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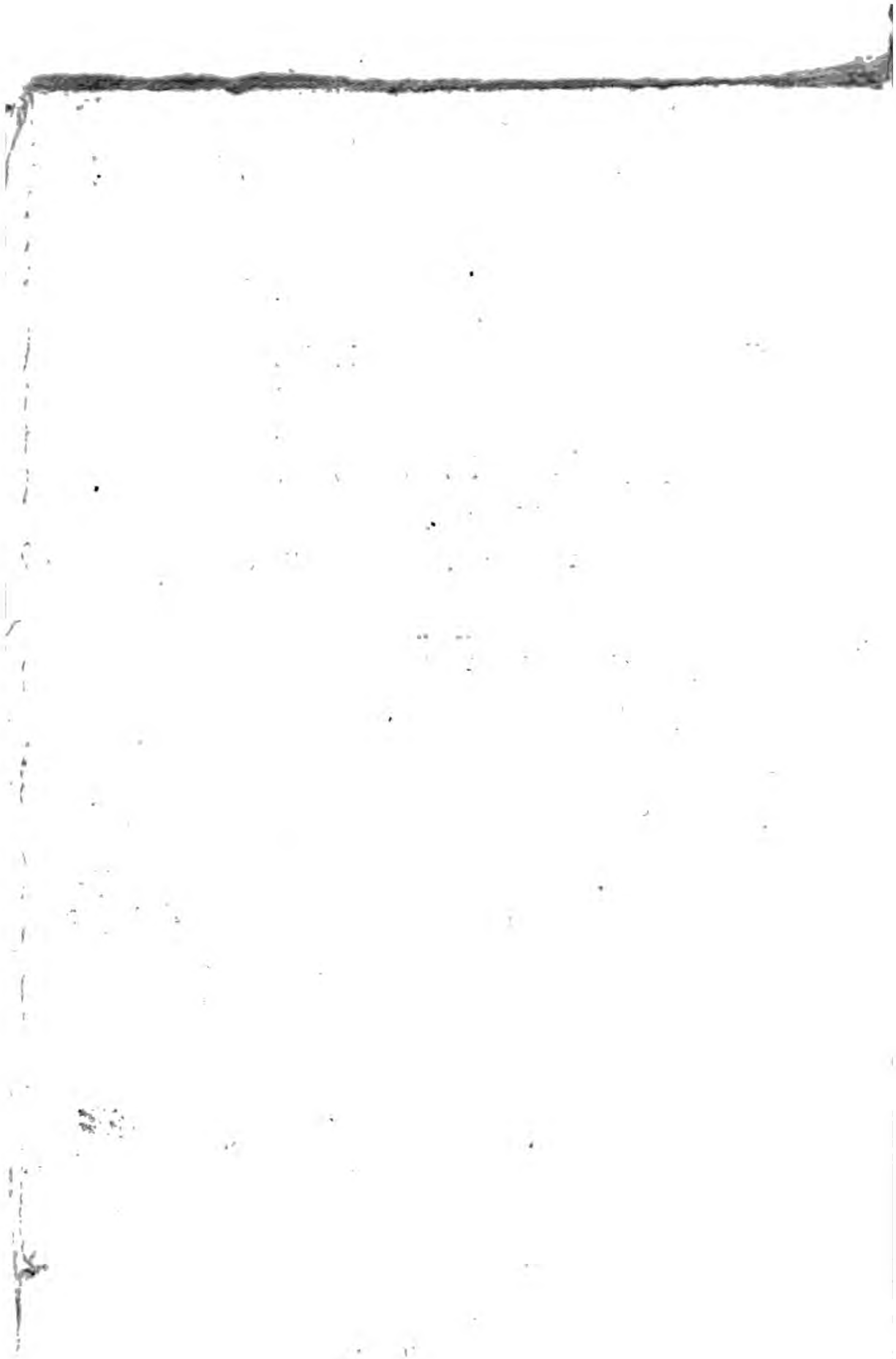
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The PRISONER released:

A

S E R M O N,

ON MATTHEW XXV. 36.

