

**The Claims of Past and Future Generations on
Civil Rulers.**

A

SERMON,

PREACHED AT

The Annual Election,

MAY 25, 1825.

BEFORE

HIS HONOR MARCUS MORTON, Esq.
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR,

THE HONORABLE COUNCIL, AND THE LEGISLATURE OF
MASSACHUSETTS.

BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE,
PASTOR OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN WEST SPRINGFIELD.

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*Winslow Lewis tract
New England Historic Genealogical Society*

Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

IN SENATE, MAY 26, 1825.

ORDERED, That the Hon. Messrs. AUSTIN, MILLS and KING, be a Committee to wait upon the Rev. WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, and in the name of the Senate, to thank him for the sermon by him delivered before His Honor the Lieutenant Governor, and the Honorable Council, and the two branches of the Legislature, and to request a copy thereof for the press.

Attest

PAUL WILLARD, Clerk.

SERMON.

LUKE.....XII. 48.

UNTO WHOMSOEVER MUCH IS GIVEN, OF HIM SHALL BE MUCH REQUIRED.

THIS declaration of our Lord contains a principle of great extent and importance. We all practically acknowledge it in the common intercourse of life ; in what we expect, and in what we require, of our fellow men.— It is recognised in every form of government, and in the very constitution of civil society. It constitutes a prominent feature in the divine administration ;—the equitable rule for deciding the retributions of the world to come. It reaches the case of every individual, no matter whether he occupy the loftiest, or the obscurest station in society. And it is withal so simple, that the most humble capacity cannot fail to comprehend it. You must extinguish the light of man's reason, or his original sense of right and wrong, before you can even bring it into question ; for it is founded in the unchanging laws of moral obligation.

It is obvious that there rests upon every man a two fold responsibility ; arising from the relations which he sustains to God, on the one hand, and to his fellow men, on the other. He is responsible to God, as the parent of his existence, and of every blessing, which renders that existence desirable. To his fellow men he is responsible, as possessing, in some measure, the means of rendering them good and happy ; and, especially, as being united with them in the nearer, or more remote relations of society. It is not easy to conceive of an individual so completely insulated, as to be absolved from all social obligation ; but even if that were possible, he would still be accountable as a creature of God. Nothing can sever the relation which man holds to his Creator, but an annihilating act, which should blot out man's rational existence.

You will readily perceive, that the text admits of easy accommodation to any station or relation in life. It is my purpose, on the present occasion, to consider it in its application to CIVIL RULERS ; and thus applied, the import of it will be, that *they, who are elevated to office, act under a responsibility, proportioned to the magnitude of the interests with which they are entrusted.*

As government is of divine institution, so the authority of rulers is derived originally from God : to him, therefore, they must ultimately be accountable. But, in a subordinate sense, it is derived from their fellow men ; for it pertains to the nature of government, that the power

possessed by rulers is a voluntary deposite from the people. It hence follows, that they are responsible to the people for the use which they make of it. And while this responsibility primarily respects the generation to which they immediately belong, it reaches backward to generations that are past, and forward to those which are to come. It is in this latter view—as it respects past and future generations, that I purpose to consider the responsibility of rulers, at the present time ; for it is an error not peculiar to any class of men, and, therefore, incident to those in authority, that they are too prone to act in view of the present, to the exclusion of both the past and the future ;—to forget that they sustain relations of immense importance, which lie beyond their immediate field of vision. You will indulge me, therefore, honoured auditors, in an attempt to confirm the impression of your high obligations, while, in this restricted view of the text, I endeavour to *illustrate the responsibility of civil rulers, from the relations which they sustain to past and future generations ; and notice some of the claims which those relations involve.*

I. I am, first, to *illustrate the responsibility of civil rulers, from the relations which they sustain to past and future generations.*

As it respects the generations that are *past*, this responsibility may appear from a reference to the prominent *objects* of publick interest, at which they have aimed, and

the *labours* and *sacrifices*, which have been sustained for their attainment and preservation.

These objects are **LEARNING, CIVIL LIBERTY, and RELIGION.**

As to the first of these, viz. **LEARNING**—it has often been remarked, as a peculiarly auspicious circumstance, that the settlement of New-England was subsequent to the revival of letters in Europe ; and that our fathers, with an ardent attachment to religious liberty, brought hither a high sense of the value of intellectual improvement. They were men, who had been accustomed to breathe an enlightened atmosphere, and some of them were among the very master-spirits of the age ; and the moment they became inhabitants here, though all around was dark and wild, there appeared, in this New-England sky, the morning star of intellectual glory. They judged—and they judged rightly—that ignorance is incompatible with a high degree of publick prosperity ; and that the developement of the intellectual powers is not more essential to the dignity and perfection of man's rational nature, than to the stability of civil government. Hence they made it an object of primary concern, to provide the proper means of education, and to bring these means in contact with every mind over which they had control. Among the earliest of their transactions, were the measures which they adopted in respect to the education of their children ; and while yet the wilderness had hardly begun to retire before the hand of civilization, they

had made ample and permanent provision for the improvement of posterity.* And this enlightened regard to education, which glowed in the bosoms of the fathers, was cherished with equal solicitude by their offspring; and happily for us, it has suffered no diminution, hitherto, from its descent through the line of their posterity. Each generation, as it has passed away, has left some monument of literary or scientific enterprize; some institutions for the diffusion of useful knowledge; something to mark an era of advancing intellectual improvement. And surely no higher testimony can be rendered to the fidelity of our ancestors in the cause of learning, than is found

*It is well known that the University at Cambridge was founded in 1640, just twenty years after the first landing at Plymouth. In May, 1647, the following act, making provision for schools, was passed by the General Court; and has been continued, with some modification, to the present time.

