

Richard Cranch
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MR. WEST'S

ELECTION

SERMON.

MAY 31, 1786.



COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
MAY 31, 1786.

ORDERED, That Mr. TREADWELL, Mr. BRIDGE, and Mr. THATCHER, be a Committee to wait on the Reverend SAMUEL WEST, to give him the thanks of the House for his SERMON delivered this day, and to request a copy thereof for the press.

A R T E M A S W A R D, Speaker.



fume of divine wisdom, and drinking deeply of the cup of sorrows for their salvation ; that his kingdom was not of this world, and that instead of the visible splendours of it, his subjects must expect distinction only from the real excellence of their character, formed upon his own example. That they who excelled in doing good should possess the post of honour ; and the most useful life share the highest glory under his universal government. This refers indeed to the spiritual kingdom of Christ, but is equally applicable to civil States ; especially when composed of such as profess their belief of christianity, subjection to its laws, and to be governed by views and motives derived from it. Without hesitation therefore, we address the assembled orders of this Commonwealth, in the language of our text, *Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.* Let no man think it sufficient to secure his pre-eminence, that he wears the title of honour, sits in the seat of office, or even shares the approbation of his country. Treacherous grounds of greatness ! Would you found your glory so as to last with your being, let it arise from a sincere engagement of the heart in the cause of human happiness, and the diligent and persevering

persevering exertion of every faculty, for the accomplishment of that Godlike purpose; and should you through some intervening prejudices, fail of your reward from men, you secure it in a consciousness of the rectitude and beauty of your own conduct, the present approbation of heaven, followed finally with the applauses of the universal Judge. Widely indeed, does this account of rank and dignity, in States, differ from the too commonly received opinions of men. And are then the emulated distinctions in civil society reduced to this? Are none truly honourable but such as are really useful? None entitled to glory except such as are improved to the good of mankind? Did not the Saviour of the world know, that titles are stamp'd with honour distinct from the character of those who wear them? That they might descend by inheritance, and give to the possessor not only the privilege of being considered as chief among his brethren, but of ruling over them, and even trampling on their most essential rights?—no; these are the suggestions of human pride, realized upon human folly. The author of christianity does but restore things to the standard of truth and nature, places the point of honour in its proper light, gives

gives pre-eminence to those who excel in publick virtue, and connects the greatest glory with the most extensive services.

REVELATION indeed was not essentially necessary to inform mankind, that as civil government ought to be the result of mutual agreement, designed for the good of all ; so they who contribute most to the accomplishment of that design, are entitled to its first distinctions. This, like the first principles of science in general, is by the wisdom and goodness of its Author, enstamped on human nature ; and like the essentials of religion, is written on the hearts of men, as by the finger of God, being an obvious suggestion of unbiassed reason. But alas ! the plainest dictates of reason, in the course of human affairs, are often obscured by the passions of men, or born down by the prevailing tide of custom. We are therefore under the greatest obligations, to that Divine Instructor, who has thrown the clearest light upon civil as well as upon moral and religious truth ; who has made us acquainted with ourselves, called our attention to the only interesting object, the happiness of the species ; and placed the dignity of character on the basis of virtue, formed from his own resemblance, and tending to the good of all.

THE Father of Being is the father of mercies, a principle of boundless active love ; and tho' infinitely various in execution, his design is one, his own glory, or which is evidently the same thing, the happiness of his creatures, is the center in which all the lines of his government unite. Every thing takes place in the universal system, according as it tends to the accomplishment of this great parental purpose. In our material system, if the sun in the heavens shines with a lustre superiour to the other luminaries, he is no less distinguished by his kindly influence on the world below.

THE characters of rational creatures, when weighed in the scales of truth and justice, must be estimated upon the same principle, with no other difference than what arises from moral agency, which evidently requires, that the exerted capacity for doing good, be directed by choice, and animated with universal love.

