

"THE COUNSEL AND PLEASURE OF GOD IN THE VICISSITUDES OF
STATES AND COMMUNITIES."

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE

CHURCH OF ST. JAMES, SYDNEY,

ON THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 1829,

BEING THE DAY APPOINTED FOR A

General Thanksgiving to Almighty God,

IN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF HIS MERCY

IN PUTTING AN END TO THE

LATE SEVERE DROUGHT,

AND IN AVERTING

HIS THREATENED JUDGMENTS FROM THIS COLONY.

BY THE VENERABLE

WILLIAM GRANT BROUGHTON, M. A.

ARCHDEACON OF NEW SOUTH WALES,

AND

LATE CHAPLAIN OF THE TOWER OF LONDON.

PUBLISHED BY DIRECTION OF

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1829.

THE GOVERNMENT AND PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
STATE AND CONSTITUTION

A SPEECH

DELIVERED BY THE HON. THE CHIEF SECRETARY FOR THE COLONY
IN THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
ON THE 11TH NOVEMBER 1850

IN ANSWER TO A RESOLUTION PASSED BY THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

ON THE 11TH NOVEMBER 1850

RELATIVE TO THE PROPOSED

IN THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

LATE SEVERE DROUGHT.

BY THE HON. THE CHIEF SECRETARY FOR THE COLONY

IN THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

ON THE 11TH NOVEMBER 1850

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WILLIAM GRANT BROUGHTON, M.A.

RECEIVED BY THE HON. THE CHIEF SECRETARY FOR THE COLONY

AND

LATE CHIEF SECRETARY OF THE COLONY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

PRINTED BY DUNSTON OF

HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR

THE GOVERNMENT

Printed by

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1850.

TO
LIEUTENANT-GENERAL RALPH DARLING,
GOVERNOR IN CHIEF

OF
NEW SOUTH WALES AND ITS DEPENDENCIES,
COLONEL OF THE 90TH REGIMENT OF INFANTRY,
&c. &c. &c.

This Sermon,

PUBLISHED IN COMPLIANCE WITH
HIS EXCELLENCY'S DIRECTION,
IS INSCRIBED,
WITH EVERY SENTIMENT
OF SINCERE AND GRATEFUL RESPECT,

BY HIS
MOST FAITHFUL AND OBEDIENT SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.

Mr Broughton
With the Author's Love

TO

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL RALPH DARLING,

GOVERNOR IN CHIEF

COLONEL OF THE 50th REGIMENT OF INFANTRY.

THE AUTHOR

IS INSCRIBED,

THE AUTHOR

A SERMON,

&c. &c. &c.

ISAIAH XLVI, 10.

"My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure."

THE foundation of all religion must be laid in the belief of an overruling Providence. So far as that assurance is fixed in the heart, an inlet is opened for the admission of devout impressions, and for the sanctifying influence of God's grace to operate on individuals. To the same extent to which the individuals who compose them live and act habitually under this impression, nations and communities are entitled to the designation of *religious*; but no farther. If we can look upon passing events, even those which are apparently the least important, and persuade ourselves that they so happen by the impulse of chance or fate, or whatever other name we may bestow upon the controlling power, instead of acknowledging that all proceed under the wise direction, and continual superintendence of Him who is the Creator and Governor of all things, then is our system no better than one of direct Atheism. A

system which thus excludes "the finger of God" from interposition in human affairs, can have no effect in improving our dispositions in this world ; still less in rendering us meet for that which is to come. We may acknowledge a Supreme Being in name ; but if we strip him of his attributes, if we consider the Universe, and especially our part of it, as exempted from his superintendence, what motive remains why we should seek and serve, and fear and obey and love him ? Every true servant of God, I repeat, will consider himself, his connections, and all the events of his life, as existing under, and proceeding according to, this controlling heavenly influence. That which unthinking men call fortune, the reflecting Christian acknowledges to be Providence ; and it would be far from an uninteresting employment to point out how this is exemplified around us and within us, and to cause many of my hearers to testify, from their own personal experience, that this representation is strictly agreeable to truth. But the circumstances of our present meeting call upon us rather to apply this doctrine of a superintending Providence to the case of a community,—of that community whereof we all are members ; and from a review of past experience, to recommend the duty of present and future thankfulness for the mercies vouchsafed to us from the Source of every blessing.

