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SERMON

Preached before

THE FIRST BATTALION

OF THE

Manchester and Salford Volunteers,

AT

St. Peter's Church,

IN

MANCHESTER,

On TUESDAY, JUNE 4TH. 1799.

BY SAMUEL HALL, A. M.

Chaplain to the Corps.

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1799.

TO THE
OFFICERS

OF THE
FIRST BATTALION

OF THE
**MANCHESTER AND SALFORD
VOLUNTEERS,**

THIS
SERMON,

PREACHED

BEFORE THEM, AND PUBLISHED AT THEIR REQUEST,

is by the

AUTHOR

MOST HUMBL Y INSCRIBED.

PSALM xxvii. 3.

THOUGH AN HOST SHOULD ENCAMP AGAINST
ME, MY HEART SHALL NOT FEAR—THOUGH
WAR SHOULD RISE AGAINST ME, IN THIS
WILL I BE CONFIDENT.

THESSE words of the Royal Psalmist, are expressive of a firm belief ~~in~~ the superintending Providence of God, and a full conviction that he will never fail to afford all necessary protection and support to his faithful servants, in the most trying circumstances.—The doctrine of Providence indeed, appears so closely connected with the acknowledgment of the being of a God, that one might naturally be led to conclude, that where the latter was believed, the former would not be rejected. The material world, on every side, presents us with such striking indications

indications of Almighty Power, that we no sooner contemplate the wonders around us, than we discover the divine Author; and may we not equally discover, that the same power that was necessary to create, was also necessary to preserve? It is a conclusion founded on the clearest principles of reason and philosophy, that were the superintending care of Providence withdrawn for a single moment, the beautiful arrangement of things we now see and admire, would immediately be reduced to chaos.* But if the material world be the object of the divine agency, can we possibly suppose that this agency is not equally extended to the rational world? That man, the chief of God's works here below, whether we regard his bodily powers or intellectual faculties, should be altogether neglected? That the dwelling should be allowed to engage more of the care of heaven than the inhabitant, for whose accommodation it appears to have been principally formed? Nay, would it not imply the greatest absurdity to conclude, that mere matter, incapable of sensation, should be

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* See Clarke's Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion, page 159.
Also Jenkin's Reasonableness of the Christian Religion, vol. 2d. chap. 9th.

more highly regarded, than a being who can feel, and gratefully acknowledge the favours received?

Thus the light of reason, if fairly employed, will lead us to this important conclusion, that "doubtless there is a GOD that judgeth the earth."*

Yet how highly are we indebted to the goodness of GOD, that this doctrine does not rest merely on the foundation of what reason might infer, but is clearly taught and established in his revealed word—in the Sacred Pages of both the Old and New Testaments this leading truth is illustrated in the most striking colours, and confirmed by the most apposite examples. We there read that "in GOD's hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind"† — that "the LORD is the preserver of men"‡ — that "he holdeth our soul in life, and he will be our guide unto death"§ — that "in him we live and move and have our being"¶ — that "the very hairs of our head are all numbered."*

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Psalms lviii. 10. † Job xii. 10. ‡ Job vii. 20. § Ps. lxvi. 9.
 Ps. xlviii. 14. ¶ Acts xvii. 28. * Luke xii. 7.

We are there also expressly instructed that the providential care of Heaven is extended to man in his social, as well as individual capacity ; and that nations and kingdoms are under his government : “ For the Most HIGH ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.* The LORD increaseth the nations and destroyeth them : he enlargeth the nations and straiteneth them again.”†

The history of the Jews may not improperly be termed a sacred record of divine Providence. And, ⁱⁿ what is usually called profane history, were effects, with equal accuracy and truth, traced to the original Cause, and the instrument to the Hand whose direction it obeyed, the constant interposition of Providence would be displayed in the most legible characters. The history of our own Nation in particular, will furnish ample proofs of this nature. And the awful scenes which have lately passed around us, one might imagine, could not fail to impress the heart of the most careless observer, with a powerful conviction, “ that the hand of
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* Daniel iv. xvii.

