

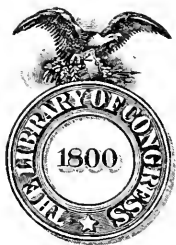
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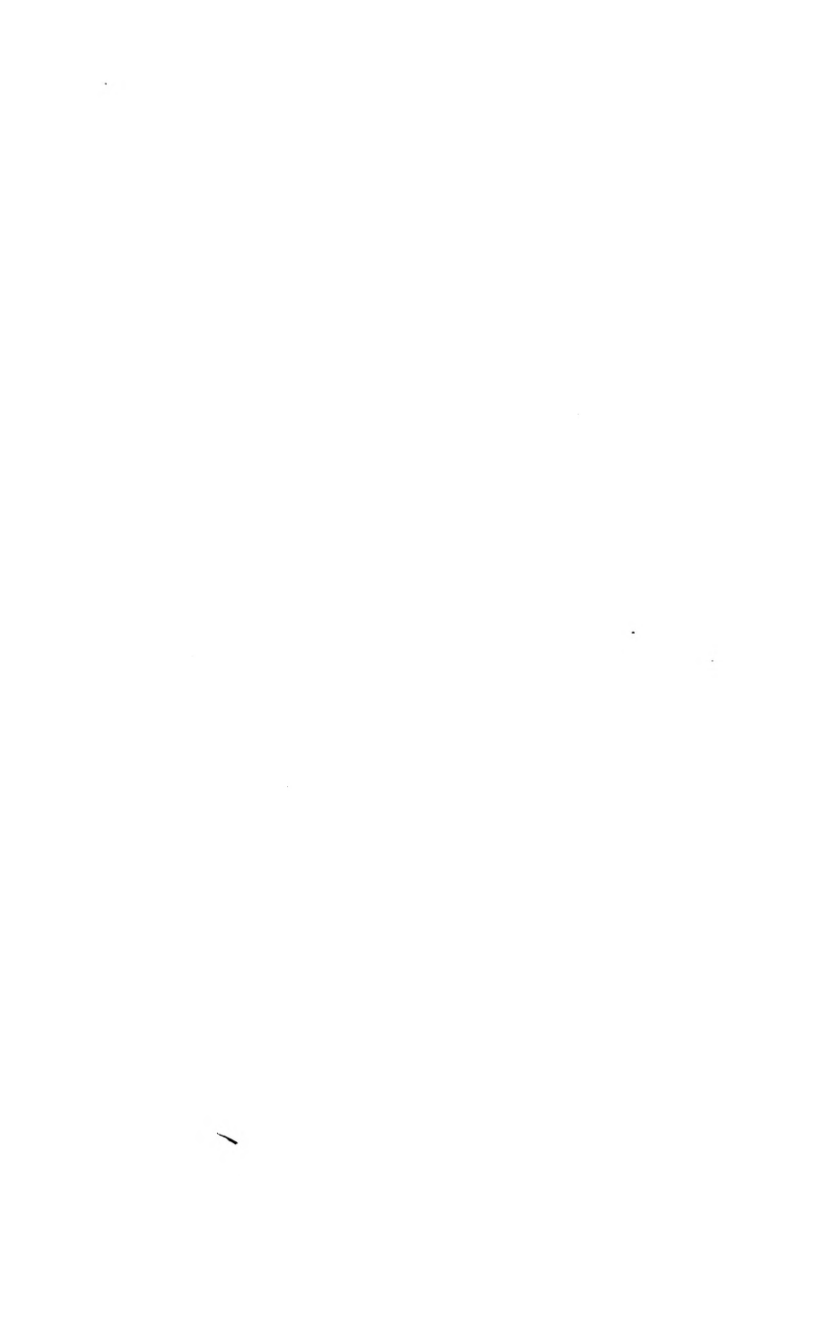
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A Sermon on the Freedom
and Happiness of the
United States of America
By Robert Davidson of Carlisle
Pa. 1794.



Class E 76

Book J 1



*D. Thomas's presented by
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The Rev. Mr. Basse*

A

S E R M O N,

ON THE

FREEDOM AND HAPPINESS

OF THE

United States of America,

PREACHED IN CARLISLE, ON THE 5TH OCT. 1794.

AND PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE OFFICERS

OF THE PHILADELPHIA AND LANCASTER

TROOPS OF LIGHT HORSE.

