A SERMON,
PREACHED AT THE
ANNUAL ELECTION,
MAY 25, 1831,
BEFORE
HIS EXCELLENCY LEVI LINCOLN,
GOVERNOR,
HIS HONOR THOMAS L. WINTHROP,
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR,
THE HONORABLE COUNCIL,
AND
THE LEGISLATURE OF MASSACHUSETTS.

BY LEONARD WITHINGTON.

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1831.
Ordered, That Messrs. WEBB and MERRILL, be a Committee to wait on the Rev. LEONARD WITHTNGTON, and present him the thanks of the Senate for his discourse yesterday delivered before the Government of the Commonwealth, and to request a copy thereof for the press.

Attest,

CHARLES CALHOUN, Clerk.

N. B. Several paragraphs in the following discourse were omitted on delivery, for want of time.
DISCOURSE.

TITUS II. 15, LATTER CLAUSE.

LET NO MAN DESPISE THEE.

In preparing a discourse for this anniversary, I have been at a loss on what subject to address you. The duties and dangers of a political life might seem at first view to be most appropriate; but these have often been discussed;—and I do not feel as if I could afford much light to the subject. The tribute to the memory of our fathers has been duly paid. Our free institutions have been commented on and praised, until in theory at least, they ought to be understood and appreciated. Besides, I have felt it was somewhat hazardous for me, a speculative man, coming from the shade, to attempt to instruct those, who were legislators by profession, and have long been engaged in the school of real life. I remembered the story of
Hannibal and his rhetorician; and I was anxious to select some theme which I understood. I hope, I shall not be considered as forgetting the objects of this day, when I inform you,—that I come to speak in defence of the clergy of our land. They are constituent members of the State. They have their rights and duties like other men. Their motives have, I fear, sometimes been misunderstood. If religion has a connexion with government, and if the characters of those who administer the sacred functions have a connexion with religion, then my subject is not wholly foreign to the purposes of this day. Fathers of our land, legislators, I solicit your patience, while I speak of those, who bring down the sanctions of Heaven to earth, in order to support your laws.

One objection, however, meets me on the outset. It may be thought that I am pleading my own cause—that, being myself of this profession, I am too deeply interested to speak with impartiality and truth. It may be so. I know the weakness of human nature. I know the blinding power of self-love. St. Paul himself, when he is vindicating himself to the Corinthians, repeatedly throws in the parenthesis—I speak as a fool—intimating, I suppose, that no man can talk much of himself without speaking as a fool. If this is to be my un-
fortunate lot; if I have chosen this respectable assembly to be only as a theatre to rise in and display my folly,—I beseech you to remember that egotism is always weak. Cast your eyes on the infirmities of human nature. Remember your own. And after all who should defend a profession, except those who belong to it. They have felt its injuries. They have watched its progress. They best know its cares and labors; its perplexities and encouragements; its sorrows and its joys.

Is it best, that there should be such a profession as a Christian Ministry? This question can be answered only by asking another. Is the religion of Jesus Christ from Heaven or of men? If the religion of our fathers was false, why then its ministers are a set of useless impostors, which the sooner we remove the better it is for our land. But I have thought, that no class of men have so much reason to believe in religion as our statesmen; for there is no one science, that leads so directly to its sanctions as that of legislation. A most convincing proof of the truth of revelation might be drawn from a view of society. It is far better than the material world. The material world only shews the existence of God with some of his general attributes, such as his wisdom and power; but the political world is an actual specimen of the
operation of his laws. What is the Bible but the unfolding of a great government, shewing the necessity of laws to the welfare of the universe,—acting on the hopes and fears of men by punishments and rewards,—seating the great law-giver on his throne; and pointing us to that final court of justice where we must all be tried? Religion is but an extension of that very science in which every statesman is engaged. It is the perfection of those principles which you are debating in your halls of legislation and courts of justice every day. The only difference is, God refines on these principles and applies them to the heart. In this science you may pick up a thousand illustrations and a thousand proofs to support the truths of revelation. The gospel is based on the depravity of man. It is a remedial system to lead him from his fallen state to immortal glory. And who has more proofs of the depravity of man than the statesman? Who should feel more the need of this refining power? In settling the question of human depravity or informing a right conception of how that depravity operates, I would give more for the observation of some experienced statesman, like Sir Robert Walpole, than for the theories of all the metaphysicians that ever wrote. Politicians, too, more than any other men, have felt the ne-
cessity of some greater sanctions than this world could supply to support their laws. This gave rise to many false religions. They found that the dungeon and the rack were not sufficient to awe man to his duty without a belief in the invisible world. In that masterly performance, Butler's Analogy, a train of reasoning, which it seems to me no man can understand and be an infidel—more illustrations are drawn from political life than perhaps from any other source. The truth is—this life is a specimen of the government of God—it is an outline, which revelation fills up; and as a poet says, that the undevout astronomer is mad, so it seems to me, that the politician, who rejects revelation, can hardly understand his profession. The exigencies of life prove the reality of the Gospel.

