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Dr. Wayland's Discourse

ON

THE AFFAIRS OF RHODE-ISLAND,

DELIVERED IN

THE MEETING-HOUSE OF THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH,

PROVIDENCE,

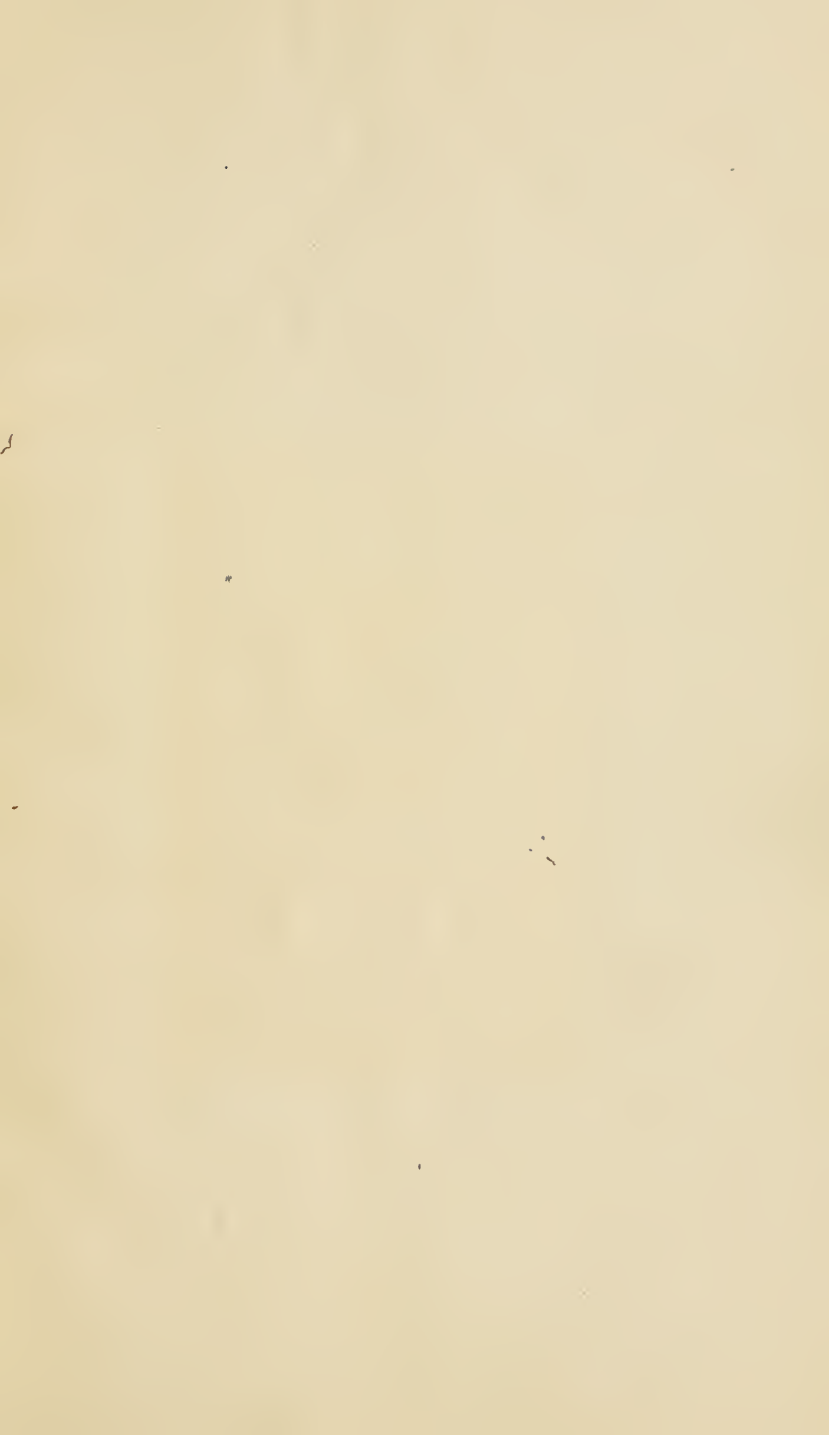
MAY 22, 1842.





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THE AFFAIRS OF RHODE-ISLAND.

A

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED IN

THE MEETING-HOUSE OF THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH,

PROVIDENCE,

MAY 22, 1842.

BY FRANCIS WAYLAND.

Third Edition.



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PROVIDENCE, MAY 23, 1842.

TO THE REV. DR. WAYLAND,
SIR,

At a special meeting of the Charitable Baptist Society, on Monday, the 23d of May inst. it was unanimously "Resolved, That the thanks of this Society be presented to the Rev. Dr. WAYLAND, for his able and impressive discourse delivered yesterday, before said Society, and that he be requested to furnish a copy of the same for the press." And it was also resolved, that the undersigned be a Committee to communicate to you the above resolution, and to carry the same into effect.