BY ROBERT DAVIDSON, D. D.

PASTOR OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CAR-

LISLE, AND ONE OF THE PROFESSORS IN

DICKINSON COLLEGE.

PHILADELPHIA:

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Daniel Thomas's presented
by his Classmate.

Angela B. B. B.

A S E R M O N, &c.

“ And what one Nation in the Earth is like thy People, even like Israel?”

II. SAMUEL, vii. 23.

TO take a comparative view of the nations of the earth, and learn in what respects some are happier than others; and to examine what are the sources of national prosperity, and the true foundations of the strength and permanency of states; must be profitable at any time, and especially proper at the present crisis. It is with this view the words now read have been chosen. And let none say, that we are carried away by the spirit of the times, to substitute mere political harrangues in the place of the Gospel of Christ: for, as I observed, on a former occasion*, the affairs of state, the

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manage-

* In a Sermon preached on the preceding Lord's day, from Proverbs, xiv. 34.---Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people,

management of public concerns, and the duties of citizens are not to be considered as topics foreign to the gospel, but the contrary; because the gospel views man in every condition in which man can be placed,—and especially as a member of society. I shall not, therefore, need to apologise for the sentiments contained in the following discourse; since, in delivering them, especially in present circumstances, I consider myself only doing conscientiously the duties of my office.

But not to waste your time unnecessarily,—let us come to the subject now proposed to be considered.

David, the pious king of Israel, had been conducted from the humble walks of a pastoral life, to the exalted station of a throne; and as he had been conducted to it, so he was firmly established in it. *Now it came to pass*, as we read in the first verse of this chapter, *that when the king sat in his house, and the Lord had given him rest round about from all his enemies*; meditating devoutly on all the great goodness of God to himself and the nation; he thought in his heart, that he ought to make preparations for building a temple to the honour
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of his God. And the Lord sent the prophet, Nathan, to assure him, that he was pleased with his pious design, and to encourage him to persevere. So we read, (in the 8th verse). *Now therefore so shalt thou say unto my servant David, Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, I took thee from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, Israel. And I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies out of thy sight, and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth.* He was ordered also to assure him of God's future goodness to his family, from which was to arise, in the fulness of time, that great Deliverer whose throne was to be established for ever. After these assurances, which filled the heart of this great man with a sublime joy, *he went in, it is said, and sat before the Lord,* and there poured out the gratitude of his soul, in the language here recorded. He admires the goodness of God, in raising him to a station so very eminent; in saving him from internal enemies, who had repeatedly attempted to distract his government; in vanquishing his external foes on every hand; in giving him peace, in which he
 appears

appears to have greatly delighted, though he had been an illustrious warrior; and thus affording him an opportunity of attending to the internal concerns of the state and his people's happiness. And while he revolved in his mind the many indubitable instances of Divine Providence towards the nation, and the happy circumstances in which they were now placed; looking around him from his exalted station on the smiling scenes of prosperity on every hand, and the ineffable comforts to be derived from a state of peace and security;—having a heart capable of ardently desiring and greatly delighting in the felicity of those committed to his care;—he utters, among many other expressions, the words of our present text,—*And what one nation in the earth is like thy people?*

I. We may here, in the *first* place, consider a little the reasons on which this expression is founded, or in what respects the people here spoken of, were favoured above the other nations of the earth.

II. This will prepare the way for our making some observations, in the *second* place, on the great goodness of God to our own state and nation in particular; our high

high and many privileges, the gratitude due from us to God for them; and the wise improvement which we ought to make of them.

I. Let us, then, in the first place, make a few general observations on the state of the Jewish people, previously to and at the time when these words were spoken; which will be a suitable preparation for the remarks that are intended to follow.

The posterity of Abraham have been a people most remarkably under the direction of Divine Providence, ever since their origin: and notwithstanding the many revolutions which they have experienced, a remnant of them is still preserved distinct from all other nations; and no doubt for some important events yet to come, in which they are to be deeply interested. The founder of this nation was a man of a most excellent character, eminent for his faith and piety; he was called out from the midst of idolators, that of him might be made a great nation; among whom the knowledge of the true God was to be preserved, 'till the times of the Messiah; when this knowledge and the news of salvation should

should be diffused over the face of the whole earth.

The history of the Jewish nation, if read with suitable views, and especially in order to gain an acquaintance with *the ways of God to men*, would be one of the most instructive that could merit our attention.

