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THE

SUBSTANCE OF A DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED

AT THE UNIVERSALIST MEETING-HOUSE

IN CHARESTOWN, MASS.

APRIL 13, 1815,

BEING THE DAY OF

GENERAL THANKSGIVING

FOR

THE RETURN OF PEACE.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

AN ADDRESS

TO THE SINGING SOCIETY AND CHOIR.

BY EDWARD TURNER,

Minister of the Universalist Society in Charlestown.

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THE

SUBSTANCE OF A DISCOURSE, &c.

PROVERBS XXV, 25.

AS COLD WATERS TO A THIRSTY SOUL, SO IS GOOD NEWS FROM A
FAR COUNTRY.

THE occasion which has brought us together, the national circumstances under which we meet, the peculiar duties which we assemble to discharge, must unitedly produce an effect, surpassing the power of language, and laboured criticism, in giving us an understanding of the text. We consult our own feelings, we study our mental constitution, and the result is every way favourable to the general truth and importance of the sentiment, which the wise man has advanced. Cold and unfeeling must the heart be, that can be unaffected with unexpectedly pleasing intelligence, especially when it comes from afar, and concerns not merely ourselves, our families, and our neighbourhood, but also embraces the interests and felicity of the country of our birth. This point makes a kind of moral standard by which true joy may be measured. We find, by many indubitable proofs, that we live not for ourselves alone.

We have a part in the interests and happiness of others. Hence, their sorrows or their joys become proportionably our own. Influenced by this principle, so favourable to human welfare, we have sighed with the prisoner, borne to far distant climes; we have deplored the wounded and dying brave, who have nobly barred their bosoms to the sword, thirsting for blood. We have mourned with their anxious, dejected relatives. We have participated the distresses of our country, struggling in the martial conflict, opposed to potent and numerous hosts. Such were our exercises and our sensations, till the sound of PEACE roused, cheered and invigorated us. As the weary traveller, on Arabia's sterile shore, panting, famishing with thirst, is re-animat~~ed~~ed by the sight of the cooling stream; so were we rejoiced at the highly interesting intelligence which has recently blessed our land. Every heart beat with new joy. Every face wore smiles of congratulation. We then experienced, and it cannot be so soon forgotten, that "as cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country."

It will be a natural and proper use of these words, and a reasonable exercise upon the present occasion, to illustrate the principles and circumstances, which render the late "news from a far country" emphatically "good news."

Whatever may be the cause or causes which may impel "nation to lift up the sword against nation," still war is, from its nature, its operations, and many of its effects, a very serious evil, and a calamity to be

solemnly deprecated. The Scriptures are express upon this point, that wars “come forth of those lusts which war in our members.” Perhaps the observation is merely general, however, and may be intended to be understood, with some exception. But in its general application, we are presented with one of those affecting, and debasing views of human nature, from which we are glad to turn away, without a wish to review our inspection. In such circumstances, to hear that the sword has ceased to devour, must be a cause of pure pleasure with all good and benevolent beings; and even the consideration that the calamity which has come to an end, was not the lot of his own country, will not prevent the sincere satisfaction and joy of that heart which is interested in the welfare of universal man: from which we infer, that peace, in whatever place, is always eligible, and the sound of it refreshing.

If we contemplate war as strictly just; as being the necessary production of patriotism, though reluctantly resorted to, yet in this case, it is an evil, endured only for its desired and expected effects, in a national view. The man who could love it for its own sake, or for any private temporary advantages which he expects to attain by it, can lay no claim to a character for Christianity, patriotism, or scarcely for humanity. With all the friends of public order, national tranquillity, and the disposition which characterizes the Christian, the intelligence of peace, will be emphatically good news; refreshing as cold waters to a thirsty soul. The end being attained, the continuance of

the means is no longer an object to be desired or even tolerated.

