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A  
S E R M O N

PREACHED AT

**St. Nicholas, Deptford,**

ON TRINITY MONDAY, JUNE 2, 1817.



A  
S E R M O N

PREACHED

IN THE

PARISH CHURCH

OF

St. Nicholas, Deptford,

BEFORE

THE RIGHT HON. THE EARL OF LIVERPOOL,

MASTER,

AND

THE ELDER BRETHREN

OF

*THE CORPORATION OF TRINITY HOUSE,*

ON TRINITY MONDAY, JUNE 2, 1817.

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BY

JOHN DAVISON, M.A.

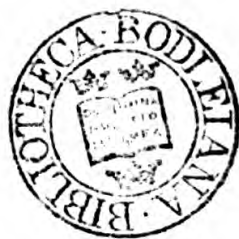
FELLOW OF ORIEL COLLEGE, OXFORD.

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OXFORD,

AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS FOR J. PARKER.

1817.



TO THE  
RIGHT HONOURABLE  
THE EARL OF LIVERPOOL,  
MASTER;  
TO  
JOSEPH COTTON, Esq. DEPUTY-MASTER;  
AND THE REST OF  
THE ELDER BRETHERN

OF THE  
*Corporation of Trinity House;*

*THIS SERMON,*  
PRINTED AT THEIR REQUEST,  
IS INSCRIBED,  
WITH GREAT RESPECT,  
BY THEIR MOST OBEDIENT SERVANT,

JOHN DAVISON.

*Oriel College,  
June 14, 1817.*



ROMANS xii. 11.

*Not slothful in business ; fervent in spirit ; serving  
the Lord.*

IN the following discourse I propose, first, to consider these words of the Apostle, as they encourage to active usefulness in life ; next, to speak of the value and advantage of Societies instituted for the furtherance of objects of public utility ; and lastly, to advert to some of the peculiar objects which come under the care of your ancient Incorporated Society.

The three brief sentences of instruction which I have recited, “ Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, “ serving the Lord,” though apparently disunited and independent, we ought to consider as having a connection in the Apostle’s mind, and making out together the following combined doctrine : “ Be not slothful in “ business, but add to the discharge of it, fervency and “ earnestness of spirit, and this do, with an eye to the “ service of God.” The passage thus understood is in agreement with many others in the Gospel. For our religion is not a recluse and inactive thing, meant to be buried in a closet. The several duties of life which



attach to men as members of society, whether in a narrower or wider connection, are explicitly owned and stated by it, and the right performance of them all is promoted by something either in its direct precepts, or its general spirit: so that a vacant, barren, and unprofitable life, without any design of usefulness in it, is as much at variance with the demands of the Gospel, as habits of sin are with its prohibitions. For taking a large view of our present state, but also a strong and distinct one, the Gospel spreads its light diffusively upon the whole, and meets us there, in the mixt relations of public, social, and domestic duty, leading us forth to action, and instructing us how to act: setting before us indeed an interest of unspeakable value "in the glory that shall be revealed," in the rewards of a life to come, but annexing those rewards to a certain fulfilment of appointed duty, under an explained probation of character, in the present scene, and drawing our hearts and hopes to the final triumph of a Christian faith, through a course of benevolence to man, and active improvement of the gifts of God.

In particular, it is full and positive in requisitions applying to the distributive welfare of society: inso-much that it may be reckoned one of the most violent perversions of religious doctrine, which in an age of darkness exalted the secluded exercise of a monastic

virtue as the perfection of a Christian spirit. Read but the discourses of our Saviour, or his parables, or read the page of his Apostles; and you will see they all imply, that the persons to whom they are addressed are engaged in the active and mixt duties; and were they not so engaged, that those discourses and writings might in great measure have been spared. The matter contained in them would have nothing to attach upon. It would be addressed to beings not in the state which the instruction supposes, and would be instructing them in sentiments and offices which their actual occupation did not meet.

This is true even of the more retiring qualities of the Christian character. Meekness, forgiveness of injuries, humility, preference of each other in honour, could have no room to be practised, if every man, as he is a Christian, were to be shut up in solitude in a sphere of his own. The meek and chastened spirit, which is the sum of these duties, could neither be tried nor acquired, were the collision and intercourse of other men's feelings and interests so studiously avoided, as that we should have nothing to concede, nothing to forgive, nothing to forbear.