PREACHED IN

Charlotte-street and Bedford Chapels,

AND PUBLISHED,

BY PARTICULAR REQUEST,

FOR THE BENEFIT OF

UNFORTUNATE PERSONS, confined for
SMALL DEBTS.

BY WILLIAM DODD, LL. D.

Preacher at the above Chapels, and Chaplain to the KING.

OH LET THE SORROWFUL SIGHING OF
THE PRISONERS COME BEFORE THEE!
Psalm lxxix, 12.

L O N D O N;

PRINTED BY W. FADEN;

And sold by E. and C. DILLY, in the Poultry; W. BROWN,
and J. KNOX, in the Strand; S. LEACROFT, at Charing
Cross; and G. RILEY, in Curzon-street, May-fair.

[Price One Shilling.]

N. B. The Profits which may arise from this Sermon, are appropriated to the charitable Undertaking which it recommends.



To the P U B L I C.

April 22, 1772.

STRUCK with Compassion for the Miseries of those unfortunate Men, who are cruelly “secluded from all the Comforts and Advantages of Society for inconsiderable Debts,” the Author of this Discourse determined to attempt something, on his part, for their Relief. And well knowing the Benevolence and Charity of those Congregations with whom he has the Happiness to be connected, he resolved to solicit from the Pulpit their humane Assistance. He was not disappointed in his Hopes; an handsome Collection was made; and, to his great Satisfaction, a general Approbation of the Undertaking expressed. Nor was Money alone imparted freely: A Set of Gentlemen, with the utmost Readiness, formed themselves into a Committee for the Distribution of the Charity; and, with uncommon Pains and Application, sought out the proper Objects, and relieved them. It is scarce to be credited, that so much Good

could be done with so small a Sum ; but the Merit of this is wholly due to the Gentlemen of the Committee, who have spared no Toil, nor omitted any Measures, to discharge their Trust, and distribute the Beneficence received, in the most advantageous and æconomical Manner.

The Miseries and Distresses to which they were Witnesses, in their Examination of the several Gaols, so strongly impressed their Hearts, and so many proper Objects still remain to be discharged, that they unitedly requested the Author of this Discourse to print it, with an Account of their Proceedings; that not only the Congregations, who had so kindly administered to the good Work, might be encouraged to persevere in the same *Labours of Love*, by seeing the happy Fruits of their Liberality, but that the Public also might be stimulated to a laudable Imitation, and help forward the charitable Design. Happy will the Writer think himself, if a Compliance with this Request of his Friends can by any Means advance the benevolent Work ; he readily appropriates his little Essay (designed and penned, in the Fulness of his Heart, solely for the *Day*) to that End; and heartily wishes
it

it may serve to procure such a Supply from the Generous and Humane, as will enable the Committee to perfect their hospitable Purposes, and to open the Prison-Gates to every industrious and deserving Prisoner.

It may be proper just to signify, that this Relief has been, and is intended to be, confined to those, who could not avail themselves of the present Insolvent Act; and who, therefore, are doubtless greater Objects of Commiseration; since without some such Assistance as the present, they may continue *Years* in Prison, miserable in themselves, and useless to the Community.

Five Guineas have been already subscribed by a benevolent Friend of the Author's, whose Liberality does Credit to his extensive Fortune: And this, we flatter ourselves, will be considered, as the Beginning of a new Subscription for the unhappy Objects here recommended; which Subscription will be received either by the Committee, who will continue to meet every *Wednesday Evening* at the *Thatched House, St. James's-street*; where the Company of every Contributor will be esteemed a Favour; or by any of the *Booksellers*, whose Names are found in the Title-page.

An Account of Monies received by the Committee, and applied for the Benefit of Debtors confined for small Sums.

Cr.