Besides, man is *naturally inclined* to peace. If a state of war is endurable for a time, and we are able to trace its origin, to the action of corrupt principles within ourselves; or, speaking more charitably, if the calamity is supported, as we support the loss of a limb, by amputation, in neither of these cases, is there evidence of a natural inclination to this *evil*, any more than there is, that a man prefers sickness to health, because corrupt humours and bad habits have engendered disease; or that he is inclined to pain in preference to ease, when he submits to the temporary torture of an operation. Some writers, indeed, have asserted, that such is the extreme depravity of our species, that we are naturally inclined to whatever is evil; and that we love war better than peace. If this last position be true, what need of the powerful inducements of lands, bounties and honours to lead men to the sanguinary field? "A serpent," says Solomon, "will bite without enchantment;" that is, because it is his nature to do so, and therefore needs no incentives. The moral fitness of these remarks will further appear, when I state, in an appeal to your feelings, when the happy intelligence of peace reached your ears, you would not, indeed, you could not have so cordially rejoiced, had the news which you heard embraced an object opposed to your best inclinations. We are, therefore, furnished in this particular, with a solid reason why the good news, lately received, is so refreshing. We find it

perfectly consonant to inclination; and at the same time we develop a noble and generous principle in the human heart.

Another reason for the truth of the declaration in the text, in its application to us, is found in the genius of our government, and is interwoven in the nature of our political institutions. Monarchical and aristocratic governments, if not naturally productive of war, which we believe might easily be proved, have from some cause or association of causes, been unfortunately, the theatres where have been acted the most dreadful tragedies, in the work of human destruction. But a republic is *ordained* for peace: at least, if any calculation can *safely* be made from the principles which compose its foundation and become incorporated with the superstructure. Like the prophet's inspired account of the principles of the kingdom of righteousness, "wisdom and knowledge" were intended to be "the stability of our times." The conductors of our revolution, the establishers of our independence, the supporters of our national rights, wisely provided for the diffusion of all kinds of necessary information. These provisions are recognized as parts of our public system. They have grown with our political growth, and strengthened with our national strength. Hence, our citizens are not to be driven by a servile fear, nor enticed by a blind and stupid attachment to imperious rulers, to draw the sword, to enlarge a sphere of unjust domination, or swell the tide of personal aggrandizement. This mild and reasonable arrangement of things,

which provides that all should know the true causes of war whenever it becomes necessary, though to some it may appear weak and inefficient, is yet upon the whole extensively beneficial, as it tends to the security and continuance of peace. In this instance, we have an additional proof of the fact, that "as cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country."

In further representations, we may come to particular cases, in which humanity is deeply concerned; and they will show why the intelligence of peace is so exceedingly refreshing. Who is there, that, upon common principles of feeling, does not sincerely regret the expense of blood which war always occasions? Who does not sigh for the fate of the brave, who expires nobly contending in his country's cause? Yet who does not consider the lot of such enviable, when compared with the condition of wives, parents, children, brethren and sisters, who are left to "mourning, lamentation and woe," for the death of the dearest objects of their hearts' affections? In behalf, then, of suffering humanity, we hail the return of peace; we listen to her enrapturing sounds; we gaze intently upon her lovely form; we know that she is friendly to life and happiness. She seems ready to guarantee our future safety; she points us to a state, where, under her benign auspices, no affectionate heart shall rend with anguish, at the premature death of some tender friend, "slain on the high places of the field."

But, my brethren, there are yet other causes of grateful joy, that peace has again blessed our land. "The sighing of the prisoner hath come up before God, and, according to the greatness of his power, he hath loosed those appointed unto death." Behold the widowed form of that aged matron, whose furrowed face hath long been clothed with dejection, and wet with tears of bitterest anguish; for the only human support of her declining years, the son on whom her earthly hopes were fixed, has been immured in dungeons, unblest by the light of day, and exposed to hourly attacks of pestilence and death. She receives him again as from the dead, and her faltering voice blesses her returning child, with raptures scarce experienced, since the ancient patriarch flew to the filial embraces of his long lost son. We mingle our rejoicing sensations with hers. The intelligence of peace has been to her "as cold waters to a thirsty soul." We imbibe, also, the salutary draught. Observe that distressed, affectionate wife. The husband of her youth, the companion of her better days, doomed to desponding imprisonment, in the land of the enemy. Few objects present themselves which are capable of throwing even a short lived beam of comfort upon her benighted mind. She turns a parental look upon her children; alas! they are "miserable comforters." They can but open new sources of anxiety, from the corroding reflection, that, in their tender age, they may soon be "fatherless," and their mother "a widow." In the midst of these painful meditations, the sound of our national jubilee, awakes

