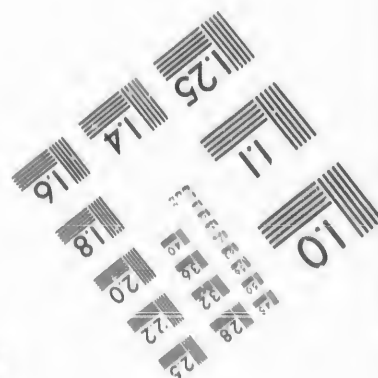
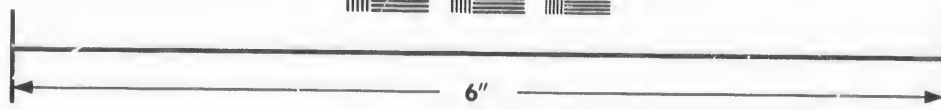
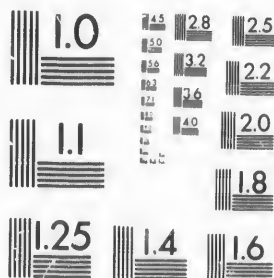


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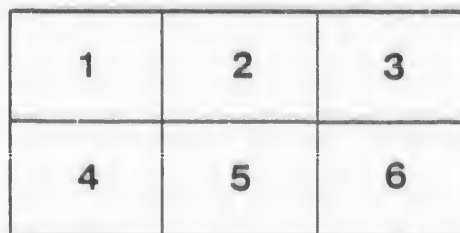
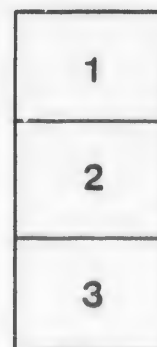
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S E R M O N,

On the Duty of attending the Public
Worship of GOD.

Preached at DIGBY in NOVA-SCOTIA,

APRIL 19th, 1789.

By R O G E R V I E T S,

Rector of DIGBY, and Missionary from the venerable
Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in foreign
Parts.

H A R T F O R D :

Printed by HUDSON and GOODWIN,

M.DCC.LXXXIX.

TO
THE RIGHT REVEREND
CHARLES INGLIS, D. D.
THE LEARNED,
THE PIOUS,
THE RESPECTED,

AND
RESPECTABLE
Bishop of Nova-Scotia, &c. &c. &c.

THESE DISCOURSES
ARE,
WITH ALL SUBMISSION,
GRATITUDE AND AFFECTION,
DEDICATED,

BY HIS MOST DUTIFUL SON,

AND

H RB
BX 5615 - MOST OBEDIENT,

.V5

HUMBLE SERVANT,

ROGER VIETS.

HEBREW S, x. 25.

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.—

THAT there is a God, the creator and preserver of all things, is a maxim so evident that none but fools can deny it. It is equally evident that God is to be worshiped by all rational creatures. But this worship cannot be effectually supported and perpetuated without particular times and places set apart and devoted to that purpose. Of this point people of all ages and religions have been so fully convinced, that all without exception have had their certain times and places dedicated to the uses of public worship.

THE doctrines, which nature and reason have taught all nations on this subject ; the true God has taught in ancient times the jews, and in latter times the christians in a more perfect and distinct manner, by special revelation. As christians are bound to this duty by uncommon obligations ; so is the path of their duty more plainly pointed out to them.

GOD has appointed one day in seven to be kept holy, to be dedicated to himself : This seventh part of time is to be employed in meditation, in reading, in religious thoughts and conversation, in examination of our own hearts ; and especiall in PUBLIC WORSHIP, in resorting to the church of God, to offer our united prayers and thanksgivings to Heaven, to sing praises, to hear God's word read and preached.

ALL nations and governments, which call themselves christians have established times and places for the public worship of God. What lamentable de-

fection from this establishment, individuals are guilty of, is, alas, too well known. Such defection gave occasion to this discourse.

REGARDLESS of exact order and method, I shall deliver my observations as they occur to my mind : Not so much with design to prove a Duty, in itself plain and indispensable ; as to impress on the minds of my hearers, some serious thoughts relative to a subject very influential on our eternal condition.

As a sentinel on the watch-tower of the church, it is my duty to warn those of their danger, whom I perceive travelling in the road of guilt towards destruction. As a physician of souls, it is my duty to probe the spiritual wound to the bottom, however painful or offensive it may be. Confident as I am, that it is infinitely better for me to obey God and satisfy my own conscience, than to please the whole world.

WITH sincerity of heart to worship the true and living God, in whom we believe, and from whom we expect salvation is the first and principal act of religion ; 'tis an act conducive to the dignity of human nature, and becoming the professors of the pure and perfect doctrines of the gospel ; 'tis the most effectual promotion of brotherly love and christian concord ; 'tis an act very fit, proper and reasonable in its nature ; enjoined by God's command, pleasing to Heaven, edifying to mankind, amiable in the eyes of all good people, and profitable to our immortal souls.

As the worship of God is the first act of religion, so is it, in great measure, the original and support of all religion. For in the public assembly of God's people, we are taught the perfect will of God, and whatever is required of the disciples of Christ. Having performed our duty in God's house with attention and devotion, we depart thence strengthened and established in every christian grace and virtue, instructed in our duty towards God, our neighbour and ourselves, with strong resolutions of performing it, having obtained of God (by attending his worship) assistance to put in practice those good resolutions.

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OUR attendance on the worship of God ought to be accompanied with purity of heart, and serious devotion of soul. Whilst we have the form of godliness, we must not deny or despise the power of it. Our Saviour says we must *worship God in spirit and in truth* ; not only in truth, or in the true rational and scriptural method, free from superstition on the one hand and enthusiasm on the other : But also in spirit, with all our heart, soul, strength and mind. Then shall we be the true and sincere worshippers of God, such as God the father seeks and requires to worship him.

IT might be expected that a duty so reasonable in itself, so peremptorily required by him, who has a right to all our services ; a duty attended with such advantages thro'out time and eternity ; the neglect of which incurs the displeasure of the Almighty, is followed by the most bitter remorse of conscience and by eternal misery ; it might be expected that a duty like this, would meet with the full approbation of all men, would be neglected by no one, who believes in a God and a future existence.

BUT the greater part of people seem to consider attendance on divine worship as a matter of indifference, as left intirely to their own choice and humour, like a vain amusement or a childish diversion, which they may neglect without guilt ; that once in a long time, it is well enough to go to the public worship of their Maker, provided it does not interfere with some temporal business or pleasure, with some visit or entertainment, or some worldly, vain or sinful employment.

MANY seem to regard attendance at God's house, not as an essential, indispensable duty of a christian ; but rather as an instance of complaisance to the officiating clergyman, or to some of their religious neighbours, or a good opportunity to make a brilliant appearance before the congregation, or to view the appearance made by others (whence it arises that the want of good cloathing is so often an excuse for absence) some regard it as a mere conformity to an ancient custom, or a gratification of an idle curiosity. How great and how dan-

gerous mistake such labour under, will appear in the sequel of this discourse.

PUBLIC worship being a principal duty, that God requires of man, the neglect of it is very provoking to God—discouraging to the ministers of the gospel, and to all christians—it hardens men in their sins—fortifies them against all motions of the Holy Ghost—makes them deaf to the voice of their best interest—ripens them for eternal misery, and tends to banish all appearance of religion from the world. How then can any person imagine the worship of God to be an indifferent action; or the neglect thereof to be but a trifling, venial fault?

IT must be confessed that a person, who gives a steady, external attendance on public worship may possibly miss of salvation, for want of the sincerity requisite to make his devotion acceptable to God. But still, we, who can judge only by appearance, must in christian charity think such person to be in the direct way to salvation, if the general course of his life be conformable to God's laws. Or if such devout person is sometimes overcome by temptations and falls into great sins, like David, Solomon, Peter, and many good men of old; yet he is in the way of repentance and reformation by steadily waiting on God in his house.