“It is ordered by this Court and authority thereof; that every township within this jurisdiction, after the Lord hath increased them to the number of fifty householders, shall then forthwith appoint one within their towns, to teach all such children as shall resort to him, to write and read, whose wages shall be paid, either by the parents, or masters of such children, or by the inhabitants in general, by way of supply, as the major part of those, that order the prudentials of the town, shall appoint: provided that those, who send their children, be not oppressed by paying much more than they can have them taught for in other towns.

And be it further ordered, that where any town shall increase to the number of one hundred families, or householders, they shall set up a grammar school, the master thereof being able to instruct youth, so far as they may be fitted for the University: and if any town neglect the performance hereof, above one year, then every such town shall pay five pounds per annum to the next such school, till they shall perform this order.”

See *Ancient Charters, and Colony and Province Laws of Massachusetts Bay*. Page 186, Chap. 88.

in the fact, that there is, at this moment, hardly a spot beneath the face of Heaven, with which, in respect to the general diffusion of the means of knowledge, New-England may not bear a triumphant comparison.

Another prominent object to which the attention of past generations has been drawn, is **CIVIL LIBERTY**. The degree of liberty which any people enjoy, depends immediately upon the nature of their government, and the manner in which it is administered ; for notwithstanding the dreams of some political enthusiasts, there is, in a state of anarchy, nothing of freedom but the name. And that the highest degree of liberty may be enjoyed, it is necessary, not only that the government in itself be good, but that it be accommodated to the genius, habits, and situation of the people. There was every thing in the character and circumstances of our fathers, to lead them to form a high estimate of civil liberty, and just views of the nature of government. Besides being men of enlarged minds, they had had the opportunity of observing the operation of different forms of government, and of noticing the elements both of their weakness and their stability. They had learned to regard an alliance between church and state as contrary to nature ;—as equally hostile to the civil and religious interests of man. Under these advantages, they organized themselves as a political body ; and the constitution which they adopted, displayed the vigor and maturity of enlightened statesmen, and combined the elements of future national greatness. And though, at a

subsequent period, this form of government was, in some degree, modified by the mother country, lest we should seem to forget our dependence upon her, yet, the moment that Britain became oppressive, the spirit of resistance shot an electric impulse through ten thousand bosoms. Whether we confine our views to our own state, or extend them to the family of states of which ours is a member, every page of our history exhibits evidence, that our ancestors have been the faithful guardians of civil liberty.

The only remaining object of publick interest which I shall notice, as having been cherished by the generations, which have gone before us, is RELIGION. Every one knows that the settlement of New England originated in the love of religious liberty. No other principle in the human breast inspires such invincible fortitude, or acts with such irresistible energy. You may abridge man's physical liberty, and shut out from him the light of Heaven, and you will not have awakened so powerful a principle of resistance, as when you attempt to cramp the operations of the immortal mind, in a concern that lies immediately between man and his Maker. Our fathers, acting under the high impulse derived from persecution, adopted into their system of government the principles of religious toleration ; and if, in some instances, they may seem to have lost sight of these principles in their practice, who, that considers the spirit of the age, and the Omnipotence of habit, but will find a ready apology for

the error? But after all, they laid, broad and deep, the foundation of religious liberty; and on this foundation, succeeding generations have built, of durable and precious materials, a magnificent superstructure. From the very beginning of our political existence, this has been, in general, the favoured land of religious freedom; a refuge from the storms of persecution; a spot where the rights of conscience have been considered inviolable; and where different modes of faith, and different forms of worship, have alike been protected by the broad shield of civil authority.

But it was not merely religious *liberty*, towards which the regards of our ancestors were so strongly drawn;—they were equally zealous for the support of religious *institutions*. They adopted it, as a fundamental maxim, that man cannot be happy in any capacity without being virtuous; that the grand pillar upon which government must ultimately rest, is Religion; and that there is an indissoluble connection between the prevalence of religion, and the maintenance of its institutions. Hence they incorporated into their political fabric, a deep regard for the cause of virtue; and threw around the institutions of God the protection of publick authority. They claimed of every individual that he should contribute to the support of the Christian religion, on the equitable ground that he was a sharer in its blessings. For the ministry of the gospel they made liberal provision, as the most efficient engine which Christianity employs; and in con-

nection with this, they enjoined a devout observance of the Sabbath. Such was the spirit of the pilgrims; and thanks to a gracious Providence, this spirit did not expire with them; for in each successive generation, there have been found a host of wise and good men, who have been a wall of fire round about our religious institutions, and have brought to their support the whole amount of their activity and influence.

