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Dr *Rogers's* Sermon
Preach'd before the
U N I V E R S I T Y
O F
O X F O R D.

THE
CITY OF
NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE
COMMISSIONER OF
THE LAND OFFICE
IN SENATE CHAMBERS
ALBANY, N. Y.
1880

A
SERMON

PREACH'D before the
UNIVERSITY
 OF
OXFORD

At S^t MARY'S
 On *ACT-SUNDAY*,
 July the 9th 1721.

By **JOHN ROGERS D.D.**

Publish'd at the Request of Mr. Vice-Chancellor.

OXFORD,

Printed at the THEATER for *Ant. Peisley*: and
 are to be Sold by *Tho Woodward, J. Knapton,*
 and *W. Meadows* Booksellers in *London* 1721.

Price four pence.

THE
STATE OF
NEW YORK
IN SENATE
January 10, 1900.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONERS OF THE LAND OFFICE

FOR THE YEAR
ENDING
DECEMBER 31, 1899.

ALBANY:

WHELAN & COMPANY, PRINTERS,
189 N. 3RD ST., ALBANY, N. Y.

[I]

A

S E R M O N

Preach'd before the
Univerfity of *OXFORD*,
On *ACT-SUNDAY*, &c.

I Cor. XI. 19.

*For there must be also Heresies
among you, that they which are
approved may be made mani-
fest.*

THE word *Heresies* in this place has
been usually explain'd as equi-
valent in sense to the *Divisions*
and *Contentions* reprov'd in the
Verses before, which related only to some
Circumstances of publick Worship, and had
A not

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not proceeded to an actual Separation between the Members of the Church, for they are said still to *come together*, and meet in the same Assemblies: But in this Exposition the particle *καὶ* is redundant and without signification, whereas the place in which it stands, naturally gives it a great force and emphasis in the Sentence: For it is not said, *καὶ γὰρ δεῖ αἰρέσεις εἶναι*, but *δεῖ γὰρ καὶ αἰρέσεις εἶναι.* As if the Apostle had said, "I hear there are some Divisions among you when you meet together. This report I can easily believe, because I know, that not only such Contentions as these, but *Heresies*, Dissentions of a higher nature, which will corrupt the Faith or divide the Communion of the Church, will by the Providence of God be permitted to arise in it. As this Sense is what the natural Construction of the Words require, so it gives them so much greater Force, Clearness, and Connection with what goes before than the other, that we may conclude it to have been intended by the Holy Writer: and that by *Heresies* he meant Dissentions of a more dangerous kind than those he had before taken notice of; such as should arise on Questions of greater moment, or be prosecuted with greater obstinacy:

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obstinacy: and either actually divide, or very much endanger the Unity of the Church.

In this Sense I take leave to understand the Word: Tho' supposing it here used in the greatest latitude, as signifying all manner of Divisions, it will however include those of greater Danger; and whatever can be hence inferr'd in reproof of any *Heresies*, will *à fortiori* be applicable to Them.

In this Scripture we may observe,

I. The Assertion of the Apostle — *There must be Heresies in the Church.*

II. The Providential End for which God permits them — *That they who are approved may be made manifest.*

III. The great Advantage the Church receives from these *Manifestations of those who are approved.* And

I. The Apostle here Asserts, that *there must be Heresies* in the Church, in the same sense in which our Lord tells us,

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** It must needs be that Offences come.* Not that He is commendable or excusable who introduces these *Heresies*, or occasions these *Offences*. They are to be consider'd as great Evils, and *woe unto him by whom they come*. But in the natural Course of things such Evils will happen, and in the Scheme of Providence be requisite for the Promotion of wise and beneficial Ends.

Now, could no external Cause be assigned for these Events, the common Frailties and Corruptions of Human Nature may prepare us to expect them in a Society composed of Men. For Christianity, tho' it prescribes the best Rules for the Government of our Passions, and has provided the noblest Support to our Infirmities, yet does not intend to constrain our Obedience to its Laws, or overrule our Liberty of transgressing them. And whenever the want of Humility happens to be the defective part of a Man's Temper or Virtue, a Person eminent in other respects for his Graces and Abilities may occasion this Evil to the Church. A Superior Knowledge, unless corrected with a due proportion of Modesty, is apt to elate and puff up; to render us less ca-

