

A
S E R M O N
P R E A C H E D I N
G R E E N W I C H C H U R C H,
O N T H E
G E N E R A L T H A N K S G I V I N G,
J U L Y 29, 1784.

Boyd 8
4

A

S E R M O N

P R E A C H E D I N

G R E E N W I C H C H U R C H,

O N

T H U R S D A Y, J U L Y 29, 1784;

T H E D A Y A P P O I N T E D F O R A

G E N E R A L T H A N K S G I V I N G:

A N D

P R I N T E D A T T H E D E S I R E O F S E V E R A L O F T H E M O S T R E -
S P E C T A B L E I N H A B I T A N T S O F T H E P L A C E.

B Y

The Rev. ANDREW BURNABY, D.D.
V I C A R O F G R E E N W I C H.

R

L O N D O N:

P R I N T E D F O R T. P A Y N E A N D S O N, A T T H E M E W S G A T E.

M. DCC. LXXXIV.

P S A L M xxxiv. 14.

SEEK PEACE, AND ENSUE IT.

IT is generally agreed, by writers and professors of jurisprudence, that states and nations lie under the same moral obligation, in regard to their transactions with each other, as individuals living in natural society. The same duties of justice, humanity, forbearance from injuries, reparation of them when committed, together with mutual forgiveness and desire of reconciliation and peace, are equally incumbent upon both,

THIS moral obligation, when applied to men in their individual capacity, is called the law of nature;

ture; when referred to them in their aggregate or collective one, the law of nations: but though it is discriminated by these different appellations, its operation and authority are precisely the same, and as binding and coercive in the one application as in the other.

THIS doctrine or position being premised and laid down antecedently, I shall proceed to consider the text as referring principally to men in their collective capacity: "Seek peace, and ensue it."

THE words are of the Psalmist; but they are cited, and enforced with additional authority by St. Peter*. I shall take occasion from them to observe, that it is the duty of nations, as it is the duty of individuals, to endeavour to live in peace, and to communicate with each other in offices of kindness and benevolence.

I. WAR is the most unnatural of all evils; yet not

* 1 Pet. iii. 11.

more unnatural than sinful. It is repugnant to every principle of humanity, of virtue, and of religion. To suppose war never to happen, indeed, would be to suppose human nature to be regenerated; because the pride, and ambition, and avarice of mankind will for ever involve them in the guilt of it. But this will not prove that it is natural, or that the state of nature is, as some wild philosophers have conjectured, a state of war: because avarice, and pride, and ambition, are, if I may be allowed to say so, unnatural passions; at least, they are such passions as it is the perfection of our nature to restrain and subdue. Now, “what every Being is “in its most perfect state” (according to a great philosopher) “that is the nature of that Being*.”—But wars and fightings come from our sinful lusts; from those inordinate appetites and desires “which war against the soul;” and which are the result of the imperfection, or, to speak more properly, of the depravity of our nature. “From whence “come wars and fightings amongst you?” says St.

* Aristotle.

James. “Come they not hence, even of your lusts, “that war in your members?”—Wars and fightings then proceed, not from the order—but from the disorder—of Nature.

It may indeed happen, that just and righteous nations shall be compelled, in defence of themselves or their allies, to draw the sword against the tyranny and oppression of overbearing and insulting power: and in this case, war is both natural and justifiable; although in regard to the aggressor it is undoubtedly otherwise. But though they may be necessitated to make war, they will make it with extreme reluctance, and always with hope and desire of speedily terminating it by a safe and honourable peace. They will readily make concessions, will give up and sacrifice many just claims and pretensions, to stop or prevent the effusion of human blood. This is the duty of every nation; more especially of every Christian nation; because Christianity adds to the moral obligation, which nations lie under, to “seek and ensue peace.”

