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Two Discourses Delivered in Norwich on the Annual Fast, April 1, 1836

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Boston University
TWO

DISCOURSES,

DELIVERED IN NORWICH,

ON THE ANNUAL FAST,

APRIL 1, 1836.

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SERMON

ISAIAH, 26. 15.

"Thou hast increased the nation, O Lord, thou hast increased the nation."

The prophet in this language ascribes the growing power and strength of the kingdom Israel to the providence of God. The doctrine is distinctly recognized in the Scriptures, that the rise and fall of nations are events which take place in accordance with the purposes of Him, who governs the moral universe after the counsel of his own will. In the history of the Hebrew commonwealth, we find striking and instructive developments of a special providence. Next to this, the history of our own favored country furnishes the most interesting and remarkable example of the special interposition of the same overruling providence. To trace the eventful history of this country from the time of its discovery to the present day,—to do this with an eye constantly directed to the manifest agency of an unseen, but all-powerful and all-controlling hand,—is employment interesting not only to the historian and philosopher, but to the christian, who loves to recognize the finger of God in the commencement, the progress, and the result, of the stupendous events which occur in the moral world.

Age had rolled after age, and generation after generation had been swept by the tide of time to that ocean which has neither shore nor bound, before this vast domain of nature was known to civilized man. In the daring enterprise of that little, frail colony, which first anchored near the Plymouth rock, there is a moral sublimity, when contemplated in its mighty bearings, and complicated relations, in view of which,
the strongest, deepest, emotions of admiration are awakened in the mind. That exiled, tempest-tost, band of pilgrims, possessed within their little brotherhood, not only the elements of a christian church, modeled after the primitive, apostolic platform,—but the elements of a free, and enlightened christian nation.

No sooner had they planted their feet on the shores of New England, and in the name of the Lord, set up their banner in the border of the wilderness, than they were an embryo nation. If we will go up the stream of time but two centuries, and from some rude pilgrim cabin survey the little infant nation, and compare it with the present gigantic stature, to which it has grown, the sentiment of the text will be fully realized, and the heart, with devout recognition of the interposing agency of God, will respond, “Thou hast increased the nation, O Lord, thou hast increased the nation.”

And could we travel down the future, another century, and contemplate the vast dimensions of this empire republic, as it then will be, if God shall continue his protecting care, with still deeper emotion would the heart respond the language, “Thou hast increased the nation, &c.”

My purpose in this discourse is to make some remarks on the present circumstances of prosperity, under which, as a people, we exist;—and on the political and moral prospects of the future.

I. The present circumstances of prosperity, under which, as a people, we exist.

We may, with propriety, adopt the language, uttered in respect to the inheritance of Joseph: “Blessed of the Lord is our land, for the precious things of heaven, for the dew, and for the deep that coucheth beneath, and for the precious fruits brought forth by the sun, and for the precious things put forth by the moon, and for the chief things of the ancient moun-

tains, and for the precious things of the lasting hills, and for the precious things of the earth and fulness thereof.”

The circumstances of prosperity, to which I refer, may be contemplated in various points of light. They are prosperous, as it respects means of subsistence and personal comfort. He who has assigned us our lot in pleasant places, “visits the earth and watereth it—he greatly enricheth it with the river of God, which is full of water. He prepareth them corn when he has so provided for it. His paths drop fatness,—they drop upon the pastures of the wilderness, and the little hills rejoice on every side”—From no burning desert does the fearful sirocco breathe out the breath of death; nor is famine ever commissioned to blow mildew from between its “shrivelled lips,” and blight the golden ear. Seasons come and go, each in its turn, laden with treasures of mercy.

In the various departments of business there is an advantageous division of labor, and such an equitable balance of profits, that all capacities and all classes, may find appropriate employment, that shall secure a competent subsistence. Virtuous and frugal industry, though it may not always command the overflows of affluence, will generally secure a competence equally favorable to substantial comfort, and more favorable to the cultivation of those moral feelings, which a sense of dependence is fitted to inspire.

The well directed labor of man will rarely fail to make the mountains, the hills, and the vallies, contribute for his use their “precious things.”—His ever wakeful ingenuity and skill contrive means to bind the elements in chains to serve his convenience, and condense the evanescent vapor into a power, that moves with precision and speed the complicated and prodigious engine.

A delightful feature in the condition of our country is the system of general education so extensively adopted. The
free-school system, which prevails in many of the States, and must ultimately be adopted by all, opens a prospect in regard to the rising generation full of pleasing hope. In most nations mental illumination is confined to a few, while the great mass are doomed to grope through life under the deep shades of ignorance. They who laid the foundations of this rising empire, provided for the universal prevalence of knowledge and intelligence. Though the full benefits of this system are not realized, in consequence of defects which yet remain to be remedied, and the very inadequate views entertained respecting the importance which belongs to the subject;—yet the results which are secured and enjoyed shed a peculiar lustre over the entire aspect of the country, and gild the future with precious promise. To our education system we are indebted, under God, for no small amount of the energy and enterprise which characterize the communities of our land, and impart to American mind such a powerful practical character.

