

John Adams
Library,



IN THE CUSTODY OF THE
BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY.



SHELF NO

★ ADAMS

191.10







MR. *BENTLEY*'s

ARTILLERY ELECTION

S E R M O N.



A
S E R M O N,
PREACHED BEFORE
THE
ANCIENT AND HONOURABLE
ARTILLERY COMPANY,
IN Boston,
JUNE 6, 1796,
BEING THE
ANNIVERSARY
OF THEIR
Election of Officers.

By WILLIAM BENTLEY, A. M.
PASTOR OF THE SECOND CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH IN SALEM.

Ὁ πόλεμος τοῖς μὲν δίκαιοις ἀναγκαῖος.

MAX. TYR.

BOSTON :
Printed by MANNING & LORING.

1796.

C

44

194.10



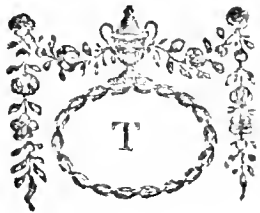
A

S E R M O N.



PROVERBS xxx. 5, 6.

EVERY WORD OF GOD IS PURE :
HE IS A SHIELD UNTO THEM THAT PUT THEIR TRUST IN HIM.
ADD THOU NOT UNTO HIS WORDS ;
LEST HE REPROVE THEE, AND THOU BE FOUND A LIAR.



THIS valuable fragment from the records of ancient wisdom, comprehends this useful truth, that from experience are all our safe conclusions, respecting the character of society, and the happiness to be attained in it. The resolution formed upon this maxim, has been more celebrated, than the maxim itself. It is experience which recommends moderation in our desires, and in our expectations, but facts, in all ages, are more easily communicated by words, than the maxims, which justify the conclusions of our highest wisdom. The writer affirms, that independent of every advantage from genius and education,

cation, this truth of our text is established. The whole paragraph contains an appeal* of a man to his neighbours, or an inquiry which may be thus represented. Indeed, should I have no uncommon natural powers; or should I not have cultivated my understanding; should I not have been a man of deep reflection, or should I not have the secrets of inspiration; tell me, whence could I get wisdom? Am I first to comprehend all creation? Who hath done this? Who hath ascended into heaven, or who hath descended? Who hath gathered the winds in his hand, or confined the waters in his garment? Who hath established all parts of the earth? What is the name of this man, or what is his son's name? Can any man tell? Is not every truth of God approved, when it has been safe to those who trust in it? Add thou not then rashly to his words; affirm only from experience; lest thy folly be exposed, and thou lead other men into error. He then proceeds to his conclusion. He had considered affluence, and poverty, and had devoutly observed how far they contribute usually to happiness, and he tells us, that experience and observation had reconciled his mind to the nature of human life, and had taught him to acquiesce in those moderate desires, which are much more adapted to health, and contentment, and have their objects commonly within every man's reach. Experience has continued to decide in favour of this choice, and to render it happy. Our text then assures us that the laws of God are known from experience, and from the safety and happiness men find in them; that every advantage beyond past experience, should be pursued with the greatest caution; that attempts at higher happiness

* There is a different preface in the Vulgate.

happinefs have been made with frequent difappointments ; that reformations have been urged, but not accomplifhed ; and that the many difappointments fhould be leffons of the higheft wifdom to mankind.

This fentiment accommodates itfelf to the prefent folemnities. The horrors of war are to be deprecated. Benevolence teaches us to avoid them ; found policy to prevent them by all reasonable meafures ; and religion to abhor the occafions of them. But the world is not in our power. Paffions exift every where, beyond control from principles within, and from fears without. General happinefs is the beft object of political economy, and fhould be regarded in all laws and in every community. But it is not what exifts, but what is to be purfued. It is to the mind, an affemblage of all thofe bleffings, which have been reported among men, but which have never exifted together, or in perfection. The picture is bold. It may fill the mind, and infpire fublime hopes. But fteadily viewed, and without fair comparifon with nature, it may diftract the imagination, make men forget the proportions of nature, and leave them difatisfied with the real objects before them, and with that happinefs, which is their beft, becaufe their higheft attainment. But even this happinefs is unequal in different nations, and in different ages. Its progrefs in fociety refembles the progrefs of all our knowledge from experience. It is gained by flow degrees and calm inquiry, and it is accompanied with unavoidable prejudices. Nations like men have a refemblance in their general character, but their manners may be diftinct. The reftablifhment of any police has been found to be impracticable, becaufe the habits, which formed it, are unattainable.