BUT what shall we say or think of him, who seldom or never worships his God? Who pretends to believe in God and calls himself a christian; but never prays to God, nor conforms to the sacraments and institutions of the gospel? What foundation for charity can we have in favor of such despiser of gospel privileges? What prospect of salvation can he entertain, whilst he will not even take pains to pray to Heaven for it? If he will not perform the most public and conspicuous part of devotion, is it probable that he will be anxious to fulfil the more secret and particular branches?

IT seems difficult to conceive that a constant absenter from the house of God, has any fear of God before his eyes, any religion in his heart. If he makes use of no means of grace how can he have any hopes of salvation?

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IF a man loves God supremely, as it is our duty to love him, nay, if he has *any* degree of love for God, he will eagerly desire to worship him. If he fears God, he will tremble at the very thought of a neglect and contempt of his worship. If he desires to honor God, how can he render more or better honor to him than to frequent his house of prayer? God himself has pronounced these tremendous words against such as contemn him—*Them that honor me, I will honor, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.* If a man is willing to serve God; celebrating his worship is the first and greatest instance of service that he can render him. If he would obey God's command; no command of God is more obligatory than to appear before him in the assembly of his children.

WITH design to palliate the great sin of neglecting public worship, it has often been asserted that a person may to good purpose employ himself at home in time of public, religious service; that he may in his own house exercise himself in private duties, in reading, in secret prayer, in meditation, and other spiritual business.

BUT I fear upon examination it will be found, that the time of public worship is but rarely well expended by those, who are not in the church. They are well known, generally, to busy themselves in secular matters, in vanity or wickedness: or at least in sloth and idleness. Indeed it would be absurd to suppose that the person, that has not conscience enough to send him to the house of God, would be very conscientious in expending his time either in his own house, in the houses of his neighbours, or in public houses of entertainment. But supposing the best that can be supposed; that he endeavours to employ himself in serving God at home: In what manner does he serve God? Does he undertake to read the holy scriptures? Those scriptures will direct him to go up to the house of God. Does he peruse the works of pious divines? All those divines will inform him that it is his duty to attend on public worship; that 'tis a great sin to absent himself. Does he attempt to pray to God? How will he form his

prayer ? " I confess, O Lord, that I despise thy time and
 " place of worship, I scorn and ridicule thy servants, who
 " are now convened for public worship ; yet grant me
 " thy blessing in a state of needless and voluntary separa-
 " tion from thy worshippers ; edify me, and save me in
 " my great wilful transgression. As to my disobedience
 " to thy command to attend on thee in public, *in this*
 " *thing the lord pardon his servant.*" Would not such
 a prayer be mockery and abomination to the Lord ?

EQUALLY frivolous is that common excuse of the
 more needy sort of people, that they have not apparel
 to make a decent appearance in the congregation.
 Altho' 'tis their duty to appear before God, and his
 people as decently as they are able ; yet if they have
 the wedding garment of a devout heart and an holy
 life, they need give themselves but small concern for
 their outward appearance. Every true worshipper of
 God will rejoice to see the poorest of his neighbours
 attend with him, tho' clothed in rags. Nor will the
 poorest man in the world, with a godly zeal, be detain-
 ed from the church by want of gay attire.

THERE is another excuse for the great sin of neglecting
 God's worship, so frivolous and unreasonable, that for
 the honor of christianity and of mankind, I am almost
 ashamed to mention it. " I am not pleased" say they,
 " with the officiating clergyman or some of the con-
 " gregation, therefore will not go to God's house to pay
 " my devotions to Heaven."

THIS excuse is founded on a supposition, that com-
 plaisance to the minister, or the congregation is our sole
 motive of resorting to God's house.

SUPPOSING their distaste is well grounded (tho' I am
 confident nine times in ten it is groundless) still it can-
 not be a reasonable excuse for robbing God of his
 requisite homage. As well might a son refuse a boun-
 tiful gift from a respectable parent, because it is sent
 by the hand of one, whom he dislikes. As well might
 a sentenced prisoner refuse a pardon from his gracious
 prince, because it was sent by the hand of one not hap-
 py enough to please his fancy. With full as much

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reason might we refuse to read or to open a letter brought to us containing the best of tidings and the best of offers, because the bearer of the letter does not coincide with our unreasonable, perverse humour,

ANY man of common sense knows, that the efficacy of God's ordinances depends not on the disposition of him that administers, but on the grace of God, and the pious disposition of the hearer or receiver.

O BLESSED Jesus! are there such among thy meek and charitable disciples, who will reject the means of grace, spurn at God's command, and forego all the blessed inestimable privileges of gospel worship from an unreasonable prejudice, a whimsical distaste against some particular minister of thy gospel? Tell it not in Mecca, publish it not in the streets of Pekin, lest the daughters of uncircumcised Pagans rejoice, lest the daughters of circumcised Musulmen triumph.

BUT the greater part are detained from social worship merely by idleness and evil habit; have been so long accustomed to this criminal neglect, that their reformation becomes extremely difficult. These have not even a shadow of excuse but must stand self-condemned: they are condemned by the word of God, by the judgment of all good christians, and by their own conscience.

CAN we think there is any sincere love of God in a man, that will take less pains to please God and serve him, than to accomplish the meanest part of his temporal business? What hope can we have of the salvation of such, as for whole years step not over the threshold of the church, tho' very near and commodious to their abode? God and their own conscience know whether they ever put up a family, a secret or an ejaculatory prayer to Heaven.

WHEREVER a general attendance is given to public worship, there will be preserved at least a decent and amiable appearance of religion: This appearance will keep religion in countenance and reputation, it will induce many people to use the means of grace, to a diligent use of these means God has given a general pro-

mise of his assistance, and of eternal happiness. Whereas a general neglect of this duty will infallibly plunge christianity into oblivion, and in the course of one or two centuries will introduce pagan ignorance, and wretchedness. Every absenter does his part towards extirpating all religion. Sacraments and other religious offices and especially social worship are the means appointed by God, for the purpose of preserving a sense and remembrance of religion among men. If men will not use the means appointed of God, for this purpose, 'tis not probable that they will use any other means, or that the purpose will be effected.

CAN there be produced many instances of families universally neglecting this duty of homage to God, that have for any length of time continued in the practice of other christian duties? Indeed can you find many such families preserve a tolerable reputation among mankind for more than one or two generations?

WERE the number but small, which refuse to render public acknowledgement to their maker, how great, how odious, how shocking would their transgression appear! But the general prevalence of the sin occasions it to appear in the sight of men small and very pardonable: But the omniscient views it not in this light; it appears to him in its odious, glaring colours. The sins of Sodom and Gomorrah, were not excused, by the universal prevalence of them in that country. The universal practice of idolatry among the ancient heathen could not be esteemed a justification of it. The jews were not excused, in crucifying Christ, on account of their being so generally agreed in that horrible crime: Neither will the moderns, *who crucify the son of God afresh and put him to an open shame*, by neglecting his worship and despising his sacraments, be excused on the plea that the crime is fashionable and triumphant. God expressly says, *thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil*. God's fury is threatned in Jer. x. 25. To be poured out upon his people for this very sin of not calling upon his name in a collective capacity.

THE church is the proper and peculiar place, where

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God has appointed to meet us, and graciously promised to bless us; the place of God's special presence, beloved and admired by all good men; the place where edification is to be expected, and the beauty of holiness to be seen; where the bounty of Heaven is distributed, our spiritual enemies subdued, our faith strengthened, and our eternal felicity secured. Are all these blessings and privileges to be neglected upon the most frivolous pretences, or upon no pretence at all? Are such unspeakable advantages to be despised or rejected as worthless toys? Is it no crime to trample them under foot? *How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?*

It will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, for Tyre and Sidon, for Pagans, Jews and Mahometans, at the day of judgment, than for christians, within reach of all gospel privileges, and yet making no use of them. How aggravated and tremendous will be our punishment, if we, who are exalted to Heaven by privileges, should be thrust down to Hell, by our neglect or abuse of them?