We are, very respectfully, Sir,

Your obedient servants,

JOHN PITMAN,

A. WOODS,

GAMALIEL LYMAN DWIGHT.

PROVIDENCE, MAY 24, 1842.

GENTLEMEN,

The Discourse which you have done me the honor to request for the press, was written without the remotest intention of publication. The subject has, however, become one of so intense interest, that I do not feel myself at liberty to withhold from the public any thing within my control, which you believe will be of any service to the cause of Liberty and Law. I therefore submit it to your disposal.

I am,

Gentlemen,

Yours, very truly,

F. WAYLAND.

HON. JOHN PITMAN,

REV. A. WOODS, D. D.

GAMALIEL L. DWIGHT, Esq.

Committee.

A DISCOURSE.

PSALM XLVI. 1.

GOD IS OUR REFUGE AND STRENGTH; A VERY PRESENT HELP IN TROUBLE.

CALLED upon unexpectedly to address you, my brethren, this morning, while every heart is still throbbing with the anxieties of the past week, I know that every one will expect me to make the events which have transpired, the subject of the present discourse. My own mind is so full of it that I could scarcely address you on any thing else. And yet, for that very reason, I am forced to distrust myself. I would not intentionally give pain to any thing that lives, much less to a fellow citizen, and, least of all, from this place, to a fellow worshipper. And yet, on such an occasion I cannot be silent, and if I speak, I must speak what I suppose to be the truth. All who have ever known me will bear me witness that I have never mingled in the strife of politics. Never, that I know of, have I uttered a syllable, either from the pulpit or the press, at which men of any political party have taken exception. This, however, is no party question. It is a question affecting the very existence of society. During the past week we have been called upon to decide, not whether this party or that shall be in the

ascendant, but whether law or anarchy shall bear sway; not at the ballot boxes, to express our peaceful wishes, but, at the cannon's mouth, to determine whether we shall be governed by constitutional law, or trampled under foot by a lawless soldiery. In such a case as this, I claim the right, as an humble individual and as a minister of the Gospel, to speak what I think, and I here lift up my heart in thanksgiving to God, that those laws still remain in force, under whose protection I may do this fearlessly.

I, however, beg leave to say, that I here have no question to raise in regard to suffrage and suffrage men. My own opinion, as many of you know, has always been in favor of the extension of suffrage. In this point, I presume that this community is very generally agreed. With men who desire a change in this respect, I can of course, have no controversy, and they, I am sure, will take no offence. To men who have been misled and deceived, who were not aware of the designs that have been entertained, and who were not therefore intentionally responsible for the measures which have been pursued, I feel every sentiment of kindness and respect. For their sakes, gladly would I cover all that is past with the pall of oblivion. But when a frightful crime has been meditated, and but for the goodness of God, would have been perpetrated, it is my duty to my fellow men to set forth its nature; and it is my duty to God to call you to thanksgiving, for the divine interposition, and here, in his courts, to celebrate the praises of this merciful deliverance.

During the past week, my brethren, we have pass-

ed through a fearful crisis. It is, I suppose, beyond question true, that a plan was matured, not only to overturn by force, the established government of this State, but to take military occupation of this city, to subject this whole people to martial law, to place the lives of us, of our wives and children, under the power of armed men, who, being without discipline, could have been under no control—to expose our property to pillage, to put at defiance the laws of the land, and unless all this was tamely permitted, to make this fair city a scene of universal carnage. This is surely bad enough, but this is not all. The principles which have been avowed, seem to me as utterly subversive of all other governments as they are of our own. If an established government may be overturned on the principles which have been advocated, and in the manner which we have seen attempted, no constitution in the land is worth the parchment on which it is written. The only law that would be known, would soon be the law of force. The only principle of action would come to be the love of plunder. All that would be necessary, in order to establish unlimited power over us, would be, without the forms of law, to lay claim to a majority, and assemble a sufficient number of armed men to carry its decisions into effect. The same means by which the first usurpation was accomplished, would be a good reason for perpetrating a second and a third, each one more bloody and tyrannical than its predecessor, until the horrors of revolutionary France were re-enacted here, and then until they terminated in as fearful and inflexible a despotism.

