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S E R M O N

ON THE NECESSITY OF BUILDING

A FREE CHURCH

FOR THE GENERAL ACCOMMODATION OF

THE PARISH OF WALCOT

AT LARGE,

And of the POOR in particular

BY THE

REVEREND WILLIAM LEIGH, LL.B.

RECTOR OF LITTLE-PLUMSTEAD IN THE COUNTY OF NORFOLK.

PRICE ONE SHILLING

A
S E R M O N
PREACHED AT BATH,
DURING THE MONTH OF DECEMBER 1792,
AT
THE PARISH CHURCH OF WALCOT,
AND IN THE CHAPELS OF
ST. MARGARET AND QUEEN-SQUARE,
POINTING OUT
THE NECESSITY OF BUILDING
A FREE CHURCH.
TO WHICH IS ADDED
A N A P P E N D I X,
BY SEVERAL GENTLEMEN,
GIVING AN ACCOUNT OF THEIR PROCEEDINGS IN THE
PROSECUTION OF THE PLAN.

BATH, PRINTED BY R CRUTTWELL,
AND SOLD IN LONDON BY
ROBSON, BOND-STREET, AND PHILLIPS, GEORGE-YARD, LOMBARD STREET,
AND BY ALL THE BOOKSELLERS IN BATH

MDCXCIII.

TO THE
INHABITANTS OF THE PARISH OF WALCOT,
IS MOST RESPECTFULLY ADDRESSED
AND DEDICATED
THIS SERMON;
WHICH,
BY THE REQUEST OF THEIR WORTHY MINISTER,
HAS BEEN WRITTEN, PREACHED, AND IS NOW MADE PUBLIC,
FOR THE PURPOSE OF POINTING OUT THE NECESSITY FOR BUILDING
A FREE CHURCH
FOR THE GENERAL ACCOMMODATION OF
THE PARISH AT LARGE,
BUT MORE PARTICULARLY OF
THE PAROCHIAL POOR,
DURING
THE USUAL TIMES OF DIVINE SERVICE.

S E R M O N.

JAMES II. 1.

MY BRETHREN; HAVE NOT THE FAITH OF OUR LORD
JESUS CHRIST, THE LORD OF GLORY, WITH RESPECT
OF PERSONS.

THE love of distinction may justly be considered, not merely as one of the most active and prevailing passions in the human breast, but as that, upon which, in proportion as it is well or ill regulated, depends the welfare of individuals, and the good order and happiness of society.

In men of mean and narrow minds, who look upon wealth as the most enviable of human distinctions, this passion is found to degenerate into avarice, and displays itself in a thousand petty instances of fraud and rapacity: in spirits of a more liberal cast, and more extensive views, it often becomes

comes subservient to ambition; and will break out, if not restrained by common prudence, by the stronger sense of moral rectitude, and of obedience to the Word of God, into unlawful efforts for the acquisition of power, or into a violent abuse of it when acquired.

But when this love of distinction is implanted in men of right principles and sound understanding, when it is exerted by proper means, and directed to proper ends; and when it is regulated by a strict adherence to that duty which every man owes to society; then it is, that it produces almost every thing that is useful, and honourable, and excellent, that it stimulates the exertions of the artist, the philosopher, and the patriot; that it quickens industry, and animates virtue: in short, it is to this principle, thus acting and thus governed, that we may ascribe almost all that in different ages of the world has contributed to polish, to improve, and to dignify mankind.

For the support then and for the propagation of a principle so eminently and so extensively beneficial, it is necessary

fary and it is juſt that ſociety ſhould hold out to merit of every kind thoſe diſtinctions which are beſt ſuited to reward it, and to which it moſt naturally and moſt honourably aſpires, ſo that no ſpecies of activity ſhould be exerciſed in vain, either with regard to the individual who exerts it, or to the community which is benefited by ſuch exertion, and that, as well for the one as for the other of theſe purpoſes, there ſhould, in every well-regulated ſtate, be objects worthy the attainment of every one who has talents and perfeverance ſufficient to attain them, Power for Wiſdom—Wealth for Industry—Honour for Virtue. On theſe grounds have in all ages and in all countries been eſtabliſhed, and on theſe grounds are in all times to be defended and approved, certain gradations in ſociety of rank and of riches, which ariſe from the proportionate exertions of ability, of induſtry, and of goodneſs among individuals, and which to confound, or to aboliſh, would be to take away from among men all liberal motives for the active and uſeful exerciſe of talents, and of virtue, and to ſubſtitute a barren indolence of diſpoſition, and a fluggiſh inſenſibility to excellence of every kind, in its room.

