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A SERMON,

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DEUTERONOMY IV, 7, 8, 9.

THE responsibility, Fathers and Brethren, as you well know, of nations and of Churches, is great in proportion to their privileges and their profession. The words of our text are taken from the solemn charge of Moses to Israel, in delivering to them the Law of God, and he enhances their obligations not only by recalling to them the *gracious and merciful* dealings of the Lord towards them in times past, but in their present enjoyment of many precious privileges and advantages. "What nation is there so great who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for. And what nation is there so great that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day.—Only take heed to thyself and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life; but teach them to thy sons and thy sons' sons." And if, Fathers and Brethren, this charge might be suitably delivered to the Israelites under the privileges which they enjoyed, how much more forcibly ought it to come home to those, upon whose day the light of the Sun of Righteousness hath arisen? and if it may afford a suitable admonition to those generally whose lot hath been cast in a christian age, within the sound of Gospel truth, and within the reach of Gospel privileges, with still more impressive propriety, may it be addressed to us, who in these days have beheld truth struggling with error, and the King of Zion with the kingdoms of this world; and truth going forth gloriously conquering and to conquer, under the banner of the Lord, in despite of every opposition, whether of men or of the powers of darkness. The aspect of the church in the age of the world in which we live, is in many respects worthy of our most serious consideration. After the first dawn and rapid diffusion of the christian religion over the world—evidencing the quickening power of divine truth—the Church, through prosperity and security, lapsed into carelessness and corruption, and a long period of darkness and irreligion succeeded, till the corruptions of the church shamed even the worldly and were made instrumental in the hand of God, for re-kindling the dormant embers of religion and piety which smouldered in the breasts of a remnant which the Lord had yet reserved to himself, and blowing them into a flame which overspread, enlightened, and purified the world. But as the natural tendency of the

human heart is towards that which is opposed to the truth, watchfulness has ever been apt to be remitted under the delusive influence of prosperity, and corruptions to creep in; and thus for a time past, verging on, or in our own day, has the peace of the Churches been again casting over them the deadening influence of a carnal security.

In Scotland, till within but a few years, this torpor and insensibility had infected a large portion of the church; nor had those altogether escaped its influence who, entertaining evangelical views and mourning over the errors and corruptions by which the purity of the church was stained, yet felt themselves so weak and their opponents so strong, that they submitted with too little struggle, to evils which they too readily despaired of being able to check; and almost the only mutual feeling which held these portions together, was a common opposition to infidelity and dissent.

In England the waters are beginning to be troubled, and the result, although we may perceive signs of the times, is yet among the hidden things of God. Among the faithful sons of Scotland, external causes stirred up a godly jealousy in regard to gospel truth and their gospel rights and privileges—rights and privileges about the importance of which, till they saw themselves on the point of being deprived of them, they had become too careless and unconcerned; and they have thus been incited to a more ardent love for the truth, and to a more firm and scrupulous adherence to it. Principles have been investigated and placed in their proper light, which heretofore were but undefinedly discovered through the mists of a half awakened vision, and a keenness and searchingness of enquiry excited, in regard to first and fundamental principles, which we trust will exercise a purifying and reviving influence upon the church, for many ages to come. The scales have been removed from the eyes of multitudes, to see an aspect and tendency in things around them, which they had never before perceived—to behold a flood of evils and of dangers which had been insensibly gathering around them, to which they had not heretofore imagined themselves to be exposed, and by which the cause of the Redeemer was injured, and the glory of God tarnished; and to behold a course of duty set before them so plainly and clearly indicated, that they could not but follow in the path which it called upon them to pursue. And impelled to make a stand in defence of their churches, privileges, and of their own rights as a christian people, multitudes both of ministers and people, at the sacrifice of

all else, have been enabled nobly to respond to the call which was made upon them, and to continue steadfast, amid many painful trials and obstacles, fighting a good fight as soldiers of the Lord Jesus Christ. And, Fathers and Brethren, ought we not to regard it as a privilege, that we have been permitted to live in these days of testifying for Christ and for the purity of the faith once delivered to the Saints, and contended for even to the death by our forefathers, in the days when God called upon them to bear witness to the truth in the face of Kings and of Princes, and against all the malice and persecution of the powers of this world, instigated by the powers of darkness. Nor have their children been unworthy followers in the steps of their fathers; theirs indeed has been a bloodless martyrdom, but one scarcely less hard to bear, and as they have suffered so we believe that theirs also will be the triumph and the Crown. And what a cheering sight do we behold, and what cheering prospects do we see dawn upon that favoured land! What a lively interest has been and is rapidly generating in the cause of truth? When was the doctrine of Christ ever more faithfully preached, and the cause of Christ more faithfully advocated? When were ministers more zealous, or people more devoted? When was the word ever listened to with more simplicity of interest and its power more manifest in awakening the church to its duty? When were individual exertions and sacrifices, or united endeavours in the cause of religion, ever greater or more willingly made? When did prayer meetings and sabbath schools, and home missions, and a sound religious education ever more occupy or concern the church? Or when were missions to the heathen or other objects of benevolence and christian usefulness, beyond the boundaries of the land, so extensively and so ardently engaged in? When, in fine, was the church in Scotland, more pure and more efficient than she now is, as represented by that branch which, contending equally against evils from within and from without, has sacrificed every worldly advantage and distinction, that she might adhere steadfast to the faith and discipline of her original standards and constitution, and maintain them unimpaired, that she might hand down to her sons and her son's sons, the privileges of her rulers and of her people, alike derived by an inalienable title from the supreme and only Head of the church. We, Fathers and Brethren, in order, as we conceived it necessary, to maintain our consistency and keep a conscience void of offence towards God and men, have found ourselves constrained to withdraw from