† Job xii. 23.

the LORD hath done this; and that the Holy One of Israel hath created it."*

It will not, I trust, be thought necessary for me to dwell any longer on the *proofs* of this doctrine. I have no reason to question your ready acknowledgment of this great truth. But is there no duty connected with this acknowledgment? If GOD governs the world, and condescends to behold the things that are transacted here below, have we no interest in all this? Is it not of the highest concern, and should it not be the first object of our care, to secure the favour and protection of this Almighty Being? It is evidently our duty and our interest to employ our best endeavours to propitiate that GOD, who is "mighty to save or to destroy," and *then* with pious confidence, trust in his goodness, that he will afford us all necessary aid, relieve us under every difficulty, or at least dispose all events ultimately to promote our benefit. Supported by this animating assurance that GOD is our defence, we may apply to ourselves the words of the Psalmist in the text—"Though an host of men should encamp against me, my heart shall

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not

* Isaiah xli. 20.

not fear : though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident.”

But to repose trust and confidence in the Providence of God is not all that is required of us. In the hour of difficulty and danger, it behoves us to have recourse to the divine aid, because we are weak, dependent creatures. But does it not also become our duty to second our application to Heaven by our own best efforts? The doctrine of Providence were indeed unhappily perverted, if it were understood to supersede, not to encourage human endeavours. The means which Providence hath already bestowed should be faithfully employed. We ought doubtless to trust that God will be pleased to afford whatever is necessary for our preservation—whatever is necessary for our health, and comfortable subsistence. But should our confidence be extended to such an unlimited degree, as to induce us to sit down in torpid indifference, and neglect those means of supplying our wants which he has already placed within our reach? A conduct like this would indicate a criminal presumption, not a reasonable confidence; for little claim can that man make to further assistance, who neglects

neglects to employ *that* which has been already bestowed.

These observations, I presume, will not be thought foreign or inapplicable to our own circumstances, and to the occasion of the present solemnity. We are at this moment engaged in an eventful war; and our situation, it must be owned, is, in many respects, truly alarming. We are urged by every motive, that can address our hopes and fears, to apply, with earnest supplication, for the protection of Heaven; and at the same time to exert our most vigorous efforts, to guard against the common danger. If ever there was an occasion that imperiously demanded a more than common exertion— if ever there was a period when it concerned every Briton to step forward in his Country's cause—this is that period! We are not now engaged in a contest for power or domination; ~~not~~ to gratify the views of ambition, or add new conquests to the British Empire. No. The important stake for which we now contend, is no less than the very existence of that Empire. The struggle involves in its consequences, our King and our Country—our Liberty, our Property, our Religion,
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and our Laws! Our Enemies have not hesitated publicly to avow the most relentless hatred against us. They have ventured to declare an irreconcilable hostility against our civil and religious establishments — they have insolently pronounced that France and Britain cannot exist together!*

At the commencement of the war numbers were, or at least affected to be persuaded, that the dreadful contest might have been honourably declined. It is now but of little importance to settle the question of aggression, and to decide whether the war, even at its origin, was not on our part strictly defensive. The subsequent conduct of the Enemy hath placed the question on a different basis. No sooner were all reasonable terms of accommodation rejected — no sooner was every overture for Peace contemptuously declined, and every conciliatory proposition answered by the menace that the terms of peace would be dictated in this Kingdom at the head of an invading Army[†] — from that moment no choice has remained to the People of this Land, but either with cowardly submission

* See the Proclamation of the Directory of France, 1 Frimaire, (Nov. 21, 1797) the 6th. year of the Republic.

† See the same Proclamation.

submission to appease the vengeance of the adversary, and tamely bend the neck to the yoke of servitude,—or with manly fortitude to maintain the character of Britons—assert our native independence, and, to the very last extremity, repel the invaders of our Country. Base and abject must be that soul, that can hesitate for a moment in choosing the latter alternative—that can endure the very thought of disgraceful capitulation, and of hugging the chain of slavish dependence. On a question like this, could our brave ancestors look down and behold the least mark of hesitation, how would they blush for their degenerate descendants!