the sinking bosom to extasy and delight. Soon, the voice of peace shall penetrate the gloomy recesses of the prison ; she hears the awakening command, " loose him and let him go." She resigns her cares and anxieties for gratitude and joy. We rejoice with all such. May the day we celebrate be sacred to those correspondent emotions, which occupy and fill the breast of every more immediate sufferer.

Without mentioning further particulars, the full catalogue of which would occupy too much time, and preclude other important views ; we pass to observe, that to our country in general, to all classes, professions and occupations of men, collectively, the intelligence of the event we celebrate, must be emphatically " good news," and prove as " cold waters to a thirsty soul." You will not suppose that this remark is suggested by a want of confidence in national ability, spirit or patriotism, to suffer any necessary privation, or endure any *quantum* of suffering that the public circumstances should require. Let us not, on a day like this, and at the close of scenes, such as our citizens have witnessed, let us not encourage in our hearts, a thought so foreign to the American character, and so utterly repugnant to its honour. We know that immense sacrifices have been made, to what was believed to be the public good. It is not mine to calculate how far this belief was correct or incorrect ; nor does the subject require it. I am not sufficiently versed in that political arithmetic, which nicely adjusts and compares the balances, in cases where there is such a discordancy of opinion. But if we may fairly judge

from the apparent coincidence of causes with their effects, the sacrifices which have been willingly made, have returned in blessings upon the heads of those who offered them. Men are always repaid, if repaid at all, for the sufferings they may have endured, in some degree of proportion to the patience they have exercised during their calamity. But the suspension of usual avocations, the dead weight which war necessarily attaches to business, and the hours which pass between hope and fear, confidence and anxiety, are certainly to be regarded as evils, from which a deliverance is as "cold waters to a thirsty soul." The event has been proclaimed, and at a period, to many unlooked for and unexpected, when these circumstances give place to activity, zeal, and laudable enterprize. Business is again agitating from its stagnant condition, and in due course of time will resume its wonted channels. Our citizens, delighted with the present, and anticipating the future, will not be disposed too much to regret the past. Invention, that child of necessity, has not been dormant nor inactive during the period of our country's struggles. Her labours in war will take a more efficient character in peace. And it is reasonable and *pleasing* to believe, that our land will long be benefited by her exertions, which probably no other circumstances could have produced. Economy, too, has plied her prudent and restrictive art. The cautious and salutary lessons she has given, are worthy our attention and practice, in the best, as well as the worst times. Peace affords us a desirable opportunity to mature

our systems, and bring doubtful cases, if such exist, to the test of experience.

To men, who bend their minds to the study of civil policy, who compare the various systems which have obtained at one time or another in most sections of the globe, the event of peace must be peculiarly grateful, especially if attached, from principle, to the form of government under which we live; for the calamitous events which they have witnessed, and the close of them in the returning blessing of peace, have tested, in some measure, the theories in which they believed; but which had not before so fully shown their capacity to be reduced to practice. The founders of our government, the framers of our constitutions, no doubt believed, that the systems they formed would bear the trial to which they might be subjected; that they would be competent to purposes of national advantage, in adversity, as in prosperity. But the supposition has been considered as the dream of a philosophic brain; and whether sufficient energy existed in the nature of such a government, to realize the expectations formed, has been greatly doubted. It is not saying too much, to remark, that the experiment has been fairly made, and the result proved favourable. That energy which occupies the minds of free, enlightened and enterprising citizens, has been found adequate to all the exigences and trials of a state of war; and the subsequent peace, while it sanctions former opinions, receives new lustre from such considerations.