unattainable. Nations may profit by the resemblance, because they knew from it the object of government and the character of mankind. But no hopes from experience will rise above the condition of human nature. From the wisdom of preceding ages,* Moses supplied the principles of his government, and the lessons of morality which accompany his laws. He did not institute wars, but he found them in the order of our world. He did not reason about their nature, but their coincidence with his political hopes. The political existence of his nation began, when they were in arms. The principles upon which they were taken at first, were never unnecessary, nor was their influence upon the national character ever lost. They reduced moral life below the standard of an happy government, but the people had not the spirit of such a government. There are in times of peace, institutions of as active virtue, and of as high spirit of honour, as can exist in war. There may exist a generous emulation in the arts, and of civil honours, which may command all the resources of human genius. And there are the endearing manners of domestic life to sweeten the temper, and to conciliate the affections. It was not, because upon fair comparison, war could be preferred, but because war was more congenial with the prevalent character of mankind. The spirit of war speaks in the devotion of David. But his sublime thoughts could not inspire those emotions, which compose the description of wisdom by his successor. It was in the quiet of a peaceful establishment, that the age became enlightened, as well as great. But in our world, we have not been able to provide the events, which combine

* Spencer.

bine empires, and preserve their existence, otherwise than by the active and contending passions of mankind. These events have not only given being to all great nations, but they have aided the triumph of every religious establishment. Even religious wars have ever been worse than those of princes for civil causes, or political fame, because they have more passion, and it is determined from the origin and nature of the establishments, consequent upon them, that they cannot be the foundation for the hopes of a perpetual peace. The difference of motives professed in them, has made no difference in the enormities, they have occasioned. It then remains a question, since such a state of the passions has ever existed, as is a self-exciting cause of war, and therefore as its incentives cannot fail from the present constitution of the human mind, whether a state of constant preparation, be not the only state of safety, to nations, and to mankind.

To examine a subject of this interesting nature, we must not propose a favourite theory of the passions, but some example of the most happy conduct of them. If we cannot find a successful experiment, we should produce the best effects in circumstances, most indulgent to our hopes. We should examine the minds of men, when most detached from the political views of their age, simple in their manners, elevated beyond the love of fame, or wealth, and in their maxims pure, peaceable, and submissive. Too humble to hope for preferment in the state, and too devout to refuse the most severe restraints upon their passions. From the conduct of such men, we may judge of the influence of condition, of the progress of society, of the motives of prosperity, and of the nature of a religious or civil

establishment. And our conclusions from such an example, may be as safe, as the nature of human knowledge will admit.

And what history can be better adapted to a Christian assembly, than the history of their own religion? Christians being in civil society, did not refuse obedience to the laws. The right of war was not denied, or maintained. The manners they associated with their religious profession, were governed by the love of peace. From the absence of power, and the full strength of mutual dependence, their habits were more social and more pure. The most offensive part of their lives was obliged by persecution, and their unkind opinions of mankind; but this assisted them in their resistance to the habits of civil society, and for a long time preserved them from the compliances, which gradually obtained from pretended regard to convenience and to duty, and the supposed obligations of different circumstances, but really from the assimilation of their manners and character to that of human nature, and the order of our world. This expediency was disclosed in a letter, or in some guarded expression; was betrayed in confidence, and employed with fear; was adopted with caution, and confessed with diffidence; was opposed by restraints and qualifications; before it was established in belief, boasted of as just, and maintained by violence. Christians, after long depression, voluntary mortifications, and arbitrary rules upon the passions, and even under the belief of a speedy and a miraculous change of condition in our world, at last claimed and exercised all the rights of war. They borrowed in their earliest prosperity from every institution, which could unite with the prejudices

dices of their converts. We look not then at their primitive morals, but at the character of man : not at professions, but at actions. Mahomed adopted war, but the Christians had practised it. Christians yielded to its expediency, but Mahomedans profiting by experience, entered upon the world in triumph.

