

THE  
BISHOP OF CHICHESTER'S  
SERMON,  
ON THE THANKSGIVING, Nov. 29, 1798.

“ *Die Mercurij, 5 Decembris, 1798.* ”

“ Ordered, by the Lords Spiritual and  
“ Temporal in Parliament assembled, That  
“ the Thanks of this House be, and are here-  
“ by, given to the LORD BISHOP OF CHI-  
“ CHESTER, for the Sermon by him preached  
“ before this HOUSE on THURSDAY last, in  
“ the ABBEY CHURCH, WESTMINSTER. And  
“ he is hereby desired to cause the same to be  
“ forthwith printed and published.

“ GEORGE ROSE,  
“ Cler. Parliamentor.”

A

S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT THE

ABBEY CHURCH OF ST. PETER, WESTMINSTER,

BEFORE THE

LORDS SPIRITUAL AND TEMPORAL,

On THURSDAY, Nov. 29, 1798,

BEING THE DAY APPOINTED FOR

A PUBLIC THANKSGIVING.

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*A* BUCKNER  
BY JOHN, LORD BISHOP OF CHICHESTER.

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EZRA, Chap. ix. Part of 13th and 14th Verses.

SEEING THAT THOU, OUR GOD, HAST PUNISHED US LESS THAN OUR INIQUITIES DESERVE, AND HAST GIVEN US SUCH DELIVERANCE AS THIS; SHOULD WE AGAIN BREAK THY COMMANDMENTS, AND JOIN IN AFFINITY WITH THE PEOPLE OF THESE ABOMINATIONS; WOULDST THOU NOT BE ANGRY WITH US, TILL THOU HADST CONSUMED US?

**T**HERE is no national event, of either sorrow or joy; nothing, that can prescribe to a people humiliation or gratitude, to which an apposite application may not be found in the History of the Jews. That nation, although peculiarly expectant of temporal rewards and punishments, was yet directed by their divinely-inspired Legislator, under every circumstance of distress,

adversities, or prosperity, to repentance and reformation, by such motives as aptly apply to all communities on earth, and forcibly recommend universal observance.

When the disobedience of the Israelites had drawn down upon them the wrath of the Almighty, and their sins were visited with scourges<sup>1</sup>; when “their enemies oppressed them, and they were brought into “subjection<sup>2</sup> ;” then were they repeatedly called upon by their prophets, to bewail their iniquities; to “amend” their “ways” and their “doings<sup>3</sup> ;” and to “return “unto the Lord<sup>4</sup> ;” that God might again “have compassion on them ; and that iniquity” might “not “be their ruin<sup>5</sup> .”

The same inspired language prevails, when, under their more religious leaders, and the restored purity of their worship, God interposed his gracious arm to their assistance, and “turned” his “hand against their

<sup>1</sup> Psa. lxxxix. 32. H. V.

<sup>3</sup> Jer. vii. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Jer. xii. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Psa. cvi. 42.

<sup>4</sup> Hos. xiv. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Ezek. xviii. 30.

“adver-

“adversaries<sup>1</sup> ;” when their enemies fled before them : and “one man of” them “chased a thousand<sup>2</sup> ;” then were they likewise enjoined, and with equal denunciations, a strict adherence to the duties of religion. When depressed by national losses ; or when, as the prophet says, “the host goeth forth against the enemy<sup>3</sup> ;” “then” were they to “keep” themselves “from every “wicked thing.” So when the Lord had wrought some great deliverance, and done some mighty thing for them ; then were they to “cleave unto the Lord “their God<sup>4</sup> ; to keep his statutes and command-  
“ments<sup>5</sup> ;” and to “serve him in sincerity and in “truth<sup>6</sup> .”

“God is the governor among the nations<sup>7</sup> ;” and “the Lord of the whole earth<sup>8</sup> ;” “his kingdom ruleth “over all<sup>9</sup> .” Gentiles, equally with Jews, are objects of his providence ; the subjects of his animadversion and regard. The stability of empires depend on his pleasure ;

<sup>1</sup> Psa. lxxxvi. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Jos. xxiii. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Deut. xxiii. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Deut. iv. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Ib. iv. 40.

