authority to spiritual decisions; and, as a consequence, that there is no provision in the commonwealth for the maintenance of the ministers of religion. From the advent of our Lord to the conversion of Constantine, religion was a heavenly system; every where extending, like leaven in a mighty mass, adapting itself alike to the genius of the various governments of the world, and was spread, as the light shines, not to exercise violence upon men’s wills, but to irradiate, and guide them into the paths of holiness and peace. Whatever liberal principles it reveals, and certainly they abound in its written institutes, are brought in incidentally; as if the messenger from heaven, taking up one and another immortal being, and leading him

hastily into an immutably happy and glorious condition, would scarcely waste his time in declaring which of the paths in this world, where we have so brief an existence, was least infested with its abundant troubles.

But when the cross superseded the eagle upon the imperial banner, and the sign of our Lord's humiliation floated in the four winds of the Roman world, we are not surprised that the honours of life captivated the servants of Him who was crucified; and that, speedily, men took up a holy vocation, from the meanest and most profane motives. They usurped the privileges of a pagan priesthood; and history tells us, how those who styled themselves the successors of Peter and of Paul, by a rare combination of effrontery and ambition, erected a metropolitan throne at Constantinople, and set up at Rome their triple crown upon the ruins of the empire of the Cæsars.

From that period commenced the unhappy union of church and state, which has degraded the divine character of Christianity, and brought her down from her celestial orbit, and made her move in the midst of the most ordinary earthly influences. Since then, the mitre and the crown have been quartered, in friendly alliance, upon the same escutcheon: the head of the hierarchy

anoints the sovereign—the sovereign sustains the hierarchy. "I am not of opinion, to think the church a vine in this respect, because, as they take it, she cannot subsist without clasping about the elm of worldly strength and felicity; as if the heavenly city could not support itself without the props and buttresses of secular authority."<sup>\*</sup> Our religious condition proves, that it does not need extraneous civil aid, to extend its wholesome authority, with its unfailling consolations. The victories of peace, and truth, and righteousness, are effected under the humble ministry of those who seek not honour from men; and who are, therefore, more honourable in His eyes, who regards alone the sentiments of the heart.

It is not easy, without personal observation, for us to imagine the dangerous effect of state protection to a religious order. In France, the ministers of religion, Catholics and Protestants, receive their salaries from the royal purse; and live upon royal bounty. The lowest peasant, therefore, as well as the philosophical politician, easily inclines to regard them as a part of the state machinery, useful perhaps in the regulation of the lower duties of morality, but deriving more authority from an earthly, than a heavenly

<sup>\*</sup> Milton: Works—vol. i. page 17.

sovereign. Thus infidelity is every where cherished; and, instead of the natural connexion of the heart, which was intended to be kept up by the pure Christian institution—where he who visits the altar voluntarily supports him who ministers, the tax-gatherer, in the remotest parish of that great kingdom, collects the sum total of the revenue, which is to be transmitted to Paris, in order that it may flow back from the royal treasury, in a moderate allowance, to the village priest.

In Holland, once like ourselves, a republic—and where the Presbyterian discipline still nominally prevails, the Sovereign, now King of the Netherlands, has imitated the policy introduced by Napoleon into the French Empire. Yet is this system the best that we find in Europe, and the least degrading to religion, of all the various forms of state protection. The valued tithes in the Church of Scotland, is the next least injurious. But the worst, and the most common mode, is the law of tithes in England. These are levied upon all the land, whether in the occupancy of Dissenters or Churchmen, which first class embraces almost half the population; and the system is so gross and offensive in its appearance, and so unjust in its division among the higher clergy, who are chiefly ornaments of the throne.

and the inferior clergy, the real supporters of the spiritual church, that it is justly regarded as oppressive by a large portion of that great nation. If it were necessary to adduce the evidence of my recent personal inspection, to the obvious reasonableness of the statement, I might go on to show how this bolstering up church authority by civil law fosters general irreligion, and is at the root of the numberless and just complaints, that they who set about the reform of the state, are infidel or atheistical in their principles. Men will not discriminate accurately between the good and evil; what is protected by a corrupt political government is supposed, for that very reason, to be only political and corrupt; and hence we see with regret, that those who are sound and well informed in state affairs, are ready to pull down Christianity with the stalls of the prebendaries and the episcopal throne. It is the alliance of church and state, which has cherished the infidel spirit all over Europe—in the Radicals of England—the Republicans of France—the Carbonari of Italy.

