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A
S E R M O N

PREACHED AT
CHRIST-CHURCH, DUBLIN,

BEFORE
HIS EXCELLENCY THE LORD LIEUTENANT,

AND
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
THE HOUSE OF LORDS,

ON
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 1778,

BEING
The Day appointed by AUTHORITY for a GENERAL FAST.

By *ISAAC*, Lord Bishop of *Cork and Ross*.

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M D C C L X X V I I I.

Die Jovis 5^o Die Martij, 1778.

IT is ORDERED by the Lords Spiritual and Temporal in Parliament assembled, that the Thanks of this House shall be, and are hereby given, to the Lord Bishop of CORK, for his Excellent Sermon preached before this House the Twenty Seventh of February last, at Christ-Church, being a Day appointed by Authority for a General Fast, and that his Lordship be desired to Print and Publish the same, and that no Person do presume to Print the said Sermon, but such as his Lordship shall appoint.

Will. Watts Gayer }
Edw. Gayer } Cler' Parliamentor'

A
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CHRIST-CHURCH, DUBLIN.

ECCLESIASTES, vii. 10.

SAY NOT THOU, WHAT IS THE CAUSE THAT THE
FORMER DAYS WERE BETTER THAN THESE?
FOR THOU DOST NOT INQUIRE WISELY CON-
CERNING THIS.

IN these Words of the wise Man seem to be con-
tained two Prohibitions; one implied, against
complaining of the Misfortunes of the Times, the
other express, against inquiring into the Cause of
them, and the Reason of these Prohibitions is like-
wise assigned; viz. that such Complaints and In-
quiry are not founded in Wisdom. This seems to
be the natural Import of the Words. But it is to be
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observed, that the concise and general Terms in which moral Precepts are usually expressed do not upon all Occasions admit a rigorous Construction, but must often be understood in a more liberal Sense, according to the Nature of the Case to which they are applied. This is plainly intimated in the Introduction to the Book of Proverbs ; where it is made

Prov. i. 6. a Point of Wisdom and Judgment *to understand a Proverb and the Interpretation ; the Words of the wise and their dark Sayings ;* dark and unintelligible to such as do not set them in their true and proper Light ; to such as do not duly weigh their real Design, and consider the particular Object to which they are pointed, and the Circumstances of those for whose Use they are delivered.

The Prohibitions and Censure in the Text are doubtless of this Kind, and to be understood not in a strict and absolute, but in a limited and qualified Sense. We cannot be expected to be insensible to Misfortunes, nor can we be forbidden to compare our present Condition with what is past. Such a Comparison, instead of deserving Reproof, may be made to answer very useful Purposes ; as tending to make us thankful for the Blessings we have enjoyed, and patient under a Reverse of Fortune ; as tending
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to shew us the Errors of our past Conduct, and teaching us by former Experience to correct them. In Cases of Calamity and Distress which our best Care could not guard against, we shall be taught to look up to the sovereign Disposer of all things for Support, and by an humble Acquiescence in every Dispensation of Providence, shall be enabled to draw no inconsiderable Comfort from the most unfavourable.

And what thus appears to be both our Interest and Duty in our private Concerns cannot be forbidden in those of the Publick: and to them shall our Reflections be confined on the present Occasion.

The Records of former Ages are then only of practical Use, when we make a judicious Application to our own Case, and grow wiser and better by the Experience of others. The Histories handed down to us under the Sanction of Divine Revelation are expressly said to have been intended as Examples, for our Admonition. And indeed what Benefit can be drawn from History, if we are not at Liberty to compare one Period of Time with another; to inquire what Conduct hath usually occasioned publick Misfortunes, and what on the contrary hath by God's Blessing restored national Prosperity? Surely, if we inquire thus, with a View to profit by the Neglect, the Errors,

Errors, the Vices of former Days, on the one Hand, and by their Care, their Prudence, their Virtues on the other, we can be in no Danger of incurring the Royal Preacher's Censure in the Text.

No: What is here condemned is the Language of unmanly Impatience, of peevish Discontent, of unemployed Vanity, or of interested Ambition. These are Principles which evidently disqualify for an Inquiry into the Ways of Providence.

They whose Minds are enervated with Ease and Sloth and Luxury, are unprepared for whatever happens contrary to their Expectation, and ask *What is the Cause*, not with serious Composure, but with Consternation and Impatience; and as they enjoyed their former Happiness without Profit, or Reflection, they are now overwhelmed by Calamity, without being able to trace it to its Cause, or to judge of its true End and Design.