A CONSTANT and sincere attendance on public worship, preserves and promotes religious knowledge and practice. All that is necessary to be known, believed and performed in order to salvation, is taught, inculcated and often repeated both in our devotions and sermons. But ignorance and vice alway have, alway will, and inevitably must increase in proportion to the neglect and contempt of God's instituted worship. To convince us of this, we need but look into the history of christendom. Nay we need look no further than the history of our own nation: How much has ignorance of religion, how much have the various branches of wickedness increased, with the increasing neglect of divine worship! In visiting the sick how surprisingly deficient do we find them in spiritual science! What number of sins burden their conscience, which many of them confess to have arisen from a neglect of God's public service! What profound ignorance of religion is discovered in the greater part of malefactors sentenced to death! How many of these, at the place of execution, have confessed

that a disregard to the public duties of God's church first led them to the vices so fatal to them ! And no wonder ; for a person absenting from worship, is on satan's ground, and invites the evil one to meet him, nor is it surprising that, in such a crisis, " the devil should " enter into him, and fill him full of all iniquities, and " bring him to destruction both of body and soul."

If any should inquire why the Greeks, Romans and some other nations of old arrived to the utmost height of national glory and prosperity, in a state of religious ignorance and paganism ? It may be answered that they had their national religion, to which they seriously and strictly adhered : Altho' this was not the true religion, yet it was sufficient to support their national grandeur and prosperity. Had they paid as little regard to their religion as we pay to ours, their national fame as well as power would have soon been humbled to the dust. Their own poets and historians take notice, that their learning, power, wealth and reputation, gradually advanced or declined, according as they regarded or disregarded their Gods, their temples and their sacrifices.

THEY possessed national virtues. They were not in general effeminate, luxurious, deceitful, treacherous, selfish, contentious, stupid and ungrateful. As christians (so called) must be, before they can despise and reject the privileges of the gospel. Had we even the same national, moral, heathen virtues, of which the ancient Romans were possessed : Those virtues would greatly conduce to our national peace and prosperity. But 'tis not probable that he, who is so depraved as to throw away superior christian virtues, will ever sincerely espouse inferior heathen virtues. He that casts off the easy yoke and light burden of Christ, will hardly assume a yoke so much harder, a burden so much heavier.

" BUT many, who are esteemed sober, honest people " do not resort to the house of prayer."

MANY people, who have no religion at heart, may support a good character in the world for a few years by a plausible appearance, and may behave themselves as good neighbours and wholesome members of society.

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Self-interest alone will induce a prudent man to conduct himself with sobriety, justice and kindness, because such conduct will gain the good opinion, confidence and benevolence of the world; but if a man had faith or conscience as a grain of mustard-seed, it would impel him to the first and most obvious act of duty, to pay homage to his maker, preserver, redeemer, sanctifier. How can he be called a good man in the eye of an holy, heart-searching God, who lives in the steady, voluntary neglect of a great and plain duty? The worship of God is so great a duty, that none can be esteemed greater, so plain, that none can be esteemed plainer.

How glaring is the absurdity of doing *that*, of which we expect hereafter bitterly to repent! Who can harbour the least doubt that he will in some future time most sincerely and deeply repent of his robbing God of the homage due to him, and peremptorily required by him? Look forward to the interesting period of a death bed; let me seriously ask you whether you imagine that you shall in the extremity of sickness and the hour of death, rejoice that you have despised God's worship, contemptuously rejected the means of grace and the hopes of salvation, disdainfully trampled on divine institutions, sold your christian birthright for the diversions, follies and vices of an idle, wicked world?

FOR brevity's sake I will omit those many places in God's word, where this duty is mentioned with all the force of persuasion; where the opposite transgression is rebuked with all signs of the Almighty's displeasure; and will adduce two or three familiar allusions, not foreign to my design.

SUPPOSING a kind and gracious father should invite and command his numerous offspring to meet him at his house, once in seven days to demonstrate their affection and regard for him: One half the number meet according to the paternal injunction, the other half needlessly and wantonly absent themselves. What would be thought of the absent half? would not they be esteemed glaringly deficient in point of filial duty?

SUPPOSING a great and good prince in a tour thro' his own dominions, should send a message to a particular city appointing a time and place in that city, to meet all the citizens, with an earnest desire and command that all the inhabitants would appear to shew their homage and respect to him. One quarter of them appear according to his appointment; the other three quarters spend the day in idleness or wickedness; frequent public houses and vain company; some sauntering about the house, wherein the prince is giving a gracious audience; would not all judicious people cry out that this delinquent part of the citizens were criminally deficient in complaisance as well as loyalty?

ONCE more, supposing a gracious king had at the expence of his own life delivered his country from the greatest misery and slavery, and procured for them the most perfect liberty and happiness; and desired them, as his last and dying request, or rather injunction that they would once in seven days meet together to celebrate the benefits purchased; and three times in every year hold a feast to commemorate his death. What would be thought of such as neglected and despised not only the feast, but the weekly assembly? would they not be justly deemed unworthy of all benefits?

ACCORDING to the common method of God's dealings; a country, that falls into a general neglect of gospel worship and sacraments, must expect to be deprived of the blessed gospel itself; and to fall into pagan darkness, or mahometan absurdity. To some people this may appear no great calamity; But by wretched experience they may find themselves grossly mistaken. Altho' some nations, who never embraced christianity, have been great and happy in their national capacity, what nation, which was once christian, and afterwards rejected christianity, has long supported her national dignity, knowlege or credit? The loss of christianity always has been and probably, always will be attended with the loss of arts and sciences, good government, liberty, commerce, power and influence. For the most ample proof of this allegation, look into

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the ancient and present state of those people, who first embraced the christian religion. There christianity once flourished, in the utmost purity and splendor: But with the loss of gospel privileges, they have lost almost every other privilege worth the desire of a rational creature.

Our obligations to wait upon God in his house, are as strong as those of the ancient Hebrews, our motives are much stronger. We find the most positive injunctions laid on *them*, to attend on the times, places and ceremonies prescribed to them; but in a more especial manner three great annual festivals were appointed, and a command given in these words, *THREE TIMES in the year all thy males shall appear before the LORD GOD.* And he that did not appear, *even the same soul shall be cut off from his people.* When that nation became very corrupt, they fell into a neglect of the public services due to Heaven; at which God declares his just indignation by his prophet Malachi. *Will a man rob God? yet ye have robbed me: But ye say, wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse, for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.*

YET in particular cases there may be sufficient and reasonable causes for not attending on public worship.

If our residence be at a very great distance from public worship, or from such public worship as we can with a safe conscience partake of, or attend—If we are detained by sickness, lameness, old age or other similar calamities—If we are unavoidably withholden by business of necessity or charity—If the weather be extremely severe and we too old or feeble to endure it with comfort and safety—Those circumstances and some others may be admitted as sufficient excuses. Every one's conscience (if he be a man of conscience) is the best judge, whether his excuse be sufficient. But he must carefully examine whether the same causes would detain him from *temporal* business of great profit? Whether he would not, under the same disadvantages, travel as far and take as much pains to gain some great world-

ly advantage, as would be requisite to attend on God in the public assembly of his saints ?

WHEN you are thus necessarily deprived of the pleasures and privileges of God's house ; let me beseech you to expend the Lord's day, in the most suitable, solemn, edifying employment possible ; in reading, meditation, prayer, holy conversation, and instruction of your families. Likewise I earnestly recommend and press upon you, the same godly exercises to be performed before and after public divine service, upon such days as you can and do give public attendance. Preparation is very needful and very expedient to the worshipping God acceptably in his house. And when we depart from God's house very much instructed and edified, our good impressions will be lost or very much impaired by going directly from the house of God into vain, not to say dissolute and profane company.

