

A discourse preached in the Episcopal Chapel, Cowgate, Edinburgh, Feb. 9, 1809; being the day approved by His Majesty for a general fast / [Archibald Alison].

Contributors

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A
DISCOURSE,

PREACHED

IN THE EPISCOPAL CHAPEL, COWGATE, EDINBURGH, FEB. 9. 1809,
BEING THE DAY APPOINTED BY HIS MAJESTY
FOR A GENERAL FAST.

W. B. B. B.



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A

DISCOURSE,

PREACHED IN

THE EPISCOPAL CHAPEL,

COWGATE, EDINBURGH,

FEB. 9. 1809;

BEING

THE DAY APPOINTED BY HIS MAJESTY FOR
A GENERAL FAST.

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DISCOURSE

PREACHED IN

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

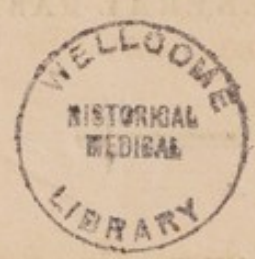
OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

ON THE 10TH OF

DECEMBER

THE DAY APPOINTED BY HIS MAJESTY FOR

A GENERAL FAST



BY ARCHIBALD ALLISON, LL.D.

RECTOR OF THE CHURCH OF ST. JOHN, N.Y.

AND MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF BISHOPS

NEW YORK

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TO

MAJOR-GENERAL GRAHAM

OF BALGOWAN,

&c. &c. &c.

SIR,

I obey the unexpected request with which you honoured me, in presenting this Discourse to the Public: And, I trust, you will permit me to obey, at the same time, the impulse of my own heart, in inscribing it, TO THE FRIEND OF SIR JOHN MOORE, and the PARTNER of his GLORY.

I have the honour to be, with the most profound Respect,

SIR,

Your very faithful

And obedient Servant,

ARCHIBALD ALISON.

EDINBURGH,)
FEB. 26. 1809. }

MRD CHIR. SOC.
ABRIDGED.

TO

MAJOR GENERAL GRAHAM

OF BALSOWAN,

Dec. 20. 1801.



SIR,



I observe with great regret
which you honoured me, in presenting the
course to the Public. And, I trust, you will per-
mit me to obey, at the same time, the impulse of
my own heart, in insinuating it. To the friend
of Sir John Major, and the Partner of his
Glory.

I have the honour to be, with
the most profound Respect,
SIR,
Your very obedient servant,
RICHARD ALISON.

DISCOURSE, &c.

ST MATTHEW, XVI. 3.

“ Can ye not discern the signs of the times ? ”

IN these words, our Saviour replied to the national prejudices, and to the national arrogance of the Jewish people. It was with them (even under their peculiar dispensation) as it is with mankind in general. They valued themselves as being the favourite people of Heaven : they conceived that no errors or vices of their own could ever forfeit the covenant made with their fathers : and they forgot, amid the pursuits of temporary power, all the promises which their peculiar records gave of a Spiritual kingdom, and of a Moral dominion.

The occasion on which these memorable words were spoken, was the following :—

“ The Pharisees also, with the Sadducees,
 “ came, and tempting, desired him, that he
 “ would shew them a sign from Heaven. He
 “ answered and said unto them, when it is even-
 “ ing ye say it will be fair weather, for the sky
 “ is red, and in the morning it will be foul wea-
 “ ther to-day, for the sky is red and lowering.
 “ O ye hypocrites ! ye can discern the face of
 “ the sky, but can ye not discern the signs of
 “ the times ?”

In these words, there are two things remarkable :—

1. The first is the assertion that there *are* Signs of the times : That, as in the natural world, there are signs established by the beneficence of Heaven, from the observation of which the business of life may be carried on ; so in the moral world, in the conduct of individuals and of nations, there are also signs, established by the same beneficence, from which the thoughtful

mind may foretel the consequences that must follow, and from the observation of which, it may regulate its future conduct. It is upon this foresight, upon this interpretation of the signs that individuals or nations exhibit, that the wise and the virtuous of every age can act ; by which they are enabled to profit by the experience of others : by which they are taught what to avoid, and what to pursue ; and by which they are perpetually reminded, that there is in nature a greater administration than that of men, to which they ought to be subject, and that their loftiest wisdom consists in obeying the *signs* which that administration displays.

