



Bodleian Libraries

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

This book is part of the collection held by the Bodleian Libraries and scanned by Google, Inc. for the Google Books Library Project.

For more information see:

<http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/dbooks>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 UK: England & Wales (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) licence.

A
S E R M O N

PREACHED BEFORE THE HONOURABLE.

H O U S E O F C O M M O N S,

ON

FRIDAY, APRIL 19, 1793.

Lunæ, 22^o die Aprilis, 1793.

ORDERED,

THAT the Thanks of this House be given to the Reverend Doctor HUNTINGFORD, Warden of *St. Mary's College, Winchester*, for the Sermon by him preached upon *Friday* last, before this House, at *St. Margaret's, Westminster*; and that he be desired to print the same: And that Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Lord APSLEY do acquaint him therewith.

J. H A T S E L L,

Cl. Dom. Com.

19

A
S E R M O N
Preached before the HONOURABLE
H O U S E of C O M M O N S,

AT THE
CHURCH OF ST. MARGARET, WESTMINSTER,

ON
FRIDAY, APRIL 19, 1793:

BEING
THE DAY APPOINTED BY HIS MAJESTY'S ROYAL
PROCLAMATION,
TO BE OBSERVED AS
A DAY OF SOLEMN FASTING AND HUMILIATION.

BY
GEORGE ISAAC HUNTINGFORD, S.T.P.
WARDEN OF ST MARY'S COLLEGE, WINCHESTER.

L O N D O N:
PRINTED FOR J. WALTER, CHARING - CROSS.

M DCC XCIII.



H A B A K K U K, II. 12.

WOE TO HIM THAT BUILDETH A TOWN WITH BLOOD,
AND STABLISHETH A CITY BY INIQUITY!

THOUGH on various emergencies, those who have gone before us, have offered up their prayers to Almighty God for Divine Aid to the people of this land; yet on no occasion could the most humble supplication be a duty so incumbent on them, as it is on us, who are now called upon to assemble for a purpose so devout and important. For, * “consider the years of many generations;” from the earliest ages of our civilization, the annals of our country cannot exhibit, at any one period, a combination of evils so foul and alarming, as at the critical conjuncture of public affairs immediately preceding the appointment of this day’s solemnity.

* Deut. xxxii 7.

THE pages of our history in past times do indeed record many memorable events, which must have created solicitude, and occasioned sorrows, to our forefathers. Haughty enemies have threatened to establish universal dominion over all the nations of Europe. Struggles for liberty have raised intestine discord, shed the precious blood of citizens, and terminated in usurpation. The pure form of our religious worship has been menaced with the horrors of persecution. Competitions for supreme authority have harassed our people, desolated our cities, and destroyed thousands, who fought valiantly to defend what they esteemed the better cause. Those dreadful ministers of God's vengeance, Pestilence and Famine, have grievously afflicted and smitten our land, dealing havoc with resistless violence and undiscerning devastation.

DOUBTLESS the æras of these several calamities were productive of much misery to those, who were witnesses of the evils which others suffered, and by which themselves were menaced: still, however, those days of affliction were not without their prospects of hope, and sources of consolation.

HAD victory attended the lust of extensive conquest, yet the subjugation of our country would not have been followed by a total confusion of all the rights enjoyed by private individuals. In the midst of the convulsions which distracted our fathers in the last century, there was no apprehension

prehesion that Liberty should be extirpated : the question to be decided was the proportion of freedom, which should be left without restraint imposed on it by any superior legal power. When those, who mistook the Ceremonies for the Effence of Religion, conceived it to be a work of piety towards God, if they persecuted all who should continue obstinate in deviating from what they maintained to be the way of Truth, they were so far from meditating the extinction of Christianity, that they were more zealous than prudent in the propagation of it. The leaders of the several parties, who so often and so long disputed the claim of succession to regal authority, never contended for the wicked purpose of infringing on every branch of the Constitution : their first aim was to defend each his own pretensions ; their next, to rule in conformity to the laws, which had been transmitted from their predecessors. Even when parents and children, husbands and wives, friends and relations, were by pestilence and famine severed from each other, yet were the survivors supported by the comforts with which Christianity will alleviate the heaviest sorrows ; they relied on God's goodness through their merciful Redeemer, that the souls of the departed would be blessed with immortal happiness in a state of future existence.

