

RELIGION,
ESSENTIAL TO THE
SECURITY AND HAPPINESS OF NATIONS.

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST. PHILIP,

AT SYDNEY, IN NEW SOUTH WALES,

ON SUNDAY, JANUARY 26, 1834,

(Being the Forty-sixth Anniversary of the Foundation of the Colony.

BY THE

REV. WILLIAM GRANT BROUGHTON, M.A.,

Archdeacon of New South Wales and its Dependencies.

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[ADVERTISEMENT.]

As everything connected with the late Bishop Broughton has a melancholy interest in the eyes of his friends, no apology is offered for re-printing the following sermon. It comes to light just now with a singular appropriateness, when we are about to celebrate the anniversary of the foundation of the Colony, which dates just twenty years onward from that whereon the sermon was preached. What changes has that twenty years' interval produced? The penal origin and character of the colony almost forgotten, and in its place a position of national and political importance and commercial greatness acquired, which it is marvellous to contemplate. How strikingly appropriate will appear the subject of this sermon to our altered condition! With solemn earnestness may our venerated Father in God, though dead, be said to speak to us, when, reminding us of our national responsibilities, he admonishes us of the "vast importance and the incumbent duty of labouring to fix the principles of purity and holiness, where millions will soon be rising up to profit in time and in eternity by their enjoyment of the means of grace and salvation, or else to be miserable in time and in eternity through the dearth of them." Moreover, its warnings against shallowness and laxity in holding the faith: its advocacy of the sound christian education of the young: its admonitions against the neglect of religious ordinances, and against Sabbath-breaking: its rebukes of the pestilent sins of drunkenness and covetousness give this sermon a singular impressiveness at the present time. To use the good Bishop's own words, it is enough to add, "at what time could these warnings be inopportune? But if they can ever be considered especially appropriate it is now; on an occasion which can hardly fail to remind the most thoughtless and indifferent of the weighty obligations under which this rising community and each individual member of it is placed."

SERMON, &c.

DEUT. iv. 39, 40.

Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the Lord he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath : there is none else. Thou shalt keep therefore his statutes, and his commandments, which I command thee this day, that it may go well with thee, and thy children after thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days upon the earth, which the Lord thy God giveth thee, for ever.

In these terms, more than thirty-two centuries ago, did Moses address the children of Israel, on their emerging from the wilderness ; when he at the same time announced that the day was now come in which it was appointed for them to pass over Jordan, and to possess the land which the Lord sware unto their fathers that He would give them to dwell in. " Therefore," he says to them again, respecting the injunction of the text, " thou shalt keep the commandments of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways and to fear him. For the Lord thy God bringeth thee into a good land—a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills—a land of wheat and barley, and vines, and fig-trees, and pomegranates—a land of oil-olive and honey—a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it—a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass."—*Deuteron. viii. 6—9.*

It must be impossible, I should conceive, to read, without great interest, these declarations of the terms upon which prosperity and duration were promised by God to that com-

monwealth which he in an especial manner founded. The rules which were thus promulgated, must be eternally and universally applicable: for in God there is "no variableness neither shadow of turning." "His word shall stand for ever."

As long therefore as the societies of men shall continue to multiply on the earth—as long as the parallel case shall occur, of leading forth nations and planting them in new lands where they may take root and multiply, and, agreeably to the primitive charter, may "replenish the earth and subdue it," so long must all who believe in God as the Supreme Director and Governor of human affairs, be anxious to comply with the principles upon which, they are instructed by him, their civil greatness and security, no less than the happiness of individuals, depend.

The institutions of a nation, it is pronounced, must be fixed upon a religious basis, to be either permanent or salutary. There can be no dependance that provisions designed for the public good will accomplish that end, unless there lie at the root of all, a deliberate acknowledgment that "the Lord he is God in heaven above and in the earth beneath": and that there is none else whose power, wisdom and goodness are equal to the task of ordering the unruly "wills and affections of sinful men"—of providing for their manifold wants upon earth, and of guiding them in the path of eternal glory. God assures us, in that He communicates to the people of Israel, that according to his appointment, if any would prolong their days upon the earth which the Lord hath given them, if they desire that it should go well either with themselves or their posterity, the only course by which these ends are to be attained, will be "to keep his statutes and his commandments."

If we had faith even as a grain of mustard seed, we should receive, without waiting for other authority than the declaration of God himself, a truth which so readily commends itself to all the most reasonable conceptions which we can entertain of his providential regard for man. But as we are too much disposed to manifest that spirit which demands a

sign from heaven to confirm the testimony of God, I will appeal to one sign which is so uniformly exhibited as to be inexplicable upon any other supposition than that of a divine and overruling appointment. I mean that in the course of history, no nation appears to have fallen utterly, until a forgetfulness of God had taken general possession of the inhabitants of the land. Instances there are unquestionably, of virtuous and religious nations having sustained the severest trials, war, civil discord, and even temporary subjection to their enemies. But of such a final and conclusive overthrow as should destroy a people, and blot out its name from the earth, I can recall no instance, except where that people had first exhibited signs of religious defection and consequent moral degradation, such as marked the nation of the Jews, for example, during the latter stages of its existence, and more eminently disfigured it upon the eve of its final catastrophe.