But whatever policy or justice may dictate with respect to the affairs of this world, and to the different relations of man to man in the modifications of human society; with regard to that wide, and common relation in which we all stand to the great Creator of the universe, there can be no variety, no preference, no distinction: and though the greatest benefit is doubtless to be acquired to society by the existence of personal distinctions arising from influence, from wealth, or from ability, yet Religion considers all mankind in this respect upon an equal footing; since it is from the bounty of the Supreme Being that originates all that wealth, that ability, and that fortunate concurrence of circumstances, which form the basis of every degree of eminence in society.

In the sight of God, therefore, all personal distinctions, however honoured by the approbation of the world, are of no avail: the approbation of the world may gratify our pride. Religion consults not our pride, but prescribes our duty. We may reason ourselves, as indeed we are justified in doing, into an opinion of the consequence of that approbation to our happiness; but Religion appeals from our reasoning

reasoning faculties to our faith in Christ, and to our obedience to the Gospel: Amongst our fellow-creatures, we may rank high or low according to our relative merit or situation, but Religion commands that we all walk in *equal humility* with our God, since there can be no claim to pre-eminence in the presence of Him, who is all-knowing, and all-powerful, and in whose sight human grandeur is but vanity, and human wisdom but foolishness.

The purity and benevolence of the Christian faith inculcates no precept more diligently than this equal situation of mankind in the eyes of their Creator¹ and the simplicity of the Christian worship (more especially of that reformed state in which we have adopted it) is admirably well calculated for its illustration. Instances, however, of departure from this simplicity are to be found scattered through the New Testament, and there is among them one which presents itself so forcibly, and which so aptly applies to the particular occasion for which I have been induced thus to address you from this place, that I have chosen it to characterize the subject of my discourse.

“ My

“ My brethren, (saith the Apostle St. James in his general
 “ epistle) have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ the
 “ Lord of glory with respect of persons. For if there come
 “ into your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly
 “ apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile rai-
 “ ment, and ye have respect unto him that weareth the gay
 “ clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place;
 “ and say unto the poor, Stand thou there, or sit thou here
 “ under my footstool · are ye not then partial in yourselves,
 “ and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hearken, my
 “ beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this
 “ world, that they should be rich in faith, and heirs of
 “ the kingdom which he promised to them that love him?
 “ But ye have despised the poor: if therefore ye have regard
 “ to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law
 “ as transgressors.”

From this reproach of the Apostle, it should seem, that
 it was not in the disobedience of the *great* precepts alone,
 that the purity of the Gospel was destroyed even in those
 early days, but that the pride of the human heart displayed
 its

its unjust partialities even in the forms of its worship, and created a distinction in the very house of God, where, of all places, distinctions of any kind are most especially forbidden.

You will recollect that the first object of the *Christian* Revelation is, that it is to be addressed without partiality to *all mankind*, for it prescribes no duty as essential to salvation, which it is not in the power of all men to obey; nor does it appoint any form of worship, with which all men may not equally and without difficulty comply. It is not by precept alone that this object has been ascertained, for the history of Christianity gives us frequent and striking examples of the truth of it during the earliest period of its propagation. “Go your way, (saith our Saviour to the disciples of John the Baptist, who came to enquire of him if he were indeed the promised Messiah) and tell John what things ye have seen and heard how that the Blind see, the Lame walk, the Lepers are cleansed, the Deaf hear, the Dead are raised to Life again, AND TO THE POOR THE GOSPEL IS PREACHED.” And Christ’s last command to his Apostles, just before his ascension into heaven, was, that they

should “ go, and make Christians of ALL NATIONS, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”

It is also worthy of our observation, that the first divine declaration ever made to a heathen convert, as in the case of Cornelius the Roman centurion (of the justice and propriety of which, it required a circumstantial vision from heaven thrice repeated to convince St. Peter) was conveyed in this solemn form: “ Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but that in every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted of him.”

