

National piety conducive to national happiness. A sermon
preached at the spring assize, for the county of Denbigh,
April 3d. 1794, by Whitehall W. Davies, ...

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National piety conducive to national happiness.

A

SE R M O N

PREACHED AT THE SPRING ASSIZE,

FOR THE

COUNTY OF DENBIGH,

April 3d. 1794,

By WHITEHALL W. DAVIES, A. M.

FELLOW OF

CHRIST'S COLLEGE CAMBRIDGE,

AND CHAPLAIN TO HIS GRACE

THE DUKE OF NORFOLK.

Published at the request of the High Sheriff,
and Grand Jury.

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TO

BRYAN COOKE ESQUIRE,

HIGH SHERIFF FOR THE COUNTY,

TO

SIR WATKIN W. WYNNE, BART.

FOREMAN,

AND TO THE OTHER

GENTLEMEN OF THE GRAND JURY,

THIS DISCOURSE

IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

BY THEIR OBEDIENT SERVANT,

W. W. DAVIES.

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SRMON, &c.

PSALM, 144. V. 15.

HAPPY IS THAT PEOPLE THAT IS IN
SUCH A CASE, YEA HAPPY IS THAT PEO-
PLE WHOSE GOD IS THE LORD.

IN this instructive Psalm, the King of
Israel presents to us a lively description
of public prosperity. After selecting the chief
circumstances which denote, or constitute,
the happiness of a people, advancing popu-
lation, increasing wealth, security from the
irruption of foreign enemies, and exemp-
tion from the complaints of domestic foes,
he concludes with a circumstance equivalent
to all, for it is the cause of all, " Happy is
that people whose God is the Lord.

T>hi rend="smallcaps">HE Enemies, from whom David prays,
B and

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and prays with confidence to be delivered,
are described as " strange children, whose
" mouth speaketh of vanity, and their right
" hand is a right hand of falshood : "

which terms, in the language of scripture,
imply blasphemy towards God, and deceit to-
wards man : and as these points are pressed
a second time on our attention in the com-
pass of a very few verses, in order to en-
force the contrast with the character of those
" whose God is the Lord," we may conclude
that the royal Psalmist designed to convey not
only the favour and loving-kindness of the Al-
mighty towards his chosen people, but that

this people, on the other hand, acknowledged HIM as their benefactor, and adored him as their God; that their happiness was derived from the great fountain of all good, and derived in consequence of their obedience to his WILL, and reverence for his NAME.

BUT be this as it may, history warrants the assertion, that nations have prospered or declined, in proportion as they have advanced in virtue, or sunk into vice : and whether, in this dispensation, the mind, overpowered with pious awe, sees only the immediate act of

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of God ; or whether, with more curious research, she traces the effect to its cause, and pronounces that depravation of character is equally destructive to nations, and to individuals, the argument is still the same; for these causes and effects, the eternal and immutable laws of the moral world, are the ordinance of God; and in them we see as distinctly the figure of divine justice and mercy, as in the natural world we behold the impress of divine wisdom and power.

ENLARGING upon these ideas, I shall first endeavour to point out undoubted and undeniable instances of divine interposition, to punish an ungrateful and rebellious people: and, secondly, examine why national piety is the necessary cause of national welfare.

I. I am first to point out undeniable instances of divine interposition. In the history of the Jews there is not, perhaps, a single instance, where disobedience to the will of God is not followed by some great and general cala-

mity; in many cases the nature of the punishment is exactly foretold, and declared by the voice of prophecy to be the consequence of defection from God: it is therefore impossible to

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allege, that these signal judgments fell upon them by what is called the natural course of events. But as the effect, produced on the mind by general assertion, is rather acquiescence than conviction, I shall select three instances, which will appear satisfactory, because presented distinctly and in detail; I shall quote the passages in which they are contained at some length; there are three points to which you will principally direct your attention; the nature of the crime, the nature of the punishment, and the precision of the prophecy which connects them.

i. The first instance is found in the eleventh chapter of the first book of Kings,

" And it came to pass at that time, when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him in the way ; and he had clad himself with a new garment, and they two were alone in the field. And Ahijah caught the new garment that was on him, and rent it in twelve pieces. And he said to Jeroboam, Take thee ten pieces, for thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel; Behold I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee ***; because that they have forsaken me, and have worshipped Ashtoreth, the goddess of

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" Of the Zidonians, Chemosh, the god of the Mo-
" abites, and Milcom, the god of the children of
" Ammon ; and have not walked in my ways, to
" do that which is right in mine eyes, and to keep
" my statutes and my judgments, as did David his
" father. Howbeit, I will not take the kingdom
" out of his hand, but I will make him prince all
" the days of his life, for David my servant's sake,
" whom I chose, because he kept my commandments
" and my statutes ; but I will take the kingdom
" out of his son's hand, and give it unto thee, even
" ten tribes."

