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**A discourse, delivered on the national thanksgiving,
April 13, 1815.**

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A

DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED ON THE

NATIONAL THANKSGIVING,

APRIL 13, 1815.

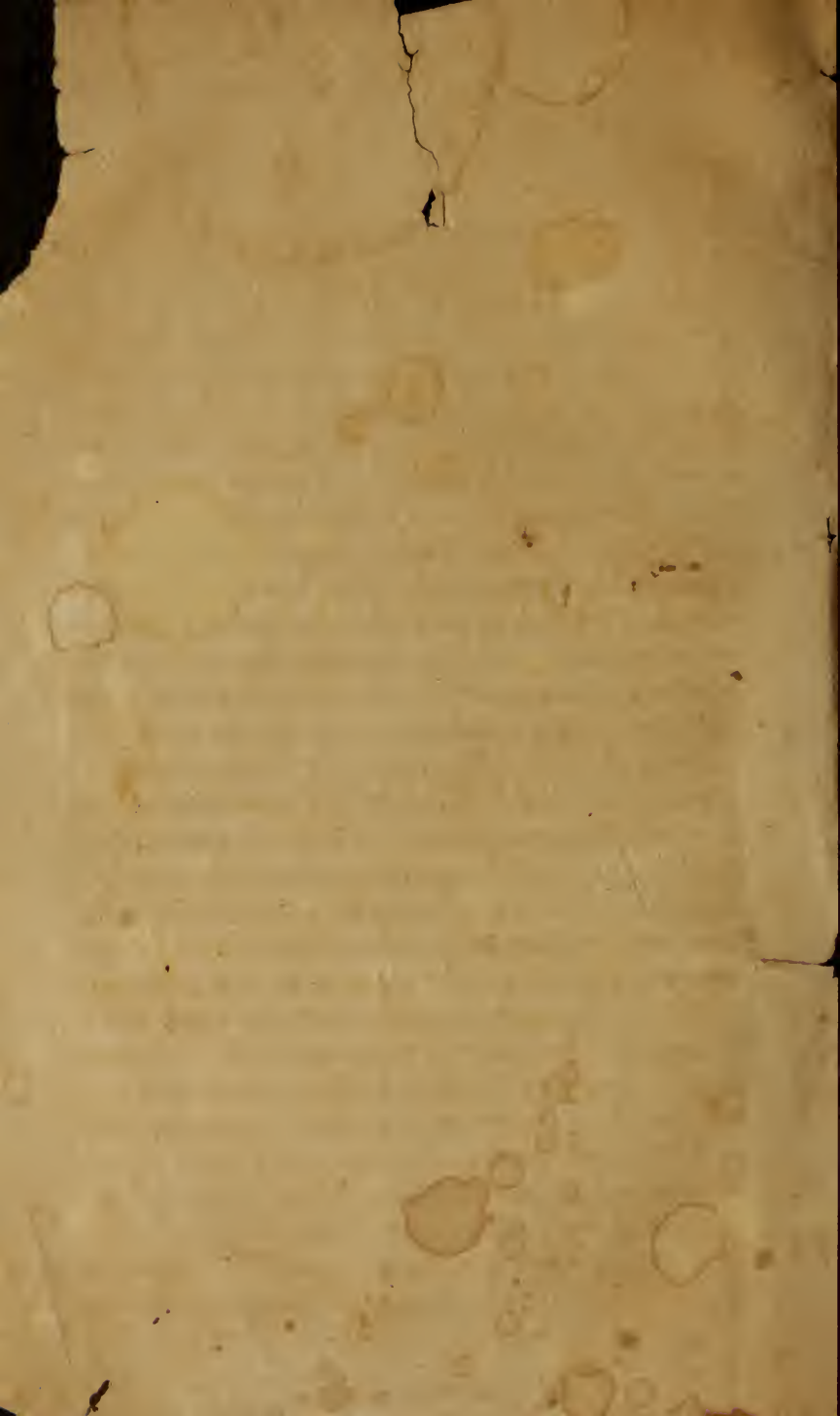
BY NATHANAEL EMMONS, D. D

PASTOR OF THE CHURCH IN FRANKLIN.

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1815.



