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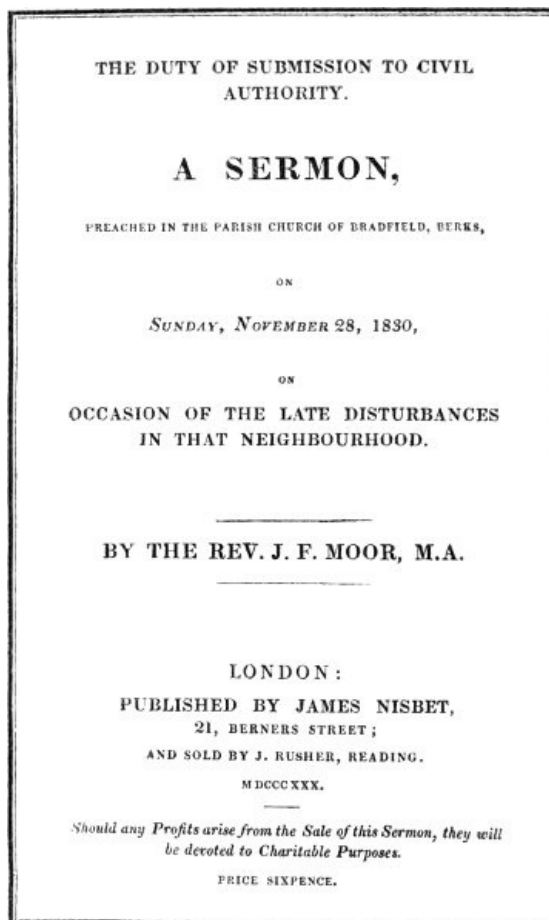
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THE DUTY OF SUBMISSION TO CIVIL AUTHORITY.

A SERMON,

OCCASION OF THE LATE DISTURBANCES
IN THAT NEIGHBOURHOOD.

BY THE REV. J. F. MOOR, M.A.

LONDON:

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MDCCCXXX.

*Should any Profits arise from the Sale of this Sermon, they will
be devoted to Charitable Purposes.*

The following Discourse lays no claim to originality. The Author acknowledges his obligation to the excellent Bishop Beveridge for many valuable and leading thoughts contained in it. But having thrown them into a new form, and having had it suggested to him by some members of his congregation, that the publication of them, at the present eventful crisis, might, under the divine blessing, be useful, he has consented to let them appear in print. The Author deeply feels the awful responsibility which, in these turbulent times, more especially devolves upon every minister of the sanctuary—to withhold nothing from the public which may have a tendency, through the powerful influence of the Holy Spirit accompanying it, to strengthen the walls of our spiritual Zion, and to preserve among us "that righteousness which" alone "exalteth a nation." It is with the earnest prayer, that the following pages may in the perusal of them be blest to these ends; and that, if they are, all the glory may redound to Him, to whom alone it is due, that the Author sends them to the press. [Pg 2]
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A SERMON, &c.

1 PETER ii. 13, 14.—*Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake; whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well.* [Pg 5]

One of the charges brought against the early Christians by their enemies, was, that they were rebellious, and despisers of civil authority; and accordingly we find the Apostles, in all their Epistles to the different churches they had been instrumental in planting, strongly enforcing the duty of submission to "the powers that be:" for, brethren, a more false imputation cannot be thrown upon true Christianity, than that which charges it with giving the slightest countenance, either to rebellion or a contempt of authority. True religion will ever make men the best and most loyal subjects, as well as most faithful, and upright, and conscientious, in the discharge of all the other relative and social duties of life. A man cannot be a Christian indeed, who "despises dominion, and speaketh evil of dignities."^[1] The Apostle Jude, speaking of such, classes them among those that are "sensual, not having the Spirit." But if this be the case, we seem to have fallen upon times wherein, whatever be the profession of religion that prevails, there is little of the reality of it left. How few are obedient to the "powers that be, as ordained of God!" How general is the indifference shewn to the office and authority of the magistrate! How many seem to consider religion altogether a separate thing from the submission due to their rulers; whereas the one as necessarily grows out of the other, as the branches do out of the stock of the tree. And who, then, that has witnessed the riotous and tumultuous proceedings of our misguided people for the last few weeks, which has led to the issue of the King's Proclamation, now affixed to the door of our church, will not be ready to take up the complaint of the Psalmist, in saying, "The godly man ceaseth; the faithful fail from among the children of men."^[2] [Pg 6]

I purpose, therefore, for the conviction of those who may have partaken of the disorderly spirit which has been abroad among us, as well as for the establishment and comfort of the truly pious and submissive Christian, to endeavour, in the present discourse, to explain and enforce, from the Apostle's words in the text, the duty of SUBMISSION TO CIVIL AUTHORITY; and I shall, [Pg 7]

