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A
S E R M O N,
PREACHED FOR THE
B E N E F I T
OF THE
S U N D A Y S C H O O L

AT
R O S C O M M O N,
On SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER the 28th, 1788.

BY THE
REV. THOMAS LEWIS O'BEIRNE, B. D.
VICAR OF STAMFORDHAM AND WHITTINGHAM, IN NORTHUMBERLAND,
AND CHAPLAIN TO HIS MAJESTY.

Published for the BENEFIT of the SCHOOL, at the Desire of the GENTLE-
MEN of the COUNTY, assembled at the RACES.

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Houses of the Oireachtas

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When the Ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the Eye saw me, it gave Witness to me: Because I delivered the Poor that cried, and the Fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The Blessing of him that was ready to perish, came upon me, and I caused the Widow's Heart to sing for Joy. Job, xxix. 11, 12, 13.

SUCH are the emphatic Words in which the holy Job calls to Mind the Works of Mercy, to which he had devoted the Season of his Youth, and the Period of his Prosperity. In the History that has been handed down to us, of this extraordinary

Personage, we are informed that he had fallen from a State of unequalled Splendor and Affluence, into the lowest Depth of human Misery. The Cup of his Affliction was prepared for him by that Being, who knows every Source of Pain and Anguish within us; and its Bitterness was proportioned to the Design of exhibiting in his Person an Example of Patience under Sufferings, and of Resignation to the divine Will, which the licensed Malice of the Enemy of Mankind should in vain exert his most virulent Efforts to subdue.

There is not a Pang that can rack the Body, there is not a Sorrow that can wound or agonize the Mind, that did not enter into the Measure of his Sufferings. He outlived his numerous Offspring, and saw his seven Sons and three Daughters laid, by one Stroke of Providence, in their untimely Graves. His Inheritance became the Prey of his Enemies—Of all his princely Possessions not a Wreck escaped the Incursions of their rapacious Hords, except the wretched Spot, whereon he was suffered to cast his naked and ulcerated Limbs. To this general Bankruptcy of Fortune, this total Extinction of his House and Name, were added the Desertion of those who had fed upon his Bounty, and the Ingratitude of all who had shared in his Love. They all took to themselves the same Wings with his Riches, and transferred to others that Adulation which he could no longer purchase, and those Affiduities which he could no longer reward. Not content to leave him to commune with his Sorrows, in all the helpless Solitude of fallen Power and departed Wealth, they

leagued themselves with the very Refuse of the Earth; Outcasts, as he describes them, *whose Fathers he would have disdained to have set with the Dogs of his Flock*, to heap Scorn upon his afflicted Head, and to make a *Mockery* and a *bye Word* of his Miseries. Severe were these thy Visitations, O God! Heavily did thy chastising Hand press upon thy Servant! But if thou *tookest away*, thou also *hadst given to him*; and in the Recollection of the Use which he had made of thy Gifts *while thou wert yet with him*, he found a Source of Consolation, beyond the Malice of Enmity, the Deceitfulness of Friendship, or the restless Vicissitudes of sublunary Events, to destroy.—And you, O ye Young and ye Affluent, attend to the important Lesson; attend and treasure it up in your Minds, amidst the numberless Casualties, to which your Fortunes and your Enjoyments are hourly exposed. Of all the Pleasures which the Wealth of Job had purchased, of all the Gratifications which his Power could command, he found no Traces in the Day of his Calamity, except what had been impressed upon his Recollection by the Good which he had done. If a Gleam of Comfort broke out at Times on this complicated Scene of Distress, Humiliation and Anguish, in which he has been exhibited to your View, it was solely reflected from the Improvement which he had made of his Prosperity while it shone upon him; it was solely lighted up by that beneficent Spirit, that had once converted his Superfluities into a perpetual Fund for the Suffering and the Indigent. It was this Spirit that still hovered round him when he became poor and destitute. It presented a Retrospect to him, that

recalled, in some Sort, his former Fortunes to be enjoyed by him a second Time; and in the Remembrance of the Happiness which he had contributed to bestow upon others, made him often forget that Providence had destroyed his own.

In all the glowing Confidence of a self-approving Conscience, and with an ardent Appeal to that Season, when *the Candle of the Lord shone upon his Head*, he calls upon the *Months past* to bear Testimony to him if *every Ear that heard him did not bless him* for the Blessings which he dispensed around him, and if *every Eye that saw him did not bear Witness* to the Use which he made of his Power and his Possessions.—“ *Feet was I to the Lame, and Eyes to the Blind*: By me they were prevented from feeling the Severity of Nature; I ministered to the Wants which she had denied them the Power of removing. The *Oppressed and the Poor who cried*, looked up to me as their Avenger; I was the Refuge of the *Desolate*, and the Protector of *him who had none to help him*. Who was in *Trouble* and *I did not weep*? Who was in *Suffering* and *my Soul was not grieved*? I *dried the Widow's Tears* by being a *Father to the Fatherless*; and by cherishing the tender *Years* and cultivating the tender Mind of the destitute Orphan, I caused the *Heart* that had been long closed against all Consolation to *sing for Joy*.”