As to the whole of the active part of a Christian charity, it manifestly derives its very being from a participation in the concerns of our fellow creatures. Bounti-

fulness, beneficence, personal kindness, personal service, are only so many other modes of expression for a manner of living with others, and living for them. They are wholly relative in their feeling and their practice; and the same divine authority which enjoins them, places us in that busy and peopled world which gives them their proximate motive, and their opportunity of action. In short, the very love of our neighbour, which is the second great commandment, must fall to the ground, unless we keep a station of intercourse with him, and make him the better for our existence; and even the first commandment, the love of God, is made to have its evidence and its perfect work in the fulfilment of the second.

It is therefore justly observed by the great master of knowledge, "that there was never any philosophy, religion, or other discipline, which doth so plainly and highly exalt the good which is communicative, and depress the good which is private and particular, as the holy faith<sup>a</sup>."

They moreover who have considered at all that moral and reasonable soul, which the Gospel makes us so deeply concerned to improve, are well aware of this part of its nature, that it is not by a mere feeling, nor a ge-

<sup>a</sup> Bacon, Advancement of Learning, book ii. p. 77.

neral purpose, towards any given duty, nor by the most devout meditation upon it, that we can secure to ourselves the habits and dispositions of mind we desire to cultivate. Actual performance of the precise duty is the very medium of their acquisition, and the bond of their perfection. Nothing could avail to fix in us a right disposition of any permanence or value, if we did not lay hold of real occasions to put the disposition into act. And in this respect the Gospel is full of wisdom, as it is full of power. For whilst it sets before us the most commanding and comprehensive motives of obedient feeling, principles of influence which take the mind in its strongest points, it reduces always the matter of duty to some plain specific exercise, some direct and substantial instance of application, to make us see at once the difference between a notional and a real virtue. It first gives life and energy, and then turns that life and energy to use. Its last instructions come home to this; "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." (Philipp. iv. 8.) Hence therefore besides the communicated good, which follows from doing the work that lies before us, we may perceive

that our progress in the Christian virtues is to be measured only in that way. Whereas much of the good intention or good feeling which men often indulge without being disciples of religion, is useless to themselves and to others. It is urged by no decisive obligation "to patient continuance in well doing." It transpires in a speculation of benevolence. It strikes no change upon their settled character. It wants the sober proof of its worth, that of doing good. As it bestows no blessing, so it inherits no praise; nor does it come within the promises of that day, when "men shall give account of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil."

Some of these observations, by which I have endeavoured to recommend a right notion of the Christian character, as cast in real life, and perfecting itself in practice, might have been omitted perhaps before persons who have given so clear a proof of their sound apprehension of duty as belongs to the declared objects and purposes of your Society. But the union of religion with all our graver concerns is in a manner the main, I had almost said the only work, of our lives here. And to point out the consistency of the one with the other, and the strict relation they bear to each other, may be useful to their joint interest. It is a vain faith and piety which does not penetrate the concerns of life.

And the business and concerns of life, which perhaps is the other doctrine more necessary to be insisted on, are as much in need of being sanctified by a principle of religion. Happy are they who, while they tread the earth, look up to heaven, and who, in the face and light of heaven, turn their religious strength to the praise of the Giver of it through the good of his creatures. Far be it from us therefore ever so to impoverish or vilify the plan of our lives as to take up the occupations and engagements of the world, as the mere creatures of the world; instead of rendering to our Saviour and our God that unequivocal homage and honour, which makes His will the oracle of our daily sentiment, and His favour the ultimate aim of all our doings. For without this, our labour and industry and busy plans, after all, may be found out to be such as they are, bred in corruption, and without a holding in eternity; destined to perish with the world out of which they were raised; they a wreck, and we castaways.

I pass on to speak of the advantage of Societies instituted for the furtherance of objects of public utility.