2. The words of the text seem to convey another meaning : a meaning of reproach ; of reproach to the people of that, and of every succeeding generation, for their inattention to the indications of Heaven. It was not that the Pharisees and the Sadducees of that unhappy age were *incapable* of discerning the *signs* which the times afforded them ; it was that they *would* not discern them. They were the Parties of that de-

voted country ; they were rivals in power, in influence, in consequence ; and while Heaven threatened, and Prophecy foretold, and Rome in consequence was in arms, they closed their eyes to all the signs of heaven and of earth ; and, under the hypocrisy of religion, were ardent only for the low and momentary ends of vulgar ambition.

Whenever, my brethren, a nation is assembled before the Throne of God ;—whenever, in the midst of public danger or calamity, the command of a Sovereign unites the voices of his people in supplication for the assistance of Heaven, I know not that there is any subject of meditation more fit for so solemn an occasion, than that which is suggested by the words of the Text.

It is not in obeying the ritual of a prescribed devotion ; it is not in merely following the multitude into the house of God, and joining in words which the heart neither weighs nor feels ; that the solemn duty of days like the present can be performed. It is in raising our thoughts to the Administration of the universe ;—in contemplat-

ing the Laws which the Almighty has given to the social world ;—in marking, amid the calamities of nations, the operations of his justice, and his wisdom ;—and, by thus observing the signs of *his* Will, in learning the path of *our* Duty. From the distractions and the miseries of the world, Religion calls us into the temple of God ; and the voice of our Saviour there meets us to say, that, amid all the desolations around us, there are signs of the care and the providence of Heaven, and that they are exhibited for our instruction.

If ever there was a period when the *Signs of the Times* were solemn and portentous to mankind in general, and to the inhabitants of this Country in particular, it is doubtless the present. We are spectators of the greatest and most awful events upon which the eye of man has ever gazed. We have been witnessing for years the progress of that mighty stream of conquest and of desolation, which has been spreading over the fairest portions of the civilized world. Year after year, we have seen it rolling forward its sanguinary tide, unchecked, and unexhausted ; and burying in its progressive wave, the riches of nature, the land-

marks of nations, and all the most venerable institutions of human policy. In the last season we have seen it pause indeed—but pause only for a moment ; and while our hearts were throbbing with the hope, that a barrier was at last opposed to its fury, we have been doomed to see it return with accumulated force ; and soon (I fear) in spite of all the profusion of British generosity, in spite of all the energy of British valour, in spite of the sacrifice of the noblest blood which British heroism can shed, to see it overwhelm that Country, which we have in vain endeavoured to protect, in the stream of general desolation. Amid the wreck of the nations of Europe, *this* country stands now, insulated, and alone. But we see the torrent gathering around us ;—and it is fit that, on such solemnities as this, we should raise our eyes to Heaven, and implore the direction and the assistance of HIM who alone can say, *Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further ;* and who yet may make us the instruments of his power, *in stilling the noise of the waves, and the madness of the people.*

It were to be ignorant or inattentive to the

signs which *the times* present to us, to say that they were the consequences of Military prowess, and Military numbers *alone*. The world, in its history, has seen many Conquerors, but it has seen them, too, checked in their career, and driven back into the regions which nursed them. There is not a nation almost upon earth, which has not (at least in the annals of its earlier story) its tale to tell, of national prowess and independence; which has not to number the hosts that were brought in array against it; and which does not point, with exultation, to that illustrious page of its history, which contains the narrative of their defeat and disgrace. There is, in truth, so deep and so active a LOVE OF COUNTRY in the bosom of mankind; there are so many cords of affection by which it is wound round the heart of man; there is so much energy in freedom, so much elevation in public virtue, and, even at the last, so much fortitude in despair, that we may take for granted, whenever nations fall prostrate before the sword of an invader, that the origin of their fall is not so much in external violence, as in internal decay; and that there must have been some previous and overpowering causes in the nature of

Government itself, which alone could reconcile the hearts of men to the wretchedness of ignominy and submission.

What have been the Civil or Political causes which have led to the general ruin in which we see all the nations of Europe involved; what were the seeds which have been sown, which have now sprung up into legions of armed men, it is the business of the historian and the philosopher to investigate. It is the duty of this place, my Brethren, it is the duty of *all* of us in days like the present, to direct our attention to a *greater* inquiry. It is our duty to look to the *Moral causes* which have been operating; to discern the *national Sins*, which are now visited by so much national suffering; and, when we see the mighty tragedy concluded, to learn the *Moral*, which it is destined to convey to us, and to every future people.