To this course we are also invited by the words of the text, referring, as they evidently do, to the determined purpose of the Almighty in so allotting national good and evil as to bring to pass the purposes of his own unsearchable will: "My counsel shall stand; and I will do all my pleasure." The precise and immediate reference here, is undoubtedly to that first-chosen, and never entirely forgotten or forsaken people, whom, in a previous verse, their gracious God so movingly addresses: "Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, which are born by me from the belly; which are carried from the womb. And even to your old age I am He; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry and will deliver you."* If we required an instance of the fulfilment of this affectionate and affecting assurance, doubtless the entire history of that people is filled with examples to our purpose. What are all the promises and threats, the mercies and severities, the punishments and the remissions, which, during the lapse of ages, distinguished the history of the Jews, but so many instances of God's earnest desire to preserve them in their true interest, that is, in his worship and fear; of his resolution to punish or reward them, in proportion to their neglect or ob-

* Isa. xlv. 3, 4.

servance of his laws, and by their agency to “do all his pleasure?”* “His seed will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven:” but, “if his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes and keep not my commandments, then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes.”*

In resting this doctrine of God's superintendence of the affairs of nations upon the case of the Jews, it is however proper to observe, as it might appear to form an objection, that theirs was an instance professedly miraculous; and that the marks of divine interposition, in their temporal success and failure, were more direct and more visible than are now witnessed, or can be expected with regard to other nations. Still I am persuaded that this affords no real objection to the doctrine in question. With respect to the Jews, indeed, God has told us, in more direct terms, the ends which he had in view, and has displayed more visibly the means of their accomplishment; but in the history of no nation in the world has he left himself without witness. Two especial conclusions are universally to be drawn;—First, that every people, in whatever country, has had some appointed purpose to execute in the great scheme of earthly Providence; and Secondly, that with respect

* Psalm lxxxix. 29—32.

to nations, although the interposition of God be not directly shewn, as was the case with the Jews, by an inseparable connection between obedience and prosperity; still, if we regard their final destinies, we shall find them universally given up to decay and punishment, so soon as they have proved themselves unqualified to fulfil the purposes of God. "My counsel," he says, without exception, "shall stand; and I will do all my pleasure." This might be fully exemplified by a reference to the history of those empires which have proved of greater importance to mankind at large, and have attracted to themselves a greater share of attention, through their connection with the introduction of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, than from their unrivalled proficiency in the arts of war and peace.

But the most signal, the most recent, and to us the most immediately important instance of this procedure of the Divine Counsels, is found in the present condition of that country to which so many here present look back as to the land of their birth. The present attitude of Great Britain, with reference to the other and even the most distant parts of the globe, is beyond all comparison the most interesting feature which presents itself to every devout observer of the signs of the times; as her influence upon the present and future condition of those countries is

momentous beyond the reach of foresight or the possibility of conjecture. If there be any here present, whose reflections have never yet been directed to this channel, but who have witnessed the exaltation of the English nation, and its gradual extension of power to the limits of the habitable world, without ever considering this but as effected in the natural course of things, and not, as it assuredly is, by the particular and evident Providence of the Lord, for the fulfilment of his own purposes; if such there be among us, let them, I say, awake and take a new view of passing events, which will fill their minds with astonishment, and with expectation of what is coming upon all the earth. "The vision is yet for an appointed time," and, "he may run that readeth it."* Look to the East and to the West, to the North and to the South; and every where we witness the extension of the English name. Some men may take so narrow a view of these occurrences, as to be satisfied that the feeling of ambition, the competition of commerce, the desire of novelty, or any of those immediate motives by which men are induced to spread themselves over the world, will sufficiently account for them; and that when the desire of power, of wealth, or of amusement, is gratified, there is no farther result to be expected. But such views, if they prevail, are narrow indeed. Let us

* Habak. ii. 2, 3.

expand our conceptions of the government under which the concerns of the world are conducted, by a reference to that Sacred Book in which the will and purposes of the great Governor of the world are recorded; and we shall be irresistibly impressed with the conviction, that though worldly motives may have operated in diffusing the influence of our country so widely, there is a higher power in operation which directs the past and present equally in conformity with the declaration in the text: "My counsel shall stand; and I will do all my pleasure." And what, let us call to our remembrance, *what is his counsel?* *what is his pleasure?* but that "the Gospel shall be published among all nations;"* and that through its blessed influence "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."† No; it was not the design of Him who created all things for his own glory, that even these shores which we inhabit should for ever redound as little to his praise as if they had remained still undiscovered by civilized man, and unimproved by his labour and skill. It is the evident design of Almighty God that this vast tract of country should be, in his own season, replenished with a race of men to whom it is granted to "sanctify the Lord God in their hearts."‡ Here, it is true, from the beginning of time, desola-

* Mark xiii. 10.