To trace this history may not be without instruction. The Author of our religion has reported by his disciples, his own convictions of the right of war. Jesus discovered to his friends, before his entrance upon the garden, in which he was apprehended, that he was determined to resist. But the prudence of a disciple could not be as easily under the command of his master, as his zeal. The reproof assures him, that his resistance was unseasonable, not unlawful ; because he went armed by his authority, and with his knowledge. His followers were thus taught to employ prudence with the lawfulness of war : And as the destruction of the country was impending, they were not taught to contend in its battles. This ingenuous temper was not lost in the primitive ages. To our own times, the records of men, who were governed by their religion, rather than education, have been carefully transmitted. A work attributed to one* of the first Christians, dissuades from sedition and schism, from moral motives, rather than from express and religious prohibition. And from military arrangements, he happily illustrates the common interest, which comprehends what is useful to the strength and defence of their cause. A care for personal safety induces another† to advise to appease the people, from a knowledge of their passions, which precipitate human affairs.

* Clement.

† Ignatius.

fairs. While a third* qualifies his obedience to civil authority by the protection, he receives ; and from the indignation which rises against insult and oppression, he claims the right to question their power, who do public wrongs. The character and the justice of these feelings, in our free government, it is not necessary to vindicate, or describe. They belong to the best part of human nature.

In the next period we see less simplicity of heart, and less ingenuous sentiments. When Christianity had a public form, and a rising interest, it speaks in flattering apologies, from its more learned friends, the language of the laws, and the subordination of the empire. Thus while one † acquiesces in the laws of slavery, and the full authority of reason, and government in the concerns of life, another ‡ to quiet the state, ascribes false honours to his religion, and professes to prefer prayers to arms, and in the apparent piety, though error of his address, he opposes active duty to devotion, and the order of civil society, to the hopes of a divine religion. While a third, § more sincere, than discerning, dares to anticipate a triumph over the laws of nature, from an authority not established in these laws, but formed in a religion too pure to exist in the present order of our world. But the patrons of the Christian cause, were not all of this character. They had refined their taste by the elegance of Rome, and had imbibed the manners of society with the best knowledge of its laws. They were not so ignorant as to plead for war from virtue, or religion, nor so superstitious, as to subvert society, by refusing it the necessary defence. To the passions of life,

* Polycarp.

† Athenagoras.

‡ Justin.

§ Irenæus.

life, and to the habits of civil society, they imputed the convulsions of empires, and the defence of the sword. To meliorate human condition, it was taught,* that the passions must be governed. That from their natural character, human genius was displayed in the arts of military defence, as well as in the maxims of virtue. The disputes of the age † for power, and the vile services of faction were stigmatized, as unlawful to Christians from a regard to reputation and the public peace, while Roman eloquence in the school of Christ, taught the philosophy of reason and religion. “Nor do I refuse,” says an enlightened Christian, ‡ “to confess, that it is the duty of man to know himself in all the relations of his being. What he is, whence he is, and why he exists. This duty he cannot perform, without an inquiry into all things around him, for they are so associated, connected, and united, that an ignorance of them involves an ignorance of himself, and disqualifies him for every civil obligation. Where is society formed on virtue,” he appeals, “or dissolved without blood? Wars throughout the world, disunite the dearest kindred, and the greatest empires report not the same history of their fate !”

A cause, which could admit such rational views of society, must have already risen into reputation, and its friends must have had an acquaintance with the world. We may then soon expect to find its power and its influence employed in public affairs. When Christianity had thus prevailed, its friends had interest at court, and in the armies. It had a command among parties in the state. Experience has told us, what to expect. Let us hear, how the Fathers reason, what the

* Lactantius.

† Tertullian.