The conclusion to be drawn from this is, that a spirit of piety and devotion generally animating a people, is to them what the vital principle or the life is to an individual. So long as this is preserved, whatever calamities may befall, there is still ground for hope that a happier period may be approaching. But when godliness is generally extinct, or God forgotten or despised, then is the last end not far distant: and "Where the carcase is, thither will the eagles be shortly gathered together."

If experience did not confirm these opinions, reason might be appealed to for proof, that in proportion as the influence of religion upon men's minds is less extended and established, so must the security of worldly possessions and of life itself, be diminished also. Where there is no hold upon the minds and consciences of men but from human laws, even the certainty, and therefore much less the apprehension, of detection and of extreme punishment cannot restrain the hand of violence: impelled as it is by the force of unbridled passion. If such be the state of morals in any community that among the people generally there is no conscience to check secret

dishonesty, and no fear of divine justice to deter from open force, then human laws are no restraint upon fraud which can evade them : locks and bars afford no protection against the violence which sets such slight securities at defiance. Nay, there will be, in such a state as is supposed, less regard paid to human laws, when there is so much reason to anticipate that the truth can never be known without oaths. But among a people who fear not to say "the Lord liveth," and yet "swear falsely," oaths cannot prove any thing.

Peace, too, is as little to be expected in an infidel community and constitution. Wrath and resentment must prevail, and fill with bitterness and hatred the minds of those who ought to live in harmony and good neighbourhood, strangers to malice and revenge, unless they remember habitually that "vengeance is the Lord's ; He will repay ;" unless religion shall have taught them to expect a blessing upon lowliness and meekness of heart, and to trust that their own sins will be forgiven only if they themselves forgive each one his brother their trespasses, as God for Christ's sake has forgiven them.

And if, where there is no religion, no restraining fear of God nor faith in a future state, malice and revenge are at full liberty, how shall life be safe ? The proud, the wrathful, or the vindictive, may when they please, with a prospect of impunity, (for perjury may screen them) lay violent hands upon their brethren in this life, if they have no expectation of meeting them in another, before the judgment-seat of Him who is the Author and Guardian of human life, and the dread Avenger of blood violently and unjustly shed.

As a community, then, which is irreligious, can afford but precarious security to liberty, property, peace, or life, it is no better, perhaps it is even worse, than no society at all : for when the laws which are in operation do no good, they must do mischief. Every prudent and honest man will endeavour to remove himself as fast as he can from under such a ruinous and tottering heap of iniquity, as must prevail if the little religion which now exists were to be altogether withdrawn.

If, as it is most certain they would, the faithful and upright should betake themselves to flight when they beheld the last spark of godliness expiring, and the darkness of infidelity gathering hopelessly around, the degenerate mass that would be left behind must quickly be destroyed in its own corruption. Justly did our Lord pronounce of his followers, "Ye are the salt of the earth." "Ye are the light of the world." A society made up of persons wholly devoid of religion, could not subsist. Their own injustice and wickedness would save Divine vengeance the necessity of interposing as in the matter of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, beneath whom the earth opened its mouth to swallow them up quick. It is but allowing the wicked full scope to prosecute their abandoned purposes without check or hindrance from the example of any who fear the Lord; and they will bring down vengeance upon themselves through that inseparable connexion between wickedness and destruction, which sooner or later is found to prevail in all human affairs.*

The words of the text suggest these observations; while all experience, and none more powerfully than that derived from the example of the Jews, confirms their truth. To us assuredly my brethren, they furnish matter for the gravest consideration. For are not you whom I now address standing upon the threshold, as it were, of a new fabric of society; anxious, "that it may go well with you, and with your children after you; having as yet no certain landmarks set up;" sensible, I trust, how very important it is that they should be permanently and therefore prudently established; and aware with how serious a calamity any mistake in fixing the principles by which society shall be regulated, must be attended, not now alone, but it may be said, henceforth even for ever.

Be sober therefore in your judgments; be vigilant in scrutinizing what you shall approve; for upon the decision of

* See the Rev. Philip Skelton's Sermon, entitled "Religion necessary to Civil Society"; from which the last three paragraphs are in substance taken; but with much alteration.

the present generation, depend in a great degree, the virtue, the happiness, the eternal welfare it may be, of all that are to follow. At what time could these warnings be deemed inopportune? But if they can ever be considered especially appropriate, it is now; on an occasion which can hardly fail to remind the most thoughtless and indifferent of the weighty obligations under which this rising community and each individual member of it is placed. Forty-six years expire this day, since the soil upon which we stand was for the first time trodden by the foot of civilized man.