The wisdom of our pilgrim ancestors was no where evinced more strikingly, than in the noble purpose they formed, to render the ample fields of knowledge accessible to all. It was an enlightened community which they were ambitious to plant in the new world, and the benefits of their elevated praiseworthy object, have equalled all that could ever have been anticipated. The union of mental and manual labor is strikingly productive of that high tone of action, that masculine vigor, visible in all the movements of our community. To our primary schools the country must continue to look, as the fountain-head of those influences, on which the power of mind depends—that power, which more than any amount of physical resources, contributes to the firmness, and energy of any commonwealth. The common district school develops and moulds the mighty elements of the nation—and yet this momentous department suffers in consequence of being committed, in many cases, to hands but superficially qualified for the work, and the reason is, that there is scarcely any kind of business, which is not encouraged by more adequate and ample pecuniary compensation. No common laborer would accept the price allowed as a compensation to the teachers of our public schools.

Besides the primary schools scattered among thousands of villages and neighborhoods, there are numerous seminaries of a higher order, where thousands of the youth of our land are receiving the elements of a practical education. Not far from eighty colleges, located in every section of the country, are annually pouring forth the fruits of a cultivated literature. In addition to all these there are numerous professional seminaries, furnishing important and valuable facilities for making thorough and extensive attainments in the ample fields, which the learned professions cover. With these numerous and wide-spread nurseries of mind, the invaluable blessings of education become accessible to those of every class and condition. It is true, that some States in the confederacy have not yet taken that elevated stand in regard to the subject of primary education, which its vast importance demands; yet in this respect, the tendency of things is onward, and the time cannot be distant when, if present measures are followed up, the light of education will shed its benign radiance over every village, and hamlet, and settlement through our wide spread population.

Another auspicious feature in the moral aspect of our country is the existence and voluntary support of religious institutions. The principles of toleration are universally recognized, as the only principles, under which pure religion can prosper. The public recognition of the Sabbath, the observance of the worship of God, the general dissemination of the Scriptures, the establishment of Sabbath schools, and the various humane and benevolent operations of the day, exert and concentrate a degree of moral power of prodigious strength. By it vice is re-
strained, error exposed, the tone of morals elevated, the social virtues cherished, and the christian graces developed and cultivated.

In our religious institutions we recognize the most important and effectual source of that influence, which can hold in check the turbulent passions of the depraved heart. Pure religion, propagated and rendered effectual by the sacred institutions, established for its support, holds a mighty conservative power, which prevents, so far as that power is felt, the abuse of authority, the prevalence of corruption, the restlessness of ambition, and the violation of personal rights and liberty. It is indispensable to sustain that sound and healthy tone of public morals and political integrity, without which government will become weak and powerless, or degenerate into the odious form of an irresponsible despotism. So long as the moral and political machinery of the country shall feel the regulating force of religion, the fond hope may be cherished, that the momentous affairs of the growing nation will move on prosperously.

The operation and success of the great benevolent institutions of our country, constitute a bright and hopeful feature in its moral condition. In sustaining these institutions there is a cooperation of tens of thousands, scattered all over the land.—Though separated by distance and sectional interest, here are common channels in which their sympathies may flow, and through the interest felt in a common object, fraternal sentiments are cherished, which serve to strengthen those ties, and cement that union, so essential to the peace and happiness of a people. While the grating of discord and collision is experienced in respect to many political questions, it is an auspicious circumstance, that there is common ground, on which all who love their country and their God, may stand and act in concert. So long as these benevolent organizations shall continue to enlist in their support the counsels, prayers, and patronage of the

wise and good all over the land, the hope may be confidently cherished, that no political rupture will occur to interrupt the amicable relations, and dissolve that union-chain which binds together the different sections of the country, and consolidates its strength.

The peaceful aspect of our foreign relations is a circumstance, which denotes the continuance of that providential interposition, under which the nation has increased in numbers, wealth, and power. The menace of war, which has for some time past hung lowering in our political horizon, has passed away, and the painful apprehension that prevailed in relation to such a calamity, has given place to cheering anticipations of continued prosperity. When the scourge of war seemed about to fall on our coasts, and involve so many millions of the human family in the deadly relation of murderous hostility, the God of our fathers has in mercy averted the impending evil, and prevented the terrific carnage of battle.

As it respects internal and domestic tranquility, there is nothing as yet, which portends immediately any disastrous rupture. There is the clamor of the demagogue, and the menace of now and then a reckless spirit, designed to create a panic; but the hope need not yet be abandoned, that there is enough of stability, and firmness, and patriotism, and virtue, to preserve the union, and weather the storms of sectional jealousy and party irritation. The war of opinion may be protracted, without resistance unto blood.