The friends of religion, and lovers of that liberty which is favourable to its interests, share copiously in the blessings contained in the "good news from a far country." If politicians have doubted the real utility of our systems of civil government, divines and others have likewise disputed the permanency of religion, unless founded upon law, and supported by penal coercion. It has been feared that a state of public anxiety and national distraction would break the hold which men have upon virtue and piety, if not strengthened by human power.

Disciples of the Lord Jesus! who adhere to your Master's cause for its own sake; decided friends to universal liberality! yours must be joys of no inferior kind. Yours is the double enjoyment of deriving firm support from religion in days of public distress; and the knowledge that the cause you espouse is competent to its own maintenance in the most disastrous and trying periods; and "peace upon earth and good will to men" are at once your exercise and your reward.

The republic, of which we make a part, has been, from its first organization, a spectacle to the religious and political world. To the one, it has exhibited uncommon and unpropitious features, from the supposed want of legal authority to support and enforce the mandates of religion. To the other, it has worn an equally unfavourable aspect, from the impression, that its civil institutions require the union of the altar with the *secular* seat; a connexion which is cautiously disavowed by our constitutions. The truth seems to be,

that, ever since the adoption of our present form of government, we have been making an experiment, novel to the world, and upon the result of which, the civil and religious freedom of unborn nations depended. The eyes of millions have anxiously waited the event; or at least have attentively watched for some interesting fact, which should either exalt their hopes or confirm their fears. It has been known that ours is the first republic which has existed, founded and organized upon similar principles. The Grecian and Roman states had little except the name, to entitle them to rank as republics; and on the whole, bore but small analogy to the confederation of our country. To the good and great men, who have been earnest spectators of our struggles, our efforts and our trials, every approximation towards final success, will be, at once, a pledge of the utility of our system, and a preventative of despair, in periods of public trial and calamity.

We proceed to such an improvement of the subject, as we think it justly demands, and as the purposes of this joyful day require.

1. To the production of the rational exercise of gratitude, to which our rulers have invited us, it is necessary to cultivate in our minds a sense of the preserving, supporting and overruling hand of Heaven in all our concerns, from the first establishment of our fathers in this land. Like Israel, under the oppression of Egypt, seeking refuge in the wilderness, and bending their weary steps towards Canaan, so our progenitors sought security from religious intolerance, by

emigrating to this country; and the Divine agency is observable in making that which was considered an evil, subservient to the purposes of peopling a country, and producing all the subsequent circumstances of civil establishments and national prosperity. We have been marvellously carried through various public trials, to encounter which would have seemingly required the strength and experience of nations, who had become old in arts and arms, and successfully trained to political and military enterprize. We may well adopt the language of Israel, "had not the Lord been on our side when men rose up against us, then they had swallowed us up quickly." From such pledges of Divine favour, let us learn to trust the great Ruler of nations for future blessings, "committing ourselves to him in well doing."

2. Let us thankfully observe the present happy situation and prospects of our country; her deliverance from war and its manifold evils, her success in repelling the late enemy, when most confident of success; when the hearts of many trembled for the fate of the invaded portion of our land; then "thine arm, O Lord, brought salvation." Contemplating such interpositions, we become obligated to act as the worthy recipients of the high favours of Heaven. We should recount them to our children, and impress their tender minds with a pious sense of the goodness of God. We should endeavour, early to convey to them a knowledge of our national advantages, our religious privileges, and habituate them to a respect to our constitutional authorities; that we and they may still

enjoy the blessings we now possess, and prepare the way for their transmission to latest generations.