To what pitch of real greatness human nature may rise, upon this firm basis of publick virtue, may be learned from the faithful page of history, which has recorded the illustrious names as well as actions of those, who have bled in the cause of human happiness, rescued millions from oppression and misery, have enlightened mankind with the

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the rays of truth, formed wise institutions of government, or, with a steady, though lenient hand, like gods on earth, have guided the affairs of nations, in arduous and difficult times.

THROUGH the indulgence of that Providence, which raises up and furnishes such characters, to balance the general depravity of human nature, our own country and times may furnish a list, the lustre of which will not disgrace the worthies of other nations or former ages.

BUT where are the wise, the great, the good among the meer sons of men? They fade, they vanish away, in comparison with him who was the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person.

It is no small part of the excellency of christianity, that it presents to our view a pattern of every thing truly amiable, great and good in the person of its Divine Author, not to be admired only, but copied in our hearts and lives.

THE gospel itself is a manifestation of divine love, directed to its proper object, the salvation of a ruined world. God so loved the world, is the reason assigned for the mission of his son, whose entrance on the stage of mortality, was celebrated

celebrated by the song of angels proclaiming peace on earth, good will towards men.

CHRISTIANITY appears in every view to be the friend of man. That it is adapted to the furtherance of civil and social happiness, must be obvious to every one, who without prejudice attends to its uncorrupted principles, as taught by Christ and his apostles, or to that spirit of universal love, which breathes from those principles and their Author. The wisdom and goodness which appear in the system, like the traces of divinity upon creation itself, sufficiently prove its inspiration from heaven.

THE religion of Jesus assumes no other authority over mankind, than what arises from the native excellence of its doctrine and precepts, and the influence which they have on the hearts and lives of men. It is connected with civil society only, as it enriches the heart with every virtue which tends to adorn human nature, and to increase social happiness. It forms the wise and prudent parent—the amiable child—the affectionate brother—the generous friend ; but above all, the judicious, upright and consistent magistrate ; who rises superior not only to views of personal interest, but what is often more expressive

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five of true greatness, the prejudice of party, and the blind impulse of passion; who with the knowledge and government of his own heart, is unmoved by the froward humours of the world around him; and whether they frown or flatter, he remains fixed in his purpose of promoting their happiness, and like the sun in the heavens, goes steadily forward diffusing blessings to the extent of his influence.

SHOULD it be said such characters existed before christianity appeared in the world, the objectors views are evidently confined to Jesus the man of sorrows, the victim of divine justice in behalf of human guilt: Whereas the object of our faith is the Parent of Nature, the Universal Spirit, who filleth all in all. Wherever true goodness has appeared among the children of men, or at whatever period of time, we scruple not to ascribe it to the same source; it is a ray from the son of righteousness, a stream from that fountain in which all fullness dwells.

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PIETY is the first and leading feature in every truly great and noble character: Where shall we find the system which teaches a piety rational, manly and elevated, like that which is taught in the gospel of Christ? How consistent with reason

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son, and how attractive are its representations of the Deity, as the Impartial Parent of the universe? How engaging the motives which it sets before us, to reverence, love and confide in him? How affecting its demands on our gratitude to him who, in a method equally expressive of wisdom and goodness, has procured salvation for us? If fanaticism or enthusiasm have sometimes been connected with christianity, they are not its genuine growth, but like monstrous births in nature, are the effect of a wise and gracious cause, acting uniformly amidst the imperfection of the present state.

PIETY towards God is the only solid ground of a virtuous life; and we must never flatter ourselves that the latter can be properly supported where the former is wanting. What other bond will secure the practical virtue of mankind, whether in the publick or private walks of life? Interest—yes, if rightly understood, for the treasures of immortality; in every other view its influence in favour of virtue is at best precarious, and often falls on the side of vice. Honour—a sense of honour will answer the purpose, agreed, if formed upon the standard of truth, aspiring after the approbation of heaven, and directing its
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views to the prize of endless glory. Honour, in every other sense, is the offspring of pride, directed by caprice ; and though it may prove an accidental security on the side of publick virtue, its influence often falls into the opposite scale, and candidly summing up the account, it may be difficult to determine, whether the boasted sense of honour has produced greater good or evil to the human race. Of this we are certain, nothing can secure mankind in the path of duty, through all the intricacies of civil and social connections, that does not enter the hidden recesses of the soul, and follow us where no created eye can detect our actions : That does not raise us, in many instances, above the influence of custom and popular opinion, and enable us, in obedience to the demands of duty, to tread under foot what an ill-judging world may call honour and greatness. What can effect this but a supreme reverence for the Deity, or that piety at heart, from which, as from a living fountain, flow the streams of every social virtue.

