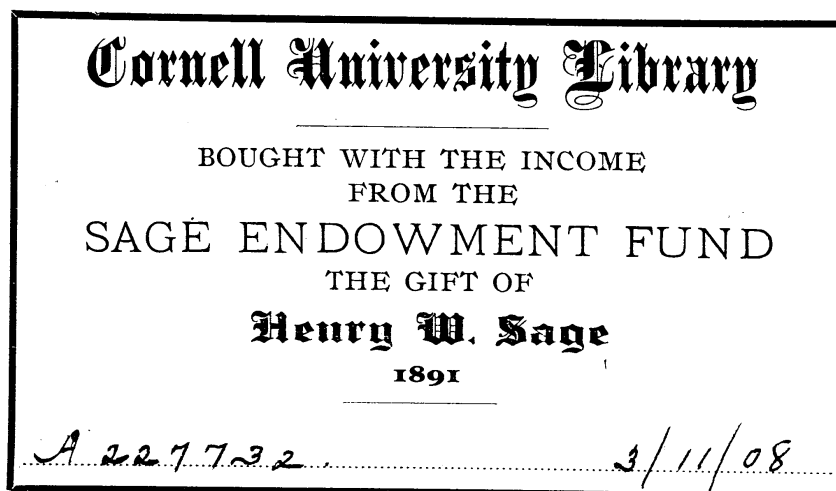


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THE DIVINE GOODNESS

TO THE

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

PARTICULARLY IN THE COURSE OF THE LAST YEAR,

THANKSGIVING SERMON,

PREACHED IN NEW-YORK, FEBRUARY 19, 1795,

By JOHN M'KNIGHT, D. D.

ONE OF THE MINISTERS OF THE UNITED PRESBYTE-
RIAN CONGREGATIONS IN THE CITY OF NEW-YORK.

NEW-YORK—PRINTED BY THOMAS GREENLEAF.

1795.

THE PREFACE.

THE Discourse here presented to the public, when delivered, was prefaced thus :

“ Having for some time past been considerably indisposed, I have neither had time, nor been in a capacity to pay that attention to the following Discourse which I could have wished. It is, therefore, hoped, that the few thoughts which may be offered, and which have been hastily thrown together, will be received with candor and indulgence.”

From this it will be justly supposed, that when the Discourse was delivered, there was not the most distant thought entertained of printing it. Misrepresentation, calumny, and personal indignities on the one hand ; and solicitation and importunity, on the other, have, at length, prevailed upon the Author to offer it to the public through the medium of the press. The occasion of the publication rendered it improper that, however defective or imperfect, it should undergo any alteration. It is, therefore, printed from the original copy from which it was delivered, without any alteration.

P R E F A C E.

It was not the wish nor the intention of the Author to wound the feelings of any of his audience. He did not then suppose, nor can he yet think, that there is any thing in the Discourse that is just cause of offence. He is confident that he has not advanced any thing that is not well founded, that was not directly suited to the business of the day, and for which there was not a just and necessary foundation laid in the President's proclamation. Born in America, uniformly, decidedly, and firmly attached to her interests, he has spoke what he thought and felt. He has not, from particular enquiry, been able to find, that among those who have taken exceptions at it, there is one who has sustained the character of a whig. And he flatters himself, that what he has advanced will meet the sentiments and views of every American. The person whose neck is under a foreign yoke, and who is inimical to the country in which he resides, and to which he is indebted for all his possessions and prospects, has no business here. "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace." If captives, &c. much more, &c.

The Discourse has been charged with being *improper to be delivered from the pulpit*—with being *a dish of jumbled politics collected from one side of the news only*—with containing ma-

P R E F A C E.

ny things not well founded, and false—with being the true hypocrisy of a Jacobin, or a Democrat—And I am told, that though there may be a majority of my opinion, yet the minority are, by far, the most respectable, &c. &c.

On these I shall make no comments, but cheerfully submit both the discourse and the charges against it, to the decision of a candid and impartial public, before whose tribunal they now stand.



THANKSGIVING DISCOURSE.

PSALM LXV. 11.

"Thou crownest the Year with thy Goodness."