† Habak. ii. 14.

‡ 1 Peter iii. 15.

tion and darkness had reigned ; but that resistless word has gone forth which says, “ I will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the Garden of the Lord.”* Even here shall the Church of the Redeemer say, “ I and the children which God hath given me ;”† for even here, “ God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”‡ We are therefore to consider ourselves not as placed here accidentally, nor even for the fulfilment of a temporary or unimportant purpose ; but as conducted by the Providence of God to bear our part in the execution of that eternal purpose which was laid in Christ Jesus before the world began ; when, with reference to the universal acceptance of that Eternal Covenant which was sealed by his blood, the Almighty Jehovah pronounced, “ My counsel shall stand ; and I will do all my pleasure.” We are to consider ourselves not as afflicted or favoured casually, nor as living under no government, nor as subject to a capricious power ; but as experiencing in all that befalls us, either nationally or individually, the wise and merciful discipline of One who giveth or withholdeth according to the perfection of that knowledge and that goodness which are Infinite in Himself.

* Isaiah li. 3.

† Heb. ii. 13.

‡ 2 Cor. iv. 6.

These observations apply directly to that awful calamity which lately threatened us so nearly, that no one here present could promise himself exemption from it; but which, when human aid was vain and impotent, has disappeared at the Divine bidding, like the melting away of a morning cloud. My purpose in making these observations is to induce my hearers to reflect less superficially than we are generally disposed to do, on the course and intent of the Lord's dealings with us; and thus by his blessing, without which we can do nothing, to excite, this day, a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving; as well as to establish an habitual feeling of our daily and hourly dependence upon God's Providence for life and breath and all things convenient for us. The four sore judgments of the Almighty are called "the sword and the noisome beast, and the pestilence and the famine."* Thanks, everlasting thanks and blessing and honour to His goodness, from three of these He has effectually screened us altogether; and when the fourth was terrifically impending, in his wrath he remembered mercy, and turned away from us those evils which we most justly deserved. Yet have the inhabitants of this country drank sufficiently of the cup of his displeasure, to certify them what its bitterness must be, when the dregs are poured out.—"Ye looked for much and lo it came to little; and when

* Ezek. xiv. 21.

ye brought it home I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man to his own house. Therefore the Heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labor of the hands."* This distressing description we have beheld around us literally fulfilled; and yet, consider now I pray you, these were but the beginnings of sorrows. "We may be glad and rejoice in his mercy, for he has considered our trouble and has known our soul in adversities;"† "he has turned his anger away and did not stir up all his wrath. For he remembered that we were but flesh."‡ Without entering far upon the province of imagination, we may represent to ourselves the afflictive scenes which might, which must have ensued, but that the tender mercies of our Heavenly Father failed not. Instead of the songs of praise which this day resound from all his holy temples, every dwelling and every chamber might have even now re-echoed with the groans of despair. Instead of that feeling of thankfulness which the experience of present re-

* Hag. i. 9—11.

† Psalm xxxi. 7.

‡ Psalm lxxviii. 58.

lief and the promise of future abundance excite, we who are here assembled to express that grateful sentiment, might have been condemned to stand, at this moment, looking upon each other in appalling doubt what severity of judgment would next descend upon us; and with nothing but the picture before us of certain and near-approaching public and private ruin. Nay, (for such visitations have befallen other lands, and what are we that we should claim or expect exemption?) we may even carry forward our thoughts to the actual arrival of that hour in which the means of support had failed; when famine had stalked through our streets; when the restraints of law and even the bonds of affection would have proved too weak to resist the pressure of distress and want; when anarchy would have reigned without control, and scenes of calamity would have ensued which the heart shudders and sickens to contemplate; and the utmost blessing which any could have desired or hoped, would have been to find the means of flying speedily from the shores of an exhausted and ruined country. I faintly picture the sufferings to which, under such an awful consummation, the feeble aged, and the tender helpless young, must have been exposed; and many a one who hears me will understand the pangs they must have experienced, when compelled by the imperious call of