No less friendly is christianity to social happiness, as it inspires the hearts of men with the warmest affection towards each other. There is no part of the sacred institution more amiably distinguished, or more expressive of its divine Original, than

than its tendency to produce a diffusive benevolence. So far from being deficient in point of public spirit, it reveals an union among mankind peculiar to itself, as subjects of the same redeeming love, alike dependent on one common Saviour, the refuge of guilt and misery, the medium of every blessing to the children of men.

THE example of our divine Master, the love which animated him in the service of mankind, may go far in producing and maintaining a similar affection in the breasts of his followers ; but it is not upon example only that this part of the christian's character depends ; the spirit of his Saviour has taken possession of his bosom, reigns there, and reflects the amiable qualities of the great Original on the world around him, as the stars reflect the light of the natural sun.

CHRISTIANITY indeed says nothing in favour of that species of false patriotism, so much celebrated in Heathen annals ; which consisted in an unreasonable preference of the spot where the hero chanced to live, to the world beside ; a desire of extending its dominion on the ruin of other States ; and of trampling on the rights of
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mankind in general, that a small number might with impunity riot in their spoils.

OUR religion takes a wider aim—teaches us to consider earth's inhabitants as one family; to open the arms of affection to the whole, and to consult the interest of every member with a view to the happiness of all.

CONFINED as we are to narrow limits, the effects of our benevolence must necessarily reach those first who are nearest in connexion with us, but, like the principle of attraction in nature, it extends from domestic to civil relations, till finally it embraces not only the posterity of Adam, but the universe of being.

IT is scarcely necessary to add, that christianity promotes social happiness, as it produces the love of justice, or integrity of heart. Reverence for the Deity and love to mankind imply every personal, every social virtue. The greatest purity of heart and life, the most spotless integrity, the warmest exertions for public good, must be the result of that divine ambition which aims at the approbation of the Great Searcher of hearts, and expects its reward from the infinitely holy, just and compassionate Ruler of the World.

THUS does christianity promote the good of society, as it fits men for public service, and produces a character which will, in a degree, prove useful in every condition. But if furnished with extensive abilities, and placed in an exalted station, its happy influence is, in proportion, more diffusive, and it becomes the best resemblance of God, below. Greatness attends such a character, not as the precarious reward bestowed by fellow-men, but as inseparable from it by the constitution of nature, in which no bond is more indissoluble than that which connects true glory with a useful life.

MANKIND are not generally ingrateful, nor do they withhold their esteem and applause where they are so justly due. But should this be the case, the christian patriot still secures his greatness, shares largely in the favour of the King of kings, and shall ere long receive the open testimonials of it, in the presence of assembled worlds.

CHRISTIANITY, as distinguished from the religion of nature, made its appearance in the world, like the gradual advances of the morning, after a dark and tempestuous night. For more than three centuries, it was left to make its way in the world, against the passions and prejudices of mankind,

kind, by its own native excellence, assisted by the gentle spirit of its Author, acting on the hearts of men. How wide did it extend its influence, and how perfect was its form? The lessons it taught were piety and love, the fruits it produced were peace and joy; it exhibited a species of moral virtue superiour to what the world had seen before; extorted the admiration of its enemies, and could only be attacked by misrepresentation and abuse.

WHAT the friends of christianity considered as its triumph proved its greatest injury, gaining the civil authority to its side. An absurd attempt to unite the divine polity of Christ, with the institutions and interests of fallible men, soon deformed this perfection of beauty, and Christ was again sacrificed on the altar of pride and avarice.