In a country which stretches its territory through so many degrees of latitude and longitude, it is to be expected, that there will be conflicting interests. A sound and wise policy—a due regard to the best interests of the nation as a whole, will so adjust measures of extensive bearing, and balance opposing interests, that all shall, so far as practicable, be protected.—And this should be the avowed and steady aim of the general
government, and so far it is, a spirit of mutual conciliation will be promoted.

I have glanced only at some of the auspicious circumstances, which characterize the present condition of our country. We have ample resources of subsistence. Our climate and soil possess such variety, that we are not necessarily dependent on a foreign country, for any indispensable article of subsistence. The system of popular education is extending its influence, and improving in its operations through the results of experience. As a people we inhale the atmosphere of intelligence. Our religious and benevolent institutions, resting for support on the free-will contributions of their friends, are prosperous, and in their influence mighty. Peace dwells in our borders, and prosperity in our habitations. Such is our present condition.

II. I pass on to consider the future prospects of our country. To the philanthropist and politician this subject is fraught with deep and powerful interest. A review of the past shows, how God has increased and prospered the nation. Present circumstances, united with past experience, indicate, in regard to the future, still greater increase as to population and resources.

Let me glance, in the first place, at the political prospects of the country. In geographical resources our nation is immense. Its territory extends through thirty degrees of latitude and sixty-four degrees of longitude. The entire outline of territory belonging to the United States is nine thousand miles. The area is about two millions four hundred and fifty thousand square miles, being about one twentieth part of the land surface of this globe. The greater part of this vast territory is capable of cultivation, and much of it is not surpassed in respect to fertility by any soil known in the world. The gigantic rivers and their tributaries, as they roll through the length of the land, furnish commodious channels for inland navigation. Thou-

sands of miles of such navigation are already improved. The hills and mountains in many places abound in inexhaustible deposits of mineral wealth. The delicious fruits of the tropics, and the substantial productions of higher latitudes, are furnished in rich abundance. The facilities for intercourse, which have almost annihilated distance, bring into apparent proximity the remotest sections of the nation. The consequence is, that every portion is becoming settled with unparalleled rapidity. The rapid increase of the population of the country is a striking peculiarity, and one of deep interest in its political prospects. The resources of soil are so extensive, that the increase of population may be expected to continue, at least for half a century to come, at about the same ratio as it has done for half a century past.

The first census of the nation was taken in 1790, and the population at that time was less than four millions. From that time up to the last census, the increase has been about three and a half per cent annually. If this ratio should continue till the next census, the population will then amount to about seventeen millions. And admitting that from the year 1840 the rate of increase shall be three per cent annually, it will follow, that in 1850 the population of this country will be not less than twenty-two millions. In twenty-four years there will be rising of twenty-eight millions. And if any of our children shall live to see the commencement of the next century, or live sixty-four years more, they will, if the same rate of increase should continue, make part of an empire, that will number not less than a hundred million souls.

What a prodigious mass of mind to be controlled by a single government, a republican government. And our country possesses habitable territory enough to support a population of four hundred millions, and then the population will not be so dense as it is in some of the large districts of Europe. It requires
not the gift of prophecy to foresee, that the prospects of this nation, as it respects resources of physical power and wealth, are magnificent beyond conception.

There are those now living in our midst, who have seen the day when we numbered but about three millions. And some of the children now with us will in all probability live to see the day, when there will be in the United States one hundred million inhabitants, extending their line of settlements from the Atlantic coast to the shores of the Pacific.

Since some of our own children will live, and perhaps be active in various departments of business, when the nation shall have grown to this gigantic stature, it becomes a question of amazing, of overwhelming interest to us, what is to be the character of this great people at that time. Sixty-four years will soon pass away, and the swelling tide of population will, like “the star of empire,” move onward in its westward march, overspreading the extensive region, yet untrodden by the footsteps of civilization. It remains, under God, for the present generation to decide, what shall be the character of the nation at the close of this century.

The political and moral destinies of what will doubtless be the mightiest nation under heaven, seem therefore to be thrown in the providence of God into the hands of those who are now on the arena of active life. Such a trust should call forth purposes and aims—efforts and sacrifices commensurate with an object of such overwhelming magnitude.

There is another topic, viz. the moral and religious prospects of our country. The signs of the present times are, in some respects, peculiar. There are in the moral horizon of our country things ominous of evil. In respect to morals and religion no people remain stationary. It cannot admit of a doubt, that we shall in these respects go forward or go back. The foundation, on which the stupendous structure of our po-

litical fabric has risen to its present glory, was laid by hands, which were often lifted up to Heaven in prayer. The fathers of this nation were men of God—they venerated the sacred Scriptures—they honored the Sabbath—they made provision for the mental and religious improvement of the rising generation. School-houses, churches, and colleges, were among the earliest monuments of their puritan enterprise. A noble proof of their wisdom, their benevolence, and their piety, is thus exhibited to excite and encourage their descendants to live and labor for the generations to come.

