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THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT

CONSIDERED AS

The HOPE of BRITONS,

IN

A THANKSGIVING

S E R M O N

PREACHED

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Psalm xcvi. 1. 2.

*The Lord reigneth, let the Earth rejoice: let the
Multitude of the Isles be glad thereof. Clouds
and Darkness are round about him: Righteousness
and Judgment are the habitation of his Throne.*

—○○○○—

THIS Psalm is supposed to have been written, after David had brought up the Ark to Zion; in order that the Israelites, who were then in great distress, might be inspired with confidence in God.

Upon an occasion as solemn, and as important, as perhaps any that ever occurred to the Psalmist, we are called upon, to trust in Divine Providence, and to bless God's holy Name, for the Victories which our Fleets have obtained over the Enemies of this Country. Such acknowledgements are our indispensable duty, as appears from this Scripture: "Call upon me, saith God, in the day of Trouble; I will hear thee, and thou shalt glorify me."

The best way to ensure present Mercies, is to be thankful for them. And if we will not glorify God, when He hath, at our request, delivered us, we may dread his Anger for our Ingratitude.

Though the Lord hath been gracious, in the Victories which He hath wrought for us; and for which we may rejoice before him: yet, when we consider fully our Situation, we can only rejoice with trembling. For, when viewing the instances of God's displeasure against Nations, on account of their transgressions: when considering the Iniquities of this Land, in which we must, with shame, include our own Sins: and when contemplating the dark Cloud gathering around us, whose Spirits do not fail? We must fly to the sacred Scriptures, and to the Words of our Text, in the hope, that they may enable us all to look to God.

I shall endeavour to shew, “ that the Lord reigneth: that though Clouds and Darknes are round about him, the multitude of the Isles may be glad, as Righteousness and Judgment are the habitation of his Throne.” How animating are these Words! How applicable to our Case!

We derive much of our knowledge from Analogy. We see that certain Causes, produce invariably certain Effects. Certain Actions produce certain Consequences. Virtue and Happiness, Vice and Misery, are inseparable. This shews the moral Government of God. This fact was admitted by Philosophers of old. But happy we, who are not confined to investigate the foot-steps of Jehovah, by the dim light of Nature alone; for his Will is so conspicuous, in his Word, that “ he, who runs, may read.”

In the first ages, the wickedness of Man was so great, as to induce the Almighty “to repent that He “ had made Man upon the Earth.” He therefore destroyed all the Human Race, except Noah and his family. “Noah was a just Man; and perfect in his “ Generation; and Noah walked with God.” Hence it was that God spared him.

The Lord’s care, over the Israelites, is another proof that “He reigneth over all.” We see them evil-entreated by the Egyptians, and pursued to the Red Sea; where they could have had no prospect but to be cut off, or driven into the Sea. When, lo! God assures Moses, “He would fight for them.” They passed through the Sea; the Waters divided before them: but, as the Egyptians pursued, the Sea returned, and destroyed all the hosts of Pharaoh. We might continue the miraculous history of this People. How the Lord fed them with Manna forty years, till, through his help, they had defeated all their Enemies, and were conducted into the Land of Canaan. The abominations of the Canaanites provoked God to anger; and He drove them out of their own Land; which he gave for an heritage to Israel.

Another instance, of Divine Interposition, is recorded in the Second Book of Kings. Sennacherib had conquered a variety of Countries. And when he came up against the good King Hezekiah, he presumed upon a continuance of his Victories. His language much resembles the mode of expression used, by our Enemies, against this Country. And the almost in-

credible success of their General, may be contrasted with the conquests of Sennacherib. The latter was most savage and wicked; he utterly destroyed the lands which he conquered; and carried away the Israelites captive; and Babylonians were placed in the cities of Samaria, instead of the Children of Israel. The French Victor hath not dispossessed of their lands, the Inhabitants of the Countries which he hath subdued: but he hath levied most oppressive contributions upon them.

Sennacherib was an Infidel: and, in his Letter to Hezekiah, expresseth himself in blasphemous terms: “ Let not thy God, in whom thou trustest, deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hands of the King of Assyria.” He insinuates as if God was capable of deceit, and of misleading those who trust in him. After the Messengers of Sennacherib had delivered his menacing Letter, Hezekiah went up to the Lord’s House, and spread the Letter before the Lord; and said, “ O Lord God of Israel, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the Earth. Lord, bow down thine Ear, and hear; open, Lord, thine Eyes, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, who hath reproached the living God. Of a truth, Lord, the kings of Assyria have destroyed the Nations, and their Lands. Now, therefore, O Lord our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the Earth may know, that thou art the Lord God, even thou only.”

This

This excellent Prayer may serve, as a Copy, in our present distress. We need only insert, in the place of Sennacherib, the name of our Enemies.