It may be justly asserted, that the second great commandment of Christianity will be more extensively practised when it is founded upon the first. good actions acquire additional value from being derived from good principles, and perhaps the most persuasive motive to man for the impartial exercise of his benevolence, is the conviction that God himself is no respecter of persons.

If

If then this great Christian Principle be thus found proportionably beneficial, as it is made to take part in all the active concerns of life, is it not the duty, and ought it not to be the pleasure, of every Christian, to assist in extending its influence over every part of society? I refer not, by this observation, to the particular moral conduct and religious examples of Individuals, these are objects of our daily practice, but I refer more especially to the *social* part of our Christian duty, which demands general and united exertions in behalf of Christianity, whenever such exertions, as in the present case, become necessary, in order to give equal opportunity to *all persons* of frequenting the public service of Religion, and in order to encourage a regular and decent attendance: since without an habitual and general attention to the Public Worship of the Deity, the very spirit of Christianity will gradually languish and decay.

The advantages which arise from some established form of Public Worship are manifold: it is not intended at present to enter into the comparative merits of any of the various forms into which the Christian world is divided, but we
may

may collect the general agreement,* that *some form is necessary*, from the zeal with which every one maintains the
superior

* The importance of public places of worship will fully appear from the following historical extract from Prideaux's *Connection*, vol. 1 p 390.

Mentioning the causes which prevented the Jews from falling into idolatry, after their return from captivity, and the building of the second temple, he proceeds thus " So that the Law of Moses was never more strictly observed by
" them, than from the time of Ezra (when synagogues first came into use
" among them) to the time of our Saviour, and they would have been un-
" blameable herein had they not overdone it, by adding corrupt traditions of
" their own devising, whereby at length (as our Saviour chargeth them) they
" made the Law itself of none effect. And as by this method the Jewish
" religion was preserved in the times mentioned, so also was it by the same,
" that the Christian was so successfully propagated in the first ages of the Church,
" and hath ever since been preserved among us. For as the Jews had their
" synagogues, in which the Law and the Prophets were read unto them every
" Sabbath; so the Christians had their churches, in which from the beginning
" all the doctrines and duties of their religion were every Lord's Day taught,
" inculcated, and explained unto them. And by God's blessing upon this
" method chiefly was it, that this holy religion still bore up against all oppressions,
" and notwithstanding the ten persecutions, and all other artifices and methods
" of cruelty and oppression, which hell and heathenism could devise to suppress
" it, grew up and increased under them. which JULIAN THE APOSTATE was
" so sensible of, that when he put all his wits to work to find out new me-
" thods

superior excellence of his own. Let it not then, My Brethren, be either privately insinuated, or publicly laid to our charge, that we, whose constant attendance in this place proves the preference which we give to our own establishment, are become lukewarm as to its preservation, or indifferent as to its *general* reception and support.

It is one of the principal benefits of Public Worship, that it affords a visible proof of the impartial love of the Deity towards all mankind. In the House of God prayers and praises are offered up to heaven in the behalf of *all*, we are *all* THERE equally instructed in the hopes and in the fears, in the conditions and in the promises, of the gospel,—the sacraments are equally and without respect of persons administered to *all*. In the equality of public worship, there is

“thods for the restoring of the heathen impiety, he could not think of any
 “more effectual for this purpose, than to employ his philosophers to preach it
 “up every week to the people, in the same manner as the Ministers of the
 “Gospel did the Christian religion. And had it not pleased God to cut him
 “off before he could put this design in execution, it is to be feared that his
 “success herein would in a very great measure have answered what he proposed
 “by it. &c.”

E

therefore

therefore an unambiguous consolation to those upon whom the world does not smile: for in the House of God at least, no person can be considered as an outcast of society, in the House of God at least, the most wretched and forlorn may be rescued from despair.