BUT the abuse of the mornings, noons and evenings of Lord's days is in part obviated by the late excellent institution of Sunday schools, for the establishment and support of which we are very much indebted to the piety and assiduity of our worthy Prelate, who is never weary in well-doing.

THUS have I with a pure and earnest zeal for the honor and worship of God, and with plainness of speech, without respect of persons or parties, represented as fully as the length of a common discourse would admit, the folly, sin and danger of despising and neglecting the worship of the true and living God. If I have given offence to any one, I am sorry, it being far from my intention ; having said nothing more than was necessary to the discharge of my public duty. If I shall have reformed even one person, it will give me great joy in this life and I hope will add to my eternal felicity.

IF all that I have said should be ridiculed or despised (which God forbid) still I meekly hope that I have exculpated myself to my great divine master, and shall stand acquitted of the awful guilt of souls lost by my remissness in warning them of their peril. In all that I have said, I have kept an attentive eye upon that di-

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vine injunction : *Son of Man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel ; therefore hear the word at my mouth and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, thou shalt surely die ; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life ; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity ; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way ; he shall die in his iniquity, but thou hast delivered thy soul.*

HAVING said so much of the wickedness and hazard of withholding the homage due to our heavenly father : It is proper to say a few words by way of just praise and encouragement of those, who give constant and devout attendance on divine service.

ALTHO' the honor of God and the salvation of your souls ought to be, and I hope are your primary motives in frequenting the house of prayer ; yet many other benefits flow from this laudable, edifying duty. The church of God, the ministers of the gospel and the civil government are indebted to you, as the principal means (under God) of their stability and prosperity. Your example will shine as the sun in the firmament—Generations yet unborn will *arise up and call you blessed*—When your bodies shall be laid in the silent grave and mixed with their kindred clay, as they will shortly be ; the influence of your example will do unspeakable service to the cause of religion. Those who are now expending their time in idleness or sinfulness or ridiculing the worship and worshippers of God, will soon be taught by a death bed, or by future misery to wish that they might die the death of the righteous, and their last end might be like yours !

ATHEISTS, deists and abandoned sinners represent all worship of God to be mere pretence and hypocrisy : How absurd as well as malevolent is this reflection ! To judge a person's heart to be evil and deceitful, because his actions are good. If those who seriously pay due homage to God, are to be esteemed wicked hypocrites ;

what shall we think of those who cast off fear, and restrain prayer before God.

WITH a constant view to the honor of God, and the command of God, proceed, persevere and prosper in the business of holy worship, a business most worthy of our nature, most acceptable to our God and most profitable to ourselves. A business that will afford the unspeakable satisfaction of a good conscience, to comfort you in your short journey thro' this life, till you arrive at the place, where worship will be your whole employment, and the pleasures of this employment will be improved, increased and made perfect.

FEAR not little flock; for it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. A spiritual, invisible kingdom, consisting of an approving conscience in this life, and perfect felicity in the life to come; a kingdom infinitely more valuable than all the empires and dominions of this transitory world.

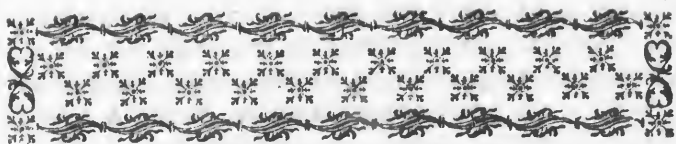
SUCH as will not come to the house of God, to join in prayers with their spiritual guide, to receive his instructions, or submit to his admonitions; such can receive no advantage from him; at least from his public administrations, tho' he were a most learned, able, faithful and exemplary man of God. But of you my dear, spiritual children, *I am persuaded better things, and things that accompany salvation.* I hope at the last day to present you (washed in the blood of Christ) *holy and without blemish* to the great Judge, *not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.* For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye, in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, at his coming?



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A S E R M O N,

On Cenforiousness and Evil Speaking.

Preached at DIGBY, in Nova Scotia, *October 26, 1788.*

E X O D U S, xx. 16.

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

THESE words, not only forbid giving false testimony, before a court of justice, under the solemnity of an oath; but all falsehood, evilspeaking and slanderous accusations of our neighbour. We may be said to bear false witness, tho' such witness is not ratified by an oath. Our text forbids the inventing and spreading a false or degrading report—encouraging and being pleased with such report—listening to defamers and wishing success to defamation. The command implies an injunction upon us to contradict all slander which we hear, to reprove every derogatory tale, whenever it can be done safely, properly and to good purpose.

THE general inclination to this malignant practice; the common custom of blackening our neighbour's reputation, is so plainly to be discovered, and is so universally acknowledged, that it would be useless and ridiculous to undertake to prove such propensity. There is no vice so generally practiced, by such as are esteemed good people in the general course of their conduct, as

this vice of calumny and backbiting. This, doubtless, arises from not considering the deep guilt, the malignant nature, and the pernicious consequences of the crime.

“ But our neighbour labours under a greivous, “ dangerous error, and it is our duty to extricate him. “ He is fallen into a very wicked habit, and it is our “ duty to reclaim him; how are these things to be “ done?” Not by vilifying and reviling him in his absence, or taking a malicious pleasure in illustrating and magnifying every mistake and foible. On the contrary, we ought in the most tender and agreeable manner to set his error and his sin, in the plainest light, before him, for his instruction and reformation. Were this advice conscientiously followed, many errors would be rectified, many vices would be reformed. But the greater part of scandal and bad reports are not founded on real errors and vices—they are founded on envy and ill-will; originating from the invention of such as are wise to do evil; and propagated by the instigations of a wicked heart, a cruel temper, the tongue of falsehood; and a total reverse of that charity, which the gospel enjoins.

WERE it from any laudable motive, or with any good design that people are so very much addicted to exclaim against each other; were it with intention to confute error or destroy vice; their conduct would be more tolerable, more excusable. Were backbiters and defamers in general fearers of God, haters of sin, and lovers of the human race, were their motives laudable, virtuous or innocent; altho’ they could not be justified; still their sin would be much palliated. But the true causes, the real motives of this sordid, pernicious vice being considered, will aggravate the crime, and give it a deeper colour of guilt. These motives and causes I will now proceed to consider.

THE first, which I shall mention is carelessness and inconsideration. There may be observed in many people a dangerous habit of thinking little and speaking much; of indiscreet tattling, void of caution and circumspection. This indeed is the best excuse that can be

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made for slandering, disparaging and aspersing our neighbour. And I have such charity for mankind, that I must think that this crime is often committed thoughtlessly and carelessly, not considering the malignity of its nature, nor the long train of ill consequences proceeding from it.

IDLENESS is another great cause of slander and reviling. The want of a lawful occupation, or want of diligence in our calling is the source of more kinds of wickedness than are easily described—Idleness is the mother of vice—By doing nothing we learn no ill—If we find no employment for ourselves, satan will find employment for us—An idle person cannot long remain innocent. 'Tis not the design of providence that either the mind or body of man should be idle; accordingly God has so created both the mind and body, that they cannot rest content in a state of inactivity; they have a constant propensity to employment. Hence we find that when people are not busied in some useful occupation, they naturally fall into vice and wickedness; and especially into that mean and wanton vice, against which I am now speaking.

How much better would it have been for the calumniator, that he could have rested in a state of total inactivity, than to have been employed in murdering the reputation of his brethren! Idleness itself is preferable to the trade of wounding our neighbours fame to the ruin of our own souls.

“THE devil tempts some men, but an idle man “tempts the devil” was a proverbial expression of our ancestors, meaning that whilst satan is the seducer and first instigator of some men’s sins; an idle person invites the wicked one to put him into business; to find work and diversion for him.