‡ Minutius Felix.

the councils publish, and the civil laws ordain. Let us listen to Chrysoſtom, who exalted the glory of a Chriſtian prince, and to a Gregory who pleaded with bold imagination and genius againſt an apoſtate. We may find perpetuated the proſperity of an eſtabliſhment, by all the means of civil power, till a Bernard diſplays to us the full force of proſperity upon a long continued ſuperſtition, which had eſtabliſhed itſelf upon the pureſt religion ever profeſſed among men. We behold at length a war which armed Europe, and was the boldeſt effort of paſſion in religion. Conqueſt was authoriſed in the cauſe of religion, and the power of war, the conduct of armies, and the control of the civil government were ſurrendered to its claims.

At firſt, to engage Chriſtians in war, the croſs was diſplayed in their banners. This was not ſo great a ſtruggle with former prejudices as we might imagine. No ſect had prevailed, which had been under the imputation of making war unlawful. All reports leave reaſonable fears of miſconſtruction upon their opinion. The myſtic ſects in their infancy might favour or incline to it. Chriſtians fought, at an early period, promotion to civil and military honours, and gradually acquired their influence in the empire. Even the dignities in the church did not extinguiſh all claims, or prove ſufficient to gratify their ambition, and the exceſs of panegyric, was the reward of the civil Fathers for diſtinctions, which they readily beſtowed. A canon early impoſed a reſtraint upon this ambition. From the modeſt vindication of ſelf defence in former apologies, the eloquence of Chryſoſtom proceeds to compare the mind under its paſſions, to a body in a fever, in which ſafety directs the remedy. To a Chriſtian

tian teacher he not only insinuates, but recommends an address devoid of Christian simplicity. The power of princes was an emblem of spiritual dominion, too flattering not to be indulged. The Christians had fought too many battles, and with too great success, to doubt of the divine right of power, or the lawfulness of war. And, though Christian teachers were professed friends of peace, they had profited enough from affairs of state, to know what the Bishop assured them was true, that excellence in political knowledge was a commendable qualification. An emperor averse from the power and name of a Christian soon found the reluctance with which honours were abandoned. Panegyric was converted into the most bitter invective. The praises of Constantine from Chrysofom may be opposed to the talents of Gregory against Julian. Whatever could irritate by comparison, or be hateful in its motives, or injurious to reputation was pronounced without reserve. A spirit so freely encouraged in the primates of any order, cannot be restrained by any institutions. Neither the habit of a recluse, nor his vows will confine his ambition. The pride of opinion is not obstinate against the temptations of power. Enemies are more easily silenced by authority, than argument. The great Augustin encouraged the temper. In defiance of his first maxims, he passed from a vindication of war, to the command of God in it. He pronounced that the general, or the soldier were not so much authors of war, as the ministers of God, and that they might exult, Blessed be the Lord, who teacheth our hands to war, and our fingers to fight.

Thus at last orders established to exhibit the virtues of retirement and silence, became powerful associations

in

in the church, and were transformed into standing armies, to instigate resentment, and to interfere in the political concerns of princes. When the church became established, there were few fears entertained upon the subject of war, among the ruling ecclesiastics. The former doubts arose in private condition, in humble sects, and in times of persecution, but they disappeared among even good men, when they were acquainted with the necessity imposed upon our world, whatever peaceful dispositions they wished to cultivate in it. They found it vain to struggle against the order of events, and that their prudence and their strength consisted in that constant preparation, which could render them formidable to their enemies. The same extensive views of life, which exalt the hopes of virtue, obliged those guards against the passions, which appear as clearly in the laws, the polity and education of every country, as they do in their military arrangements.

We may then consider the experiment upon the Christian world as fairly made, and believe that no means have been found, to render its true principles so general and active, as to render our preparations for war unnecessary. And no success will justify our expectations of universal peace till public order, is public sentiment, rather than law, which at present appears to be a period, as remote from this, as any former age. Nor is the Christian a solitary experiment. The military is the best defined part of the institution of Moses. The equestrian order of Rome is better understood than the Senate; and the abuse of the military power, is the most notorious error of the feudal

feudal system. An order of patriots* arose out of our late revolution, whom our national honour and safety teach us to reverence. And the institution we honour this day, reminds us of a more early military association. And such parts of our excellent federal constitution have proved to be the most sound, which have wisely regarded principles, it was obliged to admit and indulge, more from the wisdom and experience of nations, than from our own immediate preference or choice.