The completion of this prophecy is found
in the subsequent chapter.

" And the king" (namely Rehoboam the son
of Solomon) "answered the people roughly, and
" forsook the old men's counsel that they gave him,
" and spake to them after the counsel of the young
" men, saying, my father made your yoke heavy,
" and I will add to your yoke ; my father also
" chastized you with whips, but I will chastize
" you with scorpions. Wherefore the king heark-"
" ened not unto the people, FOR THE CAUSE WAS
" FROM THE LORD, THAT HE MIGHT PER-
" FORM HIS SAYING, WHICH THE LORD SPAKE
" BY AHIJAH THE SHILONITE UNTO JERO-
"BOAM THE SON OF NEBAT.*** So Israel

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" rebelled against the house of David to this day.
2. For the second instance I must refer you
to the twenty-fifth chapter of Jeremiah
" The Lord hath sent you all his servants the pro-
" phets, " ** saying, " 'Turn ye again now
" every one from his evil way,*** and go not after
" other gods to serve them and to worship them.
***yet ye have not hearkened unto me, saith the Lord.

" ** Therefore thus faith the Lord of Hosts, be-
" cause ye have not heard my words, behold I will
" send and take all the families of the north, saith
" the Lord, and Nebuchadnezzar the king of
" Babylon my servant, and will bring them
" against this land, and against the inhabitants
" thereof, and against all these nations round
" about, and will utterly destroy them, and make
" them an astonishment, and an hissing and per-
" petual desolation. *** And these nations shall
" serve the king of Babylon seventy years."

For the completion of this prophecy we
must turn to the second book of Chroni-
cles; at the close of which we read, that
" all the chief of the Priests and the people
" transgressed very much," ** and " mocked
" the messengers of God, and despised his words,
"and misused his prophets : *** therefore he
brought

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" brought upon them the king of the Chaldees,
" who few their young men with the sword
" in the house of their sanctuary, and had
" no compassion upon young man or maiden, old
" man or him that stooped for age he gave
" them all into his hand. ** and them that
" escaped from the sword carried he away to
" Babylon, where they were servants to him
" and his sons, until the reign of the king-
" dom of Persia : TO FULFIL THE WORD OF
" THE LORD BY THE MOUTH OF JEREMI-
" AH, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths ;
" for, so long has she lay desolate, she kept sab-
" bath to fulfil three-fore and ten years.

3. THE last instance is found in the twenty
third chapter of St. Matthew: it relates to
the final destruction of Jerusalem by the

Roman arms.

" O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest
" the prophets, and stonest them which are sent
" unto thee , how often would I have gathered
" thy children together, even as a hen gather-
" eth her chickens under her wings, and ye
" would not : behold your house is left unto
" you desolate." If it be enquired what
is meant by the desolation of Jerusa-
lem, the answer is clear and explicit :
" When

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CC (When ye Shall see Jerusalem com-
" passed with armies, then know that the
" desolation thereof is nigh; **
* in those days
" ** there shall be great distress in the land,
" and wrath upon this people; and they shall
"fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be
led away captive into all nations; and Je-
" rusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles,
" until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled."
It is well known that Jerusalem did fall,
and that the circumstances of calamity, at-
tending its destruction, have no parallel in
the annals of history. The present disper-
sion of the Jews is a living testimony, that
they were led away captive among all nations;
and no reasonable man, who considers that they
are still a distinct and separate race, not dissolved
and loft in the general mass of society by
a lapse of seventeen centuries, can doubt,
that these scattered sheep of the house of Is-
rael, will, at the appointed time, be gather-
ed together, and that we shall become " one
fold under one Shepherd, Jesus Christ the righteous. '
In each of the instances, now laid before

you, the crime is the same, defection from the worship, or opposition to the will of God;

St.Luke X X. X X.