SUCH sources of consolation amidst impending evils were opened to our forefathers : so that whatever might be the event of the measures pursued by them for the averting of

consequences painful and grievous, still, however, in the worst reverse of situation, they had not to fear the loss of All Rights, All Order, All Liberty, All Government, All Religion!

BUT what apprehensions have not we just reason to conceive, if from the hostilities commenced against us we should experience that reverse of condition, to which our enemies wish to reduce us? For who, and what, are our enemies? They are men, who so little regard rights, that in defiance of all the security, which should be given by social union, they plunder property; and, without even alledging pretended charges, they imprison and massacre the innocent. They so little regard order, that, with views subversive of all restraint over the human passions, by doctrines unfounded in nature, and notoriously contradicted by experience, they inculcate principles of disunion and sedition, which make every friend of the human species stand aghast at the horrible consequences that must ensue from their being adopted as general maxims. They are men, who so little regard liberty, that even where they have been most warm in their professions of zeal to deliver countries, which they termed oppressed, from allegiance to their governors, they have enforced their own mandates by the power of the sword; have insulted, degraded, and despoiled the very persons who received them with cordiality. They are men, who so little regard government, that they have
destroyed

destroyed the fundamental principles of it; and so little do they regard religion, that their armies, in their avidity for plunder, do not hesitate to insult Religion in the very temple of the Deity: Such too have been the language and audacity of blasphemers, that even the existence of the Deity himself has been daringly and impiously denied. By the natural consequence of such infatuation, they discourage the education of children in the fear of God; they even carry on war for the purpose of propagating their senseless and irreligious errors, which would erect Materialism, Fatalism, Chance, Fortune, in the place of Mind, Freedom, Design, Foresight, attributes inseparable from the God that ruleth the universe!

If thus they trample on the fundamental ground of Natural Religion, they cannot be expected to treat with decency the truths of Revealed Religion. In vain should we tell them that Christianity is founded, not on opinion, but on facts: in vain should we be earnest in recommending Christianity as the best gift of God to his creature Man: in vain should we endeavour to demonstrate, that it contains the purest precepts for moral conduct in this life; and holds out the most animating assurances of immortal happiness in a future state: in vain should we urge them *not* to conclude, that, because the true character of our holy religion is not established by pagantry and ostentation, therefore in the worship of the heart, expressed by simple signs, there is no vital piety. The tendency of their principles is to exclude
from

from the world all ideas and professions of faith in God ; to bring man down to a level with the beasts that perish, making his properties to consist only in being born, in gratifying his appetites, in knowing and obeying, as a private individual, no law but his own will, through the term of this life, and then sinking into the oblivion of the grave. Enemies thus hostile to Rights, Order, Liberty, Government, and Religion, are surely of a description unparalleled ; and their success is to be deprecated more earnestly, than the return of any, even the most calamitous circumstances recorded in our history.

THAT life is dear, that the love of life is rooted in our nature, cannot be denied : yet that continuance in it on *any* conditions, and in *any* situation *whatever*, can be desirable, is an assertion becoming only the basest coward, or the most profligate atheist. For who, that duly estimates the value of life according to the moral uses which it answers, would not think that * “ to die is gain,” if those ties should be dissolved, by which society has hitherto been connected ? Who would not look to the grave as a place of refuge, if every object of his regard and attachment were exposed to the wanton insults, or the merciless cruelties, of sanguinary oppressors, whom no laws, either of human or divine institution, can restrain from rapine and slaughter ? Who would not implore the Father of Mercies to shorten his

* Philipp. i. 21.

continuance on earth, if existence were to be prolonged on no other terms, than the diffimulation of his inward and irresistible conviction, that God is the Maker and Ruler of all things? And what Christian, in consideration of some few years added to his life, would sacrifice for himself, and for his posterity, either the pure precepts of Gospel Morality, or that persuasion which alone can speak peace to the soul of any thinking man; a persuasion that God, for Christ's sake, will accept of sincere repentance instead of unspotted innocence, and reward unfeigned endeavours to be good, as though they were perfect acts of real goodness? Yet all this must he endure, who would submit patiently to the insolence, the iniquity, the impiety of those, with whom we have now to contend: and submission that must end in the resignation of blessings so entirely, so essentially requisite to the happiness of our existence, must be incomparably worse than any death, which either Pestilence, or Famine, or the Sword can inflict!