Religion, then, is absolutely necessary to the support of Government; and it must be committed to some persons, whose profession it is to administer its rites and explain its principles. Every art and science must be maintained in the world by living agents, who feel their own individual responsibility combined with its success. The Christian Ministry was ordained by the same divine wisdom which revealed the Gospel. The success of the Gospel in the world depends, in a great degree, on the estimation in which its ministers are held.
am aware, that the pure spirit of religion will survive the gross bodies with which it is often encumbered. I know that a vicious priesthood cannot quench the holy sparks on the altars, which they ought to guard, but which they sometimes betray: and it appears to be one proof of the divine origin of our religion (as an infidel once told a vicious clergyman) that it has survived—I will not say the assaults of its open enemies; but the more dangerous protection of its treacherous friends. Religion is so congenial to our moral apprehension; so rooted and grounded on the most rational hopes and fears of the human heart, that to exterminate is like denying some of the permanent affections of the soul. Slay it in one age, and it will revive in the next. Still it is true, that its success in a great degree depends on the character of its official defenders. They embody it in their example; they bring it down from its abstractions, and present it, in its most glowing colors, to the living world. So convinced were our ancestors of the truth of this remark, that they carried their respect for the clergy to the highest point. The magistrate and the preacher were in fellowship; they constantly played into each other's hand; and they both felt, that, while religion would be a wild principle, in the majority without laws; that laws, also, could
not be supported without the additional sanctions of religion.

Such were the views of our fathers, right or wrong. But times are changed. It needs but a superficial view of the state of opinion to see that clergymen are falling fast, very fast, into neglect. Instead of that deep marked respect, which allowed and even invited, an interference in concerns purely civil, a clergyman now is hardly allowed to exercise his own functions; and, if the process should go on, we are in some danger of being shuffled out of our social existence. Human opinions always tend to extremes; the tide that flows in on the perigee and the full, and fills every creek and channel with its waters, is apt to roll out as largely, and leave the flats and the sea-grass exposed to the sun. In our profession, we are now paying the penalty of that superstitious reverence, which was once paid to our order by the fathers of New England. When a large body of men are flattered and cherished excessively, there will be some individuals who will use their influence imprudently. This cannot appear surprising to one who knows human nature. All large bodies of men will have some weak individuals among them. Such men, when they see a crowd around them, cringing and worshipping, will give themselves airs of importance.
They will be affected, as Alexander was by the music of Timotheus.

With ravished ears
The Monarch hears,
Assumes the God,
Affects to nod,
And seems to shake the spheres.

These stories are diligently told; they are considered as certain proofs of clerical domination; and I know not how it is, but so it is—the world is much more disposed to make all answerable for the faults of one in our profession, than in any other. If a merchant fails in a fraudulent bankruptcy, nobody supposes that any logic will prove, from these premises, that all merchants are cheats. But if a preacher departs from the simplicity of his character—"See," they say, "the priests of all religions are the same, and all priests are alike." It would seem, from some conclusions that we hear, that nature lost her variety by entering the sacred office; that the moment a man put on a black coat, his identity was merged in the whole class, who wear black. In this way, not only the faults of the fathers are visited on the children; but the faults of every weak man, and every bad man, are visited on the whole profession; and thus the poor clergyman
goes down—down into that low valley where he needs all his humility to give sweetness to its repose.

I have said that the clerical profession has been falling, for some time past, into neglect. I wish to be understood. It is not the intention of this remark, to include all the laity in this censure, of wishing to depreciate our order—it is to be received with a great many limitations. There are some, still, who reverence us too much; there are still minds who look up with superstitious awe to a minister; and not only impute to us virtues which we never had; but give a weight to our opinions which we ought not to demand. But most gladly would we change away all this superfluous respect, for a little rational esteem, dealt out with justice and flowing from an enlightened heart. We would rejoice to equalize things. Indeed it is the lot of a preacher to be idolized or abused. There is no cold medium for him. The false praises of some provoke the false censures of others; and every man he meets is often a blind friend or a blind foe. I speak on an average, and apply the remarks to the mass of the community. Our country has greatly increased in numbers and wealth. Foreigners have been pouring in. Conflicting sentiments have been brought together; and even on this con-
secreated soil religion has lost ground. Of course, if the truth of the Christian religion is doubted, its ministers will be despised. I should be glad to say something to explain their motives and characters; to preserve your respect for them, if it never has been lost; and if it has, to reinstate them, if possible, in your good opinion. We ask only for justice.

The foundation of the change in the estimation in which the ministers of religion are held, is laid in human nature itself. We are so made, that if we have been betrayed into an inordinate opinion of the excellence of any object, it always sinks below its level when its real worth is seen. We wish to be revenged on it for the deceit that it has imposed on us. When you first find that the man you looked up to with implicit confidence has his infirmities, you are at first mortified and surprised; then you are displeased with yourself for being so credulous; and finally, you are determined to be revenged on him. Thus the schoolmaster, whom you once admired, because one small head could carry all he knew, you ever after, when you come to appreciate his real character, look on with secret contempt. You place him too low; you always compare him, not with his real reputation, but with that phantom of perfection which once deluded your own mind. Something like this, it seems to me, has operated
on the reputation of our profession. When the fathers of New England came to these shores, it was strictly a religious expedition. It was impossible, therefore, that the ministers of religion should not have a great hand in that measure. It was to hear the preaching of the gospel without molestation that they came; and we frequently find it in the old records, that preachers consent to settle, provided they can have the freedom of their ministry; that is, have liberty to preach and pray without the interposition of ecclesiastical ceremonies. None but those who had the highest reverence for a preacher, would have left their homes and come to these desolate shores, solely to hear what they believed the gospel proclaimed. Was it wonderful, then, that in a colony settled on such principles, the clergy should be held in very high estimation? It seems to me we must pardon a little to the excesses of pious reverence under such circumstances. The clergy were the men who had defended their liberties, enlightened their consciences; called their attention to the most exalted subjects, prayed with them, suffered with them, and borne their full share of the danger in the battle with arbitrary power. The clergy of that day were not a set of dreaming theorists, who laid down the principles of patience and never reduced them to practice. But
their great example strengthened all their laws; and the blows of persecution fell first on them. In England the office of a minister had been a post of danger—and if an opinion was to be enforced, or a conventicle broken up, the terrible court of star-chamber was the severest on them. They were first in the cause of liberty—and in this land of exile they bore their full quota of the privations and toils. It was not the superstition, which now leads a weak old woman to think her minister can do no wrong, that led them to reverence their clergy; but it was a combination of the noblest passions; it was an actual sight of their submission and sufferings; it was something like the admiration we feel when we see Washington retreating through the Jerseys—unbroken in spirit, when all the hearts around him are in despair. Besides, it should be remembered, that almost all the literature in the country was in the hands of clergymen. Our fathers were chiefly yeomen—skilled, not in the arts of government, but in turning the soil. It was the clergy, then, that must teach them how to model and how to administer their government and its laws. The necessities of the case forced them to step a little out of their sacred profession. When they interfered with government—and they seldom interfered but by their advice—they only complied
with a pressing invitation. I ask, now—was the reverence paid to our profession, under such circumstances, such an unpardonable crime, that the punishment must be visited on us unto the third and fourth generation? Because our fathers, betrayed by some of the best affections of the human heart, may possibly have set the clergy too high—will you consider them as useless, to be blown away like chaff from the floor?

