No. 83.

Thanksgiving Sermon.

Nov. 23, 1820
Psalm 103:14. "Truly God is good to Israel!"

The revolution of the seasons, may, this again brought us to the anniversary of publick gratitude. The proclamation of civil and religious liberty, and the customs of our fathers, have once more called us to turn aside from our common pursuits, and to offer up to God, at the alter, a people's gratitude, to acknowledge that the bounty of God has accumulated blessings around us in our fields and our houses, to pursue amidst our enjoyments, and raise our hearts to Him, who is equally the God of the harvest and the God of our lives. The wonders of his providence are not only known in the great outworks of creation, but are felt at our firesides.
Serious fields, the most only light of up the blaze
of yonder stars, 33, holds in their corses enrumpence
and no, but who regards with kindness the humblest
being on earth, 33, listens to the cry of the most lowly
of His children. In contemplating the subjects of grate-
tude on occasion of this fruitful nature, we are for a
momenl somewhat confused, because they are so general.
Such is either the natural structure of the human n,
which is the basis with which it receives from the influences
of the world, that it is difficult for us to think with
deep interest with spontaneous emotions, many but
personal blessings, or those, or from these intimate con-
nexion with the welfare of those, to whom are attached,
become of themselves in a considerable degree personal.
It seems, that if we are to be made grateful, it must be
by something which comes near to us, or reaches our own
senses, or our own hearts; it must be something too, which
can appropriate, and we can feel almost an exclusive
interest. What we share in common with others, with the
world at large, loses a large part of its interest by has bit
a feeble hold on our hearts. What to every body enjoys, our
body is thankful for, as this apparently by a strange p
venerity of mind, the more cause we have to be grateful,
the less grateful we are. The bounty of God in this subject,
is, if it may be allowed the comparison, like gold, whose
it is baked into a thin leaf, may be blown away by the light
est breath of air; but when it exists in a small gold mass
it is felt to be heavy and valuable. In the natural world,
there is scarcely a greater blessing, than the light of the
sun, yet how very seldom do we think of it as a blessing.
at all; all the world is charged, blessed by it, as well as
ourselves, if it is so common, that it excites no feelings.
If you learn that a foreign country, or a distant part of
our own country, has experienced the beauty of God in a scene
of peculiar fertility & abundance, you do not perhaps for
a moment consider it as a subject for gratitude, without
it calls forth nothing like the feelings and the satisfactions
of your own fields excites; yet, there is vastly more en-
thusiasm produce in the one case, than in the other. And, on
the other hand it is with our sympathy with distress.
It is only by a very strong effort that we can enter into the feelings of others who are in sorrow, unless we have a peculiar interest in the occasion of it. Suffering must come near us, or penetrate our houses, or our hearts, before we can realize it. Every small evil or misfortune of our own makes a much deeper impression upon us, than one of infinitely larger magnitude at a distance. Man cannot feel great solicitude or horror for the loss of a friend, a property, than he would for some remote place, where thousands of our fellow creatures in its ruins, will be more greatly affected when his own dwelling is laid in ashes, than when a fire sweeps some distant town. Yet there is no comparison between the suffering experienced in the one case by the other. It seems, then, that there is a strong disposition to estimate blessings or afflictions as they affect ourselves, to feel strongly what touches our own interests, while we fail to feel the importance of what is common or general. This disposition is doubtless natural, to a considerable degree inevitable, because it serves the concentration and feelings of efforts, to make them more efficacious, instead of sending them abroad to be wasted on objects too indefinite and large. Still it should not be suffered to become an absorbing passion. I have made these remarks in order to show how difficult it is, on a public occasion like the present, to bring home to our hearts a proper sense of gratitude for blessings with which we share in common with thousands of our fellow creatures; yet such a sense we should endeavor occasionally at least to cherish, lest our feelings go into narrower and shallower channels.

It is with the hope of giving this impression a daily place in your hearts, that I would, on this day of thanksgiving, beg your attention for a few moments from the pursuit of blessings, and become us to offer our tribute of thankfulness.

"For even the lepers, because of their leprosy, going out into the desolate country, when they heard the inquiring voice of the Prophet, with that laying down of their garments, which so often appears in Holy Writ, as the expression of the pure heart of a sinner."