DISCOURSE.

JEREMIAH xxx. 21.

And their nobles shall be of themselves, and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them.

THE Jews were now in a state of captivity, where they were suffering a just punishment for their abuse of the peculiar favors, which they had once enjoyed. Jeremiah, who had often forewarned them of this national calamity, here foretells their happy return to their native land, and to their former privileges, both civil and religious. Among their civil privileges, he mentions that of choosing and enjoying rulers of their own nation. “And their nobles shall be of themselves, and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them.” This phraseology imports, that they should not only *have*, but *choose* their own rulers, from among themselves; which must have appeared a very signal favor to a people, who had long been under the dominion of unjust and absolute tyrants. The plain and obvious truth, which the letter and spirit of the text lead us to consider on this occasion, is,

That it is a great privilege to any people, to have the power of choosing their own rulers.

To illustrate and apply this single truth, will be the business of the present discourse.

1. The power of choosing their own rulers is a privilege, which but very few of mankind have ever

enjoyed. It was a privilege peculiar to the Jews, while they dwelt in their own land and continued a free people. The Egyptians and Babylonians, the two largest nations then existing, had lost their liberties, and become subject to the most despotic rulers; while the petty states around them were subject to petty tyrants. And from that day to this, usurpation and tyranny have generally prevailed in the world. There is not one nation in all Asia and Africa, who enjoy the power of freely electing their own rulers, and scarcely one in all Europe, who enjoy this privilege in its full extent. Our civil government is the only one in the world, which is completely elective, and which gives the people the right of choosing their own rulers, from the highest to the lowest, without the least restraint. Such a singular privilege is a singular mark of the divine favor, and ought to be considered as the very essence of a free government.

2. The power of choosing their own rulers is a privilege, which all nations, who are destitute of it, wish to enjoy. Though many of them have been so long under arbitrary government, that they have lost much of the knowledge, sensibility and spirit of men, and become almost reconciled to their low and servile condition; yet none have become totally indifferent to the treatment which they receive from their fellow mortals. They have some moral sense of right and wrong, of justice and injustice, of mercy and cruelty, of liberty and oppression, which makes them wish for the privilege of choosing their own rulers from among themselves, who would pity their condition, redress their grievances, and give them the rich blessings of civil liberty. How many oppressed nations have, in the course of a few years past, been enraptured and

decoyed, at the mere sound of Liberty and Equality ! This demonstrates, that all nations desire national freedom, and would rejoice in possessing the power of choosing the men, who should manage their public concerns. It is, therefore, the united voice of all nations, that the power of choosing their own rulers, is a most precious and important privilege.

3. It must be a great privilege to any people, to have the power of choosing their best men to rule over them. Some men, among every people, are better qualified than others for places of power and trust; and it is a great privilege, to have the power of filling every department of government, with those whom they deem the best able and best disposed to promote the public good.

In particular, it is a great privilege to have the power of choosing those into public office, who are best acquainted with their peculiar genius and disposition. Every nation has a national character, with which it is highly necessary, that those who rule over them should be well acquainted. Whether civil rulers mean to govern well, or ill, they cannot attain their objects, unless they understand human nature in general, and the peculiar genius and disposition of the people whom they attempt to govern. This knowledge, Oliver Cromwell, Charles V. Emperor of Germany, and President Washington possessed in a high degree ; and to this peculiar trait in their character, their great success in attaining the different objects of their pursuit, was greatly owing. Those eminent rulers knew how to meet the feelings of their subjects, and to select the proper men to carry their deep designs into effect. But by the want of this species of knowledge, Charles I. lost his kingdom and his head,

and George III. the colonies of America. 'The knowledge of men is an indispensable qualification for a good ruler ; because all political wisdom is founded upon it. As no man is fit to manage a machine, who is ignorant of its nature, construction, and use ; so no man is fit to manage a people, who is ignorant of their peculiar genius, dispositions, and habits of thinking and acting. It is a great privilege, therefore, for a people to have the power of choosing their wisest men to direct their public affairs. Again,