HENCE we may plainly discover the reason, that the oeconomy of the world is such, that constant labour and employment are necessary to the subsistence of mankind. 'Tis to preserve them from sinful courses. God could have so formed the world that man might have been supported without labour; but in that case

people would have run into the practice of many vices, for want of better employment; and in particular the odious vice of slandering and vilifying each other: conformable to this principle it may be observed that the practice of reproaching and disparaging prevails in any place, in proportion to the idleness and sloth of the inhabitants of that place.

A THIRD source of this odious practice is PRIDE. It is one property of pride and self-conceit to exalt itself; the proud man desires to appear greater than all others. But how shall he accomplish this? To accomplish it by superior virtues and dignity is too laborious and disagreeable a task, therefore it must be done by disparaging and blackening others; by infecting the characters of other people, with the venom of slander, that his own character may, in comparison appear bright and spotless. Upon characters of high stations, of sacred professions, and of the delicate female sex, their attacks are the most frequent, the most furious, and the most persevering; because the higher a character riseth, the rather is it the object of envy; the more tender and delicate a character is (like *that* of the fair sex) the more easily is it sullied and blasted.

BUT in this case, as in many other sinful courses, the consequence is diametrically opposite to the intention and expectation of the offender; for instead of destroying the good name of the slandered person; the force of the slander recoils with double violence on the slanderer himself; and if his character was before indifferent, it is now odious; if he was before despised he is now detested. We may take notice of many people, who are recommended by no very shining qualities; who are conspicuous for no great virtues; yet by a custom of speaking well of the greater part of mankind, and speaking ill of but few or none, they support a tolerable character in the world, and obtain a general benevolence among their acquaintance. On the contrary, many there are, who have no glaring vices, or heinous crimes, except an habit of evil-speaking, yet by this single vice of evil-speaking they have gained

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the ill will of the world. This observation alone is fully sufficient to convince us of the expediency of speaking well of our neighbours—of the dangerous and pernicious tendency of reviling them.

ANOTHER origin of this vice is FRETFULNESS ; a temper of peevishness and ill nature. Some people, especially at particular times, find themselves in bad humor towards the world, and seem to be angry or to wish ill to all mankind. This morose temper, this spirit of contradiction, is the reverse of that temper, which our Savior recommends, and of which he has set a bright example ; it is very repugnant to the gospel temper of universal good will and perfect benevolence.

SINCE it is out of the abundance of the heart, that the mouth speaketh : so if there be this ill temper in the heart, it will manifest itself by the language and conversation ; the mouth will utter some part of the bitterness of the mind ; reproachful words will follow the baneful fountain of corruption and degeneracy lodged in the soul.

To the fretful and uneasy mind, the whole world natural and moral appears to be disordered and in opposition to him. Whereas such person should look only to the disordered state of his own mind, there he will soon find the center of this perverse appearance. He will find, that it is not the mote in his brother's eye, but the beam in his own, that so much distresses him ; let him first reduce himself to a genuine spirit of christian benevolence, peace, tranquility and patience, and he will soon find less need of blaming his neighbours, and exclaiming against the world.

ENVY is another fountain, from whence the bitter streams of slander flow. There is among inferiors a general temper of envy and grudge against superiors. Some men by high parentage ; some by natural abilities ; others by the favor of the great ; others again by activity and industry, are raised to superior stations and conditions. The pride of man can but ill brook this superiority ; it is irksome and vexatious to them ; they cannot bear it with patience. But it should be con-

sidered that God in his infinite wisdom has found necessary, that there should be such subordination among men for the safety and prosperity of the whole : That one should rule, and another obey ; that one should be rich, another poor ; that like the members of the human body, each member of a community should be fixed in his proper place assigned by providence, and should cheartfully fulfil his proper duty and function, without murmuring or repining. For in the great day of retribution, the question will not be so particularly insisted on, *what* part we have acted on the stage of life, as *how* we have acted our part. Neither will any person at that awful day be condemned for poverty or meanness ; but many of all ranks and conditions, for not acting rightly, in their proper state and sphere.

SUCH thoughts as these, well digested, will go a great way towards curing us of envy, and consequently of the opprobrious language proceeding from envy. We shall not so much envy men in high stations, as pity them on account of the difficult task they have to perform in this world, and the weighty account they have to render at the tremendous day of judgment !

OF all causes and occasions of slander, MALICE is the greatest and worst. MALICE is the worst property that can possess the worst of hearts ; 'tis the most malignant disease of the mind ; it destroys all peace and tranquility of conscience ; it cuts off all our hope of salvation ; 'tis a torment to the breast that harbours it, a vexation to all that are concerned with the implacable, malicious person ; 'tis a primary characteristic of satan ; it leads directly to hell, and is itself one of the chief torments of hell. This temper of the mind, bearing so deep a colour of guilt and despair, is often the source, from whence flow such plentiful streams of false, abusive reproach. If the root be so evil, what can we expect of the branches ? If the tree be so evil, what fruit can we expect ? If the fountain be so corrupt, what can we expect of the rivulets flowing from it ? If malice be so detestable a property of the heart, what must be the words and conversation, that express that malice ?

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THE virtue or wickedness of actions, consists chiefly in the intention of the mind. If then, speaking evil of our neighbour arises from spite and malice; if defaming him is all the harm, we can do him with impunity; if aspersing him is all the malice, that we can with security exercise upon him; then what must we think of the person whose principal occupation is to revile his neighbour; whose chief study is to paint men, who are better than himself, in the blackest colours; who seems to make calumny and falsehood his trade? How contemptible must be the heart, how guilty the soul of him, whose greatest pleasure consists in giving deep wounds to his neighbour's fame! whose chief diversion is to trample into the dust the merited reputation of good men! What sad, what heavy account must such persons at last render to the searcher of hearts, to the God, to whom vengeance belongeth!

ONE very melancholy consideration, with regard to slander is, that many persons fall into the practice of it, who are not addicted to other vices; such as would not murder, nor rob their neighbour, nor steal from him, nor defraud him of his property, will make no scruple of robbing him of his good name, that is more valuable than riches: This must needs arise from want of deliberate thoughtfulness; as a remedy for this carelessness, let them well attend to the great value of a good name; and how easily it is lost. It is of price almost inestimable; but how tender! How brittle! How easily, yea oftentimes how undeservedly lost! This observation is more especially to be applied to the fair sex; the weaker but the more tender and beautiful part of the human race. Many of these have their principal dependance on a spotless name, an un sullied reputation. But how easily is that name daubed over, with the untempered mortar of false report! How often is that reputation sullied, nay irrecoverably destroyed by the contagious breath of falsehood and slander!

It is almost needless to mention, that there are some of the male sex in such stations and professions, that the

greater part of their comfort, satisfaction, usefulness and support, arises from the good opinion of mankind, from a character unimpeached, unsuspected. Such as these must suffer material injury from the least whisper of calumny or reproach. It is hard, it is cruel, it is malicious, it is extremely wicked, to take away the character of him, whose chief dependence in life is upon his character : or to rob a virtuous woman of her only dowry, an untainted reputation ; especially if it be observed that such abuse does not at all enrich the plunderer ; but makes the plundered person poor indeed ! robbed of the just wages of a life well spent, and of a conscience void of offence.

If a man's life be attacked, he commonly has some opportunity of defence : laws defend a person's property : The art of medicine assists in securing health. But, alas ! what security is there against the venom of the detracting, malicious tongue ? the wounds thereof are inflicted in the dark ; its poison is diffused invisibly ; its wicked attacks are unperceived, oftentimes unsuspected ; it is a pestilence, that walketh in darkness, against which innocence is no defence ; wisdom is no safeguard ; benevolence is no protection ; the most circumspect cannot foresee it ; the most prudent cannot shun it ; nor can the most pious be secure from it. Wherefore the psalmist cries out to God, *Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked, from the insurrection of the workers of iniquity ; who whet their tongue like a sword ; and bend their bows to shoot, even* BITTER WORDS. He represents them as taking private counsel together, as holding secret consultation, how they could most effectually shoot the arrows of detraction at the innocent.