1. We should be grateful for the civil liberty, which in joy. We have reason to bless God, that on this hand, man is what his Maker designed him to be, free and happy, not what his fellow man would make him, subject to servitude. It is our happy privilege to be governed by laws not by men. By principles, not by passion. Thus nature is secured to cast her broad and sheltering shade over the energy.
freedom of a whole nation, & to minister the growth of every thing, except those sickly & deplorable beings, who can hold to any form, or support, or do temporal damage. There are objects, dressed in a brief authority, wh a breath can make & a breath undo, walk abroad & rule his fellow men, or whom as well as on him, God has stamped his image, labor for his pleasure & bow to his will. Here, whatever be our difference of rank, fortune, intellect, or character, there is one common ground, a common assembly, & where one stands from, as another; we are all freemen; it is by this tenure, that the lowest as well as the highest claims an importance, & feels an interest in the community; the tenure of that freedom which springs not from the effervescence of popular tumult, or from the arduous result of rash labors, without a price, & by his act, the state of being who can meld the arm of power, either by the strength of arm or by the mind, but which is gained by the whole & is enjoyed by the whole, who was not honored to station before it had time to assume a proper form & consisting, he was shaped & guided by the ancient deliberations of freemen, & has been striking its foundations deeper & deeper among the very roots of society, diffusing itself through the soil, & communicating its energy to all that can abstract & sustain in a flourishing & vigorous community. This liberty is not inestimably. No, heaven knows, we should have little reason to be grateful for it, if it were. It does not exist in not being governed at all, but in being governed well, by a people, in which each citizen has a voice in delegating. We are placed in that happy situation, where there is just enough of control to assure every good and safe, without its being felt, just enough of restraint to be obnoxious, without being galling. It is the slow, year by year, growth of government, of law & principles, not is constantly operating throughout the immense extent of our republic. It has been sometimes observed by foreigners, that you may travel from end to end of our country, to another, without meeting these overwhelming barriers of public authority, where so common in other countries, without encountering all the costly apparatus of an overgrown political establishment, & there is a semblance of offices of various degrees, not give out of such an establishment. Ever may it be so, ever may the government, under us, as here, be like the air,
that we have none of those privileged orders, where so oft to become stagnating pools of corruption, diffusing social infection through a people; that no acknowledged claims to superiority, but these are nature's own, transmitted, and are the necessary result of civil society; that, that the pulse beats vigorously is the blood freely in the veins of the body politic. We are under a solemn obligation to be grateful to God for the gift of civil liberty: for there is nothing that does so much to seed mankind in the paths, that shall lead them to true dignity of his nature, as freedom; nothing that so invigorates, the spirit of enterprise, & spurs it on, through every channel, that renders the greatest destitute with so much ease, & supplies motives of so mighty a power. Every man knows that a Freeman labours with more eagerness & pursues his business with more activity than a slave; & if our country has reached an unsurpassed height of prosperity, even while, as Burke says, we are "a people but in the stage of not yet hardened into the bone of manhood," one cause, doubtless, is that liberty of thought, & liberty of action, it has so deeply pervaded the community. For this blessing, then, on this day
...when we are called upon to remember our blessings, let us raise our souls to heaven in the offering of gratitude.

2. We should on this occasion be grateful for the means of information & learning which we possess. It is a great blessing to have the mind of a people well quenched & taught enlightenment. Education as to any nation a rich treasure...perhaps no nation possesses it in greater abundance than our own. There is no country, probably, where the means of information are so widely spread & so easily accessible, where the fountain of knowledge is made to flow in so many minute streams, & to reach & fertilize so large a soil. I do not mean to say, that other nations have not more profound scholars, than ours. Nor shall I, through this superiority, in arising to unavoidable circumstances, in our condition, is it every day growing less observable. But if they have greater scholars, they have too a great y mass of enlightened & degraded population. If they have more learning, they have too a greater deal more ignorance. They have the two extremes, & every little of the golden mean. But in our country, knowledge is more equally diffused. & has become more a common blessing.

It is not so much learning, as information, that forms the distinguishing characteristic of our people. We have much of that sort of knowledge, wh is adapted to make men useful, efficient, & happy, good & useful members of society, to qualify them for acting their part well & worthily in the several stations of life behind the to prepare them to think & judge correctly & independently on most of the subjects, that occur in the concerns of the mind. As schools both public & private are so numerous, is in general so well supported, that scarce by any one is deprived of the advantages they afford...
good principles and intelligent spring up. If so, the fruits of society, if we have reason to think, in that there are institutions, in what our youth may enjoy the means of being trained up to fill the offices assigned to the claims of the community in which they live, that their minds are not from infancy pressed down and crushed by the dull and paralyzing weight of ignorance, and that they are educated to feel, to think, to act. Like men, like these, who have a personal responsibility, something to perform, something to answer for. It is a blessing to be able to raise as furnish the best powers, and God hath given us, in this the reason of the mission on which God hath set us as our hearts, to be a blessing to free the human mind from those shackles of ignorance, superstition, fear, servility, and upon it, to give an impulse to thought of an energy to motives, to live, have the opening, are the hope of society, for all the many of honorable habits, virtues, and the community expect and demand from them, to prepare them too, for those pure and solitary lessons of morality, of those sublime and powerful impressions of religious truths, as to fit them to become hereafter citizens of the kingdom of God. If all this be a blessing, then these are means to train our Sin. R. for the means of education. Indeed, there is scarcely any thing we enjoy, any improvement we hope, that may not be traced to the influence of education. It is, as Scripture comparison, like "the heavens, which was hid in three means of small, till the whole was uncovered." We have enjoyed its advantages so long that we scarcely know how to estimate them. But suppose you were suddenly de- of even what may seem the small part you have com- mon schools afford,—suppose your children were compelled to grow up without even the few beams of light with the most superficial education imparts, ignorant, harsh, unindulgent, unregenerate, to any part of well, except the fear of sin,—what, then, think you of the next generation of men? We? In fact, we are not sensible, how good an influence is produced even by the knowledge of s common arts, as these of reading writing. If the
you would preserve the source of your freedom, improve it, acquire and uncloud, choose your schools and all your institutions of learning, and God too, that He has given you such blessings.