Again; there are Men of so soure and querulous a Disposition, that they never fail to view things in the worst Light; overlooking important Blessings of which they are in Possession, and perversely affecting to seek for Gratification in cherishing Melancholy and Despondency. To Persons of this gloomy Cast *the former Days are always better than these;*

these; and tho' what is past and gone received no better Quarter from them until it was past and gone, yet such is their Propensity to complain, that in whatever Respect the present Times may be more advantageous, they are ready to pronounce them every way inferior and degenerate, compared with the foregoing. Unhappily for the World this is a contagious Disease. As in Religion that System is often found to be most attractive to the Multitude which most abounds with Denunciations of eternal Perdition, so he that in publick Affairs is most peremptory in threatening the Commonwealth with impending Destruction, is sure to gain a general Attention. Nor is the Case very different in common Life; the Empirick, by enumerating the Maladies incident to human Kind, easily persuades the Croud that they are labouring under them.

Others there are, who for Want of some stated Business of their own to attend commence political Directors; and tho' they have neither Means of Information, nor, if they had, Capacity to use it, do not cease to descant on publick Measures, applauding the past, condemning the present. Happy in the Incense which is offered to their Vanity by a little listening Circle, they flatter themselves, that they are established in the publick Confidence, as if they were *Job xij. 2.*
the People, and Wisdom were to die with them.

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These, it is true, are insignificant Characters; but some of the most insignificant Animals possess Talents fitted to do Mischief. And happy were it for the Publick, that no Character less obscure or insignificant need be mentioned on this Occasion.

But besides these, there are others alas! no less active to excite popular Discontent, with Views more interested and more dangerous; who from Envy and Ambition employ the Advantages of distinguished Abilities and elevated Station, to perplex and embroil Affairs, of which they wish to obtain the Direction. If they review the State of things in former Days, it is not in order to improve, but to impeach the present; not lamenting, but exulting and triumphing over the Calamities of their Country; not with a tender, trembling Hand endeavouring to assuage and to heal, but with unfeeling Cruelty exposing and tearing open its Wounds! Where this is the Case, Who can forbear to join in the Complaint, that in this Respect, if in no other, *the former Days were better than these!*

To Persons of these several Characters then, the Words of the Text, we may conclude, are strictly to be addressed in their fullest Force. They certainly *inquire not wisely concerning this.* They are, all of them

them, either incapable of that Seriousness and Temper, or destitute of that Candour and Integrity which so important an Inquiry demands. They have already taken their Part and prejudged the Cause.

In a Country of Freedom Differences of Sentiment upon national Questions will unavoidably arise. They are perhaps essential to Freedom; nor can it be the Duty of any one who stands in this Place absolutely to condemn such Differences, tho' it doubtless is, to expose and reprove the false Pretences on which they are fomented, and the very improper Spirit with which they are too frequently carried on. What hath now been said on this Subject hath no other View than to guard the honest and unsuspicious against an implicit Reliance on the Opinion of incompetent Judges, or the Representations of the artful and interested: and a Caution which attempts no more than to advise Men to consider and weigh Opinions before they give themselves up to be led by them, one might hope, would be favourably received, and tend to close the Breaches made by Prejudice, and to conciliate Men's Affections towards each other, which are

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now unhappily irritated by Difference of Sentiment on publick Affairs.

But to proceed ; Having thus shewn to what Persons the Words of the Text are to be applied in a direct and absolute Sense, it is now Time to consider them in a more qualified and liberal one ; not as intended to prohibit, but to regulate the Practice of judging of the comparative Merit of the former and present Times, according to the Rules of Wisdom and Religion ; for in Scripture the Word is generally to be understood in this united Sense. An Inquiry of this Kind must therefore be prosecuted on the Principles of both ; so that neither the End designed, nor the Means employed, may appear to be unworthy of the Approbation of the Wise and Good.

In comparing the present with more prosperous Times, we need not on this Occasion look far back into History. In the last War, entered into for the Security of the Colonies, every Action and every Enterprize by Sea and Land had been successful in every Quarter of the Globe, and the British Name exalted to its highest Pitch of Glory ; and by the Pacification that followed not only the great Object of the War was fully obtained, but a vast Extent of
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Territory was added to the Dominions of the Crown. The unprecedented Expence was forgotten in the Advantages acquired, and there was every possible Reason to believe, that nothing remained but to cultivate the Arts, and enjoy the Blessings of Peace. How short alas! is human Foresight! The very Means relied on for ensuring a lasting Stability, proved the speedy Occasion of a most unhappy Change. When all appeared serene and bright, *there arose a little Cloud out of the Sea, like a Man's Hand*, which rapidly increasing in its Progress, in a short Time covered all our fair Prospect with Darkness, and at last burst in a Tempest, which threatened to shake the British Empire to its Foundations. No sooner was the Enemy removed, than the greatest Part of the Colonies became less amenable to the Authority of the Parent Country; soon afterwards open Disturbances broke out, and at last a strict Alliance and Confederacy having been formed by several of the Provinces, among whom there had always before subsisted a mutual Jealousy and Variance, all Obedience to Great-Britain was solemnly for ever renounced, and, under a false Idea of Liberty, an Independency was set up, and supported with every possible Exertion of the most hostile

1 Kings
xviii. 44.

Animosity. And notwithstanding the numerous, and as they were vainly reputed, irresistible Forces sent against them, not only do the revolted Colonies remain still unsubdued, but the Glory of Veteran Troops, accustomed to carry Terror and Conquest wherever their Ensigns were displayed, hath, by a fatal Reverse of Fortune, been tarnished by almost the first Essay of a People unpractised in Arms.