The right of election gives them a fair opportunity of choosing from among themselves rulers, who are the best acquainted with their own laws and constitution of government. This is an extensive branch of political knowledge, and essential to a good statesman. Those who are destitute of this kind of information, however well they may be disposed, are unequal to the task of guiding the helm of government. They may happen to steer right, but it is much more likely, that they will steer wrong, and involve the people in great difficulties and dangers, if not in final ruin. No ruler can take his measures wisely, who is not well versed in the laws and constitutions of his country ; because he must always keep these in his eye, as a pole star to direct him to his ultimate end, the public good. Those who administer the government, are always in danger of adopting measures, through ignorance or inattention, which directly or indirectly tend to weaken or destroy the very pillars that support it. No men are qualified for the higher offices of government, but such as clearly understand its constitution, which is designed to limit the powers of both rulers and subjects. And when a people have the right of choosing their own rulers,

they may fill the highest offices of government with men, who have the largest share of political knowledge and experience.

Again, where a people appoint their own rulers, they have it in their power to put those men into office, who are best acquainted with their various and clashing interests. A civil community, which contains a large body of people, scattered over a large extent of territory, always have local interests, which are various, and apparently, if not really inconsistent. And it belongs to rulers to consult all these interests, and make them, if possible, the bonds of union and harmony, instead of causes of mutual discord and complaint. But in order to do this, rulers must have a clear and extensive knowledge of such separate and jarring interests. Those who are unacquainted with these, can never know how their laws and regulations will operate, until they have made the experiment, when it may be too late to apply a remedy for their mistakes. Whereas men of profound political knowledge and experience, know how to employ local prejudices and conflicting interests, as so many means of uniting and cementing the members of the body politic. A people, therefore, enjoy a great privilege, when they have the power of appointing such peace-makers, to manage their public concerns.

Furthermore, in the free exercise of the power of election, a people may appoint men of tried integrity to places of the highest trust and responsibility. Integrity is the first virtue of a civil ruler. "He that ruleth over men must be just," said David in his dying hour. When a people choose their rulers from among themselves, they have a fair opportunity of knowing the moral principles of their fellow-citizens, and of

appointing those only to the first offices of government, who have an established character for integrity. Men of principle always establish their character, by that time they are qualified, in point of age, to sustain offices of high trust and importance. And it is a divine maxim, that "he that is faithful in the *least*, will be faithful also in *much*."

Now, rulers who understand the genius and disposition of their people, who are acquainted with their laws and constitutions, who have a comprehensive view of their various interests and connexions, and who are men of tried integrity, are well qualified to fill every department of government. No people can desire better rulers than these ; and such as these, the power of election gives them the best opportunity of appointing to office. This must be a very desirable and important privilege, because they can never expect that such rulers will be appointed for them. In absolute monarchies, the distant provinces are obliged to submit to governors appointed for them, who never lived among them, who are ignorant of their customs and manners, their laws and interests, who are destitute of the principles of virtue and integrity, and who seek their own honors and emoluments, more than the peace and prosperity of their subjects. These evils we bitterly experienced, so long as the king of England appointed our chief magistrates. But when a people are free to choose their own rulers from among themselves, they may, if they please, elect rulers, who are both qualified and disposed to seek the public good, and make their constituents prosperous and happy. I must add,

4. That is a great privilege for a people to have the power of choosing their own rulers, because *good* rul-

ers are a very great blessing. The power of rulers to do good is very extensive. There is no other order of men, who have *all* the interests of the people so much in their power. They have greater or less influence over all those things, which can contribute to the outward prosperity and happiness of a civil community. They are the guardians of all that a people hold most dear and sacred; and so can do them greater service and more essentially promote their temporal good, than any other men in any other public or private stations of life.

The customs and manners of a people have a direct tendency to make them happy or wretched; and these are very much under the controlling influence of civil rulers. Though they are not appointed for this purpose, yet their example has a transforming effect. They are the most respectable members in the community, to whom the lower classes look up for guidance in their common modes of conduct and social intercourse. The court in all civilized nations is the *model*, according to which the men of wealth and figure mean to form their customs and manners, respecting their dress, their amusements, their language, their equipage, and their various ways of spending their time and property. Rulers, therefore, of correct sentiments, virtuous habits, and exemplary conduct, may do much to promote the general good, without displeasing a single individual, by the exercise of legal authority.