I. Shew the NATURE and EXTENT of the DUTY.

II. The MOTIVE by which the Christian is to be actuated in the discharge of it.

I. I am to endeavour to shew the nature of the duty enjoined in the text, "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man." We must understand, then, first, *What is meant by every ordinance of*

man; and this the Apostle himself explains to us in the following words: "Whether to the king as supreme, or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him." From which it is plain, that every ordinance of man, means all that are entrusted with the government of the place or country in which we live. To all these the duty enjoined in the text refers. And we should observe, that it refers to them without any allusion to their respective *characters*. The command does not say, submit to the king, as *good*, and *wise*, and *mild* in his government; neither does it say, submit to the magistrate as being *equal* in their administration of justice; but it says, submit "to the king as supreme," that is, as deriving his authority not from man, but from God; and, therefore, as responsible to God alone, for the manner in which he exercises it. And again, submit to the magistrates or to governors, as those that are sent by the king, and therefore, as answerable to the king alone, or to those whom he may appoint to judge them, either for the right or wrong administration of justice. What, then, it may perhaps be asked, is a wicked king, or are unjust governors to be submitted to, in the same way that those that are good and just are? Is their character and conduct to make no difference in the submission due to them? The Apostle, in the text, makes no difference whatever. It belongs to God to punish a wicked king, because it is from God the authority he abuses, by his wickedness, is derived: "By me," he says, "kings reign;"^[3] and it belongs to the king, in a similar way, to punish unjust magistrates, because "by him they are sent for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well." Hence, then, whatever be the character of the king, and of the governors sent by him, the submission due to them from the people is the same. This, too, is remarkably confirmed by the conduct of the Apostle Peter himself, and of the early Christians in general. At the time when the Apostle wrote the Epistle from which the text is taken, one of the most wicked and cruel tyrants that the world perhaps has ever seen, was upon the throne of the Roman empire. Not only was he avowedly, in common with the rest of the then known world, (except Judea,) a heathen, but he was one of the worst, and most degraded of them, abandoned to the lowest vices, and taking delight in the sufferings of his people. You may judge a little of his character, when I tell you that he is related to have set on fire the capital city of his dominions, and afterwards charged the Christians resident in it with his own crime, and caused as many of them as could be seized, to be put to death. And still later in his reign, both St. Peter and St. Paul suffered martyrdom by his orders. And yet, brethren, this is "the king" to whom, "as supreme," the Apostle exhorts Christians, in the text, to submit themselves. This is the king to whom, we know, he not only exhorted others to submit, but to whom he submitted himself, even "unto bonds, and imprisonment, and death. But if the duty of submission to civil authority extended even to such a monster as this, and to the governors that were sent by him; if the Gospel gave no sanction to rebellion, even under such a reign as this, but, on the contrary, required of its professors a patient endurance of all the cruelties they were exposed to in it; how much more must the Gospel require submission of him who lives under a just and a righteous government. We have not a heathen Nero for a king, but one whose throne is established in righteousness, and who is ever ready, when applied to through the lawful channel, both to defend the oppressed and to relieve the distressed. Well, therefore, may it be said to us, "Submit yourselves," &c.

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But it may perhaps be asked, *what is it to submit rightly* to every ordinance of man? 1st. *It is to offer no resistance to the powers that be*. This St. Paul shews in Rom. xiii. 1. &c. where, describing the submission required of Christians, he opposes it to the act of resisting them: "Let every soul," he says, "be subject to the higher powers;" (and, be it remembered, he is here writing to those, who were living under the government of the cruel Nero;) "for there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God; whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God." It is plain, therefore, that any open *act of resistance* to the king, or the governors sent by him, is a breach of the duty enjoined in the text. Any *conversation*, too, that excites others to such resistance, is a breach of it. There may be resistance in words, as well as in deeds; and those who excite others to rebellion, though they do not themselves engage in the open act, are nevertheless with them partakers in the guilt. Cherishing any *principles* of resistance in our hearts too, is a breach of the duty. Such resistance, indeed, is not to be punished, as in other cases, by the arm of civil authority. It is not for man to punish for principles, or for the thoughts and intents of the heart, unless the person holding them, render them mischievous, by communicating them to others; but though they be never made known to others, yet, if they are cherished in the heart, they are known to God, and in his judgment, the person holding them is as guilty, though not to the same degree, of resistance, as though he had given utterance to them in words, or proceeded to any open acts of violence. Clearly then, would we submit to every ordinance of man; we must offer no resistance, either open or secret, either "to the king as supreme, or to the governors sent by him." But it may perhaps occur to some one to inquire, how are we to act, if either the king, or the governors sent by him, command us to do something which is *contrary to the laws of God*? Are we then to offer no resistance to them? Here the saints of old are an example for us. How did the three Jewish youths act, when they were commanded to worship the golden image, which the wicked Nebuchadnezzar had caused to be set up in the plains of Dura? Did they offer any resistance "to the king as supreme?" Did they endeavour to raise (as it is more than probable they could easily have done, from their rank and influence in the province of Babylon) a rebellion against him? No: they would not obey, indeed, the impious command of the king, because it was contrary to the commands of God; but they willingly submitted to the punishment which the king ordered to be inflicted on them. Here they offered no resistance. Remember the noble answer they made to the king, when they knew that the fiery furnace was awaiting them; "O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, neither will we worship the image which thou hast set up."^[4]