I regret to say, that if these principles could have obtained a foothold here, they would, I fear, have spread, I know not how rapidly, to the adjoining States. Meetings of men, sympathizing as it is called, with this movement, have been held in Boston, in New-York, in Philadelphia, and in other places. They have been fostered and abetted in some cases, by the civil magistrates; and yet more, in some instances by men who have been nurtured among us, who have sat at our tables, and been warmed at our fire-sides. I hope that such men have been deceived and misled, but I can hardly believe it as much as I wish I could. So dire is the lust of office, so blind the rage of political ambition, that I fear there are men among us who look at nothing as a crime, which will put them at the head of the strongest. Such men will easily find a multitude to follow wherever they will lead. Thus the flame which was almost kindled here, might have spread over all New-England. That such principles would have ultimately triumphed, I do not believe, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth; and with all our sins, I cannot believe that we have yet deserved so awful a visitation. I believe that throughout our country, as He has done here, He would have aroused the intensest love of right, and hatred of oppression. I believe that rather than submit to such a despotism, the despotism of lawless force, every good citizen would have contended unto death; I believe that such an attempt would have ended, as it has here, in utter confusion. But who can tell what such a contest would have cost? Who can tell what blood would have been

shed, ere we should have been again restored to tranquillity? And who can estimate the effect on the civilized world, of such a spectacle? Who can tell how the friends of liberty would have been confounded, and how their best hopes would have been dashed, for centuries? The very notion of a free government, if it must be liable to convulsions such as this, would be a scoffing and a bye-word. Nay, I already feel humbled more than I can express, when I reflect, that the news of this wicked design, borne on the wings of the wind, is already on its way to every dwelling in the civilized world. As a citizen of this State, how can I look a stranger in the face, and be obliged to confess that this soil has been degraded by men who were assembled with arms in their hands, for the purpose of overthrowing a government under which every man has ever been most perfectly protected—under which, every man has enjoyed the most perfect liberty, and to overthrow it at the sacrifice not only of the best blood of this State, but of the blood of relatives, of brethren, nay of a tender and too-indulgent parent! But the subject is too painful; I can pursue it no farther. May God, in his infinite mercy, pardon the guilt of this transaction.

But from all this, I trust a merciful God has delivered us. He has brought to confusion this design, so steeped in atrocity, and all good men, and among them, those who were at first misled into a partial participation in the measures in which it commenced, see it in its true character. The whole feeling of this community is aroused, and Rhode-Island is her-

self again. God himself permitted the evil doers to awaken our fellow citizens to their danger, and He himself called into action the energy required to meet and to dispel it. Without aid from abroad, by summoning to the crisis the spirit of the State, He scattered it as the chaff of the summer threshing floor. To Him be first of all the praise of this deliverance. Here in thy courts, Oh God, here under the protection of constitutional law, here in the quiet enjoyment of the blessings which our fathers have bequeathed to us, we render to thee the homage of humble and grateful hearts. To thee belong the song of thanksgiving and the anthem of praise. The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof.

And next let us tender our grateful acknowledgments to those of our fellow citizens, who perilled their lives in support of liberty and law. Blessed be God, that the blood of neither party has been shed, that no heart has been called to mourn the loss by death, of any whom it held dear. But I well know, that had such a sacrifice been necessary, among the company of citizens who, on the last Tuesday night were assembled to defend yonder arsenal, there was not one who would not have cheerfully sacrificed it. And a similar spirit pervaded the multitude who were on the succeeding day, marched to disperse the insurgents. All felt that all they held dear was at stake, and all felt that in such a cause, life was freely to be perilled. And not to our townsmen alone, is this tribute of acknowledgment due. Our fellow citizens from Warren, Bristol, and Newport, who with such

promptness came to our assistance, and stood with us shoulder to shoulder, in the defence of liberty and law, have bound themselves to us by a tie which shall not easily be severed. Rhode-Island will long have occasion to remember them with gratitude.

While, however, I have spoken thus of this occurrence, I desire it to be distinctly understood, that neither I nor any one else believes for a moment that the vast majority of our fellow citizens who were engaged in what is called the Suffrage cause, had any participation in, or even knowledge of the atrocities that were intended. Many of them were seen in the ranks with their fellow citizens, prepared to resist this violence to the uttermost. Others who were not seen there, were using their influence to prevent any recourse to arms. A large portion of the military assembled at the insurgent head quarters, knew nothing of the designs of their leader, until the last moment, and as soon as they were informed of his intentions, immediately withdrew. But a very few, and those I believe principally men collected from other States, eager for nothing but plunder, were prepared to shed the blood of this city. If there were those among us who were prepared for such a deed, I hope that I shall never know of it. May God forgive them, and grant them better minds.

But, you will naturally ask, how was it that such an attempt could ever have been conceived, and how could the preparations for it have ever been made, in such a city as this; a city in which peace and good feeling have, from its first settlement, so universally prevailed? I feel constrained to answer this question

very briefly, as there arises from it directly many a lesson of wisdom, which may guide us in the future.

