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Discourse
de novo
A

DISCOURSE,

PREACHED IN THE

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,

NEWBURY.

FAST DAY, APRIL 7, 1853.

BY LEONARD WITHINGTON, D. D.

NEWBURYPORT:

MOSES H. SARGENT, PUBLISHER,

No. 29 Market Square.

WM. H. HUSE, PRINTER—UNION PRESS.

1853.

The Blessings of our Institutions, and our obligations to continue them.

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NEWBURYPORT:
WILLIAM H. HUSE, PRINTER;
Daily Evening Union Press, Newburyport.

REV. LEONARD WITHINGTON, D. D.

Dear Sir : — We desire to express to you our sincere thanks for the Sermon delivered in your church on the afternoon of Fast Day. We cordially sympathize with you in the enlarged views—the grateful and patriotic sentiments—so forcibly stated and so richly illustrated in that discourse ; and we would respectfully ask of you a copy for publication.

With great regard and esteem, we are, Dear Sir,
Your Obedient Servants,

STEP. W. MARSTON,
DANIEL COLMAN,
S. MULLIKEN,
JACOB STONE,
JEREMIAH COLMAN.

NEWBURY, April 8, 1853.

GENTLEMEN :—I have received your partial request, and commit the Sermon to the mercy of its friends and the severity of its enemies, if such there be. The gist of the discourse lies in the last paragraph under the first head. That I have not encountered a vague fantom will be evident to all who peruse the speeches and speculations of the late Hon. J. C. Calhoun of South Carolina—a man of great penetration—great political consistency, and, as I believe, of great honesty ;—but a man whose powers and virtues make his authority more dangerous when it supports a wrong principle. I believe that the experience of two centuries in New England, after all abatements and exceptions, goes to confute the first grand postulate of his social system.

Yours, truly,

L. WITHINGTON.

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S E R M O N .

“ FREELY HAVE YE RECEIVED, FREELY GIVE.”

MATT. X. VIII, LATTER CLAUSE.

Our partiality to ourselves often prevents us from discerning the most obvious truths. The wide ocean may be concealed by a mist, and the sun himself emits his light in his meridian glory in vain around the sluggard's couch, unawakened by his beams. The mental eye is more apt to be closed than the natural, and we are very reluctant to learn the lesson which we have no delight in knowing. That we owe many duties to the social system of which we are a part, is alike the dictate of morality and religion. Society does not stand on its own base like a stone temple where each block is pressed into its place by the superincumbent weight of all above it, and supported by all below—it is a collection of voluntary minds, each having its place and all having their duties—we must be active in its support—we must own its laws—we must feel a love for the general welfare—we must bring our contributions to the general store-house, and we must learn not to separate our private welfare from that of the community to which we belong.

As the man that has reached the top of the mountain has a far purer air and a wider prospect than he involved in the mists of the vale below—so that country which has,

through effort, reached the highest point of civilization, is far purer and happier than that which still lingers in barbarism and ignorance. We should ever be mounting the hill. Improvement is the blessing and duty of man. Growth is life. It is a responsibility which rests on us all. But the tendencies of selfishness are not toward improvement.

We are bound to honor a parent from the relation itself and from the ordinance and command of the supreme parent. But how much more is this duty enhanced when we recollect a thousand favors needed—a thousand favors received. The lake Genessaret pours the waters of the Jordan down its winding channel on its southern side; but then it receives them in turn from the north. Freely it receives and freely it communicates.

When our Saviour uttered the words of our text, he was about to send his Apostles to the *lost sheep of the house of Israel*, who were to go and preach the prelusive gospel; that is—the gospel as far as then developed. They were to *provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in their purses; nor scrip for their journey, nor two coats, nor shoes, nor yet staves*. The first offering of the Gospel was to be free—*without money and without price*. The meaning of the word *free*, may be—that, though the Gospel must cost something, yet the difference between the price and the value of the thing offered is so great, so immense that it may well pass for nothing. If the express-man were to bring you a trunk of California gold, you would hardly call the quarter of a dollar which you paid for the carriage an equivalent for the immense value. The Gospel, though it comes to us through our exertions and sacrifices, yet it may be truly said—to be *without money and without price*.

My application of the text this day will be to a kindred subject. We belong to the community in which we dwell. We are drops in a stream, leaves on a tree—component

parts of one great whole. Society has done something for us ; we owe it something in return. The star that shines over your journey when you travel by midnight, will continue to shine without your care so long as it is embraced in a cloudless sky. But if you enjoy a lamp you must replenish it with oil. We have certainly received very much from the community in which we dwell—New England and its institutions. Not the sunny islands of the Pacific sea—not the climes of Araby the blest—not the ever-bearing fields watered by the rich sluices of the Nile—not the realm of India or Ceylon—can afford such moral blessings as the icy soil of New England. Vigor breathes in all her gales, and the blessing of God is written upon her rocks.