<sup>6</sup> Jos. xxiv. 14.

<sup>7</sup> Psa. xxii. 28.

<sup>8</sup> Zech. iv. 14.

<sup>9</sup> Psa. ciii. 19.

and

and “ he giveth them to whom he will <sup>1</sup> ; he removeth  
 “ kings, and setteth up kings <sup>2</sup> ; he increaseth the  
 “ nations, and destroyeth them ; he enlargeth the nations,  
 “ and straightheneth them again <sup>3</sup> .” States, as well as in-  
 dividuals, find protection in his favour, and suffering  
 in his displeasure. Under affliction, they fly to penitence  
 and supplication to appease his anger ; in prosperity,  
 to extol his goodness, they turn to thanksgiving and  
 praise. Happy the people, who receive, with moral  
 improvement, the visitation of their God, which corrects  
 that it may amend ; and his mercy, which blesses that  
 it may win to duty !

If there ever were a nation, since the government of  
 Judea ceased to be a theocracy, that had reason to believe  
 a superintending Providence ; motives to “ repent and  
 “ turn to God ;” to adore and honour him both in his  
 judgements and his mercies ; obligations to gratitude for  
 his goodness ; calls to listen to his gentle admonitions, and  
 to improve under his instructive discipline ; grounds for

<sup>1</sup> Dan. iv. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Ib. ii. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Job. xii. 23.  
 humility,

humility, for trust, and obedience to the Almighty, surely it is Great Britain. If the long-suffering and forbearance of the Deity ; if his lenity and kindness ; if his protection and favour could excite a people to thanksgiving, and attach them to virtue ; it is Britain that must be the first to acknowledge her obligations ; “ to sing his praises, and to keep his laws.”

If this appeal be just and indisputable ; may we not well join with pious Ezra, in the words of the text, “ seeing that thou, our God, hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us” great “ deliverances ; should we again break thy commandments, adding ingratitude to our wickedness ; wouldest thou not be angry with us, till thou hadst consumed us ?”

Now, in what historic records, antient or modern, is the lenient and gracious hand of Heaven, chastening, or interposing in the favour of any people, so visibly to be traced, as in the annals of this country, both ecclesiastical and civil ?



Look to the æra of our reformation from the corruptions of Popery. Observe to what slight and apparently inadequate causes, the religion, we profess, owed her purification. View her, in subsequent periods, again exposed to imminent dangers; at one time, sinking under superstition; at another, maddened with fanaticism, or debased by hypocrisy; till, at length, we discover her on the point of being brought back, and immersed in her original corruptions, had not Providence, once more, graciously interposed to save her from that gulph of spiritual impurity, and to establish her on a creed, far more simplified, far more congenial to evangelical truth.

I cannot refrain here from contemplating the present state of that church, from whose depraved worship we have departed. We see it trembling to its very foundation. We see the leaders of one nation totally renouncing it; and in their precipitate rage to suppress falsehood, impiously abjuring and banishing truth. But is it a wonder, that God should permit such a system of religious corruptions to be subverted? Did he not  
suffer

suffer the sword of Mahommed to overrun a very considerable part of Asia and Africa, and his religion to supplant the religion of Christ, when the Christian churches of the East had dreadfully departed from the purity of the Gospel<sup>1</sup>?

Was it not, then, an heavenly voice, that cried to us of this nation, “Come out of her, my people<sup>2</sup>?” Oh, let not that sacred admonition die away upon our ears! Let us not forget the spirit of papal Rome; her unscriptural tenets; her idolatrous practices; her slavish impositions! nor let our charity for the professors of that faith, make us too charitable to their opinions. As fellow-creatures, they are entitled to humanity; as unfortunate, we owe them relief; as exiles, we give them refuge; but while Christianity abhors persecution, and enjoins universal benevolence, let us take care, that tendernefs to their misfortunes do not blind us to the dissemination and prevalence of their dogmas in religion.

