

17010

A
S E R M O N

Preached in the Parish Church of

REIGATE in SURRY,

On THURSDAY, the 5th of MAY, 1763.

Being the Day Appointed for a

GENERAL THANKSGIVING

T O

ALMIGHTY GOD, for putting an END to
the late Bloody and Expensive WAR.

By WILLIAM STEAD, M. A.

*Vicar of Reigate in Surry, and Chaplain to her Grace,
CHARLOTTE, Duchess Dowager of Somerset.*

L O N D O N :

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PROVERBS XVI. 33.

*The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is
of the Lord.*

IN these words the Royal preacher delivers his sense of
the divine superintendence and direction of all events,
even the most minute. And our Sovereign cannot be
supposed to intend less, by the command which has assem-
bled us together in this place, on this occasion. And it were

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uncharitable

uncharitable to believe, that any person here present, entertains any sentiments different from those of the Preacher and the King; or, that he joins unwillingly in paying to Heaven the just tribute of praise and thanksgiving, for the happy return of the blessing of Peace we are met to celebrate.

To men, so disposed, it cannot be unacceptable to give a slight opening of the blessings naturally attending Peace; to point out its benign tendency and happy influence; and to recommend, so it be done with the modesty that becomes us, the conduct fit to be held by those who wish, and would deserve, the stability and permanency of it.

“THE beginning of strife, says Solomon, is as when
“ one letteth out water;” the aperture in the mound may, at first, be small and trifling; but, if this be wantonly or unskilfully made, the unremarked weight of the superincumbent water, may tear it to such dimensions as to admit the whole to rush out with so dangerous an impetuosity, as to spread terror and inundation through the inoffensive country.

AND such are the beginnings of strife. And at no period, and in no country, has this truth been so remarkably exemplified, as it has been in Europe in these times. The interests of the Princes are so blended and complicated, their connexions, by blood and alliance, so various and mutual; their rights and claims so embarrassed and unascertained; their guarranties so numerous and reciprocal, and, may we add, their desires and ambition so alert and grasping,

ing, that no strife can arise, even about the least and most remote corners of their territories, but, by the inevitable influx of the surrounding powers, the torrent of War is soon swelled to such height and strength, as to shake their dominions to the very foundations. So that it is impossible for a system, composed of parts so discordant, whose bearings and dependencies are so nice and intricate, to subsist, certainly not so to subsist, as to afford the comfort and security which society was framed to administer, without the salutary virtue of Peace.

THIS calls off the attention of the Princes from adverting too scrupulously to what they call their Rights; calms their resentments, and quiets the ruder and more boisterous passions. And, perhaps, in this still serenity, the voice of the liberal arts may be heard, which are incessantly calling on those who have the power of cultivating them, and never fail of being listened to by every generous mind, when not lost and confounded in the din of War. And then may the active and magnanimous spirits innocently spend themselves in works of splendor and magnificence; the narrow and contracted, in hoarding what they can legally accumulate, for to extortion and rapacity the season of Peace affords no colourable pretence; and the milder and humane will rejoice in the godlike employment of administering justice, introducing politeness, and diffusing happiness through all their dominions. And then will the subjects, when un-

respective Princes (for God knows, the welfare of society but too much depends on the disposition and employment of these) mutually conspire in spreading the blessings of science and commerce amongst them ; and in securing and enjoying those Rights, and that happiness, to which God and nature has entitled humanity.

To men, living under the influence of the great truth held forth in the text, it may not be improper to offer this consideration ; that while " The lot is in the lap," no man can foresee what " the disposing of it" may be. And when the lot is the terrible lot of War, every thinking mind must be agitated with doubt and anxiety. And, as it is to be feared, there is no nation in Europe, whose crimes will not reconcile to the ideas of justice its utter excision, the wisest men during the suspension of the event, may be allowed to entertain the most serious apprehensions. And as the manners of a whole people, are an object too large to be perfectly comprehended, and exactly weighed, when once the " Sword of the Lord is gone forth," who shall pronounce whether it is for correction or extirpation ? But the return of Peace dispels this doubt and uncertainty, and restores order and serenity to the minds of men ; and they may humbly hope, either that the merit of the nation is more than the Estimates made of it exhibit ; or that God, for reasons inscrutable to human penetration, is pleased to be gracious and propitious to his people.