It is obvious that such associations grow freely out of our nature, not such indeed as it is in its ruder state, which is too selfish for the common good, and too violent for orderly action; but in that happier conjuncture of things, when man finds a better level under the in-



fluence of religion, civil order, and moral improvement. It is there, that the better feelings of our kind being trained and brought forward, look abroad for connection and cooperation; that men attract one another to a common cause; and their union becomes safe and useful under the auspices of responsible personal character, and with the sanction of an acknowledged public confidence. Their spirit towards their common object is engaged by something of a public stipulation; and they act for it with more effect by union and concert. When that object is really a good and praiseworthy one, such societies are like main-works and fortresses in the map of life against the evils and deficiencies which lie around it. I need scarcely say, that endeavours collected to a point by confederation, if there be an evil spirit working in them, are in the same degree the more powerful to do harm. That their ends and aims be explicitly understood, is a requisition issuing out of the most necessary laws of civil society. Combinations within the general society must claim under its implied approval, and be for purposes in concord with it. Under this qualification, they are either its dangerous domestic enemies; or its powerful labouring allies, to fill up its general views for the production of good.

The great number of institutions confessedly of a religious, benevolent, or useful design in this country,

may pass for one of its distinguishing excellencies. They are the offspring of the improved mind of the country, fostered in the shade of civil security: and as they serve to invite to the profit of some serious purpose the social dispositions which might otherwise run to waste in a frivolous indulgence, with no rational designation upon it, nor leaving any benefit behind it, they contribute their share to the increase of the whole stock of public virtue, as well as of public service. For we should greatly err if we did not look at institutions and establishments not merely as depositories of public utility, but also as nourishers of the virtue and personal qualification that are to produce it. Private beneficence indeed has its duty always at hand. But there are interests and services of value to the community, which no single or separate efforts could either adequately arrange or accomplish. When therefore by the hallowed patriotism of such foundations, a well ordered system of any public utility has been set on foot, it enlists into its service the zeal of those who have the power and the will to think for their neighbourhood or their country, and turns their endeavours into a safe and judicious course, instead of leaving them to be lost in the desultory, uncombined, and ill-applied attempts of their own private suggestion. Such institutions give a fixed point and a home, as well as a system, to the purpose



which they adopt. They afford a place, therefore, where all who can may cast in their share towards it, to the greatest advantage. Nor is it unworthy of being mentioned, that they lend a fair opening to mutual esteem and good will; as men meet in them not like competitors for an interest, nor to divide the labour of a compulsory duty; but with the liberal heart of men pledged to each other in a free service: and learn to love their brethren and companions for their common work's sake.

The prevalence of such societies formed for patriotic or beneficent purposes may be seen in all your more populous cities. To a stranger's eye the picture of your metropolis especially is marked by the buildings and establishments belonging to them. They fill up much of the crowded scene which meets his observation; as the business connected with them occupies no small part of the time and thought of their zealous and numerous supporters. Not even your opulent traffic, with its many hands in motion, is more active, than your public beneficence in its generous efforts and offices through its several departments.

In that course of change however to which all human works are liable, it will happen sometimes, that institutions of ancient utility lose their application to present use, or decline from that industry and vigour

with which they need to be supported ; and remain then as monuments of a departed benefit, sacred even in its ashes. The substantial credit and efficacy of your institution however remain to this day unimpaired ; and if I did not fear to offend by the indelicacy of praise, I ought in following the general voice to say more, and state that the administration of it is as highly maintained, as it is certain that its ends and purposes, instead of being passed away, are rather daily rising in their importance. To maintain in strictness and purity the general spirit and principles of your Corporate Body, will continue therefore to be the generous task of those who aspire to the chief praise in its direction. They are its confidential guardians ; and neither their virtue nor their wisdom must stop short in taking the necessary securities against that decay, which sometimes from the silent encroachment of time, sometimes upon the apology of a distributed care, is apt to insinuate itself into our fairest works. That "fervency of spirit" which the Apostle recommends will here have its place. It will be the proper force to counteract any remission of your duties, and enable you to transmit entire and undilapidated the charge you have received.

In touching upon the value and importance of those objects which your Incorporated Society has espec-

ally entrusted to it, as means of public service to your country, and consequently as well worthy of your zealous and enlightened superintendence, I must entreat your favourable hearing, whilst, to satisfy the duty of this occasion, I am lead to address you on a subject, which the annual discourses that have gone before on this day, and still more your own personal judgment and experience bring home to your apprehension better than any thing can do which I have to say. But things already in esteem with you will bear perhaps with less offence a repeated mention. I shall restrict myself however to a very sparing use of the topics which offer themselves, under the persuasion that you will understand more than you hear, and that what I may omit will not be lost in your own spontaneous recollections.