But you will ask—is this representation just? The very first preachers in the colony might have been mortified and self-denying men. But did there not follow a very different class? Men who step into the influence which others had acquired; of a sour aristocratic character. We remember some, you will say, who seemed to rule with the rigor of a Romish priesthood. We remember when the prelate of the parish used to stalk round, with his awful white wig—and his visage screwed into a formal sanctity—infusing terrors into all the children he met. We remember the servile bows which we paid him and the gloomy terrors that he infused into our hearts. He was in fact the little Pope of his scanty dominion; and he exacted and received the triple crown. I wish not, my hearers, to defend anything that is wrong; I see that manners have changed; and that much of that
aristocratic trapping which distinguished the gentlemen of the last age has disappeared. We are now becoming republicans in fashions, as well as in laws. If the clergy of the last age were austere and too fond of influence, I am sorry for the mistake. But I beseech you to be equal in your judgment. Were not other classes in the same error? We had laid aside monarchy, but some of its tassels and fringes remained. We had bound the strong man; and turned him out of the house; but some of his furniture was left unspoiled. It is to be wished that even now our manners were a little more republican; that the rich and the poor would not live at such a dangerous distance; for depend on it, in order to be good republicans you must be so throughout; to lead the people you must mix with the people; you must pour yourself into society; for liberty cannot last, when it is assailed by a system of manners, wholly contrary to its spirit. The clergy it is true partook of the general error. They had their faults. They put too much powder on their wigs. They wore large shoe-buckles; and I heartily wish they had been a little more familiar and condescending. But surely the inveterate errors of an age and a profession are not the greatest crimes. We slide into them before we are aware of it; and as to their wigs, I think I have
seen some tremendous wigs on the heads of laymen; and I am not sure that they covered up any more brains.

Thus the censure to which we have been subjected, has been partly in consequence of the natural reaction, that must follow all inordinate esteem. But the actual change commenced with the preaching of Whitefield in this country. That powerful, but excentric speaker, it will be remembered, arose at a time when the English church was sunk in a very low state. It is confessed by some of their own writers that the reformation had never reached the lower classes, they were still sunk in ignorance and superstition; and the English church, like all great national establishments, supported by law, had many preachers, who did little credit to their calling. Whitefield saw a cold, formal ministry, men who took up preaching as a mere profession; and glowing himself with religious feeling, he denounced them; he acquired a habit of pouring out his anathemas upon a sleeping church and a formal ministry. This severe language was not altogether inapplicable in England; for there were multitudes there, who, on all schemes of doctrine, richly merited his reproof. But unfortunately when he came to America, he continued the same strain of denunciation, and, what is worse, he denounced the
clergy here before he had learned their actual character. He seemed to assume the point that all preachers of the standing order must be alike. Hence he filled the country with bitterness and censure. He broke up that traditionary reverence with which people had been taught to regard their ministers. He poured contempt on all who did not come up to his religious fervor, he taught the people a sentiment, which they never seemed to have harbored before, that a man might preach the gospel and yet be a bad man. He did worse; he taught them to suspect some of the most substantial characters. Let me, however, do this distinguished preacher justice; in after life he labored to rectify his first mistakes. He found that he had been engendering a very bad spirit; and he honestly endeavored to counteract it. There is hardly one of his later sermons in which there is not something to soften that spirit of bitterness which his first ministry had produced; and I heartily wish that those warm geniuses, which are so fond of copying Whitefield the youth; would sometimes remember the example of Whitefield the old man. But, mark! it is easier to kindle a commotion than it is to stop it; it was not even in his power to quench the flame he had excited; and ever since that day the influence of the clergy has been sinking.
Then came the war of the revolution, with all the licentious principles which it introduced into our land. The ordinances of religion were necessarily disturbed; the Sabbath was profaned; a foreign soldiery was introduced, and every victory cost us the defeat of some ancient principle. Alas! my hearers, liberty ought to be cherished as a dear possession; for it cost us a price which no commercial arithmetic can calculate. When you strike out of the account all the blood and treasure that have been expended; all the provisions that were wasted; the houses burned; the harvests destroyed; the broken ties of affection and kindred; the midnight alarm; the fear and the flight—when all these are erased, a fearful balance of sufferings will still remain. We lost more in our morals, in the single war of the revolution, than we ever lost before. It was a period of declension. Then the young soldier learned to scoff at virtue, and relish vice; then principle was prostrated, religion forgotten; the heart corrupted and the man undone. A veil was drawn over the realities of religion, and political blessings were substituted in their place. The simplicity of manners with which we began that struggle, departed never more to return. O what is war, when God, though he sends victory, enstamps so many evils on the righteous and conquering side!
Our example sent an electric spark through Europe. The foundations of society were there broken up. The French revolution shook monarchs on their thrones, and priests at their altars; and, for the example of virtuous liberty which we afforded them, they sent us back an abundant cargo of infidelity and irreligion in return. Such was the rage for liberty, in men who had just broken loose from their own dungeons, that they would hardly permit God to sit on his throne. Indeed, when I consider the elements which have been at work in society since the year 1789; when I consider the geniuses which have been arrayed against the gospel; the wars that have been waged; the party spirit that has prevailed; the policy and the power with which religion has been assailed,—I almost wonder that a single temple remains. The preachers of religion must be willing to suffer, for the gospel has suffered with them. We feel no alarm for the ultimate success of this cause. We know that its principles are founded too deeply in the human heart; we know that God will give us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Nor do we feel much solicitude on the score that our personal influence is declining. It is true, we are men, and have the common feelings of men. The cold eye of contempt, it is true, sometimes
pierces our hearts. But we feel conscious that our motives will at last be understood; and as far as we learn the lessons of the gospel, we shall reap just so much reward as God shall see fit to bestow. We know, that being sons of freedom, we are friends to that sacred cause. Our religion is linked in with liberty; and, whatever clamours there may be respecting party plots, or a union of church and state—I venture to lift up my voice in the name of all the clergy of every denomination in this protestant land, and say they are as sincere republicans as any class of men. For the truth of this assertion, they appeal to their works.