In such an inquiry, I fear, we shall be at no loss in discerning the *Signs* of the evils that have arrived: nor is there any one of us, perhaps, so regardless of the *times* in which we have lived, as

not to have felt some prophetic fears, of *what* was *coming upon the Earth* :—

1. We shall discern them, in the *first* place, in the *corruptions of Religion*; in the sins of that proud but servile Hierarchy, which poisoned, at its source, the spring of more than mortal life; which cherished superstition only that it might ensure obedience; and which bound the noblest faculties of the human soul in chains, that it might make them the instruments of its own temporal and impious power.

We shall discern them, in the *second* place, in the *sins of Statesmen*; in those maxims of political conduct which sacrificed justice to expedience; which gave to cunning and deceit, the names of wisdom and of policy; and which never hesitated to waste the blood and the treasures of nations, to gratify either the rivalship of Kings, or the ambition of their Ministers.

We shall find them, in the *third* place, in the *injustice of Internal Government*; in the exclusion of the great body of the people from all share in

the administration of their country ; in the haughty neglect of their rights, their interests, and their feelings ; and in the subjugation of the whole social system to the will of certain individuals, or certain hereditary orders of men.

We shall find them, in another view, in every country we contemplate, *in the personal vices* of the Great and the Powerful ; in that licentiousness of manners, which never fails to be the consequence of superiority to laws and to public opinion ;—which offends the minds of men, at the same time that it corrupts them ; and which, by a fatal contagion, reaches not only into the *business*, but into the *bosoms* of all who are below them.

We shall find them, in the *last* place, *in the guilt* of Genius and of Talents ; in that base prostitution, by which they who were destined by Heaven to be the instructors of mankind, have lent themselves either to be the slaves of Power, the panders of courtly Vice, or the apostles of Sedition ; and who, for the sake of a guilty celebrity, have trembled not at dissolving, at one time, all

the ties of private virtue, and, at another, all the obligations of social duty.

Such have been the *signs of the times* in which we have lived ; the signs, in some degree or other, in every country of the Continent, of those coming calamities which we are now doomed to behold ; and which, though they were derided by the *Pharisees* and the *Sadducees* of their day, were significant to every religious and every thoughtful mind, of the dissolution of the nations which presented them. They signified, that whenever Vice, and Injustice, and Oppression reign, the period of society has arrived :— They signified, that the means by which Heaven visits the sins of those who govern mankind, is, by alienating the hearts of the Governed ;—and that, whatever may be the instinctive love of country, there is a limit of duty, beyond which the *heart of the citizen is cold, and his hand is feeble* : They signified, that when once the vital principle of society is gone, its natural termination is approaching ; and that, although it may retain the form and semblance of strength, it is yet

destined to dissolve at the first touch of the steel of the Invader.

—“ *When thy judgments are in the earth,*” saith the Prophet “ *the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.*” —It is in these words, my brethren, that the great Moral of the tragedy of nations is to be found. It is in them we are reminded, that there is a throne of justice in Nature ; that there are laws of righteousness prescribed to Nations as well as to individuals ; that whenever the happiness of the whole is sacrificed to the power or the interests of the few, the seeds of dissolution are sown : that the means by which the Almighty visits the sins of society, is not by the visitation of the earthquake or the pestilence, but by the silent operation of the principles of human nature itself ; and that the same instincts which first assemble men into society, are destined to separate them again, whenever the ends of society are not fulfilled.

It is upon this awful and prophetic spectacle, that you, my brethren, and the people of this

country, now look. Years have been passing, and, in every one of them, you have seen the same signs accomplished.—What impression it is to make upon your minds, I presume not to say; I will repeat only the awful words of the SAVIOUR of the world, that these are *the signs of the Providence of Heaven*; and that they are given *that Ye may discern them.*

Were it the inhabitants of any other country whom it was now my duty to address, I know not that I could add to these words any accents of political comfort: But in THIS country, I thank GOD, that I can, and that I ought to add words, not only of comfort, but of animation. I dare not say, indeed, that we partake not in the infirmity or in the guilt of human nature. I dare not say, that there is nowhere injustice in our rule, nor oppression in our government. I dare not say that, in looking at the annals of our day, the eye of science will find every thing wise, or the eye of piety find every thing virtuous. But in the great and gigantic sins of other nations, I do trust, I may say, that

we have little participation. I trust that there is among us a living spirit of RELIGION, of PATRIOTISM, and of PRIVATE VIRTUE. I trust, that the peculiar blessings with which Providence has visited us ; that, that REFORMATION which purified our religion, and that REVOLUTION which fixed our constitution, have given to the people of this land a corresponding CHARACTER of religious principle, and of civil energy, which neither prosperity can corrupt, nor adversity can subdue. I trust, that the breath of freedom, which the lowest among us inhales with his birth, while it has poured prosperity through every vein and artery of the state, has poured along with it the spirit of loyalty, the vigour of patriotism, and the energy of independence. Amid the waves of the ocean, I trust we shall still present to mankind the Beacon which may enlighten and direct them : and that, among the millions of our population, there is not one heart so base, or one arm so coward, as to shrink from sacrificing life itself, in defence of the majestic fabric of our Laws, and the *grey hairs* of our anointed Sovereign.