3. Let us on this occasion be grateful to God, who have
remembered our privileges of religious freedom. If there is any thing in our condition, so be it for the voice of thanksgiving, it is that among us the soul is free, that each man is left to His religion, as he ought to be, to his own responsibility, and that the relation between man and Maker is not fashioned by the arm of civil authority. In this land we are not obliged to judge of what is true or right by precepts or fixed formulas, religious truth is not
forced into its fold by circuits and rules, it is not compelled to steal along in silence and secrecy, but walks faith in the light of day; it is not pressed down by the heavy load of necessities, nor the authority of the invention of man, has sometimes thrown upon it. In some nations you see this angel of God's mercy, fell
sighed, converted into a passive instrument of human
power, its fair countenance of heavenly mildness chang'd to the dark and frowning mind of a tyrant, amidst
truth she seems like the morning star thrown from heaven; but among us, thanks be to God, this angel re
turns her native freedom and beauty. she is here no more
free to hold in her flight, is free from restraint, she sheds blessings from her wings. There is no papal pow
no inquisitorial tribunal, no established church; here a
man may freely think, freely express his beliefs, his conscience is his director, and he is answerable to God only.
Here there is universal communication, unembarrassed
circulation for every truth, every doubt, every thought
that excites attention, as each ray of light, is reflected
in a thousand minds, each spark of celestial fire is commu
nicated to a thousand hundred hearts. I do not mean to say, that ours is the only country, where religi
ous liberty is enjoyed; but I believe it is the only one where it is enjoyed in that restrained, counteracted...
al religion must be made... for here it differs from others in opinion is no punishable crime... Here, as we trust, the spirit of uncorrupted religion, like the patriotic long, will find a resting place, after her wearisome wanderings, or will bring the divine light, not only as a sign that the storm has passed away, but as a pledge of ever-needful tranquility. For this gift of religious freedom, then, if we have abundant reason to thank God, right on this public occasion are pens cut to their due tribute of gratitude, let us resolve that so far as dangers, this sacred object of religious liberty shall be transmitted to succeeding ages, & every its blessings dawn from one generation to another, till time shall be no longer:

Such is a hasty sketch of some of the public blessings, for which this occasion are ought to render our thanks... of gratitude... And shall we not be grateful? We are not led, that we have privileges & enjoyment, to shun indifference, but to offer up to the throne of God a sacrifice of praise, & to make our supplications to that holy name. For besides the obligation of gratitude, to which I have referred, there is another which presses itself upon our attention.
this time, I mean the obligation of love to our country. This is a passion not every citizen among us is solemnly bound to cherish.

"Give that a man with weaker eyes, and so said,
"Where his heart is, there his name is both said,
"This is my own, my native land.

It has been observed by a great statesman, that in order to love our country, our country must be loved. If this be the condition on which patriotism depends, who among can fail to love his country? In this land on which God hath smiled benevolently, is where the basis of praise to God, arising in the minds, shall we go in self of heartless carelessness to all the blessings which have been secured by transmitted to us, by men, the memorial of whom are inscribed on the very fields of plains which surround us. The providence of God has called us to be agents in the grand experiment of national freedom & happiness; shall we be better aware of the deepest hope of many, than void of care of our avarice of the glittering trappings of devotion?—Never will each one of us say in the patriotic language of David, "if I forget the

A solemn, let my right hand forget her cunningly,
my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I should remember thee above my chief good!"

There are other blessings, too, for which this day was called to express our gratitude. The past year has been rich in the goodness of God to us. The interests of agriculture have been prospered in a remarkable degree. The smile of plenty has been upon our fields; there are more able to enjoy the abundant harvest, which God by his providence has given us! While some, perhaps, have been unfeeling to the wailing hand of famine, those who trembled before the destroying angel, it has pleased God to preserve health in our habitations, to turn away the destruction that was threatened at every day. The day is the means of grace have likewise been continued to us, we have been permitted to worship God in his sanctuary, to hear the truth be taught from the lips of men, and commit the world to teach y them. Out time would fail me were I to go on with the catalogue of blessings. What shall I render unto thee for all this goodness? for his wonderful works and to the children of men?" The Lord is a
Oven a shield; the L. will give grace and glory.' Come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord. 

Nahum: 'for He is our God; we are the people of His pasture, the sheep of His hand.'

*Nov. 1820.*

And while we are pleased in the midst of His bounty, it becomes us to remember that time alone, who feel the pressure of want and poverty. Those who have received the good things of life, should consider them selves as in some degree the aments of heaven’s bounty, judging the tiring season that is approaching should enter the land of short supply, if this show their gratitude to God by doing good to men.

*At Home (Thanksgiving Day) Nov. 22d, 1820.*