14

A

SERMON

Preached before the

SONS of the CLERGY,

AT THEIR

ANNIVERSARY MEETING,

IN THE

Cathedral Church of St. PAUL,

On THURSDAY, MAY 11, 1769.

BY THOMAS PERCY, D.D.

CHAPLAIN in Ordinary to His MAJESTY,

AND

Domestic CHAPLAIN to his Grace the Duke of NORTHUMBERLAND.

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(14)

TO

The Right Honble the LORD MAYOR,
The Right Rev^d the Lord Biſhop of LANDAFF,
The Right Honble Lord CLIVE,
The Honble and Revd SHUTE BARRINGTON, LL. D.
The Revd THOMAS WILSON, D. D. Dean of CARLISLE,
The Revd JOHN MOORE, D. D. Canon of CHRIST CHURCH,
Rev^d GEO. BERKELEY, LL. D. Preben. of CANTERBURY,
PETER CALVERT, LL. D.
JAMES FORD, M. D.
The Revd RALPH DRAKE BROCKMAN, B. D.
The Revd HENRY WIGLEY, A. M.
STEPHEN LUSHINGTON, Gent.

S T E W A R D S

For the late Feaſt of the SONS of the CLERGY,

THIS

D I S C O U R S E

Is, with the greateſt Reſpect,

INSCRIBED,

By their moſt obedient,

and moſt humble Servant,

THOMAS PERCY.

S. JOHN xiii. 35.

BY THIS SHALL ALL MEN KNOW THAT YE ARE MY DISCIPLES, IF YE HAVE LOVE ONE TO ANOTHER.

WHOEVER compares the Spirit and Genius of the Chriſtian Religion with that of any other Syſtem of Belief and Practice, muſt perceive its wonderful Superiority over them all, in promoting and inculcating the Duties of Beneficence. As the Sublimity of its Doctrines, the Purity of its Precepts, and the Efficacy of its Sanctions, all concur in manifeſting its divine Original; ſo the Tendency it has to promote the Happineſs of Men, by cheriſhing and diffuſing a Spirit of Love and Kindneſs, plainly prove it to have come from the Author of all Good, and to have been the greateſt Bleſſing ever imparted to the World.

THESE are its genuine and darling Principles: ſider all Men as our Brethren *, and to love them ſelves †: to love even our Enemies ‡; to return C Evil ‖; and to be unwearied in Well-doing §.

THIS great Law of univerſal Love, given by ou Maſter, was ſo different from the common ſelfiſh the World, ſo ſuperior to the partial, narrow V every other Inſtitution; this great Duty of M Kindneſs was, before his Time, ſo imperfectly kn ſo little practiſed, that it was in Effect a new Reve new Law to Mankind, and required that peculiar fecting Solemnity, with which the divine Lawgi liſhed and inforced it. "A new Commandmen "unto you, that ye love one another: As I ha "you, that you alſo love one another **."

WE ſee, then, that this Spirit of Love and was ſet forth as the great and peculiar Duty of Religion: It was the viſible Mark by which the of Chriſt were always to be known and diſtinguiſh World: "BY THIS SHALL ALL MEN KNOW "YE ARE MY DISCIPLES, IF YE HAVE LO "TO ANOTHER."

TOO ſeldom does it happen that the Practice correſponds with their Principles: Too ſeldom do

* Matt. xxiii. 8. & paſſim. † Matt. xix. 19. R
‡ Luke vi. 35. ‖ Matt. v. 44. § Gal. vi. 9. 2 Th
** John xiii. 34.

up to thoſe Precepts which they acknowledge to be wiſe, and juſt and good: And yet, notwithſtanding the Imperfection and Fraility of human Conduct; notwithſtanding the corrupt Opinions, which too ſoon obſcured the Light of the Goſpel; and the corrupt Manners, which diſgraced its Precepts; ſtill we may affirm, that the great Duty of univerſal Benevolence has been more eminently practiſed among Chriſtians, than among the Followers of any other Inſtitution; that more charitable Eſtabliſhments have been formed, more Attention ſhewn to the Wants and Miſeries of our Fellow-creatures, and more Care exerted to relieve them; in ſhort, that the Rights of Humanity have been more clearly underſtood, and its Duties better practiſed, in Proportion as the Religion of Chriſt has prevailed in the World; and that its Energy and Influence in promoting a kind, a tender, and benevolent Spirit, have been productive of general and laſting Good.