THAT the war now brought on us by those, "who build their town with blood, and stablish their city by iniquity," may terminate, not in the resignation, but in the security of our civil and religious blessings, is the object of this day's solemnity: and in our reference of measures, adopted for the preservation of national safety and national faith, to the Ultimate Disposer of all Events, we shew ourselves to be not more practically pious, than philosophically wise.

THE

THE controul exercised by God's Providence is evident throughout the universe. We exclude it not from the Inanimate World; why then should we exclude it from the Rational? We allow its influence on Inert Matter, how then can we doubt its energy on Beings Intellectual? It is by the same God, all-good and benevolent, that both Matter and Mind were created: it is on the same God, all-powerful and irresistible, that the * laws of physical and moral government alone depend. To Him therefore every dictate of Reason will bid us offer our prayers, that He would give us a heart of wisdom and an arm of strength, to repel those disturbers of public tranquillity, those enemies to Man, to Religion, to God!

BUT there are other weighty and important considerations, which will prove the wisdom of appointing a national supplication for Divine Assistance. We are hereby instrumental towards perpetuating the most infallible principle on which human happiness can securely rest; and towards laying still deeper the only solid basis on which human society can possibly stand firm.

WE profess our own belief, we exhort others to believe with us, that there is a Divine Providence, by the superintendence of which the heavens and the earth, the sea and

* Some very excellent passages on the interposition of Providence occur in REID'S Essays on the ACTIVE POWERS of Man. Ess. 4. Ch. 9.

the dry land, all living creatures, all men and angels, are seasonably protected. We profess our own belief, we exhort others to believe with us, that the Supreme Being, by whom this universal Providence is exercised, neither is, nor can be an indifferent spectator of actions, moral or immoral, in rational agents.

IF trust in Providence were wrested from individuals, what consolation would remain to assuage the sorrows of life? Who that conceived himself to be the sport of fortune, exposed to all the ills that blind chance and undistinguishing fatality might bring upon him, who, under this persuasion, could be either industrious, or tranquil, or happy? The dread of what might befall him in the next hour would discourage him from all laudable exertion, would agitate his mind with restless apprehensions, would banish from his soul all love of existence. But restore to him reliance on God's Providence, and you will give him a most powerful incentive to good actions, a most effectual soother of turbid sensations, a perpetual source of substantial comfort.

IF from society could be eradicated the doctrine, that God, in the unlimited extent of his knowledge, must perceive, and in the impartial execution of his justice will reward or punish human actions; if all ideas of a moral governor regarding man's conduct could be extirpated from conscience, what principle would remain sufficiently efficacious and general in its influence, for the controul of passions, and

guidance of morals, in the bulk of mankind? Fear of the magistrate would prevail so far only, as the knowledge of the magistrate could detect, or his authority punish, outrageous offenders. But it is to be observed, that those who are most notorious in violating the law, are not always the most dangerous enemies to mankind, nor are they the *only* persons from whom civil society has cause to apprehend the deepest injury. Crimes, which the law has defined to be punishable, do so obviously lead to fatal consequences, that the most abandoned will seldom perpetrate them without some precautions to escape public notice; and against offenders daringly criminal, it is the interest of all honest citizens to be on their guard. But there *may* be, there *are*, many kinds of villany, which fear not to walk in noon-day, which however no law of man can bring to condign punishment, because their essence consists in artful evasion of law, and their depravity arises from a vile perversion of that freedom on which the law does not presume to infringe. The propagator of falsehood, the seducer of innocence, the fraudulent dealer, the treacherous deceiver, the grinding oppressor, the poisoner of virtuous principles, the thankless, the ungrateful, the vengeful, the obdurate; all these, though they may carry on their practices so cautiously as to be out of the reach of condign punishment, according to the express letter of the law, are nevertheless foes to civil society, more to be

4

dreaded,

dreaded, because more subtly baneful to the very ends for which society is formed, than the majority of malefactors who are punished for transgression of the law. Yet against men of this description no remedy can be provided, nor for the black crimes, which they commit, will punishment be necessarily apprehended, if we discourage the belief of retribution in a future state from the Searcher of Hearts and the Witnesses of all Misdemeanors.

