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1 Bamford's Coffee House March

THE
BISHOP OF ST. DAVID'S
S E R M O N:
PREACHED BEFORE
THE HOUSE OF LORDS
ON
TUESDAY, JANUARY 30, 1781.

Die Mercurii, 31^o Januarii, 1781.

ORDERED, by the Lords Spiritual and Temporal in Parliament assembled, That the Thanks of this House be, and are hereby, given to the Lord Bishop of St. David's, for the Sermon by him preached before this House Yesterday, in the Abbey-Church, Westminster; and he is hereby desired to cause the same to be forthwith printed and published.

ASHLEY COWPER, Cler. Parliamentor.

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S E R M O N,

PREACHED BEFORE THE
LORDS SPIRITUAL AND TEMPORAL,

IN

THE ABBEY-CHURCH, WESTMINSTER;

ON

TUESDAY, JANUARY 30, 1781.

BEING THE DAY APPOINTED TO BE KEPT AS THE DAY OF
THE MARTYRDOM OF KING CHARLES I.

BY

JOHN LORD BISHOP OF ST. DAVID'S.

L O N D O N,

PRINTED FOR LOCKYER DAVIS IN HOLBORN.

PRINTER TO THE ROYAL SOCIETY.

MDCCLXXXI.



R O M. XIII. 7.

RENDER THEREFORE TO ALL THEIR DUES, TRIBUTE TO WHOM TRIBUTE IS DUE, CUSTOM TO WHOM CUSTOM, FEAR TO WHOM FEAR, HONOUR TO WHOM HONOUR.

GOVERNMENT is considered, in Scripture, as the ordinance of God; and Christians are exhorted to be subject to the *higher Powers*, not only *for wrath*, but also *for conscience sake*. Neither CHRIST, nor his Apostles, any where tell us, what measure of obedience is due, nor what those *higher Powers* are, to which our submission is required. Before this can be known, recourse must be had to the laws and customs of the Nation, to which we belong; and, when we are properly instructed in that point, our next care should be, to pay our Rulers that degree of obedience, to which we find them justly entitled. Agreeable to this is the Apostle's direction: *Render to all their dues, tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour.*

honour. Had our Forefathers attended to this advice; had each of those Estates, of which our Constitution is composed, kept within their due bounds, without making any encroachments on one another; or, after some encroachments had been made, had legal remedies been applied for correcting the evil; the *execrable Parricide*, which we have just now expressed our abhorrence of, could never have been committed; nor can the like ever happen again, if their Posterity will be so wise, as to take warning from their example. And what caution can be more proper, or necessary, since there are, in every Kingdom, and at all times, men of factious, fickle, restless, dispositions; who, being dissatisfied, for some pretence or other, with the form of Government they live under, are watching for an opportunity to disturb the public Peace, in order to bring about a change? Some are prompted to act, in this manner, from motives of avarice, or ambition; some from disappointment or revenge; and others merely from a love of innovation, and a fond desire of trying new experiments. But, whatever their motives may be, they are always very active in endeavouring to form a party, and make Converts to their particular opinions; and, in this business, they commonly succeed but too well, by reason of the many specious and plausible arguments they have
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have to propose; and which may easily be advanced on a subject of so complicated a nature, as Government is, whether it relates to the Church, or the State.

To instance, in the first case :

What Religious Establishment, in any Country, was ever so well framed, as to be approved of in all its parts? What articles of Faith and Doctrine, were ever so judiciously drawn up, as to leave no room for doubt or scruple? What mode of Worship was ever so well settled, as to admit of no exception; or what form of Discipline was ever so nicely adjusted, as to be liable to no objection? From this short sketch it appears, how easy it is for men of querulous discontented tempers, to expose the defects and imperfections of any particular system of Church-polity; and, by that means, to raise, in the minds of its members, *first* a dislike, and *then* an aversion to it.

The same reasoning may be applied to civil Establishments: For what civil Government was ever so perfectly contrived, as to answer all occasions, all exigences? Indeed, the wisdom of man cannot reach far enough to view all the possible variety of circumstances; and yet till this can be done, many cases will happen every day, for
which

which no provision is made. And besides this imperfection, which is common to Government in general, has not every different form and species its own peculiar defects and inconveniences? and how often are these encreased by the unavoidable mistakes of the persons, who are entrusted with the management of Public Affairs? So that, partly from the original imperfections of Government itself, and partly from the difficulties, which necessarily attend the Administration of it, there never was a period, when factious and discontented Men could not find some pretence for public complaint; and, in unquiet times, when the minds of the People are inflamed, and ready to receive every impresson, what mischief is not to be apprehended from persons of this turn and character?