It is generally supposed that Job was not an Israelite. He was of the Land of Uz; one of those good and happy minded Gentiles who, as St. Paul observes, *did by Nature the Things contained in the Law*. Following the Light of Reason, and contemplating

the visible Works of the Creation, and what past within himself, he was led through the Shades of Idolatry to the Knowledge of the true God, and of the Duty which he owed to him and to his Creatures. The Sentiments which he breathes in the Passage that I have selected for the Purposes of this Day, are far from combating this Supposition. Under the System of the natural Law, as well as under every religious System, every Dispensation, moral or revealed, Charity and Beneficence have ranked amongst the primary Virtues, and have been inculcated amongst the most obligatory Duties of Man. It would seem as if Providence had been at all Times solicitous to vindicate its own Ways, in establishing the Oeconomy of human Society, and to justify that unequal Distribution of the Goods of this World, amongst those whom it had otherwise made equal, for which superficial Observers might arraign its Decrees.

By the Law that was originally written in our Hearts, the Sense of the Obligation to Benevolence was infused into the Feelings: The Practice of it was adopted from a Conviction of Fitness and Right. Whether they considered the Frame and Condition of their own Being, or attended to the various Circumstances which passed in daily Review before them, the Happiest and most Fortunate found Reason to be convinced, that whatever Distinctions had arisen between them and the Rest of Mankind, from fortuitous Causes; in the Eyes of Nature and of Nature's God, they must all have been equal. They sprung from the same Origin with the meanest and humblest human Being, and were destined to be brought

again to the same Level by a common and inevitable Fate. They were actuated by the same Passions, and solicited and impelled by the same Cravings and Appetites. The same Hopes elated, the same Fears depressed, the same Terrors appalled them. They were exposed to the same mental Weaknesses and natural Infirmities, and were liable to similar Changes and Reverses of Fortune, from Chance and the doubtful Rotation of Events.—Hence they were compelled to acknowledge, that they were nearly and personally interested in all the Miseries of the human Race. They were forward to alleviate Evils, to which the very Condition of their Nature exposed them. They compassionated Sufferings, which in the endless Vicissitudes of human Life, might plead for themselves in their Turn, and hold them forth as Objects of Compassion to the more Fortunate of their Fellow-creatures. “I am
 “a Man” (said a Heathen Poet) “and as such cannot consider
 “myself as unconcerned in whatever Regards the Rest of Men.”

Under the Jewish Dispensation, Religion lent its powerful Aid to the natural Sense. Humanity towards the Fellow-creature was heightened by Piety towards the common Creator; and in the indigent Brother, they were taught to look up to the universal Parent, who *accepteth not the Person of Princes, nor regardeth the Rich more than the Poor, for they are all the Work of his Hands.*

But it was reserved for the Gospel, to refine this universal Principle into its own distinguishing Duty, and to exalt it, I had almost said, beyond the Sphere of human Virtues. By the Gospel, Love to our Neighbour is placed on a Level with our Love to

God. The Measure of the one is made the Standard by which we are to judge of the Extent of the other. It is the second Hinge on which *all the Law and all the Prophets*, all the Duties and all the Hopes of the Christian are made to turn. By the Gospel we are taught to consider the Almighty himself, as the Object of all the beneficent Exertions of Charity, and to look to him as its Debtor for all its Works of Mercy. By the Gospel the Foundation of this Virtue is laid in the Regeneration of the Heart; the Heart, softened beyond even the Feelings of Nature, refined and harmonized even beyond the Touch of Humanity; the Heart, such as our merciful Redeemer himself assumed it,—he whose Sympathy was as various as are the Sufferings of the human Race, and as boundless in its Exertions as are the Wants of his Creatures.

In the Circle thus traced for this Virtue by the Redeemer of Man, it allows no Distinction of Persons, it admits of no exclusive Claims. It embraces the Gentile as it embraces the Jew; the despised Samaritan as him that worships at Jerusalem. It narrows not its Sphere of Action to the Mitigation of corporal Sufferings, or the Alleviation of temporal Distress, to *the Healing the Sick*, the *Visiting the Imprisoned*, the *Clothing the Naked*. It follows its divine Teacher beyond the Boundaries of Sense: It searches the Miseries of the Heart and the Infirmities of the Soul: It opens the Ears of the Understanding, and pours Light upon the darkened Eyes of the Mind: It checks the Growth of Vice that takes Root in Ignorance, and cherishes the latent Seeds of Virtue,

which the disorderly Habits that rise from neglect, and a Want of Cultivation blight and extinguish in the human Heart. To the Poor, whom the proud Philosopher despised, and the yet prouder Teacher of the Law neglected, it unfolds the Treasures of the Gospel—Life and Immortality brought to Light; the Knowledge of a God, of a Redeemer, of themselves; the eternal Maxims of Truth, of Justice, of Equity; the Duties of their Station and what they owe to Society. In a Word, it exerts itself in such Works of Mercy as you are called to this Day, it delights in finding such Objects as are now supplicating before you.