self-preservation to neglect the pleadings of nature, and to abandon those who gave them life, or to whom they gave it; all those, in short, who have the tenderest and most sacred claim upon our reverent assiduity and our filial or paternal regard. These are not the pictures of imaginary woes. I repeat they have happened; the earth bears many testimonies to this effect upon her bosom, and history is filled with such records. Whence then, let us ask ourselves, whence then does it arise that we have not experienced the like? Whence but from the compassion and infinite beneficence of God? *that* compassion and *that* beneficence which we are, this day, so becomingly commanded devoutly and thankfully to acknowledge; and which, I trust, we do acknowledge in the inmost recesses of our hearts.

In order that these feelings of devotion and thankfulness may rest upon a right foundation, let me recal to you what was advanced in the former part of this discourse: that in planting us in this remote quarter of the globe, there was, on the part of our Lord God, a "counsel" which cannot but "stand," and a "pleasure," or determined purpose, which is yet to be fulfilled. And does the word of inspiration leave us room to doubt that this counsel and purpose was to extend the kingdom of his dear Son, and here also to "purify unto himself a

peculiar people zealous of good works ?” Looking at our situation under this point of view, I discern, with the plainness of demonstrative evidence, the final end of that calamity with which the Sovereign Lord of all so lately threatened us. Well was it qualified to awaken among us those Christian dispositions in which we are too manifestly wanting ; and to open our eyes to a sense of our entire dependence for every thing, even for our existence, upon a Power we have too much neglected and provoked. It is the counsel and pleasure of God, I repeat, to raise up here a Christian nation ; and if by our distresses we are so turned from our former vain conversation as to become indeed doers of the word and not hearers only, then will he bless us in turning away from us the punishment due to our iniquities. National mercies demand national thankfulness ; and national thankfulness is best shewn by national reformation. It is not by one day’s expression of gratitude that we must consider our debt discharged. If we approach God in that spirit, even these our solemn assemblies are an abomination to him. It is by each of us endeavouring, through God’s grace and assistance, permanently to amend our lives, and to depart from all iniquity, that the thanksgiving of this day ought to be continued and rendered acceptable. The only true religion, be assured, is that which by its influence leads its professor, through

faith in Christ, to cease to do evil and learn to do well; to become holy in affections, pure in desires, kind in disposition, thankful for mercies, and submissive under suffering. That is the true Christian belief which leads to improved practice; which fosters domestic virtue and public principle; rendering every household a scene of purity and devotion; and training the entire community to resemble one great family, living together in the true faith and fear of God, in the bonds of peace and confidence, and mutual equity and forbearance. Are these dispositions, then, visible among us? Is there not too apparent a disregard of things sacred; a disposition to forget God; to live without him in the world; and to undervalue, or even scoff at, that great Atonement by which alone the sins of the world are taken away? As a natural consequence, we trace on every side of us the universal prevalence of vice; especially of the horrid, soul-destroying crimes of drunkenness and unchastity; we trace them to such an extent around us, that a stranger would be led, from the appearance of our streets, to surmise that the name of Christ had never been named among us, but that heathen darkness and its attendant vices still prevailed. It is displeasing to swell the catalogue of our crimes; but while these things are justly laid to the charge of such multitudes, can it with truth, can it with propriety, be

affirmed that there exists any spirit of real thankfulness? Let us not deceive ourselves : “ my counsel,” saith the Lord, “ shall stand ; and I will do all my pleasure ;” and in pursuance of that determination, he will bring it to pass either that true religion shall flourish and abound, or that all the workers of iniquity shall perish. God has spared us : God has averted from us the judgments we had provoked : O let us return to him : let us render to him the sacrifice of thanksgiving by endeavouring to extend the dominion of Christ and of Christian holiness. And may his grace incline our hearts that we may have a due sense of all his mercies, and be unfeignedly thankful ; shewing forth his praise not only with our lips but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to his service, and by walking before him in holiness and righteousness all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be ascribed all honor, majesty, dominion and power, now and for evermore.—

Amen.

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