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THE
BENEFITS OF CIVIL GOVERNMENT,
A GROUND OF PRAISE TO GOD.
A SERMON,

PREACHED ON OCCASION OF THE LATE
GENERAL THANKSGIVING,
FOR THE
RESTORATION OF HIS MAJESTY'S HEALTH,
APRIL 23, 1789.

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and have said that the world

P R O V. viii. 15.

“ BY ME KINGS REIGN, AND PRINCES DECREE
“ JUSTICE.”

SOLOMON is recommending Wisdom as the fairest possession, and more valuable than every other acquisition. Struck with its superior excellence, he gives a large and elevated encomium of it; representing it under the poetical figure of a personage of the highest dignity—
“ as dwelling with God from the beginning, when the
“ mountains were brought forth, when the heavens were
“ preparing, and the Almighty set a compass on the face
“ of the deep.” And one branch of the character of Wisdom is that in our text—“ By me kings reign, and princes
“ decree justice.”

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FROM

FROM which words I shall take occasion;

I. To illustrate this truth—That it is by wise and divine appointment that civil government obtains in the world, and

II. THAT our acknowledgments and praises are due to Almighty God, for all the public advantages and blessings which are derived to us from government.

FOR the First—Government is the institution of God. He has laid the foundation of it in the frame and constitution of our nature, and wrought the materials of all civil policy into our very composition and make. Our wants and necessities oblige us to cling together by coalitions of this kind; and our different passions and affections are a sort of natural cement, which incorporate us into civil societies, and strongly unite us by the common tie of mutual interest and satisfaction.

SOCIETY is the proper element of such beings as we are, out of which we cannot subsist; and, whatever suppositions may be made of a state of nature, there never was, nor ever could be, such a state, at least of any continuance,

nuance, previous to society. To this our necessities oblige us to fly for shelter and protection. Our social affections make us chuse and delight in it. The idea of a *country*, or constitution, is common to people in all parts of the world; and we find a natural affection for it to prevail among men, as evidently as that of parents for their offspring, or as that which prevails among persons of the same family.

ADD to this—We have a sense of honour, a desire of esteem and reputation, which could never be gratified, but upon the supposition of our being formed for society. And, upon this supposition, we see the wise intention of it in our natures, as an incentive to great and worthy actions—to pursue a common and public interest, and to signalize ourselves by a generous ambition (even contrary to private interest, and, in some cases, with the entire sacrifice of it) to promote the good of the community to which we belong.

I ONLY touch upon these outlines in our composition, not so much to prove that we are formed for society (of which there can hardly be a doubt) as to illustrate the wisdom, as well as the paternal goodness, of the Deity, in
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making such a kind provision for the ease, security, and happiness of human life—to shew that government is the ordinance of God—that the original of it is divine—and that all that security, pleasure, and comfort we derive from it, cometh from the Father of mercies, “the Giver of every good and perfect gift.”

If a superior Wisdom had not previously laid the foundations of civil policy in the constitution of our natures, where must the great statesman and the lawgiver have learnt their admired wisdom?—If there had not been settled, antecedently, such a constitution—such an order in our natures—such passions, principles, and affections of mind, both private and social, what plans could have been formed?—What rules of political science have been laid down?—Where must have been their materials for erecting the fabric of any civil establishment?—How must they have been capable, at all, of contriving to unite contrarieties—to balance opposite interests—to fix the proper checks of power, so as to make an union and concord from the whole—to give force and power for the execution of law and justice, and yet to restrain it within such bounds, as not to become oppressive and injurious to the people?—Whence could they foresee the probable operation

tion of laws, or understand how to apply them to the hopes, ~~sand~~ fears, and the various passions of mankind, both to stimulate them to virtue, and also to restrain them from what would be hurtful to society?

THIS is the Providence of Nature, or the Wisdom of the God of Nature, which teaches them, and shews those springs and principles which are the foundation of all knowledge of this kind, viz. both how to form, and also how to conduct the Machine of Government.

SHALL therefore the founders of states and kingdoms, wise statesmen and lawgivers, be had in such high veneration—their praises be sounded forth, both in their own and in succeeding ages, and their memories be revered with applause and gratitude, for the good services they have done mankind?—Yes. Unenvied be the honours which they have deserved!—But then, let us not forget the Source and Fountain of all Blessings—that superiour and matchless Wisdom which lays the ground-work and basis of all Law and Government—that Wisdom by which “Kings reign, and Princes decree justice;” and which has directed mankind to this necessary expedient, for the security of

of their persons, their properties, and every thing they hold dear and valuable.

AGAIN—Not only the original of government must be ascribed to God, the great Author of our natures, but also the wisdom of any *particular* constitution, and the skilful establishment of any political community, for promoting the true end of government—the peace and welfare of a people—must be ascribed to the same cause.