But lest we should distrust the zeal of ancient times, and presume upon modern wisdom, we have before us in our own country, the most bold experiment, ever made in favour of perpetual peace, and it was conducted upon the Christian motives of piety and benevolence.

A sect established upon the lovely plea, that it was practicable to live without war, originated a state of civil society in a new country. The power of the magistrate, it did admit, and did attempt to define. Says the most able apologist† of the sect, “Let it be admitted that the magistrate may lawfully use his authority to preserve moral and perpetual statutes.” He then presumes that every thing is granted, which ought to be required. But if laws may require the virtues of obedience, they must defend the obedient. And the means of defence must be as extensive as the evils of opposition. The means must be adequate. But in what does any penalty differ essentially from a war? To find the point at which men may desist, short of the extent of their power, is difficult. If the

C

individual

* Cincinnati.

† Barclay.

individual may be defended, the state must be, which unites its safety with the multitude of the people. Civil society involves then the right of war. But when we observe the expedients to promote this false security of society ; when we see its abject dependence ; when we behold the character of interest in it ; the limited power, or rather equivocal nature of its government, depending on private manners ; the superiour strength of private will ; the discouragement of knowledge to preserve it, the dangers of ambition ; and the reluctant acquiescence in this state, the fordid interests it creates in multiplied private views, and when we add an impartial* view of facts, which are of the greatest consequence, the experiment appears contrary to nature, to civil government, and to personal safety.

But while we confess the necessity of war, and of a state of defence, we ought to be cautious not to propose too freely political advantages from war, or to encourage a disposition to provoke it, without a sacred regard to all the motives of an honourable peace. There is an ambition, which may be awakened in great revolutions, but it should have urgent and noble occasions. Dangers may provoke rashness, rather than courage. Wars are easily converted into real evils. Conquests have been faithfully reported, and history dwells upon them, but ambition for war has been often fatal. If wars can raise the fame of nations, they can as powerfully concur with the means of their destruction. The consequences of the Peloponnesian war upon the Grecian states, have been confessed, and deplored. The state in which Grecian arts flourished, was of peace.

The

* Smith's Letters on Pennsylvania.

The ambition of Rome under a military government employed a rivalship, which had glory, but not victory, and shews how powerfully the self inspiration of liberty unites with excellence in the arts beyond the love of the arts, when aided only by power. A more generous emulation and friendship of the arts in Europe prevented the recurrence of the same events. Independent nations produced a principle more active than any motives of government, and genius employed the most splendid advantages, and was triumphant. And we ought on this occasion, to pay a just tribute of respect to that patriot,* who justly holds a distinguished office in our federal government, for that reasonable work, in which he has placed before us, the political experience of our world. Could the highest wisdom have chosen a subject, could it have chosen a better for the instruction and glory of our country? It affords a review of the difficulties of civil government, and of the endless expedients to maintain the prosperity of states. Convinced of the nature of war, men in all ages, have imagined, that they could act upon their sober convictions: They have attempted to institute an higher order of things, and to create an influence of opinion over the passions of the world.

But they who consider the present state of our world, and our constant experience in it, may find the necessity of that sublime religion, which instructs our prudence in this world, but establishes our best hopes upon our qualifications for a better life, and they may increase their esteem of that revelation upon which all our hopes of happiness must rest. Our highest duty is to guard against impending evils, while we endeavour

our

* JOHN ADAMS.

our to preserve from a love of the public happiness, for our own times, the sweet intervals of peace, in the wisdom of our laws, and in our constant preparation for a most active defence.