<sup>1</sup> Mosheim’s Eccles. Hist. vol. II. and Universal Hist. vol. XVII.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. xviii. 4.

But to return :—not to confine your reflections to religious benefits, contemplate, likewise, the civil constitution of these kingdoms. Mark, through the preceding centuries, with very few exceptions, the galling despotism of the monarch, and the abject servility of the people. On the very brink of ruin stood our invaluable rights and privileges, when the same heaven-directed Hero, who preserved to us the profession of genuine Christianity, restored to this half-enslaved nation, the birth-right of Englishmen, their liberties, and their laws. O may the guardian Angel<sup>1</sup> of our constitution in Church and State, while immortalizing that glo-

<sup>1</sup> The doctrine of tutelary, or guardian Angels, has been held by Heathens, Jews, and Christians. That individuals were believed to have their attendant angels or demons, we learn from Hesiod, *Opes. et Dies*, l. i. v. 121.—Plato de *Legibus*. l. 10.—Apuleius, de *Deo Socratis*—It was, likewise, the commonly received opinion among the Jews, from the earliest period, *vid.* Gen. xviii. 16. et passim; and we may trace the same to the time of our Saviour, Matth. xviii. 10. Act. xii. 15. And that this angelic superintendency was held to extend over nations, provinces, and cities, we may collect from Dan. x. 13 and 21; and, if the LXX version be followed, it strongly supports that belief. Deut. xvi. 9. Act. xvi. 9. has been deemed also to give it countenance. It was a tenet generally adopted by the early fathers of the Christian Church.

rious period, inscribe on its adamantine pillar, *esto perpetua!*

Here let us for a moment pause, and admire the divine goodness towards us, displayed in these repeated deliverances of our favoured Constitution; and, while meditating on such distinguishing kindnesses, such heightened obligations to thankfulness, how are we prompted to exclaim with the Psalmist, “Many, O Lord, “are thy wonderful works, which thou hast done, “and thy thoughts, which be to us-ward<sup>1</sup>! With thy “favour, O God, thou compassed us, as with a “shield<sup>2</sup>; and crownest us with loving kindness, and “tender mercies<sup>3</sup>! Fear,” therefore, “the Lord,” ye highly favoured, “and serve him in truth with all your “heart; for consider, what great things he hath done “for you<sup>4</sup>!”

But, the more fully to illustrate our motives to gratitude, by exemplifying, in one point of view, the

<sup>1</sup> Psa. xl. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Ib. v. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Ib. ciii. 4.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Sam. xii. 24.

great things God has done for this nation ; let us detail the blessings of that constitution, whose general praises we have rehearsed, and particularize those excellencies of it, which render its preservation such a just subject for thanksgiving.

Behold, then, a political fabrick, which, founded on the principles of equity and freedom, and receiving such improvements as accumulated experience and progressive wisdom could suggest, has long been the admiration and envy of other nations. Under this fabrick we live, neither subjected to regal despotism, nor aristocratic tyranny, nor democratic turbulence. By the spirit of our polity, and by the letter of our chartered privileges, every Englishman is born to the rights of personal liberty and personal security<sup>2</sup>. He is governed by laws virtually of his own making ; and enjoys all the freedom under them, which is consistent with the public good, and most truly productive of his own ; laws, which protect every man from wrong ; and are as much

<sup>2</sup> Blackstone's Comment. b. I. c. 1.

calculated to prevent all regal encroachment on the privileges of the people, as to enforce respect and obedience from the subject to the prince. The streams of justice flow free and unpolluted to all; and all live under sanctions, which maintain inviolate, to every man, the just claims of conscience, and secure to him his reputation, and his life, his property, and his creed.

Britons, too, have a King, whose throne is established on the very basis of freedom itself: a King, who has never infringed any right of his people; but uniformly made the laws of the land the rule of his will; who, feeling himself the governor over a free nation, has always exercised that power, with which he is invested, with a mild and paternal hand; and, in consulting the happiness of his subjects, finds his own.