Nor is there one protestant sect, which as a sect, would wish to set up any kind of persecution. It is true, all preachers are warmly attached to their own tenets, (you would certainly despise the man that was not) and would be glad to make as many proselytes as possible. This is to their honor; for what a strange preacher would he be, who did not believe his own doctrines! A belief in a system of doctrines, naturally implies their importance to human happiness; and hence we are urged by our most benevolent feelings, to offer them with earnestness to mankind. But there is no respectable class in our land, that wishes to pass over the line of persuasion. Persecution for opinions! Why we are
the men who have the most reason to dread an influence of this kind. We are continually dealing in opinions. By a measure of this kind, we should be the first to suffer. It is the speculative clergyman that always falls into heresy; and, if heresy is proscribed, we are the men on whom the proscription falls. We often hear it stated, how many persecutions have been excited by clergymen! Shall I turn your attention to another fact? How many clergymen have suffered in persecution, and sealed their doctrines by their blood? Who were they that perished in the fires of Smithfield? Protestant clergymen. Who were cited oftenest to the cruel courts of the high commission, and star-chamber? Puritan clergymen. Who suffered most from the five-mile act in the days of Charles the II? Puritan clergymen. Such men as Baxter, and Roswell, and Bunyan, and Flavel. Indeed, my hearers, if any class of men ever learned mercy from suffering, we are the men. The storm of persecution has always beat heaviest on our devoted heads. Our predecessors wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented. They wandered in deserts and in mountains; and in dens and caves of the earth. We must be strong lovers of persecution, if all these sufferings have not taught us to renounce it.
Few employments are more painful than ours; or hold out to the labourer less hopes of an earthly reward. Permit me, my hearers, to give a loose to my feelings, and magnify my apostleship. Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly, and indeed bear with me. How did the Christian ministry begin? In toils and in sufferings; in dangers and privations. The first heralds of the cross were in journeyings often; in perils of waters, in perils of robbers; in perils by their own countrymen; in perils by the heathen; in perils in the city; in perils in the wilderness; in perils in the sea; in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness; in watchings often; in hunger and thirst; in fastings often; in cold and nakedness;—and, though since those times, some bearing the clerical profession have rolled in riches and sat on thrones, yet certainly you will allow we have little of their luxury, and, I hope, as little of their spirit. It is the lot of a minister in our country, generally, to live on a poor salary; to be engaged in obscure duties; to walk his narrow round without encouragement or applause. He must meet all the dangers of a tumultuous and fluctuating parish; must declare truth, which men do not relish, and reconcile tempers in which there is no conformity. He must visit all; must sympathize with all. He must go
into every cottage and hear the doleful tales of poverty and distress, and often go, to increase his task, without any means of relief; he must stand by every sick bed, and watch the glazing eye and hear the expiring groan. He must go to every house of mourning; every creature in distress has a tax on his sympathy. Finally, when age has worn out his power, such is the precarious nature of modern settlements, he must be dismissed without any provision for the decline of life; without bread for support, or a shelter for his dying head. Exceptions there certainly are to this melancholy picture, and many exceptions. But such I do know to be the prospects of some clergymen, without any exaggeration. So you see if mortification makes good men, we ought to be good.