But if such are the prominent objects, which have awakened the interest of past generations, let us glance, for a moment, at the *labours* and *sacrifices*, which have been sustained in behalf of them. And, on this article, I shall only, in few words, point you to two periods, by way of illustration:—I mean, the period of *the original settlement of New England*, and that of *the revolution, which gave us our national independence*;—for though, in the one case, the immediate object for which they toiled and suffered, was religious liberty, and in the other, civil freedom, yet, in each, the enterprize had an important bearing upon all the dearest interests of man.

In regard to the sacrifices which attended *the original settlement of the country*, little need be said; for happily, most that *can* be said, has been a thousand times repeated, in every form, from the dignified oration down to the stories of childhood. The sufferings of our ancestors, it is well known, did not commence on this side the ocean: in their own country, they were every where met by the persecuting arm of civil power. And such was

the oppression to which they were subject for daring to assert those rights which Heaven has forbidden man to invade, that they broke away from the endearing associations of family and home, and committed themselves to the bosom of the ocean, and the mercy of God. And when they had buffeted with the storms of a protracted voyage, they exchanged the perils of the deep for the perils of the wilderness ; and here, they found themselves without a hovel to shield them from the winds, while the face of nature far and wide, was one bleak field of desolation. I need not tell you, how the horrors of famine clustered upon them ; or how soon half their number had gone to people the land of silence ; or how the savage yell broke up the repose of midnight ; or how the shrieks of houseless, shivering infancy, struck, like the knell of death, upon a mother's heart. There was that in the sufferings of the pilgrims which the most touching eloquence has never told ;—an originality of human woe, which cast into the shade the common calamities incident to men. And when the first generation, wearied and worn out by vicissitude, laid themselves down to rest in the grave, their children entered into their labours ; and while they reaped a rich harvest of privileges from the sufferings of their fathers, they sowed, in their own tears, the seeds of prosperity for the next generation. Say, then, sons of the pilgrims, what value will ye affix to that legacy, which comes down sealed with the privations and tears of the fathers of New England ?

But every estimate of the sacrifices of past generations will be extremely imperfect, which does not take into view the sufferings of our *revolutionary contest*; for, if it cost some of the dearest interests of the fathers to originate our privileges; it cost some of the best blood of their descendants to preserve them. Never, perhaps, was there a contest commenced, in which the conflicting powers seemed more unequal; but yet, in truth, the infants' arm was nerved with the giant's strength; the most invincible energy lay on the side of the greatest apparent weakness;—for on that side, was truth, and right, and Heaven. It rarely happens that an oppressed people cast off the yoke, without a desperate struggle; for while, on the one hand, the very act of determining to be free, at once supposes and inspires an invincible heroism; on the other, there is no hand, that wields the thunderbolts of war with more desolating energy, than the hand of oppression. Though our fathers could, with confidence, commit their cause to the God of armies, and often received tokens of his favour, and finally obtained complete success, yet, in the progress of the contest, there were scenes exhibited, the very thought of which makes the heart bleed. There are many now among us, who have in vivid remembrance, those days of peril and conflict. There are those who recollect how the flames of our conflagrated villages went up to heaven; how the green fields were despoiled of their beauty by the march of armies, and the soil fattened with the blood of those

who had tilled it. There are some widows and mothers still left, who will tell you how they watched and wept at midnight, longing, and yet dreading to hear the event of some decisive battle ; and then, how the current of life set back, when they were told that their husbands and sons would return to them no more. And there is, here and there, a revolutionary patriot, not yet fallen before the hand of death, who led his countrymen into the field, and some, who bear the marks of wounds, which constituted part of the price of our country's glory. So long as the record of our revolution remains, and, especially, so long as we can converse with those, who shared in its perils, and bled in its battles, we can hardly form a moderate estimate of those privileges which it was designed to secure.

There are other occasions than those which I have mentioned—occasions interwoven with our whole history, to which I might refer you for evidence of the sacrifices of past generations ; but what I have already said is all that the time will permit, and it is sufficient for my present purpose. Now, as preceding generations have done and suffered so much in behalf of the interests of Learning, Liberty, and Religion, and as these interests are confided, in an important sense, to civil rulers, who does not see that there hence devolves upon them a corresponding obligation to be faithful ? In committing this important trust to your hands, your ancestors remind you that it is a monument of their toils and trials ; and as

the sons of the pilgrims, and the sons of those, who bled in the revolution, they bid you cherish it with most sacred fidelity.

Having now illustrated the responsibility of rulers, from the relation which they bear to past generations, allow me, for a few moments, to direct your attention to the counterpart of this, *in respect to the generations which are yet to come*. I will illustrate this part of the subject, from *the progressive operation of influence upon society*, from *the analogy of experience*, and from *the peculiar circumstances of our country*.