Yet in the midst of our congratulations on this subject, we must not forget that we are carrying on a great experiment in the face of the world, and that the eyes of Christendom are upon us. Many beyond the ocean, who love our country, and

are bound to us by a common veneration for our religious principles, derived from the same source, I think, without reason, fear the result of this experiment. They interpret differently the duty of a Christian magistrate in reference to a Christian commonwealth; and it becomes us to add the evidence of fact to the evidence of reason, and prove, by the result, that Christians need no other motive than that derived from the intrinsic vitality of their doctrine, I should say, from the divinity that is in it, to sustain the fabric of their ecclesiastical government.

Some, indeed, have not hesitated to predict the downfall of Christianity in this country, and even now to announce the prevalence of impiety, because our civil officers, not bearing the sword in vain, do not also seek to bear up the ark of the Lord.\* We know better: and put our trust in God, that the latest generation in this asylum of persecuted religion will refute so injurious a calumny.†

2. We are to be thankful that we have established in our church the pure system of Presbyterian discipline and government: a representative system according exactly with the method of our civil rule, which is indeed little more than a

\* Rom. xiii. 4. 1 Chron. xiii. 2.

† See in the Appendix, Note II.

copy from our ecclesiastical constitution. The equal rights of all the ministers of the Gospel—the lay deputies in Church courts—the delegation from the lower judicatories to the highest Assembly, which exercises a kindly supervision over all the parts, and is the organ of communication between its most distant members; all are elements in our externally prosperous condition as a church of Christ. "So little is it that I fear lest any crookedness, any wrinkle, or spot, should be found in Presbyterian church government, that if Bodin, the famous French writer, though a Papist, yet affirms, that the commonwealth which maintains this discipline, will certainly flourish in virtue and piety; I dare assure myself, that every true Protestant will admire the integrity, the uprightness, the divine and gracious purposes thereof, and even for the reason of it, so coherent with the doctrine of the Gospel, beside the evidence of command in Scripture, will confess it to be the only true church government."<sup>2</sup> Others of our fellow Christians prefer other modes of government. To their own master they stand or fall. We do not demand freedom for ourselves, when we will not grant it to our neighbours: the land is wide enough for us

<sup>2</sup> Milton: Works, vol. i. p. 115.—The reason of Church Government urged against Presby.

all: to those who prefer the government of Bishops, now reduced in our happy country nearer the apostolic model, they being little more than pastors of churches, and to all others, so far as they hold the essential truths, we repeat, God speed—may they advance and prosper.

3. We are thankful that we hold the pure Christian doctrine unimpaired—that the legacy of truth left us by our ancestors is revered as the palladium of our safety, and guarded as the richest treasure of our hearts.

There are men, happily we only know of them by distant report, who profess that the revelation of God is improveable as human volumes, by new and fuller light—that it was the lot of some Polish divines, or a later English chemist, to analyze the church's inheritance, and to convert the dross, (although sanctified by the blood of martyrs,) into a new and golden system. These are they, who call themselves disciples of Jesus Christ, and yet deny that they are "redeemed unto God by his blood"—who class the doctrines of our Saviour with the instructions of Socrates, and sit down, (self-sufficient judges!) to decide upon the truth of his affirmations. It has taken somewhat more than a century to discover this

\* Eph. i. 7. Col. i. 14. Rev. v. 9.

phoenix; and we doubt not that, like the virtues of that fabled bird, the Socinian system will soon be lost in the effulgence of truth. In the mean while you, Christian brethren, do not need to be warned against such opinions; these notions are too cold—too obviously contradictory to the letter of the record, to be embraced by any other than curious speculatists, and are not to be found among the yeomanry of our country, the bulk of our people. We may be indignant, while we pity the man, who refines upon the written word of life, as we should be excited by his disloyalty, who would pervert the meaning of our published laws; but we are contented to stand with Chrysostom and the apostolic Fathers—with St. Paul and St. John, and believe that "Jesus Christ is over all, God blessed for ever," in whose name we were baptized, with that of the Father and of the Holy Spirit, one God, invisible and eternal.\*

