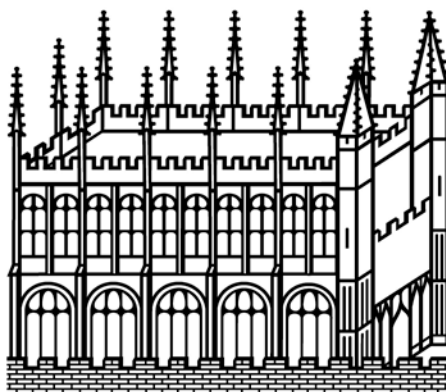




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Ramford's ²*Coffee House* April, 1780
Liberty Moral and Religious.

A
S E R M O N
PREACHED BEFORE THE
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
ON
FEBRUARY the 27th, 1780,
AT
GREAT ST. MARY'S CHURCH.

By WILLIAM COOKE, M.A.

FELLOW OF KING'S COLLEGE.

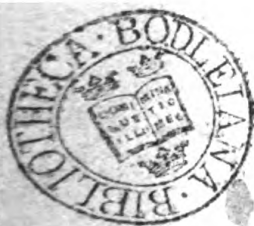
(now Greek Professor.)

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MDCCLXXX.



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TO THE RIGHT REVEREND

E D M U N D,

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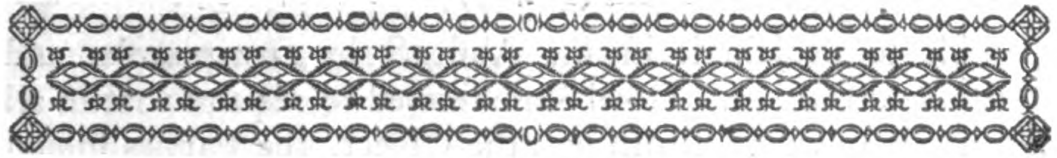
A N D O B L I G E D S E R V A N T

T H E A U T H O R.

A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

The Second Part of this Discourse which considers Civil Liberty, is prepared for the Press, and will be published as soon as preached.

Speedily will be published by the same Author, printed at the University Press — The Poetics of Aristotle with large Notes in Latin, Introductory Discourse, &c. in the same Language.



A

S E R M O N, &c.



I P E T. ii. 16.

AS FREE, NOT USING YOUR LIBERTY FOR THE CLOKE OF
MALICIOUSNESS, BUT AS THE SERVANTS OF GOD.

WHEN Socrates was urged by the *Sophist to deliver himself on the Nature of good; sensible that it was a captious question, He desired him to be more particular, and ask rather what was good for such or such things. Good was a Term of so large and comprehensive a sense, applicable to so many subjects, and liable to so many cavils, that it was impossible

* Aristippus put the question: and every Man that puts a question to trepan another, and makes not Truth the object of his inquiry, is a Sophist, let him found what Sect he will.

A

possible to explain it in the Abstract by any popular and plausible discussion. Good sense seemed to require that in all disputation, where Truth was the Object, the Parties should be agreed on the import of Words, and the extent of the ideas, whereof they were signs: And Socrates, as He was a Man of exquisite discernment, plainly saw, there was no other way to extricate Reason from the snares of Sophistry, than by defining the value of Terms, and ascertaining their length and limits: at the same time that it was absolutely necessary for particular Questions emergent from them to be brought to decision, before Debate could be justly instituted on their general and abstracted meaning. It was upon this Socratic plan, that Aristotle framed his Logic, and invented that intellectual Gnomon called the DISTRIBUTION OF TERMS, which should fix to a line of precision the true measure of language, and mark and discriminate the shades of Ideas. Good, Evil, Right, Wrong, Liberty and Necessity are no objects of Knowledge abstractedly considered, and must pass a logical Process, and sustain analytical Experiment, before They can be reduced to a debateable Shape: Unless indeed we should assume them like the fallen Angels of our Poet, by way of Sport and Remission, with Understandings as false and corrupt as our Hearts.