<i>Dr.</i>	
To Cash received at the Collections at Charlotte-street and Bedford Chapels, — —	81 1 0
By the Discharge of thirty-four Debtors from Newgate, the Marshalsea, the King's Bench, the Borough, Wood-street and Poultry Compters, the New Gaol in Southwark, and Whitechapel Prison, Relieving sundry Persons not discharged, Advertisements,	78 4 6 0 11 6 2 5 0 <hr style="width: 100%; border: 0.5px solid black;"/> £.81 1 0

N. B. This Account hath been advertised, and Copies of it left at the above-mentioned Chapels.

The

*Thatched-House Tavern, St. James's,
April, 16, 1772.*

The Committee appointed to distribute the Money collected for the Relief of Persons confined for small Debts

R E P O R T,

THAT out of 109 Supplicants for this Charity, they selected 34, most of whom have large Families, and appeared to be useful Members of Society: Some of them were confined only for their Fees, and the Debts of the others the Committee compounded on the best Terms they could. The Objects who were aged and infirm, are restored to their Friends; others, who were with their Wives and Families in Prison, are restored to the Manufactures wherein they were skilled; particularly four Manufacturers, with their Wives and twenty-three Children, were taken out of Prison for the trifling Sum of 15l. 1s. 3d. except one of the Women, who died of a broken Heart and the Gaol Distemper, before Relief could be administered.

The Utility of this Charity to the Public will appear, from the Consideration that every Man's Labour may be estimated, at an Average, to be worth to the Community 2s. 6d. per Day, or £.39 a Year: So that the Confinement of the four Manufacturers abovementioned, occasioned a loss to the Public at the Rate of £.156 annually, over and above what the Women, and some of the Children, might have earned; all of whom, by a voluntary Confinement with the Father, were not only prevented from such
Earnings,

Earnings, but became liable to the Consequences of habitual Indolence, Filth, Disease, and Vice ; and probably, in a short Time, would have become nuisances to the Public, and obnoxious to the Penal Laws.

Of the remaining 75 Suppliants, 19 appear to be the greatest Objects of Compassion, all of whom may be discharged for less than one Hundred Pounds: And of the rest, many are such as well deserve to share the Mercy of the Public; if it were possible, by future Contributions, to extend that Mercy to them. But those who wish to know more respecting these unfortunate Men, may be fully satisfied by applying to the Committee at the Thatched-House ; where they may read the Petitions, and hear a true State of the Difficulties and Distresses of the Prisoners at present confined : For, willing to preserve, amidst their charitable Aid, a Delicacy and Regard to the Unfortunate, it is hoped the Public will judge it not improper, that all mention of Names is omitted.

N. B. Since the above was written there has been received from

	£.	s.	d.
W. Baynton, Esq; ———	5	5	0
C. D. (a Bank Note of) ———	10	0	0
Mr. R. Dixon, ———	0	10	6
B. W. — — — — —	0	10	6
Anonymous, by Mr. Willis, —	1	1	0
Sundries, by Mr. Steuart, ———	0	10	6

FOR

FOR THE
RELIEF OF DEBTORS, &c.

MATT. Ch. xxv. Ver. 36, latter part.

I WAS IN PRISON, AND YE CAME UNTO ME.

AMONGST that variety of arguments, which tend to demonstrate the truth and divine original of the Christian Faith, there is none more persuasive and convincing than that which is drawn from the *Spirit* of this Faith;—from that humane and benevolent disposition which it inculcates, as its great and distinguishing characteristick. Every Precept laid down by the wise and gracious Author of this Religion is replete with Good-will to Man: Every Action of his Life emphatically expresses the same benign Tendency: nay, and as Love, universal Love to all Mankind, constitutes, if I may so say, the very Sum and Substance of his Doctrine, so he has positively declared it the essential badge and mark of all his true Disciples. *This is MY Commandment*, my peculiar and distinguishing

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tinguishing Commandment, *that ye love one another: By this shall all Men know that ye are my Disciples, if ye have Love one to another.*

Treading in the steps of their Divine Master, well informed of his Doctrine, and full of his Spirit, his immediate Successors in the great Work of propagating the Gospel were diligent to inculcate the same Maxims of Humanity. Hear, how *St. Paul* expresses himself on the subject, in his 12th Chapter to the Romans;—a Chapter more fraught with sublime Morality than the most elaborate Treatises of Antiquity.—*Let Love be without Dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good: Be kindly affectioned one towards another, with brotherly Love; in Honour preferring one another.—Distributing to the Necessity of the Saints; given to Hospitality. Bless them who persecute you: Bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Owe no Man any thing, but to love one another: For he that loveth another, hath fulfilled the Law.*