The progressive operation of influence upon society, cannot have escaped the notice of any person of observation ; and its bearing upon the responsibility of civil rulers, is scarcely less obvious. You may place a person of any character, in any situation, where he shall see and converse with human beings, and you will strive in vain to neutralize his influence. No matter how great may be his intellectual degradation, or how unanimously he may be excluded from the decent walks of life, there are those, whom his opinions and example will, in some measure, controul. It is an inherent quality in the constitution of society—the ordinance of Heaven—a law of the moral world, that human beings associated together, should be subject to each other's influence. And this influence is not limited to the brief period of human life ;—it is what remains of us after we are gone down to the grave ; and it will continue to operate till the grave shall

give up its dead. Nay, there is no limit which you can assign to its operation ; for the beings upon whom it acts, are immortal ; and no doubt it will be felt through every period of their existence.

It is obvious, then, that the influence of every person is in direct proportion to the number and importance of his relations. Though there is none of us, that lives for himself alone, yet there are some, whose relations constitute a medium, which enables them to reach almost every pore of society ; every action of whose lives seems to be the property of the world, and of future generations, as well as of the present. This is true, in a high degree, of civil rulers. The influence which they exert, has but just begun to operate, until they and the generation to which they belong, are dead. The visible materials, which constitute society, after a few years, change ; but there is a sort of moral machinery—the life and soul of the body politick, which, though liable to derangement, is not identified, in its existence, with any generation. It is this high deposite—all that is perpetual in the fabrick of society, with which civil rulers are charged ; and the manner in which they discharge their trust, must, of course, have an important bearing upon the welfare of posterity. They are entrusted with the interests of those, who, by the ordinance of God, are subject to the influence of measures, which they can neither sanction nor oppose ; and hence the obligation to guard these interests with the most vigilant attention.

But, if the obligation of civil rulers to future generations be apparent from the progressive manner in which influence operates upon society, it is not less manifest from *the analogy of experience*. You may look into the history of any community, and you will find that the measures adopted by its rulers, at any given period, have, usually, in proportion to their importance, exerted an influence upon succeeding generations. There is probably no period in the history of any country, to which this remark may not apply ; for though there are seasons of political quiet, in which the wisdom and energy of legislators are but moderately taxed, yet such are the various connexions and dependences of society, that it is hardly possible that the influence of any publick measure should die with the generation in which it originates : and though a revolution should succeed, which might seem to new-model the very structure of society, you will still find that it has not borne away all the effects of former legislation.— There are, however, some periods, in which the course pursued by civil rulers, has not only a *bearing* upon the interests of posterity, but manifestly *decides* their condition ;—some great occasions, on which it is for a few men to say, whether the prosperity of unborn generations shall be sacrificed or secured. Not to go beyond our own country for examples, and not to multiply examples from that ;—how manifestly were the destinies of many generations entrusted by Heaven to that body of men, who decided that we should prosecute our revolu-

tionary conflict ; or who framed that noble instrument—the charter of our country's liberty. And indeed, you may fix your eye upon *any* period of the political history either of our commonwealth, or country, and you will find, though in an inferior degree, an illustration of the same principle. All experience proves that the political as well as moral iniquities of rulers, are visited upon succeeding generations ; and on the other hand, that all that is just, and honest, and of good report, in their administration, is propagated, by many nameless influences, to posterity.— If then, the thing that *hath* been, is that which *shall* be ;— if the order of Providence, in this respect, be uniform, it is manifest that civil rulers of the present generation are acting for generations to come.

There is yet another consideration, which may help to illustrate the responsibility of civil rulers, in reference to future generations ;—and that is, *the peculiar situation of our country*. I refer to *its rapidly increasing population*, and to *the attitude which it holds in the view of foreign nations*.

The *population* of this country, whether we take into view the whole period from its original settlement, or fix upon any particular portion of it, has, in respect to the rapidity of its progress, had no parallel in modern times. When it is recollected that but little more than two centuries have passed away, since it became the residence of civilized man, and that it now contains, probably, more than ten millions of inhabitants ; and, moreover, that there

are many causes in operation, still to advance the ratio of its increase, a prospect opens before us, which, at first view, seems more like the dream of an erratic fancy, than the calculation of sober judgment. The distant mountains and vallies, which, but a few years since, were the undisputed dominion of savages and wild beasts, are now smiling under the hand of cultivation, exhibiting the improvements of civilized life, and temples for the worship of God. And it requires not the spirit of prophecy to perceive that, at no distant period, this same spirit of enterprise, which has already penetrated so far into the wilderness, will have peopled the shores of the western ocean. Who does not see that this feature in the state of our country, invests the office of civil rulers with high responsibility; for not only will their influence be felt by future generations, but each successive generation, for ages to come, will, probably, surpass by millions the one which preceded it. I admit, indeed, that this consideration falls with its greatest weight, upon those, who are more immediately active in the concerns of the nation; for every pulsation at the seat of political life, vibrates to the remotest part of the body. But to those, who are entrusted with the government of the different states, and especially, to you, honoured guardians of this commonwealth, this consideration should convey a deep impression of responsibility. Though the influence which you exert upon the nation, be neither so direct, or so universal, as that, which proceeds from her supreme councils, yet,