Here then is an humiliating Contrast between these and the former Days; nor can a Series of Events so affecting and important be contemplated but with the most profound and anxious Attention. If we say *what is the Cause* (and upon so interesting an Occasion it surely imports us to ask) how shall we *inquire wisely concerning this?* On what Principles can we hope to form a rational and satisfactory Conclusion upon the Subject? Must we not humbly resolve this Calamity into HIS good Pleasure, in whose Hands are all Events, who disposeth of them all, as will best answer the Accomplishment of his own Purposes, how contrary soever to human Expectation, or human Experience; often *choosing the foolish things of the World to confound the wise, and the weak things of the World to confound the Mighty;* giving

giving Weight and Importance to things in common Estimation of little Moment, and sometimes deciding the Fate of Armies and of Empires by some inconsiderable Circumstance, which perhaps was not foreseen, or if foreseen perhaps was despised, but against which the Multitude of an Host and all the Instruments of War are found upon Trial to be weak and vain? Tho' human Means are necessary, yet human Means are not infallible in their Operation; but may be directed by Omnipotence, to defeat the very Measures which they were intended to execute. *The Race is not to the Swift, nor the Battle to the Strong. It is God alone that giveth Victory unto Kings, and doth according to his Will in the Army of Heaven and among the Inhabitants of the Earth.* And if by this Consideration we are duly impressed with awful Sentiments of the Divine Authority and Government, we shall be justified to inquire into, and enabled to discover as much as is fit for us to know of the Designs of Providence in this Procedure. *Affliction cometh not forth of the Dust, nor doth Trouble spring out of the Ground. It is God that formed the Light and created Darknes: He makes Peace and creates Evil: but God is not a Man, that he should act from a capricious or a vindictive Spirit, neither the Son of Man, that in the Exercise of his Power he should ever*

Eccl. ix. 11.

Ps. cxliv. 10.
Dan. iv. 35.

Job. v. 6.

Isai. xlv. 7.

Num. xxiiij.
19.

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lay aside the Direction of his Wisdom and Goodness. He is our Moral, as well as our Natural Governor, and every Act of Divine Administration is intended for the Correction of some Evil, or the Advancement of some Good in his Creatures. Let us keep this in our Thoughts, when we are inquiring into the Purpose of the Dispensation under which we are now suffering.

War is one of God's fore Judgments. If most prosperous, it is unavoidably attended with many Distresses; how much more, if successful? We are unhappily involved in an intestine War, where every Advantage we gain is damped with the Reflection of the Loss it brings to them who are opposed to us; and every Misfortune falls with double Weight from Hands which might have been expected not to be armed against the Parent Country, but employed in Returns of Gratitude and filial Piety. Can we hesitate a Moment then, to pronounce that we are under the heavy Anger of God, and are suffering for our Sins? *Our Iniquities have separated between us and our God, and our Sins have hid his Face from us.* This is at the same Time the Language of the Scripture, and a known Truth exemplified by the constant Course of Providence. The Histories of all the Nations,

Isai. lix. 2.

tions upon Earth inform us that Irreligion and Immorality, Sensuality and Debauchery, Luxury and Dissipation have never failed to bring down the severest Chastisements; and tho' the Divine Mercy and Forbearance which we have long experienced, as well as the vast Extent of the Designs of Providence, the infinite Connections of which we cannot comprehend, forbid us to say that the Sins of a Nation are always punished in exact Proportion as they prevail, yet there is neither Superstition nor Presumption in affirming, (for the Assertion is founded in Fact) that when the Measure of Iniquity is full, a Period, which cannot be unknown to the supreme Governor of the World, it hath been found to be the inevitable Destruction of the most flourishing and best-established Empires.