EVEN amid that Neglect of our holy Religion, which too much characteriſes the preſent Times, ſtill the Influence of its mild and benevolent Principles continues to be felt: For that humane Attention to the Wants and Miſeries of our Fellow-creatures, and thoſe generous Efforts to remove them, which ſo eminently diſtinguiſh this Age and Country, ought ultimately to be referred to this great Cauſe. It is owing to the Goſpel that the tender and compaſſionate Virtues are ſo much better known and practiſed among us than they ever were, either among the ancient Inhabitants of Greece and Rome, or in any other Nation where the Chriſ-

tian Religion was not eſtabliſhed: And we may
the World to produce a ſingle Inſtance, out of the
Pale, like the Meeting of this Day; where a Societ
from the firſt Ranks of the Community, are aſſe
the noble and diſintereſted Purpoſe of collecting,
ing, and managing a Fund for the Relief of the
the Widow, and the Orphan; and for alleviati
Miſeries, which morally ſpeaking, they are exem
themſelves.

IT has been already ſhewn, that the great Mark
Chriſtians were always to be diſtinguiſhed, was t
of Love and Kindneſs: BY THIS SHALL ALL ME
THAT YE ARE MY DISCIPLES, IF YE HAVE L
TO ANOTHER.

IT will be a Subject very ſuitable to the Occaſio
preſent Aſſembly, to enquire how this Spirit has
erted in the Chriſtan World, and by a ſhort hiſto
duction to ſhow how far the Diſciples of Chriſt h
diſtinguiſhed in all Ages for Works of Mercy and

UPON the firſt Publication of the Goſpel, ſo ent
every low and ſelfiſh Principle extinguiſhed amon
tians, that they HAD ALL THINGS IN COMMON.
was the Piety and Charity of the firſt Converts,
" the Multitude of them that believed were of o
" and of one Soul; neither ſaid any of them that
" the Things which he poſſeſſed was his own, but

" all Things common; neither was there any among them
" that lacked: For as many as were poſſeſſed of Lands or
" Houſes ſold them, and brought the Prices of the Things
" that were ſold, and laid them down at the Apoſtles Feet,
" and Diſtribution was made to every Man according as
" he had Need *."

A CONSTANT and eſtabliſhed Community of Goods, however, neither did, nor was intended to continue among Chriſtians, as an eternal Rule of Duty. This, in many Inſtances, would be utterly incompatible with human Society, and would prevent the Exertion of many excellent Virtues. The Writings of the Apoſtles every where abound with innumerable Exhortations to Works of Charity and Beneficence, which plainly prove that Chriſtians were not neceſſarily required to part with that Property by which they were enabled to be Charitable and Beneficent.—Nor, in Fact, did this Practice of having all Things in common continue long, or ſpread univerſally, among the firſt Chriſtians: For we find very ſoon in the Acts of the Apoſtles, that " the
" Diſciples" at Antioch " determined to ſend Relief to their
" Brethren" in Judea, " EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS
" ABILITY †." And St. Paul, giving Orders to the Churches of Galatia and Corinth, " concerning the Collections for
" the Saints," directs, " That upon the firſt Day of the
" Week every one of them ſhould lay by him in Store,
" ACCORDING AS GOD HAD PROSPERED HIM ‡."

BUT

* Acts ii. 44, 45. † Acts xi. 29. ‡ 1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2.

BUT though an intire Community of Goods, and
ſolute Renunciation of Property, were neither requi
nor practiſed by the firſt Chriſtians, yet the Spirit o
and Kindneſs operated among them in its utmoſt
One of the earlieſt Acts of Church Union, when the A
began to form themſelves and their Converts into a
Society, was the appointing Deacons, to miniſter to
lief of the aged and deſolate Widows *. And the
alleviate the Diſtreſſes of their Brethren became ſo e
a Part of the primitive Eccleſiaſtical Eſtabliſhment
wherever a Chriſtian Church was gathered, the pr
for the Poor became one of the firſt Objects of th
tention †.

