

A

DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED AT ST. JOHNSBURY,

DECEMBER 3, 1818,

BEING THE DAY OF THE ANNUAL
THANKSGIVING.

—*—
BY LUTHER JEWETT, M. D.
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DANVILLE :

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—*—
1819.

The subscriber having been appointed by the Church to examine Dr. Jewett's Thanksgiving Sermon, I hereby certify that I have so far examined it as to be satisfied that the several statements therein made, and particularly those relating to the church are correct.

DAVID STOWELL.

January 28, 1819.

A

DISCOURSE, &c.

Psalm 107—35, 36, 37, 38. He turneth the wilderness into a standing water, and dry ground into water springs. And there he maketh the hungry to dwell, that they may prepare a city for habitation;— And sow the fields, and plant vineyards, which may yield fruits of increase. He blesseth them also, so that they are multiplied greatly; and suffereth not their cattle to decrease.

IN this Psalm David recounts some of the dealings of God with mankind. He points out many instances of his goodness and wonderful works. He expresses his most ardent desire that men would praise him for them; and concludes by saying, Who-so is wise and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving kindness of the Lord. Encouraged by the example of the inspired penman, I propose to direct your attention to some of his providential dealings toward us in this place; especially such as more particularly relate to our religious concerns. I regret that I cannot enter more fully into this subject; but a want of time to procure the necessary information and the short compass of a single discourse will not permit. Therefore, after having briefly pointed out some of the steps by which we, as a town, have been led, I shall confine my remarks to those occurrences which have been more particularly

connected with the Congregational Church and Society. But I intend on a future occasion, if the Lord will, to attempt a history of the other religious denominations into which my friends in this town are divided.

The charter was issued to Jonathan Arnold, Esq. & his associates in 1786, "and in the tenth year of the independence of this state." One Right of land, containing somewhat more than 300 acres, was reserved "for the settlement of a minister and ministers of the gospel in said township; and one right "for the support of the social worship of God in said township." A considerable part of these lands are leased, and yield a small annual income, which is divided among the several denominations, in proportion to their respective numbers. The next year after the charter was granted, Dr. Arnold, accompanied with about a dozen men, some with wives, but more unmarried, commenced the first regular settlement of the town. He was a man of more than ordinary talents; but not eminent for piety. The sabbath at this time was a day of relaxation and refreshment. The fields and the woods were roved over—some labor occasionally performed; and plans for future business or amusements formed the burden of the conversation. The first settlers usually give a stamp to the moral character of a place, which remains for many years. It was so in this town. At a meeting of the inhabitants on the first Monday of March 1794, On the question being put, "Will the town raise money by a tax to pay for preaching the gospel," it was "determined in the negative."

On the first Monday of March 1795, "Voted, That a committee be appointed to draw a subscription paper and obtain subscribers to pay for preaching of the gospel." A committee of 5 was chosen. The fruits of their labors were little or nothing.

At a town meeting on the fifth of September, 1797, "Voted, To raise money by the town to hire a minister to preach the gospel." But on the same day before the meeting was dissolved, it was voted, That the vote already past should "be recalled or postponed;" and that a committee, consisting of Daniel Pierce, jun. William Sumner, and John Ladd, "see how much the town will subscribe to pay a minister for preaching the gospel."

At a town meeting on the first Monday of March 1798, "Voted, To raise 60 dollars to pay a minister for preaching the gospel." Joel Roberts, Esq. Alexr. Gilchrist and Jeriah Hawkins, were chosen to hire a minister.

Four months after, the town was again called together, and once more took the subject of hiring a minister into consideration. A committee was appointed on the subject who reported in favor of hiring a minister to preach one year—half of the time on the Plain and half of the time toward the north part of the town. The town accepted the Report, and, "Voted to hire a minister." Whether any thing was done to carry this vote into effect, those now living who were then inhabitants of the town can best tell. The public records inform us, that 2 months afterward, to wit: "At a meeting of the inhabitants on the 4th of September" following, "It was put to vote to see if the town would raise money to pay for further preaching, and determined in the negative."