Under this well-poised and excellent form of government, there is no office of dignity and honor, no accumulation of wealth, to which the lowest person in the realm may not attain. And, since the unalterable nature of society requires inequality among its members;

some

some to be poor, while others are rich; some to be high, and others low; some to rule, and others to obey; it makes every possible reparation for these unavoidable differences, by rendering an interchange of services, and mutual aid, necessary to both; while it calls for the labour and industry of the lower orders of the state, it impels the higher ranks, in return, to make provision for their misfortunes and their wants.

And, under what government shall we find the necessities of the poor so well provided for as under this? Where, but in this kingdom, and to equal extent, shall we see such numerous places of reception for the relief of every species of human distress? A refuge for age and decrepitude; for indigence and disease; for bodily misfortune and intellectual infirmity; for helpless infancy and repentant vice. Thus balancing, as far as possible, these social distinctions, and softening down the apparently harder lots of human life.

Are all these religious and civil advantages, matters of small estimation? or benefits enjoyed by nations in general? If they be not; then, in proportion as they  
are

are not of common possession, but more peculiarly our own, do they not distinguish us from every less favoured people, and demand from us proportionate returns of gratitude to God? "Unto whomsoever" most "is given," "of" them "shall" most "be required".<sup>1</sup>

In such a country, then, as this is, can there be just grounds for disaffection and ill-will against the state? Can a constitution, most aptly fitted to vindicate and establish the common rights of man, be an object of malevolence and hostility? Surely, a system of national rule, in which so many and such important advantages combine to form its very essence, should claim respect and esteem from all who live under its protection; should extort their best wishes, their warmest attachments, their most strenuous support.

It is true, the tried loyalty, and well-known patriotism of the community in general must leave, comparatively, but few, to whose serious reflection such a remonstrance might be addressed. But, engaged as we

<sup>1</sup> Luke xii. 48.



are. in hostilities with a people who have attempted, by all the means of secret intrigue and open violence, to disturb the tranquillity of the world ; to subvert governments, and spread anarchy, misrule, and desolation on all around them ; unhappily for the peace of these kingdoms, their unprecedented rancour has not wholly proved unsuccessful. Not content with waging war against our power, our wealth, our commerce ; they wage it, too, against our polity, our morals, our religion. Our enemies have artfully contrived means of disseminating their deleterious principles, which have found, in the minds of some among us, a soil too favourable to their growth, and rendered them dissatisfied with the settled constitution of these realms, even while they are enjoying its inestimable advantages.

We will not, indeed, dwell on the prejudices of discontent, but proceed to fresh sources of consolation. Superadded to our constitutional advantages, and to our repeated rescues from the perils of intestine commotion ; from the insurgent spirit of sedition, and the gathering clouds of domestic trouble ; how singular has been our preservation, in the various and unequal contests we have  
sustained

sustained with foreign foes ! how illustrative of divine interposition and favour has been our frequent and wonderful success ! How oft might we have said with the King of Israel, “ If the Lord himself had not been on our side, when men rose up against us ; they had swallowed us quick, when they were so wrathfully displeased at us <sup>1</sup>.” But, “ O Lord, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power <sup>2</sup>.”

Without recurring, however, to long-past and distant periods, let us fix our attention on the great and manifold deliverances which these kingdoms have, within a short space of time, most happily experienced. What a prospect of disasters once opened before us ! with what calamities were we not menaced ! a desolating invasion planned ; a convulsion of our Government decreed ; nay, its very extirmination denounced. And have not these destructive plots of our implacable and malignant enemies been hitherto frustrated ? have not their formidable efforts failed ? The very winds and waves,

<sup>1</sup> Psa. cxxiv. 1, 2. H. V.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Chron. xiv. 11.

all obedient to the voice of God, like the stars in their courses, fighting for Sifera, have fought for us, and for our Country. “ God has delivered us from our strongest enemy, and from them which hate us.”