THIS Tenderneſs and Care were the more exempl
among their Heathen Contemporaries there appears
been no regular Attention paid to the Wants and D
of the loweſt Rank of Men. Refined and poliſhed
Manners of the ancient Greeks and Romans were
withſtanding the eminent Virtues to which many
duals among them attained; notwithſtanding their
guiſhed Love of their Country and Fellow-citizens,
generous Warmth of their private Friendſhips; all
one would have thought, tended much to promote t
tues of Humanity; yet they do not appear ever to ha
any regular Proviſion, or ſolid Eſtabliſhment, for t
lief of their Poor: But they were left to the precario
plies of accidental Benevolence, or to periſh altogeth

* Acts vi. 1—6. † See CAVE's Primitive Chriſtianity, Part iii.

WE hear, indeed, among the Ancients, of Largeſſes, given by thoſe whoſe Deſigns wanted the Aid of Popularity; but ſuch Gifts were always, I think, conſidered rather as Bribes than Charities: And ſometimes, when Famine threatened the Public, the Government made ſome general Proviſion for general Diſtreſs *. But of thoſe who are among us termed the POOR, of Individuals that are ſinking under perſonal Miſery, and to whom the Proſperity of the Public is not communicated, as they are without Name and without Poſſeſſion, there is ſo little Mention, that ſuch a Claſs of Men might ſeem to have had no Exiſtence among them, did we not know, that, wherever there is Subordination, the loweſt Rank muſt often be oppreſſed; that, where there is diſtinct Property, ſome muſt be left out in the Diſtribution; and that, where Labour is neceſſary to Subſiſtence, ſome will always be diſabled by Impotence.

FAR different were the Principles and Conduct of the firſt Chriſtians: Firmly perſuaded that all Men were originally equal, and proceeded from one common Deſcent; and regarding this Life as only a ſhort Prelude to Eternity, where all Diſtinctions would ceaſe, and for the Hopes of which the meaneſt were Candidates, they conſidered all Men as their Brethren; and the more helpleſs and diſtreſſed they were, the more they thought them intitled to their Regard. And this they eſteemed an indiſpenſible Duty, which they

* See on this Subject a little Tract, intitled, An Account of the Care taken in moſt civilized Nations for Relief of the Poor, more particularly in Times of Scarcity and Diſtreſs. By the Rev. Richard Onely, &c. London, printed for R. Davis, 1765, 4to.

they were not at Liberty to neglect, and for the O
of which they muſt ſeverely anſwer. They had beſ
Commands and Example of their Divine Maſter co
before their Eyes, and being ſtrongly influenced by
exalted Motives with which the Chriſtian Religion ſo
fully urges the Exerciſe of Charity, they were con
employed in Works of Mercy and Kindneſs, and
ing away the Tears of Poverty and Diſtreſs *.

" If any be hungry (ſays an ancient Father †)
" give him Food; if naked, let us cloath him; if
" by a powerful Oppreſſor, let us reſcue him fro
" lence. Let our Doors ſtand open to receive the S
" and him that is without a Home. Let us not wi
" our Protection from the Orphan, nor our Aſſiſtan
" the Widow. It is a noble Work of Mercy to
" Captives ‡; and no leſs to viſit and aſſiſt the Sic

* See CAVE's Primitive Chriſtianity, Part iii. Chap. 2.

† LACTANTIUS. Divin. Inſtit. Epitome, c. 7.

‡ THIS forms a very ſtriking Contraſt to the ordinary Prac
Greeks and Romans in the Treatment of their Slaves, who
other, for the moſt Part, than Priſoners taken in War. The
Cruelty of the Spartans to the poor Helots is at large deſcribe
tarch (in Vitâ LYCURGI) who has likewiſe, with great Human
demned the Precepts and Practice of Cato the Cenſor on the
ject. But whoever would ſee the inhuman Treatment which
happy Claſs of Men ſuffered from their Maſters in Rome deſcr
diſtinctly, need only conſult HENNEKENIUS's Diſſertation
Domeſticâ Rom. [apud SALENGR. Nov. Theſaur. Antiqu
Tom. i. p. 1270, 1271, &c.] It was not unuſual for theſe u
Wretches to put an End to their Miſeries by SUICIDE: W

" for Strangers and the Poor, in caſe they die, let them not " want the Shelter of a Grave. Theſe are Offices and " Works of Mercy, which whoever performs offers a true " and acceptable Sacrifice to God; who is not pleaſed with " the Blood of Beaſts, but with the Charity of Men: Who " in his ſovereign Juſtice will deal by us, as we ourſelves " act by others: Who has Mercy on him whom he ſees " merciful, and will ſhut his Ears againſt him who hath " no Pity."