On the 15th of July following, i. e. July 1799, "At a meeting of the inhabitants of the town of St. Johnsbury," on the question being put, Will the town raise money to hire a minister, "Voted in the negative." 1801, July 9, "Voted to raise one hundred dollars" for the purpose of hiring preaching; and appointed Joel Roberts, Barnabas Barker and Nathl. Edson a committee to procure preaching and provide a place

for meeting. This was the last vote which the town ever passed on the subject of obtaining preaching. Subscription has long been the only mode resorted to. Different missionary societies have from time to time afforded an occasional supply.

We will now turn our attention to the measures pursued by the town with relation to a house for public worship. At a town meeting in March, 1798, on the question being put, "Will the town build a house for public use or a town house? It was determined in the affirmative." A committee was appointed to report to the town in June following, "The most convenient place whereon said house shall be built." At the town meeting in June, "On the question being put, Will the town agree to build a meeting house in said town? it was determined in the negative." Though those who were in favor of building a meeting house were defeated, they were not discouraged, but procured another meeting to be called, Sept. 4th of the same year, and, "On the question being put, Will the town build a meeting house or town house? determined in the negative."

Here the business rested until 1802, Sept. 29, when the town "voted to raise \$850" toward building a house and appointed a committee, consisting of Gen. Joel Roberts, Lieut. Thomas Peirce and Lieut. Square Aldrich, to superintend the business, with power to dispose of the floors of the house to individuals and to finish said house suitable and convenient to attend public worship in, and for a town house.

1803, Sept. 6. "Voted to raise \$80 to defray the expense of raising the meeting house."

The work was prospered—the house completed, and we are permitted this day to assemble in it and unite in thanksgiving to the author of all our mercies.

Very few of the first settlers had been members of churches before they came here; and it was not until

the 21st of November, 1809, that a church was organized. It was a solemn transaction, and numbers received impressions solemn and permanent. The church was organized on the Congregational plan, and consisted of 19 members. Their names were John Barker, Andrew Putnam, Stephen Ayer, Hubbard Lawrence, David Stowell, Samuel Eaton, jun. Aphia White, Rebecca Houghton, Sarah Ayer, Lucy Putnam, Susanna Mansfield, Rebecca Brown, Ruth Barker, Mary Lawrence, Mary Bissel, Nancy Ayer, Rebecca Stowell, Susanna Baldwin, Martha Aldrich. Hubbard Lawrence was chosen Moderator and David Stowell, clerk. Seven or eight of the members of the new formed church had been members of other churches previous to their settlement in this town. The present number of members and the annual additions will appear from the following statement, viz :

1809, Nov. 21st, Organized	.	.	.	.	.	19
Dec. Added	.	.	.	.	.	1
1810	-	-	-	-	-	7
1811	-	-	-	-	-	5
1812	-	-	-	-	-	6
1813	-	-	-	-	-	15
1814	-	-	-	-	-	13
1815	-	-	-	-	-	4
1816	-	-	-	-	-	40
1817	-	-	-	-	-	12
1818	-	-	-	-	-	11
Making in the whole						133

By the excommunication of one member, and by deaths and dismissals to other churches, the present number is about 115. The sacrament of the Lord's supper has on an average been attended upon 3 times in a year, from the first forming of the church to this time. And at every sacramental season, except three,

there has been an addition to the church. The church continued almost 6 years destitute of a Pastor. Some part of the time they enjoyed the preaching of the gospel, and they uniformly maintained public worship on the sabbath. On the 25th of October, 1815, the Rev. Pearson Thurston was installed their Pastor. The next spring and summer was a season of unusual attention, and 40, in the course of the year, were added to the church. In the latter part of this year, Mr. Thurston's health began rapidly to decline. He became unable to preach, and at his request, on the 13th of October, 1817, the pastoral relation between him and this church was dissolved.

The instruction of the rising generation by catechising is an object of which the church has never lost sight, though sometimes it has been for a season neglected. At the present time many of the youth of different denominations are treasuring up the holy scriptures in their memories. Some have committed all the portions of scripture which are set down as answers to the questions in Wilbur's Biblical Catechism, and are progressing in committing the New Testament. Others are following hard after them, and doing themselves and their teachers great credit. The number at present engaged in this good work is about 100. May it speedily be doubled!

