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S E R M O N,

&c. &c.

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# S E R M O N

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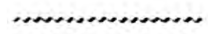
ABBEY-CHURCH, WESTMINSTER,

ON

*Tuesday*, JANUARY 30, 1810;

BEING

THE DAY OF KING CHARLES'S MARTYRDOM.



BY

WILLIAM-LORT

LORD BISHOP OF BRISTOL,

AND

MASTER OF TRINITY COLLEGE IN THE UNIVERSITY  
OF CAMBRIDGE.



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# S E R M O N,

&c. &c.

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JER. IV. 10.

*Then, said I, Ah, Lord God! Surely thou hast greatly deceived this People, and Jerusalem, saying, Ye shall have Peace; whereas the Sword reacheth unto the Soul.*

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**I**N various parts of the New Testament, precepts are given to the followers of Christ, on the subject of their conduct as members of *civil society*. They are directed to the duty of submission to magistrates; and are informed, that the privileges of the Gospel do, in no instance, make void the duty of allegiance, or absolve from human authority, the disciples of the Lord of Life.

It is not however unfrequently asserted, that the Gospel is entirely separate from every *political* consideration; that the conduct of Christians to civil governors, rests precisely on the same grounds as it did before the promulgation

of the Gospel; and that Religion and Government are subjects so distinct in their motives, principles, and objects, as that an attempt to unite them, is to lay the State open to the mercy of interested zealots, and to debase Religion by the intrigues of artful politicians.

Without entering into any minute disquisition upon this subject, or the various arguments to be derived from Scripture, from Reason, and from Experience, I would ask whether in these endeavours to keep distinct and separate the relations of Religion and Civil Government, the conscience of a real Christian can well discharge from itself so great a portion of duty, or tear off from the main body of religious obligation, so large a branch as that which embraces the community of which he is a member, and the degree and nature of that subjection which he owes to the Civil Magistrate.

The speculations of the wisest of the Heathen Philosophers, as they were, on every account far preferable to many of the abstractions of the present day, so do they peculiarly excel in their perpetual and pious reference, upon such occasions, to that Great Being, whom, amidst the gloom of Natural Religion, they dimly discerned.

In vindicating, however, the nature of Civil Government, and in thus wishing to submit our speculations to the general rules which the Scriptures prescribe, and our public actions, as much as possible, to the motives which it inculcates, I would, by no means, be understood, as if the minuter details of political prudence, the relative excellence of particular forms of government, the exact balance of submission on the

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one hand, or of resistance on the other, might be there traced. But, from admitting the *general* principles of the relationship to which I allude, and the perpetual superintendance of God's providence, such tempers will, most probably, be formed, as may incline both Magistrates and Subjects to render their conduct safe to themselves, and beneficial to mankind. I would add, that if, instead of looking for our rule of action, in the false and intricate speculations and systems of *human* artificers, we were to adopt an outline of conduct on the grand, luminous, *scriptural* principles offered to us by inspired Apostolical wisdom; I conceive that such proceeding would be far less at variance with human experience, than a superficial observer might be willing to suppose.

That this doctrine, however, though derived, from such a source, and by no means either doubtfully or equivocally expressed, does not meet with unqualified, or universal assent, requires but very little observation to allow. The duties, the measures, and the limits, of submission to Civil Government, are generally canvassed with an earnestness seldom bestowed upon other subjects: they are watched with a minute and circumspect jealousy, as objects of the last importance, of vital and fundamental concern. And of great and momentous consequence, indeed, they are! But, it may be observed, that, whether it arise from the tone and temper of the times; from the indefiniteness of the thing itself; or from any peculiar principle in our nature, few disquisitions upon this subject are carried on with the moderation common both to religious and moral topics; they are seldom listened to

to



to the *satisfaction*, much less frequently, to the *conviction* of the hearer.

I shall, therefore, avoid, as much as possible, the invidious task, of endeavouring to draw your attention to so unpromising an object, as the nature and extent of Civil Obedience on the one part, or of Prerogative and Power on the other: enquiries, ill adapted to the nature of our profession, and so well understood by those who hear me. *We* are in our proper place, when we deliver and enforce the word of God. *Our* station is then best filled, when we are least heard of, on the subject of mere *political* investigation. *Our* work is to make, and to keep men Christians, by endeavouring to possess them with a hearty belief of our Saviour's doctrines and promises, and persuading them to a conformity to his precepts, in their lives. *This* is our proper work. But at the same time, I would not wish to be misunderstood: it can never be conceived that it does not belong to a Clergyman, that it is not his office, that it is not his bounden and indispensable duty, to exhort Subjects to be faithful to their Prince, to live peaceably under his government, and to be obedient to the laws. We would not, it is true, busy ourselves with *politics*, as such; we would not meddle with questions relating to them: but we would preach plain lessons of duty, allegiance and fidelity to our Rulers; such as both Christ and his Apostles taught in all places wherever *they* came; and such as *ought*, at least, to hold, in every government of the world.