At the same time it is a comfortable Reflexion, to consider, that the manner in which the War has been conducted has
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a natural tendency, in the ordinary course of things, to make the Peace that has succeeded, firm and durable. The original cause of the War, was, so far as I understand it, on our part, fairly conformable to the strictest ideas of justice; and we have prosecuted it, through all its operations, with a fortitude and perseverance that amazed the world. The spirit of this nation — will it be a digression to do justice here to a citizen, who incontestably stands first in that small list of patriots, whom Providence, at certain intervals, sends into the world to save a state? For that season of despondency should not be forgot, when “all faces were turned into paleness,” and it was generally thought, and, I believe, said, there was not virtue enough left to save the nation. At this season, whether touched by the eternal spirit, or prompted by the Generosity of his own Nature, this citizen arose, and put himself at the head of a despairing people. And the spirit of the nation (to resume what I left) soon underwent so total a change, as astonished even those that felt it. When the largeness of his views (which marked the master) when the steadiness of his measures, the firmness of his resolution, and the fortitude of his mind were remarked, the generous infection spread through all ranks, and every man became a thousand. So that the expressions of their valour are so deeply impressed in all quarters of the world, that time itself shall scarce efface them. And their humanity and generosity, the certain attendants of true courage, even in the height of the storm of War, have been such

as would have done honour to the best of the high polished Greeks, or generous Romans. And their moderation, even in the pride of victory, must deserve, from all Europe, the fullest acknowledgment and confession that they are a magnanimous people.

FOR these reasons, I think it may be presumed, that no nation will wantonly insult a people of this character; and from the equity and good faith, for which this nation is confessedly remarkable, it is probable we shall not give them any just occasion.

BUT I seem to hear some, scarce articulate, murmurs, as if the Peace we rate so high were not indeed what we represent it; but rather inadequate to the expence of blood and treasure with which we have purchased it, and dishonourable to the nation.

WOULD you then have more war? "Shall the sword devour for ever? Knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end?" It is mighty easy for a man, in a warm commodious apartment in the midst of the abundance of all things, and fenced, in full security, with the protection of a well-ordered government, to raise speculations, settle the balance between the contending powers, and determine on another campaign, with the same ease and unconcern as he orders his coffee. But let your imagination transport you, for a moment, into those countries which have been the scenes of the War. Observe how the subsistence of innumerable innocent families, every social and domestic joy, has been ruined and destroyed by the brutal ravages

vages of an insolent soldiery ! See the havock of War, the carnage of a battle, and the fields streaming with English blood ! Go to the hospital of the camp ; and see the gallant youth of England wasting to a flower, but not less, certain death, under wounds unheeded in the hour of ardor, and for want of those accommodations, and that attendance which the meanest of your servants would call scanty and inhuman ! Then look at home. Mark the gaps made in the ranks of your citizens : and observe how there is scarce a family that is not mourning the loss of some of its branches, which it held most dear, that have fallen in the service of their country, honourably, indeed, but how tenderly regretted ; insomuch, that even the joy of the present festivity is imperfect, and interrupted by “ the noise of the weeping of the people.” Not to mention that all these calamities have been brought by Christians on Christians, who, I am afraid, will scarce find themselves authorised, by the precepts of their religion, to exercise such violences on each other. And do you desire a repetition of these scenes ? Humanity will withhold you from so wanton a declaration.

WELL, then, it must be confessed we had not enough attended to these things, and Peace must be allowed to be a Blessing. But still a better Peace might have been had for the same price at which this was purchased : and it is an affront to the sense and reason of the nation, to have Rights so dearly earned, and acquisitions so hardly made, and so essential to our well-being, given up to the enemy, by the ignorance, or villainy of our Negotiators.