A GREEABLY to the recommendation of the Executive of our general Government, we are this day assembled, gratefully to recognize the instances of the Divine Goodness to us, as a nation, particularly in the course of the last year. The words which have been read will serve as a suitable subject from which to address you upon the occasion—"Thou crownest the Year with thy Goodness."

The language here is highly figurative and beautiful. A crown is an emblem of honor; it encompasses the head of the person upon which it is placed, and it denotes the completion, perfection, and happy accomplishment of an undertaking. Have we, as a nation, arrived to any promotion or honor in the course of the year? We owe it to the Divine goodness. This has run throughout the whole, and been manifest in the different parts of it. As it began with it, and has been displayed in its several parts, so it has continued even to the close. How far this has been the case with us, will more fully appear in the sequel of the discourse.

It becomes us, my brethren, upon proper occasions, to recount, with gratitude and praise, every instance of the goodness of God to us, whether public or private, temporal or spiritual, special or common, as individuals, or as members of society. This, however, would be too extensive a subject for our present meditations. If we attempt to recount all the instances of the Divine Goodness to us, where will the growing numbers end? Surely we should be swallowed up in the enumeration, and must be constrained to say, with the Psalmist, "Many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee; if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered."

Confining ourselves, then, to the particular objects of the day, my design is, to endeavor to promote in you a disposition, and excite you to exercises suitable to it, by leading you to a view of the goodness of God to us, in a national capacity, particularly in the course of the last year.

I. The goodness of God has been manifested to us in the general and great prosperity and success which have attended all classes of citizens among us, in their respective occupations and employments. This must strike every one upon the slightest and most general survey. The increase of property has been general, rapid, and great. Agriculture, trade, and commerce have flourished; and the honest industry of the farmer, the mechanic, and the merchant have been crowned with success. All ranks are dependent upon the labor of the husbandman, and equally supported by the produce of the field. The abundance yielded by the fertility of the soil, is to be estimated among the first of

temporal blessings. This God, in his great goodness, has afforded us. Our land has yielded its increase. He has given us winter and summer, spring and autumn, seed-time and harvest, in their respective seasons. He has given us rain from Heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. He has fed us with butter of kine, with the fat of lambs, and with the fat of kidneys of wheat, and given us to drink the pure blood of the grape. And such has been the profusion of the goodness of God to us, that our own wants have not only been supplied from the openings of his hand, together with the wants of those who have taken refuge among us from the calamities and distresses of other nations, but our exports for the supply of others in different parts of the world, have been large, and a source of much wealth flowing in upon us. Never had nation greater cause to adopt the language of this psalm, from the 9th verse to the end, "Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it. Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly; thou settlest the furrows thereof; thou makest it soft with showers; thou blessest the springing thereof. Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness. They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness; and the little hills rejoice on every side. The pastures are clothed with flocks; the vallies also are covered over with corn: they shout for joy, they also sing."

The tradesman and mechanic, abundantly supplied with the necessaries of life, from the produce of the field, readily possessing themselves of the materials requisite for their different occupations,

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finding ready sale, and receiving an advanced price for whatever they have manufactured, have also greatly advanced their profits and their stock.

And, perhaps, notwithstanding the partial injuries to which our commerce has been subjected, the profits of the merchant have not been less than either of these. Whilst they have contributed largely to the increase of the revenues of government, by the duties paid into the treasury, which, in the course of the last year, have far exceeded those of any of the preceding, we hope, and are persuaded, they have also proportionably enriched themselves.

In short, the sources of wealth have been proportionably open to all those whose occupations led them in the pursuit of it. Even the price of daily labor has kept pace with the increasing value of other articles. And the advanced price of the necessaries of life, amidst abounding plenty, are incontestible evidences of the increase of the circulating medium, and the general prosperity pervading all classes of our citizens.

II. The goodness of God has been manifested to us, in the course of the last year, in the peace which we have enjoyed, in its restoration where it seemed to be threatened, and in the prospects afforded us of its continuance and establishment. Our attention is necessarily directed here to three different objects—To the danger with which we were threatened, of being involved in a war with Great-Britain ; to the incursions of the savages upon our frontiers ; and to the insurrection of some of our own people.