ALTHO' slanderers and calumniators are very often themselves people of bad characters ; yet how do they receive such treatment of their own names, as they offer to the names of others ? Do they not receive it with the utmost impatience, with the most violent resentment ? Can they bear with christian patience to be reproached ? Can they with manly fortitude sustain disparagement, insult or even ridicule ? By no means.

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The good man by his innocence is supported, in the heaviest storm of calumny and detraction, against the darts of malice, and the arrows of falsehood : Whilst the slanderer has no such guard, being conscious that he is but rewarded in his own traffick of scandal : The darts of reproach wound him with a double sharpness, whetted by his own conscious guilt. With this idea, David speaking of defamers, says, *God shall shoot at them with an arrow, suddenly shall they be wounded ; so they shall make their own tongue to fall upon themselves.*

THE person who gives himself up to this vice will be feared by some, despised by others, hated by many and shunned by all. Each one cannot but foresee, that he will exercise his talent of abuse, his trade of vilifying upon HIM in his absence, therefore will fear him ; the man of bold integrity will despise him ; the man who is conscious of blemishes in his own reputation, will hate him ; and all men will avoid him as an enemy. David says of the detractor and calumniator, *all that see them shall flee away.*

THOSE, who deal in scandal and evil speaking, are constantly watching for the backslidings, the errors and the little inadvertences of their neighbours ; they are sad and melancholy when they can find no such ; they are elated with joy at the discovery of any such. This is the proper business and pleasure of evil spirits, and resembles the father of wickedness and falsehood. But they do not rest here, for if they can find no foundation in truth, they will have recourse to fiction ; and will assist each other in framing an idle tale or a false report. One invents a small part, another makes some addition ; a third adds a little more ; a fourth puts a finishing hand to it ; a fifth, sixth and seventh, spread, publish and proclaim it to the world. *I have heard the defaming of many ; fear on every side : Report, say they and we will report it ; all my familiars watched for my halting ; saying, peradventure he will be enticed, and we shall prevail against him, and we shall take our revenge on him.*

WHEN the defamer seriously considers his past ac-

tions and conversation—when he reflects, how much precious time he has expended in disparaging and backbiting his brethren; how unprovokedly and wantonly he has debased, degraded and vilified those who have done him no injury, and who are better than himself: What bitter remorse, what deep and lasting melancholy must it leave upon his mind! What excruciating anguish and stinging reflections must torment his conscience! If he has taken pleasure in his malicious employment, it is the meer pleasure of sin, the pleasure of devils. Some vicious pleasures may be called the pleasures of men; some the pleasures of brutes, but those of malicious, envious slander, are properly the pleasures of satan and his angels, and of souls condemned to eternal pain and despair.

BUT how pleasing is the thought, how comfortable the reflection, that we have spoken well of our neighbour, as far as truth would permit; and have spoken no evil of him! That we have published his virtues, and have by our silence concealed his errors and infirmities. If we have gone to extremes in characterizing a person; it is much better for us, that we have represented him in too favorable, than too unfavorable light; the one is the effect of charity, the other of envy or malice. It is much better to be a little blind to the foibles of our neighbour, than to view them with eagle eyed sharpness; or with uncharitable scrutiny. Many people think every thing is to be well accepted from themselves, all their faults to be easily forgiven; whilst they are steadily construing their neighbours words and actions in the worst meaning possible: They strain at a gnat to find an accusation against their neighbour; but swallow a camel to excuse or justify themselves: What they esteem in themselves a venial fault, not worthy of notice; in another person they esteem an unpardonable crime: Nay in some cases, what they reckon in themselves a commendable virtue; they deem a very reprehensible vice in others.

LET every one find some lawful and commendable employment, for the benefit of himself and his country;

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in such business let him expend his talents, and he will find but little time to canvass the character and conduct of his neighbour. Let their leisure moments be improved in examining their own hearts and reforming their own conduct; not in fabricating idle tales, or spreading false reports of others.

I AM very sensible, that many slanderers have never well considered the odious nature and baneful effects of their sin. Otherwise they would start with horror at their own conduct. Let any sober, considerate person sedately and deliberately view the man, who makes reviling his trade, whose chief joy is to expose the real or imaginary infirmities of his fellow-creatures; then let him pronounce whether it is a character, in which he would be willing to appear. There is scarcely a character, at once more despicable and more odious, than *that* of the common defamer. It appears both mean and detestable in all people, who devote themselves to it.

BUT there are two sorts of people in whom it appears uncommonly odious and indecent, viz. in people of superior stations, and in the tender female sex.

WITH regard to the first of these descriptions, men of distinguished wealth, dignity or influence; it is to be hoped that there are but few such, who make themselves busy in such degrading employment, so much beneath their honor, and so repugnant to what might be expected of them. But when they descend to take the seat of the scorner, and the occupation of the busy mocker, the guilt appears more heinous, the practice more odious, and the mischief falls with double weight on the injured or misrepresented party.

WE might in reason expect that the fair sex, by the delicacy of their nature, and the tenderness of their own character, would be effectually restrained from this sordid vice, so glaringly unbecoming a woman. Therefore when we see it in them, it appears uncommonly imprudent, indecent and offensive; in *men* it appears wicked, wanton and cruel; in *women* it has

all these properties ; and in addition to *these* 'tis indecent and indelicate.

If you are tempted to listen with pleasure to the voice of scandal ; consider that probably in other company, other people are with as much pleasure, and perhaps more justice listening to hear you slandered, ridiculed, backbitten. Do you encourage or indulge the defamer ? Consider that he will fall upon your character as soon as your back is turned. Perhaps you have or imagine you have innocence and discretion to secure you—But no innocence is a defence against the venomous darts of malice ; no discretion is a security from the laughter, of fools or the song of the drunkard : Nor can you depend on the brittle friendship of the reviler for security ; he will exercise his talent and his trade, on friend and foe ; he will cast firebrands, arrows and death, and say, “ am not I in sport ? ”

THE holy scriptures are very pregnant with rules and instructions applicable to this doctrine. Sometimes giving out the most pointed prohibitions against the sin of reviling our neighbour, and against even listening patiently to an idle tale ; sometimes commanding us to exercise all charity towards him ; sometimes denouncing vengeance against the tale-bearer, the backbiter and the slanderer ; and sometimes commending people of the opposite character. In the 15th psalm, David is describing the man, that shall be found worthy to abide in God's tabernacle, and dwell in his holy hill ; among other things he is one, who *backbiteth not with his tongue, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour*. Indeed the places in God's word to this purpose are too numerous to be quoted at present, and too plain to be disputed or mistaken.

PRAISE and commendation, encomiums and expressions of respect, are the greatest encouragements and inducements, in this world, to virtue : slander is the greatest discouragement—The indiscriminate slander, that has become too fashionable, confounds all virtue and vice, and mingles them in one promiscuous, moral chaos. Many dissolute persons have been reclaimed

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by undeserved praise ; many virtuous people have been ruined by unmerited aspersions. If kind, respectful language will not reform a man, there is no prospect of his being reformed by rash censures, or by malicious aspersions.

COLLECT all the weak, childish and trifling actions, all the whims and caprices, all the defects and faults, all the worst principles, expressions and deeds of the best man in life ; set all these in public view, keeping all his good qualities out of sight ; he will appear a monster rather than a man. What then will he appear when falsehood has doubled the number of his sins and follies, when ill nature has magnified, and slander has published them !

LET us dwell upon encomium rather than accusation. There is no man, but has some commendable properties ; let these properties be the chief subject of our conversation. Listen not to such as view all the inadvertences, the foibles, and the irregularities of their neighbour with the eagle eye of malevolence and proclaim them with the trumpet tongue of scandal, and by such means form a character fit for aversion and contempt : For the eye of malice is very sharp to discover and magnify blemishes ; the tongue of slander is very loud and diligent in publishing them.