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It may be so, for ought I know : for I have no grounds on which to form a judgment in this matter : and I doubt not but when such villainy is detected, and fully proved, that it will meet condign punishment. But it may also not be so : and if those that lay the complaint, are no better informed than I am, it is probable it is not so. That the concessions of the enemy, and the conditions of the Peace, do not amount to the utmost our successes in the War seem to intitle us to, I readily allow : but this may be owing to causes very different from either ignorance or villainy in the Ministers. Examine all history, and point me out the Peace which gives the conqueror all his situation enabled him to demand. I am sure our annals afford no such instance. Or recollect your own private affairs, and tell me if, in any matter of consequence, to which there were various parties, every circumstance fell in with such ease and precision, as to enable you to compleat the whole exactly in the manner you wished. And if this cannot be done, as I am afraid it cannot, in our little concerns, how large is the allowance which candour must make in transactions of such compass and extent, where the jarring interests, and inflamed passions of contending Princes are to be composed and reconciled, who bend with the last reluctance, to those humiliating exigencies the hard necessity of the War has imposed on them ? This Peace secures to Great Britain a larger and better territory than all the Wars from the conquest to this day, have produced ; and yet, I have allowed it to be far enough from compleat.

And

And what does this shew? Only this: that speculative arrangements are very different things from practical Execution; and that, perhaps, the nature of human affairs will not admit of that full exactness, coincidence, and adjustment, in action, which we readily conceive in Idea. Perhaps some material defect, or decay, in essentials, known only to those who touch and govern the principal springs of the political Machine, or some unaccountable perverseness in the enemy, founded in rage or despair, unconquerable by any arguments or applications, may make it impossible for you to obtain even those Rights to which you are unquestionably intitled, which would give a roundness and compactness to your system, which you ardently wish for, and most earnestly endeavour after. What is to be done? Will you again "cast the lot into the lap," subject the whole state to the chance of War, because you cannot reach that point of perfection, which perhaps never was reached, and which perhaps is simply unattainable by mortal man? Prudence, I believe, will give other advice.

OR will it misbecome us to apply the doctrine in the text to this great Occasion, and to reverence, as we discern, the hand of Providence interposing, to check the insolence of Victory, and put men in mind of their dependence, which a long course of success is but too apt to make them forget?

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things themselves? For abundant experience must have convinced us, that we are far from being infallible judges of our true interests, in affairs of such extent. There must somewhere be a Line, drawn by Nature, beyond which no country can wholesomely colonize. On which side that Line we now are, I pretend not to say. But this is certain, that whenever it is transgressed, instead of aggrandizing, you only induce a radical decay on the Mother Country, which undermines its foundations; and when the Capital Fabric tumbles, the Colonies, though intended, perhaps, as its Props and Support, must inevitably be buried in the ruins.

So that every advantage, which seems to offer itself so obviously to every common observer, may not, when weighed in the scale, which the unskilful know not how to hold, prove so salutary to their Country as the unthinking are so ready to pronounce.

BUT be it as it may. Still Peace may be a Blessing devoutly to be wished. For, in estimates of this kind, it is not the Conditions of the Peace only, that are to be taken into the account, but the circumstances of the Nation also, which may demand it. And every grievance of the War, which is pernicious to the State, must be allowed to be a recommendation of the Peace. And such, I believe, those who have thought on this subject, have found attending us, at this juncture: One especially, which I have reserved for this place, for your particular attention, of so
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blasting a complexion, that it singly makes Peace, I had almost said any Peace necessary.