The great doctrines of divine truth are held sacred in the midst of us; such are, that of our inherent depravity; † the necessity of renewal by the energy of the Holy Spirit ‡ reconciliation to God, through our Lord's death § the imputation of our Lord's righteousness; || the doctrine by

\* Rom. ix. 5. Matt. xxviii. 19. † Eph. ii. 3. ‡ John iii. 3—5. § II. Cor. v. 18—21. Col. i. 21—22. || Rom. x. 4. and iv. 22—25.

which, as Luther exclaims, the church stands or falls—that we are justified by faith alone, without the deeds of the law;\* the binding obligations of this same law, not derived from a covenant of works, but from the command of Christ, under the influence of that solemn asseveration, “without holiness no man shall see the Lord.”† These, with the future events, which we know are to arrive in the life of every man—that we are all to “appear before the judgment seat of Christ,” to answer for our privileges; and that some immortal beings are to enter into life eternal, and others to depart into everlasting misery,‡ all bear with a supereminent weight upon our consciences, and keep alive those apprehensions and hopes, which may prepare us for “the inheritance of the saints in light.”

The influence of these truths is extended, by God’s vivifying Spirit, not only in the ordinary services of His house, but oftentimes in different districts of our happy country, in such sudden and large measure as should induce us to pour forth loud notes of praise. There is joy in heaven when one sinner repenteth; and there should be joy on earth when we see hundreds at once renounce their allegiance to “the spirit that now

\* Rom. iii. 28. † Rom. vi. 15. and Heb. xii. 14.

‡ 2 Cor. v. 10. and Matt. xxv. 46.

worketh in the children of disobedience,” and solemnly profess that they will follow in the footsteps of the Lamb of God, who is, at the same time, the Captain of their salvation—Almighty Lord in the upper and the nether world.

We have tokens every where in this land, that the influence is practical, full of good fruits. Our Bible Societies increase in number and activity: directed by a national head, there is additional union, and force, and honour in their movements. Our Missionary Societies are attempting to supply the wants of the western settler, and the aboriginal wanderer; and among the Indians, whole families are now sent, instead of insulated individuals, to make the advantages of Christianity evident in the comforts of civilization, and to address to the naked savage the practical argument of an ameliorated bodily as well as mental condition. We behold the wilderness and solitary place beginning to bud and blossom, and the Sun of righteousness shooting his benign rays into the deepest recesses of our forests. The general benevolence thus produced among so many classes of our citizens

\* The protection and encouragement which are enjoyed by the Missionary Schools at Brainerd, Elliot, and elsewhere, reflect the highest honour upon those who now administer the affairs of our National Government.

is interweaving us in ten thousand different ways, and rooting out the harshness of individual and sectarian jealousy.

Certainly we should doubt either the honesty or the sense of the man whose preference to his own church and creed should not be decided and paramount. "They are in the dark to whom all colours are alike." And of all the errors which have lately sprung up, and which is especially infectious and deadly, that of general indifference to all modifications of belief is most fundamentally ruinous. Yet with that preference for our own system, which is the acquired right of any one who has examined before he has chosen, and sought for truth wherever hidden, we do not need to wage war with those who in essential points agree with ourselves. We have reason, then, to be thankful in considering our condition for a general spirit of union.