This is the return of the day on which the founders of the Colony, under a providential guidance, we cannot permit ourselves to doubt, first landed under the shade of a Forest coeval with the ground upon which it stood; and drank with thankfulness of the stream which is still flowing: not as then through the majestic solitudes of God's creation, but amidst the enterprises of art and skill, and beside the crowded habitations of men. It is a day to be much remembered and observed: for however little thought of or intended at the time, great have been, and greater incomparably yet must be, the effects of that day's proceedings upon the condition of so prolific a branch of the human family as has taken root and is extending itself here. It has been the custom to celebrate the day's return with demonstrations of festivity not unnatural in themselves, nor censurable, if enjoyed with moderation and sobriety. But such rejoicings have no tendency to excite the reflections which are appropriate to a reasonable and religious being, contemplating this important episode in the history of the human race. They cannot be expected to leave behind them an impression of the vast importance and the incumbent duty of labouring to fix the principles of purity and holiness, where millions will soon be rising up to profit in time and in eternity by their enjoyment of the means of grace and salvation, or else to be miserable in time and in eternity through the dearth of them. I have availed myself, therefore, of the opportunity, not very frequent, of addressing you at a season which renders these observations doubly impressive; in

the hope that the efficacy which is thus borrowed from the time, may compensate for the feebleness and imperfection with which it is in my power to present to you truths of such unquestionable magnitude and importance. Something has been already said to you upon the justice and certainty of the precept of the divinely inspired law-giver: that if the people of Israel were anxious it should go well with them and with their children after them—if they desired to prolong their days upon the earth which the Lord their God had given them for ever, then was it indispensable that they should steadfastly acknowledge him who is God in heaven above and in the earth beneath; nor acknowledge him in words alone, but also keep his statutes and his commandments. What then do we in the present day, but continue to hand down this memorable lesson as of never-ending obligation? What do we but remind and warn the generation who are entering as it were by the gate of the Lord into another land of Canaan, that if they would enjoy happiness, whether national or individual, if the abundance of prosperity which it seems probable they may reap, is to prove to them a blessing not a curse, their principal care and concern must be to scatter plentifully the seeds of religion, the fear of God and the faith of Christ crucified, in all the quarters of the land. They must lay the foundations of the Gospel deep and wide, and strive to bring its heavenly principles into general adoption and operation.

How then, it may be asked, is this to be brought to pass? How are the hearts of men to be placed under such restraints of religion? How is this prevailing spirit of piety to be introduced, and how to be spread over a community? I reply that the extent and influence of religion in a community can be only as the extent to which it prevails, and the influence which it exercises over the individuals who compose the community: and in their case it is the gift of God. Not of themselves, lest any should boast; but the effect of his blessing upon their pious and earnest application to his appointed means of grace.

But since God worketh not except for those who, while

there is time, prudently and diligently exercise the capacities which he has given them, I will refer to a few of the leading points to which we must apply ourselves, if we would have a genuine and influencing piety become the characteristic of the land : of which, however, God is our judge, we see as yet but little hope or prospect.

First, we must seek and strive to have, through the grace of God, our faith established ; and to fix our principles and abide by them. "Without faith it is impossible to please him ;" and there can be no faith where there are no settled principles. Let every christian enquire earnestly, if he will jealously, into the grounds of the truth ; but being once satisfied that he has found it, let him embrace it with decision. It sounds well, indeed, to talk of exemption from intolerance ; and in proof of it to maintain that all opinions and modes of faith are equally good if they be but sincerely entertained. But this is the very language and artifice of the deceiver to betray men's souls to perdition. All opinions in religion are not equally good, however sincerely they may be entertained. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself ;" "neither is there any other name given whereby we must be saved." Whatever stands opposed to this, or does not accept this as the only ground of salvation, is error and sin. And till we have resolution fearlessly to adopt this profession exclusively, and to reject all community of feeling with those who talk ambiguously of Christ, and are neither hot nor cold in their acknowledgment of him, we are influenced, it is clear, rather by the praise of men than by the praise of God : and can have no claim to the title of a religious or a christian nation.