Your services then comprehend several interests placed under your care, of no mean consideration in any maritime country, in your own of the very highest public concern. Besides your offices of jurisdiction, and the maintenance of your extensive and well directed charities; let me name especially that which is perhaps the greatest of your privileged duties, the duty of selecting and recommending, and in some degree of holding yourselves answerable for the training of those expert men, upon whose skill the welfare of your navigation and the safety of your ships and seamen, mainly, under Provi-

dence, depend. The Pilot's art, which you have to guard, is a branch of skill that may draw the admiration of those who know how to estimate the resources and faculties of the human mind applied to the practical wants of life. That element upon which he has to act, full of wonders in itself, its ways and movement, is the fit but perilous ground for the proof of his science; and the combination of ingenuity in the vessel which he undertakes to guide, is not greater than is that intelligence which gives direction to its course, and discerns a highway for it through the trackless waters.

That whole service in which the peculiar guiding skill of these intelligent men bears so conspicuous a part, is among the most generous of the necessary labours of man for turning to account that charter of dominion, which the Creator originally gave him over this world he inhabits. Its intercepting seas were meant to provoke his enterprise. Its divided climates and countries to diversify his enjoyments, and his arts for obtaining them. The dispersion of his kind was to be counteracted by the bonds of a mutual communication. The works of God were to be seen and known in the great waters<sup>b</sup>. And how rich and various in its store is this world made, to create the desire, invigorate the faculties, and reward the labour of that master being, who has re-

<sup>b</sup> Psalm cvii. 23 to 32.

ceived for a time the delegated possession of it. Sea and land yield him their increase. Productions are removed to a distance to be recommended by their cost and peril of acquisition. The whole society of the species consolidated by the intervention of a mutual want, and the variety of a partial privation: and many wholesome qualities of morals and understanding, with the general circulation of arts and knowledge, growing out of the meaner pursuits, which are secured in their activity by the progressive demands of our mere physical nature. The worse is here made to serve the better part. For that some may eat the fruit or wear the clothing of foreign lands, what labour and skill to be laid out in the attempt, and how richly freighted does the vessel return, in experience, in discovery, in information, in the value of hardships patiently endured, and of dangers bravely encountered. And this commerce of the world is daily becoming an object which the wise and good man may contemplate with the greater pleasure, as he sees it purged of one evil which an inveterate avarice had long been permitted to reckon among its acquired possessions.—May the healing hand of British benevolence stop only where its means shall fail!

If we look to this same service as one of the defences of our national security and independence, it is not possi-

ble to say any thing too great for its importance. It is, by a natural appointment of things, the right hand of an island's strength. The surrounding seas draw spontaneously to them, both for near and for distant communication, in the circuit of our coasts at home, or for the access to a remoter traffick, the best part of our moving industry and enterprise. The resources thus created by the spur of peaceful exertion become the appropriate foundation of the public force; in as much as they afford by the easiest transition habits of peace ready for the duties of necessary war, and nurture the elements of the strength of the state without separating and sacrificing, at a cost, a large portion of its productive and useful population. Policy of system and opportunities of nature thus go together. Great exigencies may for a time call for a leaning towards another side. But it is not likely that our national councils will ever long vary from this habitual and standing policy which imposes upon your Society the office of guarding in some measure the fountain-head of our national hopes and strength.

In the character of the men who compose the whole body of your naval population, their intrepidity, their knowledge of duty, their hardy and laborious habits, their expanded kindness of heart, and their loyalty, are matter of just praise to them, and congratulation to



their fellow subjects. May these qualities long continue to make them dear to their country! Whatever they are, it cannot be ascribed solely to their occupation and mode of life; for natives of other lands have the same lot with them in that; but it must be ascribed in no small part to their being born in the influence of their country, and reared in the spirit of its mixt blessings, and blending the ties of it with the working of their mind and feeling, whether at home or abroad. The wind blows as healthily to the seaman of another land, and the wave meets him with as hardy an encounter. The difference is, that with your own his country follows him wherever he is bound, and possesses him with its spirit under every sky.