1. The depredations made on our commerce, the detention of those posts which, according to treaty, ought long since to have been delivered up, and

the continuance, support, and encouragement afforded to the savages, threatened, in the course of the last year, to involve us in a war with Great Britain. Lord Dorchester's speech to the Indians, and the instructions given, by the British ministry, to the officers and judges of the admiralty in the West-Indies, were sufficient indications of their designs. These were, indeed, high indignities, and very provoking. From the nature and circumstances of these aggressions, from the obligations which we were under to France, from the part which Britain was acting both towards them and us, and the means of which we were supposed possessed to retaliate, and do ourselves justice, it was the opinion of a large and respectable body of our citizens, that we ought to have adopted vigorous measures of redress. But, my brethren, however sensible I am of the obligations we are under to our generous ally, for the effectual and decisive assistance afforded us in the struggle for our own Liberty ; * however heartily and sincerely I wish them success in every measure tending to their establishment in all the blessings of Peace, Liberty, and Independence ; with whatever indignation I have beheld the interference of the combined powers, for the regulation of their internal police, or the insult and injustice which we ourselves have suffered, still I

* I am one of those who believe that there are such things as national, as well as individual honor and honesty, and that the nation which doth not respect them, will never herself become great or respectable ; and from my heart I detest and despise the base and partial policy which would conduct the concerns of a nation solely upon the principle of interest.

I believe farther, that arguing against our obligations of gratitude to France, for her " most necessary and efficient aids," in the war with Great-Britain, because the present were not the then ruling powers, is palpable and absurd sophistry, and, if admitted, would equally prove, that we are under no pecuniary obligations to her.

must consider it as a happy circumstance, and an instance of the goodness of God to us, if, upon terms equitable and honorable, we can keep ourselves clear of the vortex of European politics, and from being involved in the miseries of war; if moderation and delay can procure restitution and justice. War is a dreadful calamity, and a nation ought never to be involved in it but in cases of absolute necessity. We are informed, in general, of a successful negotiation; and the public mind waits, with anxious suspense, to be informed of the particulars. At any rate, to me it is clear, that, in the course of divine providence, France has fought our battles for us; and that to their successes, under God, we owe our peace, and prospects of redress.*

* As I learn that the opinion here advanced has been particularly cavilled at, and the truth of it denied, it may be proper to hint at the facts on which it is founded.

At what period were those private instructions, to capture and condemn American vessels, sent, by the British ministry, to their admiralty in the West-Indies? Was it not when they flattered themselves with the prospect of conquering France by the combination which was formed against her? Was it not at the same period that Lord Dorchester, no doubt in consequence of similar instructions (he dared not to act thus without them) endeavored to excite the savages against us? When were those instructions counteracted? Was it until their flattering prospects were all entirely blasted? To what probable cause shall we impute their alteration of conduct but to the successes of France? For my own part, I know no other to which it can be imputed.

To shew that I am not singular in my opinion, I will add a quotation or two from Dr. Smith's sermon, of Princeton, preached in Philadelphia on the same day.

"Has not the former," viz. Great-Britain, "affecting a tyranny, and dictating a new law of nations upon the ocean, committed the most injurious and insolent spoil upon our commerce? Has she not treated our citizens with every outrage that could flow from hatred and contempt? Has she not held fortifications? Has she not claimed dominion within our territories? Is she not known to

2. The goodness of God to us has been conspicuous, in the course of the last year, with respect to the war in which we have been engaged with the savages. Jealous of our increasing greatness, alarmed at the rapid extension of our frontier settlements, and mortified at their own decrease and exclusion from territory, which they formerly possessed, their minds were highly irritable. Of this situation of mind the British incendiaries availed themselves, in rendering them hostile to us. Elated by their success in defeating the troops sent against them on former campaigns, they were become haughty, backward to treat, and bent upon war. The murders which they perpetrated upon our frontier settlements, were many and cruel, and the distresses occasioned to our citizens great. But the issue of the last campaign appears to have much altered their disposition, and given us favorable prospects of peace with them. By the goodness of God,

have excited that ferocious war that has so long afflicted our frontier—to have kindled against us the rage, assisted the councils, and concentrated the force of the savage tribes? Is it not plain, that the meditated hostilities? That she had already conceived the purpose of attacking us, and only waited the opportunity to carry it into execution?”