To correct the vanity of our expectations from the greater wisdom to prevail in our world from any causes, which now exist in it, let us only recollect the causes, which have already proved insufficient to establish a more happy order of things. Genius has in every country had its opportunities, to assist a flourishing age, and to plead with mankind, in favour of the blessings of peace. When princes have contributed to the lovely purpose, the public sentiment of joy has been addressed to them in the boldest panegyric. But the ambition of statesmen, the corrupt manners, and turbulent passions of men have interrupted and frustrated every generous design to establish, what men have professed to believe to be the dignity of life and the end of government. Religion also has given its friendly assistance. But violence has been nursed even at the altars, and they who for one age associated religion with peace, have resigned it to those, who have made it the incentive of war. The human faculties continue to develop unequally. Ambition is not less strong, as the advantages of education are extended. Natural and untutored passions with all their incentives, every where exist. War has yet all its causes. The passions which excite it, it can inflame. Little durable happiness then can we hope from the enthusiasm of mankind in the most ardent love of liberty. They feel their native claims on liberty, but command not for a long time, the wisdom to preserve it.

it. In the means of bold resistance nations become formidable, and restrain their enemies.

With sincerity then, we congratulate the Members of this ANCIENT AND HONOURABLE ARTILLERY COMPANY assembled this day, in the spirit of our ancestors, who were urged by a love of liberty and religion to establish themselves in these remote, and uncultivated regions. The rigour of their manners formed by persecution, and confirmed by habits of suffering, and danger, did not instruct them, with an ingenious modern,* that the history of the Jews was not an example to them, or that local manners were the true principles of Christian morality. They conceived that their future hopes did not refuse them the best means to secure their present safety, and they associated the use of arms, with their purest doctrines. Like Moses, they supplied laws from experience, and like the great teacher of their religion, they provided principles of active virtue in the most humble condition. In this institution and school of arms, we recover the history of their best families, as well as principles, and the names of the officers lead us to the recollection of men, who have been conspicuous in the successive generations from the plantation of the colony, to the present flourishing state of our commonwealth. It transmits the character and the sentiments of Massachusetts. As a very early institution it demands our veneration. In its freedom from innovation it is a memorial of the stability of the public opinion regarding the use of arms ; and even with its interruptions, it records its intimate connexion with the liberties of the people. During the last efforts
of

* Soame Jenyns.

of the House of Stuarts to perpetuate their power, it ceased to enjoy its privileges, and in our late war with the parent country, it gave place to the establishment of an army. Its members saw at these memorable periods, the boldest attempts for freedom. In the first, the spirit of revolution was directed by an ambition devoid of principle, and by an enthusiasm which could command, but not enjoy victory. Its strength proved the terrour of a government, it was not able to reform, and fear qualified a power, which was not absolutely withdrawn. But in the other we beheld, the mild virtues inspired by the love of liberty and mankind, and guarded by prudence and fortitude, conducted to victory by the laws of a free people. Our General became immortal, and our cause yet triumphs in the federal constitution, and in the peace and prosperity of our country. Thus have the absent years of the history of this institution been supplied from the records of our nation, as sacred to courage, and to a glorious defence of arms in the hands of a free people. Its present worthy members, and officers* its active patriots, and the commanders of our late army perpetuate its fame. The names of a HULL, a BROOKS, and a LINCOLN will be revered in future ages. May our national defence be as perfect, as it is necessary, and just.

But mankind are yet in a state of war. How terrible has been the havoc among the most enlightened nations of Europe! We confess the melancholy truth. And we will not fall a willing sacrifice to the passions of angry nations. We love peace, but we will render it

* Q. M. Gen. AMASA DAVIS, Commander of the Company. J. EATON, Lieutenant. JER. KAHLER, Ensign.

it safe and honourable. We desire to possess the best blessings of civil government, but we will be able to defend it. To restrain the passions of men, we must be a terrour to them. We will love peace, but we will defy ambition, hate oppression, and die for our laws and our liberty. Pure religion will teach us to love peace, and experience will teach us, how to preserve it. But we will never forget that the good citizen is a good soldier. Able to defend, as well as sure to deserve his liberty. He hates faction, but he is not afraid of war in defence of his country. He loves peace, because it preserves the highest value of freedom. He rises to conquer perverse passions, not to employ them in his own cause. He appears to support the laws, not to triumph over them. His victory is for good government, and to God, with a pure conscience, he can commit his cause.

