

A
S E R M O N
ON THE DEATH OF
General George Washington;
DELIVERED
LORD'S DAY, JANUARY 5, 1800,
BEFORE THE
B A P T I S T S O C I E T Y
IN
P R O V I D E N C E .

By STEPHEN GANO
Pastor of the Baptist Church and Congregation;

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PROVIDENCE, January 13, 1800.

*TO the Baptist Church and Congregation in
this town, before whom this Sermon was delivered,
and by whose request this Sermon was delivered,
and by whose request it is now published, it is res-
pectfully dedicated by a sincere mourner on the oc-
casion, and their*

Most affectionate Servant

In the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ,

THE AUTHOR.

A

S E R M O N , &c.

LAMENTATIONS, V. PART OF THE 16TH AND THE 17TH VERSE.

THE JOY OF OUR HEART IS CEASED – THE CROWN IS FALLEN FROM OUR HEAD.

My BRETHREN *and* FELLOW-CITIZEN,

THE late afflicting dispensation of Divine Providence, in removing from this life the First Man in the nation, is universally felt, and sincerely lamented. Such is the force of this shock, which millions feel with the keenest sensibility, that eloquence fails to express it, and imagination to paint it.

LET others engage actors on such occasions, as some of the ancients have done, to exhibit external marks of grief – a vain mockery, which passeth off like an empty tale: but when the heart is pierced with anguish, even nature herself directs to suitable expressions of it. Such are the tears, and such the badges of mourning in our nation, on this solemn occasion. To mourn with those who mourn, is a principle of nature, particularly enforced by the Christian religion. It is at the same time a mournful satisfaction to friends; the means of exciting a laudable emulation among survivors, and of transmitting to posterity characters rendered illustrious by their public services, by their talents, and by their virtues.

I SHALL take the liberty to apply our text to the mournful subject of our discourse, although originally expressive of Zion's sorrows: and

- I. I SHALL consider something of the public loss we have sustained – *The crown is fallen from our head.*
- II. THE effect this loss has produced – *The joy of our hearts is ceased.* And,

LASTLY, conclude with some reflections and inferences from the subject.

I. In considering the public loss we have sustained, it is not to be expected we should fully display the character of the departed, nor the greatness of this national calamity. Indeed it is a subject so far beyond my feeble powers of expression, that I was ready to mourn in silence, with my beloved country, in this common calamity. But left we should appear deficient in respectful attachment to the memory of this best of men, I have been emboldened to ask your attention to this solemn and affecting subject – while I hold up to your view this bright example of public services and private virtues.

HIS fame and great military talents shone conspicuous early in life; and as if destined by heaven to be the instrument of saving his country, he then, by his foresight, prudence and bravery, brought off the remnant of a defeated British army, and baffled an enemy of superior number. This exploit excited several predictions respecting his future glory.* These predictions have been verified in the late revolutionary war. Our countrymen, at the commencement of the war, were unprovided with military stores; untutored in the art of war, and destitute of a leader to direct their military operations. How could they meet the veteran bands of foes, led on by generals grown old in war? Lo! the renowned friend and father of his country, WASHINGTON, appears! The ornament of human nature, to compose whose character, such an assemblage of shining virtues conspire, that it were difficult to mention one most eminent. His dignity of mien, propriety of manners, wisdom in council, valour in the field, disinterested patriotism, inflexible probity, humanity to his enemies, sympathy to the suffering, and veneration for virtue, rendered him the joy of the people, and gave him an unrivalled ascendancy in our armies through an eight years war. From this height of dictatorial power, equally possessing the unbounded confidence of soldiers and citizens; having accomplished to object of his appointment, and the wishes of his heart, he returns to the common rank of citizenship; retiring to the peaceful shades of Vernon, without pension or emolument to himself or family, and without other reward for his long, painful and important services, than the affectionate glowing hearts of his countrymen, and the admiration of the world. How unlike a Caesar or a Cromwell, or the heroes of antiquity! When *they* had acquired or usurped the sovereign power, the reins of government were guided to aggrandize themselves at the expense of their country's liberties. It was reserved to this first of men, with disinterested zeal for his country's welfare, to secure her freedom, and then to retire to enjoy, in common with his fellow-citizens, the blessings he had procured with so much toil and danger.