Indeed the study of history in general, if properly conducted, tends greatly to edification. In order to derive the greatest profit from it, we ought to mark the course of the divine dispensations,—in the happy consequences of national virtues, and the awful effects of national vices;—the rise and progress of states and kingdoms; their short or long duration, according as folly or wisdom sat at the helm of their public affairs; their enjoyment or loss of liberty; their ruling over, or becoming subject to neighbouring nations; and the like;—in these things, I say, we should mark the course of God's Providence; we should see the operations of a divine hand; and then we shall read a well-written history of any nation, especially that of the Jews, with high satisfaction and advantage. But if we read those histories only to gain an acquaintance with

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a few of the more remarkable events, detached and separate; and if we endeavour to persuade ourselves, that all human affairs are under the guidance of blind chance, and tending to no conclusion for the display of the divine justice and goodness;— we shall find our knowledge fruitless, and all our researches vain.

The mind of man is so formed by its adorable and wise author, that it wishes to understand the final cause of every thing which it contemplates and admires. In viewing the *works of nature*, so many striking proofs of design and benevolence present themselves to the mind, as soon as the reasoning powers begin to unfold themselves, that even children wish to be instructed in these things, to trace a chain of causes and effects, and to know why certain things are so and so, and not otherwise. We see the most beautiful harmony subsisting from age to age, among the heavenly bodies; however various in size and situation, and how complicated soever their motions and revolutions. We look for, and are pleased to find, in every province of nature in this lower world, evident

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marks

marks also of wisdom and goodness. A power that is irresistible, under the direction of infinite wisdom, appears to be constantly operating, on every hand. It seems to be doing the utmost violence to our reason, to endeavour to persuade ourselves, that there is no wise design in the constitution of nature, and the arrangement of its various parts.

And is it not doing equal violence to our rational nature, to suppose that the events of this lower world are under no wise direction, or, that there is no Providence over *the affairs of men*? Even the Romans of old, who built the most astonishing fabric of empire that ever the world beheld, evidently acknowledged, especially in their better days, that their republic was under the divine direction, and could stand no longer than it was the will of the Supreme Deity, to preserve it by his guardian care. They seem gratefully to have ascribed their victories to an over-ruling power. The sentiments of their most celebrated orator, patriot, and philosopher, on this subject, have always been greatly admired.

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As a Divine Providence, then, must be acknowledged over the affairs of men; and something may be learned on this subject even from *the light of nature*, and the general voice of nations;—how thankful should we be for *the light of revelation*, by which our views are so greatly enlarged, and our thoughts are carried back to the creation and forward to the consummation of all things!

But what we have more particularly in view, at present, is the interesting history of the *Jewish* nation. And we say that this is above all others full of instruction, because the designs of Providence towards them have been more fully unfolded to us, than his designs towards any other people. Had we only the history of that nation, in the way in which histories are commonly written,—a splendid enumeration of the most shining facts and revolutions;—and especially laboured descriptions of battles, and high encomiums on the characters and exploits of Moses, Joshua, and other leaders;—with little of *the doings of the Lord*, and the interpositions of his hand;—had we, I say, this

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history,

history, thus composed in the common way, and were we only amused with the ingenious remarks of historians, on the operation of mere natural causes; we could not read it with so much advantage as we now can; nor could we, in a satisfactory manner, account for the many changes through which that nation has been made to pass. This people were called *the people of the Lord*, and he was pleased to stile himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But we must not suppose, that they had the same ideas of the government of the world, which many other nations seem to have had, *i. e.* that every nation or state had some particular Divinity presiding over it, and attending to its concerns alone. For the representations which are every where given of God, in the Jewish writings, lead us to conceive of him as the Creator, Preserver, and Lord of heaven and earth; as having all nations under his direction; and employing all the shining armies of heaven as his ministers, in the government of this lower world.—Now, as this people had so much light and knowledge, respecting
 God

