" THE DAMSEL IS NOT DEAD, BUT SLEEPETH."

A

SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

PARISH CHURCH OF ASHFORD, KENT,

ON SUNDAY, NOV. 16, 1817;

AND REPEATED

BY THE DESIRE OF THE PARISHIONERS,

ON THE

DAY OF THE INTERMENT

OF THE

Princess Charlotte.

BY THE

REV. JOHN NANCE, D.D.

RECTOR OF OLD ROMNEY, AND MASTER OF ASHFORD SCHOOL, KENT,
AND LATE FELLOW OF WORCESTER COLLEGE, OXFORD.

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ON VARIOUS

SUBJECTS AND OCCASIONS;

TO WHICH IS ANNEXED

AN ADDRESS

TO THE

Members of the Church of England

ON THE

NECESSITY OF A REGULAR MINISTRY.

A

SERMON.

ST. MARK V. 39.

The Damsel is not dead, but sleepeth.

[THERE * can be no greater proof that the feelings of our minds are pure, and the principles we profess stable and virtuous, than that they are susceptible of tender and lasting impressions. And the request, which has been made, that the discourse that was delivered from this place three days ago, should be repeated, is a convincing evidence that the melancholy subject of it has sunk deeply into your hearts. I sincerely wish it were within the scope of my humble

* The passages within the Crotchets were added on the day of the Funeral.

abilities to do justice, not only to the extent of our national loss, but to accord fully with your commendable feelings of regret and lamentation. To repeat on this day, what I delivered on Sunday, is by no means consonant with my wish; but as the request proceeds from so respectable a congregation, and the religious observance of the day seems so general, I should consider it arrogant in me to set my opinion against that of so many others, and certainly think it my duty to comply.

The words of the text, are taken from a parallel passage to that which is found in the Gospel appointed last Sunday. They appeared to me particularly appropriate to a discourse on the distressing event which has involved the whole nation in mourning, and are connected with one of the most striking miracles, which the Son of the Highest condescended to perform.]

Though seldom listened to by the opulent, and affectedly disdained by the powerful, the blessed Jesus attracted the attention of all. All wondered, though few believed. All confessed the power of his

word, though not many suffered his admonitions and doctrine to give their minds a proper direction. But grief softens the heart, and renders it fit and willing to receive truths, which in the sunshine of prosperity appear gloomy; and in every condition of human life are, to sinners, far from welcome. When the Jewish ruler was apprehensive that death would deprive him of his only child, he turned for assistance to Him, whom he probably would have otherwise despised; and whose sacred ministry he would have neglected for ever. When grief, therefore, and despair of human assistance, had seized his heart, he applied to the "man of sorrows;" he earnestly intreated him to enter his roof, he fell down and worshipped him. Having arrived at the ruler's house, the assistance of our blessed Lord seemed fruitless, the maid was already dead; all were weeping, and bewailing her loss, and were so convinced of the inefficacy of farther skill, knowing that she was dead, that they laughed him to scorn, in whose hands are "the issues of life," when he exclaimed, "Why make ye

this ado, and weep, the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth."

Omnipotent power was exerted to restore the ruler's daughter to her place in society: the same Almighty power will as effectually, and still more gloriously, be exercised in restoring our afflicted and paternal Ruler's Daughter to her place among the "spirits of just men made perfect." Though her loss has plunged her amiable husband into grief, which is inconsolable, and covered with mourning the whole population of this kingdom; yet we are not to grieve as men without hope. This calamity may be improved to a holy use; it may teach us lessons, which we should all learn, and when learnt, few will forget. Let it not be said, or imagined, that it is a circumstance which is common, or might have been expected; and no more than happens frequently in every parish in the kingdom. The death of our governors, or of those whom we expect to govern us, must make a greater impression than those of other people. It is fit it should. It sets the power of the all-sweeping hand of death

before the eyes of a whole nation. It warns us, that He, who "maketh sore, and bindeth up, who woundeth, and his hands make whole," strikes off the blossom of the most majestic flower, as well as the most humble herb of the valley. It convinces us, that all human power is vain, all worldly splendor transient, all mortal skill nugatory. It admonishes us not to set our minds entirely, or exclusively, on any thing this world can give; and that even when a temporal crown seems almost within our grasp, nothing is secure, or worth seeking for, but that crown of glory, which has been purchased for us by the blood of our Redeemer, and will certainly be secured to us by faith in his merits, and obedience to his word.