HAD his life terminated with our revolutionary war, what American heart would not have lamented his departure? He stood unrivalled in human glory and greatness; - but Heaven, as if determined to shew to posterity the sublimest virtues of human nature, preserves his important life until the exigencies of public affairs require the aid of his other talents and virtues. The statesman and civil ruler remain to be displayed. Although our foreign enemies are driven from our favoured land, and the dove with the olivebranch of peace fettles upon the bosom of our country; yet, without order and government, peace cannot long be maintained; like a vessel destitute of rudder and compass, she lies exposed to the fury of every wave. Alike great in war and peace, this man of the people again steps forth, and presides in the formation of our excellent constitution. Called by the unanimous voice of his country, he relinquishes his beloved retreat, and guides the helm of the government. At this critical moment, his consummate prudence, inflexible firmness and endearing moderation, secured his country from the machinations of designing internal enemies, and the horrors of civil war. Under the auspices of his most excellent administration, we reposed in peace under our "vines and fig-trees." The paternal advice he gave us on his voluntary retirement from this exalted station, his country being in prosperous condition, I hope is indelibly engraven on the tablets of all our hearts, and will be faithfully transmitted to posterity, as the best of earthly legacies.

* Among the many observations made upon this subject, we find President DAVIS, in a Sermon delivered in Virginia, in the year 1755, speaks of him in strains of praise, and predicts his being a future blessing to his country.

HIS acceptance of the command of the armies of the United States, on a recent apprehension of his country's danger, from the hostile aggressions of a great and ambitious nation, enhances our obligations of gratitude, and more especially as he was in the decline of life. Yet such was the energy of his mind, and ardour for public usefulness, that he was yet ready once more to forsake the most domestic enjoyments, when his country demanded the sacrifice.

WHILE we contemplate such heroic virtue in this ever faithful leader and friend to his country, we are constrained to admire and to applaud; - to rejoice in such a noble sample of the sublime virtues to which our fallen nature may be restored in this life. But the instance is singular, nor can the annals of history furnish a parallel.

IF we believe that God raised up, girded and went before Cyrus, to deliver Israel from their oppressors, why are we not to believe that this far more meritorious character has been, by an especial and particular Providence, raised up to deliver and to secure the people of this land?

BUT what avails our weak essay? Has not the trumpet of fame long since circulated through the nations of Europe the achievements and virtues of this *hero and patriot*? But, my fellow mourners, we have this day to lament that the "*Crown is fallen from our head.*" "How are the mighty fallen!" And we may say, with greater emphasis than David said of Abner, "*Know ye not that a Prince and a great man is fallen?*" Yes, Americans, your crown, your friend, the friend of man, the father of his country, the guardian of your rights, sleeps in dust. How incalculable the loss! No more will he head our arms to victory and peace - no more shall he hear our call on the greatest public exigencies - no more shall he add dignity to order and government by his illustrious examples - no more salutary counsels shall flow to us from his lips, no sealed up in death. "*Their joy of our heart has ceased.*" I proceed to consider,

II. The effects this loss has produced in our country. - It always has been customary, in days of great public calamities, to indulge public expressions of grief. Who can forbear, upon an occasion like the present, to mingle their sorrowful notes with the millions whose "joy has ceased," and whose song of melody is turned into mourning? Why this solemn appearance in the house of prayer? Why these uncommon ensigns of mourning which meet our eyes and damp our joys in the house of God? * We may well lament a friend to virtue fallen. Let not the reproachful complaint be repeated in our ears, which the Lord made by the Prophet, "The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart." The melancholy tidings produced a general shock pervading the nation, and the

* On this melancholy occasion, the meeting-house exhibited such affecting testimonies of affliction, as were highly calculated to impress the mind with seriousness and solemn veneration. The pulpit was entirely covered with black, with the addition of a mourning-piece in front, representing a pedestal and urn, with three angels over it, as guarding the *richest dust* of America; the pedestal inscribed with this motto: "*Sacred to the Memory of WASHINGTON;*" under it the following lines:

*"Glory with all her lamps shall burn,
And watch the Warrior's sleeping clay,
Till the last trumpet rouse his urn,
To aid the triumphs of the day."*

sorrow stands depicted on every countenance, which shews that the joy of the heart has ceased: from every part of our country the sad echo finds the nation in tears.