In the mean time, we labor, respected legislators, in the same functions with yourselves. We teach the people to obey the laws, and give the most powerful motives to make them good citizens. We tell them that every soul should be subject to the higher powers; that the powers that be, are ordained of God; and whosoever resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God. We teach them that morality, without which jails and executions would be wholly inefficient; we build up this morality on its only sufficient foundation—the sanctions of religion.
Such, venerable law-makers, such are our toils—and we co-operate with you; we are strengthening your hands; we are endeavoring to carry your good designs into practical effect; to make liberty a blessing to mankind, and not a curse. But here is the difference between your lot and ours. You are placed on an eminence; your good deeds are seen and estimated, and the mead of fame awaits you whenever you do well. While we tug away at the little wheels of the machine, no man thinks of our services; no eye sees our difficulties but the eye of God. Nay, there are some who rather suppose us to be an incumbrance to the state, and would lay us by on principles of pure good husbandry, to save expenses.

Yes, we are members of the great body politic—and, like good citizens, we are laboring at our posts and bearing our share of the burdens. Draw, if you please, a veil over the eternal world, and let religion for a moment be considered as a mere policy of state; there is no class of people who have done more for their country than the clergy of our land. From the time when the pilgrims landed at Plymouth, to the hour when I am now speaking, they have used their influence on the side of good order and good morals—and that influence has been great. Whatever the functionaries of religion may
be in other parts of the world, I am sure New England has reason to love her clergy, and hold them in the highest respect.

But you will say, perhaps, how happens it there is so much contention among you—you, who ought to be messengers of peace? How can we respect your order when you are always quarrelling among yourselves. For twenty years past this whole land has been kept in agitation by a religious dispute. Hard names have been called—violent denunciations have been uttered; pamphlet after pamphlet has been hurled from either side setting the whole world on fire. Your debates have divided families and disturbed the peace of domestic life. What can we think when we see grave doctors forgetting the meekness of their calling; and throwing out the most cruel insinuations on each others motives. The charge of a plot has been brought on both sides. There has been an unitarian plot and an orthodox plot—each party solemnly asserting that their opponents were aiming to fill the offices of government. All agree that there are some terrible machinations at work somewhere. Now what can we think when we hear such mutual charges but that you are a pack of common rogues that have brought each other out? It is not the laity, it is the fury of your own passions that has brought
your order into contempt. If you will bring down the Holy Spirit from Heaven in the shape of a raven, instead of that of a dove, you must not wonder, if all impartial men, should fray it away in disgust as a bird of prey.

My hearers, I repeat it, I have no wish to defend any thing that is erroneous. Clergymen are men; and all the mistakes and infirmities of human nature follow the good man until death is lost in glory. It would be idle to say that our profession have not sometimes carried on their controversies with a very wrong spirit, and how we are to defend these things at the bar of God, I know not. It is fearful to think of it. But at your bar, I apprehend, we have something to say. For as Origen told the Pagans, that though the christian assemblies were not what they ought to be, yet they were far superior to theirs, so may I not say to you that no religious strife has borne any comparison in violence with the bitterness of political strife. You reproach us with our odium theologicum. But do statesmen always love one another? Do you find perfect simplicity in the halls of legislation? Do you know nothing of the fierce conflict of opinions; and how insensibly a man loses his temper while he is pursuing his end? Have you never seen two honest men not in cassocks disagree—and loose their
charity because they could not see with each others eyes? It seems to me there are some examples even in political life, which might teach us serious lessons of candour and forbearance. Remember too the subjects on which you contend are trifles compared with ours. They have not half the heart-stirring and absorbing interest—as the truths which swim before our vision and overwhelm our souls. The more magnificent the interest, the harder it is to be calm. You express your wonder that clergymen cannot differ in their speculations without a breach of charity. Well—it is wrong. But you remember there were two such men as Charles Fox and Edmund Burke. They were two of the most enlightened men that Europe ever saw. And yet, when these two great men came to differ seriously in political opinion, they could scarcely speak to each other. What then? Was Fox a bigot? Was Burke as bad as a clergymen? You remember that there were two such men in our country as Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr. These two, have always past for enlightened men. America enrolls their names among the brightest and ablest of her statesmen. These men disagreed in politics; and one of them was shot down in a duel on a bloody field, to the everlasting disgrace of a noble and splendid life. Instead then of reproaching particu-
lar classes of men, let us weep over human nature;—yes, weep that the highest attainments, and the most solemn professions have been too impotent to raise it above the passions of the savage and the squabbles of the child.

The world scarcely presents a sight more humbling than a great man with great errors. A high station marred and corrupted by the same little vices that disgrace the meanest of our race. We look up to such a man as to a burning mountain, exalted on high, to pour out his fiery streams; and to be a more conspicuous spectacle of convulsion and disgrace. All eyes behold him; all hearts feel his shame. Such sights abate that envy which is incited by high stations; and lead us to conclude, with revelation, that verily in his best estate man is altogether vanity.

But to return to the subject. You wonder that theological debates should be pursued with such warmth and you think that the clergy have sunk their own profession by the noise and violence of religious dispute. It may be so; and if so, I lament it. But are you not aware my hearers, that a great deal of noise may sometimes be made by a very small section of a party; and these not the wisest and best of them neither. How is it in political life? How is it on the floor of your own legislature?
Do you find that the wisest men always speak most? Do wisdom and moderation and true patriotism make the most noise in a debate? Do the most efficient men raise all the smoke; and does a man's discernment always hold an exact proportion to his disposition to thrust himself forward? The most majestic animals of the forest are silent; and even those who do utter a voice are not formidable in their cries in proportion to the terrors of their strength. No, while this whole land has been distracted by religious disputes; and while the meekness of Christianity has been in danger of being lost in the chase after its truths; amidst all the noise and bustle of the strife, hundreds, and I might almost say thousands, of clergymen have been attending to the silent duties of their profession, and have taken no part in these works of violence. They lament the agitation of the unhappy scene and mourn over the excesses of all parties. Shall I tell you a great secret? Very much of the violence of party strife comes from a source which is the constant temptation of a popular man. A popular man loves to strike; he unconsciously gets the habit of raising the commotion that he may ride on the whirlwind and direct the storm. He may not be exactly sensible of this; but it operates on him like the instincts of nature, when he wakes or sleeps. He
loves the rattling of that car which bears him on to distinction; and too often forgets the terrors which its scythed wheels spread among the crowd. The man thinks he is serving God. But the snake ambition, is winding beneath the flowers of a fair profession and secretly nestles in his heart. I am speaking to an intelligent assembly. I address those who know the complex character even of good men.

