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A

SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE THE

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

AT SAINT MARY'S,

NOV. 5th, MDCCLXXXI.

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FELLOW OF NEW COLLEGE.

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MDCCLXXXI.

A SERMON, &c.

EXOD. XII. Ver. 24, &c.

Ye ſhall obſerve this thing for an Ordinance to thee and to thy Sons for ever. And it ſhall come to paſs when ye be come to the Land which the Lord will give you, according as he hath promiſed, that ye ſhall keep this Service. And it ſhall come to paſs when your Children ſhall ſay unto you, What mean you by this Service? That ye ſhall ſay, It is the Service of the Lord's Paſſover, who paſſed over the Houſes of the Children of Iſrael in Egypt, when he ſmote the Egyptians, and delivered our Houſes.

THIS is the inſtitution of that great and ſolemn feſtival which they who hold to the Law of Moſes ſtill continue to celebrate, and which to us under the Chriſtian diſpenſation is memorable, inaſmuch as it prefigured our deliverance from a bondage worſe than Egyptian. For our Almighty Father, agreeably to the nature of the religion he at that time eſtabliſhed, did ordain this redemption of his peculiar people, to be a type of the ſpiritual redemption of all men from the dominion of ſin and death.

But the primary and viſible deſign of this ordinance was to perpetuate among the Children of Iſrael a memorial of

what happened when God brought them out of Egypt: not that they needed ſuch, to keep alive their reſentment againſt thoſe ſevere oppreſſors; the forgiveneſs of injuries was as yet neither inculcated as a duty, nor applauded as a virtue. But to preſerve a remembrance of God's wonderful power ſhewn in their deliverance, to mark his eſpecial protection and care of them, and to awaken in their minds a proper and conſtant ſenſe of their dependance upon him, and the gratitude due for ſuch ſignal favours, it was neceſſary that a law as ſolemn and laſting as this ſhould be eſtabliſhed; it being a melancholy truth, and well confirmed in the hiſtory of this ſingular people, that often the affronts of men are remembered when the goodneſs of God is forgotten.

Moreover, this inſtitution of an annual feſtival, the earlieſt on record, is alſo the moſt perfect in thoſe eſſential circumſtances which are requiſite to give due force to ſuch an ordinance. It was to commemorate a great and acknowledged benefit, and it was by an authority which had a right to bind the conſcience: and thus it ſtands forth a pattern of what a national feſtival ſhould be. It muſt be for an acknowledged benefit; becauſe no man can honeſtly expreſs a gratitude for that which he does not eſteem to be a good: and it muſt be ordained by an authority that hath a right to bind the conſcience, which this Jewiſh law moſt undoubtedly was, being from the direction of God himſelf. But where the divine command is wanting, as there is no authority in one man to bind the conſcience of another, this religious

gious ſervice muſt be left to the dictates of each man's judgment; and therefore general conſent alone can hold the place of this authority, to eſtabliſh a commemoration by a general act of religious worſhip.

And upon this ground it is that we perform (if we perform duly) the ſervice of to-day, which two ſignal bleſſings have made dear to the people of this land, to judge of their value from the general acquieſcence of all wiſe and good men in that thankſgiving which the legiſlative authority hath recommended. For on this day were We ſaved (like the Children of Iſrael) by a religious and a civil deliverance: firſt, when that remorſeleſs conſpiracy which darkly plotted againſt our Church was prevented and puniſhed; and again, when that lawleſs power which had begun to hunt with havoc among our civil rights, was reſiſted and overthrown. It is hard to conceive there can be found that dull and unthankful mind which muſt not feel and acknowledge theſe benefits. Nevertheleſs, if this nation ſhould contain any of ſo blind and cruel a zeal, as to believe that all means are juſtifiable for promoting religion, or any of ſo abject and ſlaviſh a ſpirit, as to think that all the evils which tyranny may inflict are to be endured in a paſſive obedience—to ſuch (if any ſuch there be) this day brings no juſt occaſion of triumph: for ſo, they would rejoice in the defeat of that attempt which they cannot diſapprove of, and in the ſucceſs of that reſiſtance which they condemn. Except the heart make thankſgiving here, the ſacrifice of the

lips is a vain, if not a wicked oblation. No man ought to join in a religious ſervice which he cannot conſciencioufly diſcharge: and ſo ſacred is the right of private judgment in this matter, as pertaining to the perſonal concern between a man and his Maker, that no human authority whatever can controul it; nor command any man what he ſhall call good and what evil, to pray that God would grant him one, or avert the other.