By

By what false reasoning or logic it is, that Christian powers can reconcile to themselves the unnecessarily commencing of war; that they can suppose they have a right to harass and oppress mankind, to spread ruin and desolation, and to deluge every region of the earth with blood—merely perhaps to gratify a capricious fancy, an inordinate ambition, or a greedy and insatiable avarice—is a paradox so inexplicable, that, were we not convinced of its possibility by frequent and fatal experience, we should scarcely believe it. Alas! what a dark and melancholy picture does it exhibit to us of the wretched and incorrigible depravity of human nature! We may call these mighty leaders of armies, these invaders and subduers of provinces,—we may call them perhaps heroes and conquerors;—such misapplication of titles and honours accords with our depraved and perverted judgments:—but reason and religion will call them by their true names; by the names of usurpers, plunderers, incendiaries, and assassins. Instead of loading them with honours, these will brand and reproach

B

them,

them, in the anguish and bitterness of grief and indignation, with the groans of the expiring, the tears of the widow, and the cries of the orphan. These will show them the blood which they have spilt upon the ground in the cruelty of their hearts, and will cloud their reputation with the reeking vapours of it. These will urge them to “seek peace:”—to seek—by restoring their usurped possessions, by repairing the injuries and wrongs which they have committed, and by offering and conceding fair and equitable terms—a just and honourable peace;—and, having made such peace, to endeavour to preserve it, by strictly and religiously observing the articles and conditions of it —This, which is pointed out in the latter part of the text, is deserving of a further and more particular consideration.

2. It too often happens, that nations, after having been engaged in war, agree to make peace, with no other view or intention, than to take advantage perhaps of the first favourable opportunity to break it
5
again.

again. Compacts and engagements weigh nothing with them, in comparison of what they deem state policy. They imagine that they are exempt from religious and moral obligations; and that national treaties and conventions, though sworn to, and ratified by all the solemn functions of religion, are mere forms or empty sounds; binding only upon the ignorant, the credulous, and superstitious.—But where is the difference between the perfidy of nations and the perfidy of individuals? between bodies of men, who forfeit and violate their promises, and single persons who are guilty of like treachery and deceit? Does not the same fraud, the same falsehood, the same perjury, stigmatise the behaviour of the one as of the other? They are undoubtedly equally guilty and criminal, and will be equally obnoxious to the just and severe judgments of God. Nay, the observance of public faith is a matter of so much importance to the general interests and happiness of society, that the violation of it seems to be proportionably more culpable, as the welfare of greater numbers is more

immediately implicated and concerned in it. The effect being more extensively pernicious, the cause must be more deeply malignant, and the crime of it great in proportion.

HAVING thus briefly discoursed upon the text, I shall allot the remainder of the time indulged me, to the particular occasion, which has now brought us together.

WE are assembled, under the sanction of public authority, to return thanks to Almighty God for his having restored to us, after the late bloody and expensive war, the invaluable blessing of peace :—that blessing, which we so frequently importuned, so fervently implored, and so humbly and devoutly supplicated in this place, during the continuance of the war. If we recollect the many unfavourable circumstances which attended our situation ;—if we consider that the whole world was in a manner armed against us, and that destruction seemed to impend over us from every
quarter ;

quarter ;—we shall readily and heartily join in this grateful and pious work : we shall, with unfeigned lips and undissembled hearts, offer up our praises and thanks to the gracious Giver of all good things, for this instance of his mercy and loving-kindness towards us.

BUT perhaps some of you may not feel that pure warmth of affection and gratitude, which appears highly suitable to the occasion : you may wishfully look back upon the splendor and celebrity of this empire before the commencement of the late troubles, and may impatiently regret the dismemberment of it. To such I am at a loss in what manner to address myself.—We must all undoubtedly feel and be sensible of what has befallen us. The judgment of Heaven seems to have visited us, in order to correct in us what was universally allowed to be amiss. Our national pride was become obnoxious to all the kingdoms of the earth. We are now taught the wise and salutary lesson of moderation and humility. May Heaven grant us grace to improve and profit by it !