The badges of mourning exhibited among all ranks and ages of citizens, strikingly pourtray the feelings of their hearts. While our sorrow is expressed in national groans, what heart interested in human affairs can be indifferent? Weep, then, my friends; ye do well to weep with your country, with the world. And while we drop our tears over his precious dust, and bewail this public bereavement, we join in the general lamentations of all that is human. Mourn, then, ye veterans, whose heads have been shielded in the day of battle, for your beloved leader! Mourn, ye young and rising generation, for you have lost a faithful friend and counsellor! Mourn, ye friends of liberty and justice, for our crown is fallen! Mourn, ye friends of the arts and sciences, your patron is removed! Let the world mourn, FOR WASHINGTON IS DEAD!

LET us close with some reflections and inferences:

1st. IN all the dispensations of Divine Providence, it becomes rational beings to contemplate the Sovereign Disposer of all creature, and make suitable reflections for their own profit. And in all God's dispensations of judgments, we may trace the emanations of his goodness, infusing some salutary cordial into the most bitter draught. This sentiment is strikingly exemplified in the present melancholy instance. It has been a singular blessing, that God should raise up such a wonderful character, at such a critical time of our nation, as a luminary to shed his rays upon us in dark and dismal times.

2d. THE preservations of his life, which seemed essential to our national existence, was no less expressive of God's goodness. In the name of WASHINGTON were all the hosts of America united. The security which all felt under his guidance, has no parallel. His name united the different parties of the nation, and reconciled them to a change in the system of government. Our most excellent constitution, under his administration, dispelled fears of those who were jealous of innovation.

3d. THE example of his dignified retirement to the condition of a private citizen, cultivating those peaceful employments which give strength to the government, and happiness to the governed, is worth imitation. He has taught this lesson, that happiness does not consist more in leading armies, or filling a presidential chair, than in filling the duties of our several stations with industry, probity, honour and virtue. Indeed we cannot turn our eyes upon this first of men, but our hearts are filled with veneration, and warmed with flame of sincere and filial love. However fondly we may wish that talents and virtues like these may be continued upon earth, heaven has otherwise ordained, to shew us that "all flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof as the grass with perisheth."

WE shall now infer,

1st. IF death has entered Vernon's shade, and taken the great, the good, and wise, who can expect to escape? If temperance, that best preservative of health and life; if the collected virtues of the Man, the General and the President, could have secured an earthly

immortality, never, O lamented WASHINGTON, never should they fall have added fresh honours to the trophies of death! But since he is no more, let the great and the mighty of the earth prepare to die like men. Let us be wise, and consider our latter end, when the alarm of mortality is founded from such an elevated height; - and he who lived for our benefit, may then die for our benefit too – to remind us that we also must die.

DEATH sweeps off our fellow-citizens ever year, every day. Our neighbours, like lives in the autumn, drop into the grave in a thick succession. The air, the earth, the ocean, and all the elements, are armed with death. A thousand dangers lie in ambush for us. The principles of mortality lurk in our own constitutions; and sickness, the herald of the last enemy, often warns us to prepare. Yet how few realize the thought, that they must die! How many forget this solemn subject, till they feel it! They stand fearless and unapprehensive upon the slippery brink of eternity, till they unexpectedly fall, and are ingulphed in the boundless ocean. But shall not this loud alarm awaken us out of our vain dreams of an earthly immortality? When the mighty is “fallen,” shall not the feeble tremble? If the father of a people must cease to live, shall not the people expect to die? If common deaths are so frequent that they have lost their monitory force, shall not the death of this mighty man constrain us to realize our own mortality? Shall it not awaken that universal seriousness which that prospect inspires? How great a blessing might this awful dispensation prove, if thus religiously improved?