The ordinary dispensations of Providence often call upon us to regret the loss of our friends; we mourn at the departure of the infirm, and the aged; sometimes of those in middle life; and at others of the infant, whom, we fondly thought, would carry down our names and memories to the latest poste-

rity: but never have we of this generation had our feelings so universally lacerated, our hopes of public rejoicing so completely crushed, our expectations so entirely disappointed, as by the blow, which has broken the course of lineal succession. We well know, and must publicly profess, if we are Christians, that every visitation of Providence originates in mercy, which is infinite; and in knowledge, which far transcends our limited understandings. We have reason too to be thankful, that our next presumptive Ruler is no stranger to us; and we may rationally hope, that He, who has so long been honoured and esteemed, as the Head and Commander of an honourable profession, will be still more universally beloved, when he becomes the Governor of the people.

But still no expectation, no hope however fervent, or well-grounded, can counteract the general feeling of grief at the loss of a Princess, whose youth gave us confidence that we should all partake of the mild exercise of female power; and whose manners, whose known principles, and domestic vir-

tues, rendered her the pattern of royalty to all other people, and the darling of her own. —Her loss perhaps will render her virtues still more generally known, may I not say imitated, as it is consonant with the disposition of us all, more ardently to enquire after, and admire, merit, that no longer exists, than to admit its worth, while our eyes are dazzled by its brilliancy; I hope I need not say turned aside by a feeling of envy, or any latent wish of detraction. Envy towards the dead is a passion not commonly felt, though it be the only envy, that can be justly entertained, if the word can ever be used in a good sense. For they are those only, who are completely happy. They are those only, who are free from pain, anxiety, and affliction. "Blessed are the dead, saith "the Spirit, who die in the Lord." Blessed therefore may we justly call her, who, after two days of protracted labour, could hear the tidings, which blasted those hopes, that had supported her spirits during her pain, and crushed the expectations of the empire; who could reply to those notes of sorrow, which wound most severely a mother's

heart, with a meek, resigned, and truly Christian ejaculation. Blessed then be our Ruler's Daughter, for "the Damsel is not "dead, but sleepeth." To her all the honors and glories of this world are vanished, nothing remains, but the evidences of her faith, her hope, and charity; of those Christian virtues, which afford ample ground of comfort to those whom she has left behind, and which will assuredly be recompensed at the resurrection of the just. They are now her only treasure; they constituted her employment, her recreations, her principal delight on earth, they are laid up as an imperishable treasure, which neither rust nor moth can corrupt, and which no open violence, nor clandestine treachery can ever take away or steal.

Before she had an opportunity of evincing her resignation to the adverse visitations of Providence, at that trying hour, when she learnt that she had endured no common suffering, only to lament the death of her child, she constantly exhibited, she proved the sincerity of her faith in the Gospel by her domestic virtues. Without taking these

into our consideration, we cannot adequately feel the extent of the national loss: as they afforded examples of conduct in private life; the best patterns of individual imitation. In the first rank of excellence stand conjugal affection, a strict observance of the sabbath, and charity to the poor. And when we are assured, that she who was born to the highest rank in the most powerful kingdom in the world, was herself in early life, in the very blossom of her days, a model for the nation to imitate; that her practice in these respects was such, as made the virtuous and the pious admire and be glad;—and the profligate and infidels hide their heads ashamed: we shall then be convinced that the sable garb now so general, is not, as is commonly the case, the mere costume of fashion, but the genuine expression of the nation's grief.

We feel that the Almighty has taken away the best hope of the country. We sanguinely entertain the hope, that our departed Princess has exchanged a corruptible, for an incorruptible inheritance; that her crown is no longer temporal, but eter-

nal. God forbid, we should be compelled to fear, that she is removed from this lower world, that she may avoid any national calamity. That she is classed among those righteous who "are taken away from the "evil to come." An intimate knowledge of her virtues, when compared with the practices of the majority of this nation, and with the vices which we are daily implanting from our infidel neighbours, too well warrant such an apprehension. When we know that our departed Princess was remarkable for conjugal affection; and we read almost daily of the shameful crimes and perpetual divorces, that tend to make the marriage contract regarded more as a temporary convenience, and a means of gratifying sensual desire, than a divine ordinance, instituted by our great Creator, formed for the comfort of society, and the nurture and admonition of the young:—When we compare her undeviating attendance at her parish Church, with our encreasing negligence to the Divine command, "Thou shalt reverence my sabbaths;" with the general habits of the people; especially

that sinful practice of choosing the Sabbath as the day most convenient for travelling; or if we look round on the empty seats which our Churches exhibit in the morning; do we not feel some alarm at the contemplation of the blow, which the arm of omnipotence has inflicted on this nation?