It would be natural to imagine that thus presenting itself to us with the universal Passport of all Ages, thus pressed upon us by the unerring Voice of Nature, enforced by Religion, this Gospel Virtue would only require an Opportunity of exerting its Influence, irresistably to force its Way into every Breast. But it is with this Duty as with all the other Duties of the Law: We are compelled to admit their Principle; they command our Veneration.—Does an Occasion offer for fulfilling them? Pretexts are never wanting to weaken their Impression and evade their Claims. This is an Imperfection incident to our Nature, which the Moralists of all Ages have seen and lamented. Just in our Conceptions and in the Discernment of what is right, and forward to applaud it, we fail in the Practice and pursue the wrong. There are but few Men so unfortunate in their Feelings, and so deserving of our Pity, as not to have experienced some of those happy Moments, when the Heart overflows with Compassion for some

Child of Adversity, or melts in Sympathy at some Tale of Distress. All the tender Sensibilities of the Soul are set afloat: Humanity resumes its native Seat in the Heart, and touches every Spring which Nature has tempered for her own beneficent Purposes: Charity descending from above blends the Love of his Creatures with the pure Love of God: All the fastidious Distinctions and insulting Delicacies with which Pride, Presumption and Vanity, look down upon the greater Portion of Mankind, fly at her Voice, and we discover in every human Face, however clouded by Sufferings, or squallid from Indigence, the dear and sacred Image of a Brother: Glowing with these mixed Sensations, we are led on to consider our Possessions merely as the Inheritance of the great Brotherhood of Mankind, entrusted by the common Father to our Management and Equity: We look upon ourselves as merely placed between God and his Poor, like fruitful Clouds ready to shower down upon them the Dews of Heaven, with which we have been enriched for their Refreshment.—In the Enthusiasm of such a Moment, when we are yielding to Affections which we feel to be interwoven with our Frame; when we find ourselves elevated into such just Conceptions of ourselves, and of the Views of Providence in accumulating his Blessings upon us, how miserable is it to find some of those base and groveling Passions, that lurk in the Heart, infusing their Leaven through all its Feelings, and souring and corrupting it with Maxims of worldly Craft, and Suggestions of worldly Wisdom! On the one Hand, Pride, Ostentation, and the inordinate Love of Pleasure,

raise up an innumerable Host of fictitious Necessaries, that dispute every Claim upon our Generosity, as an Invasion of their Right. As the Wantonness of their Demands, acknowledge no other Limits, than the capricious Cravings of Vanity, and the *Madness* and *Folly* of depraved Appetites, their Cries are as insatiable as they are importunate: They deafen our Ears to every Call of Mercy. On the other Hand, a niggard and avaricious Spirit, masks its narrow Views under the Appearance of Prudence and Discretion, and obtrudes its cold cautious Maxims upon us. The Current of Humanity that flowed warm round our Hearts freezes at its Breath. It prompts us to enquire if the Object be really deserving our Protection—If the Individual, if Society be really to be benefited by our Donations; Or if it may not be likely that while we were retrenching from our own Enjoyments, we are only establishing a Fund for enlarging the Enjoyments of designing Persons, who abuse our Goodness and impose upon our generous Dispositions.—I shall briefly consider these Objections, and as I proceed throw out such Observations as occur to me on the Subject, and as are connected with our present Purpose.

In the first Place, I would ask whether they are the Laws of Nature and of God, or our own disorderly Inclinations, that shall ascertain what the Necessaries are, that should supercede the Claims of Mercy. Are they only to be bounded by our own inordinate Desires? Are they to extend as far as Pride or Ambition can stretch their Wishes? Is that alone to be counted superfluous that

can escape from our Pleasures, our Profusions, our capricious Humours, our worldly Pursuits? Then indeed there will be but little Room for the Purposes of Humanity; and to be voluptuous, dissolute, a Slave to every new Whim, and the Dupe of every rising Folly, must be our Plea before the Throne of Justice for shutting our Ears against the Calls of Mercy.

In the next Place, I would observe to you that, as far as the present Demand upon your Bounty extends, small is the Pittance required at your Hands. There is not a Wish to break in upon any one even of those fictitious Appendages to your State, which Fashion, the Creature and Instrument of our Passions, has erected into so many indispensable Wants. A small Portion of what has escaped from the round of Pleasures you have run—The Overflowings of the Cup of those Subscriptions, which you have filled with such unusual Exuberance, would answer all the benign Purposes of the Institution which we recommend to your Patronage. An Institution that carries in itself an Answer to the second Part of the Objections to the Claims of Charity, which I have stated—An Institution that sets at Defiance the Illiberality of the Suspicious, and the cruel Ingenuity of the Hard-hearted, and is as secure of their suspecting its Administration, as of cavilling at its Object—An Institution which secures to the present Age, however it may have degenerated in other Instances from the Virtues of former Times, the Boast of having improved on the most perfect of all Virtues, and given Charity a Form worthy of its Christian Origin.