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God, in each, a calamity ensues commensurate with the offence; and in each, the crime and calamity are inseparably connected by means of an intervening prophecy: it is not easy to conceive, by what proofs the reality of divine interposition can be more incontrovertibly established.

IT may be urged against the conclusion I would draw from these facts, that the Jews were selected from the rest of the world to be the peculiar people of God; and therefore, instances of divine interposition may be expected among them, for which we should in vain examine the history of other nations. To this I answer, that the destruction of Babylon and Tyre are foretold by Ezekiel and Jeremiah, with as much precision, as the destruction of Jerusalem: I forbear to quote the passages; they will be easily found by those who are desirous to pursue the enquiry.

THE conclusion then, and we shall do well to attend to it, is this : that throughout the Jewish history, God has punished national irreligion with national suffering; that he has afflicted other nations, as well

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as the Jews, when their crimes called for

punishment; and therefore we have reason to believe, that similar enormities will, at all times, and upon all nations, bring down similar destruction.

AND indeed, the general history of mankind affords examples, without number, of the corruption of nations, followed by some signal overthrow: but these the nature of my argument forbids me to adduce; because proof of divine interposition is altogether wanting, or darkly seen in the mysterious language of the more obscure prophecies: in the history of the Jews all is distinct and clear: we are admitted into the very presence of God, we hear the mandate of Omnipotence, and instantly behold the elements and powers of the world co-operate to fulfil his word. Piety adores in silence, and doubt settles in conviction.

NOR are the denunciations of the wrath of God, against that rebellious and idolatrous nation, more explicit than his promises of favour, on condition of their return to obedience; of this nature is the following passage of Jeremiah. "Thus saith the Lord of
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@, the God of Israel; amend your ways
"and your doings, and I will cause you to
"dwell in this place. Trust ye not in lying
"words, saying, the temple of the Lord, the
"temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord
"are these; for, if ye throughly amend your
"ways and your doings, if you throughly ex-
"ecute judgment between a man and his neigh-
"bour; if ye oppress not the stranger, the fa-
"therless, and the widow; and shed not in-

"nocent blood in this place; NEITHER WALK
"AFTER OTHER GODS TO YOUR HURT, then
"I will cause you to dwell in this place, in
"the land that I gave to your fathers, for
"ever and ever." @

BUT, though the sacred writings afford-
ed no examples of divine interposition,
to reward the obedient as well as to
punish the rebellious, it may still be assert-
ed, that religion and piety are, in their own
nature, the necessary causes of national pros-
perity. And this is the subject I proposed
to consider under the second head of my
discourse.

II. HOWEVER great the consolations of re-
ligion to individuals, by heightening the en-
C2 joyments,
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joyments, and alleviating the afflictions of
life, and by assurance of eternal and com-
plete happiness in another state of existence,
yet, I shall pass over these considerations
without farther notice; because my present
subject only regards religion, as it operates
upon civil society; and is consequently li-
mited to the consideration of public and
and temporal advantages.

LET US suppose, that there existed a so-
ciety of men so perfect, as to be incapa-
ble of injuring each other, either in the
act or in the wish; it is evident, that
their system of morality, founded on what-
ever principle, would render all other re-
straints superfluous; no mischief could arise,
but through ignorance or inadvertency, and
reparation would be offered, before it was

demanded. If, in process of time, vice should obtain a partial admittance among them, there would be a combination to exclude the obnoxious persons from their society, or at least to lay them under such restraints, as appeared likely to prevent a repetition of the offence : if crimes still multiplied, and vice became progressive, penal law must advance with equal pace, and justice

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justice assume a more sever aspect ; if the contagion spread still wider, and guilt, from the confidence of numbers, opposed menace to authority, the executive goverment must be armed with greater and more discretionary power, adequate to check the growing mischief: if this were found impractical, the bands of society would be rent asunder, and every man be left to perpetrate all that malignity could suggest, and cruelty execute. To this extension of sin, religion opposes a firm, I wish I could say impenetrable, barrier: she denounces murder, adultery, fraud, perjury, slander, and every offense, by which man is rendered pernicious, she forbids intemperance, and every habit, by which he is rendered useless : and as She suppresses every crime, in all its modifications and degrees, so she ripens every virtue which can meliorate, and every grace which can adorn society; by her we are commanded, to comfort the afflicted, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, and to visit the sick ; we are enjoined to be " kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love, in honour preferring one another." And " to secure by the strongest ties our obedience