THROUGH the ignorance, or craft, in which the short-sighted are wont to abound, of the Politicians at the Revolution, it happened, that one of the best maxims of sound policy, to raise the supplies, for the expence of the year, within the year, was forgotten, or neglected. So that in the Wars, which soon followed, by the anticipation of the annual supplies, a national Debt was contracted, which leaned heavily on the best part of the subjects, the industrious, the commercial, and the landed, insomuch, that even the returns of Peace brought not with them, on that account, that ease and refreshment which otherwise naturally results from it. This was not unremarked by the discerning, at that time ; but was over-ruled, by that strange imagination, that I know not what kind of security arises to Government from its being in debt. This, by degrees, and, I suppose, for the same reasons, grew into a custom ; till, at last, we find ourselves crouching under a debt which would have astonished our forefathers, and may be allowed to alarm us. But this is not the worst of the malady. The wisdom of better Politicians may correct the errors of the ignorant ; and in some season of Peace and serenity, the breaches made in the Constitution, by the little arts of the crafty, may be repaired by the wholesome exertion of the abilities of a vigorous, sound, and upright administration. But the palpable incapacity of our Financiers, in the last war, was such, that they could not tread

even this beaten track, without exposing their country to the depredations of the vilest race of vermin that ever preyed on a commonwealth. The Stockjobbers, I mean; who, with the avidity of the wolves of the forest, have fallen on every new loan, as their proper prey; and, to the disgrace of all government, have gone on, uninterrupted, in the exercise of every base art, every species of fraud, deceit, and circumvention, which cunning could devise, or villainy execute: insomuch, that this country is thought to have suffered more from the machinations of these miscreants, than from the pressure of that enormous debt, which the necessities of the state annually accumulated.

AND the "Wages of their unrighteousness" have been such, as have astonished those who disdained to be contaminated in this vile traffic; and industry has blushed at the small progress to be made in the ways of honesty, when it compared its little heap with the mountains of wealth raised by these mushrooms of a day.

AND, to shew the pitch this depravity has reached, we may observe, that even Shame, the last lingering guardian of integrity, which sometimes supports it in minds unacquainted with better principles, even Shame is gone away; and cant terms and mock appellations have been ludicrously invented for practices, which, as they in truth are, so ought they to be called, plain knavery. But this is ever the course. For in morals, ridicule is the fatal symptom of expiring honour, and the sure successor of departed honesty.

NOR is this yet the worst. Property may be transferred, from hand to hand, even by these base arts, without endangering the being of the community. But the mischief to be apprehended is, a total change of the Genius of the whole people, when every generous sentiment, every feeling of humanity, all sense of honour, and all regard to decorum and a character, is swallowed up and lost in this raging lust of gain.

FOR this has not been confined to the dregs of the people, but the contagion has spread through the most respectable ranks of the state; and, to the disgrace of the nation, we have seen Peers and Senators, Magistrates and Clergymen, ignominiously mixing with this obscene herd; and with foreign whores, foreign Jews, and foreign sharpers, in this dishonest scramble.

LET me borrow a glass from Rome, in which these men may see the deformity of their conduct.

A GREAT statesman, in a treatise of Ethics, puts this Case:

A MERCHANT sails from Alexandria to Rhodes, with a cargo of Corn; of which, on his arrival, he finds the Rhodians in extreme want. At the same time he knows, which the Rhodians do not, that many other ships, laden with the same commodity, are on their voyage to the same Port. — The Question is, Whether he shall declare this circumstance, or sell his own cargo, in silence, at the best price he can get?

IF he is an ingenuous, honest, just man, says Cicero, he will certainly declare it; for to conceal it would be direct knavery and injustice.

WILL not Christianity weep, when the conduct of her degenerate sons is compared with the decision of this honest Heathen? Must she not blush at the letters from the Hague, and orders from Amsterdam, forged in England, and, at the eager haste with which these Christians seize the lucrative advantages resulting from the fears of the timorous and unskilful, raised by such infamous expedients?

AND where will all this end? For, as soon as the prospect of Peace had somewhat stilled this storm, in which the innocent were shipwrecked that Knaves might ride on its billows in triumph: Have we not seen one of the Adepts in these mysteries, disdainful of the low arts of fraud and chicanery, attempt, and execute, one of the boldest and most enormous forgeries, that ever appeared in this country?