But suppose us to have forfeited the spirit of our ancestors; suppose, merely for the argument's sake, a state of things, which, I trust, will never be realized, that in consequence of some baleful influence, the subjects of this Realm should be disposed to surrender the honour and independence of the Kingdom; to violate the sacred bonds of allegiance to their King, and of attachment to the Constitution: yet would they be equally disposed to relinquish their own interest and welfare? To surrender all the invaluable

valuable blessings connected with this happy Constitution?—the privilege of “dwelling safely, every man under his vine and under his fig-tree” * —the privilege of equal laws impartially administered — the privilege of property secured from rapacious hands — together with the privilege of worshipping God in whatever religious forms the conscience may approve? These privileges are not confined to this or that order of society: they are equally extended to all: they pervade the whole system of the community, and diffuse their impartial influence to the humblest, as well as the most exalted member of the State — all, therefore, without exception, are deeply interested in their preservation, and are bound by the strongest motives, to guard and preserve them with a jealous care.

I am well aware that it hath frequently been insinuated, with the most insidious design, that the great and the opulent, — those who are sometimes termed the favourites of fortune, and have much property at stake, are the only persons who have reason to be alarmed at the approach of an invading victorious

* 1 Kings, iv. 25.

torious Enemy. To you, my friends, it is almost needless to detect the fallacy of this insinuation; you are well convinced, that in the according harmony of a well mixed State, "one member cannot suffer, but all the members must suffer with it." — The labourer and the mechanic, the man who procures the necessaries of life by the sweat of his brow, must seek employment, and the reward of his industry, from the hands of his more wealthy neighbour. Thus in the animal system, by the regular course of circulation, the extremities are supplied with necessary support; but intercept the genial current at the heart, and every member must languish, decay, and perish. We are all, then, from the highest to the lowest, deeply concerned in the opulence, the commerce, and the general prosperity of the kingdom at large.

Let it ever be remembered, that wealth can furnish no enjoyment to its possessor, without the industry of the inferior orders; and that *these* would in vain look for subsistence and support, unless from the stores of the powerful and wealthy. In a word, by an absolute decree of Providence established in

our nature, subordination forms a necessary chain of connexion and mutual dependence, which cannot be broken, or even impaired, without the most ruinous effects. In truth, were it possible for the Enemy to carry their threats into execution, and succeed in their desperate attempts against this kingdom, every order and description of its inhabitants, be assured, would be compelled to drink the bitter cup of suffering, even to the dregs.— In proof of this, we need only appeal to well authenticated facts recorded in the passing history of the times. Enquire what has been the conduct of the enemy in Holland, in Switzerland, in Italy; in short, in every territory where they have been enabled to erect their standard—Have they not marked their progress by acts of cruelty, devastation, and plunder?—and under the plausible pretext of liberty and fraternity, have they not annihilated the antient forms of Government? and reduced the people to the most lamentable state of poverty and vassalage? And could Britain, if induced to capitulate with the foe, reasonably expect a milder fate? Say rather, would not the yoke be bound upon our necks with tenfold aggravation?

It is well known that this highly favoured nation has long been considered as the abhorred rival of France—has ever been viewed with an eye of jealousy and envy, as the grand obstacle to her ambitious projects. Would not France then, if a favourable occasion offered, eagerly gratify the insatiable passions of avarice and revenge, at the expence of her prostrate rival? Nay would she not, even on a principle of policy, think it expedient to deprive us of every means of future competition? Nothing, in short, can be more evident, than that, if it should be the will of Heaven, as a punishment for our iniquities, to give us over a prey to our enemies—it is not for me to describe the sad variety of wretchedness, which must then be experienced by us—in such a dreadful event, suffice it to declare, “that no sorrow would be like unto our sorrow.”

It will naturally be enquired, to what new, and extraordinary combination of circumstances is it to be ascribed, that France is now become the object of terror and alarm to surrounding nations—more especially will Britons be ready to make the enquiry,

who, on former occasions, have frequently been enabled to chastise her insolence, and repel her most powerful efforts.

The politician will probably tell us, that much of the effect may be attributed to the pernicious doctrines taught, and industriously propagated by the emissaries and partisans of France — Doctrines that have too well succeeded in creating disloyalty and disaffection, especially in the breasts of the inferior ranks of society; and have thus fatally tainted the heart, and blasted the arm of national defence. They will also urge, that the ruling despotism of that nation, has not scrupled to adopt such arbitrary means of concentrating her force, as none of her Kings had ever dared to employ. They will probably add, that France, having assumed like Rome of old, a military character, has gone far beyond the example professedly imitated, in the most dreadful acts of perfidy, cruelty, and extortion: and has uniformly employed the plunder of every recent conquest, in new and more extensive schemes of depredation.