I know that it has been the Fancy of some eccentric Characters amongst us, to condemn all Institutions for the Instruction of the lower Classes of Men. Swelled with high Conceptions of their own Birth and Station, and blinded by that Prosperity, which, from its uninterrupted Course, they consider as their natural Inheritance, they hold mental Improvement and an abject Origin, to be unalterably separated by the Purposes of Providence. Advocates for Vice and Disorder, they condemn all Attention to cultivate the Understanding of the poorer Sort, as interfering with the Occupations of Industry. They represent Ignorance, and the Abjectness of Mind, which is its inseparable Attendant, as the first Requisite to a State of Toil and Labour. To soften the Manners of the Peasant, or widen the Sphere of his Knowledge, is in their System to give him Conceptions, that raise him above his Level; is to render him insolent, presuming, and intractable.

It is scarce credible that there can be Men so ignorant of themselves, and of their own Frame and Constitution, and so blind to the daily Occurrences of the Society in which they live, as to be serious in maintaining these Opinions. In touching upon this Part of my Subject, I should be almost afraid of exposing myself to the Suspicion of inventing a Theme for Declamation; of raising Objections merely with a View to answer them. But there is not a Circle in modern Society, that does not produce Men of this extraordinary Stamp, and some of them are of Weight to deserve Refutation. In Order to this I am willing in the first Place, that

they should assume all the Self-sufficiency of their Station and Acquirements. Let them boast, if they can boast, the Form fashioned with the highest Elegance and Grace, the polished Manners, the refined Sentiments, the nice Sense of Honor that trembles at the lightest Breath of Suspicion, and holds that nothing short of Death, can make Atonement for the Imputation of Falshood or Dishonesty. To the Self-complacency and Arrogance of this Survey of themselves, let them add the most degrading Comparisons, in all these Particulars, with those whom I recommend to your Bounty, and whom they would confound with the Beasts of the Field—Still it remains for them to inform us to what partial Power, to what happy Circumstances peculiar to themselves, they are indebted for this proud preeminence. To silence those Strains of Self-adulation, must Nature raise her solemn Voice? Must she strip them of those gaudy Trappings in which their Pride has dressed itself, to exhibit them to themselves such as they came from her Hands, and to teach them that if Providence had dealt out the same Measure to them, that it has dealt to those on whom they look down with such Scorn; that had they been cast upon the same bleak and barren Spot, where the same biting Frosts, and cold Dews would have chilled their Faculties, theirs would have been the same homely, rough, and uncouth Forms, theirs the same abject, wild, and disorderly Minds.—'Tis Education and Nurture therefore, which, under the Dispensations of Providence, produce those Extremes: Their Effects are proportionable in the Degree. In the moral as well as in the physical World, the great

Author of all Things has established a Gradation of Beauty and a Progression of Excellence which, under the Hands of Cultivation, constitute the Perfection of the whole System. The humblest Shrub offers to the Exertions of Industry its own Measure of Use and of Ornament, no less than the majestic Oak that shades and protects it. The Peasant fills his Place in the moral Scale as essentially as the Monarch: As their Minds are formed they are, both alike, either the Bane or the Blessing of Society.

In the next Place, I would refer them to the daily Occurrences of the Society in which they live. Let them enquire into the Disorders and Vices that infect the lower Classes. Let them examine the unhappy Felon, who by his Crimes and Depredations on Society, deserves to be excluded from all its Privileges, and forfeits his guilty Life to the Laws of his Country. To what Causes will he attribute his Excesses, and the Pain and Ignominy of his untimely End? He will tell them, that born in Poverty and running up wild in Neglect and Ignorance, the Fear of God had never been set before him in his early Youth. That abandoned in Idleness to the unregulated Suggestions of his own depraved Thoughts, and to the Seductions of bad Example, he had gone on in a Progression of Vice, unacquainted with the Beauty of Honesty, and uninstructed in the Distinctions between wrong and right. That at length he had filled up the Measure of his Iniquities, and was atoning for the Injuries he had heaped on the Public, by the Sentence of public Justice.

Let them ask those unhappy Females, the Bane of our Sex and the Scandal of their own, by what Steps they have been led to cast off all Shame and Restraint, and to abandon themselves to all the Excesses of Prostitution. They will answer that no tender and virtuous Parent had watched over their early Days, to instil into their Minds the Sentiments of Delicacy, or to cherish and strengthen the instinctive Principles of female Honor: That no humane Substitute had filled a Parents Place, or cautioned them against the Arts of the Seducer, who barbarously took Occasion of their Ignorance and their idle Habits, to rob them of their Innocence, and left them a Prey to endless Infamy.