Yet,—whatever may be our hopes, and whatever may be our prayers, let it never be forgotten what are our *Dangers*. They are not the dangers of a day, or of a season. The clouds which so long have hung around us, seem now to be gathering into the final storm. From one end almost of Europe to the other, we see the various nations which inhabit it, marshalled against us. We see their mingled forces wielded by that powerful Arm which victory has strung with new vigour; and their march directed by that penetrating Eye, which marks, with cool decision, wherever nature, or policy, or vice, has made us vulnerable, and which permits no slumber of peace to quench its malignant ambition.

If such are the Signs of the Times, they are to us the summons to **DUTY**. Amid the sunshine of prosperity, there is a character of national gaiety and levity, which suits, in some degree, with the character of the times, and which may be forgiven at least, if it is not approved. But the hours of danger demand another character; and the voice of Heaven calls *then* for loftier pur-

poses, and sublimer energies. In such hours, it calls upon Vice to pause, and Folly to think, and Party to be silent. It calls upon the citizen, of every rank, to prepare his mind for the scenes that may follow ; to remember what are the blessings which are included in the name of his country, and to supplicate from Heaven that strength which may enable him, in its hour of peril, to defend and to save it. It calls upon the Great and the Affluent to lay their wealth at the feet of their country ; to vindicate their distinction, by the distinction of their patriotism ; and to scorn every calculation of private interest, when the interest of their native land is in danger. It calls upon the Poor man to harden his mind against the conflict in which he must act or suffer ; to brave those additions to penury, which the struggle for national existence must produce ; and to prepare himself, in the last rank, to defend the humble cottage, which is yet the abode of liberty and of religion.

But chiefly you, MY YOUNG FRIENDS ! It is

you, chiefly, whom the voice of religion *now* summons to duty. You are entering upon the stage of time ! and upon that stage great interests are depending, and great events are to be transacted. In your day, the fate of your country will, to all human appearance, be determined : and whether it is to exist or to fall, will depend upon the wisdom of *your* councils, and the vigour of *your* arms. It is a time, therefore, for you to encourage in your bosoms all the native generosity of youth ; to scorn every vice that can debase, and every folly that can enervate ; to train your minds for scenes of firm enterprize, and high achievement ; to clothe yourselves in the armour of that Faith in which you were baptized ; and, with the lofty devotion of Freemen, to swear to Heaven and to mankind, never to surrender to a Tyrant, the inheritance you have received from your fathers.

Do you want *motives*, MY BRETHREN, to animate you to duty ? They are around you,—they are in every scene of that country, which is now *like the garden of Eden before you*, and which the

sword of a conqueror would convert into *a desolate wilderness*. The names you bear are the names of patriots and of heroes ; the ground on which you tread has been often wet with the blood of the invader ; the mountains of your country rise around you, to remind you that on *their* summits no hostile banner was ever reared ; and that from them, the Eye of your Ancestors saw the tide even of Roman invasion roll back.

Do you want *examples*, MY YOUNG FRIENDS ! to direct your patriotism ? Go not to the records of other countries or of other climes. Go to the annals of your own country ; to the examples which every page of them presents to you, and which teach you how the patriot can live, and how the freeman can die. Go to that *recent page* which is yet wet with your tears ; to the example of that ILLUSTRIOUS MAN, whose *uncoffin'd remains* repose, alas, far from the sepulchre of his fathers ; but whose ascending Spirit now lets fall the *mantle of its glory*, to cover the land which gave him birth ; and who has left to mankind a NAME, at the sound of which, in every succeeding age,

the heart of the patriot will throb,—when tyrants shall have ceased to reign, and when the world shall have awakened to Truth, to Victory, and to Freedom.

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the heart of the patriot will stop—when tyrants
shall have ceased to reign, and when the world
shall have awakened to fight for liberty and to
freedom.

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