Intelligence and piety constituted the ground-work, on which this growing empire was founded, and on which it has risen to its present elevation. On this same basis it must continue to rise, if it rises any higher, or it will one day fall beneath the weight of its own gigantic dimensions.

What is the prospect in regard to the religious character of coming generations? It must be confessed, that there are sad and alarming indications of degeneracy. In “the sacramental host” there is disunion, and commotion. Brother lifts his voice against brother,—and the energies of the church are wasted in exhausting, an unhallowed debate and strife.

Suspicion and jealousy—those insidious worms which knaw at the root of charity—create a needless alarm in the christian community, and from the platform of concentrated power utter the strong tones of denunciation. Against whom are these anathemas aimed? Is it the mustering enemy, whose high-handed depredations call for the entire energy and strength of a united church? No—the victims are the tried, steadfast servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, the head and front of whose offending is a moral inability to pronounce some theological shibboleth after the canonical standard. O tell it not in Gath—publish it not in the streets of Askelon!

Again—those portions of our country, where a dense and
powerful population will shortly rise up, are deplorably destitute of the means of mental and spiritual illumination. The central power of this nation will very soon be lodged in the great western valley. This valley embraces about three-fourths of the land area of the nation. If the march of the emigrating column is not arrested, the preponderance of population will be found there probably within thirty years. And when the seat of empire shall once be lodged there, it will never return.—There it will remain, and there the nation will receive its laws. The moral and religious aspect of this vast and splendid region is gloomy and discouraging.

There is sowed in this wide field some good seed, but it is fast becoming planted with tares. Infidelity and Romanism threaten to bring back the dark ages, and shut out forever the light of pure religion from every mind. The man of sin has obtained a firm footing at the most important and influential points in all that extensive domain. And though some pretend to despise this power and predict its failure, yet the history of the past will show conclusively, that the power of the Roman hierarchy, as established in our own country, is not to be despised for its imbecility. Left unchecked, and the time is not far distant, when it will hold the balance of power between any two contending political parties, and thus be able to dictate, who shall be our rulers, and what our laws.

There are many circumstances which indicate in our own country a downward tendency, as it respects vital religion.—There is not a little leaning to infidelity even in some of Zion’s most favored spots. If the progress of degeneracy shall be proportionate to the growth of population, the time at no distant period will come, when a degenerated, a corrupted public opinion will sweep away the Sabbath, and desecrate the Bible, and thereby sunder the only effectual ties, which bind man to the government of God. Men will then break loose from the restraints of religion—and true piety will be driven, as in ancient times, into mountains, and dens, and caves of the earth. What will follow?

To adopt the vivid language of the lamented Evarts—“Pride, ambition, luxury, sensuality, profaneness, blasphemy, frightfully intermingled with poverty, crime, debasement, guilt and shame, will lash with scorpions the enslaved and abject population.” Then subjection to the laws will have to be enforced by the point of the bayonet. We may see in the riots and mobs, which have disgraced the country for a year or two past, what the tendency of things is at the present momentous crisis.

There is the appalling system of slavery, which cannot long stand on its present footing. The nation must and will, ere long, rid itself of this abomination that maketh desolate. But unless the controlling power of religion shall be depended on under God to accomplish the stupendous work of universal emancipation, there will be the heavings of a moral earthquake, such as no nation has experienced in modern times. The breezes of an exasperated South carry the portentous war-cry over the land, and the whole country is agitated, and may yet be convulsed with the death-struggle of a system, that cannot much longer survive any where in christendom.

Under existing circumstances, what but religion can ensure to the future the prosperity of the past. If wickedness shall triumph in this land, it will reign with tremendous and irresistible energy. The cry of violence, like the cry of Sodom, will insult the ear of Heaven. Some persecuted prophet, like Elijah, may summon courage to come forth from his hiding place, and in hearing of the degenerate people, open the forsaken Bible, and read the message of an insulted, angry God,—“Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field. Cursed shall be thy basket and thy store. Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy land, the in-
crease of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out. The Lord shall send upon thee cursing, vexation, and rebuke, in all that thou seestest thine hand unto for to do, until thou be destroyed, and until thou perish quickly; because of the wickedness of thy doings, whereby thou hast forsaken me."

Such is the terrific doom which a jealous and holy God threatened to execute upon the people, whom he had distinguished with blessings, if they should rebel against him. And in regard to that people all these curses have been executed. God will sooner or later scourge the madness of the times. And if this nation shall throw off the restraints of his moral government, and array itself in defiance against the religion of the Bible, the insulted Ruler of the universe will give it up to the infatuation, that shall speedily accomplish its overthrow. No destroying angel will need be sent to execute the wrath of God. The unbridled passions of a guilty, degenerate people can furnish the executioners of vengeance. The waves of an uncontrollable commotion will swell and dash from east to west, from south to north, sweeping before them the fragments of our demolished republic, burying beneath the agitated waters the world's last hope. There is a spirit abroad which tends to a result like this. It is the spirit not of renovation but of innovation, showing on the folds of its banner the taking watchword, Reform. It lays its reckless course through all the departments of our political, social, and religious system. — Mistaking the true and only safe principles of reformation, it rides in the whirlwind, but cannot direct the storm. It overthrows, but is unable to rebuild. It detects a flaw in a system, and dooms it to instant destruction. There is friction in the machinery, and therefore the entire engine must be broken down.