This difficulty, as you are all aware, arose upon the question of suffrage. The Charter* under which this State has from the beginning existed, limits this right to those who possess real estate to the value of one hundred and thirty-four dollars; on the principle that as law is a permanent enactment, those only should vote for legislators who have a permanent residence, and are themselves likely to be affected by their own decisions. Of this permanence of residence, the possession of real estate was supposed to be the most appropriate evidence. And moreover, the qualification was placed so low, that it was believed that most persons who really desired to participate in public affairs, might easily do so. In consequence of this arrangement, the number of voters in proportion to the whole number of citizens, was less than in most of the States of the Union. With the wisdom of this provision I have nothing to do. A very able argument might easily be made out on either side of the question. It is, however, proper to remark that under it, this State has enjoyed unexampled prosperity. The people of Rhode-Island, whether voters or not, felt a natural pride in possessing the oldest form of social organization existing in any part of this new world, from Labrador to Cape Horn. No instance has ever been adduced, so far as I have been informed, of any oppression or injustice which has occurred under it. A form of social organization which has maintained this character for one hundred and eighty years, in the midst of a people proverbially

*See Note on last page.

ally jealous of their rights, could not surely contain any element essentially unfavorable to liberty.*

While, however, I say this, it is proper to add that in my opinion, a citizen of Rhode-Island, who has been always familiar with this form of the constituency, does not readily appreciate the manner in which it strikes persons from other States, who have been accustomed to a wider extension of suffrage. It gives rise to odious and unkind comparisons.—Hence, whatever may be its practical value in other respects, it should be borne in mind that this value may be overbalanced by the ill-feeling which is liable to be engendered. It should be also remembered that in any social compact, not only the rights but also the feelings of our fellow men should be strictly regarded ; and that it is frequently better to yield in a doubtful matter, than to suffer the accusation of injustice from too strict an adherence to our own opinions. Besides this, the population of the different towns had increased in very different ratios. Hence, the representation had become palpably unequal. There was therefore, good reason for a revision of the whole subject. I believe it to be at present universally conceded that it would have been better if

* The authority of Mr. Bancroft, the historian of the United States, is very explicit on this subject. "The Charter Government, constituting, as it then seemed, a true democracy, and establishing a political system, which few, beside the Rhode Islanders themselves, believed to be practicable, is still in existence, and is the oldest constitutional charter now valid, in the world. The probable population of R. Island at the time of its reception, may have been 2,500. In 170 years, that number has increased forty fold ; and the government which was hardly thought to contain checks enough on the power of the people to endure among shepherds and farmers, protects a dense population, and the accumulation of a widely extended commerce. *No where in the world, have life, liberty, and property been safer than in R. Island.*"—Bancroft, Vol. 2. p. 64.

a change in the elective franchise had been made many years since. Had this been done, it would have saved us a period of intense anxiety and alarm. While, however, I say this, it is proper to add that until very lately, it has been really doubtful whether a change was actually desired by any large number of our citizens. Petitions on this subject were, it is true, several times presented, but they never seemed to arise from any strong feeling, nor to assume a form that called for immediate action. It has really been a matter of surprise to me, that the question awakened so little attention.

Believing that this change ought to be made, the plan was some time since suggested, of carrying this object into effect by means of voluntary associations. The simple object of these associations at first, was to procure a change in the constituency, by legal means and without the idea of violence. To this no citizen could object, and had these associations been restricted to their original design, they would have accomplished their object without incurring even the suspicion of wrong. But here allow me to caution my fellow citizens. A voluntary association for an innocent object, by innocent means, is of course, in itself, innocent. But when the object strongly interests the feelings of men, it is, of all things, most difficult to confine it to its original design. It forms a band of union, by which the whole power of the association may be brought to bear upon a single individual. Hence, every member is placed under the control of the whole. The body is at the command of the head, and thus men are too

frequently led to lose sight of the object, to exchange it for another, or to seek its attainment by means of which they originally had no conception.

Such was the case in the progress of this transaction. Soon was engrafted on this original idea the notion of forming a distinct and separate government, without regard to any thing that at present existed. A convention was held, and a constitution framed. When this instrument was proposed to the public, a large portion of our citizens voted for it, without the remotest conception of really forming a new and revolutionary government, but merely as an expression of their desire that suffrage should be extended. Many with whom I have conversed, have thus expressed to me, in the fullest manner, their intentions on this subject. In this, I must be allowed to say that I think they were greatly in error. They unintentionally were led to say what they did not mean, and the result was unfortunate. They voted to *adopt* this Constitution as the supreme law of the land, when they merely *intended* to say that they desired the constituency to be enlarged. Hence majorities were claimed which did not really exist, and a false issue was given to this whole question.*

*The number of votes thus claimed for this Constitution was nearly 14,000. A large number of these were given by proxy, and as no oath was taken or required of moderator, clerk, voter, or proxy, no one can form any estimate of the value of the act as an expression of the public opinion. That it was by no means such an expression as justifies action upon it, even on the principles which were assumed, is evident from the fact, that when the officers under this constitution were chosen, but 6,417 persons voted, that is, 7,449, or more than one half, had abandoned it; and less than one third of the whole number of adult male inhabitants appearing in its favor. I make this note merely to show that I have not overstated the fact in the paragraph above.

