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A

SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE

CHAPEL OF WIBSEY,

ON THE

TWENTY-NINTH of NOVEMBER, 1798,

BEING THE DAY APPOINTED FOR A

GENERAL THANKSGIVING.



BY THE REV. J. BOOTH,

OFFICIATING MINISTER OF THE SAID CHAPEL.



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A SERMON.

ACTS xxii. 27, 28.

THEN THE CHIEF CAPTAIN CAME, AND SAID UNTO HIM, TELL ME, ART THOU A ROMAN? HE SAID, YEA.

AND THE CHIEF CAPTAIN ANSWERED, WITH A GREAT SUM OBTAINED I THIS FREEDOM. AND PAUL SAID, BUT I WAS *FREE BORN*.

AFTER St. Paul had, by permission of the chief captain, delivered an oration to the people in the Hebrew language, (*Acts* xxi. 40,) *to which they gave audience*, till he mentioned his having been sent unto the gentiles, they lifted up their voices, and said, *Away with such a fellow from the earth.* (xxii. 22.) And, as if preparing to stone him, *they cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air.*

While they thus vauntingly manifested their indignation against him, *the chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and ordered that he should be examined by scourging, (a punishment more severe and painful than beating with rods,) that he might know for what reasons they made such exclamations against him.*

And, *as they bound him with thongs, Paul manfully and religiously asked, “ Will the
 “ Roman laws permit you to deal thus with
 “ a free denizen of Rome, before any legal
 “ sentence be passed upon him? Let bar-
 “ barous states and tyrannical governments
 “ scourge or put to death their crouching
 “ slaves; yet free and imperial Rome suffers
 “ not any of her citizens to be thus shame-
 “ fully handled!”*

“ When the centurion heard that, he
 “ went and told the chief captain, saying,
 “ take heed what thou doest: for this man
 “ is a Roman.” (Ver. 26.) “ Then (in the
 “ words of the text) the chief captain came

“ and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a
 “ a Roman? He said, Yea. And the chief
 “ captain answered, With a great sum ob-
 “ tained I this freedom. And Paul said, *But*
 “ *I was free born.*

This eminent apostle, on different occasions, was compelled to speak on his own behalf; as in his Epistle to the Corinthians, by way of wiping off those aspersions which false apostles endeavoured to cast upon him, with a view to prevent his esteem amongst, and usefulness to, the Corinthian and other churches. Hence we find him saying, (though he counted all things, were they ever so dazzling, in the eyes of worldly minded men, but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord,) “ *how-*
 “ *beit, whereinsoever any is bold, (I speak*
 “ *foolishly,) I am bold also.* Are they He-
 “ brews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so
 “ am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so
 “ am I. Are they ministers of Christ? I am
 “ more.” 2 Cor. xi. 21—23. He also informs the Philippians, that he was “ circumcised

“ the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of
 “ the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the
 “ Hebrews; as touching the law, a Phari-
 “ see.” *Phil.* iii. 5. Which we may thus pa-
 raphrase: “ I was circumcised when eight
 “ days old, the age at which the law pre-
 “ scribes that all native Jews shall receive
 “ this ordinance, and therefore am no pro-
 “ selite; (they being circumcised when they
 “ embrace, and are initiated into, the Jew-
 “ ish religion.) My parents and predeces-
 “ sors were also Israelites, and Israelites of
 “ an eminent tribe; the tribe of the beloved
 “ Benjamin, who had so large a share in the
 “ affections of his father Jacob: both my
 “ father and mother were of Abraham’s race,
 “ and such was my zeal for the Mosaic law,
 “ that I was, by profession, a Pharisee, the
 “ strictest sect among the Jews.” The rea-
 son why the apostle enumerates these things
 is, to urge the Philippians not to rest in any
 thing short of the knowledge of Christ, and
 to induce them to forsake all for him, who
 is the head of all things to his church. *Ephes-*
sians i. 22.

In the subject before us, he pleads his being a Roman, with a view to shelter himself from the malice of his enemies; for though he was not afraid to die, knowing, that, if his earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, he had a building of God; an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens: (*2 Cor. v. 1.*) yet, at the same time, he knew it to be his duty, to use all lawful means for the preservation of his life. And here, let none of us suppose, that the apostle represents himself in this or that character, as exigencies require; sometimes saying he is a Jew, and at other times asserting himself a Roman, without reason founded in fact for his so doing: for we are to observe, that many persons, of different countries, obtained the freedom of Rome, either through favour, or by purchase; in which latter way, the chief captain here was invested with Roman freedom, having personally bought it, at no small price, as he himself testifies in the text, saying, “With a great sum obtained I this freedom.”