such is the sympathy, which exists between the different branches of our republick, that if one member suffer, the other members will, in some measure, suffer with it ; and besides, there are multitudes emigrating, and probably still to emigrate, from within the sphere of your immediate administration, who will carry with them into distant regions the characters which they have here formed, and will transmit them to posterity. It is not a wild conjecture to suppose that there may hereafter be large communities, where the foot of civilized man has never yet trod, whose character you may have assisted to form, and whose destiny your measures may continue to influence, after your bodies shall have returned to the dust, as they were, and your spirits to God, who gave them.

The other circumstance connected with the situation of our country, to which I adverted, is *the attitude which it holds in the view of foreign nations.* The history of republicks has generally been short ; and not unfrequently, it has been written in blood. Such had been the result of all the attempts of former times to maintain a republican government, that the nations marvelled when they saw *us* repeating the experiment. They told us that we were deaf to the voice of experience ; and that we were resigning ourselves to the delusions of political childhood ; and that we should wake from our dreams only in season to witness our destruction. But so it has not yet proved. I will not venture an opinion on the question, whether or not the grand experiment in relation to the practicability of man's

being both free and happy, has been brought to its legitimate result : but be that as it may, it admits of no question that our government has already exerted an important influence upon the destinies of other nations ; and if it should gather stability with age, and for centuries to come, stand forth to the view of the world firm and beautiful, I know not what limit can be assigned to its influence, short of the remotest boundary of civilized society, and the most distant period of time. Now then, when it is remembered that the permanence of our political fabrick is to have such a mighty bearing upon the prosperity of other nations, can we resist the impression, that our civil rulers are charged with interests of immense importance ; and that it is scarcely too much to say, that they, who are called to legislate for our country, or for any portion of it, at the present day, are, in fact, legislating for the world, through every future generation.

II. I have now closed the illustration which I proposed of the responsibility of rulers, from their relation to future generations ; and with it, the first article of my discourse. I proceed, secondly, to *notice, more particularly, some of the claims involved in the relations which I have been considering.*

I. It is incumbent on civil rulers, in view of their relations to past and future generations, that *they guard against a restless spirit of change.* Far be it from me to plead for a blind and indiscriminate reverence for antiquity ; for I well know that as man is now a fallible

being, so he has ever been ; and the deductions of human Reason are always liable to partake of human imperfection. It is, therefore, unquestionably, the duty of civil rulers to purge away the dross of former ages ; not to be the more indulgent towards an error, because it may have been rocked in the same cradle, and cherished by the same hands, with the dearest interests of our country.— It is right, too, that the measures of civil government should correspond with the exigences of the community ; and that changes should be made to meet the different attitudes which it may assume. But all this is very remote from that spirit of innovation, which is never at rest, except when the elements around are in a commotion, and the fountains of the great deep seem likely to be broken up. I do not mean that this spirit is peculiar to those in authority : I regard it rather as belonging, in a greater or less degree, to human nature ; but when it happens to gain possession of those, to whom are committed the destinies of a state or nation, it acts with a most malignant energy. It sweeps away the ancient landmarks of society, and levels with the dust the fairest monuments of legislation, and brands with contempt every system of policy, which has received the sanction of other generations. Let whatever has descended to us—I repeat it—of the fruits of error, in former days, be corrected ; but let not the hand of innovation blot out any thing, that is praiseworthy or venerable. Our institutions are not the less valuable—they are the more so—from having origin-

ated in the wisdom of our fathers ; for while they have gathered, in a good degree, the honours of age, they have yielded *us* far better advantages of intellectual and moral culture, than if they had been the product of our own labour, and of course, were now in their infancy. He, therefore, who rudely assails them, is guilty of a kind of parricide ; of palsying the hand that has fed him, and of striking a dagger into the heart, not merely of venerable age, but of parental tenderness.

Against this spirit in civil rulers, those, who have passed off the stage, and those, who are hereafter to occupy it, enter a united remonstrance. The language of past generations is, "do not sacrifice to an impatient desire of change, the fruit of our toils and sufferings, or hastily cast away that, which has the testimony of ages in its favour." The language of future generations is, "beware how you divert from its course that stream of blessings, which originated in the sacrifices and piety of our ancestors, and which has, hitherto, flowed onward in the line of their descendants. Beware how you alienate the goodly inheritance which was designed for us, and entail upon us the bitter result of experiment and innovation."