To resist the turning and overturning agencies, now at work with constantly increasing energy, demands and should receive the united wisdom, influence, and exertions of every patriot, every philanthropist, every Christian. To their hands the ark of our nation's hope is committed,—and under God they may bear it safely through the swellings of the impetuous Jordan.
SERMON.


"In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence."

The expression, "fear of the Lord," which so often occurs in the Sacred Writings, is comprehensive in its import, including the general idea of love and holy veneration for God, and devotion of heart and life to the duties of religion. It sometimes has a meaning kindred to what is implied in the words statutes, testimony, commandment, judgments of the Lord. It embraces whatever is comprehended in the idea of practical religion. This is affirmed by the inspired writer to be the grounds of strong confidence;—and human experience has established the conclusion, that it is the only grounds of such confidence.

Nothing is more frequent than mistaken confidence and disappointed hope. And the principal reason is, that men are deceived in respect to the real nature of the objects, which inspire their confidence and their hope. The text brings to view a sentiment of great practical importance, both to individuals and communities, viz: Religion furnishes the only permanent foundation for temporal prosperity and happiness. An illustration of this sentiment, in its application to communities, is what is proposed on the present occasion. There was an allusion to this sentiment in the conclusion of the preceding discourse, the illustration and application of which is reserved for more particular consideration at the present time.

It is an unquestioned fact, that the existence and prosperity of nations has been temporary and fluctuating. Various forms of government have been tried, and the experiment of ages has
rendered it abundantly evident, that there is no particular form, which of itself is adequate to the permanent security and prosperity of a people. The crisis of dissolution eventually comes, and no physical power can prevent the fatal result. The elements of destruction are incorporated with the materials of every community and nation, and nothing but a vigorous moral influence is competent to counteract their tendency to work a common ruin.

The wisdom of sages has been put in requisition, and the talents of statesmen have been strenuously exerted, to discover some remedy, that will remove the predisposition to disorder, inherent in all political bodies. Such attempts have proved fruitless, and no doubt can remain, that they ever will so prove, unless the healing power of pure religion shall be the remedy applied. In nothing else can strong confidence be reposed.

Some distinguished statesmen in our own country have felt an overweening confidence in the constitution, on which the government is based. In the far-reaching wisdom, and profound talent of that remarkable document, they have felt that there was some secret, mysterious, omnipotent energy, which would secure the permanent existence and happiness of the nation. But it is a question of serious interest, whence does the constitution, which serves as the platform of our national government, derive the power it possesses? It recognizes the claims of the divine administration—avows a deference to Christianity—and inculcates the sentiment of dependence on the providence of God. Its conservative power is not lodged in its inherent wisdom, but depends on the influence of pure religion, exerted on public opinion, feeling, and practice.

Give such a constitution to a nation that knows not God—a nation without religion—and what would be the result? Would materials collected from the region of paganism, or Mahomedanism, work favorably under a free constitution of government? Freedom in its strict sense, cannot dwell with such a community. "Where the spirit of the Lord is there is liberty"—nor can it exist any where else.

Republics have been organized, it is true, where the throne of true religion was never established; but where have they long remained? The republics of ancient Greece were erected on foundations laid with the choicest materials of Grecian genius and literature. But what sort of communities did they prove to be? Athens, the central power of one, was a madhouse—Sparta, the head of another, was a confederacy of thieves. How long did they remain? After the most strenuous efforts that human wisdom and political foresight could make, the support of a republican government was found to be impracticable, and the experiment was abandoned. Greece fell a victim to internal dissensions, and bowed her neck at last to a Roman yoke. Rome too, renowned for her literature, eloquence, enterprise, consolidated power, and as elevated morality as paganism can boast, could not perpetuate a republican government. She yielded at last to an iron-sinewed monarchy,—there being no alternative between that and anarchy. The people who composed these ancient confederacies lacked the self-controlling power of moral principle, which no where operates except where the religion of the gospel exerts its legitimate influence.

There was republican France. There the genius of freedom boasted of lofty achievements, and millions were charmed with the dream of constitutional government. Many and loud were the voices which united in the frantic shout of jubilee,—"long live the republic."—And there was no lack of talent, or learning, or physical resources, if these things were all that the establishment of a free government required. But the terrific result of that revolutionary tempest is well known. Never did a more bloody scourge lash a deluded, misguided people, and
they were glad to escape from the confusion and horrors of abused liberty to the arms of despotism. What was the grand cause of such a disastrous result? The controlling, redeeming spirit of religion was banished from the head and heart of the nation,—and infidelity glorying in its shame chanted the orgies of an infernal fanaticism around the shrine of enthroned reason.