While Hezekiah was waiting for an Answer to his Prayer, the Prophet was commissioned to say: “ Thus
 “ saith the Lord God, That which thou hast prayed
 “ to me against Sennacherib I have heard.” The Lord takes notice of the Assyrian’s blasphemy; and of his confiding in the multitude of his Chariots. His attempt was directed against a people, under the special care of God: and He considered the enterprise as against himself. Hence, he saith of Sennacherib,
 “ I know thy rage against me: I will put my hook in
 “ thy Nose, and will turn thee back by the way by
 “ which thou camest. I will defend Jerusalem for
 “ mine own sake; and for my servant David’s sake.” And “ in that night the Angel of the Lord went out,
 “ and smote, in the Camp of the Assyrians, an hundred fourscore and five thousand.” How wonderful is God:—How regardful of his People:—How faithful to his Promise!

As we believe the Scriptures, that “ there is no variableness in God,” what Encouragement may we derive from his gracious Answer to Hezekiah? We do not fully know the amazing efficacy of Prayer; nor what power it hath had with the Almighty, when his wrath hath waxed hot against his People. It hath turned aside his Vengeance; and prevailed upon him to receive, with tender Mercy, the once devoted Objects.

We

We shall next consider, in what respects, “the
“ Lord appears encircled with Clouds and Darknefs.”

When we first engaged in the present War, most of Europe were our Friends. And, viewing such powers united, the presumption of speedy Victory amounted to almost moral certainty. Those who were in the secret of Government, and who reasoned after the manner of Men, pronounced, “that one
“ Campaign would finish the business, and honour-
“ ably for this Country.” Such was then our expectation. But Experience hath taught us, that
“ though Man deviseth his way, the Lord directeth
“ his steps.” Our calculations were erroneous. The Cloud that arose, and appeared at first, “like a Man’s
“ hand,” spread itself in every direction; contracted a dismal darknefs; Storm and Tempest were found in it.

Thousands of our Country-Men bravely fought, and bled upon the Continent: but they could not vanquish the hundreds of thousands, that opposed them. Our Friends were also overpowered with numbers. One Ally early withdrew himself from the Union; and made Peace for himself. Others have acted faithfully, till they have been reduced to the dire necessity of accepting, nearly such terms, as the Enemy chose to dictate. Spain and Holland, from Allies, are compelled to be our Enemies.

In addition to these Calamities, we have to lament the Expences of the War. Taxes, year after year, have

have so multiplied upon us, that a considerable part of the Income of the more wealthy, must be appropriated to the Exigencies of the State. And none can fix a limit to the demands, which Parliament may yet impose.

Our Enemies are so elated with Success, and with spoils of Conquest, as to entertain a hope, and publish their threat, of Invading this kingdom, and overturning our Government. The prudent measures of Ministry, indicate the possibility, if not the probability of such an event. Thus are we encompassed with Clouds and Darkness, indeed!

Should the question arise, Why hath the Lord thus heavily afflicted us? Vain Man! Why wilt thou presume to search the inscrutable Counsel of the Most High? “His path is in the great Waters: His footsteps are not known.”

Could you believe certain Politicians, (Tyros in Théology) they would resolve all your doubts, by attributing every Disaster, however unexpected, wholly to Administration. Such Men ascribe to Ministers, what is the peculiar Province of God, viz. the Government of the World.

Who, but Jehovah, can send the Wind, still the boisterous Waves, controul the Actions, or change the Hearts of Men, who are under the influence and power of Satan?

The first, in Administration, or in Opposition, are nothing but Instruments, under the invisible direction of the Almighty. They are merely second causes; Himself the grand cause of all. He hath made known his Will. When that Will is disregarded, and Vice refuses to be controuled, His displeasure is exasperated, and is generally inflicted upon Transgressors. Fire, although a Patriarch intercedes, may come down, and destroy a wicked City, as it did Sodom. Vengeance may ascend from the deep, and swallow up those who have offended, as in the case of Dathan and Abiram. Or War may be sent, to punish us for our Iniquities. We read of “the Sword of the Lord and “of Gideon.” Gideon’s name was here inserted, to shew that he was “the Rod” in the Lord’s hand.

Thus Kings, their Ministers, and French Directors, reign over, and are permitted to govern Millions; and appear as a blessing, or a scourge to those whom they govern, not so much on account of their own Wisdom, or Virtue, or Vice, as of the Piety or Impiety of the Millions over whom they are placed.

We have, thank God, a good King. But were He “as Noah, Daniel, or Job,” or better than any who ever reigned, his own personal Virtue, nor his Prayers, though of high estimation, may not be of sufficient avail, to induce the Almighty to avert his Displeasure from a wicked People.

If we wish for peace, we must co-operate with our
King.