And, in perfect conformity with these heavenly, these sublime and blessed sentiments,

ments, the divine *St. John*,—who lay in the bosom of Jesus, and thence imbibed, as it were, the very Soul of Love,—exhorts, with his usual sweetness and affection, *Beloved, let us love one another ; for Love is of God, and every one that loveth, is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God ; for GOD is LOVE. If we love one another, God, that pure essential LOVE, dwelleth in us, and his Love is perfected in us.*

So shining a mark of Excellence and Superiority stamped upon the Religion of Christ, cannot fail at once to convince us of its Truth, and to prove it worthy of the exalted Source from whence it is derived ; worthy of the wise and universal Parent of Mankind. Solicitous, in the boundless riches of his benignity, for the welfare of those Creatures whom his sovereign hands have formed, he hath been pleased not only to interweave in the very texture of their inmost Nature a strong Principle of Sympathy, Humanity, or Compassion ;—a Principle, which we find powerfully operating, as well amidst the wildest *Hordes* of the *Tartars*, as amongst the most polished European Na-

tions;—But, to encourage and improve this Principle, to exalt and sublimate it even to a divine perfection, He hath constituted the active and universal display of it, to be the great, the indispensable characteristic of that important Revelation which he hath made by his only-begotten Son. A Revelation fraught with innumerable Blessings to Man; but by nothing more amply attesting the Almighty's Wisdom and Goodness, than by the forcible manner in which it enjoins Universal Charity, Universal Good-will; a Spirit of unbounded Love, of unlimited Mercy and Tenderness to all the human race.

A Divine Revelation, delivered to free moral Agents, and to be propagated by human means, must and can have only such influence and effects, as are consistent with those Agents, with those means. It can urge no irresistible force: It must, it can operate on free and rational minds only by the means of moral Suasion. And hence we may fully satisfy ourselves whence it comes to pass, that although the Christian Religion inculcates in this strong emphatic manner the practice of Universal Benevolence and Love,
yet

yet so many are found, in Countries professing that Religion, not only void of each, but palpably actuated by the principles diametrically opposite. The fault lies not in the Religion, or in the Doctrine; but, unquestionably, with those who receive it not in its Truth and Perfection; hardening their Minds against it, and encouraging Dispositions, which are not more contrary than they are hateful and pernicious. Indeed, if on this account any reasonable objection could be urged against the Christian System, (which certainly there cannot) assuredly the same, or even a stronger objection might be urged against the very Being and Excellence of that Principle of Sympathy or Compassion, which we have remarked to be implanted and interwoven in the Human Nature. For, if the Malevolent and Uncharitable act contrary to the Principles of their Christian Faith, they certainly act as contrary to that great Law of God, impressed upon their Nature: and of consequence, before we can draw any conclusions derogatory to that Faith, we must draw conclusions, as derogatory to that Principle; which I suppose will never be allowed;

allowed; all the World agreeing to honour and estimate that Principle in the highest degree. And therefore, upon the same foundation, the Christian Religion must stand equally free from blame or censure.

But though I have said thus much to remove a difficulty, which some have pressed with seeming triumph, and others of better minds have felt with some inquietude; yet it is a fact not to be denied, that wherever the Christian Religion hath been spread and propagated, and especially where it hath been professed in its greatest Purity, a spirit of Humanity and Benevolence hath diffused itself: Mankind have become more civilized and more compassionate: A thousand barbarous customs and practices, which, if need were, I could easily enumerate*, have been discountenanced and disused: and the Spirit of the Religion of Jesus hath palpably and extensively displayed itself in the human heart and manners.

It is with a singular satisfaction that I observe we need not go further than our own

* See Doctor *Robertson's* admirable Sermon on the time of Christ's appearance in the World.