The history of the world abounds in proof of the position that the wisdom, virtue, power and skill of man cannot, independent of the influence of pure Christianity, perpetuate any mild form of government. A people may overturn one oppressive form of government and flatter themselves that their liberty is achieved; but it will be followed by another no less, perhaps still more severe, that shall doom them to a more intolerable weight of oppression. Remove from the support and protection of our free political institutions, the pervading and regulating power of religion, and they cannot long survive the fatal experiment.

The illustration of this subject will be exhibited by considering the manner in which the power of religion operates in securing to a people a free constitution of government,—the permanent enjoyment of their unalienable rights,—uninterrupted peace and prosperity.

In the first place, religion promotes a spirit of conciliation and union. It proposes objects of a common interest, which involve no local prejudices, awaken no party feelings, affect no secular interests. The more any people shall be engaged in the promotion of some common cause of general interest and acknowledged magnitude, the more likely will they be to cherish a spirit of union. "A kingdom divided against itself cannot stand." The truth of this inspired sentiment is established by an appeal to facts. History records the ruin of many a nation, and in tracing out the causes of that ruin, the historian has often found them in the turbulent spirit of disunion.

Our fathers would not have achieved the independence of this country unless they had concentrated their strength, and clung around a common standard. After the storm of the long and hard contested conflict had subsided, and the grand point had been gained, the no less difficult work of settling the great principles of a free government, and binding together the confederacy, had well nigh failed, in consequence of a want of union in adopting the articles of the constitution. The ark of a dear-bought freedom was in danger of foundering after having rode into harbor.

Whatever has a tendency to strengthen this union must be considered as a valuable auxiliary in perpetuating the prosperity of the nation. Nothing possesses such power to bind together a people in firm and stedfast alliance, as the influence of evangelical religion. It is this that creates the sympathies of a brotherhood, and makes men feel that they are members of the same family. Let the gospel pour its healing influences into all those channels, in which public sentiment and feeling flow,—let the nation, rulers and subjects, have their minds pervaded by the fear of God,—and the strongest confidence may be cherished, that our peace, prosperity, and glory will be perpetuated.

A christian spirit, so far as it prevails, destroys the elements of strife, and those combustable materials which faction or lawless ambition depend on to accomplish their selfish schemes. It gives existence to a spirit that revolts at every thing, which has a tendency to hurt or destroy. Such a spirit is competent to hold together not only a single nation, but the nations of the world. Any confederacy, that is united by the power of religious principle, possesses within itself sources of security, on which more dependence can be made, than on the most imposing bulwarks of physical strength. We must depend on this, rather than on castles, fortifications, military legions, and
naval power, or we shall lean on a broken staff,—shall raise a costly, gorgeous fabric on a foundation of sand.

Secondly.—Religion possesses a power that will control the internal man—the heart. The genius of our government is such, that if it is sustained, it must be done by moral and physical power. It depends on the will of the people. We sometimes hear the constitution of our government lauded as a sort of political palladium, possessing a self-sustaining, and self-preserving power. But though framed in wisdom, and gloried in as a sort of guardian genius, it is but a bulwark of parchment, which one general burst of popular excitement may rend asunder, and destroy forever. The sovereign people, whose concurring counsels ratified our national compact, can, whenever they shall so decide, repeal it, and dissolve the government and the union. A republic cannot be based on a military platform, or be maintained by physical force. It depends, and must from its very nature depend on the will of free citizens.

The influence needed to support such a form of government, is that which can reach and control the heart. In religion this power is found, the only power competent to counteract the restless workings of those passions which, unrestrained, will lead on to misrule, corruption, and anarchy. Ambition, avarice, and dissatisfaction, have been the forerunners of no small part of the tremendous national catastrophies, that have occurred in the world. They have laid the train and sprung the mine, the explosion of which has resulted in the overthrow of states and empires. Revolutionary movements generally grow out of those turbulent elements. What can restrain them within safe limits, and prevent the mischief which they work? Can paganism do it? This is the congenial soil for the growth—the favorable field for the operation of these reckless passions. Can it be done by the authority of human reason? The experiment has been tried, and has always failed. Reason, spurning the aid of religion, attempted the establishment of a republic in France; but could not control the frenzied passions of men, after they had thrown off the restraints of religion and the authority of God, and it soon sunk in a sea of blood.

Virtue must lie at the foundation of a free government, or it cannot long exist. When the substantial bulwark, reared in the strength of moral principle, is demolished, the key-stone in the magnificent arch, which supports the union, is removed from its place, and the fabric falls.