In this manner will the politician attempt to account for such a rapid succession of

* victories

victories as have filled all nations with astonishment and apprehension: nay, perhaps he will rest satisfied that he has assigned causes adequate to the effects produced — As secondary causes, who will venture to question their weight and importance? But the Christian philosopher extends his view beyond these limits. He sees in the wonderful and unexampled victories of France, the hand of the Almighty stretched out to take vengeance on a wicked world. He sees a people, preeminent in guilt, in profligacy, and infidelity, selected as proper instruments for this awful purpose — to warn the careless, to reclaim the dissolute, and to punish the abandoned; and at the same time to become, by a just retribution, the devoted objects of their own vengeance.

It will not, I presume, be necessary for me to pursue this subject. If I have not been altogether disappointed of my aim, you are effectually convinced that it behoves you to be warned by the portentous signs of the times, and seasonably to provide for your own security, by attending to their salutary admonitions. So far at least as regards your military preparations, you have not been in-

attentive;

attentive. Your ardour and energy has hitherto challenged the highest approbation. Go on, my gallant countrymen, and fellow-foldiers, in the road of patriotifm and honour — perfevere in the object you have chofen; and let the ftadinefs and confiftency of your conduct testify, that you have been more influenced by the merit, than the novelty of the caufe. Let it be your pride to become good foldiers, by a ftrect attention to difcipline, and the ufe of arms, and a prompt obedience to the commands of thofe, to whom obedience is due. Be affured, that fhould circumftances demand your exertions in the field of battle, the excellency of your difcipline will afford the beft human means of perfonal fecurity — and render your fervices, doubly efficacious, and valuable to your country.

But, my friends, perhaps I am deviating from the preacher's province, to whom it more efpecially belongs to point out and enforce, rather your *sacred*, than your *military* duties.

When it is confidered that thofe, who are engaged in the profeflion of arms, muft of neceffity be expofed to peculiar danger: and that life, uncertain in its beft condition,
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is rendered still more precarious to the soldier; one might naturally be led to conclude that this circumstance would have no little weight in promoting religious habits, and powerfully impress the mind with a sense of the importance of a serious and virtuous conduct.—But will experience justify this favourable conclusion? Does not the life of a soldier generally bear the outward indications of levity and folly? Nay, is it not too often marked by acts of a profligate and immoral nature?—It were indeed much to be wished, that the intervals of duty were employed to better purposes, than in promoting a spirit unfriendly to religious obligations; and that by means of some salutary and seasonable regulations, the abundant leisure of the military profession, might not continue, as it is generally supposed, a snare to the morals of the young and unexperienced—Be this, however, as it may, you, my friends, are exempt from temptations of this nature—with you, the season of military duty is the season of relaxation from your usual engagements—But the regular, as well as the occasional soldier, might readily make his military, in some measure subservient

servient to religious and moral discipline— He might consider those duties which contribute to the health and vigour of the body; which promote habits of attention, regularity, decency, and subordination; as not remotely connected with those duties of Christianity which give health and vigour to the soul, and promote its essential interests.— St. Paul seems to have been well aware of this connexion; at least, he frequently employs military terms to illustrate and enforce divine precepts— The following passage is a striking instance of this observation, and claims your particular attention.— “ Take unto you the whole armour of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breast-plate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of Peace—above all taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked—and take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.”*

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* Ephesians, vi. 13, &c.

Give me leave also to mention another inducement for uniting the duties of the Soldier with those of the Christian. “When the host goeth forth against thine enemies, then keep thee from every wicked thing.”*

—This was the solemn injunction of the Almighty to the people of Israel—not to be confined to any particular description of men; it doubtless was designed to comprehend the military as well as civil orders of society; and indeed with how much greater confidence might we hope for the protection of the LORD our GOD, and that he would be pleased to give us victory in the battle, did our warriors carefully attend to the divine authority, and keep themselves from every evil thing.†

Let me not, however, be supposed to recommend to your notice an occasional attention to religious duties, merely confined to the season of danger and alarm—I would impress your hearts with a lively and last-

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* Deuteronomy, xxiii. 9.