II. Another claim which past and future generations have upon civil rulers, is, that *they should pursue a liberal policy, in respect to our domestick and foreign relations.* So powerful is the selfish principle in the human heart, that it is a most difficult task even for good men effectually to restrain its operations ; and perhaps there is hard-

ly any petition which the Christian, especially, in a responsible station, has more frequent occasion to offer, than that he may be kept from a low and partial estimate of duty, and may expand his views and feelings to embrace the whole circle of his relations. They, who are charged with the office of legislating for a community, are, especially, bound to adopt an elevated and liberal principle of action. If the venerable legislators of this commonwealth, should, at any time, find that the interests of different portions of it should seem to clash, and that what might increase the prosperity of one section, would diminish that of another, they are bound, so far as they can, to pursue a policy, which may harmonize conflicting interests; and while they take care not to violate any of the claims of private justice, they are to have an ultimate regard to the common good of those for whom they legislate. And so too, in respect to our national councils—if there should sometimes be an interference between the interests of different states, or between those of a single state, and all the rest, which compose our republick, it is the duty of legislators, while they pay a proper respect to local rights, to act in view of the highest interests of this great community. And to extend the principle still further—if our country, as a member of the commonwealth of nations, should, at any time, have an opportunity to aggrandize itself at the expence of other nations, it would be, at once, a violation of genuine patriotism, and sound morality, to avail ourselves of it. A

curse will forever hang upon the footsteps of such a policy; and if it should seem to confer upon our country a temporary elevation, it would ultimately mar its glory, and would, probably, be visited in national judgments upon our children's children.

It is impossible to look back upon the history of our country, without perceiving how much we are indebted for our present prosperity, to that liberal system of policy, which has generally been pursued by those, who have gone before us. It is with this, no doubt, that we are to connect the fact, that the interests of different sections of our commonwealth and country, are so happily balanced, and that our relations to foreign countries are, on the whole, so desirable. And through this happy state of things, there is conveyed to civil rulers a charge from preceding generations, to go and do likewise; while it is echoed, by millions of voices, from an unborn posterity. It would be treason to the dead, to put at unnecessary hazard that publick harmony which they strove so earnestly to establish; and it would be cruelty to those who shall come after us, to sow the seeds of domestick faction, or foreign invasion, which, in their day, should spring up, and yield a plentiful harvest of publick calamity.

3. It obviously results from the relations which civil rulers sustain to past and future generations, that *they should extend a liberal patronage to the cause of education*. It is not, in respect to the influence of learning, with communities, as with individuals. Though it is true,

indeed, that the enlargement of the intellectual powers is always an addition to human enjoyment, unless it be rendered otherwise by the countervailing influence of depravity, or by some accidental circumstance of our condition, yet it is also true, that an individual of extremely limited capacities and cultivation, may, on the whole, enjoy a good degree of happiness ; for beside that which results from a well balanced state of the affections, he may have many external means of happiness ; and, especially, he may live in the secure and quiet enjoyment of all his rights. But there is obviously implied, in this very case, an enlightened publick sentiment ; for this is essential to the existence of good government, without which the rights, even of an individual, could not be secure. You may fairly calculate, that in proportion as ignorance prevails in a community, civil government will partake of the character of despotism, and the amount of publick happiness will, in the same ratio, be diminished.

In every well-regulated community, it is necessary that there should be some men of high intellectual attainments, not only to controul the complicated machinery of civil government, but to establish and sustain publick institutions, and to impart respectability to publick character. And it is peculiarly demanded by the genius of *our* government, which recognizes no other sovereignty than the will of the people, that, while there should be some, who have drank deep at the wells of learning, there should be a general diffusion of knowledge through all

classes of society; for if the administration of government is actually in the hands of a few, it is committed to them by the voluntary suffrages of a majority of the people. Hence there results a necessity that while we should have some literary institutions, which may furnish extensive advantages to those, who have the ability and disposition for intellectual pursuits, there should be provision for carrying the means of what is usually termed a good common education to every family and individual in the community. And, happily for us, through the wisdom of our fathers, and the smiles of Providence, we, of this commonwealth, at least, have this double necessity supplied, in our university and colleges, on the one hand, and our academies and common schools, on the other. Let this system of means, then, for extending useful knowledge, which has had the sanction of long experience, be sacredly guarded by our legislators. Let them recollect that the stability, the energy, the very existence of our government, may depend, in a great measure, upon the protection and encouragement, which are extended to the cause of learning. Remember that the good and great men, who have gone before you, have been nursing fathers to our literary institutions, and that they have a right to require that the fruit of their labours and sufferings should not be sacrificed in the hands of their successors. And remember, too, that they who will live after you are dead, will bless your memories for every effort in the cause of learning, as having contributed to

perpetuate our republican institutions, and to render posterity more wise and happy.

4. I will only add, fourthly, that the relations which civil rulers bear to past and future generations, demand that *they should guard, with great care, the interests of religion*. I am not here about to plead the cause of any religious sect; for if there be one feature in our constitution upon which I dwell with more satisfaction than the rest, it is that, which recognizes a perfect equality among all Christian denominations.—Not that I believe the faith of all denominations to be equally pure and good: far from it;—but I believe that the faith of every man, provided it do not, in its practical results, infringe the interests of his fellow men, is a matter, which does not fall within the cognizance of any human tribunal: and when our constitution extends its protection to the right of private judgment, it only echoes a sentiment which the voice of nature, and reason, and conscience, had always proclaimed. Civil government, then, has nothing to do with the peculiarities of different sects: its only legitimate sphere is ground common to them all;—*the support of religious institutions, and the suppression of publick vices*.