The Treason of this day is a melancholy proof of the truth of this observation; and we need only look back to the annals of the last year for a farther confirmation of it: I mean the tumults in this great Metropolis: when an universal conflagration seems to have been intended, and was, in part, effected; when the most unprecedented acts of violence were committed in our streets; when the best and gravest Characters were insulted; when the Houses
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of Parliament were besieged, and the civil Authority set at nought: and all this was done by an unthinking multitude, who had been seduced from their Allegiance by mistaken notions of Liberty, and worked up to an incredible degree of infatuation, by repeated libels on Government, by gross misrepresentations of public Measures, and all the other wicked Artifices, which men, watching and labouring for a change, are wont to make use of. Thanks be to God, who so far blessed the means, which were taken for suppressing the fury and madness of the People, that we were soon delivered from our apprehensions of any farther acts of open violence. I wish, I could add, that the spirit of Sedition, which occasioned these commotions, had subsided at the same time. But how can this be said, when we find, that the same factious engines are still incessantly at work? when we, every day, see so many publications, which have no other tendency, but to destroy all principles, and to set men free from all Government; and when those, who cannot disturb the Publick Peace in this way, take an unbounded licence in speaking evil of those Powers, which God hath placed over them. These were the beginnings of the *Troubles*, which we are here assembled to lament; and lest the same evil seeds should grow up to the same height of wickedness, and again produce the same fatal

consequences ; nothing can be more agreeable to the design of this Solemnity, or more suitable to our present Situation, than to offer, in this part of our discourse, a few remarks on the duty of Allegiance, in opposition to those loose opinions, which have, of late, been so industriously propagated : and, with this view, it will be proper to mention that the general rule to be observed, on the part of the People, with respect to their Governors, is *Obedience* : the extent of which may be ascertained, by considering the end and design of Government. Now the end and design of all Government is the Good of Society, especially of those, who are governed, they being in all nations by far the most numerous. If it should be asked, whether the end and design of Government will entitle our Rulers to *Obedience*, when they pursue measures, which, instead of promoting the Public Weal, are detrimental to it : The answer is, that, Government being in the hands of fallible men, mistakes sometimes must unavoidably arise, and, in consequence thereof, bad measures will sometimes be pursued, and still the end of Government, which is the Good of Society, may be, in the main, promoted ; and when this is the case, greater mischief would ensue, from the subversion of Authority, than from a concurrence with it ; and as the least evil is to be chosen, no doubt can arise here, how Subjects ought to act. And
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when only wrong, or impolitic measures are pursued, the case is still plainer; since, if every man had a right to judge and determine for himself how far the means adopted, by the ruling Powers, were likely to attain the end, and consequently how far he ought to obey the Laws, there could be no such thing, as Government.

But farther, as the object of Government is the happiness of the whole community, and not of a part only, it follows, that *Private Interest* must, in all cases, give way to *the Public*, and consequently that no man, nor any set of men, can justly resist by force the civil Authority, on account of any private dispute; though it should be allowed, that they were very hardly treated. This is the dictate of true Patriotism: This is agreeable also to the spirit of genuine Christianity*.

As no cause can be a proper ground for resistance by force, unless, as we have shewn, it is most important in its consequences, and most general in its tendency; so must it also be absolutely clear and certain.

* St. Matthew v. 39. 1 Cor. vi. 7.

Resistance being a desperate remedy, it is indispensably necessary to inquire, whether the disease, under which the State is supposed to labour, be desperate also; and if there should remain the least doubt of this, the only safe way is to follow the general precept, which prescribes *Obedience*: for resistance and disobedience are considered, by the ablest writers on Government, as necessary evils at best; and we shall stand condemned, by all the rules of prudence and good sense, if we have recourse to the evil, before we are convinced of the necessity*.