† If the influence of example should be thought necessary to promote the union above recommended, some distinguished characters of modern times might be pointed out, who, to the highest degree of professional skill and bravery, have added the heroism of the true Christian: And among these, let it not appear invidious to mention particularly, the venerable names of a HOWE, a DUNCAN, and a NELSON.

ing conviction, that the fear of God should be the prevailing principle of your whole lives, and sanctify every part of your conduct. Such a principle, be assured, will prove the most effectual security against the fear of men; it will inspire that genuine courage which, to the Soldier, is at once his ornament and protection. It will supply firmness and fortitude under every trial; it will bestow comfort and consolation at the hour of death.

We all of us profess ourselves sincere lovers of our Country—We have this day united in prayer for the peace of our Jerusalem—O that we could be prevailed upon to promote *that* peace, by repentance and reformation!—While, with a laudable zeal, numbers of you have devoted much of your time and attention, to the use of arms, in order to strengthen the defence of the Nation, at an awful crisis—and perhaps still greater numbers have made large and liberal contributions for its support—the ardour of your patriotism must not be questioned: but, I fear, it has not always occurred to your minds, how much you might still further contribute to the welfare of your Country,
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by sacrificing your irregular passions, and vicious habits to the cause. Confide not alone “in the arm of flesh;” “trust not in chariots and in horses.” It is of still higher importance, that you should “remember the LORD your GOD.” By the mercy and goodness of that GOD, we have been hitherto preserved from the more dreadful effects of war; while other nations and kingdoms have been forced to feel its complicated miseries. Let us not, however, rashly presume on his future forbearance; for though the storm has raged at a distance, it may still be commissioned to spread among us, havock and devastation. Fearful and apprehensive of these judgments, let us repent us truly of our sins, while, through the merits of our Redeemer, mercy may be found; then, may we humbly hope to secure the favour and protection of GOD; then, may we indulge the pious confidence of the royal Author of text, “Though an host of men should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident.”

AMEN.

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Prayer of Consecration.

O ALMIGHTY LORD GOD, who art the protector and defender of all that put their trust in thee; we thy humble servants, duly sensible of our own weakness and insufficiency, apply to thee for succour in the day of our trouble. We know and are assured, O LORD, that thou art mighty to save, but that the help of man is weak and vain: we confide not therefore in our own strength, but in thy Almighty arm. Defend us, we beseech thee, from the hostile designs of our foreign enemies, “from the gathering together of the froward, and from the insurrection of wicked doers:” and while we thus prostrate ourselves before thee, devoutly imploring thy grace and protection, may we also prevail with thee to further all our lawful endeavours to preserve, from the
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hands of rapine and violence, those inestimable blessings thy Providence hath bestowed on the people of this land. We trust thou wilt be pleased to favour the righteous cause in which we are engaged — “ Prosper thou the work of our hands upon us, O prosper thou our handy-work.” — With this confidence we have presumed to bring these banners, the emblems of war, within the doors of thy holy temple, that they may be thus solemnly consecrated to thy service, and to the support of thy true religion. — O may they henceforth become a sacred pledge of our faith in thee, of our allegiance to our gracious Sovereign, and of our veneration for the laws established among us! May they also become a bond of union among ourselves, and a solemn token of brotherly affection! And suffer us, O blessed LORD, to indulge a ~~firm~~^{firm} persuasion that they will never be disgraced by disaffection, stained by cruelty, or tarnished by cowardice. — Confirm our hearts, and strengthen our hands, that we may quit ourselves like men, in whatever difficulty or danger we may be called upon to share; and endue our minds with such fortitude as may enable us, not
only

only to repel, but also to pardon the aggression of our enemies.

Finally, O LORD, we beg that thou wouldest be pleased, of thy gracious goodness, to turn the hearts of those that delight in war. Dispose them to follow the things that make for peace, and cultivate the principles of humanity, justice, and moderation. Open their eyes, that they may discover the light of thy truth, and renounce the error of their ways: — “So we, that are thy people, and the sheep of thy pasture, shall give thee thanks for ever, and will always be shewing forth thy praise from generation to generation,” and continually serve thee in all godly quietness, through JESUS CHRIST our LORD. Amen.