What is it that inculcates and promotes the spirit of loyalty, and subjection to “the powers that be”? What is it that strengthens the influence of integrity and moral justice? What promotes that spirit of philanthropy, patriotism, and benevolence, which foregoes personal convenience and advantage for the sake of the public weal? What enjoins sentiments of conciliation, discountenances the spirit of war, and with angel voice proclaims “peace on earth, good will to men”? It is the pure religion of the gospel. The fear of God—a spirit that hallows his name, and yields to his will, and honors his institutions—is the only thing possessing omnipotence enough to govern the conflicting elements of such a world as this. What but this will eradicate from the human heart ambition, envy, covetousness, revenge, a greedy desire for office and honor? The sages injunctions of philosophy, and the strongest remonstrances of reason, prove availing with those, in whose souls these mad passions predominate. So universal experience will testify.

It is owing under God to the auspices of a pure religion, that our country commenced its political existence, and has risen in manly proportions, and might, and glory, till it attracts the admiring gaze, and awakens the jealousy of the kingdoms of the world. And under the same auspices it must continue to rise, if its prosperous growth shall continue. It cannot stand alone, and sustain the occasional shocks of political earthquakes, which
may be expected in a country, combining such heterogenous materials, and such a diversity of interests, that will conflict with each other. There are not wanting in our own favored country materials capable of being wrought into a revolutionary tempest. And it were strange, if there were not a Cataline, who would readily improve a crisis, that should favor the purposes of treason—and a Caesar likewise, who would not have virtue enough to spurn the proffer of a crown, or decline the sceptre of absolute power. Cursed is man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm.

Thirdly.—The influence of religion will secure the appointment and the services of faithful rulers. The prosperity and happiness of any nation depends much on the character and conduct of those who are entrusted with the administration of the government. A maxim sanctioned by inspiration, and tested by human experience is, that “where the righteous are in authority the people rejoice, but when the wicked beareth rule the people mourn.”

In elective governments a common evil, and one difficult to prevent, is office-seeking. In consequence of this the community is agitated with those periodical electioneering spasms, which seriously affect the health and soundness of the body politic. Intrigue and corruption are among the instrumentalities sometimes employed to secure a place of office and of honor. Where is the power that is competent to remedy the evils, which follow in the train of the determined aspirant to political power. What can erect around the high places of responsible office a rampart, that will prevent the intrusion of unqualified men? There is nothing save that pure religion, which, when it moves upon the abyss of political elements, hushes the storms of faction, and destroys the materials on which it operates.

In proportion to the extent of the conservative, renovating power of a divine religion, with political honesty and integrity prevail. When the rulers of a people are governed by religious principle, they will manifest in all their measures political integrity—they will aim with conscientious scrupulosity to fulfil the important trust committed to their hands—and instead of being swayed and controlled by a predilection for any party, they will with unblenching firmness go for the measure that is right. Can men be safely entrusted with interests of a high and sacred character, who are governed by selfishness, instead of moral principle—and who have no higher object than to gratify their love of power or of money?

The man who will veer his course with every variation in the breeze of the political atmosphere—who studiously trims his way between conflicting parties, so as to keep his standing with that which happens to be in power;—who without any settled principles of action or steady aim throws himself on the wave, to be carried with the current, go as it may,—such a man, in the concerns of common life, would not be trusted;—and can he be safely entrusted with the high responsibilities of official power? He lacks integrity—that indispensable element in the administration of a free government, and destitute of which the whole head will become sick, the whole heart faint.

That genuine patriotism or love of country is an indispensable qualification in the character of a ruler, will on all hands be admitted. Under no influence is this spirit cherished to such a degree, as when it springs from the heart, that is pervaded by the spirit of religion. There may be boisterous, vaunting professions of high regard for the country—a sort of hot-blooded chivalry, that boasts of what it would do for the nation’s welfare,—but the strength and purity of that benevolence which is ready to expend itself in such services as the highest interest of the country demand, are not always found, where the loudest pretensions and strongest professions are made. A
people who mean to look well to the security of their peace and prosperity, will demand unequivocal proof of such benevolence in those men, who are proposed as candidates for their suffrages.

Is it probable, that those who are restless and eager in the pursuit of popular favor and political ascendance, are governed in their movements by a pure love of country? True patriotism never declines any service, or any sacrifice of treasure or of blood, that the public weal demands;—but it is never officious in obtruding such services. Like the high-minded Cincinnatus, it seeks retirement from the anxious and laborious duties of public life; and waits a summons from a confiding people, ready to serve them at the expense of convenience and comfort, when the exigencies of the pending crisis makes the demand.

So far as the influence of religion pervades a community, it will, if they act consistently, lead them to canvass the claims of those for whom their suffrages are solicited;—not merely from a political, but from a moral stand-point. They will require, that the man shall exhibit credentials not only of talent and wisdom, but of moral worth. Unmoved by the huzzas of committed or mercenary friendship, they will watch for the rising of the star of virtue, before they assume the responsibility of political action, where the vote of a single citizen may determine the preponderance of the political balance.