The next step which was taken was to assert that this was the supreme law of the land, and to elect and organize a government under it. In the mean time, however, a Constitution proposed in conformity with the law of the land, and offering very nearly as wide an extension of suffrage as had been at first demanded, was offered to the people. This you well know was rejected by the combined vote of the whole suffrage party and of those citizens who did not desire any change. The main ground of the controversy was thus changed, and the original ground abandoned. It was no more in the main a practical question how far the right of suffrage should be extended, but the abstract question whether the asserted majority of the people, a majority determined by no forms of law, has a right at any moment to overturn the whole fabric of existing institutions and form a government at will. This seems to me no other than the question whether in entering into society, I submit all that renders existence valuable to the unlimited power of a majority, or whether that majority as truly as the minority, is subject to law; whether when I swear allegiance to a government, I mean to be true to my engagement; or whether I am at liberty to break that allegiance as soon as I please; whether, in fact, existing laws and Constitutions are of any force, or whether they are only blank paper, and the majority have a right to govern the minority at all times and for all purposes, according to their simple will. On this principle I see not how a government could exist for a moment, nay, I see not how society could be held together. The object

of all society and all government, is to secure to every individual his just and natural rights ; but how can these be secured when the majority has the right to do whatever it has the power to do? Solitude would, in such a case, be better than society, inasmuch as freedom by one's self is better than slavery in company.

When the tendency of all this became apparent, a large portion of those who merely desired an extension of suffrage by constitutional means, withdrew, and henceforward had no farther participation in the transaction. Still it was determined by those who remained, to organize a government, and this also was done. Still I am well aware that a large majority had no intention to proceed any farther than merely to give the question a form which might bring it before the General Government, in order that the question might there be decided, whether or not they had thus far acted constitutionally. When this had been done they also withdrew, desiring only to bring the question to a legal issue. Others, who did not withdraw, were of the same opinion, and remained, I believe, for the purpose of giving an innocent termination to a movement which they could not arrest.

The die however had been cast. There had been formed an organization, purporting to be the constitutional government of Rhode-Island, and though the greater part of those who originally commenced this movement had withdrawn, yet those who remained claimed the right to exercise the supreme authority of the State. The sentiments expressed in the letters of the President of the United States, had no effect

to turn them from their purpose. It was boldly given out that the question was to be settled by arms, and that this Constitution would be enforced at the point of the bayonet. Argument was lost sight of and the attempt was made to overawe the citizens by intimidation. The worst passions of the human heart were aroused by the most inflammatory addresses and resolutions. The friends of liberty and law were denounced as tyrants, oppressors, aristocrats; who were grinding the faces of the poor, and deserving of all that a sanguinary mob could inflict, and it was plainly intimated that the cause of liberty required the infliction. Many of our best citizens were spoken of as *marked men*; and in the public papers their places of residence were designated in such a manner, as left no question as to what was intended, in case of an outbreak.—The notion of a division of property was becoming somewhat familiar; and several cases have been mentioned to me, in which the ignorant and vicious declared that this division of property was to be effected as soon as the new government came into power, and that henceforward they would have no occasion for labor.

It may seem strange that all this should have been for so long a time patiently borne, and that this community was not sooner aware of its danger. The reason is highly honorable to our citizens. The fact is, that so accustomed are we to the prevalence of law, so confident was every good citizen that he had done justly, that all seemed willing to leave the whole matter to the returning good sense of those, who,

without any rational cause, seemed so much exasperated. They felt themselves strong in the principles of all social order and good government, and there they rested, willing and ready, as soon as tranquillity should be restored, to make another attempt to form a Constitution which should remove every just ground of complaint. Besides, the idea of shedding blood was abhorrent to the mind of every good man, and it was scarcely believed that the attempt would actually be made to enforce this usurpation at such a sacrifice. They also believed that they were by the Constitution entitled to protection from the General Government, and that when the matter came to this issue, this attempt at revolution would die away and be forgotten.

These hopes, however, were fallacious. The interference of the General Government was withheld until a subsequent contingency should arrive. The leader of the insurrection made an appeal from the government of the United States, to those whom he chose to call the people of the United States. In this he was countenanced by large meetings in New-York and other places, and arms and assistance were promised him in the prosecution of his design. He returned to the city on Monday last, and immediately surrounded himself with a military guard. On the next day, troops to the amount of nearly four hundred were assembled at his head-quarters, though, I believe, that a large portion of these came together rather for the purpose of preventing his arrest than of attacking the city. On Tuesday afternoon he seized two brass field pieces belonging to an artillery

company in the city. This last act revealed to our citizens their danger. They immediately flew to arms. The arsenal was fully garrisoned, and preparations were made for resistance. Orders for troops were sent to Warren, Bristol, and Newport. At midnight the city was startled by the rapid discharge of the signal guns of the insurgents, announcing that they had commenced their march upon the arsenal. Alarm bells were rung during the night, and the whole city was under arms. The morning light, however, brought the intelligence that the attack upon the arsenal had failed, that the insurgents had retired from before it, and had mostly returned to their homes. About a hundred were, however, assembled about their head-quarters. By eight o'clock in the morning, the troops arrived from abroad, and nearly eight hundred men were assembled under arms. They marched immediately to arrest the mover of this insurrection, but he had already fled. All but a few desperate and intoxicated men were dispersed; and these promised to deliver up their arms in the course of the day. By the ensuing morning all had retired, and the city was suffered to resume the duties and avocations of peace.