It would occupy more of your time and attention than could be appropriated to a discourse from this place, to describe particularly the advantages of public worship in all its gradations, as it tends to keep alive, through every period of our present existence, the comforts, the blessings, and the hopes of Christianity. Suffice it to say, that it is the leading source from which Religious Principles are nurtured in our infancy, are strengthened in our youth, are matured in our manhood, and become the consolation of our age. We are taught by it to look up to the Deity with joy, to tremble at his displeasure, to have confidence in his promises, and to view the near approach of death without sorrowful apprehensions. With regard to this life also, the habitual attendance on public worship, by setting before us so repeatedly the history of all that has been done and suffered for us by our
Saviour

Saviour and Redeemer, teaches us the true nature and the final object of that piety, that faith, and that fortitude, which are required of us, and thus it tends to imprint indelibly upon our minds, that we should become insensible, in a great measure, to every encomium, and to every reproach, except such as we apprehend will rest upon us at the last solemn day of account, from the unerring judgment of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. On these grounds every sincere Christian will account it his duty and his happiness to encourage the regular attendance of all ranks of people, and to remove every obstacle which may prevent it.

The Ceremonial of the Church of England is not burthenfome in what it requires of us ; it impedes not the necessary attention to any business ; it interferes not with the reasonable pursuit of any pleasure, its great object is, that we should worship God after the manner which *he himself* hath pointed out as most acceptable to him, in the Name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost ; in the full assurance of pardon through Christ to repenting sinners, in the firm faith of deliverance from death, by the death of our Redeemer ;

deemer; and of resurrection to immortal life through his resurrection.

Such then being in few words the spirit of the mediatorial covenant between God and Man, which has been made public by the gospel, and confirmed by the death of Jesus Christ; on what motives of private convenience, or of personal advantage, can any Christian justify the seclusion of part of the community from the participation of its public service? And if by any unfortunate train of circumstances (for I must call the very prosperity of a place unfortunate, if it tend to confine the influence of the religious principle) the poor of this parish should happen to be denied a general and free access to places of public worship, which, from having been built at the expence of individuals, cannot reasonably perhaps be expected to open their doors promiscuously to all, but only to those who purchase admission there, it should seem that such Religious Assemblies (however sincere be the devotion of those who frequent them) must unhappily be subject to the reproach of not complying with the first principle of the Christian Religion—that TO THE POOR

THE

THE GOSPEL IS PREACHED—of thus giving the example of men having the glorious faith of our Lord Jesus Christ with respect of persons : and of thus making the Temple of the common Father and Redeemer of us all, a place where the rich and the poor do NOT freely meet together.

Yet, my brethren, although this be a fact, of which the truth cannot be denied, and of which the existence must be lamented; still may we not be permitted to hope, that there are means in our power to wipe away from among us the reproach under which at present we labour, of not accommodating the parochial poor during the time of Divine Service?—a reproach which, though it may be attributed principally to the respect in which the right of private property*

* It is unfortunately the nature of man to turn into abuse the very best principles of society for instance—The exercise of the right of private property is now in many instances falling into great abuse, particularly in our churches and chapels; in the former, the right of possessing pews, now become private property, threatens gradually to take away *all accommodations* from the poor during the time of Divine Service. The poor, it seems, *may* indeed *stand* in the aisles; though even of this limited indulgence they are deprived in our chapels, where, it must be owned, they are most unwelcome guests. It is a known fact, that

is deservedly held in this country, ought not, in a parish where improvements of every kind are so rapidly advancing, to be permitted any longer to exist.

The most effectual remedy appears to be that of building a FREE CHURCH: and we trust, that, without injury and without offence to any individual, we may solicit your assistance towards the completion of this design, which, in addition to the places of public worship already established, may give general opportunity to persons in every station of life to meet together, *at one and the same time*, and with one heart and one voice to adore the Majesty of Heaven and Earth, “to praise the Lord for his goodness, and to declare “the wonders that he doeth for the children of men.”

there is a disposition in the middling and lower classes of people in Bath and Walcot to attend Divine Service, and that many, of those who do attend, retire before Service is ended, for want of the common accommodation of a sufficient number of benches and seats properly disposed and appropriated to their use. It must be obvious to every one, that if some attention be not paid to these circumstances, the good effects of those early impressions of Christianity, which are now generally given to the children of the poor, will be very much abridged.