** Matth. 28. 7.*

pable

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pable of Instruction, and less submissive to Authority than the Peace and Order of the Church requires. It cannot but be observed, that, of all parts of our Knowledge, we are inclined to be fondest of those in which we differ from other Men. Obvious and indisputable Truths are generally regarded with indifference. 'Tis the Singularity and Distinction of our Knowledge, the discovering something that Others have overlookt, which strikes our Vanity, and affects us with Pleasure. This we labour to support with Arguments, and adorn with all our Eloquence, as an Acquisition of our own, and in which we have a sort of Property exclusive of the rest of the World. And so long as this Ambition is confined to points of mere Philosophy, it may deserve not only Indulgence but sometimes even Praise. But the misfortune is, that the same Vanity attends Men in inquiries of Religion, where all that is True is Old, and has been from the beginning, and consequently no new Conclusion can be admitted. But even here too it appears Dull and Undistinguishing to tread on in the common Road, and Think and Believe as other Men do. This will not sufficiently recommend to publick notice, and engage
the

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the Attention of the World. Something New and Surprizing must be sought for, Something that will argue a deeper Pénétration than other Men's, and intitle us to the Venerable Character of Masters, and which whosoever will learn must acknowledge himself to receive from us, and be lifted in the Train of our Disciples. And if we observe how deeply this Passion is rooted in our Nature, and how difficult it is even for good Men to restrain it within due Bounds, and how naturally whenever it is indulged, in Religion it must lead Men into Heresies, we may from this single Consideration conclude that the Church of God can never be wholly secur'd from these Evils. And if we take farther into our reflection that Envy, Resentment, and almost every other Passion may accidentally concur in producing them; That whenever it happens (and often it must be expected to happen) that the Powers of the World give encouragement to these *Divisions*, Avarice and secular Ambition must be added to the causes of them; And lastly, that the Malice of all its Enemies from without will be always vigilant to cultivate every seed of Dissention, to take advantage of every Passion, and improve every Incident that may distract

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tract the Church ; We must confess that these Evils are , humanly speaking , necessarily and unavoidable : Events to be lookt for in the ordinary course of Things.

And accordingly we are by frequent Predictions of Scripture prepar'd for them, as natural Effects of the corrupt Passions of Mankind. Thus St Paul, taking his final leave of the Church at *Ephesus*, uses This as a principal argument for that *Vigilance* he recommended, That among *Themselves should arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away Disciples after them.* Their Character He more particularly describes to *Timothy*, as *Lovers of their own selves, Boasters, Proud, Blasphemers, Disobedient, Heady, High-minded,* and, in general, corrupted by the basest Passions, tho' artfully cover'd with *a form of Godliness.* The same Prophecy, with almost the same Description of the Persons, is repeated by Saint *Peter* and *St Jude*: That there should be *False Teachers, who should privily bring in damnable Heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them.* In their Character we are told They should be *Presumptuous, self-willed, not afraid to speak evil of Dignities, speaking proud swelling Words of vanity, promising Men*

a Act. 20. 30. b 2 Tim. 3. Ch. c 2 Pet. 2.

Liberty,

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Liberty, while themselves were servants of Corruption. And how fully these Predictions have been verify'd, we are inform'd by the Annals of past Ages of the Church, and too sensibly feel in the experience of our Own.

From false Teachers and Seducers then, the Church must never hope to be perfectly free in this world. Neither shall we be surprized at the success of their attempts, when we reflect that there will be Hearers too of like Passions; Light and Unstable men with *itching Ears*; strongly inclined to hearken after new Discoveries, and Pretensions to direct them more accurately in the way to Happiness: Especially when these Pretensions are recommended under the Usual Cover of a disinterested Zeal for their Souls and their Liberties. And if it shall happen that either a friendship with the Person, or an Esteem for the Holiness, Learning, or Character of the Heretick, concurs with these motives, the Resolution must be great and well founded, that stands unshaken. And accordingly our Saviour expresses an uncommon apprehension of a Seducer thus qualify'd for Reverence and Attention, when he tells us, that, "*if it were possible,*

a Mat. 24. 24.

He

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He should deceive even the Elect. Our Lord indeed applies this especially to such Deceivers, as should come with an appearance of Miracles ; but since 'tis the Esteem and Authority they acquire by these Miracles which render them dangerous, whoever is by any other Character recommended to Esteem, will prove equally capable of seducing men into Heresy.