When we consider the extraordinary successes of our arms, in seas, which wash the shores of foreign countries, as well as in those which girt our own: When we reflect on those exploits, that have not only saved Great Britain from depredation, from massacre, from ruin; but have raised her naval splendour to an unexampled height; where shall we trace the kind hand of Providence, if we discern it not in the late unparalleled achievement of our Navy in the Eastern Sea? Of all the victories, which grace our marine annals (and numerous, of late, have been such incitements to our grateful reminiscence) the immediate subject of this day's solemnity seems to challenge our most unbounded admiration: a victory, unexcelled, if we regard its beneficial consequences; scarcely equalled, if we weigh its daring heroism, and consummate skill. Who, that considers what a proud day that was to England, and

<sup>3</sup> Psa. xviii. 17.

reads,

reads, with personal exultation and national pride, the intrepidity and judgement of the illustrious Commander, and the zeal and energy of his brave Associates, in that conflict, with a well-defended, well-arranged, and superior fleet; who, I say, while he extols with warmest eulogies, and heaps immortal honours on the Victors of the Nile; but must adopt the language of David, “The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of the Isles be glad thereof!” and, like the pious and worthy Leader of that triumphant band, “praise God for his goodness<sup>2</sup> ;” and say, “Let them give thanks, whom the Lord hath redeemed, and delivered from the hand of the enemy<sup>3</sup> !”

Whilst Atheists, amid their victories, crown the statues of their favourite idols, Reason and Liberty; our Hero, no less religious than brave, ascribes the honour of the day to “the Lord of Hosts;” the Governour and Judge of the Universe; to God, omniscient and omnipotent.

<sup>2</sup> Psa. xcvi. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ib. cvii. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Psa. cvii. 1. H. V.

The Almighty, who, by a power visibly superior to human strength or policy, overthrows one nation, by the same means that he preserves or raises up another, acts, in his government of the world, by secondary causes. And, as for the wisest purposes, purposes calculated to subserve the general interests of virtue and happiness amongst mankind, he prospers, with very rare exceptions, the undertakings of ability : Yet, lest men should forget God, and attribute the propitious events of life to their own sagacity or prowess, he does “ not” always “ give riches to men of understanding, nor favour to men of skill :” thus occasionally teaching the necessity of dependence on Him for aid ; while, at the same time, he encourages, by the dictates of reason, and the precepts of religion, their well-meant endeavours and best exertions, as their fairest title to his favour and assistance.

It is on these principles of piety, and patriotism, that, while important events, events highly conducive to national prosperity and greatness, demand our gratitude to God, our love, our veneration, our obedience ; every

<sup>1</sup> Eccl ix. 11.

humane feeling, every liberal sentiment, every ardent commendation, is excited towards those of our fellow-subjects, who, by the faithful and honourable execution of their momentous trust, have been, in the hands of Providence, the glorious instruments of our success.

Let us, now, turn our thoughts from public exultation to private enquiry; and seriously examine, how far we, of this nation, have deserved these providential favours. Happy will it be for us, if national pride end not in personal humiliation! happy will it be, eventually, if, by the calamities we have suffered in war, “God has not punished us less than our iniquities deserve:” and still happier will it be, if “such deliverances,” as he has given us, should so work upon our gratitude and our discretion, that we may not “again break” the divine “commandments;” nor “join in affinity” with our irreligious neighbours, “the people of the obominations,” lest we cause God to “be angry with us, till he consume us!”

We are assembled in this sacred place, to express our gratitude to the Almighty, for a fresh instance of his protection and favour. But how is that gratitude to be  
acceptably

acceptably expressed? We have been on our bended knees, confessing our sins before God; acknowledging our unworthiness; imploring his pardon; extolling his goodness; and returning thanks to the Throne of Grace for kindness shewn to us, far beyond the reward of national virtue, and for mercies, to which we had no moral claim.