THE love of our species, the love of our country, the beauty of virtue, the intrinsic excellence of rectitude, have been proposed by speculative men as principles of moral action: and it must be confessed, that to ingenuous minds they appear principles most amiable and exalted; nor are they altogether without forcible effect on those, who have been nurtured in the best school of philosophy. Yet even the disciples of these principles cannot always be impelled to virtuous action by the single energy of an abstract truth: they too, like others who partake of human nature, are encountered by temptations of passion and interest, and require, as an additional excitement to resistance, the recollection that God most Holy is the spectator of their conduct. But whatever influence such refined principles might have on the few, who have devoted themselves to the study of moral science, yet how inconsiderable is the number of such men in comparison with the millions who

have neither time nor talents to speculate? To exhort them to virtue for virtue's sake, would be uttering a jargon of words wholly unintelligible, an attempt utterly fruitless. A more distinct, short, impulsive principle must be applied as the rule for millions; there is a God that knows and sees all things; he will reward good men with eternal happiness, he will punish bad men with eternal misery! This axiom the most illiterate can understand, and the most learned cannot disprove.

BUT if neither fear of the magistrate, nor abstract reasoning can be productive of general virtue, or at least can be a restraint on the tendency to vice, in a degree requisite for the security, the comfort, the credit, of civil society, we act wisely, and for the most important interests of mankind, by maintaining and enforcing the only principle, which can ensure the safety, the felicity, the glory of civilized man. That principle is, the firm belief that a God most Holy, most Just, most Righteous, beholds men as his rational children; that he loves every one who promotes goodness, but disapproves of every one who practises vice; and that in all periods of our existence, both present and future, a curse is annexed to sin, a blessing to virtue. He that has thoroughly imbibed this principle, and adopted it as the leading rule by which to regulate his actions, will make it the first and last consideration of his thoughts and wishes,
that

that he may ever conscientiously discharge his duties to God and Man ! These duties are inseparable : he that acknowledges and worships God, if he would offer his prayers in an acceptable manner, must do good to his fellow-creatures, who are God's children : and he that confers benefits on his fellow-creatures, performs towards God a commendable service ; since he thereby imitates, in some measure, the most adorable attribute of his Creator, unbounded Benevolence. Thus closely connected and intimately interwoven with each other are Faith in God and Beneficence to Man : in every point of view they are kindred graces most admirable and lovely : and he approves himself the true friend of human nature, who endeavours to recommend and establish them, as the surest guides to temporal and spiritual happiness.

UPON principles of this kind the legislators of antiquity founded their constitutions : and the salutary effects of building a constitution on some religion are proved by the duration of the ancient monarchies on the basis even of false religion : but still farther are they evidenced by the extraordinary existence of the Jews to this day ; who yet continue a distinct people, united by their Lawgiver through one common faith in " the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob." Scattered though they are over all quarters, and depressed though they are in all nations of the earth,

earth, yet they are living witnesses, not only of the truth of prophecy, but also of the irrefragable strength, with which uniformity of religious opinion and religious ceremony binds societies of men.