And again—“ Shall I not ascribe it to a merciful providence over us, that the hostile plans of Britain have been all blasted on the plains of Belgium?”

Precisely the same sentiment, I am well assured, was advanced by several of the clergy in this city on the same day.

If any thing farther was necessary to shew the effrontery and stupid obstinacy of controverting this opinion, I might add the testimony of Mr. Fox, in the British parliament. Speaking of the treaty of amity and commerce which America had obtained with Great-Britain, and which he terms a very advantageous one, he adds—“ A treaty, as far as I have heard of it, which justice and policy would have dictated at any time, but which he feared the difficulties in which the ministry had involved themselves, rather than their justice or policy, induced them to give.”

our arms against them have been victorious. They were utterly routed, and a great slaughter made of them. Looking in vain for succour from their instigators, they have been taught, that upon our clemency, moderation, and justice, they are to depend. And there is now a favorable prospect of treating with them upon terms of equity and mutual advantage.

The 3d instance referred to here is, the Insurrection which took place among the inhabitants of the four western counties of Pennsylvania, beyond the Alleghany mountain. Of all wars, those which are intestine, are most to be dreaded and deprecated.

When all due allowances are made for the supposed noxious and exceptionable nature of the excise law ; when full weight is given to the unsuccessful legal opposition made to it by petition, remonstrance, and a body of our representatives in Congress ; and when every palliating circumstance, arising from the particularly oppressive nature of the excise law upon them, from their local situation, are admitted, still their opposition must appear unjustifiable, and highly criminal. If, more especially in a republican government, the minority will not acquiesce in the decisions of the majority, there is an end of all order and peace.

This insurrection, in its first stages, wore an alarming aspect. By the goodness of God to us, it has been quelled. Happily, the decided firmness and activity of our citizens, in support of the executive, have proved successful, and order and tranquility restored without the shedding of blood.— Thou, O God, *stillest the noise of the sea, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people.*

III. The goodness of God has been manifested in continuing us in the possession of constitutions of government, which unite, and by their union establish, liberty and order. Civil government is the institution of Heaven, and, in the present state of human nature, absolutely necessary to the preservation of peace and order in the world; and happy the people who live under a government well constituted and equitable, in comparison of those who are subject either to tyranny or anarchy.

The peaceable adoption of our federal constitution was an event singular, and unparalleled in the annals of the world. To nothing short of that all-pervading energy which influences the hearts of the children of men, making them subservient to its sovereign and gracious purposes, can we impute the friendly coalescence, and continued union, of so many separate and interfering views and interests. This constitution, you ought never to forget, was framed and adopted by yourselves; by the people in their representatives. In you is the power vested of altering and amending it, agreeably to provision which itself contains. And to you it belongs to see it faithfully executed, and to preserve it inviolated.

As the federal constitution tends to secure the liberties and privileges of the collective body, so each state has its particular rights secured by its own constitution. In how many instances is so complicated a machine liable to be deranged? How great, then, the goodness of God in preserving its regular and uniform motion!

IV. It becomes us, my brethren, as professing Christians, and as members of religious society, to observe, and gratefully acknowledge the goodness

of God to us in the religious liberty and privileges which we enjoy. Among us, every man is left to adopt the religious principles, and to practice that mode of worship which are most conformable to the dictates of his own conscience. Here every religious denomination is left to support and establish itself, and to extend its influence by its conformity to the light of divine truth, the force of reason, and the influence of examples.

This, you may say, is the right of every one. Religion is a thing between God and every man's own conscience, and civil authority has no right to interfere or meddle with it, whilst he conducts himself as a good citizen, and neither his principles nor practice tend to disturb the peace and order of society. Be it so. But how few have enjoyed this privilege? Where is the nation, under Heaven, which now enjoys it, in its full extent, but ourselves? When we consider what has been the lot of pure and undefiled religion, and its professors, in every age; when we consider the particular oppositions which have been made to genuine Christianity, and the persecutions and sufferings to which its professors and advocates have been subjected; when we consider that, as the things of the spirit of God are foolishness to the natural man, and he cannot either receive or know them, so the carnal mind is enmity against God, and every thing that resembles his pure and holy nature; and that, were the restraints of the providence and grace of God taken off from the lusts and corruptions of men, they would wage open and eternal war with every thing good: When, I say, these things are duly considered, will we not find abundant reason to acknowledge the great goodness of God in the religious liberty and privileges which we enjoy? We have free access to the house and ordinances of

God, and are allowed to worship him in the manner we judge most conformable to the prescriptions of his holy word, whilst there are none to molest or make us afraid.