But do all encroachments and innovations in matters of Government take their rise from the People only? Do they not sometimes proceed from our Rulers also? May not they be as justly said to encroach, and to be fond of innovations, when they transgress the bounds of the Constitution; when they assume a greater degree of Authority, than is allowed to belong to them, and make their Will, and not the Law, the measure of their Government? Most

* See Grotius, Lib. I. Cap. IV. Puffendorf, Lib. VII. Cap. VIII. where the Duty of Allegiance is treated of at large, and settled on the soundest principles.

undoubtedly

undoubtedly they may : since our Governors have not a better title to their Powers and Prerogatives, than the People have to their Rights and Liberties. Indeed the Powers and Prerogatives, with which the Magistrate is invested, are so many Trusts, lodged in his hands for the defence and protection of the People, and to enable Him the more easily to carry on the necessary works of Government : and this brings me to consider, more particularly, the case of that unfortunate Prince, who is, in an especial manner, the Subject of our present meditations.

Charles, in the former part of his Reign, had endeavoured to subdue the high spirit of his Commons, by a resolute adherence to his own Measures ; by a rigorous exertion of Prerogative on all occasions ; and by assuming too frequently a greater degree of Authority, than could be warranted from Precedent, or justified by the law of the Land ; but finding, from experience, how unsuccessful this mode of Government had proved, and observing what discontents prevailed in all parts of the Kingdom, and how much He himself was sunk in the esteem and good opinion of his Subjects, He resolved to alter the whole course of his Conduct, and, if possible, to regain the confidence of his People, by a more pliant Behaviour.

In consequence of this new system, the Royal Assent was granted to several Acts, by which the Crown was abridged of some of its most valuable privileges; and, besides these concessions, many more were made of equal importance, so that, one would have thought, an entire stop must have been put to every species of complaint; especially, as the Noble Historian informs us, *that there was not now a Grievance, or Inconvenience, Real or Imaginary, to which there was not a thorough Remedy applied* *. But notwithstanding this, still greater, and more exorbitant demands were insisted on; and at last, nothing would prove satisfactory, but a Law to empower the Parliament to sit, as long, as they should judge it necessary. *Even to this did the King consent, and did, by that means, as effectually dethrone himself, as if he had made a formal resignation of his Crown and Sceptre.*

In return for so many instances of compliance, Charles had a right to expect some indulgence at last from his Parliament; but in vain did He look for this; in vain did He hope, that they, instead of continuing their inroads on the

* Clarendon, Vol. I. p. 262.

prerogative, would heartily concur in some plan of accommodation, to which, at the expence of his power, He had so earnestly invited them. Unfortunately for the King, his concessions, however great, were but little regarded, as his sincerity was suspected; though, if that matter be examined with the candour it deserves, there will not perhaps appear to be quite so much grounds for this dishonourable charge, as some are apt to imagine: since the King gave up many of the most important rights of the Crown in the beginning of his *Troubles*, when his Affairs were far from being desperate. And, after the Parliament had involved the Nation in a civil war, He shewed at all times, even in the midst of his greatest success, an inclination to *treat*; and, in order to stop the effusion of blood, and restore peace to his distracted Kingdoms, He scrupled not, on several occasions, to stoop below the dignity of a Crowned Head; till at length the Parliament itself was satisfied, and voted the terms He had complied with to be *sufficient Grounds for settling the Peace of the Nation* *. 'Tis true, indeed, this *Treaty* was never carried into execution; but it did not fail, because the King had not granted enough, or because He was insincere, or refused to fulfil his engage-

* Whitelock, p. 359.

ments: but it failed, because the Army, being now become the Masters of the Parliament, would not suffer them to act agreeably to their late Resolution. The Great Usurper, in concert with his principal Officers, had already formed the daring design of bringing his Sovereign to Justice, and of punishing, by a judicial Sentence, his Prince for Tyranny and Misgovernment; and, as this *Treaty* stood in the way of this Grand Scheme, an end must be put to it; and, in order thereto, the Commons were forced to renew their former vote of *non-addresses*, and to declare the concessions on the part of the Crown *unsatisfactory*.