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The subject, however, of this day's solemnity, is not unfrequently, the occasion of some anxiety to the preacher. It is generally, a day of trial and difficulty to him, being considered, in some measure, as a test of *political* sentiments. He has to address himself to an audience of mixed or opposite persuasions; not liable to, or susceptible of the impressions which arguments on moral or religious topics might produce, but with minds frequently made up on the subject of the day.

If, therefore, he discourse of the duty, the honour and obedience of the Subject to the Prince, as violated upon this occasion, he may be supposed to think lightly of the liberties of the People: if, on the other hand, those liberties be dwelt upon, he may appear, and not without reason, to kindle into a flame that disposition to the turbulent assertion of them, which requires no helping hand to call it into existence.

In these conflicts of opinion, it generally, and almost necessarily happens (as I have observed), that the sentiments of the preacher himself, are of little avail; they neither weaken the opinions of those who come previously disposed to think differently from him; nor do they strengthen or add to those which coincide already with his own.

In such circumstances, he has only to discharge his solemn office, to the best of his abilities and conscience. And, under that impression, I would endeavour, not so much to dwell upon the *fact* or *history* of this day's solemnity (which is as well ascertained as that of any modern, cotemporary occurrence) as to derive from it such moral or religious inference, as may result

result most naturally from it, and to suit best the circumstances of the awful period in which we live.

It must ever be an object of melancholy speculation, to reflect upon the means by which this admirable fabric of our Government *may* be overturned; but which, we trust in God, rests in speculation only. We have a confidence that a constitution, which seems to be more than the work of *human* wisdom, will not be forsaken by Heaven, should men ever take counsel together against it. From our fallen nature we cannot hope for perfection, either in the characters of Civil Governors, or in the forms of governments themselves. We know that even every variety of expedient, cannot reach the root of the evils under which suffering humanity is destined to groan. We know, also, too well, that that which desolates and deforms the earth; which lifts the brother's hand against his brother; which drove the Angels from Heaven, and Man from Paradise, was the pride and haughtiness of his heart; Pride which disguises every passion, and palliates every corrupt affection of our fallen nature. Such an influence, therefore, a Christian will be forward to discard in every judgement which he passes on public affairs, and in every measure which he adopts: and being well assured that prayer and humility are the best attendants of a penitent's pilgrimage, he will not expect in societies collectively, that perfection, which experience shews him not to exist in the members of them individually.

Happy would it have been for themselves, happy for the succeeding generations, in different ages and countries, if our  
ancestors

ancestors had adopted and pursued, so cautious, calm and Christian a conduct! But in the progress of Civil contentions, they grew intoxicated with success and pride, forgetting soon the professions and temper, with which they commenced their opposition to the measures of their Monarch.

It is not meant to assert, that the power which the King arrogated at the beginning of his reign, did not exceed those bounds which the public welfare, and even national liberty prescribed to it. I would only be inclined to believe, that those claims arose not so much from a *spirit* of tyranny or domination, as from mistaken notions of the extent of his prerogative, which was, at that period, so uncertain and indefinite. But from every exorbitant claim he had completely receded, when war was commenced against him by those, who would, indeed, have left him *nominally*, his royal authority, but so hampered and circumscribed, as not to enable him to defend his *own* rights, or the liberties of the people entrusted to his charge.

The consequence was but too natural: for, after protracted years of oppression, confusion, and bloodshed, the awful exhibition was presented to the world, of a Monarch slaughtered in the face of day, after the mock ceremonies of an usurping court of judicature fortified by a military tyranny, amidst the unavailing tears of a great majority of his subjects.

After a deed so accomplished, it may fairly be asked, what *fruit* did they gather; or what portion of that liberty, under the name of which they had proceeded to so signal a catastrophe, did they secure to their country?

Alas,

Alas, we know too well, that after various abortive efforts to erect that country into a republic, they fell under the absolute usurpation of a single man, who scrupled not to trample upon their rights, their privileges, and their liberties, not with violence only and audacity, but with scorn, with insult, and contempt.

Could those who, on this day, were first tempted to violate their allegiance, and to lend themselves as instruments upon the occasion; could they have foretold the fatal consequences which were to ensue; could they have foreseen the winds and storms and tempests which were to arise; could they have taken in at one view, the confusions of a long war, the dissolution of a flourishing Kingdom, and the overthrow of an Apostolic Church; they would never, surely, have laid their hands to the great work of ruin.

But it is *our* duty to gather instruction from the awful moral thus presented to us; namely, from the great and fatal power of *delusion*; under which principle, more evils have accrued, more direful consequences been brought upon the world, than have ever, perhaps, been felt from any other source, or than a mind, which had not sufficiently considered its power, could readily believe.