AND, what is much more to be lamented, have we not seen the flower of England bursting every band of honour, and every tie of gratitude, “as threads of tow that have smelted the fire;” crowding with shameless haste, and bending with ignominious fervility, to the new Dispensers of Emoluments, as the Babylonians of old to the golden image which Nebuchadnezzar the King had set up.

AT such a Crisis in the national Character, must not Peace be a blessed dispensation, which drops the curtain on scenes of such turpitude, and, by removing the temptation, cuts off all occasion and opportunity of repeating them?

AND

AND now, it is to be hoped, the Legislature will find leisure to squeeze these upstart sponges, swelled with the spoils of their Country, to the natural size of Citizens of their rank. For surely it requires no extraordinary sagacity, to fall on a method of doing so high an act of Justice to their country; and, at the same time, to turn the current of the supplies into such channels, as shall protect it from the impure handling of this wretched Crew of Harpies.

FOR is it not intolerable to observe, as many wise men, with the deepest concern have long done, on the approach of a new Tax, the industrious Tradesmen, the Yeomanry, and the lower Gentry, the Nerves and Sinews of the state, in dutiful obedience to their Sovereign, and moved perhaps by some remains of that antiquated Virtue, Patriotism, preparing for its arrival; proceeding with the most serious anxiety in considering what can be saved, what can be spared, retrenching somewhat of the figure and appearance their situation, in decency, demands; and not without touching perhaps on some things,

Queis humana sibi doleat natura negatis,

rather than the state should sustain detriment from their refusal or delay; and, at the same time, to see the gaiety and alertness with which these wretches are calculating, how many hundreds, how many thousands, how many tens of thousands of this sum, with so much difficulty and distress scarce extracted from every branch of the veins of their Country, shall be diverted into their Pockets?

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WHAT must the resentment of this sensible People be, to see the national aids, granted, as they trusted, to strengthen and invigorate the exertions of the national power, converted into the nourishment of the Botches and Tumours of this country! To see the Gentry distressed and impoverished, Trade cramped and fettered, and the very vitals of the people squeezed out, to furnish the stakes in a gaming-house.

WHAT a waste of the Loyalty and confidence of a generous people! and what ignorance, or wantonness, in the Ministers and Financiers, not to know, or to despise, that great truth, that no where upon earth is the good-will of the people so indispensably necessary to the Prince, as in this country! for but too many unhappy occasions have verified Gourville's observation, That a King of England, without the Affections of his people, is just nothing at all.

BUT a better disposition may surely now be expected; and then will the liberal part of our countrymen, who have been unhappily touched with this stain, to which they could not be moved by baseness of nature, but were drawn perhaps into this foul vortex by the all powerful force of the general example, feel the remorse which every generous nature must undergo, at this unwary deviation from the paths of honour. And, when they have recollected themselves, to which the calm of Peace affords at once the motives and the means, and looked round on the company, with which they have debased themselves, mere indignation will sever them for ever from this vile commerce, and they
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will return to the honourable Ranks they were born to hold in the community.

THEN will Reason and Honour resume the sway, and remind them of the various duties resulting from the high character they have to sustain, as Men, as Englishmen, as Gentlemen, as Christians. And when the Root of all Evil is thus extirpated, and the scales of Avarice are fallen from their eyes, they will clearly see the absurdity of individuals attempting to found their private happiness on any thing else but the broad basis of the public welfare. And when they look up to the fountain of honour, emulation will excite them to run, with vigour, the race that God and Nature has set before them, and to atone for their late humiliation by higher attainments in the ways of honour; conscious, as they must be, that nothing else can recommend them to the notice and approbation of a Prince, who is at once the Rewarder and the Example of every Virtue.

To the fine feelings of this excellent Person, to the delicate Sympathy which made him share in the dangers the intrepidity of his forces were incessantly hurrying them into, to his just discernment and commiseration of the hardships the industrious and the honest laboured under at home, from the inevitable expence of the War, we owe his ready acquiescence in the terms of Peace, which the events of the War disposed the Enemy to offer; and, to the favour of Providence, its full accomplishment.