There may be who look up to the abstract Idea of Liberty, as Plato did to that of Good, and it may be presumed, with similar success and certainty: Who choose to maintain that before the coalitions of Men in Society, and their voluntary surrender to Civil Restrictions, All were absolutely Free, without other law than their Will. To these we should apply,

ply, what was hinted above, and ask whether Man was the object of such description, or some imaginary being of their own? and whether it were possible to conceive Man, or indeed any intelligent Animal whatever, exempt from all Rule and Controul? For figure to yourself a Being made up wholly of Will, which includes Intelligence: Where there is Will, there is Choice, and consequently objects of pursuit, and others again of aversion. Will of course would aim at these, and decline the others; so that Objects of disgust and abhorrence would become in good degree a Law to Will; and though obliquely and indirectly still influence and determine its Action. Where therefore there is Will, there is of necessity Restraint: Where Restraint — Liberty. For Liberty is not so much Exemption from Restraints, as Submission to them, and Carriage under them; and Will, and Liberty are not imaginary, but founded in Nature, and that Nature — the Human.

For there never was a time when Man was perfectly free: when the Mind was discharged of its Natural clogs and impediments, those impressions and sentiments of Right and Wrong, Good and Evil, which the Conscience holds and manages as Bridles on the human Will. While we act conformably to these natural dictates enforced by religious Duties, We *use* our *Liberty*. For Liberty, like Riches, consists in the Use, rather than in the Possession. While we use our Liberty aright, in the same manner as our Wealth, we act agreeably to our Nature, satisfactorily to Ourselves, and justifiably towards God. By the Abuse of our Liberty, as of our worldly goods, we undo Ourselves, revolt from our Na-

ture, and offend our Creator. Adam in Paradise, besides natural Notions had an immediate injunction from God, prohibitory of a certain Action. — Here was Liberty, subject to Law natural and revealed. — How did He act? — He threw off the Restraints and *abused* his *Liberty*; whereby He brought Shame on Himself, dishonoured his Maker, and incurred a great Guilt, and its just consequence a bitter Penalty; which extended to us his Descendants, we take care should not be unmerited; in that, while with grief and reluctance we partake of his Punishment, we most freely and willingly contract his crime — the ABUSE OF LIBERTY.

But has Man no Rights, as well as Restraints? Is He not intitled to Privilege, as well as ban'd by Prohibition? Is his whole state Mortification and Abstinence? Is there no room for Indulgence and Pleasure? May He not be allowed to gratify the Genius, and humour the propensity of his Nature? — Yes most certainly. But then these Claims and Pretensions have all their proper Checks and Restraints, collateral and corral with them: And it is in the due Contrast, Counterbalance and Poize of these Rights and these Restraints that all our Liberty and Duty consist. Thus in Mechanics, two Powers or Bodies acting obliquely on a third intermediate, by reciprocal pressure and repulsion give that third and middle Power all its Weight and Motion, propel it in a right Line, and sustain its force and direction. Now to instance — A Man has a Right to his Life; but God and his Country have Claims upon him paramount and superiour to that natural Right. — Here is Right on the one hand, Restraint on the other. — The Restraint preponderates, and
bears

bears down the Right. The Man is perfectly free, to lay down his life or keep it. — If He sacrifices his Life in case of Exigence to God or his King, He *uses his Liberty*, waving his lesser Right in deference to the greater Restraint. On the contrary — The Subject's Obedience is due to the Sovereign in all Things lawful: whereby Restriction lies on his moral Agency. — He is enjoined by his Prince to change his Religion — He is free to do it, or not — but He has a Right of his own too strong for the Restraint of his Sovereign's Will — viz. his plighted Faith to God. — He throws off the Restraint — asserts his Right — keeps steadfast to his Religion, and his Disobedience to his Sovereign is allowed and justified in the good and rational *Use* of his *Liberty*.

To be *sober minded*, to have sound Judgment, to form a just apprehension and estimate of our several Rights, and their correspondent Restrictions, — This is the Point of Difficulty, the Touchstone of Reason, the great Art and Business of our Lives. Through Ignorance, or Contempt of which, we become unjust both to Ourselves and our Neighbour, abuse our Liberty, and make that which was *designed for our Help*, an *occasion of Falling*. To illustrate the Abuse of Liberty, let us resume the Cases and reverse the Propositions. As before, we consider Man with a Right to his Life, subordinate and subject to a Restraint, viz. Duty to God or his King (or call it Country, we do not cavil about a Term.) Now should He magnify the Right in prejudice to the Restraint, (for you cannot exalt the one but that you extenuate and depreciate the other) and choose to maintain his natural Right to Existence to be insurmountable and indefeazible by that restrictive Obligation.