BUT,

BUT, after all, let us consider, whether we have not greater reason to be thankful, than to repine and be discontented: whether the issue of the war has not been more favourable, than we had any right to expect. May we not still be a flourishing and happy people? The welfare and prosperity of nations do not depend altogether upon extent of dominion. Even small states are frequently happier than large ones; and pride and ambition alone induce men to think otherwise. Ours, it must be confessed, however, is far from being a small state. It is large and extensive, perhaps more than sufficiently so.

PROVIDENCE has wisely distributed the earth into various regions and climates, separating them from each other by seas, or mountains, or deserts, or sands, or other natural boundaries, to make it evident that he intended they should be kept apart, and at no time brought under the same government or dominion. The moral impossibility that a government extending over the whole, or the more distant parts of the earth, should

should be well or rightly administered, might perhaps be the reason—if it may be allowed to conjecture concerning so recondite a subject—why Infinite Wisdom has judged fit to divide and separate the different regions of the earth in the manner I have here described.

BESIDES, I must observe, that the diversities of climate and country—to omit that of language—form and adapt men for different kinds of government: prompt and severe government suiting the violent and impetuous dispositions and characters of some climates; while slow, and formal, and more gentle modes of administration seem better adapted to others. In any case, an empire may be too large, too unwieldy, even to be governed at all:—and the truth of this observation is incontestably proved by the Macedonian and Roman empires: for these mighty powers had hardly reached the summit of renown, before they mouldered away, and fell into anarchy and confusion.

We ought then, instead of repining at our losses, to
be

Be thankful for the blessings which are still reserved to us ; and we should endeavour to improve the advantages of these blessings to the greatest extent and degree possible. It is recorded by the sage and moral Plutarch, that Pyrrhus king of Epirus, discoursing one day with Cynceas, upon the design he had formed of attacking the Romans, and his hope of subduing and conquering the whole world ;—“ And when you have completed all these conquests, what then ?” said Cynceas :—“ Why then,” replied the monarch, “ we will live at our ease ; and daily divert our minds with convivial and delightful conversation.” “ Ah, Sir,” said the philosopher, “ what hinders you from immediately enjoying that happiness, which you propose to acquire with so much risk, and such infinite calamity to yourself and others ?”

NOTHING could exceed the wisdom and justness of the remark. Happiness, generally speaking, is within our reach ; and it depends upon ourselves whether we will possess it or not.—Permit me then, in conclusion
of

of this discourse, to point out what I think the most likely means of attaining it, in our present situation and circumstances.

First ; We must endeavour to divest our minds of national prejudices, of hatred and malice ; and must esteem those, who were lately our enemies, as friends and allies : we must forget what is past ; and carry on an amicable correspondence and intercourse with them. Commerce, not conquest, seems to be the true interest of this country ; indeed it is the true interest of every country : for commerce is the cement of all national friendship and alliance. Providence, when he separated the different regions of the earth from each other, did not preclude or prohibit their friendly intercourse. The different productions of nature in different climates, induce a sort of necessity for men's having recourse to each other in their mutual wants ; and for their bartering and exchanging the growth of their respective countries, as their several occasions and exigencies may require. This is similar and ana-

C

logous

logous to what we find to be the established order of Providence in regard to man's own nature ; the different capacities, powers, talents, understandings, and abilities of different persons, connecting and rendering them serviceable and necessary to each other.

Nor only the chief comforts and conveniences of life, but many of the greatest improvements in science, in arts, in manners, in laws, and in religion, are to be deduced from the source of commerce. Even the pure and inestimable treasures of the Gospel have been derived to us by this channel ; and it is our duty, by means of the same channel, to spread and communicate the knowledge of it, if possible, to all who are yet ignorant of it, and “ who still sit in darkness, and in the shadow of “ death.”