Every people hold their religion, whatever it is, as a matter of serious importance. And this also lies within the reach of civil rulers, who always have it in their power directly or indirectly to promote it. If they take it directly into their hands, they can estab-

lish what kind of it they please : or if they do not take it directly into their hands, they can in various ways have great influence upon it. Indeed, it is a serious truth, that in every age, and in every branch of the christian church, not only the modes and forms, but the kinds of religion, have always taken the complexion of the civil powers, for the time being. We know that this has been the case in Europe, and especially in England, where the popish and protestant religion has alternately been the religion of the nation, as either a popish or protestant prince held the reins of government. And it has lately been demonstrated, that infidel rulers will substitute infidelity in the room of christianity. But it is equally true, that religious rulers will form the religious character of the people. This for nearly two centuries has been demonstrated in New-England. Good rulers, therefore, can have a powerful and happy influence upon the great interests of religion, which renders the choice of such rulers of high consequence to the public welfare.

The good of the people requires, that useful knowledge should be generally diffused among them. Their dignity, happiness, and security, greatly depend upon their being well informed. Rulers can easily promote, or obstruct the general information of their subjects. In some nations, rulers take pains to keep the people in profound ignorance ; which instead of being the mother of devotion, is the hand-maid to despotism. But good rulers will seek to promote every kind of useful knowledge among all classes of citizens. They can oblige them by laws, as well as by public patronage, to cultivate not only the arts, but the sciences, which tend to enlarge their minds, refine their intellectual powers, and form them for useful and happy members of civil society.

The fortunes of a people are in the hands of their rulers. They have authority to determine what sums shall be taken from them for the service of the public; and when the taxes are levied, they have the final and absolute disposal of them. This is a power capable of great abuse. They may drain their subjects of almost all their property, under pretext of discharging public debts, or of promoting the public good. And it is very difficult for the people to discover what use is actually made of the large sums, which they contribute for the professed purpose of supporting the safety and credit of the nation. In many countries, rulers riot on the fortunes of their subjects, who are but so many slaves to minister to their luxury and prodigality. But good rulers will be really, as well as professedly, economical of the property of the people. They will exact no more from them, than their own safety, credit, and prosperity really require. Instead of diminishing, they will aim to increase the wealth of the nation.

There is still another great benefit, which a people will receive from good rulers. They will guard their lives, as well as fortunes. They have the tremendous power of making war and peace. They can call thousands and thousands into the field of battle, where multitudes may fall together under the most dreadful forms of death. How many millions of the human race have been sacrificed to the ambition and avarice of tyrannical rulers! What rivers of blood have unwise and unrighteous despots spilt! Some princes train up their subjects for war, and hire them out to be the common butchers of mankind. But good rulers will never wage unjust, nor unnecessary wars, nor cruelly sport with the lives of their fellow-men, which they esteem as precious as their own.

If these observations are just; if civil rulers have the customs and manners, the religion and learning, and the lives and fortunes of their subjects in their power; then they will certainly be great and extensive blessings to their constituents, if they wisely and faithfully discharge the important trusts reposed in them. And for this reason, it is a very great privilege to a people, to have the right of choosing their best men to manage their best interests. It is indeed the sum of all their civil privileges. For without this, all their other privileges may be wrenched from their hands, and turned into engines to work their ruin. Through the mere want of this essential privilege, many great nations, who enjoy the most salubrious climates, the most fertile soils, and the most delicious productions of nature, live but one degree above complete poverty and wretchedness. It is a high and distinguishing privilege, which God has bestowed upon us, to choose such men from among ourselves, as will guide and govern us according to the integrity of their hearts and skilfulness of their hands.

This subject now suggests several reflections, which are pertinent to the present occasion of rejoicing at the return of national Peace.