3. Considering the happy return of peace, the very report of which is "as cold waters to a thirsty soul," it becomes the benevolent man and the Christian to pray, that henceforth we may be free from all alarms of war; that America may ascend like the eagle to the crag of the rock, yet neither seek the prey from afar, nor behold the slain at home. Nor this only; but that the promised time may be hastened, when wars shall universally cease; and the kingdom of Prince Immanuel rise above all thrones, principalities and powers; the kingdoms of this world having become, by actual subjection, the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ.

4. In the transactions of this occasion, let us be reasonably joyful; but let our festivity be chastened by a humble and dependent spirit. We probably feel the application of Solomon's direction, "eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart." In the observance of this, may we not be forgetful of Him who spreadeth our table, and causeth our cup to overrun; and, "whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, may we do all to his glory." And as the best evidence of our gratitude, let us remember the poor; for "the liberal soul shall be made fat, and he that watereth shall be watered also himself."

17
AN

ADDRESS,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE SINGING CHOIR

IN THE

UNIVERSALIST MEETING-HOUSE, CHARLESTOWN,

APRIL 30, 1815.

BLESSED be that voice, which sweetly invites and engages the children of heaven and earth to awake to the sublime transports and enrapturing pleasures of the songs of mount Zion! Forever hallowed, in the view of dependant man, be that Divine intellect, which, measurably communicating itself to the sojourners in the vale of time, inspires with new energy, and prepares the drooping spirit for the melody of immortality. "Awake and sing, ye who dwell in dust." Suffer no harp to be unstrung, or suspended "upon a willow." Let no voice be feeble or faint. Let all beings, in all possible circumstances, unite with all their powers, not in the labour, but the refreshment of praise. The four and twenty elders, around the throne, with the spirits of the just, already made perfect, have commenced "a new song." From the height of their glorious abode, they wishfully bend

towards earth, and impressively solicit our united exertions. It is their unanimous declaration, that "the time of singing is come." With one voice they proclaim, "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth God." "Sing ye praises with understanding." Let the inhabitants of the rock begin the song. Let the villages that Kedar doth inhabit, catch the grateful lay. Shout ye lower parts of the earth. Break forth into singing, O forest, and every tree therein. Let them shout from the tops of the mountains. Let them give glory unto the Lord, and declare his praise in the islands.

Compared with so sublime, so solemn, yet joyful an employment, what are all the pursuits of this too enchanting world! Nay, what are all the other exercises of religion! A rational and well timed discourse, founded on the "law and the testimony," may awaken the thoughtless, arouse the spiritually indolent, or invigorate the fainting spirit with a noble and holy energy. But the very institution of preaching presupposes a world dead in trespasses and sins, and needing Divine instruction, though communicated from the lips of mortals. But singing is the representation of that more glorified state, where we sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, and where there is no occasion to teach ever man his neighbour or brother, saying, know the Lord; for there all know him from the least to the greatest. "Prayer," says the pious Hervey, "turns chiefly upon a regard to one's self." But sacred music presupposes the "fulness of joy and pleasures forevermore," bestowed upon all engaged in that exercise, and is the reciprocal expression of the felicity of each.

No desire left unsatisfied, no necessity unsupplied. The principle that produces the "new song" on high, is the very essence of heaven. The imitation below, is as near the original as earth will permit. This is his language who "sings with the spirit and understanding," "Thy loving kindness is better than life; my lips shall praise thee." "My soul is satisfied, as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips." If prayer be, as Milton styles it, "the golden key which opes the palace of eternity," singing is the happy exercise and employment of the blest inhabitants of the "house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