Obligation. — Or should He in the other case with Rights of Faith and Religion confessedly more cogent and prevailing than the Restraints of Loyalty and Allegiance, depart from his unalienable Rights in compliance with the less obligatory Restriction, and dishonour God, to honour his King. — In either case He abuses his Liberty; or in the very express and emphatical words of the Text — *Uses his Liberty for the Cloke of Maliciousness* — that is, He builds up false, unwarrantable Rights of his own, and obtrudes them as the shield and covering for his Impatience under just controul; for the depravity, degeneracy, and debasement of his Nature — the profligate prostitution of his Honour and Conscience, and the wilful rot and corruption of his Heart and Principle.

Upon the Truth and credit of this deduction, we may synthetically frame the Position, which may serve for the Definition of human Liberty; that Liberty is the Action of a reasonable Being according to the direction of Rights or Restraints. — Over these Rights and these Restraints 'tis our business to keep guard and watch; to balance the contending Powers; prevent encroachments on either side; maintain them in due Equilibrium, and act according as in the sound and uncorrupt judgment of the conscience, either Scale shall incline. If we thus act, our Liberty is an honour to us, inclusive of Duty, Virtue, Happiness, Security — Whereas on the contrary, the Misconception, Abuse or Perversion of Liberty recoils on ourselves, and reflects shame and disgrace upon us; in that it is *used for the Cloke of Maliciousness*, for the veil and disguise of all evil Design and iniquitous Practice. — For the further illustration of this Theory, let us apply to some of the most interesting

ing relations wherein man is engaged, and contemplate his Liberty in his several characters and capacities; first, his Private and Oeconomic; next, his Moral and Religious, and lastly, his Public and Political. For the present it may suffice to keep within the two first distinctions, and confine our Speculations to the MAN and the CHRISTIAN.

A Father has a Son of Age—settled in the World—Master of a Family of his own — independent of his Father as to present Possession or future Expectancy.—The Father extends that authority, which He justly exerted over the Pupillage of his Son, to his full growth and Manhood — exhorts, chides, rebukes.— The Son resents this undue Usurpation—rejects the Yoke, and discards the Dependency. — Here is Abuse of Liberty on both sides — Excusable on the one — for Age, Weakness, Habit, Affection, any of these are reasonable Apologies of the Father's Conduct—On the Son's part absolutely inexcusable—For such Reflection, as that He owes his Breeding, his Education, his Establishment in Life, perhaps to his Father—that He may have often offended him, nay grieved him to the Heart; and that possibly, any neglect of his filial attention may *bring down his grey Hairs in Sorrow to the Grave*; add to this, that He stands bound to him for his Birth and Being, which like an unprovoked act of kindness, not dischargeable by any return, is a debt never to be paid off or cancelled.—These are Restraints which exceed and outweigh all the Rights of the Son and his manful Immunities; and if He yields not to their superiour influence, He *uses his Liberty for the Cloke of Maliciousness*: He does not so much consult his own honourable Independence, as sacrifice probably to his
Pride;

Pride, comply with his Selfwill, and advance a Pretext for criminal Licence, relieved of Paternal Inspection and Censure.

* The Relation between Father and Son is limited Monarchy—That of Husband and Wife—Aristocracy.—The Rights of the Male over the Female, need not be fetched from Natural Excellence, Civil Institution, or Gospel Authority.—'Tis enough that they are acknowledged on the part of the Female at the time of their solemn Union. — But has the Woman no Rights? — She has — and they are so many Bars to the Power of the Husband. — Her Sex, her Infirmary — The Tenderness of her Nature—her Inferiority in Judgment and Knowledge—her Attention to his Health—her Assiduity in his Sickness — her many unspeakable Sufferings with her Children — all these the Man must admit as shackles on his Lordly Will — Otherwise — He *uses his Liberty maliciously* — as the vehicle of his Pride — his intemperate Insolence — his presumptuous Lust of Prerogative — his brutal Tyranny.

The same obtains in the Despotic, or the Master's government over his House and Domestic. — Though no Usage from the Master, can justify the Servant in any outrage on his Person in return by Word or Deed. — Though it would be highly criminal, nay, treasonable in the Servant to betray his Master, expose his Secret or concert his Ruin; and though indeed He has no Rights of his own, as long as He continues his

* Ἡ μὲν γὰρ Πατὴρ πρὸς υἱεῖς κοινωνία Βασιλείας ἔχει σχῆμα.

Ἄνδρὸς δὲ καὶ Γυναικὸς Ἀριστοκρατικὴ φαίνεται· ὅσα δὲ γυναικὶ ἀρμόζει ἐκεῖνη ἀποδίδωσι.