SUCH were the generous and exalted Sentiments of the firſt Chriſtians, and ſuch the Exhortations poured forth by their Preachers. Nor were theſe Exhortations without Effect; for no ſooner was the Chriſtian Church delivered from Perſecution, and began to attain a firm Eſtabliſhment, than we ſee theſe noble and beneficent Principles reduced to Practice, and the whole World abound with their Works of Mercy and Charity.

ALONG with their Churches, we ſee thoſe good and holy Men erecting Houſes of Refuge for every Kind of Diſtreſs. They provided Hoſpitals to receive Orphans, and to edu-

may obſerve by the bye, was ſo common a Practice throughout the Roman Empire, that it was a ready Excuſe with ſuch as wanted to buy Poiſon of the Apothecaries, that it was for the uſe of ſome Perſon, who wiſhed to deliver himſelf from the Pains of a lingering Diſeaſe; as the uſual Pretence now is to deſtroy Vermin. See a remarkable Inſtance of this Sort in APULEIUS, Metam. Lib. x. See alſo on the above Subject, FLEURY's Mœurs des Chrêtiens, c. xl.

cate young expoſed Children: To accommodate and
the Sick and Wounded: To entertain and lodge poo
vellers and Strangers: To afford a comfortable Ret
indigent and helpleſs Old Age; and for the Relief
avoidable Penury and Want *.

THE providing, the maintaining, and eſtabliſhin
takes up a great Part of the Eccleſiaſtical Laws of t
Chriſtians; and their Regulations are as prudent,
Contributions were liberal. Theſe Retreats for the
leſs and Wretched were not ſuffered to be the Lu
places of the Uſeleſs and the Idle.—It was an expreſ
mand of the Apoſtle's, that "if any would not wor
"ther ſhould they eat †:" And it was for a long
the Rule and Practice of the primitive Church, tha
Man "ſhould labour working with his own Hand
that not merely for his own Subſiſtence, but tha
"might have to give to him that needed ‡."

* See FLEURY Mœurs des Chrêtiens, c. xl. & Cod. de Sacr
I. xix. c. 22.

† 2 Theſſ. iii. 10.

‡ Eph. iv. 29.—It may be obſerved here, that the Charity o
mitive Chriſtians was ſo far from being indiſcriminate or con
Sloth, that it was under the Chriſtian Emperours that that fam
was enacted to ſuppreſs the Nuiſance of common Begging, w
curs in the COD. JUST. lib. xi. tit. 25. De Mendicantibus vali

"IMPERATORES GRATIANUS, VALENTINIANUS, & TH
"SEVERUM, P. U.

"Cunctis, quos in publicum quæſtum incerta mendicitas v
"inſpectis, exploretur in ſingulis, & integritas corporum & r
"norum: atque inertibus & abſque ulla debilitate miſerandis

"

EVEN in After-times, when from an ill-directed Zeal, and mistaken Notions of Perfection, the Religious had begun to run into Cells and Solitudes, and to desert the more active Duties of Life, still they abhorred all Appearance of Sloth, and were sensible that their Devotion, however intense and abstracted, would be no Excuse for being idle and useless. They earned their Food with the Sweat of their Brows: They were for a long Time as exemplary for their excessive Labour as for their ardent Piety; and not content to subsist themselves, they afforded large Supplies to the Poor *.

THESE salutary Rules by Degrees grew into Disuse and Neglect. The Purity of the Christian Religion became sullied with human Inventions: Rude and barbarous Nations over-run the World: General Ignorance prevailed; Learning and Knowledge were extinguished; and Superstition ingrafted a thousand false Principles and unmeaning Observances upon true Religion. Then Monasteries, the Retreats of idle Devotees, rose on all Hands, and none

"inferatur, ut eorum quidem, quos tenet conditio servilis, proditor studiosus & diligens dominium consequatur: eorum vero, quos natalium sola libertas persequitur, colonatu perpetuo fulciatur, quisquis hujusmodi lenitudinem prodiderit ac probaverit: salva dominis in eos actione, qui vel latebram forte fugitivis vel mendicitatis sub eundæ consilium præstiterunt."—Vide etiam COD. THEODOSIANUM, lib. xiv. tit. 18. leg. 1.