The same will be the Answer of all the Guilty and all the Profligate, and to them we will leave the Task of refuting these over-wise Reasoners, who delight in Paradox and in opposing the general Sense of Mankind. As far as their Objections bear upon the Interference of all Education among the lower Ranks with the Occupations of Industry, they cannot affect the Institution for which we plead. The Portion of Time allotted to its Purposes, are those short Hours of Rest from Labour, which the most unfeeling Task-master allows to the very Brute that drudges in his Field — The Rest of the Sabbath; which even Infidelity would venerate as consonant to the Dictates of Humanity, and Avarice would demand as necessary to its own Pursuits.

If this Rest interfere with the Occupations of Industry, or the Good of Society, neither Prejudice nor Profligacy can contend, that the Disorder is in the Establishment and not in the Abuse. If it

be urged that it is almost universally prostituted to the most unchristian and immoral Purposes, by the lower Classes amongst us, it is only a more unanswerable Proof of the Necessity of attempting a Reform in its Observance, which is the Object of Sunday Schools. Look to the Sister Kingdom! May I not call upon those who are acquainted with the Habits and Morals of the middling and lower Orders there, to be my Witnesses if amongst them the sacred Institution of the Sabbath, does not still maintain its Influence genuine and unabated. Held in Veneration and consecrated to its original Purposes by the decent and exemplary Parent, the Child grows up in the habitual Observance of the Rites and Services, which it prescribes. It habitually returns to him as a Day of pious and instructive Repose, a Day of chearful and innocent Relaxation from Labour. Even the licentious are restrained within Bounds by the public Sense, and an universal Face of Order, Sobriety, and Decency would mark its Return to the Stranger, who should visit their Land, as unacquainted with their religious as with their civil Institutes. Nor do the Impressions stamp'd upon the public Mind by the Exercises to which it is dedicated, vanish with the Day. We discover their Traces amidst the Avocations, and Employments that return with the Week: Amidst the Activity of the Industrious, the Cares of the Frugal, and the Toils of the Laborious: We discover them in the general Tranquillity that reigns in the Society, and in the Comforts and the Enjoyments of each contented Individual.—Would to God that even Partiality, strong as I feel it for my native Country, would suffer me to

captivate your Eyes with a Picture equally pleasing and amiable of our Sabbaths. Hope, trusting in the Assistance of the divine Spirit, may anticipate the Prospect from such Institutions as this before us: But alas! for the present, what Room is there for the pleasing Allusion? If the Sabbath *be* a Day of Rest among the labouring Part of our Community, is it not a Day of Rest from useful Industry and profitable Application, and a Day of Toil and Drudgery in every Work of Sin? Instead of employing its Leisure in attending to moral or religious Instruction, or enjoying the Sweets and Comforts which the meanest, if virtuously disposed, must taste within the domestic Circle, is it not prostituted to the forming of Combinations for the Invasion of private Property; to Associations of Violence and Rapine, that disturb the public Peace, or, when most inoffensively employed, to licentious, drunken, and tumultuary Meetings, that generally terminate in Riot and Bloodshed? Does it procure to the wretched People even bodily Relaxation or recruited Spirits? Or do they not on the contrary take Advantage of that Day to squander the scanty Pittance, which they wring from the Sweat of their Brows, in the Purchase of strong Liquors, that inflame their Blood, dry up their Substance, and lay the Foundation of Disorders, that never fail to bring them to an early Grave? Thus the Day that was designed by Religion and the Legislature, to be a Day of Instruction for the Mechanic and the Labourer, is become the Day the most fatal to their Morals, and the most destructive of their religious Principles. During the Intervals between the Sabbaths, their Minds engrossed by

the Necessity of providing for their bodily Wants, find but little Aliment to feed their Disorders. The Return of these Festivals brings with it Want of Occupation ; and finding nothing profitable either within themselves, or from abroad to fill up the Void, or exercise their Thoughts, the Old, from rooted Habits, and the Young from bad Example, resume the disorderly Intercourse that had been interrupted by the Labours of the Week ; and the Communication is certain to terminate in an encreased Reciprocation of Corruption and Interchange of Vices. Do I exaggerate? Look to the South—Look at your own Doors—At every Sign Post—At every Meeting of four Roads—Unless we begin by removing this Evil, and casting out this Profanation from amongst us, all our other Efforts must be hopeless. And thus the Institution that is in the Sister Kingdom an excellent Auxiliary to the Means of disseminating religious Knowledge, and widening the Circle of Information, that are already in Use, is, amongst us, an essential Preliminary, an absolute and indispensable Requisite, to the Plan of Reformation in the national Morals, to which the Minds of all thinking Persons are now happily turned.