The future Historian of these Kingdoms, whose Task, we trust, it will principally be to celebrate the Reunion of the Colonies with Great-Britain, and to describe the prosperous Effects of their mutual Friendship and mutual Support, will doubtless endeavour to unfold the Causes and Circumstances of the present unhappy Breach; and whilst he is impartially considering the Passions and Prejudices which have contributed to widen it, will not fail to
drop

drop a Tear over this affecting Crisis. And what Analogy (do our Consciences admonish us) will he observe between the Manners of these Nations and those of others who have been visited from Heaven with the like Punishments? Will he not find himself obliged to describe us as a People not more distinguished by the Enjoyment of inestimable Blessings than by the Practice of enormous Vices? As a People, tho' enjoying the Light of the Gospel more freely and fully than almost any other Nation upon Earth, yet disdaining to perform any of the publick Duties, or even to acknowledge the peculiar Doctrines and Principles of Christianity? As governed by a Prince, whose domestick Life is an Example of every private Virtue, and whose Administration in the whole Course of his Reign has been uniformly directed by the Principles and Spirit of the Constitution? As a People I say, tho' thus governed, yet aspersing the Royal Character in both Respects, with Rudeness more illiberal than would be born by Subjects from their Equals? As a people professing to disdain any Control but the Authority of Law, yet every Day setting up the Phantom of Honour in Defiance of Law, and by retaining, as among Savages, the Right of Revenge in private Hands, committing Murder
upon

upon the slightest Surmise, with Impunity? As a People, tho' boasting of the important and peculiar Privilege enjoyed by the subordinate Ranks of Men, yet sap-
 ping that excellent Constitution in its essential Rights, by not discountenancing, by conniving at, nay, may it not be said, by encouraging Corruption and Perjury, to serve the Purposes of Interest and Ambition? If this be a just Picture of the Times, must not a faithful Historian pronounce us a most absurd and inconsistent, as well as a sinful People?

After this Description it may be thought needless to mention the Vices of Dissipation and inordinate Pursuit of Pleasure. But low as the mild and modest Virtues of Temperance, Regularity and Moderation may be deemed to stand in the Class of moral Duties, they must at least be confessed to be of no little Use, as Guards to defend the rest. As such they claim Respect; for when these are once removed, the Mind is laid open to every Inroad of Misery and Vice. Is not this too evident in the Distress and Ruin of every Kind, which an unbridled Relaxation has sometimes brought upon Families of Consideration and Rank, not only in the Shipwreck of their Fortunes, but (what is much more deeply affecting) of
 their

their Honour, and internal and domestick Happiness? And yet, so unbounded is the Rage to try new Modes of Amusement, that, unfit as the present State of things is for enlarging the Sphere of Dissipation, a novel, fantastick Species of Entertainment is about to be introduced, which (as if Folly acquired an higher Relish by trampling upon every kind of Order and Decorum) is to take place not many Days hence, before the Impression made by this Solemnity (if any Impression be made by this Solemnity) can be supposed to be worn out; and at a Season too, more particularly set apart for the Purposes of Abstinence, Retirement and Devotion; at a Season, when our Admirers of foreign Manners know, that it is not suffered in the Countries from whence it was originally imported, noted as those Countries are for the wildest Licentiousness; it being reserved, it seems, for the Genius of this Nation to brave the united Authority of Church and State.——
But I hasten to a Conclusion.

We have now all solemnly confessed to Almighty God the Sins we have committed, and the Punishments we have deserved; and we have his gracious Assurance, that if *we do truly repent and put away our*
 Jer. xvij. 8. *Sins, he will repent him of the Evil, and Iniquity shall*

shall not be our Ruin. If we turn to him, he will turn to us. If we will be his People, he will be our God. He will defend us under his Wings, and we shall be safe under his Feathers. His Faithfulness and Truth will be our Shield and Buckler. We shall no more turn our Backs upon our *Enémies*; but he will make them be at Peace with us. Let us cherish this most gracious and blessed Assurance; remembering nevertheless, that the Accomplishment of it depends on the Sincerity with which the Condition shall be performed.

Ezek. xviii. . .

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Ez. xxx. 22.

Pf. xci. 4.

Pf. xliv. 11.

Prov. xvi. 7.

Fasting and Mortification are but subsidiary and instrumental Duties, and in common with every other Act of Piety and Religion will be of no Avail, but when accompanied with the Genuine, Solid, Permanent Effects of true Repentance and Amendment. Let us *humble ourselves therefore under the mighty Hand of God*, and bow, not our Knees only, but every Faculty of the Mind, and every Inclination and Desire of the Heart before the Throne of his Divine Majesty. If we have indeed the great End of national Reformation and Prosperity at Heart, we shall consider ourselves as not only interested in the Event, but obliged to contribute, according to our respective Opportunities, towards effecting it. We shall not only deplore the Sins of the Nation, but shall

1 Pet. v. 6.

shall, every one for himself, with true Contrition of Heart, cast off our own. So shall all Complaints cease *that the former Days were better than these.* So shall we be a People whom the Lord will delight to bless.

F I N I S.

E R R A T U M.

Page 14, Line 11, for successful, read unsuccessful.