GOVERNMENT is the Ordinance of God in general. In this he acts with the same variety which appears in all his works, and allows of great difference as to the forms and modes of it. Some of these are vastly preferable to others, answering the right purpose and intention of all government; which is, the punishment of evil-doers, and the protection of them that do well.

CONSTITUTIONS in the body politic, as constitutions of the natural body, differ. Some are more firm, healthy, and robust. Others are weak, infirm, and subject to more disorders; nor is the happiness of particular persons more affected by the crisis and temperature of the one, than
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that of a whole people is by the other. The virtues and vices, the genius, manners, and customs, and also the ease and security of a people, are principally derived hence.

POSSIBLY the worst establishments—the most absolute and despotic empires—are much better than no government at all. But the felicity of a good one is among the richest blessings that Heaven bestows upon men. It makes every thing to smile where it takes place, and the face of nature to wear a gay and chearful aspect. “It makes the mountains to rejoice, and the vallies to sing for joy”—changes the barren soil and the desert waste into a well cultivated garden, and a land of fruitfulness and plenty—gives encouragement to industry, the flourishing of arts and sciences, and is also promotive of nobler fruits—of great characters, brave exploits, sublimity of sentiment, and the virtues of fortitude, patience, public spiritedness, with whatever the human mind is formed to conceive as excellent and worthy.

THE reverse of all this happens, and the desolation both of land and people (even where all the other advantages of soil and situation are united) must ensue, when Oppression

pression and Tyranny reign, and spread their baneful influence around them.

WHEREVER, therefore, so great and diffusive a blessing obtains, as that of an excellent Constitution and Government, where the Laws govern—a blessing which involves in it many others—have we not all possible grounds of joy and gratitude?—But gratitude to whom?—Not only to the more immediate causes (instruments, rather) of the public felicity, but surely to the First Cause and Original—even to “*Him* by whom Kings reign, and Princes decree “justice;” whose Providence presides over all the kingdoms and nations of the earth—gives the direction to all secondary causes, and governs all the changes and revolutions, which happen on this little globe through wild ambition, the caprice of power, and lust of dominion, to the noblest and best of purposes, though inscrutable to the view of our short-sighted understandings.

AND, as the excellency of a good Constitution and Form of Government, so the wise and just Administration of it, is a blessing for which Almighty God challenges the praise and gratitude of a nation. His Providence raiseth
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up one, and putteth down another—brings upon the stage of power the Oppressor, to scourge a people for their sins, or lodges the administration in the hands of the wise and Just, to bless and protect mankind.

THE best constitution will lose its effect, if not wisely and justly administered. No barrier, no fence can be raised, for securing the rights, and liberties, and happiness of a people, which will be effectual against the lust of power and ambition in bad minds. But the happiness of a good form and constitution of Government is complete, when the execution of its intention, and spirit of its laws, falls into the hands of those who preside with capacity and integrity—watch as guardians over the welfare and happiness of a people, and consider their power and prerogatives as a sacred trust, for which they are accountable to God and Men; when Law is made the measure of Government, and is allowed its free course, without partiality and prejudice.

AND, considering the infirmity of humanity—the temptations which adhere to greatness and power—the strength of genius and capacity requisite to bear the weight of Government, and to conduct the important affairs of it with steadiness, courage, and prudence, amidst the storms of fac-

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tion, contending interests and passions at home, and the threats of danger from foreign enemies ; it will appear a most favourable indulgence of Providence, when one sitteth at the helm who is capable of steering and piloting a people safe through so many surrounding dangers.

THIS is a Blessing as rare as it is great, granted now and then in mercy to some peculiar people—a blessing so truly Divine, that we can no where derive its origin but from above—from that great and good Being “ by whom kings “ reign, and princes decree justice.”

AND surely, if not a sparrow falleth to the ground without our heavenly Father’s notice—if the very hairs of our head are all numbered—if there is a Providence ever vigilant over individuals, ordering those events in which their own personal safety and happiness are concerned, we cannot be so unreasonable as to exclude it in the greater and more general concerns, where the fate of numbers, the prosperity or adversity, the safety or ruin of a whole people, is at stake. Shall we praise the Instrument and not the Hand that guides it ?—In such events must we stop at the second causes, and exhaust all our acknowledgements, admiration, and gratitude on them, forgetful of the first cause—that se-

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cret and powerful hand of Providence which stations each man in his particular province, assigns him his sphere of duty and action ; and, let me add, qualifies and capacitates him for the right discharge of it.

Thus every advantage derived to us from Government—the supply of all our wants and necessities—the many conveniences, pleasures, and embellishments of life—the protection and security which it gives both to our persons, and all that we possess and enjoy, are originally the gift of God. To his supreme wisdom and goodness are we indebted for the institution of it in general, as well as for the peculiar excellence in the form and constitution of it ; and also to his Providence are we indebted, which directs all events, for the wise and prudent, the legal and upright, administration thereof.