From the whole then we may conclude That *there must be Heresies* in the Church, that Seducers shall in all Ages arise, *deceiving and being deceived*, and that *Many shall follow their pernicious ways.*

II. The *second* thing that occurs to us in this Scripture, is the Providential End here assigned for God's Permission of these Evils, — The Trial and *Manifestation of those who are approved.*

And thus *Moses* tells the *Israelites*, that *if there should arise among them a Prophet or a Dreamer of Dreams*, who should endeavour ^a *by signs and wonders* to turn them away from the Religion he had taught Them, they should remember *that the Lord their God proved them by such experiments, to*

^a Deut. 13.

B know

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know whether they loved the Lord their God with all their Soul. And so when our Lord had caution'd his Disciples against the various Trials of Reproach and Persecution, and very particularly against this of *false Christs and false Prophets*, He tells them, *These things should turn to them for a Testimony.* (i. e.) These Trials should Prove and Evidence the Integrity of those who persevered in the true Faith and Church of Christ. And agreeably the *Apostle* here observes, that these *Heresies should come, that they who are approved might be made manifest.* By which Expression we are not to apprehend, that the Character of the Elect is made more manifest to God than it was before. He sees, without any such methods of scrutiny, with what steadiness their Faith is rooted, and how firmly they are united to his Church : And therefore They are here represented as Persons approved by him Antecedently to such Trial. But this Manifestation may be understood either

1st, With respect to our selves ; or

2dly, With respect to the rest of the Church.

^a Luke 21 13.

1st,

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1st, With respect to himself, 'tis a Comfort unspeakable to a Good Man, to find his Graces of strength to endure this Trial: to be able after a conflict, to applaud himself with *St Paul*, — *I have fought a good fight, I have kept the faith.* When we observe the Number and Abilities of those who have, in all Ages, been led away by this Temptation; When we remember that even Angels themselves were seduced into Apostacy; and behold, in present examples, the *Thousands that fall besides us*, Even the best of us may find reason to be diffident of our Strength, and suspect our resolutions. Unless our Constancy has been tried, we know not how far an affection for the Person, an Esteem for the Virtues and Abilities of any Man, may prevail on us to desert the Faith or Communion of the Church. If upon experiment we find our selves equal to the Trial, we may then hope well of our Integrity, and that we shall *hold the beginning of our Confidence steadfast unto the End.* But

2^{dly}, What the Apostle seems here principally to intend, is that the rest of the Church, upon the evidence of such a Proof, may acknowledge us in the Character of sincere Members and faithful Servants of Christ.

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Known unto God only are they who are his,
by an internal inspection into their hearts.
To the Church this Character can no other-
wise appear, than by outward and pre-
sumptive Evidences: And therefore expli-
cit Professions of Faith have been always
required, as Terms of Admission into its
Society; And from all who are intrusted
with any Office in the Administration of
its Polity, more full and exprefs Declara-
tions are demanded, as a Test both of their
Abilities and Sincerity. But These, though
prudent and necessary Cautions, yet are
not always sufficient to reach the Heart,
and discover the sincerity of the Man.
When the Church is favour'd with Civil
Encouragements, secular motives may in-
duce the Hypocrite to associate himself
with it: and the Honour and Distinction
annex'd to Its Offices, may engage his com-
pliance with the Terms of receiving Them.
Even an Enemy may, under this Disguise,
endeavour to recommend himself to a Sta-
tion in the Church, by the advantage of
which he may more effectually subvert it.
And consequently these Securities, though
in the ordinary course of Discipline the
best that can be taken, yet cannot always
be depended on as a proof of Sincerity.
But He who has stood firm in the day of
Tempta-

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Temptation, has given an Evidence of his Integrity which cannot be suspected: and if to his Faith he has added Knowledge, appear'd able by the spirit of Wisdom to convince gainsayers, and defeat the Craft and sophistry of those who lie in wait to deceive, We must distinguish him in our esteem not only as a sincere Member, but as a Light and Ornament of the Church of God.

Let us then

III. Consider the Advantages derived to the Church from these *Manifestations*. And

1st. 'Tis a great and general Advantage to the Church, that 'tis hereby enabled better to exercise Its Discipline, to separate the Hypocrites from the sincere Christians, the sound from the Corrupted Members of the Body. For if they who are *Approved* are hereby made *Manifest*, They also who are *not Approved* must be equally *Manifested*.

The qualifications upon which any one is admitted or continued in the outward Society of the Church, ought to be equitable and legal Presumptions that he is a Member of that *Invisible* Church of the Elect,

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lect, which is approved by Christ. And tho' Human Discretion, which can judge only by external appearances, will never be able so effectually to guard against Hypocrisy, but many will remain in the *Visible* Church, who are not Members of the *Invisible*; Yet still the more apparent and *Manifest* this Distinction is made, the freer may the Church be kept from this Alloy, and the more effectually will Its Honour and Happiness be secured. And consequently these *Manifestations* must be of great service to the Church, in promoting the Ends of Discipline, and thereby preserving the Body in Health and Purity.