Should the controlling power of religion become so diminished in a community, that their suffrages shall be given without regard to the character of the candidate,—if no other passport shall be demanded, than a certificate of nomination by some irresponsible body,—when the high seats of power shall be filled in this summary way, the broad arena for civil promotion will be crowded with competitors, and the contest will be for personal victory—not the nation’s glory. The way will be open for corruption and intrigue to play their games,—for a reckless ambition to organize some revolutionary legion, that shall be ready, on the giving of a signal, to lift a thousand battle-axes at once against the boasted temple of freedom, leaving its ruins to be employed in such way as shall suit the caprice of the unprincipled destroyer.

In the political horizon of our country there are some flying clouds, which look like the precursors of a storm. There is an occasional thunder-flash, and the jar of some mighty concussion. The present is a crisis in the circumstances of the country, which should lead to solemn deliberation. Great interests are so delicately poised—the pulse of the nation is so rapid and feverish—the heat of excitement has risen to such a degree—and there is so much which is combustible—that a single rash measure might produce an explosion, that would rend asunder the chain of the union and prostrate its glory forever. At a crisis of such portentous character, how important that the wisdom which cometh from above be sought—that the conciliating spirit of religion be cherished and exemplified.

The duty of the true patriot, who is concerned for the continued prosperity of his country, requires that he lend the weight of his influence to the cause of religion. If the only grounds of confidence is in the fear of the Lord, what conclusion must be adopted in respect to those, who, confiding in the wisdom, intelligence, or power of a free people, set aside the claims of religion, as unauthorised or doubtful, and prove themselves recreant to its sacred influences? If they can in any sense be considered as trust-worthy, and firm friends of the country, they still overlook the most effectual, the essential means on which its growth, and peace, and rising glory depend.

It is not questioned, that the elements of a prodigious power are combined in the resources of the country. There is power in the knowledge which exists, in the wealth possessed, in the
enterprise and practical energy of the American character; but something aside from the resources of such power is indispensable to permanency of national prosperity. The greater the power in a body, the greater the danger, unless it be rightly directed. And nothing but the influence of a divine religion—that religion which is the power of God—has ever proved competent to give a safe direction to the intellectual and physical energies of a community.

Every true friend of the country will regard with heart-felt pleasure the benevolent and philanthropic movements, which have for their object the universal dissemination of religious knowledge, and the promotion of a sound state of morals. I cannot understand, how an American citizen can meet the claims, which the present and future welfare of this growing nation has on him, if he withholds his countenance from those noble and auspicious efforts, conducted by the wise and virtuous, to furnish all the people of the country with the pure word of God—to throw into extensive and perpetual circulation those winged heralds of religious instruction, issued from the press in the form of Tracts; to provide, commission, and send forth living teachers, to lay the foundation of churches, and plant the institutions of the gospel in every settlement, where truth can find a hearing; and last, but not least, to lift up the standard of the Temperance reform, and urge its principles and its practice, till the last fires of "distilled damnation" are quenched forever. Let there be union and perseverance in the prosecution of such efforts, and our country will be prosperous and happy for generations to come. Who, then, will not gladly embrace the opportunity to aid these efforts, and rear a wall of salvation around this favored land.

The present aspect of national affairs cannot but awaken solicitude and anxiety. The crisis is a portentous one, demanding high moral courage, firmness, and decision on the part of every true and dutiful citizen. To adopt the language of another,—"the sea of religion, of morals, of politics, is each in agitation. Throughout Christendom, men cannot be neutral on either of these questions; they are continually acting; but the danger is, that they may act in many cases without reflection, or without independence. They act as those about them act, because they have not courage to act as they think; or they think as those about them think, because they dare not think for themselves." Such a state of things is fraught with dangers of high magnitude.

There is a spirit of rude aggression prevalent and growing. It assails every thing sacred, and in some cases labors to overturn the foundations of good morals. It is a restless, disorganizing spirit, whose tendency is to disturb the harmony of human society, and bring into jeopardy social happiness, personal security, and civil liberty. False principles in every department of religion, morals, and politics, are budding and ripening, and now is the time to check their growth or root them from the soil.

Our fathers, it is said, by a shrewd forecast anticipated the coming on of evil, and with promptness and energy exerted themselves to prevent it. Ever on their watch, as true and faithful citizens, "they smelted the tainted breeze afar," and adopted measures to save themselves from its pestilential influence. Such examples are worthy of our imitation. Our duties, as citizens of a free, and yet happy country, are at the present day solemn and imperious. And we shall prove recreant to the noble principles in which we have been educated, unless we sound the alarm on the approach of evil, and promptly use the requisite remedy. That remedy is found in the fear of the Lord—in pure religion. It seems not to admit of much if any doubt, that the present generation will decide the great question, whether a republican government can be perpetuated.
How vast the interest which our posterity have at stake in the issue of the grand experiment, now going on in this nation. If the generations to come shall find on this now favored soil a republican government,—and as free, intelligent, virtuous, and happy citizens, rejoice in such blessed privileges as have been transmitted to us,—it will be because the great practical truth of the text is devoutly recognized by those, who now are giving shape and form to the destinies of this rising empire.