If you see a real fault in your neighbour, tell it him in a friendly, decent manner, not with insult or provocation, not with an assuming, haughty air ; but in the spirit of meekness and christian love : If you perceive any thing commendable in him, cherish and encourage it.

LISTEN not with pleasure or content to the tongue of scandal ; but frown upon every idle malicious surmise, and reject it with disdain. For he that gives heed or gives credit to such a tongue, becomes in some degree partaker of its guilt. Let every one attend to his own proper business, and study to reform himself, and he will find but little inclination or leisure to exclaim against the foibles of others ; to make or propagate false reports.

A GOOD word is as easily spoken as a bad. 'Tis as easy to commend our neighbour, as to disparage him. Then why should we not say *that* which is as easily, and more truly spoken, and much better received, *that*, which is more satisfactory to our own consciences?

A GOOD name is the easiest and cheapest bounty, that we can bestow on our neighbour—If we are poor and have nothing else to give him, we can give him a good name—If we are just and honest, we shall give him the credit of his virtues—If we are charitable we shall not publish his real faults—If we have integrity, we shall not accuse him falsely—If we are covetous and niggardly; speaking in his praise will cost us nothing—Are you troubled by slanderers? Justify them not, encourage them not by following their example—Is your fame clear and unspotted? Provoke not others to revile you by invading *their* character and reputation—Is your reputation low, and your influence but small? Speaking well of your fellow-creatures, will mend your reputation, and increase your influence—Are you very popular, and in high credit with the world? The habit of evilspeaking will sink your credit, and lessen your popularity.

A COMMON defamer declares war against mankind; he sets himself up a common enemy to his fellow-creatures; and makes it the interest of the world to be his adversaries; and he will find to his sorrow, that the world will never have so much of a gospel-spirit, as to love, or even forgive its enemies.

WHEN we seriously consider all these things, we shall bitterly lament the general propensity of mankind, and even of christians to this vice; and shall tremble at our own offences of this kind. We shall bewail the depravity of the world, which appears in this practice, more perhaps than in any other: And shall with most unfeigned sorrow, with the deepest anguish lament our own guilt in this cruel, sordid, heinous vice.

To evince how mischievous, how ungovernable a member the tongue is, attend to the inspired description of St. James. *The tongue is a little member,*

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and boasteth great things ; behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth ! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity ; so is the tongue amongst our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature ; and it is set on fire of Hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind : But the tongue can no man tame ; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison : therewith bless we God, even the father ; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing.

LET us consider the practice of slander and railing, as it really is, a sin of a very deep dye ; highly offensive to God, and strictly forbidden by him ; a crime diametrically opposite to the gospel of Jesus Christ ; grievous to the Holy Ghost ; subversive of the church of Christ ; repugnant to the precepts, example and doctrines of all the Prophets, Apostles, Saints and Martyrs of ancient times. Let us then purge our hearts of all malice, and keep our tongues from all evil-speaking : let our speech be modest, discreet, holy and edifying : let us encourage and commend whatever virtue we see in our neighbour ; covering his infirmities with that charity, which God enjoins, and the gospel recommends ; which pleases our Saviour, and promotes our salvation.



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A S E R M O N,

Preached at the Funeral of Mr. WILLIAM
HUGGEFORD, Son of Doctor PETER
HUGGEFORD, at DIGBY, Nova-Scotia,
January 7th, A. D. 1789.

2 S A M U E L, xii. 22, 23.

While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept; for I said who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live: But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.

TH E are the words of David, upon the death of the child, which Bathsheba bare unto him: And they are introduced, as assigning a good reason why he made such grievous lamentation for the child, whilst he was yet living, but finished his mourning at the child's death.

OF all the eminent saints mentioned in the old testament, none appear more compassionate, none seem to have an heart more susceptible of benevolence and devotion, than king David; for which reason he is (notwithstanding all his faults and infirmities) called **THE MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART**: His bitter lamentation over Absalom, and his deep anxiety at the sickness of Bathsheba's child clearly demonstrate his benevolence and tenderness for his children.

BUT amidst all his tenderness and fondness for his children, he endeavors to confine his lamentations to the same period with the child's life: This he does from a consideration that all his tears and lamentations could not in the least avail towards restoring the deceased infant to his natural life—that the child had but gone before him to his final home—that the deceased could not return, but the father must follow him, to the place appointed for all living—must soon enter that war, from which there is no discharge.

SINCE David, the illustrious saint and servant of God, made this maxim, an argument for preventing violent grief and lamentation, it is very proper that we should give attention to it, and suffer it to have great weight with us, when we find ourselves inclined to despair, to discouragement, or to extravagant grief under the chastisements of our heavenly father's hand.

MANKIND cannot absolutely and universally rule their passions, such as hope, fear, joy, grief and the like; but *some* controul and command of these passions lies within our power, yea *much more* than is generally imagined. We find upon trial, that it is (to a considerable degree) in our power to increase or diminish, our belief or disbelief of a proposition; to magnify or to lessen our hope of a benefit, or fear of an evil: In like manner we find ourselves able (beyond what is commonly supposed) to increase our joy upon prosperity, and our grief under adversity. Upon this principle David undertook to regulate his mourning, to moderate his grief at the loss of his son. He considered the impossibility of bringing back his son from the dark and silent grave: and he endeavored to let reason predominate over his passion, to regulate his conduct by the principles of a sound understanding: He argues with himself like a rational creature, and like a true child of God. If we under the same affliction, imitate the bright pattern of king David, we shall perform our duty to our God and to ourselves: we shall escape much needless distress and unavailing vexation; we shall act more consistent with our own reason, more a-

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greeable to our condition, and the dignity of our nature.

STILL further to moderate our grief upon the loss of children; let us be advised constantly to habituate ourselves to a serious, realizing consideration that we must finally be separated from them—that they must leave us, or that we must leave them. The laws of nature and reason; the laws of creation and providence; the laws of scripture and of Heaven; all forbid that we should dwell in this world forever with our children—both parents and children are born to die—death is the common lot, the inevitable portion of all the human race. Death is of all things most certain; the time WHEN is most uncertain. If parents would duly and steadily consider these truths, they would be better prepared to resign their children to God, whenever he sends his grim messenger death to demand them.

It not only behoves us to consider that we must be separated from our children: but that this separation must be in a short time at furthest. Few and evil are the days of the longest pilgrimage that human life can expect. How soon do three score and ten or four score years pass away! how soon are they gone, forever gone! how quickly are they to be numbered among “the years before the flood.”

SHOULD we, and the children, which God hath given us, have our lives continued to the full extent of Methuselah's age; even *that* portion of time, compared to eternity, would be but as the small drop of the bucket, as the light dust of the balance; it would be more easily swallowed up by eternity, than the smallest drop of water by the greatest ocean.

BUT as the case really is, as we find the life of man in fact to be; the longest time, which we can expect to sojourn with our friends and children is but like a shadow, a vapor and a dream: let any person look back thro' forty or fifty years of past time; how short, vain and empty will such period appear! we may with great propriety say—of such a space of time, what the prophet says of the glory of Ephraim and the prosperity of

Israel; It is *as the morning cloud, and as the early dew, that passeth away, as the chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor, and as the smoke out of the chimney.*

As another alleviation of our grief; let us consider that in all probability it is better for persons, in many instances, to be taken out of this world of sin and trouble in their earlier years, than to be continued in the present life to extreme old age. Youth has commonly more innocence and less trouble than old age, or even the middle stage of life.