In the Vth and last place. As a mean of begetting in you a disposition, and exciting you to exercises suitable to the day, let me beseech you to contrast, for a moment, your situation throughout the past year, with that of other nations. Your minds will readily anticipate more here than I can pretend to insist largely upon, or even to mention. See most of the powers of Europe in arms. Spain, Prussia, Austria, Holland, and England combined against the peace and the liberty of France. Russia and Prussia conspiring to keep the Poles in that state of slavery from which they were endeavoring to emancipate themselves. The Netherlands the great field of battle, and every where exhibiting scenes of devastation, bloodshed, misery, and death. The groans of a large proportion of the miserable inhabitants of the earth, under the iron rod of tyranny and oppression, are heard from afar. Whilst Britain, which formerly gloried in being the seat of liberty, and in affording protection to the oppressed, is burdened with an enormous national debt, which she has no prospect of ever being able to redeem, she is threatened with a foreign invasion, and many of her subjects, unable any longer to bear the exactions which are laid upon them, are ripe for a revolt. Whilst, in many parts of the world, a large proportion of its inhabitants, by the utmost frugality and hard labour, with difficulty procure a scanty sustenance, scarcely, in this happy country, can honest industry fail of securing a competency, if not of being crowned with wealth. How many of the nations of the earth are yet in heathen-

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ish darkness, under the influence of Mahometan delusion, or subject to popish idolatry, superstition, and tyranny? Whilst the arms of France have penetrated into the very heart of the surrounding kingdoms which have been hostile to it, and been every where crowned with astonishing success, infidelity, the natural offspring of that many-headed monster which had been long obtruded upon them for religion, has boldly reared its hedious front among them, and every where stalked in open day. In most of those places, where Christianity is professed, how is it corrupted by error and heresy, and shackled by civil establishments, religious tests, and impositions of different kinds! Compare now your situation in those respects, and in many others which might be mentioned, with all or any of these, and, sure I am, you must be constrained to confess, that God hath not dealt so with any other nation; that there is not one upon the face of the earth which enjoys the blessings and privileges which you do. O happy Americans! praise ye the Lord.

The only improvement which I shall make of the subject, shall be by offering you a few directions for securing the continuance and increase of the divine goodness to you. And I must content myself with barely mentioning the most of them.

1. Then, Let the goodness of God, manifested to us in so many instances, serve to make us ashamed and sorry for the many instances of undutiful conduct with which we stand chargeable against him; and engage us to turn from every evil way. This is its native and genuine tendency. "Not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance." O what disingenuous and base conduct to continue in a course of sin against a God of so great goodness and mercy! He has nourish-

ed and brought us up as children ; let us not be found rebelling against him.

2. See that the goodness of God, manifested to you in so many instances, and in so distinguished a manner, meet with suitable returns of thanksgiving and praise. This he is justly entitled to. This he expects, and claims. The Lord has done great things for us. Let us be glad, and rejoice in his goodness ; and let us, from hearts deeply penetrated with a sense of his goodness, and overflowing with gratitude, with joyful lips shew forth his praise. Let the language of our hearts, on this day, be, Let the people praise thee, O Lord ; let all the people praise thee. Bless the Lord, O our souls, and forget not all his benefits. Why should the wonders he hath wrought be forgotten, or lost in silence ?

3. Let the streams of the divine goodness, which flow to us in such great variety, and in such rich abundance, serve to lead us to himself, the great original and source of all good. Real personal religion is the only true security both of public virtue and of private happiness. " O taste and see," then, " that the Lord is good." And let each of us address ourselves in the language of the Psalmist, " Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee."