2d. AMERICANS have been indulged with a living example of such distinguished and rare virtues; are they not bound to improve it, by copying those parts of it within their particular spheres of action? Let not the exalted height deter us from the attempt. The more fair, beautiful and perfect the original, the more refined the pleasure shall have in the imitation. It is not expected that we should all be generals, presidents or rulers; but we should all be good citizens – peaceable, industrious, virtuous and faithful, in our several stations; “rendering to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s.” Do we venerate the character of the deceased? Let us give evidence of our veneration, by imbibing his spirit, treasuring up his advice in our bosoms, and transmitting the fame to posterity, that our children may learn to lisp that beloved name, and look up to him as a model for their imitation. Let us cherish his philanthropic sentiments – let us copy his example of humanity, and convince the world, that Americans have caught the “mantle” of our departed FATHER and BENEFACTOR.

3d. IF all that is great in human nature is but mortal – if “*the joy of our heart is ceased,*” it becomes a rational immortal being to seek permanent, unchanging good. Where shall it be found? only in the Supreme Good. Let us then lay up for ourselves “treasures in heaven,” and be rich towards God. There is one gift of heaven to mankind, which shall survive the dissolutions of the world, which shall flourish and reign forever; I mean religion. Yes, the divine religion of our adorable Saviour, who conquered death when he died, who has opened the portals of eternal glory, “and holds the keys of death and the grave,” who openeth, and no man shutteth; who shutteth, and no man openeth. This religion will shine bright in the night of affliction – will irradiate the thick glooms of death, and blaze out into immortality. This will be a fource of happiness through the revolutions of eternal ages; what inconceivable comfort does our religious disclose to the

believing eye! It guides the pilgrim in the house and prison of his clay; it points out the road to duty and happiness; it soothes the mourner in the deep anguish of sorrow, when his earthly "*crown is fallen,*" and "*the joy of his heart is ceased.*" When the "king of terrors" knocks at the door of the pious, he may bid him welcome; for, with a well grounded hope of eternal life by JESUS CHRIST, he can sing, "Oh death, where is thy sting? Oh grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be unto God, who gives us the victory, through our LORD JESUS CHRIST." Yes, this religion unfolds the mystery of a resurrection; that the precious dust of the righteous has the guard of Omnipotence, and the deep founding trump of God shall finally bring forth the sacred deposite. Then shall corruption put on incorruption, and the vile bodies of his servants "be fashioned like unto the glorious body of our LORD JESUS CHRIST."

Now we may ask, in the language of an elegant writer, "Is this the senseless dust all that is left of this greatest of men? Has he suffered a total extinction of being? Is he dead to himself, to the universe, and to his God? No, he lives! he greatly lives the life of immortals – he lives in the immense regions of spirits; where all the superficial distinction of birth, riches, power and majesty, are lost forever; and all the distinctions that remains, arises from the virtue and vice; from our having acted our part well or ill in the station were we are fixed. There triumphant tyranny, that bade defiance to human power, is blasted and degraded by the frown of Omnipotence; and there those rulers of men, who were the servants of God, are advanced to a higher badges of earthly greatness are superfluous to their dignity, and would but conceal their worth;" "for they are made kings and priests unto God forever." There they are clothed with the robes of salvation, and the garments of praise: and wear crowns of unfading glory, infinitely brighter than those which the gold, the gems, and glittering trifles of the earth, can compose.

THIS, view of the great, good, and mighty, does not diminish, but heighten and brighten their glory: for what renders the nature of man and even of angels, so important, so noble, so divine, as immortality? This advances the offspring of the dust to a king of equality with the natives of heaven. Are not sentiments like these congenial with our most ardent swishes and national feelings, when we see the great, good and useful of our fellow creatures, fall before the all-conquering hand of death? If so, let us forever banish from our hearts every seed of infidelity, which filled the soul with black despair; and has no virtue to calm and soothe the mind, ton by the heart-rending anguish of parting with the objects of our dearest affections; and let us cherish the religion of our Saviour; let us receive it as a heavenly balm, fitted to fortify us against the trials of the present life, and to give us the soul-comforting confidence, that our godly separated friends are disposed of to their everlasting advantage, in their enjoyment of the heavenly world.

TO THAT SOVEREIGN, ALL-WISE AND MOST GRACIOUS GOD, WHO "KILLETH AND MAKETH ALIVE, AND FROM WHOSE HAND NONE CAN DELIVER," LET US GIVE ADORATION, PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING, NOW AND FOREVER.

AMEN.