KINGDOM for a sufficient testimony to the truth of what I have advanced. Consider it in the times of barbarous Uncultivation ; consider it in the days of Darkneſs and Idolatry ; nay, conſider it, even when more refined and civilized, yet under the bondage of Popiſh Superſtition and Ignorance ; and then compare it with its preſent ſtate ; when Truth ſhines with undiminished ſplendor ; when Liberty of Conſcience and Free Enquiry are univerſally allowed and indulged ; when the Faith of Chriſt is profeſſed in as much Purity, and underſtood with as much preciſion, as perhaps in any Age ; and then ſay, Do we not plainly trace out in the Character and Manners of our Times, the high Influence of the genuine *Spirit* of that Faith ?—the Influence I mean of that Humanity, that Benevolence whereof I have been ſpeaking.

For though, unqueſtionably, many Vices and Evils abound amongſt us,—Evils and Vices, which, it is to be feared, will always abound more or leſs in a great, a wealthy, and a populous Nation like this ; though the ſerious eye diſcerns, and the feeling heart laments many, far too many deviations

viations from the paths of Truth and Virtue : Yet, surely, it is not to be controverted or denied even by the most misanthropic and severe, “ That a Spirit of Humanity characterises our Nation.” The Hearts of Englishmen are as tender to feel, as their Hands are ready to relieve. Amidst the most shining instances of intrepidity and courage, our Heroes abroad have given testimony to this National Spirit by deeds of the most extensive Benevolence and humane Compassion : While our Countrymen at home have not been behind hand with them in succouring Distress, and applying the lenient hand of Mercy and Relief to Sorrow and Suffering, in whatever shape they have presented themselves.

“ For my own part, I cannot but felicitate my Country on the prevalence of a Spirit at once so honourable and so advantageous : A Spirit, which, while it does credit to Human Nature, is, and must be highly acceptable to the great Being who formed that Nature ; and appointed LOVE, appointed Benevolence, as its characteristic Law ! May we not reasonably hope, my Beloved, that the prevalence of
this

this Spirit, so estimable in the sight of God our Saviour, will plead with his Mercy, strongly plead in behalf of our Nation, so eminently blest and favoured by him; will stand in the gap between us and our manifold offences, and secure to us, through many Generations, those high felicities so peculiarly our own!

Oh may his Goodness not only bless our land with every desirable Blessing; not only pour forth more abundantly into every heart that Spirit of Benevolence, which hath already been productive of so many laudable undertakings! But may his providential Care prosper and succeed every such undertaking! May the dew of his Mercy fall richly upon every good, every compassionate design, and cause each one of them to flourish abundantly, and bring forth the most desirable fruits, to the encouragement and satisfaction of the Promoters, to the advantage and comfort of those who partake them!"†

† It is to be hoped this short Quotation from a Discourse before published, will be pardoned and allowed by the Candid, as the present was never designed for Publication. See Sermon before Governors of the Magdalen, preached at St. George's Hanover-square.

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But,

But, while thus felicitating ourselves and our Country on the prevalence of the genuine spirit of Christian Benevolence and Mercy amongst us; while wishing prosperity and good luck in the name of the Lord to every Institution and to every effort of that merciful and philanthropic Spirit; you will allow me to request your more particular attention at present to an *Object*, which appears to have an high claim on our Humanity; and which will afford you, my Brethren, an ample opportunity to verify the observations we have made on our National Spirit and Character.

The Object I wish to recommend, is
“ The Relief of poor Debtors, confined in Prison for small Debts.”

It is not by any means my purpose to enter at large into the Consideration of Imprisonment for Debt; a topic at present much agitated, and doubtless extremely important. The subject is not only far too complicated in itself, but certainly, in a great measure, foreign to the business of this place. Leaving it therefore to those venerable Sages of the Law, with whose Wisdom, Justice, and Humanity, the fa-
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cred Rights of Englishmen are securely lodged; I shall only just observe, that though Compassion would ever incline me to take the side of the unfortunate Debtor; yet due Consideration should be paid to the Claims of the Creditor; or the Interests of Society may be wounded even more by a too indulgent lenity, than by what some may suppose, a too rigid severity.