God and his providence, more than others around them had; this shows the force and propriety of the words of David, when he said,—“*What one nation in the earth is like thy people, even Israel?*” It must be considered as an exalted privilege, indeed, to have the knowledge of the true God, and of the manner in which he is to be worshipped. This his chosen people had; while mankind in general around them were bowing down before stocks and stones, and paying a superstitious adoration to false and imaginary objects of worship. The ideas which they had of the Supreme Being, of his Providence and government of the world, are fully set forth in those hymns of praise, which were composed principally by this pious King, and which all men of taste and piety have ever admired. They had also the moral law, written by the finger of God himself, which gives a full view of all those duties which we owe to God and to one another. For the sum of the commandments is, *To love the Lord our God with all our hearts, and our neighbour as ourselves.* They had assurances

assurances not only of the justice, but also of the mercy of God through a Redeemer, who is slow to anger, and sometimes spares sinners for many years, and who forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin, to all those who truly repent. They had the clearest proofs of his mercy; for he had often turned away his anger from them, and *exacted of them less than their iniquities deserved*. He gave them the most encouraging promises of his protection, as well as the clearest views of the miseries that would come upon them, as a nation, if they departed from him, and became immoral and profane. He placed them in the land which he had promised to their fathers,—a land, which, to use the scripture-phrase expressive of the greatest plenty, *flowed with milk and honey*. Out of this land he expelled those nations, which by their enormous wickedness had become ripe for ruin, that he might plant his people in their stead.

To sum up all in a few words,—the Jewish nation were, at the time here alluded to, in an independent and flourishing condition; having the light of the
 knowledge

knowledge of the true God shining upon them ; having also excellent laws for the rule of their conduct ; and being in a state of peace,—having no enemies within the state that were disaffected to its best interests, nor any without, to be feared ; while a pious and prudent man, of extraordinary abilities, and whose life Providence had watched over and preserved through many a scene of trial and danger, was placed at the head of the nation, and reigned in the hearts of his people.

When these several things are taken into consideration, which time will only allow us at present briefly to mention, we see how much superior, in point of privileges, the Jewish nation was, to all the other nations around them.

II. Let us now, in the *second* place, consider the great goodness of the Divine Being to our state and nation in particular ;—our high privileges ; the gratitude which we owe to God for them ; and the wise improvement which we ought to make of them.

We might draw a parallel between our condition and that of the nation spoken of
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in the text, in a variety of particulars. A perfect resemblance, indeed, of the circumstances of any two nations is not to be expected; and yet it may be sufficiently striking to merit attention.

The celebrated navigator who first discovered this continent was doubtless under the guidance of heaven; and the discovery was preparatory to the wonderful events that were to follow. This part of the New World presented itself as a place of refuge for those who wished to enjoy religious and civil freedom, unmolested, and to the greatest extent. They hoped that here they could worship God according to their consciences, and would be at a secure distance from all the insults of tyranny. The infant settlements, which Providence designed as the nurseries of a vast republic, in due time to arise, gradually extended themselves along the shores of the ocean, and into the interior parts of the continent. Their growth was rapid and astonishing; they were in general a sober, industrious, and pious people; and the governor of nations prospered them. The same of the privileges
here

here to be enjoyed, and of the salubrity of the air, and fertility of the soil, drew hither great numbers from different nations of the OLD WORLD.

But, alas! how subject to change are all human affairs; and by what a precarious tenure are these possessions held and enjoyed! Attempts were made to deprive us of the privileges which we so highly prized; and a distant power, which we were wont to call the Parent nation, insisted on *the right of making laws to bind us in all cases whatsoever*. We could not conceive in what other language, the most absolute tyranny could have clothed its mandates and its menaces. We resolved to refuse a submission to the most unequal and iniquitous laws; for we would not acknowledge the power, that was assumed, to be a *lawful* one; but, on the contrary, *a violation of our chartered rights*. Hence arose an obstinate and bloody contest.

To take a view of this in its rise, progress, and termination, would be a work of much time; suffice it to observe, that being confident of the justice of our cause, we com-
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mitted ourselves into HIS hand, who disposeth of states and kingdoms at his pleasure; we prayed to him, and made a diligent use of the most proper means of self-defence. And the arm of the Lord appeared evidently stretched forth for our preservation: And in nothing did his care more fully manifest itself, than in raising up and preserving those illustrious men, of whom it may be said, as is here said of David, that he made unto them *a great name*. The malice of disaffection, the deep-laid schemes of treachery, and even all the open attacks of courage, aimed at our subjugation, were wholly disappointed. Many powerful friends were raised up for us, and our independence, (to obtain which so much blood and treasure had been expended) was at last acknowledged. The foundations of a free government being thus laid, and the most favourable opportunity afforded, which appears ever to have been given to any of the sons of men, of establishing the freest and best form of civil government, which could be learned from the wisdom and experience of ages,—

constitutions

constitutions for the several states, and a general one for the union and interest of the whole combined, were formed, and regularly and solemnly adopted.