But where the mind is convinced, and a man with the teſtimony of a good conſcience can keep the ſervice, it is not only allowable and fit, but indiſpenſably his duty; both in reverence to the voice of national wiſdom appointing it, and in acknowledgment of that Providence by which all things are governed: and hence ariſes the obligation to obſerve a religious ordinance; the end of which ordinance ſhould be, to remind us of what we receive at the hands of God, rather than to commemorate what we have received from the hands of men; and therefore may exiſt long after the occaſion that gave riſe to it. Thus the obſervance of the Paſſover was to continue among the Jews after all their connection with Egypt had ceaſed; when time muſt have fully repaired the injuries they had ſuſtained, and when all reſentment muſt be obliterated. But the duty of praiſe and thankſgiving to God was a duty of perpetual obligation, and therefore made an act of religion for all their ſucceeding generations.

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In like manner the commemoration of this day may well confiſt with perfect charity towards the Roman Catholics, and with ſome relaxation of thoſe penalties by which their religion has been reſtrained. And if the lenient temper and liberal ſpirit of the age ſhould farther operate in favour of a ſect from whom ſo little is to be apprehended, what man of humanity would not rejoice? When dangers are gone by, can it be unfit to remove the ſeverities that were ſet as a guard againſt them? However expedient the penal laws originally were, to protect an unſettled Reformation, or to prevent an evil that threatened the ſtate; yet theſe ends being obtained, are they longer neceſſary? If they are not neceſſary they are unjuſt. The benevolence of our Religion and the generoſity of our Country plead loudly for thoſe fellow-ſubjects who have ſo many years endured their hard lot in patience and ſilence: cut off from the deareſt rights of citizens, and living as aliens in their native land, only for retaining the religion of their fathers, and the old inhabitants of that land before them.

But if it be imagined that in good Policy the Catholics ought ſtill to be held in a rigorous ſubjection, it muſt be either on account of their numbers, or their diſpoſition, or the influence and practiſe of that Church with whom they hold communion. For their numbers—when that idle report of their increaſe ſome few years ſince induced the ſtate to take an account of them, it appeared how inconſiderable they were, and how cauſeleſs was the alarm at that time.

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Of their diſpoſition, let their peaceable and loyal behaviour bear witneſs; but eſpecially that dutiful and affectionate Addreſs which they preſented to the Throne, at a ſeaſon when duty and affection were moſt welcome. A numerous and formidable armament appeared on our coaſts, and the boaſted ſtrength of our navy ſhrunk from before it. We then began to perceive that even in our own dwellings we were not invulnerable, and the iſland was overcaſt with the terrors of an invaſion. In that gloom of doubtfulneſs and danger, came forth the Roman Catholics, and by this Addreſs gave proof of a reſolution to ſtand or fall with their country. It was an offer of their fortunes and lives in its defence: it was a declaration of hoſtility againſt thoſe to whom they were ſuppoſed to wiſh well; it therefore muſt have made them the peculiar objects of reſentment to the invaders that then threatened us. It ſhewed that they had no foreign views or connections, but caſt themſelves into the hands of their own Government; and from that only ſought their protection, and expected their relief. I truſt that neither their ſufferings nor their merit will be forgotten

For the power of the Roman Church, it is no longer an object of dread; that haughty Church deſcribed heretofore as ‘ a mint of woful factions and combuſtions, of ‘ treaſonable conſpiracies, of barbarous maſſacres, of horrid ‘ aſſaſſinations, of inteſtine rebellions, of foreign invaſions, ‘ of ſavage tortures and butcheries, of holy leagues and pious frauds

' frauds through Chriſtendon' *—but her enchantments no longer prevail againſt reaſon and learning; and the kingdom is departed from her. She is fallen, unaided, for her power was pernicious, and unpitied, for in her greatneſs ſhe felt no pity. Her own children have ſet themſelves againſt her; and they whom ſhe foſtered in her tyranny have combined to ſpoil and inſult her. She is abandoned to ſolitude and decay. She, whoſe word troubled the inhabitants of the earth, and who made the kings thereof her footſtool, is now left without ſtrength to reſiſt, or reverence to awe, the weakeſt oppoſer; and only by the moderation, or the jealouſy of her neighbours, is preſerved from utter deſtruction.