But, whatever may be necessary in such cases and circumstances for the Interests of Society, one position may be laid down, and will be received, I apprehend, with the general suffrage: "That those unhappy persons, who, by a series of misfortunes, have been reduced to a state of Insolvency, and have honestly and unreservedly given up their All, ought not, upon any of the Principles of Humanity or Policy, to be confined in Prison, and restrained from a possibility of procuring their bread, or of doing justice to their Creditors." And I am happy to find that my sentiments on this topick are strongly supported by the excellent and humane Author of "*The Principles of Penal Law*," a Work which does no less credit to the heart, than to the judgment and abilities

of the Writer. He observes, "That the case of a confined Debtor, whose confinement is the mere consequence of inevitable Misfortune, without any mixture of criminality or neglect on his own part, is extremely pitiable, and contradictory to every just principle of Legislation."*

May I not venture to go one step farther than this benevolent Writer hath advanced, and to say, "Supposing the person confined is not perfectly free from all blame; suppose instances of misconduct *may* be urged against him; yet, if he is wholly insolvent; if he hath absolutely and unreservedly given up all; is not his case extremely pitiable, if Confinement be added to the rest of his misfortunes: and does it not seem contradictory to every just Principle of Legislation, to every Principle of Equity, of Humanity, of Religion, to augment the load of such a wretch's woe, by depriving both Society and himself of any benefit from his future industry and labour?"

From a numberless variety of accidental circumstances (says the Author just quoted) which happen in the course of hu-

* Page 52, 2d Edit.

man transactions, it must fall to the lot of many to become insolvent. *Debtors*, therefore, though certainly a species of Criminals, should in general be considered rather as *unfortunate* than *culpable*." And if Debtors in general should be considered in this view; if all, under that unhappy predicament, have "a claim to humane treatment," how much rather should we view in this light, should we treat in this manner, those, who in the circumstances of Debt just now defined are by the universal voice, by the general decision of Humanity and Policy, Objects of the truest compassion.

It is on behalf of such that I now appear an humble Advocate; imploring your generous and considerate Aid towards the Relief and Enfranchisement of such poor Men as, confined in Prison for *small Debts*, are unable to pay, and are lost to their Families and the Publick. The multiplicity of Debtors confined in our several Gaols, renders it impossible for so feeble an Effort as the present to look to, or to think of relieving any but such as are imprisoned for small Sums. However, were an Effort of this kind seconded and generally

generally pursued, doubtless numbers of these unfortunate Men would reap benefit from it; and it would prove a temporary Supply, a palliative at least, till the wisdom of Legislature shall think fit to interpose, and to offer a perfect Remedy for the Evil. But, be that Matter as it may; be our Efforts seconded or not, suffice it for *us*, my beloved, that we do our parts as Men, and as Christians; suffice it for us, that we gratify our Humanity and Benevolence with the exquisite Luxury of contributing what we are able, towards the Liberty, the Comfort, the Peace; towards the Deliverance of our Fellow Creatures from Imprisonment and Misery! If *one*, if it were but one honest and worthy Man that should reap the Fruits of our charitable Aid; if our compassionate Hands could unlock the Prison Gates only to one distressed and forlorn Sufferer, restoring him to Freedom, to Industry, to his afflicted Wife and miserable Children, surely it were a Deed truly meritorious in itself, and such as must refresh the benevolent heart contributing towards it.

To move such benevolent hearts already sufficiently stimulated to acts of Mercy by
their

their own genuine Feelings, I need not exaggerate,—indeed it seems impossible to exaggerate the wretched Circumstances of a Man, torn for a little trifling Sum, which all his Industry has not been able to procure, and which, perhaps, has been expended in necessary Supplies for the support of his Family;—for that trifling Sum, torn from his humble, but beloved Dwelling; torn from the Wife he affectionately regards; torn from the Children dearer to his embraces than Life: his humble Substance rudely seized, and cruelly dispersed; and himself, hurried by the unfeeling hands of Imposition and Insolence to a loathsome Prison! — there to remain, deprived of all the common Comforts of Life; of that free Air, which all-bounteous Heaven ordained to breathe on all its Creatures; of that Liberty, which to Man is justly the most invaluable of Blessings; of that Peace of Mind, which gives to every sphere of Life its zest and relish: deprived of every means to supply his own Wants, or that lov'd Family's Wants, which possibly oppresses him much more than his own; deprived, in short, almost deprived even of the Wretch's last source and support,

of

of Hope itself, and left in loneliness and solitude to indulge his own sad Reflections; or, what is worse, far worse, prevented perhaps from indulging those or any other Reflections, by the obstreperous and abandoned Crew, who are not less hardened by their Confinement than by their Crimes.