It has, therefore, been frequently observed, that of most of the calamities which nations, as well as individuals have ever contributed to bring down upon themselves, the *real* causes of those calamities seldom seemed, at the outset, to threaten any probability of evil. They were generally disguised under some appearance, too specious to admit of  
doubt

doubt or examination ; they held out some plea, or offered some temptation, which it might not have appeared wise or creditable, perhaps, either to resist or to distrust.

How bare and empty, for example, would be the ranks of Civil Insurrection, if insurrection did not carry with it something *attractive* in its beginning; if it did not enter upon the stage, with a gallant show and seducing appearance? To have told the People, at first, that they were oppressed, and that, therefore, they could do justice, neither to themselves nor their country, without the *blood* of the oppressor, would have been too harsh a doctrine, and not to be endured. Many of the foremost in the subsequent catastrophe, would have shrunk at such a declaration, and been appalled at a prospect so hideous and unnatural. The proceedings, therefore, were more in unison with the *right* feelings of their nature; and the broad mantles of *Religion* and *Civil Liberty*, were thrown over the various passions and interests, which were, eventually, to accomplish their downfall.

I would, by no means be understood, as intending from hence, to reflect, generally, upon the conduct or memory, of those, who, at this eventful period, appeared upon this distracted theatre of the world, and took a share in its memorable events. But I think that I may venture, safely to rest much of the success of this day's transaction, upon the operation of *Delusion*.

With great openings for reconciliation; for healing the wounds which had been inflicted, even by the hand of the King himself, upon the Constitution; and with the great mass

of the people, panic-struck at the scenes which were passing, and open to a restoration of their accustomed habits of allegiance and dutiful submission, the passions and interests, and ambition and vindictive feelings of their leaders, were not so to be asswaged or mollified. They had recourse to every expedient, in order to cast an air of splendour, and to give a character of patriotism to their designs: and knowing well, the irresistible force of *supernatural* interpositions and appeals, they scrupled not to hold up their cause as sanctioned by Heaven itself: they were, therefore, the *Lord's* battles which they fought, and the war was the cause of *God*.

Under the influence of *such* impressions, by which the best feelings of their country's population were sure to be called into action, their progress was uninterrupted, and the strength thus nourished and compacted, became tremendous. It was in vain for the people by any subsequent contrition, to wish to retrace the steps of anarchy and desolation: the power to which that people had so largely contributed to give force, was now *self*-sustained; and the great machine, thus animated, hastened on its career, irresistible in its strength, and independent of their controul.

It has been said, that there is an inconsistency in the *different* modes of our solemnizing the event of the present day, and that of the deprivation of the Second James at the Revolution; as if they were alike entitled to an anniversary either of humiliation or triumph. But we may venture, I think, very confidently, to assert, that the principles on which the Civil War was begun against the Monarch whose death

was

was the occasion of this day's solemnity, were directly opposite to those which our ancestors so wisely and so successfully projected and followed at the glorious and necessary Revolution. At the same time, that they in this latter instance, provided against the abuses of monarchical power, they left the ancient prerogatives of the Crown, sound and untouched. They *defined* without *diminishing* its extent and operations; they *increased*, (we may venture to assert,) rather than *impaired* the veneration for a limited monarchy, by shewing, that even its *excesses* could not prevail upon them to forget the benefits accruing from it. They left, we trust, an everlasting document to posterity, that no rational and enduring scheme of free government *can* be adjusted to the temper, circumstances and permanent interest of the British nation, of which *kingly power* does not constitute the corner-stone.

In the consideration of this day's transactions, I would by no means compare them either in their commencement or their progress, to those of a country, now, unfortunately, so well known to us, for the variety and dimensions of its deeds and miseries, and for the portentous aspect which it has assumed. It would be needless in this place, to describe the progress of a people, whom we have now, for so many years, accustomed ourselves to contemplate with wonder; whose likeness we hardly know how to name, or boundaries to describe. I mean not to dwell upon their crimes; before our common Maker, both they and we, must either stand or fall. But, surely, they press too nearly upon us not to be referred to in all our serious and solemn reflections upon the frail and wretched



wretched nature of man and his concerns ; they come too closely home at all times to our bosoms ; but at the recurrence of this day's solemnity, they present themselves more immediately to our view, and, almost without an effort on our parts, become objects of awful recollection. •

I would not, however, (as I have said,) and I cannot compare together the proceedings of two periods so fatally distinguished in the annals of the world, further than in the *ignorance*, the dark and total ignorance, in which the humble instruments at both those æras, were kept back from a participation in the motives, with which, from the beginning, many of their leaders were influenced, and upon which, even to the consummation, *they* kept too steady and unerring an eye.