But you will say there is another cause which has depressed the clergy—and that is a constant propensity to meddle in politics. If your cloth will step out of its profession and talk on subjects which it does not understand; and with which it has no concern—what can it expect but repulsion and disgrace? We remember the time when preachers were most violent in the political strife. We remember the fast day sermons and thanksgiving sermons; in which, instead of preaching the gospel of peace, they dared to denounce the rulers of their country. It was absolute sedition—what we heard from the pulpit; and a railing accusation was brought against those fathers of our country, whom the Bible commands us explicitly to reverence and obey. Here is the true cause of clerical contempt. If a lawyer were to lay aside his brief and books, to dabble in medicine, it would be impossible to re-
spect him; and if a minister, with equal ignorance, will preach with the most confidence on themes on which he knows the least—let him not be surprised if we refuse his lessons. Let him remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy—let there be one day in the week in which there is "a truce to the passions and animosities of mankind."

Such is the heavy charge; and I make no doubt you have already whispered to yourselves—it is impossible to answer it. Answer it I may not; but let us view it in all its circumstances.

When New-England was settled, it was the manner of the age to make the pulpit the organ of politics. This was partly owing to necessity—Newspapers were then hardly known, at least very little used; and no town had a common mart of intelligence, like the ancient forums, where the people met to hear the public news and consult on public measures. When Queen Elizabeth wished to adopt any popular measure she used to begin by what she called tuning the pulpits—that is, to set every courtly chaplain to preaching on the subject, as the most effectual way to prepare the peoples' minds for it. In Cromwell's day, it is well known what an essential organ the pulpit was; it did more for that artful man than all his gunpowder and cannons; and when he aimed at arbitrary power it was
a more formidable barrier to him, than all the daggers of the royal assassins. With these manners our fathers came to New-England, and there was a peculiar reason here why the preachers should glance at public affairs—for there was no other way of reaching the people; and they were almost the only educated men in the country. Thus religion and politics were twined together. When the revolutionary war broke out; it was of the utmost importance to bring all the people up to the contest. Our union was our strength. It was necessary that every village and hamlet should join in resisting the aggressions of Great Britain; and fortunate was it for the cause of American freedom that the clergy entered into this contest with such united zeal. They addressed a class of men which the newspapers did not reach, and their hallowed voices were heard, mingling the notes of religion with the thrilling songs of freedom. No complaint was heard then of clergymen, for preaching politics. "I shall always honor the New-England clergy" said an old patriot of '76 once to me "for they roused the people to the cause of liberty." Nothing could exceed the praises which our order received for the eloquence they exerted in the cause of their country. Hancock, Adams, Washington, and a hundred other patriots, felt the value of that moral trumpet which sent hosts to the banner, and
wealth to the public chest. Indeed my hearers I should like to dwell on this theme. I should like to trace the secret influence of those holy men, whom I am proud to call my predecessors, on the bloody fields of Bunker Hill and Brandywine. There walked the secret spirit of your clergymen, to inspire the brave, to teach men how to live and how to die, to sanctify the public strife, and to give victory to a cause, which never could have conquered, had it not been good. Some of them did, in fact, enter the battle and pour out their blood; where it mingled with that of other patriots and went up as an acceptable sacrifice to God. When the revolution was finished, you well know that all the elements were still afloat; society was unsettled; and nothing saved us from anarchy but the remains of our old religious habits and manners. Here too the influence of the clergy was felt. They were almost to a man in favor of the Federal Constitution. You chose them into your conventions, your asked their opinions; you heard their speeches; you invited them to ratify by their influence the government you had formed. They were told that they were freemen like others; that all men were equal, and that they were as deeply interested in our political happiness as any class of men. Was it wonderful then, that when the great parties were formed under Washington's administration, that the clergy
should think that their interposition might still be of service? They only continued in the path in which you had always encouraged them to walk. They continued to perform the work for which they had been abundantly praised. They rallied around the father of their country; and though they may sometimes have been betrayed into bitterness, something must be pardoned to the force of those circumstances, which make men wise, and sometimes lead wise men astray. They were warm in what thousands believed to be a good cause.

Unfortunately however for bands and surplices, federalism went down, and almost all the clergy happened to be on the losing side. Here was the source of their political crimes. Had they been found in different ranks, it might have been as great a merit to preach politics in 1796 as it was to preach the cause of liberty in 1775. But, alas! no man forgives an error which leads to misfortune. I am not so unreasonable as to ask you to pardon us: I only wish to put in one plea in abatement of damages. Do not, I beseech you, at one time make us subservient to your purposes, and laud us to the moon for our works; and then condemn us, on another occasion, for doing precisely the same things with equally good intentions.

But if our interference was a crime, let us at least claim some merit for our subsequent forbearance.
While the clergy saw that their exertions in politics were encouraged by the people, they endeavored to give their best advice; and now, when such interference offends you, behold! every pulpit is silent.