Freely have ye received, freely give. The text naturally divides itself into two parts. I. A consideration of what we have received from the institutions of our country ; and II. The obligation it lays us under to support and improve, if possible, the institutions from which we have derived so much benefit.

I. We have received much. We are citizens of the freest nation on earth. A combination of circumstances very rare, have made New England a peculiar country. With us self-government is not only a passion but a habit ; and, for many centuries, causes have been at work to make us capable of what we enjoy. The laws, customs, schools, institutions, religions, habits of our land, are not the work of a day, but the slow growth of teaching ages. They are like the soil we tread, where we see that one layer of earth has been deposited after another, and its present fertility is the accumulated gift of time. Our fathers came from England. They were of Saxon descent. Though England is a monarchy, she has the most republicanism in her composition of any nation beyond the Atlantic. The aristocracy there was a very gradual one ;—it

was diffused power—it was shaded off by slow degrees into the commonality, from which it was constantly recruited. Many of the great land-holders were without a title of nobility ; and then there were a set of small land-holders called yeoman, very numerous in former ages ; and still farther, a tenant there was always regarded as an independent man ; a man of peculiar rights ; he might sue his Lord and the courts were always favorable to him.* There prevailed trial by jury, and finally England and Scotland soon became Protestant countries ; they read the bible, judged of its mighty doctrines, and learned to bow with complete submission to no king but the king of Zion. Thus a gracious providence prepared the way for that sacred trust which man in his weakness and ignorance is so apt to abuse. Suppose yourself standing at the mouth of a river, where its waters meet the sea, and you wonder at their abundance—you ask if they ever can fail. You are told that they drain a whole county of its floods—the showers of a vast surface—the snows of distant mountains supply the never ceasing stream. It has had acres and miles for its preparation. Thus it is of our institutions—God has been for ages planting the roots and preparing the way.

It would be to tell an old story to relate how this continent was settled. Our fathers dissented not only from Rome but from the church of England. They were driven from their native land—they left the streams and breezes that murmured around their native cottages and came to settle this western wilderness. They were thrown on their own resources. It would be almost impossible to enumerate the various causes which combined to prepare the felicity of a self-governing people. The hard climate—the rough soil—the trees to be cut down—the long winters—the fierce savages—the dangers of a midnight alarm—the strict industry and temperance enforced by their con-

*See Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, book 3d, chap. 2d.

dition—the admirable proportion between the literary and laboring population—the distant power to which they could always appeal in the danger of anarchy—a power which they hated to call in, and which, from that very circumstance, had a silent influence—all these blessings and many more—combinations never before seen on earth—prepared the way to make a free, a sober and a moral people. Self-government became a habit, before we knew its value. We planted and cherished the tree for its shade, and lo! it was unexpectedly bearing fruit. We blundered into blessings; and, though some were foreseen and sought, many—many more were providentially found. As the Mormons when driven from Illinois, wandered over the wilderness and finally fell into the valley of the salt lake best fitted for them—so our fathers were guided, as if by some guardian angel, through briars and thorns, which only served to make the land of promise more safe and more sweet. All favored that peculiar prosperity we now enjoy, and are taught to consider our greatest blessing.

Happiness is no abstraction. It is something fitted to us—something we must be prepared for; the tortoise finds it in mud—the bee among the flowers and the bird on the tree. It is the perfection and perpetuation of our taste, our habits and our cultivated nature.

Our dear native land has given us much. She is a kind mother and she has rocked us in her rough and deal-board cradle; she has sung her songs over our earliest sleep. She knew what blessings she had to impart and she knew how to prepare us for them. What different beings you are from being born in Massachusetts—in Essex county—on the banks of the Merrimack—from what you would have been had you drawn your first breath among the Bushmen of Karroo, or the dark skins of the Fejee Islands. I can speak for one—a thousand recollections press upon my grateful memory. I found a school; a social library;

a sabbath ; a weekly habit of assembling to hear sermons ; though born to labor, I was nursed to thought ; and I can never forget those sweet forms of Christian amelioration which charmed my infancy and made life a blessing. O ! my dear native land—thy streams are sweet because they flow by the sanctuary. They murmur to the songs of Zion. Thy flowers are beautiful because they remind me of the school-house where I was first taught to read. Thy hills are pleasant because they look down on the steeple. The ocean that lashes thy eastern rocks is majestic, because it wafts the improvements without the imperfections of the old world, to thy welcome reception. Even thy pastures and barren sands that tinkle to the sheep and the cow-bell, are delightful because they need and command that skill which can turn floods on the dry ground and make the wilderness blossom as the rose. O, New England—dear New England—asylum for the wretched—pride of thy sons and joy of the whole world—the faltering tongue, that would bemoan thy imperfections, shall speak thy praise. Thou hast given us much. Thou art our mother ; our nurse—our refuge and our home. *If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth ; if I prefer not Jerusalem to my chief joy. Out of Zion the perfection of beauty God hath shined.* There I found my cradle and there may my surviving kindred dig my grave.