But as every state of life has its temptations, so in the seaman's in the ordinary ranks of that life, there is one point to excite the anxiety of the Christian moralist. The defect, now alluded to, is one commonly felt and confessed to be as prevalent among our own seamen as any other; it is a disposition to intemperance and excess, after relief from duty, carried farther than any rule of morals can allow, and to the rule of the Gospel most repugnant. The access to this fault probably exists in their condition of life, when in the course of a long voyage they pass through alternate peril and leisure, fatigue and indolence, and have to

encounter a shock, in this vicissitude, by no means favourable to moral sobriety : and this again is succeeded by the licence of ease and abundance on shore. You will not suppose that I speak in any other sense than that of a sincere affection for these brave and enterprising men, nor without much mistrust of my own judgment to do more than solicit your attention to the defect in question. If however, in the midst of your various duties, your consideration should be turned towards this point, there is no doubt that whatever suggestions might come recommended by your authority, would be received every where as they would deserve to be, coming from persons whose knowledge of all the circumstances of the service makes them the best judges of what is fit and advisable to be done in it. Perhaps however it may be mentioned, that the frequent intervals of leisure which the seaman enjoys while at sea, lead one to consider whether they might not be made use of to lay the ground of more steadiness and sobriety of moral apprehension. That leisure itself, I believe, is often more a burthen to him, in the course of a protracted voyage, than a relief. To be long unoccupied is itself one of the greatest evils. The most established virtue is not fit for it. Might not those seasons then be occupied with his entire good will in his own concerns in some way likely to make him wiser and better?



And since instruction has been found practicable even at an adult age, might not this instrument of improvement be put to a trial, at least in the more numerous ship's companies, with a hope of his receiving more distinct notions of strict religious duty, and wearing off some part of the grossness of an untrained mind by the practice of thought in the course of instruction?

The sense of religion, as a feeling, is observed to be rather quick and strong in the sea-faring life; but it acts with great uncertainty upon the occasion, and is often of a debased and superstitious kind. It is a sense however ready to promote the force of instruction, and deserves to be taken in hand by a better culture. Whatever is prudent and possible to be done towards this end, I feel persuaded will have a candid consideration with you, as also that from no other quarter could any hints come so well recommended as by your judgment. They especially among you, whose former years have been the most largely engaged in sympathy and connection with this invaluable body of men, and whose exact knowledge of the whole nature of their service makes them masters of the practical subject, would have their country's best prayers and blessing attending them in any endeavour to add this one praise more to the character of the comrades and companions of their former meritorious labours. It may be highly necessary

to use caution, both as to the soundness of any instruction to be given, and the judiciousness of the arrangement to be made for it. But you will never believe that any quality of a sailor's mind, either in its strength or its bravery, can stand upon the sin of dissipation, or upon a moral ignorance. When it is considered how large a part of their time these men pass in a state of separation from many of the ordinary opportunities of a regular religious institution, we may see some apology for much of whatever is defective in them; but a cogent reason, at the same time, for endeavouring to qualify as far as possible their peculiar disadvantage. The moving scenes of hazard and vicissitude, in the midst of which they live, might, to considerate minds among them, be improved into an effectual dissuasive from every sin. For such scenes are well fitted to put the conscience upon an examination of itself before Him in whose hands are the issues of life and death. They seem, therefore, to be all argument and motive for a resolved practical piety. The truth is, that they are argument and motive, but to good or to evil, as they light upon minds differently prepared.

To conclude. May we now commend ourselves to Him without whom our labour is but vain, and our counsels folly, in prayer, that "He would prevent us  
" in our doings with His most gracious favour, and fur-

“ther us with His continual help, that our works may  
“ be begun, continued, and ended in Him.” And with  
one heart and mind may we, in the unfeigned love of  
our country, commend it and all its welfare to His om-  
nipotent protection, beseeching Him, that, as hitherto  
He has blessed it with mercies unexampled in public  
security and public liberty, as well as in the knowledge  
of Himself and His revealed truth, He will still be  
pleased to be our mighty deliverer, and through the  
mediation of His Eternal Son will accept us, in our  
several imperfect endeavours for its good, to His glory.  
Amen.

Now to the everblessed Trinity, Three Persons, and  
One God, be ascribed all dominion, honour, and glory,  
now and for ever. Amen.