Can there be a Care more becoming a wise and generous People, than to secure such a Blessing to the rising Generation? What great national Object can awaken the Zeal or stimulate the Exertions of every Friend to their Country, so pregnant with Hopes of every private and public Good? For what are its Objects? It withdraws the Youth of both Sexes from the tainted Air which they habitually breathe, from the Pestilence and Contagion that are habitually affect-

ing their Principles and Morals: It collects them into a safe and pure Retreat, where they may not only be supplied with Correctives to expel the Poison, which they may have already imbibed, but furnished with Preventatives against future Corruption: It imparts to them such a Portion of literary Instruction, as may enable them to search of themselves, the pure Sources of Morality contained in the Scriptures, and to be more useful in the Line of Life in which their charitable Benefactors may place them. Above all, it instils into their Minds the great Principles of the Christian Religion, and the Duties it prescribes: it unfolds to them the general Rudiments of Honesty, of Faithfulness to their Trust, of Truth, of Sobriety and Temperance; the Love of Decency, the Love of Order; whatever in their State can constitute Virtue, whatever in their State can merit Praise. I repeat it, therefore, never did Charity assume a more useful or amiable Form, never was it more profuse of Blessings private and public, than in this Outline which I have drawn of the Sunday Schools. In the Scheme and Intentions of this which you are met to promote, there is not a Feature that can complete its Resemblance to that divine Original, on which all Christian Charity should be modelled, that it does not visibly bear. Like the Charity of our Redeemer, it admits no Distinction of Sect or Denomination, it allows no partial Claims—to be poor and *ready to perish for Lack of Knowledge* are all its Terms of Admission.

Too long has a persecuting Spirit disgraced the Christian Name. Too long has it sacrificed every Principle of true Religion, every Principle of Morality, every Feeling of Nature, all the best and

dearest Interests of Society on its exterminating Altars. Dreadful must have been its Power, pertinacious must its Hold have been upon the human Mind, when it resisted the Influence even of the mild and enlightened Spirit of the Reformation.—For while we object its Horrors to others, why should we not be just even against ourselves—Have we not had our penal Laws? What blacker Page could ever Stain the Records of the most bigotted and vindictive Legislature? Through how many wounds did not the Nation bleed during that Period of Infatuation, when the destructive Spirit by which they were dictated misled and disgraced our Councils! If some of these Wounds be now happily closed, far be from me the ungrateful Task of baring them unnecessarily to your View! But amongst the most fatal of the numerous Calamities entailed upon the Country, by the Spirit that suggested the popery Laws, are those that are peculiarly connected with our present Subject; and would to God we could boast that they were altogether done away! It was this Spirit that raised a Wall of Separation between us and the more liberal and enlightened of that Order, whose Influence extended over the great Bulk of the People, and prevented all Union of Exertions to stem the Torrent of Vice that was daily breaking in upon us. It was this Spirit that proscribed that Liberality and Confidence of Intercourse, that would have softened the Spirit of Controversy, and diverted the Attention from the War of speculative Points in which we differed, to an Emulation in inculcating the great practical Duties, in which all Denominations of Christians are agreed. It was this

Spirit that shut up the Doors of Education and the Treasures of Knowledge against more than a Sixth of the Community: That barbarously forbid them to pass the Pale of that Ignorance, in which all the Vices strike their deepest Roots, in which Superstition nestles and engenders its most dangerous Absurdities; that left to the few who could purchase access to those Treasures at such a Price, the cruel Alternative either of *perishing for Lack of them*, like their poorer Brethren, or of going in Search of them among Nations, hostile to our Interests, our Religion and our Laws.—Need I enumerate the various Mischiefs that flowed from this one Act of complicated Oppression? On the Prejudices of Religion which acquired additional Force, were engrafted civil and political Prejudices. Attachment and Predilection for the Forms and Institutes of those Governments, which opened to their Youth a friendly Asylum from such unexampled Persecution, naturally sprung up in warm, generous, and grateful Minds. Opinions were early imbibed and Maxims early adopted, dangerous to our Establishment, and inconsistent with the Frame of our Constitution. Nor was it possible to conceive, but that those Victims of abused Power, must have returned to the unnatural Soil that gave them Being, but denied them every Privilege of their Birthrights, with Hearts alienated from its Interests, and soured and enflamed against its government. Above all it was this Spirit that disgraced the Doctrines and violated the Principles of the reformed Church. It seated her mild and tolerating Genius, amidst the Terrors of Pains, Penalties, and Imprisonments. It made her In-

terests responsible for the Cruelty and Oppression of its own vindictive Policy. It gave her Enemies a Handle to misrepresent her Temper, and her Discipline; and outdid all their Machinations in opposing the general Diffusion of her Light, and the general Prevalency of her Influence. Thus it fared with those Laws, as with every System of Policy, that lays its Foundation in the Subversion of natural Justice. They defeated the very Purposes, which they pleaded in Extenuation of their unnatural Rigours: They promised to gain Disciples to the established Church, and faithful Adherents to the established Government, while their obvious Tendency was to exasperate and encrease the Enemies of both.