But all this has passed away. Would that it could be blotted forever from the memory of man. Would that the events of the past week could be erased from the record of the things that have been. To what this project tended I have already alluded. To God alone is our tribute of gratitude due, that it has been so utterly confounded. Never in the whole course of my life have I seen so clearly, as in this

instance, the indubitable evidence of the Divine interposition. The most thoughtless among us has a thousand times acknowledged it. In a number of instances where the foresight of man could have given to events no direction, where the passions of men were excited to the uttermost, by a series of almost miraculous providences, God appeared to save the effusion of blood, and brought this transaction to a termination at which good men of all parties must unfeignedly rejoice. Never was there a series of events, in which, from the beginning to the end, the finger of God was so palpably to be recognized. Never had this city or this State occasion for so humble, so profound, so universal a thanksgiving.

I cannot leave this part of the subject without adding a single remark on the phases which this transaction has assumed, and the design which it ultimately adopted. There was first a voluntary association with affiliated branches, and a central committee for accomplishing an innocent object by innocent means. Next, the means became questionable, and then the object is changed, until it ends in the attempt at a bloody revolution and treason against the State and the United States. At every step the whole power of the association is brought to bear upon every individual, and he is thus constrained, unless he have firmness enough to break loose from the slavery, to participate in measures which at the beginning he could not have looked upon without abhorrence. Or, view it in another light. A Constitution is voted for without the forms of law, and of course in such a manner that none could pretend to determine what

expression of the wishes of the people it really sanctioned. As measure after measure is adopted, thousand after thousand decline any farther co-operation in the proceeding; until it has at last dwindled down to a few armed men of desperate fortunes, who pretend to be acting according to the will of the majority; and who in the name of liberty, attempt to seize upon the government and subject this city to pillage and murder. Thus easily, is an innocent association made an instrument of atrocious wickedness. Such are the dangers of attempting to remedy what we consider a defect in a constitution, without regard to existing and constitutional laws.

I believe that my fellow citizens now see this subject in its true light. Let us then forget what is wrong in the past, excepting in so far as it may teach wisdom for the future. We all believe that it would have been wise long ago to have extended very largely the right of suffrage, and to equalize the representation of the different sections of the State. Let us then be prompt to act accordingly. And let us all approach this subject as citizens of Rhode-Island, good men and true. Let us lay aside our pre-conceived opinions, the prejudices of party and of locality, and deliberate with a single desire for the good of the whole. We desire a Constitution which shall secure to us and our children, the fullest measure of constitutional liberty. To attain this result, let us all meet together as brethren, in the true spirit of conciliation and patriotism. Thus only can we expect that heaven will smile upon our endeavors.

Thus only shall we show that the lesson of the past has not been read to us in vain.

I have thus far considered merely the social aspects of this transaction. But a more solemn duty is now devolved upon me. It becomes me to speak of it as the messenger of God, charged by him with the obligation to set it before you in the light of eternal truth. I have thus far called you to thanksgiving: I now call you to repentance. Bear with me while I speak to you on this subject, briefly but freely.

1. During the progress of this contest, the most unhallowed passions of the human heart have been excited. Men have looked upon each other with envy, malice and revenge. On both sides, I fear, that emotions have been excited on which a holy God has looked down with sore displeasure. Whatever crime our fellow men may have committed, we are forbidden to cherish towards them any other feelings than those of pity and compassion. And even when we are called to oppose their measures, and resist their wrong doing, we should allow ourselves in no sentiment towards them but that of good will. It is one thing to abhor the transgression, and another to hate the transgressor. Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, is the precept of that Saviour who will judge both you and me in righteousness. That man has been in a very unfit frame of mind to meet his God, who has not been in the daily habit of commending those who have differed from him, to the compassion of his Father who is in heaven. If there be any one who has not thus lived, I call him to re-

pentance, to forgiveness, to charity. Unless ye forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your trespasses.

2. But secondly, there has been committed, in the progress of this transaction, a frightful amount of crime. This movement has been fostered and sustained by a series of most astonishing falsehoods. The public has been deceived by the reiteration of statements on every subject, which must have been known by those who uttered them, to be wholly without foundation; and by promises which never could be fulfilled, or fulfilled only by acts of the most atrocious wickedness.