But the best and most indubitable proof of the King's sincerity may be taken from his Conduct, during the last period of his life; when He was deprived of all Power and Authority; without any prospect of assistance from his Friends, or mercy from his Enemies. Then, even then, did He possess his soul in peace, and wait for the event, with meekness and serenity. He never lost sight of his own Dignity, or forgot that He was a King, when all the World beside had long forgotten it; when He was treated with coldness and indifference by his Foreign Allies, and with scorn and contempt by his own People. When He
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appeared before *the pretended High Court of Justice* *, where his own Subjects were his Judges, and when He afterwards submitted to their cruel sentence : In this dismal scene, under all these trying circumstances, He said nothing, He did nothing, that misbecame Him, either as a King, or a Christian. And to what can we ascribe all this meekness, and tranquillity ? To what can we attribute so great a degree of courage and constancy, but to his sincerity, and the consciousness of having done all in his power, to correct the fatal mistakes of the former part of his Reign, by making such great and unexampled concessions, as must have proved a good ground for a *safe and lasting peace*, had a proper regard been paid to them ?

Thus fell this unfortunate Prince, who was endued with qualities, which might have rendered both Him, and his Subjects, happy, had He lived in better days : but an undefined Prerogative, and an intemperate Zeal in matters of Religion, prevailing at that period, created such difficulties, as no one of his Predecessors had ever experienced. If the limitations, respecting the rights of the Crown, had been fixed and determined, there is reason to believe, that

* History of Independency, p. 105.

his integrity and love of justice were such, as would have prevented Him from exceeding the bounds of his Authority. But it was his misfortune to ascend the Throne of this Kingdom, at a time, when the Principles of our Constitution were but ill understood ; when all the Precedents, for a century, and upwards, had been too strongly on the side of arbitrary Power ; when our antient love of Freedom and Liberty had been gradually reviving from divers causes, and was gaining fresh vigour every day ; and, what greatly added to the embarrassment, the contest about civil Rights began then to grow more fierce and violent, by having all the disputes and quarrels in religious matters, blended and incorporated with it. By this means, conscience was called in to animate and inflame the popular fury ; and it is not easy to conceive, how much this circumstance increased the difficulty of the times : If, therefore, the King's skill in Government was not found equal to a situation so truly perilous, is He not, in some degree, an object of our pity ? And will it not better become us to throw a veil over the errors of his political Character, than to treat them, before this Assembly, with harshness and severity ? Especially, if it be observed, that even now, so long after the event, when we ought to know more, and to see farther, it is hard to determine, what measures could have effectually secured the Authority of the Crown, and, at the same time, have preserved the Tranquillity of the Nation.

There is no pleasure to a feeling mind in viewing the miseries and distractions of former Ages; nor can there be any real advantage, unless we endeavour to grow wiser, and better by the example, which the impartial page of History sets before us. From the memorable Revolutions, which happened in our Country, during the period we have been considering, Princes may learn how dangerous it is to assume more Authority, than the Laws have allowed them.

Charles himself was sensible of this, some years before his death; but the discovery was made too late. The constant exertion of Prerogative, added to the repeated acts of arbitrary Power, in the former part of his Reign, had raised such fears, and jealousies in the minds of the Leaders among the Commons, that they were resolved to reduce the regal Authority, as much as possible. The attacks, indeed, on the power of the Crown, were made by regular approaches; but one demand followed another so fast, and was so easily complied with, that, in a very short time, the entire sovereignty of the State was, in a manner, transferred to the Houses of Parliament. In vain did the *Royalists* attempt to prove, that the concessions already made were sufficient to secure the Public Peace.

In vain did they shew, how unreasonable it was to suspect any longer the honour and good faith of the King. In vain did they inveigh against the madness and folly of departing from our Constitution, now more exactly poised and adjusted, in order to adopt the visionary schemes of wild Enthusiasts. In a word, in vain did they represent the certainty of a Civil War, the anarchy and confusion, which must unavoidably ensue, and the great danger, to which Liberty itself would be exposed, if the Parliament persisted in their encroachments. To these Reasons it was thought sufficient to *reply*, that the concessions, already made, were only sacrifices to necessity, and would be withdrawn, as soon as a favourable opportunity presented itself: That no one could doubt of this, who recollected the behaviour of the Crown soon after granting the Petition of Right: That the King had imbibed such lofty ideas of Monarchy, in his early years, that it was absurd to expect he would sincerely renounce them, in his more advanced age; and lastly, that the Constitution had been of late so much in danger, and the fears and apprehensions of the Public so frequently alarmed, that nothing less could abate the one, or secure the other, than a total abolition of that Authority, from whence the *discontents* had arisen.

And

And as such Revolutions will serve to shew, how extremely hazardous it is for Princes, to transgress the sacred bounds of the Constitution; so will the same events teach us, what great national calamities may be produced by a *misguided Zeal* in matters of Religion.