"Concerning the bonds of unity, the true placing of them importeth exceedingly. There appear to be two extremes. For to certain zealots all speech of pacification is odious. *Is it peace, Jahu? What hast thou to do with peace? Turn thee behind me.* Peace is not the matter, but following and party. Contrariwise, certain Laodiceans and lukewarm persons think they may accommodate points of religion by middleways, and taking part of both.

and witty reconcilements, as if they would make an arbitrament between God and man. Both these extremes are to be avoided; which will be done, if the league of Christians, penned by our Saviour himself, were, in the two cross clauses thereof, soundly and plainly expounded:—he that is not with us, is against us: and again, he that is not against us, is with us: that is, if the points fundamental and of substance, in religion, were truly discerned and distinguished from points, not merely of faith, but of opinion, order, or good intention."<sup>\*</sup>

In terminating our consideration of this subject, permit me to entreat that you rivet upon your minds the reflection, that all that is external, however praiseworthy or splendid, will benefit us nothing without inward purity of heart. Our political privileges have been given to us by Him who is Governor among the nations, that we may exhibit a dignified example of magnanimity and philanthropy in the face of the world. Our religious privileges have been conferred upon us by the Great Head of the church, that they may be the means, under the ministration of his Spirit, of fitting us to become citizens in that heavenly kingdom where no impure thing can be admitted. Let it be our earnest endeavour to

\* Bacon: Works, vol. 2. p. 253

reach these blessed results. All our advantages will avail us little without "the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost."

The tenure of our mortal being is, that we be ready at a call to answer for our stewardship. The best earthly gifts stand but as frost-work in the sunshine, and may pass away in a moment; and, in any event, must speedily pass away. Too many in our land, and even in our Christian assemblies, are we forced to compare with the Egyptian temples,—magnificent monuments of architecture to the external observer—inhabited only by a base serpent or bird in the view of those who penetrate into the shrine. God looketh upon the heart, and demands that all be pure within which he makes glorious without.

If you are anxious to transmit your civil privileges unimpaired to your children, be equally anxious to train them up in the fear of God; and as the most effective means to produce this happy effect, continue ye in the fear of God all the day long.

How sad must have been the condition of our fathers when about to desert the land of their nativity—to behold before them only the green ocean; and as they cast a parting look upon the verdant fields and well known pasturages, and the various marks of comfort and civi-

lization, to think of all the unimaginable dangers of trackless forests and savage beasts, and men more savage. But what is all this, when compared with our actual condition, as travellers in the world, soon to float on the ocean of eternity—soon to be borne beyond the ken of human observation—and into a land whence no friend has returned to describe its opening prospects.

I correct myself; for, if we are Christians, Christ, our best friend, has returned from the gates of death, with its keys in his hand, and he will save us. The traces of his path into the immutable world are most luminous and cheering. Though at a distance they may appear, like the milky way in the heavens, faint in comparison with the broad day-light of life; yet, when our souls take a flight more rapid than ever rays were shot from the distant stars, we shall find them as the astronomer finds these, glimmering now only because they are so high, but really suns in a mighty firmament, which are yet but the outermost glories of the New Jerusalem, the everlasting dwelling place of God's redeemed.

Let us all, then, ever remember that we are soon to migrate into another country. We stand upon the borders of an ocean wider than the Atlantic, and soon must launch away. Whither? To land on the other shore with greetings or

with tears? To advance upon the heavenly coast as freemen or slaves? To have angels or devils for our companions? To enter and serve God, day and night, in his temple, or be driven away by divine justice into outer darkness? These questions ought now to be answered—for ye are yet prisoners of hope; and now is the day of salvation.

## APPENDIX NO. I

A PROCLAMATION BY ISAAC H. WILLIAMSON, GOVERNOR  
OF THE STATE OF NEW-JERSEY.

**WHEREAS** it is our solemn duty to acknowledge Almighty God in all the dispensations of his providence, and to unite in publicly expressing our most fervent gratitude to him for the many blessings we derive from his infinite goodness and favour; and especially for divine revelation, and the atonement made for sinners by the death of his Son, our Saviour and Judge,—I do therefore appoint Thursday, the 13th day of December next, to be observed, throughout this state, as a day of public thanksgiving and prayer; and do hereby recommend to my fellow-citizens to assemble on that day, at their respective places of public worship, to unite in offering the homage of fervent and grateful hearts to the great Creator and Preserver of the universe, for his continued favours to our state and nation; and in particular for the great blessings of peace, internal tranquillity, and general abundance,—for the prevailing influence of the pure precepts of the Gospel, and the assurance afforded to all of a happy and immortal existence, through faith, penitence, and obedience: and, at the same time, to supplicate his divine protection and guidance in behalf of the President of these United States, and all

in authority; to implore his blessing upon our civil and religious privileges; and most earnestly to beseech him, that the true interests of our highly favoured country may, to the latest posterity, be cherished, sustained, and preserved by the piety, virtue, and patriotism of the people.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto subscribed my name, at the city of Trenton, this twenty-first day of November, in the year of our Lord, 1821.