Blessings from God and Honor from their Country be the Portion of those manly Spirits, who first had the Courage to set the Example to their Fellow-citizens, of checking the destructive Course of this Monster in Religion and Politics, and to rise superior to the Prejudices of Education and the Antipathies of Ages. Equal Blessings and equal Honor light on the Heads of those who still dare to tread in their Steps, and who labour for the final Accomplishment of the great Work which they have begun. Associated with such Characters, and exerting his Interest and his Influence in such a Cause, is where I should have expected to find * my reverend and worthy Friend, whose pastoral Zeal hath called us toge-

* The Rev. Mr. Montgomery, Minister of Roscommon. He attended the Army as Chaplain during the late War in America.

ther. Such have I known him, in Scenes, where all the Feelings of Humanity are commonly violated, amidst the Horrors of civil War—Active in whatever could excite or forward a Spirit of Liberality and universal Philanthropy,—the Advocate of the Oppressed, and the Friend of the Sufferer. But that on which I have to congratulate him, is his having brought this Spirit to those who receive it with a native Warmth, and who cherish and promote its Progress with a Zeal that requires no other Incitement but what it finds within their own Breasts. Behold its Triumph—Behold it within those Rails—In that Assemblage of the Youth of *all* Denominations, who are ranged round the Communion Table soliciting your Patronage—Behold it on these Benches—Am I not warranted to assert that Numbers have met here this Day to sacrifice with us at the Altar of Charity, and of the public Good, who would have once thought themselves contaminated by any Intercourse within these Walls, by any Thing approaching to a Communion as Christians?

Well, therefore may my Friend and * his worthy Associate rejoice in those Children of universal Benevolence, whom they are enabled to present like the Firstlings of the Flocks of Old, *as a sweet smelling Sacrifice to the Lord of Hosts*. The Spectacle they exhibit, while it cannot fail of being grateful to every Heart that feels,

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* The Rev. Mr. Seaton, Curate of Roscommon.

and pleasing to every Mind that thinks, inspires them with the best grounded Hopes, that your encreasing Bounty will enable them this Day to gather to Industry such of the Charity as are already ripe for its Purposes. To the Zeal with which you have attended their call, they look with Confidence for the Means of placing them in some useful Employment, from which the Community may reap the Advantage of the Principles which they have imbibed, and of the Habits which they have acquired under your Patronage.

In them, they present to you the *first Fruits* of your Institution. Let them be spread abroad and the Fame of your good Works will accompany them, to the Glory of God, and to the Benefit of the Public. Your Example will not fail to operate, wherever the Effects of your Liberality are felt or spoken of. It will encourage the Exertions, and invigorate the Zeal of those who have already attempted similar Institutions: It will promote their Establishment where a Disregard to all public Improvement, has neglected, or Prejudice and Obstinacy has opposed them. The beneficent Circle will spread and gain upon the public Character from Day to Day, purifying it in its Progress, and effacing every Trace of Idleness, Immorality and Vice; nor shall we long shrink from a Comparison with the happiest of those Kingdoms, wherever they are to be found, where Religion with all its Virtues and its Graces, Civilization with all its Order, Decency, and Tranquility, Industry with all its Treasures and its Blessings cover the Face of the Land.

Let me only exhort you not to be discouraged, if you do not immediately perceive those Fruits of your Zeal in the public Reformation. The Progress of public Degeneracy is, generally speaking, rapid and overwhelming. The Progress of public Reformation is, always, slow and gradual. All the original Suggestions of Nature, all the Dictates of Reason, all the Discoveries of Revelation prove to us, that the Mind of Man is more prone to Evil than to Good. Public Degeneracy is the mountain Torrent, which having once broken down the Mounds that were placed to oppose its Violence, rises instantaneously into exterminating Force; rushes down Precipices and Declivities formed to assist its Ravages, and tears up and bears away the Soil and whatever can enrich or adorn it—Public Reformation is the pure and tranquil Stream that rises from an imperceptible Source, amidst the bleak Heath and barren Desert; that gradually works its Course against all Opposition; swells in its Progress, and extends its Banks; and through the long Length of Country through which it flows, produces or improves the best Gifts of Nature.

In the Circle to which you hold by your Property and your Connexions you have already opened the Source; you must await the Progress of the Stream with Patience and Perseverance. The Reform must begin by Individuals and small Bodies and so extend to the Community. Faint not therefore in your Labour of Love. Add this Work of Mercy to the other charitable Institutions, which are already so familiar to your Eyes, and so honorable to your Cha-

trafter. The Hands of an Individual have raised a * Monument to Humanity amongst you, which the united Exertions of Provinces have elfewhere with Difficulty accomplished. If, on this Spot, and on fuch an Occafion as the prefent, the Advocate of the Indigent could be fo unjuft or ungrateful, as to pafs over the Name of that Individual in Silence, it will be found infcribed on the Hearts of the Poor of your Land, in Characters more honorable and lafting, than thofe which they read on entering the hallowed Roof under which her charitable Care has provided a Pillow for their Heads, when weighed down with Age, Infirmities or Accident. To you my young Friends it will henceforth become equally familiar and venerable. After you fhall have grown up in the Fear of God, and under the Nurture of Religion from the provident Care of your prefent Patrons; after you fhall have acquired thofe virtuous Habits, and attained that Maturity of Years, that will fit you for the Purpofes of Society, which you are deftined to fill, you will find in the Liberality of this general Benefactrice, a Fund, that will fupply you with the Means of entering upon a Courfe of Induftry, that may enfore you Succefs: And in the Midft of every Comfort you may enjoy, and in every Stage of Competency through which you may rife, you will venerate and blefs the Name of Walcot—Such a Fund, I have the Pleafure to announce to you, has been eftablifhed within thefe few Days: Nor