Now, as the privilege of citizenship was obtained to some by purchase, and conferred on others by favour, or as a reward for their meritorious services; as, you know, the government of Turkey hath conferred high privileges, dignities, and honours upon Admiral Lord Nelson, as the justly merited reward of his skill and valour, conspicuously displayed in the complete defeat, and total overthrow of the French fleet, off the mouth of the Nile, in the beginning of August last; or, as we sometimes see in our public papers, the freedom of the city of London, Dublin, and other famous cities, conferred upon deserving characters; so, in like manner, was Roman freedom conferred, in days of old: and this honour was not confined to individuals only, but was bestowed on whole favoured cities, and therefore all who were born within the precincts of such cities, were free born, or Romans by birth. Now, *Tarsus*, a city of Cilicia, the birth-place of St. Paul, was one which Rome had honoured with her freedom: therefore, our apostle was a Roman and free born.

As this great minister of the Gentiles could allege in his favour, and justly make his boast of, the advantages he derived from being connected with free and majestic Rome; so ought we highly to esteem and value the blessings we enjoy as natives of *Great-Britain*, and make our boast, with gratitude to God, of those invaluable advantages to which we are naturally entitled, by being born in high and imperial *Albion*, a country, which the Almighty hath surrounded by the ocean, and on which he hath bestowed *the empire of the main*.

We read in the preceding chapter, that the chief captain interrogated Paul, in the following words, which plainly show, that he looked upon him as a person guilty of very great crimes and atrocities: “Art not
 “ thou that Egyptian which, before these
 “ days, madest an uproar, and leddest out,
 “ into the wilderness, four thousand men,
 “ that were murderers?” (Ver. 38.) But Paul, in reply, says, “I am a man which am
 “ a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen

“ of no mean city.” (Ver. 39.) So say we to the calumniators of our happy government and constitution; to those who, through ignorance or malice, have the temerity to compare our martial battalions, or well ordered squadrons, which plow the briny deep, to bands of robbers, led forth by men of blood, to pillage, and spread devastation amongst mankind. This is by no means the case; ye misinformed! or ye wilfully blinded! those warlike phalanxes are *Britain's free born sons*, ranged in ranks of war, for the preservation of their birth-right; they are all citizens of no mean city; they belong to a sea-girt isle, famous indeed for arms, as well as arts, but a stranger to injustice and cruelty, the protectress of virtue, the vindicatrix of injured innocence, and the guardian of genuine freedom and rational liberty.

The conduct of our country, in the critical times which have lately been experienced, and which are not yet over, shows the dignity of its character, the wisdom of its councils, and the good sense and courage of

it's diversified inhabitants; while our insidious and perfidious Gallic foes have exhausted their serpentine wiles, and fox-like cunning, with a view, first to deceive, and then destroy. All their machinations, through the Divine blessing, have been happily frustrated, and we have reason to hope that they who have digged a pit for others, will shortly, through the mercy of God to the rest of mankind, fall into the midst of it themselves.

Psalms lvii. 6.

And when these sons of wrong and robbery, of rapine and violence, are tumbled from their usurped eminence, the inhabitants of the earth will have cause to rejoice; for, as the wise man observes, "when the wicked fall, there is shouting." *Prov.* xi. 10. We may reasonably suppose, that those will take the earliest opportunity of emancipating themselves, who now labour under their *tyrannical* and galling yoke; those who, by hearkening to their polished lies, have suffered themselves to be brought into worse than Egyptian bondage; those who have

weakly permitted the French to plant in their countries, the pestiferous tree of bondage and despotism, by a misnomer, called *the tree of liberty*, more baneful than the deadly poison-tree of Java; “ a vine of Sodom, and of
 “ the fields of Gomorrah; it’s grapes are
 “ grapes of gall; and it’s clusters are bitter;
 “ it’s wine is the poison of dragons, and the
 “ cruel venom of asps.” *Deut.* xxxii. 32, 33.
 Have not all those bid adieu to prosperity, who, by force or fraud, have been brought under it’s pestilent influence? “ Because
 “ thou hast spoiled many nations, all the
 “ remnant of the people shall spoil thee;
 “ because of men’s blood, and for the vio-
 “ lence of the land, of the city, and of all
 “ them that dwell therein.” *Habak.* ii. 8.