Perhaps a concentrated idea may more impress us. Take the Putnam school as an example.—Here is a plain man, born among us whom nobody supposed to be a philanthropist, or a reformer. But he has struggled with difficulties, his own experience having taught him the value of education, his wants have suggested the means of supply, and he leaves a legacy which embalms his name in the hearts of his fellow citizens as long as a good education

shall be the best gift that charity can bestow upon her protected sons. Write on his simple stone that he was a wise man ; write more, that he was a generous man ; and write again still more, that he was both generous and wise.

Perhaps, after all, I have not given you the brightest diamond New England has given us in her fillet of precious stones. What is it ? We are so cautious and distrustful that we never fully believe a social principle until it is verified by experience. The ship of Ericsson has removed all doubt by actually accomplishing her voyage. Objection retires. Now in our land—in our hard Northern region we have shown by the lapse of two centuries that it is possible for an energetic people to till their own soil and yet support their own institutions. Labor and thought may go together. It is not necessary to have a degraded class. The forms of feudalism are not necessary to the public improvement, or the public felicity.* This lesson, fully carried out and long perpetuated, will be of immense value to an incredulous world. It is indeed an old lesson—Moses taught it. A man must be an inattentive reader of his Bible not to see that it is the involved design in those old Jewish laws. The sinewy arm that works must go with the sober mind that thinks. The jealousy of power—the iron chain of mingled fear and aggression—the groans of poverty—the luxuries of the palace purchased at the expense of the privation of a thousand cottages—the tyranny that fears while it terrifies, and the submission which crouches while it prepares the blow,—all these things are superfluous—they are self-inflicted tortures. Give man the deep principle that comes from his nature and the bosom of God—first train him and then trust him, and all is comparatively safe. Society in the eastern world so naturally falls into

*An objection will occur here to some minds ; it will be said that slavery was in New England until after the revolutionary war. True, but to such a small extent as not to affect the certainty of the experiment

a different mode, and when you have once put on the chains, it is so hard to take them off—the lower people in Egypt—in Naples—in Turkey and even in France appear so utterly incapable of exaltation—that our example to the contrary becomes vastly important. This lesson our northern states have taught to conviction—taught by experience—*our* habits are *their* miracles; and for this precious collateral of a freed Gospel, we should learn to bless God, and keep it that we may bless him. It is his richest gift. But it is time to pass to the

II thing—The obligation it lays us under to support and to improve, if possible, the institutions from which we derive so much benefit.

The text but echoes a principle deeply ingrained in our nature. The earth that receives the heat and the dew returns them in fragrance back to Heaven. *Freely have ye received, freely give.* For, in the first place, though no good were given, it is our duty to love and benefit all mankind. Wherever there is a sensitive nature to suffer, it is the yearning of true virtue to afford it relief. God himself has set us his example. Jesus Christ did not wait to receive some benefit from man before he left the skies for our relief. Our miseries were enough to move him. There is a prior obligation resting upon all active natures—not merely to *return* benefits but to *begin* them. Nay, we are bound to relieve the evil and unthankful just as our heavenly Father *sends his rain upon the just and unjust.* Were we born on the most barren island and surrounded by the most barbarous population—it would be our duty to raise and exalt the most hopeless spot in creation; but 2d, when good *is* given, it certainly increases the obligation to return it. Then common gratitude combines with original virtue to spread the blessings we have received. And when the benefit is beyond all estimation—when gold and silver are dross and dust compared with it—how does our

responsibility swell in magnitude to go and do likewise ! Think how much you owe to the fact that you were born in New England ; you might have been born a Jew, a Mahomedan, a roving Tartar ; you might have been kneeling before the throne of Persia, or been the victims of African slavery ; your birth in New England made you a free man ; a man, a Christian. You grew up among our institutions, and have received all their blessings. Our Bible instructed you, our schools taught you, our Sabbaths called you to repentance and our Fathers' God spread his mantle over you. In no quarter of the world, probably, would you stand such a chance for temporal and eternal happiness as in New England. Now will you deem her institutions a burden ? Will you not perpetuate the forms of social life that have exalted you from degradation and almost lifted you to Heaven ?