Of the 19 first gathered into a Ch ^h	15 had previously received baptism, &
In 1809, 1 was added, which	1 had previously received baptism
In 1810, 7 were added, of whom	3 had previously received baptism
In 1811, 5 were added, the whole	5 had previously received baptism
In 1812, 6 were added, of whom	1 had previously received baptism
In 1813, 15 were added, of whom	10 had previously received baptism.
In 1814, 13 were added, of whom	7 had previously received baptism
In 1815, 4 were added, of whom	2 had previously received baptism
In 1816, 40 were added, of whom	25 had previously received baptism
In 1817, 12 were added, of whom	8 had previously received baptism
In 1818, 11 were added, of whom	7 had previously received baptism

Of 133 being the whole number 84 had received baptism before they

presented themselves for admission into this church. When we reflect, that a very small proportion of the inhabitants of this town and vicinity have ever received baptism, perhaps this fact is not unworthy of notice. The members of this church have, with very few exceptions, devoted their households to God in baptism, and these exceptions have arisen from circumstances beyond the control of the believing parent,

In 1809 there were given up to God in baptism	9 members of households.
In 1810	10
In 1811	2
In 1812	27
In 1813	1
In 1814	50
In 1815	5
In 1816	20
In 1817	28
In 1818	5
In the whole	157

At least one eighth of all the 157 members of households who have been devoted to God in baptism, have already become hopefully pious since they were baptized. Sixteen have been admitted into full communion with this church on their giving evidence of piety, and some have united with other churches. Many of them are still in their infancy. While we thankfully acknowledge the goodness of God in making, as we humbly hope, so many of our children the subjects of his special grace, we have reason to look on others of them with fearful apprehensions. Unless we have the faith of Abraham and do the works of Abraham, commanding our children and our households after us, so that they shall keep the way of the Lord, we have little claim to the promise, I will be a God to thee and thy seed after thee. And let children remember, That no external relation to the people of God will benefit those who reject

Christ. Abused bibles and sermons and baptisms and prayers, make hell more certain and more dreadful.

About 5 years ago, the church presented themselves and all the members of their households, both great and small before God, unitedly to entreat that the God of Abraham would be the God of the parents and their households forever: And at the same time to stir up parents and children to the performance of those duties that arise from the relation which they sustain to each other and to the church. A meeting of this kind has been held every year since. May it never be neglected; nor one parent or child missing at those solemn seasons. If any meetings of this church have ever been evidently blessed of God, surely they have been these annual solemnities; and if churches that live in the neglect of them, knew how precious such seasons are, they would never neglect them in future.

Among the reasons why we should this day praise God and give thanks, one is that he hath remembered us in our low estate, and turned this wilderness into a fruitful field. He has been doing us good by giving us rain and fruitful seasons; filling our barns with plenty and our hearts with food and gladness. In addition to former mercies, he has this year saved us from wasting sickness, and crowned the year with his goodness. He has removed far from us the fear of famine. Our garners are full affording all manner of store; and there is no complaining in our streets. O let us praise the Lord for his goodness and for his wonderful works.

A second reason why we should this day praise God and give thanks is, that we not only sit every man under his own vine—every one dwelling securely in his own house—but we have a house built for the worship of the Lord God, where we may serve

him in company. Nor let us forget to be grateful, that though the proprietors of these pews are members of several religious denominations, such a spirit of accommodation has prevailed, that mutual satisfaction has been given to all concerned. When God giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? O let us praise him for his goodness and for his wonderful works.

3. If the good hand of our God is to be devoutly acknowledged for the bounties of his providence and for the house of his worship, still more thankfully is his goodness to be acknowledged in the reformation of morals and the increase of piety. Our iniquities still testify against us. We are a very wicked people. But those who have been inhabitants from the first settlement, have seen many out breaking sins forsaken and others driven into a corner.

Sabbath breaking, which is still among our crying sins, is less general than formerly: and those who indulge in it, feel that they have none to countenance them, except those whose approbation is a disgrace.

Intemperance. Though numbers yet indulge in strong drink, the drunkard reeling in our streets is a rare sight. Should a few more reforms take place, in this respect we might say, we are clean. So correct is the public sentiment on this subject, that our magistrates would refuse with indignation, to recommend for license a house that was known to be a resort for tiplers.