All

All therefore, who sincerely wish to preserve the peace of society, and to extend the general influence of Christian principles, may be assured that they will find their account in contributing to throw open the door of public worship indiscriminately to all: and thus to instruct all persons without exception, that as the divine assistance is promised to human solicitation, what no man can be too virtuous not seriously to want, no man can be too vicious not conditionally to obtain from the tender mercies of our God.

To the inhabitants of this large and opulent parish, who have been long in the laudable habit of providing for the religious education of the *children* of their poor, it is with peculiar propriety, that the consideration of procuring *free access* to some place of public worship *during the usual times of Divine Service*, is seriously recommended. THEY well know how small is the proportion of the whole number which the parish church* is able to contain: THEY also well

* Perhaps the circumstance here alluded to may not be peculiar to Bath, but may prevail in a greater or less degree in several other places, of which the industry and commerce may have occasioned a rapid increase of population. But let it prevail where it may, it is an evil which deserves the attention of *Government*,

know that the discouragement which the poor of Walcot meet with in entering the chapels which are called private property, is equivalent to a prohibition. What and if these very children, brought up under their own eyes,† must be made to feel that the opportunity of joining in the prayers of *this* congregation will be taken away from them, the moment they quit that school in which they have received the first impressions of Religion! and that as children they are admitted where they will be excluded as men! Surely partialities such as these should remind us, that the decline of

ment, if it be not in the inclination or in the power of individuals to remedy it. From this general observation, however, it is with singular pleasure that I am able to except the chapel at Tunbridge Wells, which is open to all, and fitted up not with pews, but with forms with backs and arms to them, and hassocks for kneeling. One side of the chapel is appropriated to the men, the other to the women. The gallery is also in the same manner left open, that on one side of the organ for men-servants and the lower class of people; and that on the other, for female-servants, and all others who choose to attend Divine Service.

† * I have but just hinted at this very material argument; those who wish to see it displayed in its full force, will do well to consult a Sermon preached at St. Margaret's Chapel, April 15, 1792, on the same occasion as the present, by the Rev. Mr. Daubeney, and printed by R. Cruttwell.

public

public worship among the parochial poor may naturally be expected to be followed by a decline of Christian principles, but that by encouraging the establishment of a Free Church, the poor may become satisfied that their real interests are cared for by *society*, as well as by Religion. Be it then our endeavour, as it is demonstrably our duty and our advantage, to estimate truly, and by our liberality to shew that we do truly estimate, our different relations towards our fellow-creatures, and the common dependency of us all upon God, who made us what we are, who of his own beneficence and for his own wise purposes hath endowed us severally with different capacities, and permitted us to attain different degrees of success in this world, but who will most assuredly call us in the next to an equal judgment, and, if we are qualified for it, to an equal reward.

How often, in the common course of this life, do we see the father of a numerous family sending forth his children into the world, to pursue the various professions and occupations for which they severally seem best qualified by their peculiar genius and inclination. Their progress in their

different pursuits is proportioned to their different attainments and opportunities, one perhaps has risen to high eminencies of rank and of consequence, while the others may be still treading the humbler paths of life among the middling or lower classes of society. But what should we think of that son, if, elated by his superior good success, he should take upon himself therefore to pay less respect than his brothers to their *common* parent, from whom like them he derived his being, and to whom he was indebted for the instruction of his youth, which was the basis of his present exaltation, if he should say to his father, "I will not *join* with
 " my brothers in homage and respect to you, for with *them*
 " I have nothing in common, *they* are poor, and *I am* rich,
 " *they* are unsuccessful, and *I* have been prosperous." Should we not think that he, who thus acted and thus argued, had forgotten the first dictates of humanity, and the best feelings of his nature? Should we not say that, however different or distant from each other the spheres of life in which the children of one family may move, still towards the *head* of that family, as to a common center, they should feel an *equal* attraction; that at *his* board, and under *his* roof, the inequalities

lities which the affairs of this world may have occasioned among them, should be lost and absorbed in that piety and veneration towards him, which it is their common duty, and should be their common pride to acknowledge.