The popular Leaders, who first projected the plan of subverting the State, could scarcely have entertained, even in thought, so vast a Design, certainly could never have attempted it with success, had it not been for the *Zeal* in certain religious points, which at that time, like a Frenzy, seized the Nation, and for the *wild Enthusiasm*, which every where accompanied it*. Many of our Historians, who lived at that period, and were eye-witnesses of what passed, agree in this; and some, with great appearance of truth, consider the civil commotions and disorders, as proceeding rather more from religious controversy, than from the political disputes concerning power and liberty. Indeed, had the King strictly confined himself within the bounds of his Authority, there is reason

* Whitelock, p. 122.

to believe, that the Sectaries could never have acquired influence sufficient to overthrow the whole Constitution; and, when the power of the Crown was brought so low, as to depend on the Parliament, one would have imagined, that a Reconciliation between the King and his Subjects might easily have been effected; and nothing, in all probability, could have prevented it, but the unhappy diffentions in matters of Religion *. Difuse of Parliaments, Violations of the Petition of Right, arbitrary and illegal Taxes, with some other Grievances, were loudly complained of, and did doubtless very much inflame the minds of the People: but the Grievances, which seem principally to have raised the popular Resentment, were of a different sort, and related almost entirely to the ceremonies of public Worship, the vestments of the Clergy, and a few other points of little or no consequence. For the sake of which both Parties, (such was the infatuation) the *One* to retain, the *Other* to abolish, did not scruple to throw the Government into the most violent convulsions; and is it not a disgrace to that Age, and to our Country to find, that the troubles and disorders, of those

* History of Independency, part II. p. 78.

times, may be, in a great measure, ascribed to so mean and unworthy a cause* ?

But if a set of factious *Zealots* overturned the State in the last century, what security have we, that the same may not happen again in our days ? To this I answer, that it will be scarcely possible to excite the like disorders at *this time* by any of the means, which were *then* made use of.

The Prerogative is now fixed, and determined, and, besides, is so limited and circumscribed by Law, that it is hardly in the power of any Prince to stretch the royal Authority beyond its just bounds. Certain it is, that in the struggles for Liberty, the Crown lost some of its greatest Privileges, but what it lost in weight, it gained in security ; as there now remains no longer any room for those jealousies and suspicions, which formerly subsisted in this Country, and which must subsist in all Governments, where the boundaries of Authority are not known and acknowledged. The first regular definition of our]

* History of Independency, passim.

Constitution, according to our present notions of it, made its appearance in the midst of *the Troubles*, and, as it was published by the King's order *, nothing could have been better calculated to adjust the disputes then on foot; had not the heats and animosities of the times been too violent to submit to so gentle a remedy. But the Glorious Revolution is the *Period*, when the principles of our Constitution were settled; and the power of every Branch of it marked out, with a precision and exactness unknown to our Ancestors. This is an advantage, of which Englishmen may justly boast; as theirs is the only mixed Government in the world, where the Authority of every Part hath been exactly and distinctly defined.

And as one great source of civil *Discontent* is removed by this means, so, with regard to matters of Religion,

* In some of the Declarations, which were published from time to time, by the King's order, during *the Troubles*, and particularly in 1642, a Definition of our present Constitution may be found; and these seem to be the first tolerably accurate Descriptions of our Government published by Authority in the English Language.

Rushworth, Part III. Vol. I. p. 731, &c.

we may observe, that the wild *Enthusiasm*, which proved so very favourable to the designs of Faction in the last age, is now subsided; that the religious controversies about certain points of no great moment, and which were carried on by both Parties, with the most unchristian heat and rancour, are laid aside and forgotten; and lastly, that they, who are disaffected to our ecclesiastical Establishment, have not the same pretences for raising clamours against it, as their Predecessors had in those unhappy days; since no vexatious suits can now be commenced for non-conformity; and all, who, on scruples of conscience, dissent from our Discipline and Worship, are suffered by Law to hold public Assemblies, and to serve God in their own way; and, in an age so favourable to spiritual and temporal Liberty, as the present, every other reasonable indulgence will certainly be allowed; and, for the Peace of the Church, and the Safety of the State, we may be permitted to hope, that more than this will never be asked on the one hand, or granted on the other*.

* See Bishop Ellys's Tracts on Spiritual and Temporal Liberty, p. 116, &c.

F I N I S . .