The very existence of religion in a community implies the maintenance of its *institutions*; particularly, that of publick worship. If then, christianity operates with a most benign influence upon a community, and upon every member of it, in respect to temporal interests, it is not an oppressive act in government to require that every individual

should contribute to its support; and, especially, to that institution with which its existence seems to be identified. And it is the duty of civil rulers, not only to protect the institution of christian worship, but to extend their patronage to *other* religious institutions, on the ground that they are of publick utility. There is not a man in the community whom you defraud or oppress, when you enact laws for the publick support of religion; or when you lend your aid, in any way, to promote the influence of the Gospel. There may be those, who are too ignorant, or too ungrateful, to acknowledge their obligation; but the truth is, that that very religion which they would leave to beg and starve, is pouring around them almost all the blessings which render life desirable.

But, if the authority of civil rulers extends legitimately to the support of religious institutions, so also it does to *the suppression of publick vices*. I know that the law of God alone can take cognizance of sin, as it exists in the heart; but when it blazes forth in acts of open transgression, it falls fairly within the reach of *human* law. Let vice, then, especially, in its more flagrant forms, be always met by a stern rebuke from publick authority. I have not time to speak, particularly, of the crimes of perjury, and blasphemy, and the violation of the Sabbath, and many other publick sins, with which we as a commonwealth, are chargeable: nor is there time, if the occasion would warrant it, to dwell on the ominous fact, that in some parts of our country, publick opinion sanctions the abominable

doctrine that *man vindicates his honour, when he takes his brother's life*; that this doctrine is defended by men in authority; and that even those, who hold a place in our national councils, sometimes go out from the hall of legislation into the field of death, and hurry each other into eternity, in defiance of the wrath of God. I will only say, if there be an energy in civil government, let that energy be roused to action. Let not the sword of justice sleep in its scabbard, while vice walks abroad, scattering firebrands and death in the face of day. By a vigorous and faithful execution of the laws, let every bad man have a practical demonstration, that shall come home to his bosom, that the way of transgressors is hard.

And here, I cannot forbear to say, that one of the most efficient auxiliaries which civil rulers can have in the suppression of vice, is their own good example; and, on the other hand, the arm of civil government is never so effectually paralyzed in the prevention of crime, as when those, who are entrusted with publick authority, violate the laws which they have themselves made, or which it is their duty to execute. If, for instance, they, who are elevated to the highest places of trust, disregard the obligation of the Sabbath, and deliberately pervert it to purposes of business or recreation, there are multitudes, who will be eagle-eyed to discover every such abuse, and trumpet-tongued to proclaim it, as a warrant for their own contempt of this sacred institution. One solitary instance of the gross violation of the Sabbath in an individual, might

counteract the influence of hundreds, who should faithfully exert themselves to secure the observance of it. Let civil rulers, then, beware, that their own example does not oppose an obstacle to the execution of their trust. Let them take heed, lest they not only bear the sword in vain, but be partakers of other men's sins.

On this subject, I cannot urge the claims of our ancestors, or of posterity, on civil rulers, with sufficient zeal.—Who, that has ever heard of the pilgrims, does not know that they were men, who cared for nothing so much as the cause of religion ;—men, who would attempt any thing, hazard any thing, sacrifice any thing, to enjoy and extend the blessings of the Gospel? Who has not heard that their very first transactions related to the establishment of publick worship ; and that all that they did, and all that they suffered, was, primarily, with a view to secure to posterity the blessings of christian liberty, and christian institutions. They speak to you, civil rulers, from their graves, and remind you of the high trust with which you are charged, as the guardians of those religious privileges, which it cost them almost every thing valuable to procure ; and all the generations, which have preceded you, unite their claims with those of the pilgrims, and offer a loud and earnest plea in behalf of the interests of religion.

But, here, again, the claim of posterity is not less imperative ; for if, not only the fostering hand of publick authority should be withdrawn from our religious institutions, but vice should be permitted to stalk abroad with an un-

blushing front, and even insult the powers that be ; think it not strange, if the next generation should find that the fair fabrick of our government, which promised so well, is yielding to decay ; and that your children's children should see it in ruins. Though yet unborn, they address you, as they are advancing towards the threshold of existence, and say, "*whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.*"

But, while I have endeavoured thus to present the claims of past and future generations upon civil rulers, I rejoice that there is so much in the occasion on which we are assembled, to warrant the conviction, that these claims will be sacredly regarded. I rejoice in the confidence that I speak to men of enlightened and liberal views, whose integrity and patriotism constitute a pledge that they will be faithful to the interests, both of our commonwealth, and our common country.

