

THE CHRISTIAN SENTINEL.

I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved.—Hab. ii. 1.

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SERMON ON THE DEATH OF HIS LATE MAJESTY GEORGE IV.

ISAIAH XLIX. 22, 23.

THUS saith the LORD GOD. Behold I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people, and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders: And KINGS shall be thy nursing fathers, and their QUEENS thy nursing mothers.

The persons of this audience in "customary suit of solemn black," and this temple of God itself with the correspondent emblems of mourning, remind us of the duty which the occasion imposes upon the Preacher. The outward tokens of a solemn state of feeling, and the established testimonies of respect, are very little worth if unaccompanied by any such actual sentiments and reflections as these formalities are designed to represent. If, in remembrance of deceased Royalty, we spread the drapery of sorrow in the very sanctuary of our worship, it is evident that we ought to set in a religious light the events and changes to which these observances have relation, and to shew that "what God" in his word "hath joined together" we do not mean to "put asunder;"—that while we honor the King, we also FEAR GOD, and make this principle the basis of our loyalty. In any other light than this, these trappings have no business here.—God grant then that the consideration upon which we are now to enter, of the subject thus presented to us, may be pursued with an eye to His glory, and that the preaching of His word may not be an affair of state but of salvation.

Wherever the work of death has been conspicuous, either in the circumstances of the stroke, or in the subject who has suffered, it becomes our duty to improve the occasion: and disregarding the fastidious criticisms of those who would charge us with formally moralizing upon events which are matters of mere feeling, to contemplate these events as Christians; as serious believers in a wise and good Providence: as persons who take their views of this world and of futurity, of passing scenes and of man's entire history and distinction, from the written revelation of GOD.—And if it be said that the equalizing hand of death, (which levels the high and low, and when the God who is to judge them, says "no respect to persons,") teaches us its if only to this world, survive the sphere for which they were formed;—if it be objected that by noticing the great ones of the earth at that concluding point of their earthly history in which they resemble all mankind, we prolong the date of their distinction, and make religion subservient to those partial regards which it disclaims,—we reply that those who are gone, are indeed little concerned in the tribute which we may choose to pay them, and have done for ever with those marks of elevation which God had assigned to them on earth;—but we are still mingling in the same scenes, we are still conversant with the same objects, filling the same relations, and in contact with the same varieties of life: And we ought to have our attention led to the precarious nature of earthly things, and be taught to compare what they now are with what they are destined to become.

It is a false philosophy which philosophizes too far, and rends off the decent veil which sage experience has thrown over the nakedness of human proceedings and affairs. It is a shallow wisdom after all, and inapplicable to the state and condition of human nature, which refines upon all the usages of life, and dissects, as it were, and brings to the microscope all the component parts of the social system, till every little defect is uncovered, and every minutely offensive appearance laid open, for the cruel pleasure, as it might seem, of sporting with the frailties of humanity. In the eyes of a better wisdom, the distinctions of society, though they are acknowledged to be only transitory and subordinate to more sacred considerations, are allowed their pro-

per weight, and their just degree of respect. "Custom to whom custom is due—honor to whom honor—fear to whom fear," is the lesson of Holy Writ. In a serious and religious point of view, we renounce the "vain pomp and glory of the world," and we adopt, (let it be hoped, in unequivocating simplicity of heart,) the deprecation of St. Paul: "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!" But it is one thing to be devoted to the world,—to be enslaved by its vanities,—to give it that place of priority in our affections which belongs to our God and Saviour alone;—and it is another, surely, to comply reasonably with the received order of things, and to conform ourselves contentedly to the course and distribution of human affairs, through which, in our appointed stations, we must travel to our eternal home. We are to "use this world" in short, although to use "as not abusing it." It is idle, it is impossible, it is neither the dictate of wisdom nor the intention of Providence that we should cut down the concerns of life and the usages of this world to the precise standard of what our necessities require, or what our philosophical abstractions might approve; and as St. Paul cites occasionally the heathen poets, we may be pardoned if we adduce upon this point the language of the most gifted among our own:—

"O reason not the need—our basest beggars
Are, in the poorest things, superfluous:
Allow not nature more than nature needs,
Man's life is cheap as beasts'—"

It is idle to disclaim upon the unmeaning nature of outward solemnities, to cry out against the absurdity of different customs and emblems and formalities, which but for the associations with which they have grown up, and the habit of the mind in regarding them, would convey, perhaps, no appropriate feeling—for while we are "in the body," we must be acted upon by such associations, must be guided, to a certain degree, by the effect which these external objects produce upon our senses. It is corrupt and wicked to subjugate the minds of men, and lead them at will by contrivance, which impose upon the senses, and through this medium to exercise a dark and mysterious sway over their consciences; but it is prudent and right to preserve the decorum of order and the reverence of authority; and in whatever capacity men appear before their fellow-creatures, to provide against an unseemly discordance between the figure which they make, and the part which they are to sustain. A judicious and moderate attention to these points has unquestionably a good effect upon the manners of a people, and operates with a softening influence upon their general deportment. It tends to promote those refinements, and to preserve those becoming restraints in the intercourse of life, which may serve as auxiliaries to the best and highest purposes; a coarse disregard or stern contempt of which is hurtful alike to the interests of society and the formation of private character.* Even in the simplicity of primi-

* It cannot reasonably be doubted, that, in the counsels of the divine mind Civil Government, and the various things therefrom resulting to human society, were intended to subserve the cause of that religion which is his most beneficent gift. For is not a good system of Civil Government generally necessary to the production and development of the true Christian character? That government cannot be good in the highest sense which throws impediments in the way of the Gospel. Does it not appear to be the duty of all politicians, legislators, and rulers, to keep in view, in their acts affecting civil society, the kind of influence those acts are calculated to have on the moral sensibilities of the human mind? Would it not be sound Christian as well as political wisdom, to adapt laws and civil institutions to the best possible methods of producing an open, manly, ingenuous, kind, and benevolent disposition, partaking as little of cringing meanness and abject servility as of insubordination and contempt of established authority, or of artifice, cunning, deception and fraud? The supposition appears reasonable; and if the principle were more attended to by statesmen, human governments might do much towards "making ready a people prepared for the Lord." In