When we are told that, not content with an outward profession of her faith, her husband regularly read to her a printed sermon at home, and that the evening of the Sabbath was spent, not in vain amusements, not in listless fatigue, not in impious exclamations, or in the no less guilty, though secret wish—"When will the Sabbath be "gone, that we may return to our diver-"sions;" not in any of those fashionable practices; but in preparing herself for the duties of her expected high and arduous station, by the perusal of the word of God; Do we not feel penitence and shame at following the vices of the world?—When we are informed that her money was expended in acts of beneficence, and the certainty of her death was announced to the neighbourhood by the mournful cries and sad

countenances of the poor, whose wants she alleviated, whose humble dwellings she visited, and whose children she taught: when we compare these well-known habits of the late presumptive Heir to the Crown, with the manner in which the blessings of Providence are by his creatures generally dispensed, have we not abundant reason to affirm, that she is taken out of this sinful world in mercy to herself? It is surely our incumbent duty to lessen the apprehension that this visitation of the Lord is not a mark of anger towards us. " Lord, who may " stand in thy sight when thou art angry. " Thou hast caused judgment to be heard " from Heaven, the nation trembles, and " is still."

Awful is every visitation of the Lord; and when any calamity is general, outward expressions of grief are particularly appropriate. But to apply our mourning to a proper use, we ought not to confine our distress to any particular day. The mourning most suitable to our condition in life, and our individual circumstances, is that which is engendered by feelings of mental

sympathy; the sorrow of which, if truly felt, is never obtrusive, but lies buried in the mind, and tends, I believe I may say invariably, to soften and amend the heart.

[Fruitless indeed would be our attendance in the house of God on this day, if the emotions of our hearts did not correspond with our outward expressions of grief; and little less than impious will be our practice, if, after having made this general exhibition of sorrow for our national loss, we suffer the anniversary of an incomparably more painful event to pass, without keeping it with the most solemn and heartfelt reverence, and real feelings of penitential affection; Need I explain my meaning more fully? Need I say, that if the day on which the Son of God expired in agony on the cross, to expiate the sins of a guilty world, to atone for our individual offences, be not observed with as much, if not more, solemnity and mournful veneration, our great accuser, at the last day, will not fail to compare our negligence, our scorn of our Redeemer's sufferings with our eager display of grief for a beloved and respected

mortal. I shall feel it my duty, if I should live, and occupy my present station, to remind you of your willing attendance in the house of God on this day, previous to the celebration of our Saviour's sufferings, of his voluntary and agonizing crucifixion. I think I know most of you too well to apprehend any large desertion of the house of God on that day of grief: and I have too good an opinion of all of you, not to be persuaded, that you are sufficiently aware, that to attend any place of divine worship, out of a wish to flatter, or gratify our earthly superiors, would be a mockery of God; and that its practical uniformity would be a national sin.

A principal, and perhaps a permanent, benefit arising from our meeting together on this day, may, and I fervently pray, will be found in the knowledge and manifestation that we are all one people, that we are all loyal to our governors, and humble towards our God. However we may differ from each other in forms of worship, our hopes, our wishes, our affections are the same. We all look up to Jesus as the

author and finisher of our faith. I trust we are all endued with the same spirit of charity and brotherly love.] Nor do I think that there are any now before me, who have not derived comfort, in more instances than the present, in the firm, the religious persuasion, that when any pious Christian departs out of this life, the same may be said of him, as our blessed Redeemer affirmed of the Ruler's daughter, "He is not dead, "but sleepeth."

Far am I from wishing to inculcate the doctrine, that death is the commencement of a state of torpor and insensibility. Reason, Scripture, even our dreams unite in convincing us, that the soul is never dormant: and that as soon as it feels itself exonerated from the burden of the flesh, it experiences joy or suffering in a state of more exquisite perception, of more enlarged intelligence, of more ample capacity. Our bodies, indeed, not only sleep, but moulder; they return to their native elements; "Dust we are, and "unto dust must we return;" but our immortal souls are reserved in a state of which we can form no adequate conception, till

they shall rejoin our resuscitated bodies; when the trump of the Arch-Angel shall sound, and they shall all rise in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and receive, at the Judgment Seat of Christ, an irrevocable sentence according to their works.

If our works, our faith, our charity, be conformable to the pattern which departed Royalty has set before us, we may at our last hour feel the same pious resignation, the same consoling hope. And when our sorrowing friends turn from beholding the last struggles of departing life, and leave our remains in the sad assurance, that they shall never more observe our eyes sparkle, or our voices speak; they may then apply the words of our blessed Saviour to themselves: "The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth."

THE END.

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