3. It has been kept alive by the propagation of the most false and malicious slanders; and by threats of perpetrating the foulest crimes. Ignorant and abandoned men have been urged onward to treason, by the hope of glutting their revenge against those who had always proved themselves their best and truest friends, and by the expectation of plundering those who, it was supposed, had not the strength or spirit to resist. The most virtuous citizens of Providence have been stigmatized as its direst enemies; and those whose public liberality had done honor to the city, were the first to be designated for destruction. On this subject I may be permitted to bear my public testimony to the city, which some time since I entered a stranger. I have resided here for about fifteen years. I have mingled with citizens of every name and of every class. I have the honor to number among my friends, the rich and the poor, of every sect and of all parties, and I do not believe

that there is a city in the world in which there exists a more universal a feeling of kindness. I never knew a community in which the deserving poor were so immediately relieved, or where a desire for the good of the whole was more universally diffused. Let any one come among us, and look around upon the monuments of our patriotism and social feeling. By whom was that Athenæum founded and so endowed, that for a trifling expense its literary treasures are at the command of every citizen among us? Who are the warmest friends of our common schools, and who have been the most zealous to carry intellectual and moral cultivation to every bosom and every fireside? Who are the men that, in times of public distress, and of pecuniary pressure, have been most ready by their advice, their endorsements, and their loans, to relieve the embarrassed, and to assist the failing? I blush to say it is the very men who have been denounced as tyrants and oppressors. And this has been done, must I say it, or at least it has been countenanced and abetted by men who call themselves the disciples of the Lord Jesus, who partake of the elements of that body which was broken, and that blood that was shed for our sins, and who profess to be cultivating in their hearts the temper of a holy heaven.

I am aware that it may be said that all this was merely intended to intimidate, and that it was never intended to put such threats into execution. I am willing to believe it. But, I ask, is it no wrong to utter a false and malicious lie, a vile and atrocious

libel? Is it no wrong to hold up a man's neighbors and fellow citizens as outlaws, when he knows that they deserve his gratitude and respect? Is it no wrong to urge men to pillage and murder, and goad their passions to action, and then to say that we thought they would never do it? Had any of these consequences ensued, the men who have uttered such sentiments, and the men who have caused them to be uttered, would in the sight of God and man, be guilty of murder; and at the bar of God they would have to answer for it. In his holy word it is written that murderers, and all liars have their portion in the second death.

But it will be said the end was right, we were only seeking that to which we were justly entitled. I answer, this may be clearer to you, than to your neighbors. But suppose this to be so, does the end justify the means? Has God permitted you to seek even a just end by falsehood and slander, and by a course of measures which must naturally tend to pillage and bloodshed? You may say, we did not intend this, but if you did not, some of your associates did; and did you not know that a social revolution is never accomplished without it? Do you say you did not anticipate this? I ask, then, was it wise for you to embark in such an undertaking, without knowing whither it would lead? No end whatever can justify such enormities; for nothing whatever is a sufficient reason for doing wrong. Whatever may be the end for which crime may be committed, the crime remains the same. I do not say, that if we have done it ignorantly, the guilt is the same. But

even in this case, we are bound to confess our error, and to repent of our wrong doing before God.

But this is not all. This movement aimed at the overthrow of the lawful government; one of the gravest crimes which can be committed against society. Whatever may have been the natural rights of men previously to a social organization, in forming such an organization, they enter into a mutual agreement to guarantee to each other the enjoyment of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. By virtue of this compact, every one of us is protected in the possession of all that he holds dear. After it has been formed, the whole society, both majority and minority, those in power and those out of power, are solemnly bound by its provisions. If a majority *out of power* may overturn it at will, a majority *in power* may do the same; and thus, all constitutional right is merged in the will of the strongest. He who undertakes to effect a revolution by force, thus, not only puts to the extremest hazard all the present interests of the community, but renders it perfectly uncertain in what manner it will ever again be organized. The man himself may not mean to proceed so far, but how shall he control the instruments which he himself has used, and whose passions he himself has excited? Within the past week, every one of us has been able to form a slight conception of what must be the results of such a catastrophe. Every one felt, that if the lawful government of this State were overturned, no security for person or property could remain, but that all was at the mercy of

lawless violence. I ask, what then can involve the elements of a greater civil crime?

But it may be asked, is a revolution never to be justified? I answer, the proper object of all government is to secure to every individual the full enjoyment of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, or the power to do in every respect as he will, if he interfere with the rights of no other human being. For this end is government instituted; and never, until it utterly fail to accomplish these purposes, can it be rightfully overturned. No other rule can be safely adopted; for, if my dislike of some of the provisions of a government be a sufficient reason for taking up arms against it, no form of social organization could endure for a day, but every thing would be tossed about in the whirlwind of ceaseless revolution.

But this is not all. The precepts of religion are explicit upon this subject. The New Testament teaches us that government is an ordinance of God, and that God himself commands us to obey it.— Thus, Rom. xiii. 1: “Let every soul be subject to the higher powers; for there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God, and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not for wrath, but for conscience sake.” Thus, also, Titus iii. 1: “Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers; to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work.”—

Again, 1. Pet. ii. 13 : “ Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake ; whether to the king, as supreme, or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him, for the punishment of evil doers, and the praise of them that do well. As free, and not using your liberty as a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honor all men, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.” These laws of the Saviour are as explicit as language can make them, and they derive a greater stringency from the fact that the government under which they were written, and to which they immediately referred, was neither just nor paternal.