The causes of that joy, which this exercise so eminently expresses, are many and important. They all, however, are associated in one general and operative reason. The exhibition of Divine beneficence to beings susceptible of felicity, is the highest principle which actuates and engages the mind. When creation first manifested the benevolence of its Author, and declared him "wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working," "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." In humble, but devout imitation of this event, the completion and dedication of the first Jewish temple was celebrated by sacred music; when those engaged in it made but one sound, in praising and thanking the Lord, with the voice, with trumpets and cymbals, and instruments of music, saying, "He is good, and his mercy endureth forever." When the moral universe arose from chaos, the birth-day of

the new creation was proclaimed by a choir of angels, who sang in holy concert, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will to men." Even the *gradual*, successive unfolding of Divine power, in the conversion of transgressors, inspires celestial rapture, and produces notes of extatic praise. "There is joy in heaven, over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, who need no repentance." The prodigal's return is celebrated with exercises, in which music has an important share. Nor shall the anthem of heavenly praise know a single pause, while operative, yet progressive grace effects its mighty deeds. And the most exalted strain is reserved for that day, when all the "ransomed of the Lord shall have returned to Zion, with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; when they shall have obtained joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall have fled away."

Since the first recognition of a Supreme Intelligence and Almighty Power, man has found a happy union of duty with advantage, in offering his humble tribute of adoration and praise before the throne of glory, "high and lifted up." The sacrifice of thankful joy, uttered in a song, has appeared the most rational, and most exalted expression which human beings could present. To "serve the Lord with gladness, and come into his presence with singing," has been considered an act in which solemnity is associated with cheerfulness, and the powers of reason and the best social affections are deeply engaged. It is a practical comment on those declarations of our relig-

ion, which represent the servants and disciples of the Lord Jesus composing one body in heaven. This delightful employment exhibits them undivided, even upon earth, where, as in heaven, their interests, their feelings, their services are one. They exhibit themselves as under tutorage for glory, and seem already to have received the first lesson for immortality.

Such being the rational duty and high privilege of our Christian vocation, it becomes a matter of importance that we should govern ourselves by these views in the external performance of so delightful a service. It is required of the devout worshipper, that he “sing with the spirit, and with the understanding also;” that is, that the mind should imbibe the idea, and feel the force of the sentiment expressed in the song, and the understanding discover the propriety of it. Influenced by such directions, the primitive Christians are said to have “spoken to each other in psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs, while they sang and made melody in their hearts to the Lord.” It must be a subject of sincere and deep regret, to every reasonable and serious mind, to observe an inclination to thoughtless levity while engaged in this edifying department of Divine worship. The heart should be deeply engaged; the mind should be detached from all inferior, but especially from all *unhallowed* objects. The inclination to vanity should be subdued. The love of pleasures, falsely so called, should cease to operate. And if we would worship God in spirit and in truth, we should say to our cares, our tempta-

tions, and our subordinate enjoyments, as the devout patriarch to his servant, when about to ascend the mount, "Tarry ye here, while we go up yonder and worship."

My friends, composing this respectable choir, we derive a rich entertainment from your exertions; we participate a portion of the moral pleasure which must be the result of your useful attainments in music, and of the labour and time employed in qualifying yourselves for this important branch of service. I congratulate you on the proficiency you have made. The instructor claims our respectful notice for his assiduity and attention to your interests. You have zealously co-operated with him, and helped to give effect to his exertions. It is not assuming too much to say, in the name and behalf of this Society, that I welcome you to the department of worship which you have desired, and to all its enjoyments and pleasures. We are convinced of your importance to the edification, permanency, and continuance of the social state. While a grateful congregation wish to appreciate the value of your labours, and to "esteem you highly in love for your works' sake;" let them observe in you, a sincere attachment to sacred music, from a consideration of its nature, utility, and moral pleasure. Suffer me to plead, that no trivial circumstances or causes may ever interrupt your present harmony. You have hitherto preserved a happy union in all your proceedings. It has been highly honourable to yourselves, and satisfactory to us. Continue, as far as may be consistent

with other duties, your endeavours at higher attainments in this heavenly art; and may fresh improvements keep pace with all your efforts. May the cheerful exercise in which you will engage, be an antipast of celestial joy. And when these pleasant scenes on earth shall be past, may you and your ministering servant meet around the throne, to celebrate the praise of ransoming grace in the "song of Moses and the Lamb," saying, "Thou art worthy, for thou hast redeemed us to God."

THE END.

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