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AND what is the conduct which Reason points out, as fit to be held by us all on this great occasion? Surely not to litigate the terms of the Peace, which we cannot alter; but to co-operate with our Sovereign, and, as we hope, with Providence, in diffusing, to the utmost extent, the blessings that naturally attend it.

IT will well become the superior Ranks, and the more immediate Servants of the Crown, to still all indecent squabbles, if such there be, for those Posts of honour or emolument, to which their Birth or Abilities may intitle them: that no occasion be given to constructions unfavourable to persons so elevated, or to any degrading surmises, that public spirit is yielding to private views, in characters so respectable: to preserve their honour and integrity clear and unbroken; that so their influence may be the greater and the better on the inferior ranks, which naturally take their colour from them: to surround the Throne with the bulwark of Union; declining all contest but that glorious one becoming their dignity and loyalty, who shall serve their country with most Zeal and Ability, in the stations to which the wisdom of the Sovereign may call them.

IT will become us all to let our Resentments, however excited, subside; and to call off our desires from objects plainly unattainable, or, if attainable, yet not without a Repetition of those Scenes which Humanity would wish to throw a perpetual veil over.

AND

AND, when our minds are thus composed and sedate, it will not be amiss to bring our Possessions to a strict examination at the Bar of Reason: but let it not be cold, abstracted Reason, but human Reason, tempered, as it ever is, when unperverted, with the soft affections of Love and Benevolence. And then, if we find any Excess beyond what has descended to us by fair inheritance, or what we may have gained in the ways of prudence and honour, this Sovereign Directress will shew us the propriety of searching, with the most scrupulous diligence, the crowd of the injured, if peradventure we may find the unfortunate individual to whom it justly belongs; or, if this should be impossible, yet let not the accursed thing cleave to us, but let us pay it to those, whom Providence has appointed the legitimate Receivers in such Cases, and let Charity sanctify what Avarice had polluted.

A QUIET Submission to Government, and a patient enduring the Burdens the War has brought on us, will become the lower ranks, much better surely than Strife and Clamour, which have been thought, even when most unreasonable, to have thrown many able Ministers off their bias, and to have defeated the wisest measures planned for the public utility. The events of the War have been so great and so frequent, that they have raised in them an insatiable Curiosity, which has degenerated into an unprofitable pragmatical spirit; and this has been fed with the Trash of political Scribblers, till the meanest of the people, to their

no small vexation, have erected themselves into judges of those measures it is impossible they should understand.

LET it be one of the happy fruits of the Peace, to call off the attention of this useful order from "these great matters, which are too high for them;" and to restore them to a sober and diligent application to the duties of their respective professions. Which sure it were not difficult to do, would they but consider how absurd it must be in those who cannot promote, to obstruct the motions of their Superiors; to clog and hang on the wheels of Government, which, even when unimpeded, must move but heavily, loaded, as they are, with the weight of the public Debt; and how improvident to increase the difficulties, and, of consequence, the expence of administration, which they themselves must pay.

AND, when the Nation is thus returned to its old good nature, its old good humour, and its old good manners, Peace will unfold its blessings in their genuine proportions, and all will discern and confess its excellence.

AND, when Reason has thus "had her perfect work," then shall the "sun of righteousness arise in our hearts," and shed its benign influence, 'till the motions of humanity are improved into Christian Charity; operating in the moral world, as the great Luminary gilds and serenens the face of Nature after a storm. And then shall we feel the high complacency arising from the mutual contemplation of each others improvements, while all are zealous to compleat the
character

character of good men and good Subjects, by the necessary addition of the Christian Graces. Then shall Gratitude kindle its holy flame in minds so well ordered; and the Experience of dispensations so gracious will raise an humble confidence, and a reasonable hope, that the supreme Providence will hear the prayer (in which may all be qualified to join!) that the welfare and prosperity of a brave, an honest, and a faithful people, may be perpetual.

F I N I S.