This is only an *outline* of the picture, hastily sketched : To give it all the variety of shades and colouring, necessary to complete it, would be rather the business of the historian than the divine.

These things are mentioned, to shew, that when we compare our condition with that of other nations, we may with great propriety borrow and apply the words of the text, and say,—*What one nation in the earth is like the American people.* History does not inform us of any people who had the same favourable opportunities, that we have had, of choosing that form of government which we might think best, and most conducive to our happiness. What was good in others, we were at liberty to adopt ; what was bad, to reject. This opportunity we hope has not been neglected. And we live, and have lived and prospered for some time, under a government which, with all the imperfections that can in any

justice be laid to its charge, is one of the most free and excellent under the sun. Nothing is wanting to make it all that we could wish it to be, and to give us the pleasing hope of its stability and permanency, but more *wisdom, virtue, and religion*, among the citizens at large. This is a government, which all the real friends of freedom in the old world appear to admire; and under the wings of which the oppressed of every nation would wish to take refuge. Here is *liberty and equality*, according to the just acceptation of those favourite terms; *liberty*, civil and religious, to the utmost extent that they can be, where there is any government at all; and an *equality of rights*, or provision made for the equal protection of the lives and properties of all. That all men should be equal, as to abilities, station, authority, and wealth, is absolutely, in the present state of things, impossible. But where every citizen has a voice in making the laws, or in choosing those who make them, and is equally under their protection,—*there is equality*. As to religious liberty especially, we may

may indeed say, *What nation in the earth is like the American people?* For every man may entertain what opinions he thinks right, and worship God in what manner he thinks best, without being excluded from any office, to which he has a prospect of rising, on account of his creed or religious sentiments. This is surely liberty, in the utmost latitude that any man could desire.

If rulers abuse their trust, or aim at oppression, they are removeable in a regular and constitutional way; and better men can be put in their places, when the power reverts into the hands of the people, at the stated periods. This way of redressing grievances is infinitely preferable to that of tumults and insurrections. Unhappy the people who can have no change in their government but what they must obtain by the sword!

The advantages arising from our situation, and the productions of the soil, in the various climates comprehended within our boundary line, might, if this were the proper time and place, be fully described. And it would appear, that no other nation !
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on earth may be compared with this, in these respects. What unspeakable advantages have we for a gainful commerce with the whole world! At what a happy distance are we placed, from the fierce and ambitious nations of Europe!

We hear of a great people contending for liberty. We hear of *a nation in arms*, combatting a formidable host of enemies, to secure their freedom and independence. But oh! what scenes of horror,—what fields of desolation and blood,—present themselves to our imagination, when we endeavour to form an idea of the real present state of Europe! And how happy are we, to be in a state of *neutrality and peace!* How much should we admire that wisdom and firmness that have preserved us in such a state; amidst so many wicked endeavours to involve us in the calamities of war!

And has not *Science* darted her benign rays, into the remotest parts of these United States? Seminaries of learning are rising into reputation on every hand; and under the fostering care of government will be
among

among the chief means of preserving our liberties. The sons of science, particularly those educated in this place*, will, we hope, never be seen at the standard of anarchy, or on the side of despotism.

And as to *Religion*, the choicest blessing of heaven to men; and without which no nation can be truly happy;—is she not left at liberty, to display to every advantage her celestial charms, and to exert her renovating powers on the minds of men, free both from the aids and the restraints of the civil arm? What would the people of these States have or wish for more? Are not these the very objects for which our patriots bled? And to obtain which the greatest sacrifices have been made by all ranks of citizens?

While thus we view the fair side of things, and realize our many privileges, we cannot but rejoice and be thankful.

Hymns

* Dickinson College, in Carlisle, has sent forth at least eighty graduates, since its erection; and promises to be an extensive blessing to the Western Country, if supported by a generous public.

Hymns of praise should every where be sung to the *Eternal King*, who fought for us our battles, and gave us liberty and peace.