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to her authority, she has proved, that this life is not the termination of our existence, that through the gates of death, we shall pass to the tribunal of a Judge, whose knowledge nothing can escape, whose power nothing can resist. Before him the books are opened, in which our actions, our words, and our thoughts, are all faithfully recorded; by this evidence we shall stand or fall, be happy or miserable eternally.

INDEED, so manifest are the temporal advantages of religion, that we may reasonably doubt, whether it be not essential to the very existence of society. The belief of a future state has, in all ages, prevailed amongst mankind; and, though the influence of such an opinion must, in some measure, depend on the force of the arguments advanced in its support, yet, the possibility of its truth at all times operated with powerful restraint. Our times alone have witnessed the portentous spectacle of a nation, infidels upon system, proclaiming death to be an eternal sleep: for the warm and vital energy of religion, substituting a cold and delusive philosophy, which perverts the understanding, and corrupts the heart. The revered

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revered names of patriotism, liberty, and reason, are usurped, and polluted, by atheism, anarchy, and blood guiltiness : humanity is

decried as weakness, and moderation proscribed as treason: such are the principles which now desolate one of the fairest portions of the civilized world; principles more ruinous in their progress than famine or the sword, than " the pestilence that walketh " in darkness, " or " the destruction that wasteth at noon-day."

IN the course of my argument, I' have asserted the uniform interposition of God, to punish the Jews for disobedience; and, in support of this assertion, adduced three instances, which appear incontrovertible: I mentioned two instances of similar interposition, in the destruction of gentile nations; and hence inferred the probability, that the Almighty Judge of human actions, and Disposer of human events, dealing with impartiality among the nations of the earth, will punish every people, who refuse to acknowledge his authority, and obey his laws. I have shewn that God, in the midst of judgment remembering mercy, promised to avert from the Jews the threatened calamity,

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ty, and establish them for ever in the land of their inheritance if they would repent and turn to their God : and therefore we may trust, that the universal Father will extend to every nation under heaven the same terms of forgiveness and acceptance. And @ is should be said, that although the history of the Jews, and of some other nations, may afford instances, where the interposition of providence is evident and undeniable, yet the rules of legitimate reasoning will not allow us to draw general conclusions from parti-

cular facts, I endeavoured to shew, under the second head of my discourse, that it is an essential property of religion, to promote the welfare of society; of irreligion) to produce national misery.

THE practical inference to be deduced will have a force proportionate to the clearness, with which these points have been established. That it is the duty of every man, as a member of society, to exert all the influence he derives from fortune, rank, office, &c, or character, to promote, both by precept and example, the knowledge of religion, and the practice of morality: it can not be too frequently repeated, that to become

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come a good citizen, it is necessary to become a good man.

If these principles had been inculcated with sufficient care, less mischief would have arisen from the contagion of those political writings, which of late have been dispersed, with alarming &c, throughout the kingdom. Abstract speculations on civil freedom are found extremely seducing, especially to young minds; which are not aware, that before theory can be reduced to practice, the moral state of the nation, to which it is applied, must be taken into serious consideration ; if a nation be virtuous, it will also be free: but no people either can, or ought to possess a greater share of civil liberty, than that, which, by their progress in moral rectitude, they are justly entitled to enjoy. It remains, that we intrust Almighty God, to protect us with his gracious favour; to

impress on our minds an awful @ of the
reverence due to his holy name, and a firm.
conviction of thie truth of his revealed word:
to strengthen our resolutions of amendment,
and assist our efforts : and while we resist the
impulse or allurement of sin through @
of

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of his displeasure, that he would breathe in-
to our hcarts the vital spirit of Christian cha-
rity : so shall we be marked as the chosen peo-
pie of God, and "@ unto the resurrection
" of everlasting life," through Jesus Christ our
Lord; to whom with the Father, and the
Holy Ghost, be ascribed all praise and glory,
majesty and dominion for ever and evcr. Amen.