AFTER a long interval, in which we discover but faint traces of this divine system, it revived again at the reformation; and assisted by the improved state of literature, and especially by the art of printing, its happy effects became more obvious and extensive than ever. This enabled mankind to gain an acquaintance with it from the scriptures themselves, instead of receiving it from artful and designing men, whose interest it was

to misrepresent it. To this we may ascribe that spirit of candour which at present prevails throughout the christian world ; and even the flourishing state of science may be imputed to the same cause ; for as superstition withers, so generous sentiments and religion tend to nourish the growth of genius.

WITH respect to society, the sacred pages teach us an happy equality among mankind. The necessity of civil government for general advantage, subjection to it for conscience sake, discountenance every species of oppression, softening even the horrors of war ; and as far as is consistent with the imperfection of the present state, entirely set it aside, by inspiring the hearts of men with that amiable charity which seeketh not her own.

THESE are thy features christianity, thou heaven-descended visitant ! Best gift of our indulgent Father to his offspring here on earth ; brightest resemblance of his own perfections ; fairest ornament of human nature ; rich source of every blessing to the children of men ; here mayest thou fix thy long, long abode ; smile propitious on these our rising States, form our rulers, adorn our every order, rendering our country
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great and happy beyond the example of former ages.

BUT well adapted as christianity is to promote the happiness of civil society, it can only do this where its influence is felt, and its obligations complied with. The wisest of men has taught us, and all experience confirms the remark, that as righteousness exalteth, so sin or prevailing vice will as certainly prove the ruin of any people. The institutions of Jehovah are not like those of fallible men, contingent in their effects : Hath he said it and shall it not come to pass ? There is as certain a connexion between a general dissolution of manners, and the destruction of the political, as between a vital consumption and the death of the natural body. This connexion is not more strongly marked under any form of government than that which we have adopted. In a Republic the people are not only the source of authority, but the exercise of it, is, in a great measure, lodged in their hands. Corruption therefore among the people at large, must be immediately felt, and if not seasonably prevented, proves fatal in the end.

No man therefore can better evidence his public virtue, than by endeavouring in his proper sphere,

sphere, to prevent the contagious spread of vice; or to promote the influence of morality and religion. Contemptible is that man's pretended love to his country, who with an ostentatious zeal for her credit, her finances or civil establishments, entirely disregards that which is the basis of the whole. He is like the man who is careful to repair and adorn some less essential parts of a building, whilst he suffers the foundation to be undermined, which failing, the whole must tumble into ruins. The period is critical, our country is in its youth, our character is forming, our credit, weight and influence, among the nations, is yet depending.

THE ardour of public spirit which was long kept alive by the agitation of war, seemed to subside at its close. We imposed upon ourselves that the contest was ended, that the prize was won; and we were willing to repose our weary spirits, after the fatigues of the field. The newly erected and scarcely cemented civil structure, which had been so nobly defended against open enemies, was left, in a great measure, unguarded against the attacks of private adversaries, or the no less dangerous effects of their conduct, who, perhaps, without any direct intention to injure us, consulted

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ed their own imaginary interest, in a manner which tended to the ruin both of themselves and their country.

THE effects of this inattention we have and still do painfully feel. It has rendered our condition in a degree distressing ; we are perplexed but not in despair. Our eyes are opened at length, our spirits are roused ; and such measures are now adopted and pursued, as will, we flatter ourselves, soon produce happy alteration in the face of our publick affairs.

GREAT is the advantage of a youthful country, she rises superior to every burden by the natural increase of national strength ; and what proves destructive to a people in their decline, in a growing state is turned to advantage, as it becomes a warning to regulate her conduct, in more advanced stages of her political progress.

BUT all depends under Providence, upon the exertions of public virtue ; and particularly much depends upon the virtue of this Commonwealth. We have been honoured for many years, with a leading influence in the American confederation. We form indeed a principal member of that important body : Long may we support our well-earned

earned pre-eminence ! by making it good upon the principle of extensive services rendered to the whole.