In addition to what we have already mentioned, it would be very prudent in us to observe, that the longer our children are spared, the more difficult will it be for us to resign them into the hands of him, who gave them. It is much easier to part from one with whom we have had but a short and slender acquaintance, than from another that has been a long time connected with us, by the dearest ties of friendship, nature and religion. The longer our own lives are spared, the more unwilling are we to die: the longer our children remain in life, the more bitter and afflictive is our task of following them to the dreary mansions of the dead. Supposing the life of your deceased son should (for your gratification) have been lengthened thirty or forty years, yet when that number of years should have expired, do you imagine that it would *then* be easier to resign him, than *now*? would it not be much harder? God knows best at what time to call us and our children to our eternal home—Our duty and our business is to submit to his will and his time; to be ready to obey his call; to be prepared to meet the awful stroke of death, whenever our great creator sends it, and to resign our lives and all our enjoyments into his hands, at such time and in such method as he sees fit; fully persuaded that God knows what is best, and that he will do, what is best. We may repose perfect confidence in him, whose wisdom and justice are infinite, and whose mercy is equal to his wisdom and his justice.

FURTHERMORE we may turn our attention to the

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almost innumerable, weighty calamities, which a deceased child escapes by an early death. If we sum up the sorrows, the temptations, the disappointments, the pains and the afflictions, which the happiest person in the world suffers, during his pilgrimage thro' this life; we shall find the distress vastly to outweigh the felicity; we shall find unspeakably more pain than pleasure. But let us take a view of the life of the most unhappy part of mankind—The idea of their distresses, will strike our minds with horror—will almost make us sick of human life and human nature. This will cause us to cry out that “the day of our death is preferable to the day of our birth”—That the house of mourning is better than the house of feasting.” Could the happiest of us foresee all the future happiness, and misery of this life, the misery would so much overbalance the happiness, that we should be driven to discouragement and despair. Wherefore our creator has wisely concealed from us the future scenes of life; has concealed them from us, for our own benefit and contentment.

LET any one seriously review his past life, with all its joys and all its miseries; and then pronounce, whether he would choose to live thro' the same life a second time. Many people have thought, that there is not one person on earth, who would be desirous of such a repetition of his former life. Our great desire of long life originates from the most absurd notion, that can be imagined, such desire is founded on the vain opinion that should we live longer, we should live happier than we have done in time past—Hope, never failing hope, that dear beguiler, that constant attendant and unfailing support of all our vain and ridiculous expectations, accompanies us thro' our whole journey of life: and tho' we have a thousand times discovered her deceit; tho' we have ten thousand times been deceived and disappointed by her fair promises; yet we are still captivated by some new promise, we still are in eager pursuit of some new, specious phantom, which she holds up before us, always within our view, but never with-

in our reach ; till in our race (to sieze the airy vision) we fall into the grave. The absurdity of expecting *that* happiness amidst the infirmities of old age, which neither youth nor middle age could afford ; is plainly demonstrated by common sense and universal experience.

BUT notwithstanding the great troubles of this life, and the supposed happiness of an early decease ; yet both God and reason have implanted in our nature a great desire of life ; and the most eager wish to preserve the lives of our children. This instinct and propensity are necessary to preserve the human race, and to prevent the depopulation of the world. Nay God has not only made it our inclination, but our strongest duty to do our utmost, to preserve our own lives and the lives of our fellow-creatures, especially the lives of our offspring ; for they are in a special manner committed to our charge, and will be required at our hands.

I WILL finish my sermon by a more particular address to those, who are peculiarly interested in the loss, under which we are now mourning.

PERMIT ME, who have more than once felt a similar stroke of tribulation ; who have repeatedly drank of the same bitter cup of anguish, who therefore very well know how to mourn *with* you and *for* you ; permit me to take a zealous part in your grief, to enter warmly into a sympathetic partnership of your sorrow ; suffer me to mourn, with those that mourn.

THERE is a remarkable sympathy observable among those, who are interested in the same kind of distress : from this sympathy there proceeds some small degree of consolation ; this small consolation, with all willingness, we offer to the afflicted, the melancholy parents and friends of the deceased ; to the respectable father, to the tender mother, who are, with the utmost bitterness of soul, mourning for a son, descended from reputable and substantial ancestors, a son beloved and regarded by all who knew him, whose reputation is unimpeached, whose memory is precious ; a faithful and loyal servant to his king ; a true friend to his coun-

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try—a dutiful son to his worthy parents—a tender, affectionate brother—an agreeable companion—a good and wholesome member of society—who with exemplary patience, bore a lengthy, tedious sickness—and with uncommon fortitude met the king of terrors.

It is to be hoped that this spectacle of mortality, will in a special manner affect the minds of such as are in the bloom and vigor of life; it may teach them the great, important lesson “that young persons are not exempt from the stroke of death.”

LET the amiable brethren and sisters of the deceased consider this operation of God’s hand, to be a loud and near call to them, to be prepared to follow him.

LET the members of the ancient, humane and benevolent COMMUNITY to which he belonged, consider this blow of mortality as a peculiar warning to the fraternity to consider themselves as mortal; that none of their virtues, labours, improvement, or deeds of benevolence (for which they are so noted throughout the world) can secure them from the fatal dart of death; that however lasting the community, as such, may be; yet that each individual member, is like other men of few, very few days, and those days full of trouble; like an empty shadow, or an idle dream.

BUT the parents, the sorrowful PARENTS are the deepest, the sincerest mourners. TO THEM let me principally address my consolatory advice.

NATURE compels us, and God gives us leave to mourn for those, who were precious to us whilst living, whose death falls with the most distressing agony upon us. The death of such, it is natural, it is decent, it is even our duty to lament. It is innocent, it is laudable to pay a due tribute of sorrow to the memory of our dear children. But reason tells us that all our mourning will not avail to bring them back from the silent grave: and revelation tells us not to mourn as those, who mourn without hope.

LET us then lift up the hands that hang down in despair, and strengthen the knees, that are feeble with

long sorrow and bitter woe. We may contemplate the blessing which our saviour has pronounced upon mourners, that they shall be comforted. When we consider death in its beneficial part ; so far only, as it is a deliverance from the troubles and temptations of life, we have reason to rejoice at the death of those, whom we love and esteem. Such is doubtless the meaning of that expression in the burial office " we give the hearty thanks for that it hath pleased thee to deliver this " our brother out of the miseries of this sinful world." These words thus understood are very properly, wisely and piously inserted.

We shall do well to consider the numerous perils and miseries, the variety of pains and troubles ; the strong temptations, the long train of evils, infirmities and diseases, which they must have expected in life, and from which nothing but death could exempt them ; then shall we rather thank the kind hand of our heavenly father, which hath rescued them from all this complication of evils, dangers and temptations, than despair or murmur at the dealings of God's providence.

MOURNING parents will find great alleviation of their distress, by meditating on the blessings still in their possession, rather than upon those taken from them. Have you lost a worthy son and an amiable daughter ? yet have you not still remaining that capital boon of life, an agreeable consort ? Have you not a number of sons remaining, of whom, we have the greatest assurance, that they will support the dignity of your family, and do honor to your memory ? Have you not a number of daughters endued with every female virtue ; reputably supporting the character both of the maiden and conjugal state ? Have you not health and peace of conscience, and the desirable, midway station, between poverty and riches ? If we have all these blessings, let us not murmur at a single loss.---*Why should a living man complain ?*

AFTER all, what can we see in death, either so strange or so painful as is generally supposed ; death is a change, that we daily see among our fellow-creatures ; a change, which all mankind, yea, all things living must suffer ;

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a change, which we always expect, and for which we ought always to be prepared. DEATH is an instantaneous passion, as soon as he arrives, he is gone, and is supposed by some of the principal philosophers to be much greater in apprehension than in experience.

BUT the supreme consolation of mourning parents, is the promise that their children shall be raised from the grave, to life and immortality. We have a firm confidence, a sure and certain hope that God will raise this mortal part to immortality : that by his almighty power he will make our bodies, as durable as our spirits.

To the childless, who keep God's Sabbaths, and choose the things that please him, and take hold of his covenant, God has promised in his house, and within his walls, a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters, that he will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off.

F I N I S.