Gambling, if practised at all, it is seldom—very seldom—just enough to remind us of those scenes of wickedness and shame, which were once our disgrace, and which threatened to be our ruin.

Profane language—that sin without a temptation—that folly beneath a brute. If some lips are still polluted with it, let us not despair. Their number is diminishing; and very few of decent character are found in their ranks.

Idleness, a fruitful source of wretchedness and crimes, has yielded to industry, the nurse of virtue. In many other respects, also, our morals, still much too bad, have certainly improved.

If we have reason to rejoice that gross immoralities are diminished, we have still more so, that piety has increased. We have seen that many years ago, some feeble efforts were made to obtain the preaching of the gospel. A sense of its importance has at length become, in some good degree, general. And though some diversity of opinion prevails—some choosing a minister of this stamp—some of that—very few are content without any. Vain godliness as well as morality and the social virtues, is gaining ground. While we see much to lament and deplore, we see much to cheer our spirits—to raise our hopes, and to encourage our exertions. The members of this church will feel, that while we are called upon to unite with all our christian friends to remember the goodness of God to this people, we have special reason to be grateful to him, who remembered us in our low estate; who has increased us with men, like a flock, and who has followed us with loving kindness and tender mercies continually. Whatever of good as a town, as a church, or as individuals, we have enjoyed, it has been an unmerited favor from the hand of our heavenly Father. Let the obedience of our lives prove the gratitude of our hearts. O let us praise the Lord for his goodness and for his wonderful works. Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name forever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and Amen.

CONFESSION OF FAITH.

We believe, that there is one GOD, the Creator, Preserver and Governor of all worlds and all beings ; and that he is possessed of every perfection both natural and moral that can render him the object of supreme love, unreserved confidence and religious worship.

We believe, that God exists in three persons, called the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, or Holy Ghost.

We believe, that the books of the Old and New Testament are a revelation from God, and contain a complete system of faith and practice for mankind.

We believe, that mankind are by nature enemies to God and holiness, and that they will never love either of them until made willing by the Holy Spirit.

We believe, that mankind are justly exposed to endless misery, from which no goodness of their own can deliver them ; and therefore, if any are saved it must be of the free, unmerited grace of God.

We believe, that Jesus Christ has made an atonement for sin, sufficient for the salvation of any who will trust in him, and that God by a gracious promise has engaged to save all such persons.

We believe, that water baptism and the Lord's supper are sacraments to be used by all professing christians to the end of the world.

We believe, that Christians ought to associate together in a church form, for the regular administration of christian ordinances, and to watch over one another in love to the end of the world.

We believe, that there will be a future state of retribution, that the wicked will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.

THE COVENANT.

Sensible of our guilty, condemned and lost estate in ourselves—sensible that all our righteousness is as filthy rags, unworthy to be mentioned before a holy God; and sensible of the free offer of salvation in the gospel through Jesus Christ to such guilty sinners as we are—We do now in the presence of Almighty God and before all present witnesses, angels and men, give up ourselves to God in the bonds of his covenant: taking God the Father for our God and Father, Jesus Christ for our Saviour, and the Holy Spirit for our Sanctifier; promising to take God's holy word for the only rule of our faith and practice. Engaging to make it our constant care, to live under the influence of a holy heart and in the practice of a holy life. Professing it to be our highest desire to serve and glorify God; and giving up ourselves cheerfully and unreservedly to God in all things. We, moreover, give ourselves to this church to be governed in it according to God's law, set up in his visible kingdom; promising that we will walk orderly, in attending (so far as we are able) all the ordinances of Christ's house, administered in this church—in faithfully maintaining the worship of God in public and in our families (so far as it depends on us)—in submitting ourselves cheerfully to the watch and discipline of this church—in watching over its members in love

—and in endeavoring, so far as we are able, to keep it pure from every thing offensive in the sight of God. And considering the imperfection of Christians in the present state, we promise to wait on God in humble prayer to forgive us for every breach of this covenant, and to afford us all that light and assistance which are necessary to enable us to keep it more perfectly in future, that this church may shine forth to the glory of God.

This we solemnly promise.