PUBLIC spirit, thanks to a guardian Providence, has not forsaken us, however its flame may have abated. The many wise and well conducted institutions which have taken place among us, for promoting science and the useful arts, the attention paid in some of them, to the dictates of humanity, and even to the leading design of christianity itself, witness for us that we still possess a proper sense of what is truly great, and tends to render our country illustrious and happy. Every lover of his country, every friend to religion, and the happiness of mankind, will sincerely rejoice at such appearances, and readily contribute his utmost endeavours to promote what is so happily adapted to accomplish the wish of the devout and benevolent heart.

BUT much remains still to be done for the preservation and happiness of our country. We commenced our political existence with no small share of national vigor, and with the general applause of mankind ; but, from some unhappy neglect, the insidious enemy of publick and private honour and happiness, VICE, in the forms of luxury and dissipation, gained an easy admission

admission among us. Inattention to the sacred obligations of religion, an intoxicating love of pleasures, with extravagant modes of living, have given a severe shock to our infant republic, and greatly threatened its ruin.

HERE then is a field open for the exercise of a virtuous and noble ambition. Who would wish to be truly great, to enroll himself in the lists of fame, which shall last when time is no more, let him step forth in the cause of religion; in the cause of his country, and whether in a publick or private station, his exertions cannot fail of their happy effect. Every man has some connexion with, some influence upon, society, which turned to the side of religion and publick virtue, must tend to further the happiness of present and future generations; at least it will redound to his own account, in the attestation of a good conscience, and the approbation of that God whose favour is light.

THOSE who are raised to places of trust, have in proportion greater opportunities for serving their country. As they lead in publick measures, so do they form the publick manners. It is from them the standard of œconomy, of taste, of what is honourable, great and good, is generally taken.

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To you therefore, our venerable political fathers, your distressed country holds out her supplicating hand, in this day of anxious expectation, as under Providence her best resource.

WE are happy in beholding once more, at the head of our civil establishment, a Gentleman, who, to his great literary and political character, adds that of the christian, to justify our confidence in him, and to ensure his best endeavours to support the dignity of his office, upon the example and precept of his Saviour, by rendering the most essential services to mankind in general, and to his country in particular.

THE Gentleman who holds the second rank in office, has from the decided voice of his country in his favour, through many successive years, the clearest evidence of her confidence in him ; a reflection upon which will animate his wishes and endeavours to further her welfare and happiness.

THE honourable Council, this day to be chosen, the honourable Senate and Representatives of the State, will consider themselves, as entrusted by a free people, with the most valuable deposit that men can trust to the hands of men, every thing dear in civil and social life,

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We readily acknowledge the wisdom and goodness of our constitution ; but it is not in forms of government to render a people happy : Wisdom, integrity, firmness, and public spirit in those who govern, are more essential. A wise constitution administered in the hands of such magistrates, will do much towards relieving our complaints, and ensuring our political happiness.

WE wish not to see our civil rulers officially interfering in matters of religion. Sacred be the rights of conscience ! No law can have religion for its subject, without infringing those rights, or laying an improper bias on the minds of men, with respect to the first and most important duty of life, that of judging and acting for themselves in those cases where they can only be answerable at the bar of Jehovah.

THE subject of civil legislation is still extensive and important, it includes every social interest, our invaluable rights, civil and sacred, our property, and even our lives, are in a measure submitted to their guardianship. They by wise laws are to guard the avenues which lead to the temple of virtue, to prevent the encroachments of vice, to be a terror to evil doers, and a praise to such as do well.

AT the present critical period our rulers will engage warmly in promoting œconomy ; not only with respect to publick expences, though that is an object greatly worthy their attention ; but it is the general habits of common and domestic life, which decide the fate of a nation. It is from thence the streams must flow by which the vital fountain is supplied ; and when those streams are dried up by luxury or profusion, as upon the interruption of the blood in its progress to the heart, death must ensue.