It may be observed farther, as no small advantage arising hence to the Church, that hereby Its Enemies are discover'd in their proper Character. While They can act under the Disguise of Friends They are far more dangerous, and the Weak and Unwary more easily imposed on by them: But when, either by a voluntary departure, or a Judicial separation, their Character is declared, They appear under marks of disgrace, and Men are prepared and fortify'd against their attempts.

But in this Especially is the Church advantaged,

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vantaged, that, by these *Manifestations* of *those who are approved*, the Governours of It are enabled to choose fit Persons to serve in the sacred Offices of the Ministry. For tho' the Church, as every other Society, is not without danger from a mixture of Persons disaffected to its Constitution, and the Principles upon which It is founded, in whatever station They are placed; Yet Men of this Character become infinitely more dangerous if intrusted with Offices of influence and Authority in it. If the Guides and Shepherds are inclined to the Paths of Error, how shall the Flock be preserved from going astray? If Watchmen are appointed who are prepared to betray their Post, how shall the City be secured? If that Authority of Doctrine, Rule, and Discipline, which was given to the Church for a Light and Defence, for Edification and Protection, be committed to her Enemies, the danger is imminent and hardly to be avoided; She will be murder'd by her own Guards, and undone by her own Authority. 'Tis therefore of the greatest importance to the Church, that They to whom it belongs to call and appoint Persons to the several Orders of the Ministry, may be enabled to distinguish between Friends and Enemies; To choose
Men

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Men of approved Integrity, Men who have been tried and found faithful, and equal to the Trust reposed in them.

To these Advantages, which are great and obvious, many Others may be added arising to the Church from those Trials. 'Tis St *Augustins* Reflection — That though the Enemy of Christ's Church introduces these Dissentions into it, with a design to weaken and subvert it, yet the Goodness of God defeats his Malice, by giving them a quite contrary Effect: For, by these occasions of Inquiry, the Doctrines of the Church become more attentively consider'd, more clearly understood, more strongly supported, and more earnestly preach'd, and by these means, in the Event, more firmly Establish'd than they were before. And 'tis observable that as the first and purest Ages of the Church were not free from Heresies, so to the early and various Oppositions they gave to the Truth, (the Wisdom of God so ordering) we owe, not only those valuable Treasures of the Church, the Writings of the primitive Fathers, but also several parts of the sacred Rule deliver'd to us in the Scriptures themselves.

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little reason our Adversaries of *Rome* reproach us with those Schisms and Heresies which God has permitted to vex our Church ; and to use them as an argument of our rejection by Christ. It has been observed, that *These* are necessary and unavoidable Consequences from the common Passions of human Nature, and what the Malice of Its Enemies may be expected to foment in every Society. Nothing therefore can be more unjust, than to conclude any thing in prejudice to our Church on account of Them. It may as reasonably be objected that 'tis composed of Men, and has Enemies. And least of all can this Objection become Those, who are well known to have been the Authors of these Evils to us. And when we recollect the frequent Predictions of Christ and his Apostles, that Schisms and Heresies should arise in the Church which they founded, and observe from History, that the purest Ages have been the most remarkably disquieted with these Evils ; That the account of them begins in the Writings of the Apostles themselves, and that, within less than a Century after their death, the Catalogue of them is enlarged to a prodigious number, We may rather presume That Church, to which the Enemy appears most sollicitous

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tous to create this Disturbance, to be a true Church of Christ than the contrary. Thus much at least we may with certainty conclude, that an Objection which lies equally against the first and purest Churches, cannot be a proof of the Corruption of any. Did our Church own in her Doctrines, or Encourage by her Laws the Heresies which have appear'd among us, or were they quietly suffer'd to prevail, they might then with some colour be urged in reproach against Us. But we answer with the Apostle *They go out from us because they are not of us*: And, blessed be God, a just and Christian Zeal has not been wanting in opposition to them. And all the Schisms, Errors, and Heresies, which have ever arisen in the Christian World, may with as much Justice be objected to the Catholick Church of Christ, as the Crimes of these Enemies to our Peace can be imputed to us. Neither

2dly, Can it be inferr'd, from the Divine permission of these Evils, that we are deserted by God, or excluded from that care and affection with which he has promised to watch over and defend his Church: for we are assured that He applies them to the promotion of wise and

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gracious Ends: That by them He tries and proves his Elect; gives them an inward Joy and Consolation in their own Integrity, and renders their Character *Manifest* to the Church. How many and how important advantages the Church receives from these *Manifestations*, has been in some measure observed: and whoever attends to them, cannot but adore the wisdom and goodness of God, who can thus overrule the Counsels of his Enemies, and derive strength and Establishment to his Church from Devices which intend Its Destruction.