ISAAC H. WILLIAMSON.

## APPENDIX NO. II

TO show the ideas which are indulged abroad concerning the state of religion in this country, I extract the following from a sermon, entitled, "The Importance of Ecclesiastical Establishments;—preached on Monday, Jan. 23, 1821, before the Society, incorporated by royal charter, for the benefit of the Sons of the Clergy of the Church of Scotland; and published at their request, by John Inglis, D. D.—Edinburgh, 1821."

After drawing an argument from the religious state of France, the evils of which the author attributes to the destruction of ecclesiastical establishments by the revolution, he proceeds to another illustration of his position, that they are absolutely necessary to the prosperity of religion. Having said that "An established church consecrates the state," he adds, "the essential importance of ecclesiastical establishments will be equally obvious from another case. In a land which, though distant from ours on the surface of the globe, seems to be brought nigh to us by kindred blood,—among a people of whom, or of whose institutions, I would not lightly speak evil,—we have an instructive warning, that, in proportion to the weakness, or the want, of institutions for the support of a national

religion, there is a hazard of religion and its ordinances being lost or discontinued among men. It is well known that, in the United States of the western hemisphere, an anxious concern for the interests of civil and religious liberty, and a scrupulous tenaciousness of the rights of individuals, have hitherto prevented the establishment of a national church. But what has been the result? Has the want of a national church been, in their case, supplied by the zeal of independent ministers of religion, or by any other means of maintaining its cause? If we may respect information which seems too well entitled to credit, the want of a national and established church may be distinctly read in the existing state of religion,—in a practical indifference, on the part of too many, to the very maintenance of religious ordinances, and of a class of men by whom they may be administered.

<sup>20</sup> The ancestors of the people of whom I now speak carried with them from our land a supposing zeal for religion. The maintenance of both its doctrines and its ordinances, in all possible purity, was the object nearest to their hearts. They regarded pure religion and undefiled as the glory of that inheritance which they were to transmit to future generations; and the same zeal was actually imparted, in no inconsiderable degree, to many of their immediate offspring. In these circumstances the cause of religion had every promise of support that the personal disposition of its votaries could in any case afford. But the dispositions of individuals are fluctuating; even the individuals themselves, in a short time, give place to others. Permanent institutions, founded in law, and suitably en-

dowed by the state, were still wanting to give regularity and permanence to the means of religious instruction, and the administration of religious ordinances. To the consequences I have already alluded; they are too well known to be seriously questioned; and I trust our knowledge of them may, at least, have the effect of inducing us to cherish these ecclesiastical institutions, for which we are indebted to the wisdom of an earlier age,—to the provident devices of men, who appear to have had juster views of the present condition of human nature, and of what is necessary to the permanent welfare of human society." p. 17—18.

We know not what is the information to which the author alludes, nor upon whose credit he grounds this description of the state of religion here; but, as we may be supposed to have equal means of knowledge, we venture to suggest, that there is a mistake in the narrative, and therefore, of course, though no doubt without design, a prime sophism in the argument. We are without the evils of patronage, but not, therefore, without the general influence of religion. There is here a general inquiry for faithful ministers of the Gospel to meet the unexampled increase of our people; but to infer from this that we are without them in very large numbers, is as great an error as it would be to affirm, that, in the Highlands of Scotland, the means of religious knowledge are superabundant, and the parishes small, from the fact, that, in 1818, the moderate party in the General Assembly,—unhappily a majority, and of which this revered author is a leader,—esteemed it their duty to censure "preaching in the open air, or

during journeys from place to place,<sup>19</sup> because the minister of Urquhart had committed the grievous offence of collecting the people from some ten or twenty miles, to instruct them on a hill-side, which fell within the bounds of a neighbouring minister's parish.