Yet no ſooner was a ſmall relief granted to this ſuffering ſect, whom both humanity and policy forbade us to perſecute, than ſuch a diſcontent and clamour was excited, as in their effects to threaten the very being of the State. A ſet of men, without the pretence of a grievance or the ſhadow of a danger, tumultuouſly importuned the Legiſlature to violate the faith, and ſacrifice the dignity of its act to their unreaſonable apprehenſions; and in the obſtinacy of their purſuit opened a way to the moſt dreadful and unexampled enormities. The Capital of the Proteſtant world was abandoned to rapine and flames; the Laws were without force; the Magiſtracy aſtoniſhed; and this free Country looked then for ſafety and protection to a Power whom it had always re-

* Barrow's Works. Vol. I. p. 159.

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garded with jealouſy. Such were the conſequences of that unhappy zeal, which after all was perhaps as much without knowledge, as it certainly was without diſcretion and without charity.

For if civil ſecurity be not the meaſure of religious reſtraint, to what other ſhall it be referred? Can the bounds of toleration be marked in the blindneſs of party; or ſhall our penal Code be dictated by the mercileſs policy of fear? There might be ſome pretence for the experiment, if by theſe means error could be rooted out, and true religion and peace could be planted in its ſtead. But Law, which ſpeaketh the language of command and threatning, hath no means of making proſelytes to Truth, which is taught only by reaſon and perſuaſion.

It is indeed the duty of a State to guard itſelf againſt all probable dangers: but that ought to be done only by laws that are neceſſary, enforced by ſanctions ſtrictly proportioned to the offence and the peril. When the penalty exceeds that degree, or when it is deſigned to ſupply the duty of watchfulneſs in the Magiſtrate, that law is tyrannical. Happily the temper of the preſent time partakes more of indulgent liberality than of ſevere caution; and perhaps (the duties of religion and the rights of ſociety being well underſtood, and our mutual forbearance and charity enlarged) that deſirable period may arrive, when we ſhall all ſerve God, if not in

the unity of ſpirit, which is moſt perfect, yet in the bond of peace, which beſt becomes the diſciples of Chriſt.

The true end of civil ſociety is the preſervation of the civil rights of its members; and it is incumbent on the Magiſtrate, to whom the protection of thoſe rights is entruſted, to exert his utmoſt vigilance, prudence, and fortitude in their defence: and he being bound, by the very nature and reaſon of his office, to make the welfare of the ſociety the ultimate object of his care; it is no leſs his duty to prevent the dangers he foreſees, than to remedy the evils he cannot prevent: yet muſt he not interfere by diſcretionary acts of power, for the Magiſtrate's diſcretion may be made a ſcourge for the people; nor yet in matters purely religious, for with ſuch he has not, of right, any concern whatever.

But if the Magiſtrate ſhall refuſe to fulfil that great purpoſe of his inſtitution (the protection of the people), and much more, if he ſhall betray the truſt repoſed in him, and become himſelf a danger to the ſtate, in ſuch circumſtances the community is at liberty to act for itſelf; and is juſtified, provided the members in their conſcience believe, that leſs damage will follow from ſo doing, than from ſubmitting to the evil.

It was this manner of acting (or in other words, the duty of ſelf-preſervation) that brought on the ſecond great deliverance of this day; when the people, having received

many provocations from the intrusion of papal superstitions, and sustained many injuries from the insolence of arbitrary power, arose to vindicate their truly indefeasible rights. And because they saw that their grievances had sprung as much from the assumed authority of the Prince as from his bigotry, they judged it expedient to secure themselves with equal precaution against both. They would no longer receive from his precarious bounty, that which they claimed and demanded as their right; nor would they allow the Head of their own Church to hold religious principles which made him the subject of another. The throne was placed on the firm basis of a Protestant religion and a bounded prerogative: and thus was completed for us that noble structure of freedom which the Revolution established. It was planned in wisdom, and founded in justice; and it was erected on the ruins of a royal house—a glorious and awful monument, to tell mankind—THERE IS NO GREATNESS OR DOMINION ON EARTH SO SACRED, BUT IT MUST FALL BEFORE THE LIBERTIES OF THE PEOPLE.