THERE is certainly much more depending upon the example of the higher orders in society, than is generally conceived. They have it in their power, in a great measure, to regulate the common customs and modes of living. Economy among them, would by easy stages find its way to the remotest members of the community, and produce the most happy effects upon the State in general.

INTEGRITY, firmness and consistency of conduct, are especially requisite at the present day. These will retrieve and establish our tottering credit, give energy to publick measures, and soon render us great and respected in the world.

ETCHES

FETCHES and indirect methods for saving expence, or accomplishing her purposes, are as inconsistent with the honour and interest of a State, as of an individual ; and however they may have a plausible effect for the present, must prove ruinous in the end.

IN our present embarrassed situation, it is hardly possible that every just demand should be fully satisfied, however uprightly endeavoured. The path of truth and justice in general is plain and open, and a wise legislature will steadily pursue it ; and though it may produce some temporary and partial evils, they will find, in the end, that like the steady conduct of Providence, through all the seeming intricacies of his moral government, it tends to beget a confidence in themselves, to dissipate the evils complained of, and to produce the most substantial advantages upon the whole.

NEVER was a people eventually benefited by injustice ; never was the path of integrity and justice steadily pursued, in the management of publick affairs, but it tended to the good of society. This is, and must be the case, whatever shrewd politicians may suggest to the contrary, so long as the constitution of the universe continues what it is at present, with a righteous God ruling at its head.

PUBLICK

PUBLIC spirit should animate the exertions of those who would essentially serve their country at the present period. The times loudly call for examples of a noble disinterestedness; and who so proper to give the lead, as those to whom we have committed the conduct of the State; from whom we derive our political maxims; from whom we form our estimate of the times; from whom therefore we wish to learn the patriotic lesson, of preferring the publick to every private or personal interest?

THERE is no limiting the happy effects of such an example, held up conspicuously to the view of a sensible and grateful people. It has often spread like a religious enthusiasm, through every branch of society, and called forth patriots from every class of men. Honour attends such a character as its robe of state; it is adorned with a diadem, the lustre of which shall never fade. May a noble ardour warm the breast of every ruler, thus to distinguish himself in the cause of his country, and receive a lasting greatness in the approbation of his God.

PIETY must at once finish and support the character of those who would substantially relieve and benefit their country. This is the only
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spring which will give consistent movement to political conduct. This will give weight and dignity to publick measures, ensure the propitious smiles of Him who rules the world, and diffuse the most extensive and happy influence on society in general.

O THOU great inspiring source of good ; such wilt thou form both the rulers and the subjects of this often highly favoured, and always kindly protected country. And without the gift of prophecy, we may anticipate the happy effects. Behold her rising with increasing strength and lustre, through every stage of national improvement, till she has at length compleated the utmost measure of national glory and happiness ! Israel then shall dwell in safety alone ; the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and of wine ; his heavens also shall drop down dew : Happy art thou O Israel ; who is like unto thee O people, saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency !

BUT hark ! Do we not hear the animating address of those distant ages, who shall witness the future greatness of this our Western Empire ? Yes, it is the voice of our late descendants ; it is directed to those who have gone before us. Hail illustrious

Illustrious forefathers ! Who laid the foundation, erected, nobly defended, and richly adorned this magnificent temple of freedom and religion, under which we now repose ! And may they add, with reference to ourselves, hail also illustrious progenitors, who, when the sacred structure was injured by the rude attack of war, the insidious arts of secret enemies, or the imprudent conduct of ill judging friends, roused from a temporary slumber, called forth the genuine spirit of publick virtue, and under its influence, in the practice of œconomy, integrity, disinterestedness, supported by a manly piety, not only repaired what had been injured, but gave perpetual firmness and lustre to the whole. But alas ! What can be perpetual here ? The fashion of this world passeth away ; the most durable monuments of human greatness must have their period, and time itself expire.

THE kingdom of the Prince of Peace shall survive every change ; and they who in conformity to his example, and in compliance with the invariable laws of his religion, seek for honour in the path of publick virtue, shall share his triumph over the ruins of time, and wear a crown of glory which fadeth not away.