It is well known to Christians because it is deeply felt in their own experience, that an additional obligation to love and serve God comes from the fact that we are redeemed by Christ. We were originally bound not to break the law of God. We were bound to obey it when not a gift was bestowed upon us but existence and itself. But *after* transgression and *after* the terms of pardon we are doubly bound to repent, return and obey. So with regard to the social system. We are bound to support and improve it when we first enter its protecting shade. But *after* we have shared its benefits, the obligation constantly increases. At first it is a duty, and afterwards a debt. Even the discontented prophet felt for the withered gourd that protected him from the sun.

In the 3d place, we owe to *man* this return. We owe it as social beings. On some of the desolate islands in Boston harbor, and all along the coast, there were formerly erected houses by the humane society, with fuel, tinder, flint and matches, so that, if any sailor was wrecked on

them, he might kindle a fire and find the means of preserving life. Now suppose yourself wrecked in some storm on one of these islands, and suppose yourself preserved by one of these houses. Would it be right for you, when you had done with it, to pull it down and burn it up? would it not be rather an impulse of feeling previous to all calculations of duty, to multiply these Bethedas, these houses of mercy, that every victim of the stormy sea might find a shelter and temporary home. If we measure our duty to our country by the magnitude of the blessings she has given us, how great must be our public spirit, how great our toils and sacrifices for her support!

4thly. But man is only the agent of God. God meets us through man. He is impersonated in man. *Verily I say unto you, in as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.* Remarkable words, involving a great principle. The blessings of God come to us in a peculiar way. They seldom drop directly from his hand—they come to us by humbler agency. That terrible doctrine, predestination, meets us first in a soft and bland way. Your birth in New England has shaped your whole character. The place, the hour, the mother that rocked your cradle, your relatives, your associates, the books you read, the schools you attended; what an immense influence they have had in shaping your character and linking it with your destiny! Yet who appointed these things? You could not pause on the threshold of existence and be consulted on these events so deeply connected with your happiness. As you received from God these blessings in this remarkable way, so you must return them to him through a similar channel. He selected a sunny spot where you should be born; he surrounded it with all the flowers of a modern Eden; there he fixed his tent and there he poured his blessing. He has made others the ministering angels to you, and he calls

upon you to be a ministering angel. O the deeds of mercy are hardly the foretastes, but they are the privileges of Heaven.

But lastly, consider the lasting nature of the benefits required and imparted in this interchange of love. When a man makes a feast and spreads a luxurious table, his gifts are a momentary gratification and are soon forgotten. THESE are the gifts of the eternal one, they never fade or pass away. Their effects survive the temporary scene in which they take place. I remember that an old philosopher says our gifts should be, *mansura**, such as will long remain—not flowers that fade, but diamonds which will sparkle as long as the sun shall shine. It is our duty to make the road to eternity as little dangerous as is possible in this world of snares and pitfalls. In other lands, it is all darkness; lions roar around its hedges and serpents hiss in its dust. But of our happy land we wish to say—
“And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”

Does any question what I mean by these returns we owe to our native institutions. I mean a warm and hearty public spirit, a heart that beats for every good deed. The man that pays his taxes cheerfully and wishes to see the school house, the church and the sanctuary flourish, and after he has made all his sacrifices, if we may so call them,

*See Seneca, *De Beneficiis*, Lib. 1 Chap. 12.

is willing to say, conscious of the immense superiority of the purchase over the price, that they have come to him freely, certainly so from God—he is the citizen.

Perhaps some may say, in our humble station in private life, little can be done to benefit the land. We can only pour drops into the sea. Well—drops make the ocean. It is this private influence that is wanted most. It is the most efficacious part of the contribution and the most scarce in the market. No lack of candidates for those deeds, which may be seen of men and which men are sure to reward. Think of the woman that poured her Alabaster-box on the Saviour's head. She was a reality—seen of God and praised as soon as seen.

Piety is practice ; religion is benevolence. We know the value of the cloud by the water it drops on the drooping vegetation. And it is an incitement to action that we can, through the Gospel, burst the bounds of all precedents and bear man to a level of improvement and felicity which the Past has never known. History is not our only guide. Even if our experiment should fail and our lovely New England with all her institutions be swept away by a tide of formality, superstition and despotism, should I survive, though checked and discouraged, I should still stand on her rocks and hold out the torch of hope over her melancholy ruins. I should follow her to her very grave with the tears of sorrow but not the groans of despair. I should commit her to the dust with the sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection. The principles she has evinced must survive all revolutions and at last fill the earth.



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