We may say of the planters of this direful tree, in the language of the prophet Isaiah; “ They hatch cockatrice’ eggs, and
 “ weave the spider’s web: he that eateth of
 “ their eggs dieth, and that which is crush-
 “ ed, breaketh out into a viper. Their webs
 “ shall not become garments, neither shall

“ they cover themselves with their works ;
 “ their works are works of iniquity, and the
 “ act of violence is in their hands. Their
 “ feet run to evil, and they make haste to
 “ shed innocent blood : their thoughts are
 “ thoughts of iniquity ; wasting and destruc-
 “ tion are in their paths. The way of peace
 “ they know not ; and there is no judgment
 “ in their goings : they have made them
 “ crooked paths : whosoever goeth therein
 “ shall not know peace.” *Isaiah* lix. 5—8.

We do not take occasion to exclaim a-
 gainst the base tyranny and perfidy of France,
 from the late splendid victories, atchieved,
 under Providence, by British valour, but
 from a sense of it's being the duty of those
 who speak in the name of the Lord, to ex-
 pose that which is evil, and to denounce the
 judgments of God against sin : for, was the
 power of the enemy ever so great, and had
 this been a day of fasting and humiliation,
 instead of gladness and thanksgiving, I should
 have found it incumbent upon me to bear
 testimony against the wicked and oppressive

measures of the present French rulers, and the generality of their predecessors: for, certainly, they who justify the proceedings of that disgraceful government, “call evil
 “good, and good evil: they put darkness
 “for light, and light for darkness; bitter for
 “sweet, and sweet for bitter.” *Isaiah*, v. 20.

We ought to know, and duly consider, that the threats of Heaven’s unconquered King are against him “that coveteth an evil
 “covetousness to his house;” and that “the
 “stone shall cry out of the wall” of such house, against the rapacious inhabitant, “and
 “the beam out of the timber shall answer
 “it;” that “woe” is denounced, by the Almighty, “unto him that buildeth a town
 “with blood, and stablisheth a city by ini-
 “quity; (*Habak.* ii. 9, 11, 12.) and we need not wonder if the blood of such builder, like that of Jezebel, Israel’s impious queen, be sprinkled on the wall of such city, and his carcase trodden under foot, (*2 Kings*; ix. 33.) in one of its principal streets.

It is dreadful, in the acquiring of any object, to take away the life of the owners thereof; they who do it, “lay wait for their own blood: they lurk privily for their own lives:” (*Prov.* i. 18.) as, amongst other instances, is strikingly exemplified in the case of *Ahab*, who gained possession of *Naboth’s vineyard*, in this worst way of robbing, rarely practised by ordinary thieves, but which is the method adopted by, and the present order of the day in, *France*. You may see *Ahab’s* sin, viz. murder and rapine, set forth in the 21st, and his destruction in the 22d chapter of the first book of *Kings*, which you may read at a proper opportunity; but, from which bloody scene, of guilt on the part of the king of *Israel*, and just vengeance on the part of the King of Heaven, permit me, in the meantime, to make a few brief extracts and remarks.

We find that *Ahab* cast a covetous eye on *Naboth’s* paternal inheritance, wishing to have it for a garden of herbs. *Naboth*, not willing to sell that which had descended to

him from his fathers, hath, by false witnesses, things laid to his charge which he knew not: he is unjustly condemned, and stoned to death. *1 Kings* xxi. 3, 13. This act of violence was perpetrated by a king, upon his subject, and it's whole process bears a striking similitude to that which was perpetrated in a neighbouring nation, by subjects upon their sovereign, in the year 1793. But mark the sequel. At length, the God by whom actions are weighed, speaks in thunder to this sceptred culprit; for we read that “the
“ word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tish-
“ bite, saying, Arise, go down to meet Ahab
“ king of Israel, which is in Samaria: be-
“ hold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth,
“ whither he is gone down to possess it.”
Ver. 17, 18. Observe, the prophet was not sent to meet Ahab in *his own*, but in *Naboth's* vineyard. Hence, we may remark, that it is not the bare acquisition of territory, be it contracted or extensive, but it is the obtaining of it in a way of honesty and justice, that, in God's account, entitles men to it's enjoyment. “And thou shalt speak unto him,

“ saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou
 “ killed, and also taken possession?” Oh,
 heart-rending interrogatory! if the heart be
 not harder than adamant. Killed, and taken
 possession! *O facinus nefandum!* horrid deed!
 to kill, and take possession, when the Divine
 law prohibits man from coveting any thing
 that is his neighbour’s; (*Exod. xx. 17.*) and
 saith, “ Cursed be he that removeth his
 “ neighbour’s land-mark!” *Deut. xxvii. 17.*
 “ And thou shalt speak unto him, saying,
 “ Thus saith the LORD,” the God to whom
 vengeance belongeth; who proportions
 men’s punishments to their crimes, and takes
 care that, “ with what measure they mete,
 “ it shall be measured to them again;” (*Mat.*
vii. 2.) “ In the place where dogs licked the
 “ blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick thy blood,
 “ even thine.” *1 Kings xxi. 19.* Oh, what
 an application, or terrific striking home,
thy blood, even thine! It comes nearer, if
 possible, than *Nathan’s* applicatory address
 to *David*, when he says, “ Thou art the
 “ man!”

This awful prediction was fulfilled in its time; for though Ahab disguised himself, and mixed in the vulgar ranks of war, yet, “ a certain man drew a bow at a venture, “ and smote the king of Israel between the “ joints of the harness.” *1 Kings* xxii. 30, 34. This winged random shot hits the mark, with as nice exactness as any missive stone, hurled by the left-handed sons of Benjamin, who could sling at an hair-breadth, and not miss. *Judg.* xx. 16. This arrow, barbed with death, opens a passage, out of which his life flows in streaming purple, and his once glittering armour and chariot are besmeared with reeking blood, which was afterwards licked by dogs, according to the word of the Lord. *1 Kings*, xxii. 35, 38. What shall be the case of those who tread in Ahab’s footsteps, when inquisition is made for blood, (*Psal.* ix. 12.) we leave for those to say, who believe there is a God that executeth justice and judgment in the earth.

What cause have we for gratitude to God, that we are not under the power of those who frame mischief by a law; but that he, notwithstanding the wide spread of delusion and infatuation, hath preserved the major part of our country in a state of mental soundness, so that neither the cunning nor the force of the enemy hath made any impression upon us. For it hath pleased him, from the very origin of the grand plot of France, in concert with the frantic part of society in other countries, laid against the peace and well-being of man, to give us to see, and enable us to avoid, the danger; for which our unfeigned praises are due to him. He hath hitherto delivered; “in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.” 2 *Cor.* i. 10.

Let the advocates of neutrality turn their eyes to injured *Switzerland*; let them view Gallia's conduct towards *America*; and also their nefarious behaviour towards the *Turkish empire*: though it is hoped their designs

in this part of the world, will be frustrated. The splendid victory lately obtained in distant seas, under God, by the valour and intrepidity of an English squadron, led to action by a skilful and enterprizing commander, (for which, amongst other great blessings, vouchsafed to these realms, we this day are assembled to offer unto God the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and to praise the name of the Lord,) will materially contribute to the rescuing, from the power of lawless freebooters, that part of *Africa* which is laved by Nilus' fertilizing floods.

It is infinitely better to brave their cannon and meet their swords, than to receive their fraternal embrace; for their principles, which in many instances have been developed, show them admirable proficient in hellish arts, and loudly proclaim them to be of their father the devil, who hath been a deceiver from the beginning.

England, with consummate prudence, hath wisely chosen to hold the foe in bold defiance; which she hath been enabled to do through the blessing of God upon the efforts of her martial sons, whom she hath appointed guardians of her dignity and freedom; such as her *Howe*, her *Vincent*, her *Duncan*, her *Nelson*, and her *Warren*; with other chiefs of mighty name, and dreadful in arms, who carry Britain's sweeping flag to all parts of Neptune's watery dominions.

Events have fully justified the measures which this country hath taken with respect to savage *France*; that land of irreligion and blasphemy, of unparalleled crimes and atrocities, in which blood toucheth blood: and it is a duty incumbent on every Englishman to assist his country to the utmost of his power. As great difficulties have been, and perhaps yet remain to be encountered, we, who can boast a freedom greater than Roman citizens ever knew, ought to propor-

tion our efforts unto them ; and, hoping in God's good providence for the best, be prepared to cope with dangers of any magnitude, in defence of that liberty, the faint semblance of which others have purchased with great sums, while we are admitted to it's full enjoyment by being *free born*.