To that great and good Being, therefore, whose kingdom is over all, it is just that we look up, and both offer our acknowledgements for all public and national advantages, and also place our confidence in the same vigilant Providence for the continuance of them.

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WHAT peculiar obligations our national advantages lay us under, must be determined by the sense and feeling we have of them. And surely they are not so few, that they should escape our observation. Indeed, they are many, and great, and obvious. For all that, we are too apt to overlook them. We have them with such constancy and so little interruption, that they are enjoyed, like the daily blessing of the Sun's light, without a striking sense of their value.

BUT it has pleased the Almighty Ruler of Nations to awaken us to some better sense of our public advantages, by awfully admonishing us, in his late afflictive visitation of the kingdom in the person of the Sovereign, how soon He could deprive us of them, and how wretched we should be in the loss, or even in the suspension of them for any considerable space.

UNDER the national alarm and general concern for the consequences of a continued inability in his Majesty to govern in person, we seemed to be learning the value of those blessings which, with too much supineness and ingratitude to the Author of them, we had enjoyed under a mild and
gracious

gracious government. In the view of danger we recollected our past security ; and in the fear of judgments before us, we began to think upon the mercies we had experienced.

How clearly might we discern the importance of legal and settled Government, while it was withdrawn from us in the incapacity of the Sovereign, who only, under God, could fully and effectually dispense the blessings of it to his subjects !—How much more justly may we estimate the worth of that form of Government under which we live—How much more highly than ever must we prize the virtues and wisdom of the Monarch who guards and upholds it, now that we have seen danger arise to the one, and found the want of the other in an interruption of their operation.

Of the importance of these blessings we must be worse than stupid not to be convinced by the dissensions and confusion which but a suspension of them occasioned, and which, under a continuance of it, might have risen to such a height as to surpass the efforts of Administration (wanting the support and countenance of their Royal Master) to compose them, and prevent their fatal effects.

How

How were all good and loyal men filled with apprehension at the thought of coming under the Government of untried authority!—How slow to admit it even when guarded and bounded by the wisdom of Parliament!—How dreadful then to have fallen into the hands and under the management of those men who, void of all apprehension and concern for the consequences of it to the nation at large, seemed gratified with the thought of a change, and eager to admit new authority without restriction—eager to see a *Subject* vested with the plenitude of Regal power!—What had we not to fear from men who, ready to take advantage of Royalty in distress to serve their interested and ambitious views, opposed, with unexampled indecency, all the just and salutary measures which a virtuous and upright Administration were taking for the security of the State, the safety of his Majesty's person, and for the comfort and satisfaction of his Royal Consort under the inexpressible concern which must arise from tender sympathy, and danger to the dearest of connexions?—What scenes of tumult and discordance might the continued efforts of these men to push themselves into power, have, even by this time, exhibited, who, from the first notice of Royal infirmity, seemed to enjoy the occasion it gave them to collect and animate their party

party—who were soon not ashamed to avow their views, and even to exult in the assurance of succeeding in their aim to unsettle the order of Government, so happily and wisely established by his Majesty !

AND what now if it had pleased God (I shudder at the thought) to have prolonged his afflictive visitation till this had taken place—to have restored the Sovereign to his people, but only with concern to view their altered situation, to find his approved servants displaced, those in power who have not the confidence of their fellow-subjects, and those under disregard whom the King had delighted to honour !

But—blessed be God !—who has restored the King in much comfort to his people—who causeth them to rejoice together this day before the Lord—who hath given him to see his subjects safe from the storm of faction, uninjured in their privileges, unmoved from their attachment to the Sovereign, and unshaken from their merited confidence in those whom he has placed in authority under him.

Blessed be that over-ruling Power and Providence which hath so graciously interposed in our behalf—warded off the danger which threatened us, and, after trying us with a temporary want of Regal authority, so essential in the constitution,

tution of our Government, and so necessary to the peace and welfare of the realm, has restored this blessing to us in a most seasonable and almost miraculous re-establishment of his Majesty's health.

IT remains, that we receive this great and signal blessing with all thankfulness to the Giver of it, even to that great and good Being, "by whom the King still reigns, and is "enabled to decree justice" to his people.

AND now, my brethren, in fervour of gratitude to the Divine Being we cannot exceed. But we may, in the expression of our joy before men. However, if in the time of our rejoicing, we are actuated with a true sense of God's goodness and mercy to us, and duly consider, that the glory of the Salvation, which we this day commemorate, belongeth unto God; this will temper our joy, regulate our conduct in the outward expression of it, render it decent and becoming the solemnities we have been engaged in, and sanctify the indulgence of those transports which happy subjects must feel for the restoration of their beloved King to health, and therein for their regaining the blessings of his mild and gracious Government.

Now unto God only wise, our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, be ascribed all praise, world without end. *Amen.*