Government, my hearers, is a restraint on human passions; and in this respect it bears a close affinity to religion. In both cases it is implied that something of private gratification is to be resigned to the general good. That liberty which appears so glorious in declamation—the very name of which has called forth such exertions, and kindled such raptures in a thousand breasts, is one of the maddest principles imaginable, when carried to what might seem to be its theoretic perfection. In this state it exists only among savages; it roams with the Arab over his sandy deserts, and follows the inhabitant of Afghanistan to his rocky mountains. It is passion let loose to prey on human happiness. It is well described in holy writ, when it is said, in those days there was no king in Israel, and every man did what was right in his own eyes. It is a rank, luxurious soil, untamed and uncultivated, where the richest plants and the vilest weeds grow up in the same green abundance; where you see the wheat blade and the apple-tree, mixed in with the Canada thistle, the dog-grass and the deadly nightshade; and however productive this state may be of real miseries, it has its charms for those who are accustomed
to it. Government, like religion, is a surrender of some immediate gratification for some sober and lasting good. In order, then, to tame man to its restraints, you want the cooperation of every salutary principle that can make him a thinking being and bear on his voluntary powers. You must address his conscience, his interest, his reason; you must call up futurity to his view, and teach him that when he resigns his passions' food, his loss is infinite gain. So reluctant is the heart to submit to restraints, that every inducement must be brought up before it; they must be repeated; line must be given upon line and precept on precept. Sometimes you must draw your motives from a sense of honor; sometimes from a sense of interest; sometimes from a sense of virtue, and sometimes from religion;—and all these will be too weak unless enforced by time. Leave out one of the great inducements, and you impede the progress of man towards his political perfection. Just look back to history, and see what an expense of time and means there has been to make man (and very imperfectly, too) a civil being.

It was the policy of antiquity, in accomplishing this work, to unite all the engines which wisdom could bring to bear on the moral powers. All the classes of thinking men combined in the work. They felt there must be no division in the intellectual
ranks. The warrior and the statesman, the eloquent orator and the priest, all combined to persuade the crowd to submit to a social state. We have a beautiful picture of this struggle in the poems of Homer, whose works give us some of the finest political lessons. There is a quivering crowd, ready to move, according to the poet's own comparison, like the waves of the sea in crossing winds. By dint of exertion, they can be shown their interest, and, in some degree, made to pursue it. But it requires all Agamemnon's dignity, and Ulysses' wisdom, and Calchas' augury, and Achilles' valor, to control them. While the chiefs are united, they can control them; but when they contend, the charm is broken. I have often thought, that the poet has given us a beautiful example of that degree of knowledge which the mass of the people have in political concerns. We say in our government that the people are their own rulers; the will of the people is the supreme law; and this goes on the assumption that the majority are the best judges of their own interest, and are wise enough to pursue it. But here comes a distressing question. Is it a fact that the majority have this discernment? Look over the world, and see what an excited populace has always been. See the deceptions that have been practised on the crowd. Only read the history of medicine, and remark what quacks and im-
postors have done, who have slain their thousands. Remember the gross delusions which have prevailed under the name of religion. Think of the popish plot in the days of Charles II., and of the harangues of Robespierre. In a word, is there a single delusion, in the whole catalogue of human errors, which has been too gross to deceive a fascinated multitude. Such records rather shake our faith in the possibility of making a numerical majority wise enough to see the true interest of government. But here is the true secret. Though it is foolish to say that people in the mass are wise enough to lead the way in complex subjects, yet they may be made wise enough to follow, when these subjects are debated faithfully before them. Take the case of a jury for an illustration. It is hardly possible to look over the sunburnt faces of a jury, summoned from the shop and the plough, to see them enter a court of justice, ignorant of its very forms, and not knowing the legal terms that are sounding in their ears, without asking the question, How are those men ever to decide the point? They must be like clay in the hands of the potter. And yet, when that jury have heard the long discussions; when they have been cautioned against prejudice and passion; when eloquent lawyers have addressed, and learned judges have charged them, they become tolerably
competent: that is, their attention may be turned to principles which they could never find of themselves. Such, I apprehend, is always the degree of popular knowledge. The people can find the truth when it is calmly discussed before them by wiser men. To claim for them more than this is delusive. This must be the basis on which republicanism is built.

This is the exact picture which has been given to us by Homer and all the primitive writers. The chiefs propose; the people decide. It is remarkable that some of the wisest institutions of government grew up, almost spontaneously, in the nascent state. No learned philosopher in his closet has ever been able to rival them in his plans; and therefore these primitive customs are well worthy of attention even in an enlightened age. We find, therefore, in these ages, there was always freedom,—a wild and savage liberty; but a liberty that all the sagacious men of every description, the priest and the warrior, were combining to control.

This, it appears to me, was the order of nature: it was something like that harmony which we see in our own bodies, in which the muscular strength is informed by the intellectual soul. This was the exact policy which our fathers followed, when they set up the banner of freedom on these desolate shores. They made the people as free as possible in theory and in law; but they did not allow igno-
rance to usurp the place of knowledge; they set up the aristocracy of talent. The minister and the magistrate felt that they had but one interest; they combined to form society in one beautiful image of order and proportion; the magistrate brought out his laws, and the preacher his religion. They left the upper ranks open for any mind that was qualified to rise into them. The child of the humblest laborer, if blest with genius, and willing to pay the price of knowledge, might rise to be a ruler in the land. Still all the thinkers combined to control the people on thinking principles. The great anomaly was scarcely known of telling the crowd that learned men could disagree. The wise uttered one voice; the people heard them; and this was the secret of New England's former happiness.