Secondly, we must without reserve or compromise bring up our children, and, as far as we are able, provide that all the children around us and among us be brought up according to these principles ; in firm adherence to the faith of a Redeemer which we are persuaded God has revealed from heaven to save a perishing world. It is the shallowest and at the same time most corrupt of all conceptions, that we must not

have our children taught what we ourselves are satisfied is truth, and divine truth, lest we prejudice their opinions and disable them from free enquiry. The answer to this is, that we do not thereby prejudice their minds; but being ourselves taught of God what is truth, and knowing that the mind of a child has no spontaneous capacity or disposition to receive it, we do by such instruction no more than *remove* the prejudices *against* the truth, in which otherwise the mind would naturally grow up. "Train up a child in the way he should go," says the wisest of men, "and when he is old he will not depart from it." And if professed christians ever do depart from this, under a plea of repressing the growth of prejudice, they will find not a christian generation rising up around them, but a generation of infidels and libertines.

Thirdly, to form a religious community, it is necessary to consider how the ordinances of the Almighty which minister to the support of religion, are observed. And among these, what ordinance more sacred and important than the Sabbath? How then is it observed among us? As if we sincerely designed to comply with the precept of Moses, by keeping the statutes and ordinances which God commanded us? Alas! no: rather I fear is there a too general, and all but universal neglect of this sacred day. Hundreds and thousands there are around us who by their conduct evidently prove that they entertain no sense of its holiness; while by the best, with very few exceptions, it is negligently and imperfectly hallowed. How this sad evil is to be remedied I know not, except by the revival among us of a more earnest zeal in the service of God, by parents devoting greater attention first to their own practice and then to the practice of their children; masters doing the same for their tradesmen and servants; and by those above all who are in authority taking care that nothing in their influence or example shall operate to weaken in the minds of others a due reverence for the day of God's rest. So intimately is the religious observance of that day connected with the maintenance of religion, that unless the present lax and negligent attention to its proper observance can be checked,

slight is the expectation that a warm spirit of devotion can ever be diffused and firmly established here.

Fourthly, to afford religion more room and freedom to extend itself, we must place greater restraint upon the disposition of covetousness. While all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's, how can his cause truly prosper among us? For "ye cannot serve God and mammon." There evidently prevails too general a desire for the hasty accumulation of wealth; and yet at the same time a readiness to squander it upon superfluities; not only unnecessary, as their name implies; but positively hurtful. Above all, I shrink with horror to reflect what incredible sums are devoted to the indulgence of intemperance; of drunkenness which robs its victims of the faculties, and it may almost be said of the form of a man; which dries up the spring of happiness, and prosperity in many a family; inflicts the extremity of woe upon many a heartbroken wife; and ruin, and infamy upon a neglected and abandoned offspring. In a nation where the commandments of God and the name of Christ were truly revered, such things, my brethern, could not be.

I forbear, however, to enlarge the catalogue of vices, which characterize only to disgrace our community; and deprive us, I fear, of any just claim to account ourselves a religious people. It has appeared to me that the present day afforded a favorable opportunity for charging you to lay these things solemnly to heart; and to make this not a season of a rejoicing, but rather of humiliation on account of our great unworthiness of the manifold blessings and advantages which the Lord has showered upon us. As an appropriate monument also of the event which this day witnessed, and in perpetual acknowledgment that the frame of human society should stand upon the word of God, and be compacted together by his pure worship, provision has been made for the preservation within the walls of this church, the oldest place of Christian worship existing in the Colony, of the Bible and Book of Common Prayer which accompanied the original settlers, and were here first used in the service of Almighty God. May they remind

us, and our posterity, to the latest generations, of our duty to reverence and study that sacred word : and thus at least to show our thankfulness to God who has brought us into " a land where we may eat bread without scarceness, and not lack any thing in it." A heinous and a hateful sin is national ingratitude: may it never be imputable to us. Having before us in the Sacred Volume, the history of God's ancient people, may we by it be warned to avoid the causes of their overthrow. Let us not tempt God, as some of them tempted ; let us not murmur, as some of them also murmured ; lest we be destroyed by the destroyer. Above all, let us not reject, as they rejected, the Lord who came from heaven to save us : but serve him with holy affections and purified hearts. Embrace his offers of mercy ; return to him that ye may be saved ; put your whole trust in his redeeming grace and in his precious blood. Thus shall it indeed " go well with you, and with your children after you." " In their days shall the righteous flourish ; yea, and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth : " " truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness look down from heaven." " Drop down ye heavens from above." I pray you unite with me in saying " and let the skies pour down righteousness ; let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation ; and let righteousness spring up together ; the Lord hath created it."—*Isaiah* xlv. 8. " He is God in heaven above, and in the earth beneath : there is none else." " Let all the ends of the world remember, therefore, and be turned unto the Lord ; let all the kindreds of the nations worship before him." " In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths." Thus, and thus only, shall ye grow up to be, like Israel of old, " a great nation and an understanding people." Thus shall ye " prolong your days," not upon the earth, but in the heavenly Canaan, which the Lord hath given for ever to all who sincerely love and trust in him ; to whom, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be ascribed all honour and praise, dominion and power, for evermore.

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QUE,
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