IT remained for the ignorance, the vanity, the impiety of those our adversaries, who are now arrogating to themselves the august title of legislators for an extensive country, to conceive it possible that society can be regulated without the fundamental support and pervading influence of religion. But what have been the effects of their novel experiment? In blood they began, by iniquity they have profecuted, by havoc they have laboured to execute their attempt, an attempt to spread tyrannical dominion. When the ties of religion were once loosened, the fury of passions found no inward check which might retard their progress to gratification. And in what has this gratification consisted? In every thing that is unjust, inhuman, barbarous. The consequences resulting from such a disregard of religion, St Paul has forcibly described: * “ Even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity: whisperers, backbiters,

*Rom. i. 28.

haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents; without understanding; covenant-breakers; without natural affection; implacable, unmerciful." As the Apostle painted manners from the dregs of a corrupt age in the decline of the Roman empire, we who have experienced the melioration of human nature under the Gospel, had been induced to hope and believe, that no copy of such gross depravity could ever exist among any people, who had long professed, at least nationally, to be Christians. But an example to the contrary now forces itself on our observation, and to every kingdom upon earth proclaims an awful lesson, that should warn the ruling powers to beware of weakening those principles of religion, which in their general tendency lead to rectitude of morals, ● faith in God, and ● a conviction that in his righteous judgment * " He will render to every man according to his deeds."

FOR what length of time the infatuation of those, who have threatened us with so many and great evils, may be suffered to afflict themselves and their fellow-creatures, God only can know! For the chastisement of others, no less than for their own punishment, they may by Divine Providence be permitted to spread the horrors of war for a longer season than our conjectures can calculate, or than our concern for the happiness of mankind will allow us to ap-

* Rom. ii. 6.

prehend.

prehend. But if we contemplate the whole system of Divine Providence, though we must ever with profound humility acknowledge, that as our views of God's proceedings are extremely imperfect, so our judgment must necessarily be fallible, yet we shall not be without sufficient ground on which at least to form some expectations, that the eventual termination of measures sanguinary and unjust as their measures, must be in distress, in overthrow, in ignominy.

Look to the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Take them in the lowest sense they can be taken, as a curious history of former transactions in nations once rich and flourishing, populous and powerful. Mark in them the truth, which they continually inculcate, which they draw in characters legible to the most simple, which by experience of ages we know to have been verified, that NATIONAL INIQUITY SHALL INEVITABLY LEAD TO NATIONAL RUIN. The final recompence of individuals, being rather of a spiritual than a temporal nature, is reserved for a future state: but as whole nations in their body politic will probably have no other scene of action than the globe on which they are now established, their reward or punishment is ultimately dispensed to them, in their present state of existence, either by national prosperity on the one hand, or national calamity on the other. That * “righteousness exalteth a nation, but

* Prov. xiv. 34.

fin is a reproach to any people," is an assertion so founded on the decrees of the Almighty, and so demonstrated by a series of facts, that no axiom of science, proved by manifold experiments, can be more true in theory and valid in application. Upon the ground of what God has already ordained respecting the stability or extinction of other empires, we may presume, that enormous crimes must finally work destruction. * " Shall they (says the prophet against the city of Babylon) shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite thee, and awake that shall vex thee, and thou shalt be for booties to them? Because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the people shall spoil thee; because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein." — † " Thou hast consulted shame to thy house, by cutting off many people, and hast sinned against thy soul. For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it, Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and stablisheth a city by iniquity." To those, who have eyes to see, or ears to hear, or hearts to understand, awful indeed must be these denunciations of Scripture!

THERE is a second point of view, in which the writings of the Old Testament deserve your attention. They dif-

* Habakkuk, ii. 7.

† Habakkuk, ii. 10, &c.

cover a most intimate knowledge of human nature. They exhibit man as he really is, a fallen creature; a creature, in whom are combined the most opposite extremes, in whom are concentrated the most repugnant contrarieties. If his reason suggests what is good, his passions urge him to what is evil: if in principle he loves virtue, in practice he contradicts his own principle: if in his soul he adores and wishes to imitate the Divine Attributes, yet in his conduct he frequently transgresses the Divine Commands. The object of legislation is not man in his moments of calm reflection and upright purpose; but man either contending with the tumult of his appetites, or hurried away by it. For beings of a nature thus mixed and imperfect, all wise legislators should frame their institutes: he that considers man as acting either on the one hand entirely on rational motives, or on the other altogether on the impulse of passions, is ignorant of man's mental structure, and must fail of success in his laws. Had our enemies devoted to the reading of Scripture even less time, than they have misemployed on pages of sophistry, paradoxical extravagance, and infidelity, they had gained a more thorough knowledge of the millions for whom they were to legislate, than could be acquired from the works of men, whose aim was to attract admiration, by directly contradicting all opinions received and justified by experience.