King. We must, as a nation, and individually, “confess and forsake our Sins, and then” we may claim this gracious promise, “we shall find Mercy.” No doubt, the Iniquity of the Land hath highly incensed God. It best accounts for his marked Indignation; and for all our Sufferings.

When there is War between kingdoms, one may presume that the ultimate issue of it will be in favour of those, who love and fear God. Hence, some have inferred, that, as France hath discarded Religion, and seems to set Heaven at defiance, We may therefore hope that the God, whom we serve, will, ere long, come forth, and execute Judgment upon our Enemies. But when we are assured, from respectable authority, that, previous to the late Revolution in that kingdom, “not fewer than twelve thousand Protestants received the holy Communion in the City of Paris,” who dare presume, that France, as a Nation, hath cast off God?

There are doubtless thousands in that Country, who are now ardently desiring peace: Nor is there one Individual, among them, who fears the Lord, but what hath long been upon his knees, offering up such desire, as his urgent request to God. Though the Divine Anger hath fallen dreadfully upon them; and we also groan under it: yet as God, in the midst of Judgment, remembers Mercy: as “His Name is merciful and gracious; long-suffering, and abundant in Goodness and Truth, keeping Mercy for thousands,” who can doubt of His hearing the Prayers

of his Servants? He notes all our petitions in a Book of Remembrance; but sees it right to defer answering them, and, occasionally, for years.

There is, perhaps, in the plan of Providence, some Intention highly important; the Divine Government may soon be signally displayed; when the Lord may fit, as “a refiner, and purifier of Silver;” when He may separate the Silver from the Dross; preserve the one, and destroy the other; when our fidelity to Him; our Loyalty; our Love for our Country, may be put severely to the test.

Some grounds of hope yet remain, as sources of Consolation. The first, and chief, is the Divine promise to Christians. “All things work together for good to them that love God.” This is as an Anchor, that never fails, in the most dreadful storm.

Our King hath assured us, that He is desirous of peace; and we cannot doubt his Sincerity. And every motive of Wisdom, and Prudence, must strongly excite his attention, and anxiety. Under the Administration of the Minister, from the close of the War in America, to the commencement of our present troubles, the Nation had arrived at a height indeed of Prosperity. He was (and the Country recollects He was) the Instrument, under God, of raising Britain to such splendour.

The other Ministers possess Abilities; moral Character; and great Property. But, remembering, how
 “ Ahithophel’s

“ Ahithophel’s Wisdom,” at the prayer of David, “ was turned into foolishness;” let us aid the endeavours of our King and Parliament, by earnestly soliciting, that God would give them Wisdom, and prosper, and bless all their plans.

Our numerous, and well-disciplined Army and Militia, commanded by Men of the first Families, is a source of much Comfort, in our perilous Circumstances.

Our Navy, in a limited sense, is our Hope, the Envy of the World, and is justly entitled to the warmest Gratitude of this Country. But when the Reply is made, in answer to the designs of our Enemies, “ that we have nothing to trust to, but our “ Navy :” this Sentiment must be qualified, and in a Nation, believing Divine Revelation, such Reply ought to be exploded, as it asperges Jehovah, and robs Him of this Title: “ The Lord of Hosts is his “ name.” What was this Pillar of Strength, some time ago, at the Nore? The Officers were then in duress; and the Seamen in Mutiny and Convention! This was an awful lesson of humility from the Lord. It much reminded us that “ God is jealous of his Honour.” He will not suffer his Glory to be given to those, who are as Worms, or “ Grasshoppers in his “ fight.”

The Fleets of our Enemies, after bloody Engagements, have been defeated. Many of their Ships of War are now in our Ports, as the well-earned Trophies

of our Navy. They are Trophies, for which we are under the highest obligation to bless God. He, in the Days of Battle, protected our Seamen: He inspired them with fortitude: He taught their fingers to fight: Their Arm was made strong by the Arm of the mighty God of Jacob: He directed the leaden Death; it flew, as Hail and Lightning, among our Enemies: Many fell, and the rest were discomfited. "O Lord, who is like unto thee; glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing Wonders!" Surely, none of us can suffer the recollection, of these proud Days, ever to pass, without feeling our heart overflowing with Gratitude to God, for coming forth, "as our Help," on these trying occasions.

Hence, though pressed with the incumbent Cloud of Darkness, we may avail ourselves of the hope that arises, from the late Interposition of Heaven. Interposition? much more: three times, in succession, hath God interposed; and each Interposition was in our favour; each was important, and decisive. Who, among us, or who among our Enemies, can doubt, whether God was not on our Side?

In the present crisis, no hope appears, no consolation arises, worthy of the name of Consolation, except what arises from Faith in God. "The Lord reigneth, let the Earth be glad." Blessed be his Name, that He hath not delivered us up to the Will of our Enemies. Peradventure, his Indignation is nearly overpast. He may be saying to the destroying Angel, "It is enough; stay now thine hand."