4. Let me recommend to you such manners, and such modes of living, as become republicans and free men, and as will tend to preserve the liberty and privileges which you enjoy, and to transmit them safe to posterity. Flattery, suppleteness, servility of conduct, and all the silly parade of compliment and ceremony, are below the noble and generous spirit of a free-man ; and fit only to ef-

tablish and support the throne of usurpation and tyranny. Idleness, prodigality, dissipation, and luxury are the bane of republicanism and of liberty ; and the scenes and amusements which tend to foster these, are the hot beds of vice, from which such noxious vapors arise as will taint and pollute our political atmosphere. A nation become sensual, luxurious, and effeminate, cannot possibly be long free. In such a case, the rulers become corrupt with the people. But were not this the case, were they to remain ever so virtuous and upright, the people are not in a capacity to be free. Their various excesses and enormities require the iron rod to be laid heavy upon them, to be a restraint to those vicious and ungovernable dispositions which are the enemies of all peace and order.

Are you possessed of large wealth? Have you more than heart could wish, or you know how to dispose of? Instead of squandering it away in those courses which are fruitless of comfort, which leave a sting behind them, and which will end in death, employ it for the assistance of the honest and industrious, who may be in low circumstances, and have many to provide for. Help them forward in the world. Let the blessings of them that are ready to perish, come upon you, and cause the heart of the widow and fatherless to sing for joy. This will be service well pleasing to God, and, believe me, it will be a source of rational pleasure to your own minds.

5. In the last place. As a mean of securing the continuance and increase of the goodness of God to you, let me caution you against the influence of faction and party. Beware of the man who is artful and industrious in exciting your prejudices, and inflaming your passions. Whilst the public

good is made the ostensible, pride, ambition, and interest are generally the real motives by which the leaders of party are inflamed. The people, by attaching themselves to the interests of different party leaders, make themselves their dupes, instead of their constituents and their judges. And you may lay it down as an important principle, that the person who is anxiously solicitous to be advanced to office, or to obtain some place of public trust, more especially if he can submit to any mean and servile measures for obtaining it, is seldom, if ever, qualified to fill it with integrity and reputation. As, in a republican government, all authority and power is derived from the people, it becomes them to view men and measures with calmness and steady deliberation. This they utterly disqualify themselves for, when they suffer their minds to be blinded, and their judgments warped, by party influence.

Not to mention parties which are local and more confined in their influence, it is too well known that parties exist in our general government.—— These parties mutually charge each other with views and designs unfriendly to the liberty, the good government, and the welfare of the country; and have been active to engage the public mind on their behalf. The one party, it is alledged, aim at the introduction of monarchy, or to form an aristocracy unfavorable to the equal rights of men: and the other with views subversive of all subordination, order, and good government, and tending to introduce a scene of anarchy and confusion.

It is, indeed, too often the case, that, on the one hand, men in power are disposed to increase and abuse it; and, on the other, that clamors and prejudices are excited against the most upright and

faithful. But in this case you will permit me to say, that whatever the views and designs of a few individuals may be, the imputations, on both sides, are generally and equally unjust. The true state of the case appears to me to be this—That the one party thinks the constitution would admit of improvements, and ought to be amended: the other, that it is better as it is, and might be injured by any attempts to alter it.

Granting this to be the real state of the case, as it appears to me it is, what occasion is there that the public mind should be put into a ferment, or our citizens violently arrange themselves in different parties about it? Reason and deliberation presided in the adoption of the constitution. Let reason and deliberation preside in all discussions respecting its alteration or amendment, and all will be well. Are not a good constitution, a good government, liberty and privileges equally the concern of all? The man who engages in a conspiracy against them, conspires against himself.

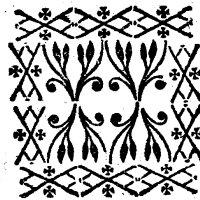
Let not those parts of the constitution which might be altered for the better, if any such there are, be adhered to, and retained with a foolish and pernicious obstinacy: neither let a licentious and turbulent spirit dare to attempt the destruction of a good constitution, or the subversion of a constitutional and just government.

But, my brethren, zeal for my country, and a wish to promote peace and order, may have carried me too far into politics.

To return, then, to the more important business of the day, and to conclude the whole, let me beseech you to join with me in the sentiments and

with of the Psalmist, Psalm 72. 18, 19, "Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name forever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and Amen."

F I N I S.



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