It would be too tedious, at present, to enumerate the privileges which, through the goodness of God, we enjoy ; and even if time would permit, I confess myself incompetent and unequal to the task : but we may briefly say, “ The lines have fallen to us in pleasant places ; and we have a goodly heritage.” *Psal.* xvi. 6. Moses, as a motive to obedience, reminds the Israelites of the fertility and pleasantness of the land they were about to possess, (as we have this day heard from the first lesson,) saying, “ The Lord thy God
 “ bringeth thee into a good land, a land of
 “ brooks of water, of fountains and depths,
 “ that spring out of valleys and hills,” &c. *Deut.* viii. 7, &c. Touching our civil pri-

vileges, we may say, our persons are secured from violence; and our properties from lawless rapine; all are equally protected by wholesome laws; and, while individuals conduct themselves aright, every possible encouragement is afforded them. There are no impediments in their way, on the part of government, to honour and happiness. In this favoured land, merit, in every line and direction, meets with most just and ample rewards. *Here*, men have opportunities of advancing themselves from low to lofty stations, and such, in general, is the flourishing state of commerce and trade, in this mart of nations, that, while the merchant heaps up, and abounds in wealth, the lowest mechanic and labourer may, if prudent, acquire more than a competency.

“ O fortunatos nimium, sua si bona norint!”

Virg. G. ii. 458.

O superlatively happy *Englishmen*, did they duly prize their advantages!

Advantages and blessings which are “ like
“ the precious ointment upon the head, that

“ ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s
 “ beard; that went down to the skirts of his
 “ garments; as the dew of Hermon, and
 “ as the dew that descended upon the moun-
 “ tains of Zion.” *Pfal.* cxxxiii. 2, 3.

Surely, there are not many amongst us of the fordid disposition of Esau, “ who for
 “ one morsel of meat sold his birth-right;” (*Heb.* xii. 16.) nor like Issachar, who “ bow-
 “ ed his shoulder to bear, and became a
 “ servant unto tribute. *Gen.* xlix. 15. On the contrary, let us highly esteem the land that gave us birth: let it also be our care to improve our blessings, to the glory of the giver, and so use them, that they may be subservient to the promotion of our everlasting interests. Let us so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things that are eternal. “ Making to ourselves
 “ friends of the mammon of unrighteous-
 “ ness; that, when we fail, they may receive
 “ us into everlasting habitations.” *Luke* xvi. 9. While we enjoy the privileges of

British subjects; while, in a temporal respect, we are citizens of no mean city, (*Acts* xxi. 39.) let us endeavour to have our conversation, or citizenship, in heaven; (*Philip.* iii. 20.) to be denizens of the new Jerusalem; that city of the great King. While we strenuously guard against French slavery, and oppression, and tenaciously hold fast that freedom to which we were born; let us make our humble and earnest application to God, through Jesus Christ, that by his mercy we may be delivered from the bondage of corruption; rescued from the thralldom of sin, and brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God. If the Son shall make us free, we shall be *free indeed.* *John* viii. 36. If we turn our eyes to *Religion*, how highly are we favoured in this respect. The word of the Lord hath free course: may he grant that it may be glorified! *Theff.* iii. 1. May it accomplish that which is pleasing to him, and prosper in the work whereunto he sends it! *Isa.* lv. 11. The law and gospel of God are clearly revealed amongst us. It should

be our prayer to the Almighty, that he may open our eyes to behold the wondrous things which are therein contained. *Pfal.* cxix. 18. For our spiritual profit, many scribes, instructed for the kingdom of God, out of those everlasting treasures, bring forth things new and old. *Matt.* xiii. 52. The bread of life is set before us, of which we are invited to eat, and live for ever. May none of us pray to be excused! *Luke* xiv. 18. Nor are men confined to one way of thinking, or one mode of worship: the conscience is left to God, it's soverign Lord, while *Christians of every denomination* are powerfully protected, and bountifully privileged.

The returns we ought all, without exception, to make, are love and gratitude to God, obedience to the laws, and loyalty to our prince. Let us never forget, that, where much is given, much will be required. *Luke* xii. 48. Therefore, let not our minds be elevated with pride; but, even while we rejoice before God, let us do it

with trembling, lest, (our invaluable blessings being by us neglected, or misapplied,) we fall into the condemnation of those, who know their Lord's will, but, neglecting to do it, "shall be beaten with many stripes."

Luke xii. 47. "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