Surely,

Surely, there are but few, or none, on Earth, so callous as to wish, that more Blood might be shed. What, is not the Blood of a Million, who have been cut off, enough to satiate the Pride and Ambition of Men? War, horrid in itself, and dreadful in its consequences, is, on one side, always unjust; and it would never be long necessary, if both sides were under the Influence of Christianity. But who can answer to God for the sin of unjust War?

When will that æra arrive, which is spoken of by the Prophet? “when the Wolf shall dwell with the
“Lamb; and when Nation shall not lift up Sword
“against Nation; neither shall they learn War any
“more.” Such a period is not yet come; but will certainly come; and would to God it were nigh, even at hand.

If the Cloud, which surrounds us, should bring Tribulation, let Jehovah be our Refuge, in the day of trouble. He hath said to the faithful, “I will never
“leave thee, nor forsake thee: when thou passest
“through the fire, I will be with thee.”

As there are many among you, who, I believe, fear God: and many thousands, in this kingdom, who are his Servants: as He would not have destroyed Sodom had there been “ten righteous in it;” so we may hope, that He will protect and save this Nation, for the Honour of his Name, and for the sake of the thousands of pious Christians who are found in it.

I have

I have one Request, highly important, and which is, that each of you would set apart some portion of your time, to be devoted daily to Heaven. Then, in your Closet, pray fervently, and may the Divine Spirit help your Infirmities, that God would be merciful to us, as a Nation; and would restore to us the Blessing of Peace. You know God is inaccessible to Sinners, till they repent, and approach him through our great Redeemer. “He is our Passover;” our “Propitiation;” nor is there, for a Saint, any access to God, but through the mediation of His Son.

North and South Britain are now blessing the Lord of Hosts. And when the King arises from his Throne, and is attended by the Nobles of the Land: when our victorious Admirals, and brave Seamen, all go in solemn Procession to the House of God; there to glorify his Name, and to deposit, before his Altar, the Colours of our vanquished Enemies; surely, Deism must hide its head; and all the Earth must acknowledge we believe “the Lord reigneth.”

The Sword of Goliath was kept in the holy place, with the Priest’s Ephod: and the Golden Shields of Hadadezer were preserved, as a Memorial to the Children of Israel. The Banners of our Enemies will be a like Memento to us, and to future Generations. They will excite the grateful, the sympathetic Tear. And while a shred of the shattered Trophies remains, that shred will tell Posterity, what God wrought for this Land, in the time of need. The Procession of
this

this Day will inform the Nation, the Army, and the Navy, that “it is not our Spear that can help us:” that “the Lord is a Man of War:” that He maketh those, who fear him, valiant in fight; and that our Hope of Victory, and of Peace, must be placed in Him alone.

The Procession may have its use, even with our Enemies. They must be Infidels not to fear, as they find reason to believe that we make the Lord of Hosts our Shield; and that He is among us of a truth.

It is a reviving Consideration, that there is an innumerable Multitude surrounding the Throne of God. May He graciously accept the Thank-Offering of our King; and the Offering of his People: and all, but Apostates, will say, Amen. Then this will be an important, an auspicious Day indeed. And if God be for us, who can be against us? Remember what Moses said to Israel: “When thou art in Tribulation, “if thou shalt seek the Lord thou shalt find Him, “if thou seek him, with all thy heart, and with all “thy soul.” You must be fervent in Spirit; you must not sleep on the Wing to Heaven.

We pray not for the Destruction of our Enemies; but that He, to whom all things are possible, would take away their heart of stone; that their Inveteracy against us, may be softened into Love: that their Implacability may be changed into universal Benevolence. What are they, or what are we? We are Brethren: kindred Clay; immortal Spirits: joint
Candidates

Candidates for an “Inheritance incorruptible, and so
 “undefiled,” that neither the Passions, nor Follies
 of Men, nor impenitent Sinners, can be there ad-
 mitted. May the Divine Spirit impress these Truths
 upon us, and upon our Enemies.

I will conclude with this solemn Address, in which
 you will all join:—O merciful God, for the sake of
 the righteous among us; for thy Name’s sake, and for
 Christ’s sake, grant Peace to our Land. We will
 then glorify thy Name; we will extol thee; we will
 say, “The Lord reigneth, let the Earth be glad;
 “let the multitude of the Isles, let us in this Isle,
 “rejoice before the Lord.” Thou hast been the God
 of our Fathers; and thou hast been, hitherto, our
 Deliverer, and our God: We will trust in thee for
 Ever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting Strength:
 and we will ever join with the Hosts above, in saying,
 with all our Hearts, “Blessing, and Honour, and
 “Glory, and Power, be unto Him that sitteth upon
 “the Throne, and unto the Lamb, for Ever and
 “Ever.”

F I N I S.