Arist. Eth. L. 8. C. 10.

his Master's retainer — Yet still that very Condition of the Servant discounts from the Rights of the Master, nor can He commit himself in any harsh unreasonable severity, but that He abuse and pervert his own *Liberty*, though at the same time He be not said to invade any Rights of the Other.

And so is it indeed in all Relations, Compacts and Correspondences between Man and Man. If we stretch our Rights beyond their Bounds, and arbitrarily aggrandize them at the Expence of Restraints; however injuriously we act towards our Neighbour; we do not so much trespass on his Liberty as transgress our own — *Using it for the Cloke of Maliciousness, not as the Servants of God.* Christianity comes in with great Force and Efficacy, and very powerfully affects and alters our Liberty, deducting from Rights and accumulating Restrictions. — * Yet the Balance is still preserved — for whatever we lose in point of Right is made up in Recompence. And though our Natural true Restraints are aggravated thereby, and our Natural apparent Rights reduced in their size and compass; Yet still, which is singular to observe, our Liberty is

* To avoid Obscurity, this Passage may be thus illustrated — Before the Gospel Dispensation, Man had a RIGHT to think as He pleased, only subject to the RESTRAINT of Natural Law — Christianity adds to that Restraint by a positive injunction not to think Criminally, and in so doing, deducts from Man's Right to think as He pleases. What therefore is lost of Right is recovered in Recompence — and the Balance stands thus,

Right		Restraint	
Punishment		Reward	This Scale

decisively inclines in the judgment of the Conscience — and decided Action consequent to that inclination is *Use of Liberty*. Hence also may be explained the meaning of that expression above where it was said, that you cannot increase the Right, but you extenuate the Restraint. For if a Man in this case indulges evil thoughts, in so doing He erects a false Right, and depreciates the Precept of our Saviour, which is the true Restraint.

is improved and heightened. For Liberty is Use, and Use, Action, and the merit of Action is enhanced by difficulty, and the difficulty consists in the just distinction, measure and observance of Rights and Restraints — and to act aright, whether outwardly towards our Neighbour, or inwardly on Ourselves, is true Liberty and a Perfection of itself, incapable of any additional Improvement : like the Peripatetic Notion of Justice, which is not as other Virtues, a mean Use of the Thing situate between two extremes of Excess and Deficiency, but a perfect Medium of itself ; for no Man can be immoderately or unreasonably just and equitable.

This is the great Employment of a Christian — to act on his own Mind. For our overt acts of Good and Benevolence, must all proceed from previous inward operation and practice on our own Hearts, with an Eye and Attention to Rights and Restraints. — We mistake — and indulge rather in dictatorial dispensation of Good and Evil, Praise or Blame according as we are in the humour to be pleased or disgusted one with another. — 'Tis God's Will, that we are beset with temptations and passions — We have a Law in our Hearts — a revealed law to confirm and strengthen it — and a Promise of Rewards infinitely exceeding the Diminution and Cession of our Natural Rights. — Away with Pride, Prejudice, Propensity ! Away with false sophisticated Rights, and impious abolition of just Restrictions ! — * Chip off the Marble, and
bring

* Let the Restraints get the better of the Rights and deliver the Man free and complete as the Statue from the Quarry — according to the old Notion, that the Statue of every Man lay in the Marble, and that the Sculptor had nothing to do but to use his tools and produce it.

bring forth the Man! — *As free* — acting so under innumerable Impediments, as if you were really and truly disburthened and discharged of them. This is Liberty — this Religion — Is it Meanness? Is it abject Humiliation derogatory from the Honour of Humanity? Try it in Fact — Try it in common Life, whither as we are wont, we so fondly appeal! Is not all the Grace and Transport of Existence only felt by those, whose Hours are subjugated to habitual Constraint? Is not all the Charm and Pleasure of Society, there only, where Conversation submits to mutual Deference, and formal Forbearances? What is it, when the Sensualist is rid of his Phantasm — the Covetous Man of his Idolatry — the Ambitious of his interested Motive? — Call it Meanness? Call it Servitude? — We are sorry for it — We know it Other — and by the Spirit of God co-operating with our pious endeavours, may we feel and experience it in Ourselves — Emancipation *from fleshly Lusts that war against the Soul* — The good and righteous Sacrifice of a reasonable Creature — God's Service — and a PERFECT FREEDOM!