Now if such be the claims of an *earthly* parent, how much greater are those of our Father who is in heaven, and from whom we derive not only this present bounded existence, but the certain prospect of a world to come, not only the means of success in this life, but, through Christ, the hopes of a blessed immortality hereafter? How much greater the piety and veneration due from the diffusive *family* of mankind? Surely in *his* presence we ought to cast away the remembrance of those trifling distinctions which separate us from one another. *here* we ought to feel but *one* interest, to glow but with *one* sentiment; the consciousness that from *Him* we *all* are, and to *Him* we shall all return, that we are all equally the children of *his* love, and may all, if we please, be equally the inheritors of *his* glory

A P P E N D I X.

WALCOT FREE CHURCH.

THE want of general and free accommodation for the performance of the public services of Religion, together with the evil consequences to be apprehended from the bulk of the community being deprived of the labours of the parochial Ministry, must, to those who are well affected to our happy Establishment, be a matter of serious consideration. That this is the case in the Parish of Walcot, is notorious, and the continued increase of its buildings recommends the present subject to immediate attention. Many whole streets have been lately built, and many others are now building, for the residence of the labouring people, and there is reason to believe, that from the projected improvements in the Lower Town, and in the parish of Bathwick, considerable numbers of them will become parishioners.

The Gentlemen, therefore, who undertook last year to bring forward the subject of a Free Church to private notice, feel themselves emboldened, by the liberal subscriptions

for which many persons have made themselves responsible, and which already amount to the sum of about Two Thousand Pounds, to recommend it at length to *public* attention

They have carefully examined a great variety of plans submitted to their consideration, particularly that of an easy service,* that of purchasing galleries in the present chapels, and that of applying to the parish for a rate,† and they find none so advisable as that of building by subscription a Free Church on a large scale.

To carry this plan into execution it will require about Three Thousand Pounds, exclusive of the land, as it is proposed that the church shall be built in as central a spot as can be procured, and upon a scale sufficiently extensive to con-

* See a Letter signed A. B. in the Bath Chronicle, Nov 22, 1792.

† It appears from the assessment of the Poor Rates, that one rate of a shilling in the pound would raise three thousand pounds. There has been no Church-Rate for many years.

It was found impossible, after many attempts and vestries called for the purpose, even to enlarge the parish church, in any other way than by borrowing the money, and letting the seats to pay the interest.

tain Two Thousand People. The whole area of the building, which is calculated to hold from Twelve to Fifteen Hundred, will be benched, for the free accommodation of all the Poor who may be disposed to attend Divine Service. The Galleries round may contain fittings for about five hundred; the greater part of which are designed for the accommodation of persons in a middle rank of life, and are proposed to be lett at so low a price as will be just sufficient to defray the salaries of the Ministers, and the other necessary expences. It is also proposed, that there shall be full Service both morning and afternoon, and a Sacrament once a month.

The church will be built on freehold land, and will be vested in trustees to be appointed from among the principal contributors, (of whom the Bishop, Patron, and Incumbent, are to be three) for the purpose of preserving the free use of the same for ever, solely for the purposes abovementioned.

This plan has been submitted to the Bishop of the diocese, who has been pleased to give it his approbation, to promise a suitable donation towards its completion, and to consecrate it when finished.

Such

Such persons, therefore, as feel themselves disposed to encourage this undertaking, and may wish to receive more particular information upon it, will be so good as to apply to any one of the following Gentlemen, who will with pleasure shew them a list of sums already set down for the purpose of carrying the above plan into execution, and thankfully receive any addition to it, which they may think proper to make.

Rev. J. SIBLEY, Queen's-Parade

Rev. Dr. SUMNER, Walcot-Parade

Rev. CHARLES DAUBENY, Royal Crescent

Rev. WILLIAM LEIGH,

GEORGE WESTCOTT, esq, } Mailborough-Buildings.

GEORGE RAMSAY, esq, }

Subscriptions are also received at the Bank of Messieurs *Whitehead, Penlott and Co.* Milfom-street, where a list of the subscribers is deposited.

F I N I S.