THEREFORE commerce, reconciliation with our enemies, and permanency of peace—together with close and assiduous application to agriculture, manufactures,

tures, and those useful arts and occupations in which commerce and peace delight—must be the first means of healing our wounds, and of re-establishing our prosperity and happiness.

SECONDLY ; Unanimity and concord amongst ourselves, appear to be equally necessary to this great and important work. If ever the situation of a country required an union of parts and abilities, and of public and patriotic virtues, that of our own, at this period, unquestionably comes under the description : so great are the obstacles, so many are the difficulties, that occur to be surmounted and overcome.

IT would be an irksome and invidious task to retrace the various circumstances and causes of our late misfortunes : and perhaps it may be better that they should be buried in eternal oblivion : but this, I think, may safely be said, without injury or offence to any one ; viz. that no one party or description of men can

justly blame or accuse any other for having “solely” occasioned the losses and disasters that have befallen us. Whoever were the advisers, whoever were the ministers, or whoever were the opposers of the late war ; they all have had their share in the unsuccessful issue of it : for, had the different descriptions of men in this country been united ; had they all acted with one heart and one soul ; the termination and event of it, under God’s gracious providence, had in all likelihood been different from what it has really turned out. But it may have pleased God perhaps, for a punishment of our sins, to make our own divisions and disunion a principal instrument of our calamities and misfortunes. Be this as it may, I am sure a firm union of all that is great and good is now necessary to re-establish our prosperity and happiness. The enormity of the public debt, the necessity of imposing heavy taxes and burthens, the extreme licentiousness of the times, the want of order and subordination, the want of principle, the want of virtue, the excess of luxury and extravagance, and the alarming increase of

all

all sorts of crimes and wickedness, with the necessity of an efficient police to restrain and prevent them;—these surely—if these are of any moment in the order and economy of society—these require an exertion of all the talents and abilities which this country can produce.

BUT perhaps this exertion will be rendered more successful, its views be facilitated, and the obstacles that impede it be more easily removed, if we apply ourselves,

THIRDLY, to what seems most essentially necessary to the re-establishment of our prosperity and happiness; I mean, to religion. This alone, if it be duly, and earnestly, and conscientiously attended to, will almost supply every want and deficiency; and will singly effect and accomplish our happiness.

RELIGION will teach us to be patient under our losses and misfortunes: and not only to be patient, but to be thankful to God for having saved us from
the

the destruction that impended over us ; and for having restored to us the blessing of peace. Religion will teach us to keep and observe this peace with sacred and inviolable truth and fidelity. Religion will teach us to forgive our enemies ; to lay aside all malicious and revengeful thoughts ; and to unite with them in offices of Christian charity. Religion will teach us to live in harmony and concord with each other, in observance of the laws, and in dutiful obedience to the King, and to all that are put in authority under him. Religion will teach us to restrain and mortify our sinful desires, our carnal lusts and appetites ; and to keep them in subjection to reason and the will of God. Religion will teach us to practise humility, meekness, temperance, moderation, sobriety, industry, frugality, love of order, love of peace, love of our country ; in short, universal love and benevolence, together with every moral and Christian virtue.

To conclude ; Religion will teach us to fear God, to sanctify him in our hearts, and to revere his holy laws :

laws : and, above all things, it will teach us to resign and commit ourselves to his care, to believe in his holy gospel, to trust in his gracious promises, and to look forward, with most earnest expectation and desire, to that appointed and happy time, when his blessed Son Jesus Christ shall reign triumphant over the whole earth in peace and righteousness.

RELIGION will teach us all these things : and it will teach us, moreover, that if we are faithful and diligent to observe and attend to these things, God will bless us, and multiply us, and “ give us richly all “ things to enjoy ;” and will be our guardian and protector ; “ and will keep us under the shadow of his “ wings ; and be our refuge until the tyranny of this “ world be overpast ; and he shall have exalted him- “ self above the heavens, and his glory above all the “ earth *.”

* Psalm lvii.

F I N I S.