Oh ye blest, and ye Fortunate! you, whom Providence hath graciously exempted from these complicated Sorrows; you, within whose doors importunate Want never dares to intrude; you, who can walk forth at will, and enjoy the common bounties of Heaven—Air, Health, Freedom, Peace;—Come with me, ye happy ones, and let us for a moment visit the disconsolate Debtor, the Father, the Husband, the Man; sinking under every sorrow, which Humanity can sustain; pallid with Grief, fordid in his Dress; dejected, drooping, miserable; Famine, Confinement, and Sorrow fixing at once their fierce Fangs upon him, and tearing with more than vulture keenness every tenderest string which winds about his heart!

Oh, ye blest, and ye free! disdain not to visit, to commiserate, to relieve such a

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Sufferer ; for he is not only a *Man*, a Fellow Creature, and so justly intitled to your regard and relief, but he is a *Christian* ; and in visiting and relieving him,—hear, O Heaven, and give ear, O Earth, to the great, the astonishing, the animating Truth!—In visiting and relieving him, you visit and relieve even *Christ himself* ; for thus runs the sacred, the solemn Declaration, from the mouth of that ever gracious Redeemer—*I was in Prison, and ye came unto ME.*

Were there no reasons of sound Policy, or of sympathetic Humanity to urge ; were it impossible to offer any arguments of true Pity and Compassion in behalf of unfortunate and insolvent Prisoners ; yet, surely, it were enough with *Christians* to awaken all their zeal, and to call forth all their aid, to hear that their great, their glorious and ever-blessed Master ; He who, when they were Debtors indeed, and had nothing to pay, not only frankly forgave, but died to discharge their Debt ; He, who ever lives to reward their Munificence, and to crown with eternal blessings their acts of Benevolence and Mercy ; to hear *him* declare, that in visiting and relieving the

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Prisoner,

Prisoner, they in fact visit and relieve *Him*: That whatever they charitably do even to the least of those Fellow Creatures, whom he condescends to call HIS *Brethren*, he esteems and receives it as done unto himself; *In as much as ye have done it unto the least of these MY BRETHREN, ye have done it UNTO ME!*

It is not possible to produce a more convincing argument than this, of that great position with which I set out, and which I have endeavoured to prove; "That a spirit of Humanity is the great, the distinguishing characteristic of the Christian Religion." The divine Author of that Religion, on his solemn seat of awful and tremendous judgment hath constituted the sacred acts of Humanity and Benevolence, as the solemn, the decisive tests of his eternal approbation or dispraise: Who then shall dare to neglect or despise those sacred Acts?

Be it ours, dearly beloved, to excel in all such Acts: And, with a view to that tremendous day, let us be solicitous, during this short time of trial allowed us, to improve every occasion afforded us of doing good, of shewing mercy and loving
kind-

kindness. In the present instance especially, let us demonstrate not only that the genuine spirit of Christianity influences our Souls, but let us add a further proof of that National Spirit, which we have asserted to be the consequence of the former, as well as the happy characteristic of our times; Let us add, I say, a farther and a noble proof of it, by liberally contributing towards the relief of the unhappy Debtor, by setting open the doors of Confinement, and letting the Prisoner go free.

Thus shall we gratify the best and most honourable feelings of our nature; thus shall we restore to many Fellow Creatures some of the highest Comforts and Privileges which belong to Mankind; thus shall we *deliver the Poor that cry, and the afflicted who have none to help them; thus the blessings of them who are ready to perish will come upon us*; and thus, which is infinitely more than all, the Blessings of HIM will come upon us, who is no less bounteous than he is almighty to bestow: and to whom, the great Judge of Men, be ascribed all Honour and Glory, now and for evermore. *Amen.*

F I N I S.

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