* St. AUGUSTIN tells us that the Asceticks of Egypt, for the Relief of the Poor, often sent whole Ship-loads of Alms, arising from their excessive Labour. Vid. De Mor. Eccles. 1. c. lxvii. FLEURY Mœurs des Chrêtiens, c. xl.

were eſteemed religious that did not bury themſ
Cloiſters. Yet even thus oppreſſed and obſcured as
Chriſtianity was ſtill a Bleſſing to the World: The
Mildneſs of its benevolent Principles ſtill continue
felt: It reſtrained the Violence of the barbarous Age
bad as they were, prevented them generally from
much worſe. Even the Monaſteries themſelves ha
Uſe: They yielded a ſafe Shelter to what little L
was left in the World: They were frequently the
of the Oppreſſed and Afflicted: And in the moſt in
able Times afforded a Retreat where the Poor wer
plentifully relieved; where the weary Pilgrim and
Traveller were lodged and fed.

WHEN the Monaſteries were ſuppreſſed in this Ki
and the other Abuſes in the Church were reform
Legiſlature provided a more certain and ſolid Relief
Poor; ſuch as does Honour to the national Humani
gives the wretched Part of our Species here, what t
ver could obtain in any other Country—a legal C
Relief and Support. Whatever Imperfections may b
in our Syſtem of Poors Laws, or whatever Abuſes m
crept into them, ſtill it muſt be acknowledged that t
formed upon Principles no leſs prudent and juſt, th
mane and benevolent, viz. That every one capable o
ing ſhould be employed, and that he who is incapable
be aſſiſted by the Community *.

* See our Syſtem of Poors Laws vindicated, in a Manner t
no leſs Honour to the Humanity of the very ingenious and learn

I SHALL not now enter into a Detail of all our other charitable Eſtabliſhments, too many of which are abuſed and perverted: But there is one Species of Charity for which the preſent Age is particularly diſtinguiſhed, the raiſing Funds by voluntary Subſcription for alleviating and removing the various Calamities of the Poor.——To reſtore the uſeful Labourer to his Strength; to reclaim the Vicious and Abandoned; to reſcue Youth from the Contagion of Vice, and make them uſeful Members of Society; to ſave the deſerted Infant from periſhing, and to aſſiſt the friendleſs pregnant Mother; theſe are Inſtitutions ſo excellent in themſelves, and ſo beneficial to Society, that they demand the utmoſt Applauſe and Encouragement; and the many thouſands of uſeful Poor, who, but for theſe, muſt have periſhed unpitied and unknown, are ſo many Petitioners at the Throne of Mercy in Behalf of their numerous and kind Benefactors.

BUT human Virtues muſt always bear ſome Marks of human Frailty. Our Charity is ſometimes excited with more Zeal than Knowledge, and, however ardent and active, is too frequently capricious and inconſtant. It burns indeed with a Flame never extinguiſhed, but which changing its Direction as the Winds blow, gives neither ſteady Light nor uniform Heat. As our Eyes fall upon new Modes of Miſery, or our Imaginations are ſtruck with new Deſcriptions

ter, than to that of the Engliſh Nation, in whoſe Defence it is offered, in "Obſervations on the more ancient Statutes, by the Honourable "DAINES BARRINGTON, &c." pag. 480, & ſeq. 3d Edit. 1769, 4to.

Deſcriptions of Diſtreſs, we too often transfer ou
cence, rather than enlarge it. To the intellectu
that which is new is nareſt, and that which is r
always greateſt. New Plans of Charity riſe up and
the View of former Inſtitutions. Thoſe Evils t
have been known are little regarded. Competitor f
Competitor: One Scheme ſucceeds to another: A
Works of Mercy have their Patrons and their Riv
Piety itſelf feels the Influence of Faſhion.