In doing all this we have done what it was our duty to do; but we have not yet done all. The effusions of our lips are but equivocal acts of praise and thanksgiving. With our mouths we may have testified a sense of our obligations to God; but do our hearts give a sanction to our words? are our professions verified by our lives? What avails it, to set apart a day, merely to deprecate calamities, by fasting; or to proclaim our thankfulness for success, by verbal praise? If we really mean to “give God the honour due unto him,” we must shew forth our piety, by reverence for his holy name; by a due regard to his worship; and by living “soberly, righteously, and godlily in this present world’.” We

<sup>1</sup> Tit. ii. 12.

must “ put away the evil of” our “ doings ;” we must “ cease to do evil, and learn to do well <sup>1</sup>.” Nor must our unfeigned penitence, our good resolutions, our virtuous endeavours, set with the evening shades, nor vanish with the morning dew. Our amendment must be lasting, as well as sincere ; not entered upon as occasion serves, but as principle dictates ; not from momentary fears, but from well-rooted hope ; not as temporal views suggest, but as the will of God directs.

Who, then, that has any regard for his King, or for his Country ; who, that is a friend to order, to religion, or even to humanity ; who, that wishes to eat his bread in security ; to enjoy the fruits of his own industry ; and to hand down his well-earned competence to his children’s children ; but must view with pain, and lament with apprehension, the state of our public morals ? Or who must not feel himself bound to check, by his utmost exertions, the profligacy of the age ; to improve the manners of the people ; and promote, through the nation, an universal reform ? And shall not we be wanting in our duty to God, and to our prince ;

<sup>1</sup> Isa. i. 16.



to our fellow-citizens ; to our families, and to ourselves ; if we labour not, by every means of exhortation and reproof, of virtuous example and legal restraint, to stem that torrent of impiety and libertinism, that contempt of divine worship, that profanation of the Sabbath, so prevalent amidst every rank of men in this kingdom ? and to discountenance all insult on the morals of the people, all tendency to sedition, all disobedience to just authority, which, pregnant with political mischief, and involving moral evil, tend to the ruin of government, of society, and of religion ?

“ When the judgements of God are in the earth,” is not that a time for “ nations” to “ learn righteousness ?” If events, unparalleled in history, can rouse attention ; if there be an appropriate denunciation of prophetic woes ; if coincidence of times, and the language of symbol warrant application ; surely some adumbrated portent is impending ; and the closing book of prophecy is likely to prove, at no very distant period, an Apocalypse indeed !

Let us, my brethren, preserved from that irreligion, injustice, and cruelty, which disgrace, depress, and  
brutalize

brutalize a neighbouring nation, virtuously disdain to “join in” moral “affinity with the people of these “abominations.” Let us not espouse the impious principles and wicked practices of those, who spurn at virtue, disown their Saviour, and renounce their God : nor let us, in search of more than Christian liberty<sup>1</sup>, run into licentious conduct and tyrannic anarchy : But let us learn to set a just value on the blessing of a free and quiet government, and study, in our respective stations, to promote the safety, honour, and welfare of the Country, which supports, and the Constitution, which protects us, by manifesting a willing obedience to the lawful Sovereign, who governs us, and a chearful readiness to assist him in all his endeavours for the public good.

Oh, let not our unexampled successes dazzle us into a false estimate of our own virtues, nor prompt us to conclude, that we have a prescriptive right to the protecting favour of Heaven. Let us neither arrogantly presume on the permanency of God’s assistance, nor un-

<sup>1</sup> Gal. v. 13.

gratefully

gratefully distrust it ; but let our experience of “ God’s “ goodness lead us to repentance ‘.” Let his reiterated kindness excite us to an uniform purity of heart and life ; to humility, and diligence in our religious duties ; and, healed by the Almighty hand, let us, like the grateful Samaritan, return instantly, with joy, to give glory to our benefactor and our God ; that so, by our fervent zeal to please and obey God, we may justly hope to secure his blessing to us.

Then may we trust, that when we “ call” unto the Almighty, “ he will answer us ‘ ;” and not suffer “ the “ heathen” exultingly to say, “ Where is their God ?” Then may we have confidence, that “ the Lord” will be our “ defence ;” and the “ God,” whom we adore, “ the rock of our refuge ‘ :” that he will, at length, crown us with the blessing of peace, and grant us “ to “ see” our “ Jerusalem in prosperity all our life long ‘.”

<sup>1</sup> Rom. ii. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Isa. lviii. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Psa. lxxix. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Psa. cxxviii. 6. H. V.