STILL farther let the Scriptures of the Old Testament be recommended to your serious regard. They teach us, that Faith in the existence of an Almighty God is the foundation on which every system of Morality should be grounded: and having laid this corner-stone of the fabric, they erect on it the leading principles of man's duty, from whence particular rules in cases more specific, and on occasions which must vary with different circumstances, may easily be deduced*. "By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil:" and however ingenious, however amusing may be the speculations of writers upon man, yet to every system of ethics that derives not moral obligation from God's will, as well as from man's nature, we may apply these words of Solomon; † "Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man: for God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."

AND now let me hold out the Scriptures of both Testaments, as books of a kind most extraordinary and marvellous! Through a long series of ages, a succession of legislators, warriors, and writers continued to predict the coming of a Divine Person for the instruction, reformation, and re-

* Prov. xvi. 6.

† Ecclesiastes, xii. 12, &c.

redemption of mankind: and it is astonishing to observe in the Scriptures, how the Providence of God, through numberless generations, turned the vices and the virtues of men to the forwarding of this event. At the time appointed came this Divine Person, and accomplished the purposes which had been foretold. The Gospels, which record the principal transactions of Christ's continuance on earth, bear all the internal and external marks of credibility, that can be required for the strongest evidence to historical facts. Among other consequences, which have ensued from His advent, is one peculiarly deserving our notice at this period: it is, that *in general*, wherever the doctrines of Christianity have prevailed, the manners of whole nations have been changed for the better; and in proportion as those doctrines have been taught with greater purity and simplicity, the effect resulting from their intrinsic excellence has been apparent, by an adequate degree of national virtue and private happiness.

KNOWING then, and seeing, as we do, these facts, how earnest should we be in preserving that treasure, which others in derision have rejected! How vigilant should we be in guarding that pearl, the price of which others cannot estimate! For a witticism, a sarcasm, a conceit, such as vanity can make, and blasphemy applaud, they have disregarded the Gospel, they have persecuted Believers; and as though they had never heard of Christian philanthropy, as
 though

though they had never felt the slightest impulse of social humanity, infuriate with rage unexampled in savage hordes, even on their own countrymen they have exercised oppression, they have inflicted unmerited death ; their sword is * “ made drunk with the blood ” of their fellow-citizens.

If it were possible to conceal from posterity such instances of insatiable revenge and malevolent ferocity, we could wish them to be blotted from the page of history : nay, rather let them be written in characters indelible, let them be † “ graven with an iron pen and lead, in the rock for ever,” as a monument to the present and future generations, reminding them of the extreme and enormous wickedness into which man can be plunged when living ‡ “ without God in the world ! ”

BUT as infidelity and impiety do lead to such consequences, let us, who adore the Father of Heaven, who worship the Saviour His Eternal Son, who pray to the Holy Spirit for Divine Grace, let us endeavour to evince by our practice that we will maintain our principles of Natural and Revealed Religion, at the risk of every consideration valuable in this life ! And unavoidably engaged as we are in hostilities with those, whom from motives of self-defence, and for the preservation of our civil and religious blessings, we are prompted and bound to resist ; let us with all humi-

* Jerem. xlv. 10.

† Job, xix. 24.

‡ Eph. ii. 12.

lity, yet with that religious confidence which a just cause inspires, implore * “the Lord of Hosts to be with us, the God of Jacob to be our refuge :” and resolved to be true to ourselves, though not putting our sole trust and confidence in man, let us glory to profess before all the world, that † “We will remember the name of the Lord our God.”

* Pf. xlvi. 7.

† Pf. xx. 7.

T H E E N D.

with that religious confidence which a just cause implore * "the Lord of Hosts to be with us, the Jacob to be our refuge : " and resolved to be true selves, though not putting our sole trust and confidence , let us glory to profess before all the world, that will remember the name of the Lord our God."

* Pf. xvi. 7.

† Pf. xx. 7.

T H E E N D.