1. No nation, who choose their own rulers, can be enslaved without their own consent. The privilege of election is the grand palladium of civil liberty. The great majority in every nation, are utterly opposed to slavery, and therefore, while they possess the power of choosing their own rulers from among themselves, they may always find men of wisdom and integrity, whom they may, if they please, safely invest with power and authority to guard their lives, liberties, and fortunes. Let their form of government be

what it may, they can preserve their liberty. If their government be monarchical; yet if they have the power of choosing their prime and subordinate rulers, they may be free. If their government be aristocratical; yet if they have the power of choosing their own rulers, they may be free. If their government be democratical; yet if they have the power of choosing their own rulers from among their best men, they may be free. So long as they possess the power of choosing the guardians of their liberties and rights, they have all the power necessary, and even conceivable, to promote and maintain their civil freedom. If they ever become enslaved, it must be owing to their freely choosing unjust, unwise, and arbitrary rulers.

2. If a people, who choose their own rulers, have not *good* rulers, it must be owing to their own fault. If they choose their best men, there can be no doubt but their rulers will be good. And if they choose bad men, it must be because they are themselves corrupt, and wish for rulers, whom they desire and expect will gratify their corrupt hearts, and promote their corrupt designs. If they wish to have religion destroyed, they will choose those into office, who, they believe, will use their influence to destroy it. If they wish the constitution of government should be weakened, they will put men into power, who, they expect, will adopt and pursue measures to weaken, or subvert it. But if a free people ever have bad, instead of good rulers, it will be their own fault, in abusing the inestimable privilege of election, and they will justly suffer the fatal consequences of their own choice.

3. A people, who choose their own rulers, cannot reasonably expect to have better rulers than themselves. Rulers, who are chosen by the general suf-

frage of the people, will always bear the moral complexion of those, by whom they are chosen. This has always been found true among every people, who have enjoyed and exercised the power of appointing their civil magistrates. While the Grecians were virtuous, they chose virtuous rulers. While the Romans were virtuous, they chose virtuous rulers ; but when those nations became corrupt, they chose corrupt men to guide the affairs of state. The Jews, God's ancient people, conducted in the same manner. The ten tribes would never have chosen Jeroboam the son of Nebat to reign over them, had they not become extremely corrupt. A corrupt people, who enjoy and exercise the power of election, have no ground to expect, that their rulers will be better than themselves.

4. This subject directs us where to look for the origin of the political distresses and embarrassments, in which we have been and still are involved. They have originated from the abuse of the power of election. For more than a century before the Revolution, all the states in the Union, who enjoyed the privilege of choosing their own rulers, wisely and faithfully improved it, and of course committed the management of their public affairs to such men, as allowed them to live peaceable and quiet lives in all godliness and honesty. And when the federal government was carried into operation, the wisest and best men were placed at the head of the nation. And during twelve years of their administration, the nation enjoyed not only peace and liberty, but the most extraordinary prosperity and flattering prospects. Nor is there the least reason to doubt but that the same prosperity and happiness would have continued to this day, if the people had not neglected and abused the precious

privilege of choosing their own rulers from among their most meritorious citizens. But when they neglected their best men, and chose the worst, their glory departed, and their calamities began. Against the solemn, warning voice of some of the best patriots in the Union, they committed the supreme power into the hands of Mr. JEFFERSON, who had publicly condemned the Federal Constitution. This they did with their eyes wide open. What an instance of astonishing infatuation! What could they expect, but that he would govern according to his own political and religious principles? He fully answered the hopes of some, and the fears of others. He joined affinity with the nation, from whence he derived his corrupt principles in religion and politics, and gave a fatal stab to the peace and prosperity of America. Ever since this deplorable crisis in our public affairs, the majority of the nation have uniformly put the chief offices of state into such men's hands, as adopted the measures of Jefferson; and these measures crippled our commerce, dried up the sources of wealth, and finally plunged us in an unnecessary war, which has wasted our property, corrupted the fountains of justice, accumulated our public debts, destroyed thousands of our fellow-men, and constrained the government to make a disadvantageous and dishonorable peace. But as dishonorable as it is, we had no reason to expect a better. We deserved to be punished, and our enemies have moderately punished us. Now, when we look back upon this series of calamities, can we impute the original, procuring cause of them to any thing else, than our neglect and abuse of our distinguishing privilege of choosing our own rulers? Our rulers were applauded while pursuing the steps, which have brought our

calamities upon us, and they are still applauded for the inglorious peace they have obtained. They have acted the part, which many of their unwise and deluded electors desired and expected they would act.