It is really laughable to see the benevolent hypocrisy with which good men, in that age, endeavored to represent the union of the wise greater than it really was. Their differences were kept out of sight, and their agreements were brought forward with the most imposing authority. Thus Baxter, in his Call to the Unconverted, tells them he is not addressing them on points on which one learned man differs from another, but on common ground, on which all Christians agree. In the first edition of his Saints' Rest, he put Hampden and Pym in heaven, where I doubt not they are. President
Davies brings forward the authority of Young and Addison, in support of his fervent religion. He even mentions George the Second as a great saint, though I think he could not have known the story of the Countess of Suffolk. He mentions Washington under the name of an heroic youth; and how often have I heard the excellent Dr. Dwight string together the names of Bacon, and Locke, and Newton, and Butler, and Edwards, in support of Christianity, though he must have known that these men differed in their private speculations, and belonged to different churches. I am not advocating pious frauds; I am only showing how strongly these good men felt, that the authority of all the wise was necessary to awe the popular passions to subjection and peace.

But alas! all this policy is now changed. Discord has entered the upper camp. Faction has torn those asunder whose interest is one. The magistrate and the preacher pull different ways; politician rails at politician; and discord has entered the house of God. The reverence once paid to wisdom and learning is lost, because it is seen that these attainments do not secure men from the fury of the wildest passions and the meanness of the lowest vice. A mildew has fallen on the very flowers of human society; and the charm of voluntary influence is broken forever. It is as if the stars in their
peaceful orbits should be suddenly seized with our passions, and reel from their courses in a maddening flight. The disorder has seized the very brains of the body politic. We destroy each other’s influence; we murder each other’s characters.

If I wished to draw a picture of a happy precinct or parish, I would show all the leading men united, so far as to exercise a wise influence over the whole. I would show the minister and the representative, the justice of the peace and the selectman, so far enlightened as to know that in many things the duty of man was one. I would have them unite in supporting the ordinances of religion, in hearing the gospel, and in executing the laws of their country. I would have them feel, if they parted to blow up some sectional fire, they might each of them and all of them perish in their own flames. What can be more terrible to any well educated man than a radical spirit? There is no telling where it will stop. And this is the danger of a free government. It is as sure to break out when excitement comes, as the waves of the sea are to rise when the wind blows. All the learned professions have had their turns of being assailed. In Shays’ rebellion, the lawyers were declared useless; the medical faculty have often been suspected; and now the clergy are coming in for their share. There are times of convulsion when the men who labor as much as others,
but who labor in thought, are in danger of being cast down. But surely, if they are treacherous to their own cause, nothing can save them.

The objection which will occur to some minds here will be of some weight to limit, but by no means to overthrow what I have said. It will be said, to be sure, that "it is visionary to suppose, in a free land and in an enlightened age, that leading men are to have a perfect agreement in opinions. Your advice is like that of the Roman consul to the philosophers of Athens, to make up their disputes, when disputation was the very element in which they lived. Do you expect that dissenting politicians will not appeal to the people; and dissenting religionists not attempt to form parties. You might as well advise the air of the upper regions not to be agitated by storms." I answer, the foregoing remarks involve no such supposition. There is a wide difference between a decorous conflict of opinions; and that rash and radical spirit, that blows like a whirlwind over the surface of society; and turns from the bottom the discolored deep. Some measures are always to be kept with our bitterest adversaries; and there are certain means of pulling down their interests which are sure, in the end, to destroy our own. Only let our statesmen trace the progress of those arts by which office has been sought in this country; and let them say if
any man, who is a friend to decent life, has not reason to fear the result. So let our religious parties consider, whether they have not sometimes (unconsciously I hope) resorted to measures, which shake the very ground on which the forms of religion stand. Like Milton's Angels, we hurl mountains at each other; and the only effect is to fill all Heaven with the common tumult and distress. No victory follows. I say again, in the face of this objection and many others which might be urged, that all those characters which compose the mind of society, have, in many things, a common interest to protect; and if they disregard it in their disputes, they will be as sure to suffer for their temerity as the laws of nature are uniform or as a God is just.

My respected hearers, I have endeavored to speak for my own profession; and perhaps you will now ask me what does your order want? Do they wish the legislature to pass a law for their legal support and establish a State church? No, by no means. If you ask us what you shall do for us, we answer you, as the merchants of France did Louis XIV, when he asked them what he should do for commerce—let us alone. We wish for your personal esteem but not for your legal protection. We do not even ask for the present feeble support of religious worship which now blots your statute book. If religion cannot support itself, and...
sink, we will sink with it. But O! do not personally trifle with what God holds sacred; do not treat us and our cause with the sneer of cold contempt—do not forget all the service that religion has done for your country, do not forget the past glory of New-England; do not trample on the cross of Christ.

And you my brethren of the Christian Ministry, I now turn to you—I have been endeavoring to apologize for you before these legislators, and fathers of our State. I have made the best defence for you that I could. And now I charge you in the name of that God whom we all profess to serve, to go and ratify by your conduct all I have said. If you have been instrumental in throwing fire brands into the world (however unconsciously), you must do so no more. If you cherish a hostile or a bitter spirit, still it will be impossible hereafter for any apologist to speak in your defence—you may have your differences; you may contend earnestly for the truth—But remember one maxim of your Bibles—and all difficulties will cease. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal; but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds. Most of the evils in religious controversy have arisen, not because truth is not to be earnestly contended for, but because misjudging men have used unconsecrated weapons in that holy cause.