To us, who with grateful commemoration solemnize this day, it remains that we offer up the duty of praise and thanksgiving to God for these signal and repeated instances of his protection. And so just a claim has this day to every sentiment and expression of our joy, that it were devoutly to be wished there was no room for unwelcome reflections, and that every unquiet thought could be banished from it. But though it be our duty to rejoice in the day of prosperity, in

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the day of adverſity we are bid to conſider; and God hath ſo ſet the one againſt the other before the people of this nation, that if we will rejoice in this day, we muſt rejoice with fear. For at what time were we ſo expoſed to the dangers and calamities of war from the united attempts of ſo many and ſo powerful enemies? Or when did our unhappy diviſions, and our other manifold ſins and provocations, more conſpire to bring down His judgments upon us? Awakened from the dreams of conqueſt, we behold the moſt thriving branch of our empire engrafted on the power of our natural foe, and defend with difficulty our remaining poſſeſſions. It is a war of apprehenſion and diſmay; and even now is every one liſtening in the anxiety of fear for the news that the next hour may bring him of ſome heavy calamity. It will come; it will come quickly; and it will be but the beginning of ſorrows.

And to what can we attribute this alarming ſituation, but to the juſt viſitation of God for our offences? It is therefore every man's firſt duty to examine himſelf, and ſo to regulate his future life, that his guilt may not add more to the too heavy burden of this land. But this is not the whole matter: the cauſes of national proſperity and diſtreſs are often to be found (where they are naturally to be ſought for) in national practiſes and principles. And ſurely that ſtate cannot but be in a perilous condition, where, on one hand, Corruption maintains a wide and increaſing influence, acknowledged but uncontrouled, and prodigal beyond example: on

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the other, a people indulge themſelves in idle and luxurious diſſipation; ſo to avoid reflections too ſerious and too diſtreſſful, becauſe they care not, or deſpair of the commonwealth. Yet theſe, and other practiſes as bad as theſe, are but as diſeaſes which a ſound conſtitution may throw off, and again recover its priſtine health. Much worſe is the caſe when national principles are vitiated; when (for inſtance) it is aſſerted with a wicked boldneſs that corruption is uſeful and neceſſary to the Government; or, when thoſe plain and ſacred doctrines of civil liberty, which no ſophiſtry can perplex, and no ſtrength of argument confute, are ſlandered with the injurious name of empty ſpeculations.—Theſe are dreadful and fatal tokens; and unleſs ſome antidote can ſubdue their malignity, the conſtitution in which they are found will ſoon decline into that ſtate of agony and deſpair, when its evils ſhall be both intolerable and incurable.

Let us then turn to that Being for deliverance who hath ſo often interpoſed to ſave us; and implore him to give us that due ſenſe of all his mercies, that hereafter we may ſhew forth his praiſe, not only with our lips but in our lives, that iniquity may not be our ruin. Let us look up to him for protection from the impending danger, and addreſs ourſelves to his goodneſs in this hour of our diſtreſs. If in juſtice and neceſſity we have drawn the ſword, do thou, O God, go forth with our hoſts. But if for our manifold ſins it is thy pleaſure to chaſtiſe us in this fearful war; if thou wilt deſtroy our greatneſs, and this renowned land muſt be hum-

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bled before its enemies; we beſeech thee to teach us that true affection and dependance on thee, which muſt be our refuge in the time of our abaſement: and grant us grace to receive whatever thy ſecret wiſdom hath appointed for us, with a contented mind, and a chearful reſignation to thy will; humbly hoping, that even in thy wrath thou wilt remember mercy; and knowing aſſuredly, that whether in proſperity or afflictions, we ſtill are inſtruments in thy hand, O Father Almighty, to promote thy gracious deſigns for the general good of thy creation.

THE END.