5. This subject suggests to us the best, and perhaps the only possible way of alleviating present, and of preventing future calamities. The way is wisely and faithfully to improve our important privilege of election, and commit the direction of our national concerns to greater and better men. There is no ground to expect, that our erroneous rulers either can, or will correct their own errors. If they are continued in power, we may justly fear, that instead of lessening, they will increase our burdens, and instead of extricating us from, they will plunge us deeper in political embarrassments. Nothing short of a revolution in the administration of government, can promote union, preserve peace, and prevent ruin. There is so much liberty, so much political knowledge, so much patriotism, and so much physical strength, in the sound part of the nation, that they are able, in a constitutional manner, to displace oppressive and arbitrary rulers. It is to be hoped, that the pleasing sound of peace, which brings no positive good, but only mitigates positive evil, will not prove an opiate to lull the people in stupidity and negligence, but serve to animate their exertions for the redress of intolerable burdens. If they sit down quiet now, and relax their efforts for a new and better administration, they may rivet chains, which they will never hereafter be able to break. The peace has thrown the nation into the most critical situation that they ever saw. Their wisdom, their prudence, their patriotism, and firmness, are put to the severest trial. There are men enough in the nation,

who possess talents and integrity sufficient to prevent the political ship from sinking, if the helm were only put into their hands. If the large, respectable, and powerful minority, will only act a wise, steady, dignified part, they may prevent the *division* and *destruction* of these once flourishing, but now distressed and impoverished States. Now is the time for the most vigorous and magnanimous exertions for the perpetuation of the present peace, and future safety and prosperity of the country. As a few men first laid the foundation for our past and present calamities; so a few men of wisdom, firmness, and perseverance, may lay a foundation to retrieve the losses we have sustained, and restore us to our former state of union, harmony, wealth, and rising importance among the nations of the world. Let these few best men be chosen in future, to direct the weighty concerns of the nation, and we may confidently hope soon to see better times.

We are certainly under peculiar obligations to employ this, and every other wise and constitutional method, to extricate ourselves from our present embarrassments, and secure our future peace and prosperity.