These are the principal Inferences I have had in view from this Scripture; But there are some farther Corollaries, arising from the Doctrine here taught, which very well deserve our attention. And

1st, If, as the Apostle affirms, the Providential End of these *Heresies* is, that they who are *approved by God may be made manifest* then it follows, that They, who under these Trials persist in the Faith and Communion of the Church, are thereby *Manifested to be Approved* by God. This Conclusion, indeed, we cannot extend so far, as to pronounce Him, who thus perseveres,
to

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to be in all respects approved by God; a Presumption we may sometimes have reason to discourage; But This we have hence warrant to insist on as one mark and Distinction of the Elect, and if the Man be equally regular in other respects, we are bound to receive and acknowledge him in that Character. From hence it must also follow

2dly, That They who introduce *Heresies* into the Church, or follow those who Introduce them, are thereby *Manifested* to be *Disapproved*, or Reprobated by God; and therefore that the Church may and ought to treat Them in its Discipline, as sufficiently discover'd under that Character. Tho' the Error of the Person may, by any internal Circumstance of it, be excused by God, yet this cannot be discern'd by Men. Nay supposing him even in the Right, yet, if the Governours of the Church judge otherwise, They must proceed according to their own Convictions, and not according to his. To Them he must appear *Disapproved* by God, upon such an Evidence as, in the Judgment of an Apostle, is a due and Legal *Manifestation* of it.

Upon the whole, with great Joy and
Comfort

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Comfort may He who perseveres in the True Faith and Unity of the Church, reflect on the Assurance here given, that this is one mark and Evidence that He is *approved by God*. And on the Contrary, with Terror ought He who Divides, or Departs from any true Branch of Christ's Church, to observe under what Character He is here described.

I am not ignorant, that all Sects and Heresies assume to themselves the Title of the true Church of Christ, and are ready to turn the reproof of this Scripture upon us; telling us, that They are the *Approved*, and We the *Disapproved* here described: By what Marks or Characters the True Church of Christ is to be discern'd, is a Question of too great extent to be consider'd here. But I would observe in few words, That since every Sect assumes to its-self this Character exclusive of those from whom it separates, and rests on this Plea as the defence of its separation, All manifestly agree in this Conclusion, that to Divide or separate from a True Church of Christ is a grievous sin. And if a Profession of Doctrines derived from the Scriptures, and continued down thro' all Ages of the Gospel, and a Polity formed upon
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the purest Model of Antiquity, can give a Title to this Honour, the Church of *England* has been proved to have a more undisputable Claim to it, than any of Her Adversaries. To the Doctrines in which the *Papists* differ from us, the Ancient Creeds, the Writings of the first Ages, and the Scriptures, as explained by them, are all Strangers; And those which we hold in common with them, They themselves acknowledge to have been *from the beginning*. The Articles we contend for against the Hereticks arisen among us, have been constantly and without interruption maintain'd in the Church from the Apostles down to our Days; Whereas the Doctrines which oppose them, tho' they have some of them prevail'd far at certain periods, and engaged a great number of Followers, yet for large Intervals They have been perfectly silenced and unheard of. And as to the Frame of our Polity, no Instance has ever been produced of a Christian Church govern'd by any other for fifteen hundred years after the Apostles. These must at first View be confest to be strong Presumptions at least, in favour of our Church against all Competitors; And the more accurately we pursue the Inquiry, the more fully we shall be convinced,
that

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that She is a true Branch of that Church which Christ and his Apostles planted, and consequently that to depart from Her Faith and Communion is to depart from the true Church of Christ.

May that God, who is able to bring Good out of Evil, improve all attempts to weaken or divide our *Sion*, to the Manifestation of Her Friends, and the Disappointment of those who hate Her. May He give to Her Pastors the Spirit of Wisdom and Courage, and to every one of Her Members such a Measure of his Grace in the day of Trial, That they may not be found *of them who draw back unto perdition, but of them who endure unto the End to the saving of their Souls.* Amen.

F I N I S.