* The Infirmary at Roscommon, built at the fole Expence of Mrs. Walcot.

will the respectable Personage, whom Providence has given as a Blessing to the County, where it has placed her property, refuse this Tribute of Applause from a Stranger, who is no otherwise interested in these charitable Emanations of her Bounty, than as she adds to the Instances that reflect Honor on human Nature.—May the generous Spirit by which she is actuated, extend its Influence from Day to Day, under the Protection and Countenance of that Power from whose Seat it flows!—Go on, as you have begun in assisting its Progress; and in return be rewarded here and hereafter—Be rewarded hereafter in the Enjoyment of the Blessings, which the Scriptures of God promise to those *who lead many to Righteousness*: Be rewarded here in the Contemplation of that happy Change, which will infallibly crown your unabating Attentions to the Improvement of that Class of the Public, in whose Habits and Manners the only solid and stable Foundations can be laid of the Wealth and Power of Nations.

At present, we exhibit a Kind of political phenomenon to the Kingdoms immediately around us—A Maturity of Luxury, such as is only found among Nations that have attained the Meridian of their Greatness; an Infancy of almost all the Arts of Labour and Industry, that lead to that Greatness—A Gentry abounding in ample Possessions, and polished and refined to a Rivalship with that of the most flourishing People; a Peasantry, dragging on for the most Part, a wretched Existence in all the naked, unfed Poverty, all the slothful Habits, and rude Manners of savage Tribes,

and *universally*, unacquainted with the Comforts and Conveniences, which the comparative Opulence of the other Classes, might be supposed to place within the Reach of willing Hands and active Spirits—To look for Union, or Order, or Stability amidst such Extremes is as vain an Expectation, as that Worms and interior Rottenness should wither the Trunk and the Roots, and that the Branches should flourish, and be laden with Fruit—It is not in the Nature *of Things*, but that a State so preposterously balanced, should be exposed to those daily Insurrections and Tumults, that *destroy our Peace*—The Pretext for these Disorders may vary with the Day: But the Causes, (making Allowance for some rigorous Treatment, and for impolitic Oppression in some Instances, on the Part of the higher Classes,) lie deep in the Morals and Manners of those, with whom they originate. Laws may multiply in Number, and encrease in Severity to check the Evil; but the Evil is placed beyond the Reach of human Laws—Nothing short of encreasing and extending the Influence of those Principles, that penetrate and interest the Heart; that prevent the vicious Action by purifying the Thought and the Affections; that have been proved by the Experience of eighteen Centuries, to be more efficacious in softening the Rudeness of Manners, and taming the Fierceness of the Passions, than all the legislative Systems that have ever prevailed on the Earth; that repress the Spirit of Licentiousness and Sedition, by the Authority of that Power who can destroy the Soul as well as the Body, and inculcate the Obli-

gation of regular Subjection and due Subordination to lawful Authority for Conscience Sake; that exalts human Industry into a religious Duty, and will not consent that *those should eat who do not work*: that particularly recommends to the lower Orders, the Study and the Practice of whatsoever Things are *true, just, honest, lovely, of good Report*, productive of Esteem to themselves, of Decency, Order and Quiet to the Public—In a Word, nothing short of extending the Influence of Christian Principles, and inculcating the Maxims of Christian Morality, can establish *the Peace of our Jerusalem*, or cause *that everlasting Light to shine upon us*, under whose Rays *Violence shall be no more heard in our Land, Wasting nor Destruction within our Borders*.

What you have already done towards the Accomplishment of this great Object, is too happy an Earnest of what you are inclined to do, for me to seem to question your Willingness by endeavouring further to stimulate your Zeal—I will not, therefore, insult you with the Warmth of Exhortation, or the Importunity of Solicitation—Much less will I so far forget the Respect I feel for the provincial Character, and for your established Reputation, as even to hint at the Stain you might affix to them, if after having filled the Circles of Pleasure in such Crowds, and contributed so liberally to satisfy her Votaries, you should, as Christians, be insensible to the most pressing Invitations of Religion; you should, as Men, steel your Hearts and close your Hands against the most generous Calls of Humanity; you should, as Citizens, and Friends

of your native County, disregard the Claims, which its most avowed and indisputable Interests assert this Day, by my Ministry, on the Fortune and on the Rank which you respectively hold in it—I shall therefore detain you no longer from indulging your generous Dispositions, than to implore the gracious Redeemer to strengthen the native Feelings of your Hearts with his divine Grace, and to grant *that your Light may this Day so shine before Men, that they may see your good Works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.*

F I N I S.