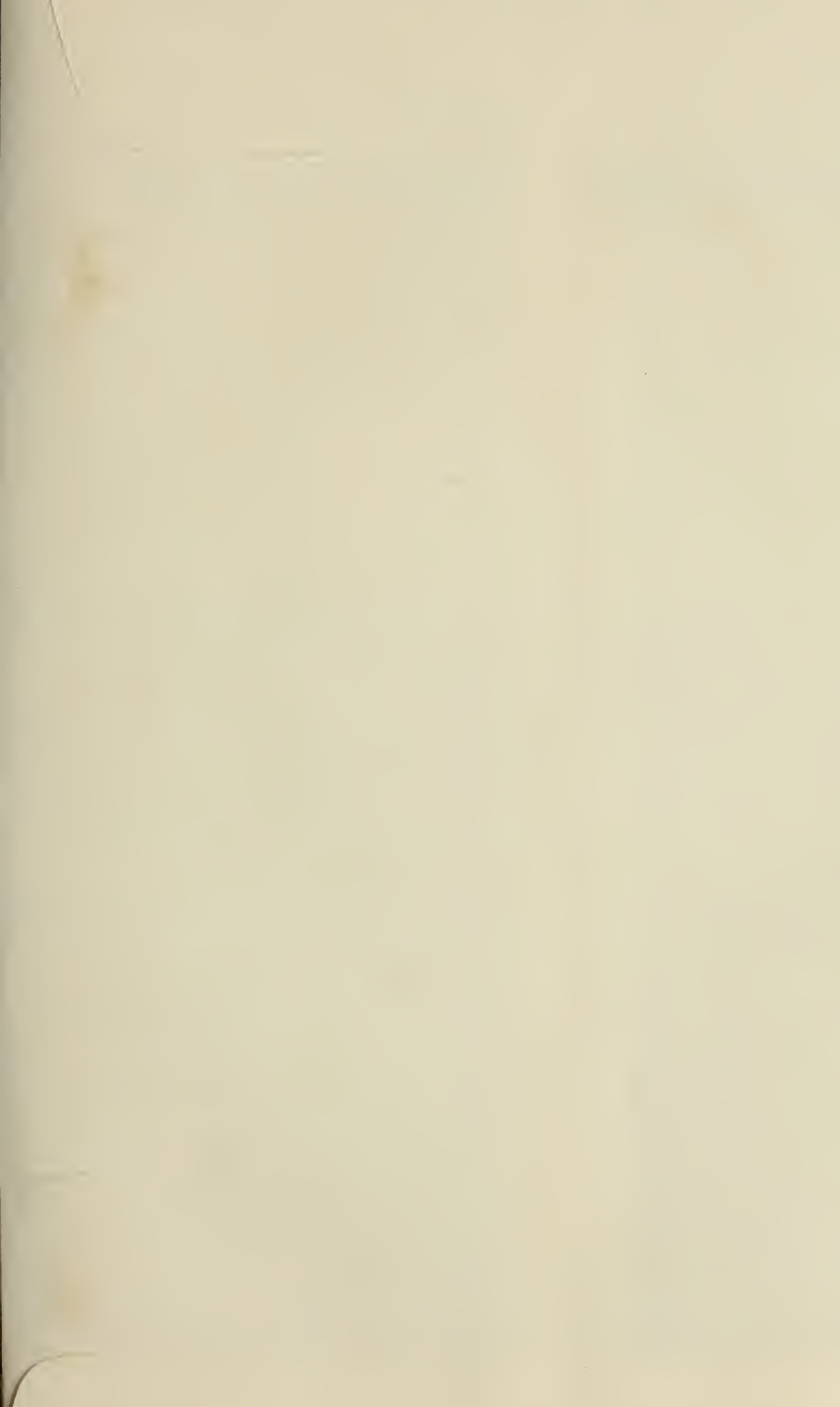
In the first place, the past goodness of God lays us under indispensable obligation, to exert ourselves vigorously for the preservation of the rights and privileges, which he has so long bestowed upon us. The President, with great propriety, acknowledges, that we have been, from the beginning of our national existence, the peculiar objects of the divine care and beneficence. It is a plain and pleasing truth, that we have enjoyed the greatest of all civil privileges, the privilege of choosing our own civil rulers. To a wise and vigilant exercise of this invaluable privilege, we

may justly ascribe our virtues, our religious fasts and thanksgivings, our general information, our excellent laws, and all our correct customs and habits. By appointing good rulers, who were qualified for their high stations, these distinguishing traits in our national character have been long preserved, and are not yet entirely lost. It has been owing, under God, to our wise, faithful, and pious rulers, that we have been conducted through every stage of our national existence, to the high rank which we lately held among the nations of the earth. No people have been from the beginning blessed with greater civil, religious, and literary advantages, than those which God has liberally bestowed upon us. These call for our unfeigned gratitude to the Father of mercies and the giver of every good and perfect gift, which we have enjoyed, and do still enjoy. Nor can we discharge this great debt of gratitude, unless we use all proper means and exertions, to transmit our civil and religious privileges to future generations.

In the next place, the present peace is a signal favor in itself considered. It has put a stop to the effusion of human blood, and the calamities of war, and given us more opportunity to attend to our national dangers, and to use our best efforts to avert them. We shall be the most ungrateful, as well as unwise people, if we suffer ourselves to bear the most unjust burdens, when it is completely in our own power to obtain justice. Our past success in maintaining our invaluable rights, is an encouraging motive, to meet every difficulty and surmount every obstacle in the way of attaining the freedom and happiness, which never fail to flow from a good administration of a good government.

Finally, let us carry our case to God, and implore him to guide and assist us in all our efforts to secure the great objects of our desires, our hopes, and pursuit. He can guide the people in the choice of their rulers, and guide the rulers in the choice of their public measures. He has the hearts of both rulers and subjects under his supreme control. He can remove the inveterate prejudice and infatuation, which have so long blinded the minds, and governed the conduct of well-meaning partisans. Let us, therefore, not only give thanks to him for the public and private, civil and religious favors, which he has so plentifully bestowed upon us, in days past; but also offer up prayers, and supplications, and intercessions for our President, and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.







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