IT is not therefore to be inferred that the Prin
Religion have loſt their Force, or that the Teacher
ligion are leſs loved and honoured, when we find
annual Contributions to that Inſtitution which we n
to celebrate and promote, have for ſome Time ra
nually declined. Charity has not forſaken us; ſhe
ing ſome other Part of the Community. She has
left her Work imperfect; it is therefore not u
able to ſolicit her Return, and to hope ſhe will n
us for others, as we do not wiſh ſhe ſhould leav
for us.

THERE perhaps never was a Time when th
chial Clergy could with greater Propriety call upon
lic Compaſſion for Relief than now, when Succeſs
and Proſperity of Commerce have filled the Nati
Exuberance of Riches, which the Clergy, and th
alone, are doomed to behold without partaking th
thoſe who are at Liberty to purſue ſecular Emplo

the Means of Gain are ſo much multiplied that every Hand is ſtretched out with Eagerneſs, and ſcarce any returns empty. But the Clergy have no Power of extending their Circuit of Operation, and are therefore the only Men whom Skill and Diligence cannot make rich; and it is the great Axiom of Charity, that he muſt be helped by others who cannot help himſelf.

I HOPE it is without Envy, but it cannot be wholly without Pain, that thoſe, who are appointed to preſerve by their Doctrine the Peace of the preſent World, and promote the Happineſs of the next, find their Profeſſion and Employment hourly ſinking into that Contempt which Poverty muſt always ſuffer where the great Conteſt is for Riches; and ſee their Order falling viſibly below that Mediocrity of Condition neceſſary to ſupport the Dignity of Inſtruction, to facilitate the Means of Knowledge, and ſupply the proper Leiſure for Enquiry.

IF the parochial Clergy grew poor only by Compariſon, if they thought themſelves declining only becauſe they ſaw others advancing, though even this would be grievous, it however might be borne. But the Decline of clerical Revenues is not imaginary but real. The Price of every Thing convenient, of every Thing neceſſary, increaſes by ſuch Degrees, as nothing but Experience could make credible. This Increaſe of Price is not perhaps a political Evil, becauſe it is the natural Effect of increaſing Wealth; but an Evil it is, overwhelming and reſiſtleſs to thoſe whoſe Wealth is not increaſed:

creaſed: And that the Proviſion for the parochial has received no proportionate Augmentation is un vertably apparent, and univerſally confeſſed.

IT is not however for ourſelves that we implore th tinuance of national Benevolence. The Station in we are placed we ſhall honeſtly and vigorouſly en to preſerve; and that Influence which we cannot c any Splendor of external Advantages, we humbly, fidently hope to obtain and enſure by Precept and E by Diligence of Study and Holineſs of Life. But and, I truſt, ſhall not wiſh in vain, to be delivere thoſe Terrors and Solicitudes that diſturb our Min in Age or Sickneſs we ſee our Wives and Children ſink into hopeleſs Poverty, and thoſe Temptations t hopeleſs Poverty muſt always be expoſed.

THE End of this Inſtitution is to procure to the of the Clergy an humble Subſiſtence, and to ma Children uſeful to Society by manual Employments. ever Charity has contributed has been faithfully e and publicly declared. No Fraud or Colluſion ha diſcovered, or can be ſuſpected. Nothing given to ciety ſinks out of Sight, or is waſted without Effe an Inſtitution ſo deſigned and ſo adminiſtered, ſu deſerves Regard. Relief is now ſolicited for tho have had once more flattering Proſpects; who ha of them relieved the Diſtreſſes of others, and no n pected to be the Objects of Charity, than they t

Compaſſion they are now compelled to have Recourſe. Among them are the Widows and the Orphans of many a worthy Man, whoſe modeſt Merit paſſed unnoticed through the World: Who in ſome remote Obſcurity was overlooked and neglected; and, while he laboured to ſave the Souls of others, eat himſelf the Bread of Carefulneſs, and could make no Proviſion for his Family. Let us haſten to relieve their Sorrows, and help to wipe away their Tears. Let us imitate the tender Mercies of him, WHO GIVETH LIBERALLY, AND UPBRAIDETH NOT *: Who profeſſes to be the FATHER OF THE FATHERLESS, AND TO DEFEND THE CAUSE OF THE WIDOWS †.

* James i. 5. † Pſal. lxviii. 5.

A LIST