His Honor, the Lieutenant Governor, will please to accept, with the congratulations of the occasion, our highest regard. Having acquitted himself with honour in the different walks of publick usefulness, he has been called, during the past year, in consequence of the death of our chief magistrate, to sustain the burden of duty and care, incident to the highest office in the state ; and I am sure that I only echo a publick sentiment, when I bear testimony to the discretion and dignity by which his deportment has been marked. It is a just occasion of congratulation to the publick, that he is still to be continued in

their service, and still to act in one of the most responsible stations in our executive government. May his public career continue to be, as it has been, honourable and useful; and may the gratitude of his fellow citizens, and the approbation of his conscience here, and the everlasting favour of God hereafter, constitute his reward.

We congratulate our commonwealth on the recent election of a chief magistrate of acknowledged talents and worth, and on the propitious circumstances in which he comes to the chair of supreme authority. It must be to him a source of peculiar satisfaction, that in all the measures which have resulted in this high testimony of public respect, the voice of party has been dumb, and he is accompanied to his office by every demonstration of universal confidence and good will. May this happy event, as pleasing as it is novel in our political annals, prove the harbinger of a quiet and happy administration. May the high expectation, which has so justly been awakened by his distinguished usefulness in other departments of public life, be more than answered; and when he shall retire from his office, may he carry with him the blessings of those, whose united suffrages now welcome him to it.

The Honourable Council will accept the expression of our cordial respect. May they have that discernment and impartiality, which are necessary to the discharge of their responsible trust, and in all their deliberations and decisions, may they scrupulously obey the dictates of an enlightened conscience. We confide in their wisdom and

integrity, because we have known them as the faithful servants of the publick.

We tender our respectful felicitations to the Honourable Senate, and the House of Representatives. You come hither, gentlemen, bringing with you, no doubt, in a high degree, the confidence of your constituents; and we have a right to presume that you also bring with you an enlightened and sincere regard for the publick welfare. But you will bear with me, if I remind you, once more, that the measures which you adopt, while you are together, will act upon the destinies of multitudes, whom you will never see, till you meet them at the judgment. I know that you regard with watchful solicitude the interests of our rising republick; that you take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof. Believe me, the most effectual means of extending and perpetuating her glory, is to purify the land from its iniquities, and to lend your whole influence to the interests of religion. You have done well to sanction, in your legislative capacity, the erection of a monument, to perpetuate the memory of those, who bled at the altar of our country's liberty. I venerate the policy, and the patriotism, which originated, and matured, and is about to execute that noble design.* But I cannot forbear to say, that if our religious institutions should be suffered to languish, and the current of iniquity, which is already flowing among us, should become still broader, and deeper, and more desolating, then

* The 17th of June is the day appointed for laying the corner stone of the Bunker Hill Monument.

that very structure, which shall ere long rise, in proud magnificence, from yonder battle ground, will testify to the inconsistency of the present generation. It will tell to future ages the humiliating fact, that we were digging the grave of our country's liberty, while we were building monuments in honour of those, who had achieved it. God of mercy, let not such an imputation fasten upon us! Give to our legislators the spirit of wisdom, and of a sound mind, that they may sacredly guard the interests committed to them, and send forth a benign and healthful influence through this whole community.

I cannot close this discourse without adverting to one circumstance of unusual occurrence, which must, at least, with some minds, invest this occasion with an air of solemnity:—I refer to the recent inroads which death has made upon the ranks of our supreme authority. Within the political year, which now expires, the chief magistrate of this commonwealth, whose active life had nearly all been given to the service of the publick; who had shared in the perils of our revolution, and occupied some of the most responsible stations in our national government, and, finally, been crowned with the first honours of his native state, has been called to render an account of his stewardship. And while you had yet scarcely done contemplating the littleness of the world, as it was reflected in the pomp and bustle of a publick funeral, another venerable name, which you had delighted to honour, and around which cluster the most interesting associations, suddenly appeared on the register of mortal-

ty.* I stand not here, civil fathers, to eulogize the dead : they hear not the voice of human censure, nor the voice of human praise ; but to you, who are yet among the living, the providence of God bids me address a serious admonition. It charges me to remind you that the pageantry of office is evanescent ; that the shouts of publick applause are worthless ; that the highest honours which the world can bestow, pall upon that spirit which is just taking its flight to the tribunal of Heaven. In that moment of agonizing conflict, when the laurels of earthly distinction shall lie withered around you, may each one of you hear from within, the voice of an approving conscience, and from above, the voice of an approving God. And when not only the murmur of publick applause, or publick censure, but the last whisper of domestick affection shall have died away upon the ear, and you shall have passed the connecting point between time and eternity, may you be greeted with a joyful welcome by the wise and good, who have gone before you, and, finally, be crowned with the blessings of many generations, whom your administration shall have assisted in conducting to glory and virtue.

* His Excellency William Eustis died on the 6th of February, and on the 1st of March, his predecessor, the Honourable John Brooks. The Hon. Solomon Smead, a member of the Council, died on the 17th of April.