The character of our countrymen, was, in no instance, so distinguished from that of our distracted neighbours, as at those two *kindred* periods. When, equally, in our country as in theirs, every restraint seemed to be removed, and every passion was afloat ; when an equally subverted government appeared not only to give room to, but almost to encourage violence and devastation without limit, we read not in *our* accounts of those days, of domestic murders, of a private thirst for blood, of a direct and open denial, not of the Redeemer only, but of the superintending providence, and even existence of a God. This last enormity, it is true, was of no long duration among them, having been abrogated by the same legislative forms which first ordained and sanctioned them. An awful lesson being thus read unto the world ;  
namely,

namely, that amidst the wreck and ruin of every moral and religious obligation, it still pleased the Almighty to leave upon record one testimony of the indispensable necessity of a Revelation from his hands, by an acknowledgement of that necessity, thus proceeding from those very men, who were so interested in utterly rejecting it. Accordingly, however mortifying it might have been to their new and infidel Philosophy, something more, they found, was wanting, than their own feeble and wretched speculation, toward the coherence and consistency of any thing that might have even the *appearance* of society; and, for this purpose, they knew of nothing so efficient, as the permitting them to retain the emblems of their faith. And, therefore, after such a trial of the sentiments and feelings of their countrymen, were they compelled to restore, even to them, their rejected rites and ceremonies, and to replace their ordinances and their altars. The strong and despotic arm of Government, they were fully aware, might serve to awe them into submission to a certain extent, but the sanctions only of *Religion*, they found, were capable of controuling those passions, which human authority was insufficient to restrain.

But no experiment of such a sort, was made in this *our* land; from this last effort of sin and desperation, *our* countrymen were free.

I am aware, indeed, that the sacred name of Religion, was applied by the leaders of the various sects among us, to purposes very different from its temper and design: but, even amidst these abuses, some comparative regrets at the  
 commission

commission of crimes, were interposed to the ferocity of the human heart. The Bible was still suffered by them to remain open; *they* were not known to treat lightly, as a community, the written records of our Religion, or to throw from them their Sacraments and their Sabbaths.

But let us not, therefore, arrogate too much unto ourselves: it being sufficient ground for mortification to us to reflect, that with all the decent observance of the *theory* of Religion, an opening may yet, unhappily, be left in the human heart, to much misery and mischief, unless our faith extend beyond mere speculation, and unless practice be the constant companion of our belief.

Among the various duties thus imposed upon us, let us bear in mind, as members of Civil Society, what a mass of human happiness, every individual has, in that character, committed to his charge.

The several gradations of that Society, and the respective duties which it involves, are to be considered as intimately and essentially connected with the well-doing and even existence of the whole. From the various relationships which bind us to each other, and from that subordination so wisely and providently adjusted to our capacities, our infirmities and wants, so much harmony and happiness have ever been derived, as that no attempt to confound their distinctions, no one experiment of interference with their arrangements, has ever yet been unattended by evil proportioned to the success of those attempts.

If such, then, be the obligations imposed on those from  
whom

whom Society has no other than that *general* claim, which, whether well or ill constructed, it has a right to make upon the members who compose it; what an obligation, derived from every principle of gratitude, admiration, faith, duty, and affection, does not the community, of which *we*, happily for ourselves, constitute a part, impose upon *us*!

*Our* Country has hitherto been the wonder and envy of all the nations of the earth: amidst the desolation of other kingdoms, the groans, the tears, the ignominious prostration of them all, we alone stand erect in arms, and powerful in the possession of the commercial affluence of the universe. That these inestimable blessings have been purchased by sacrifices, and alloyed by a mixture of reverses and discomfitures, in the course of so long and unprecedented a struggle in defence of our own existence, and of the dying liberties of the world, cannot but be considered as the consequence of the very variable condition of all *human* success, even in contests carried on upon far more equal ground than ours. But, by the protection of Providence, the national *vitality* is entire, and impregnable, we trust, to any exterior violence whatever; destructible only by internal discords and convulsion.

We lament, on the present anniversary of humiliation, the effects of such discords, even at a time, when freed from every *outward* enemy, little danger was to be looked for beyond the precincts of our Island itself. But we are now to bear in mind, that there is, in this *our* day, a ravening and murderous eagle hovering over us; watching steadily our  
movements

movements, eager to convert our contests into a means of subjugation and slavery, and anticipating, with no doubtful or distrusting anxiety, his appropriate harvest from some future field of carnage and devastation.

That we may not, either by internal dissensions, or, by a neglect of duty and allegiance to the good and gracious King, with whom, the providence of God has continued to bless us, contribute to the endangering of those rights and liberties, and that happiness, which we have so long, and almost exclusively enjoyed ; that we may never be accessory to so desperate, so deadly, so suicidal a catastrophe, may God, of his infinite mercy grant, to whom be ascribed, as is most due, all honour, might, majesty, power and dominion, now and for evermore !

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