But when I look around me, and see multitudes of men in the garb of soldiers, and handling the instruments of war,—I cannot but feel the most painful emotions, and ask,—*What these things mean?* Has some foreign despot invaded our territories with formidable armies? Are the savages of the wilderness committing devastations far and wide upon a defenceless frontier, having routed the army sent to subdue them? Or is there any other similar cause of these warlike preparations? “No! (I am answered) These preparations are for a very different purpose. They are to teach those who will not otherwise be taught,—that we ought all to be obedient to lawful authority; that we ought to respect the government which ourselves have made, and whose protection we have enjoyed; that in a pure republic the will of the majority must be submitted to, and no lawless attempts

attempts made to weaken the energy of good government." And is it possible, that all our citizens have not good sense enough to know these plain and important truths, without such a formidable force to teach them? It seems not. To our grief and shame it must be told. But upon this disgraceful part of our history I shall not dwell at present: it is a painful task! and we have heard from the proper authority the real state of our affairs. But oh! what heart, that is not hardened into an entire insensibility, does not bleed at the thought of an unprovoked *insurrection*, by some of our deluded fellow-citizens, against the mildest and freest government under heaven! What friend of peace and real liberty does not drop a tear over the folly of his brethren! Shall we pity them, and enumerate their grievances, as an apology for their conduct? If they have any grievances, what are they? and are they *such* as can justify *an appeal to arms*? No man in his sober senses can say any such

such thing. Can it be a grievance to support good government? Surely it cannot. Unless government itself be a grievance; which is perhaps indeed the opinion of not a few.

But let us, my friends, better taught, rejoice in the privileges which we possess, and do every thing that is required of us, in our several places, for their security; knowing that a regular administration of justice is infinitely preferable to anarchy; and that it is a solemn and important duty, to submit to laws, which have had every sanction that they ought to have,—for the public good and individual safety.

It is for the support of the laws of their country, I am well persuaded, and for no other object, that so many of our brethren have voluntarily armed themselves on the present occasion.

To you, my friends, who are present with us at this time, in the character of *Citizen-Soldiers*, allow me the liberty of a short address; and with this I shall conclude.

You

You are in the presence of *Him* who knoweth all hearts; and I trust you are conscious to yourselves, that you have assumed your present character, not from the desire of war, but the love of peace. We cannot but admire your patriotism and zeal. You have left your families, your friends, and all the comforts of the domestic scene,—to endure the hardships of a camp,—to expose your health to the inclemencies of the air*,—and your lives, if required, to the malice of disaffection! It is thus you will learn, as many as have not learned already, something of the astonishing hardships which the brave defenders of our country endured, for *seven long years*: and you will highly prize, and contend for, that liberty which was

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purchased

* At this time were encamped, on the Commons of Carlisle, many gentlemen from the city of Philadelphia, and elsewhere, who had left behind them large families, and all the comforts of life, which an independent fortune could give; and many of them such as worthily filled the highest departments in society. To see such men lying upon a bed of straw, and doing the duties of soldiers, was truly astonishing. What zeal for liberty and good government did this testify!

purchased at so dear a price. You have the example of our beloved PRESIDENT, and other exalted characters, to animate you to your duty. In obeying his directions, and copying his many shining virtues, you will find the path to lasting honour. Your determined firmness and unanimity will cause discord to hide her guilty head. Order and obedience will be restored, and the effusion of blood prevented. You are called to act under the direction and authority of HIM*, who never exposed to danger a single life without necessity; and who graced his victories with that *clemency* which is the greatest ornament of true courage, and one of the surest tests of magnanimity. And is not the cause, in which you are engaged, such, that you may safely pray to the omnipotent and just Ruler of the world,

* The President of the United States, Governor Mifflin, and many other gentlemen of high rank, being present, the Preacher was restrained from saying as much as he could have wished on this subject, lest the expression of his real sentiments might have appeared to some the language of adulation.

world, for his aid and protection? We are persuaded it is: and would both follow you with our prayers, and beseech you to pray for yourselves, and trust in *him* who is able to preserve you. Let no part of your conduct reflect disgrace upon your arms, or injure the good cause in which you are engaged. Be sober and temperate,—merciful and just,—friendly to each other,—and firmly combined in the cause of virtue, innocence, liberty, and law.

And now may God dispose the hearts of our fellow-citizens, every where, to the love of order, justice, and peace! May he establish good government among us! May he long preserve a life which appears so necessary for our public tranquillity; and preserve to this country her rights and privileges—WHILE SUN AND MOON ENDURE!

THE END.

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