Such, do I assert to be the law of God in this matter. We are not at liberty to enter a society and enjoy its advantages, and then conspire to overturn it ; to swear allegiance, and when we please, to violate it. We have no more liberty to overturn the social compact when we will, than the marriage compact. If we do it, we not only violate our engagements to man, but we are guilty of a sin against God. Such, my brethren, do I believe to be the law of that Saviour whom, in the presence of God and men, you have promised to obey. You have no more right to violate this, than any other of his commands, and if you do it, he has told you that you shall receive his condemnation. If with a knowledge of his will you violate it, you do it at the peril of your souls.

I may be told that this is a new doctrine, and restrictive of liberty. I reply, it is no newer than the times of the apostles ; and it is just as restrictive as

the Holy Spirit himself has made it. The laws which I have repeated to you are those which Christ has enacted. If you are his disciples, you must obey them, or he will declare "I never knew you." You must choose, therefore, in this matter, whom ye will serve.

I ask you then, brethren, is there any of you who have been implicated in this attempt to overturn this government by force? Have you encouraged this violence by your actions, your conversation, your presence, or your example? I call upon you to examine your conduct and your motives in the light of God's holy word. By that will you be judged at the coming day. Wherein you have sinned, confess and forsake your fault, and seek for the pardon of God through the merits of his Son.

It may be asked why I take this occasion to speak of these things, while feelings yet sensitive, are liable to be wounded. I answer you frankly. I have been informed that a considerable number of professing Christians in this city have been deluded into a participation in these transactions. I know that it has brought a sad disgrace upon the cause of Christ. If such things are consistent with the religion of Jesus Christ, then the religion of Christ is a fable. When such things are done, it becomes me to speak freely. I could not recommend the gospel to my fellow men, if I did not at first relieve it from this foul dishonor.

Does any one say, I never thought of all this? But my brother, it is written in the Bible; why did you not think of it? Did you go where you would be

likely to be put in mind of it? Did you take counsel of the aged—the discreet—the heavenly-minded saint, in this matter? Were you the companion of all those who fear God and keep his commandments? Was your delight in the law of the Lord, and in his law did you meditate day and night? Have you not, my brother, deeply erred in this thing? And if you have erred, you are this morning called to confession and repentance. Your fellow citizens and the Church of Christ have a right to expect this of you. The Saviour whom you have disobeyed, and whose cause you have put to shame, requires this of you. Meditate, I pray you, upon these things.

Allow me, brethren, to close by a brief suggestion of the sentiments proper for this occasion. Let us first of all lift up our hearts to God, in devout gratitude, for the preservation which he has wrought, and let us by holier and more charitable lives, show that He has not chastened us in vain. Let each one of us, of every party, review before God, the events of the past month, and humbly repent of every wrong to his neighbor, or sin against God, which he has by thought, or word, or deed committed. Let us with hearts full of forgiveness, commend those whom we believe to have erred, to the pardoning mercy of God, and the sanctifying efficacy of his Holy Spirit. And let us look with devout and pious confidence to God, for protection in time to come. In his hand are the hearts of all men. He can confound the counsel of the wicked, and scatter those that delight in war.

May he be a wall of fire round about us, and the glory in the midst of us; and to his name shall be the praise forever: Amen.

Since the first edition has passed through the press, the author has received the following note from the Hon. JOHN PITMAN, Judge of the District Court of the U. States, which he here with pleasure subjoins.

PROVIDENCE, MAY 28, 1842.

REV. DR. WAYLAND,

Dear Sir—As a second edition of your Sermon is about to be published, I am desirous that an error should be corrected which occurs on the 12th page.

The Charter of 1663 contains no limitation or regulation of the right of Suffrage. The freehold qualification was enacted by an act of the General Assembly, and was the work of the people themselves, by their delegates.

The Charter authorized the General Assembly to choose such persons as they should think fit, "to be free of the said Company and body politic, and them into the same to admit." This power of admitting freemen the General Assembly exercised until they authorized the several towns to admit freemen. In 1724, an act was passed, by the General Assembly, which provided that no person should be admitted a freeman unless he owned a freehold estate of a certain value, or was the eldest son of such a freeholder. Such has been the law ever since, though subsequent acts changed the value of the freehold necessary for such admission.

This feature in the Constitution of our State is not therefore attributable to Charles II.; it was the work of the people of this State, who had the liberty to make such a fundamental law for themselves, and it has been twice re-enacted by the people's delegates, (in the Digest of 1798, and of 1822,) since the Declaration of Independence.

I am, very respectfully, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

JOHN PITMAN.

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