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Similar to this, also, was the conduct of Daniel under the wicked edict of Darius, which forbade him to make prayer and supplication to his God. Daniel did not rebel against the king's authority, though he would not obey him in opposition to God. He preferred the lion's den, either to rebellion against his sovereign, or to disobedience to his God.^[5] And so too the early Christians acted under the persecuting edicts of the Roman Emperors. They never resisted the authority of their governors, though they refused to obey them in every thing contrary to the commands of God. While they were firm in their adherence to the truth, they were submissive to the power of the magistrate. They "obeyed God, rather than man;"^[6] but they willingly submitted to the punishment to which such obedience exposed them. They preferred oppression to resistance, persecution and martyrdom to sedition and rebellion. And such, brethren, should be the conduct of the Christian in every age and country. Even suppose it possible, (which, thank God, under our just and mild government, we have no reason to apprehend, but even suppose it possible,) that we should have a wicked king, and unjust governors, who were to impose upon us, commands contrary to the laws of our God, still we must, with the Jewish youths, and with Daniel, and with "the noble army of martyrs," rather suffer, than resist. There appears to be no limitation to the command; "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man."

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But further, submitting to every ordinance includes, not only offering no resistance to the civil authority, but also *giving it our assistance and support*. Those cannot be said to submit to every ordinance of man, who, when a spirit of rebellion is abroad in a land, use no exertions to suppress it. Many are apt to think that, if they sit quietly at home, and take no part in what is going on amiss, they are free from blame, and are fulfilling their duty; and certainly, as far as shewing no disposition to join in any acts of rebellion goes, they are right. "Meddle not," says the wise man, "with them that are given to change."^[7] But more is required of the Christian, especially in troublous times, than this. "He that is not with me," saith the Saviour, "is against me, and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad."^[8] Those, *i. e.* who stand neuter in the cause of Christ, professing to take neither one side nor the other, are reckoned as his enemies; for by their indifference they add strength to his enemy's cause. It is the same, then, with regard to the king, and the governors sent by him. Those that are not with them are against them; those that refuse to support their authority, that do not willingly come forward, at whatever risk to themselves, to assist them in enforcing the laws, are in reality giving countenance and strength to the rebellious. It was on this very ground that that bitter curse was pronounced against the inhabitants of Meroz, which we find recorded in the song of Deborah, Judges v. 23. They were quiet, peaceable inhabitants of a little town,^[9] on the borders of Canaan, and the only fault that we hear of them, was, that, when the Israelites, the chosen people of God, were engaged under his guidance, in destroying the Canaanites, they remained at home, without declaring themselves either for or against them: but, saith the angel of the Lord to Deborah, "Curse ye Meroz, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty." Whence it is evident, that the Lord requires of his people a decision of character and conduct suited to the circumstances in which he places them. It is not enough for them "to cease from doing evil," they must "learn to do well."^[10] There must be activity toward that which is right, as well as an abhorrence for that which is wrong. There must not be a sitting still, like the inhabitants of Meroz, but an avowing ourselves on the Lord's side. And this applies with as much force to the precept of the text, as to any which the Scriptures contain. Would we submit ourselves to every ordinance of man, we must not only stand aloof from those that oppose themselves, but we must cast in our lot with those that support them: we must be as zealous in the defence of our governors, and as ready to aid them in the execution of the laws, as others are to weaken and destroy their authority; and this leads me to observe, further,

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That the submission required in the text implies also *obedience to the laws the governors give us*. He cannot be said rightly to submit either to the king or to the governors sent by him, who refuses to *obey* the laws they enjoin. Should those laws indeed be contrary to the laws of God; should, for instance, any earthly prince command us to worship any god except our own God, or enact that murder, or theft, or adultery, or any other crime forbidden by the word of God was lawful, then we must obey God rather than man; then indeed we must act as we have seen the saints of old did—not break out into acts of rebellion, but submit to the punishment of the laws, "suffer for righteousness sake,"—"take joyfully the spoiling of our goods," and be willing to be led either to prison or to death, rather than rebel against the ordinance of man, or disobey the commands of God. But while we have a king whose throne is established in righteousness; while we have a government which, in all the laws it enacts, is, as to all essential points, of necessity guided by the word of God, our submission to our governors must include submission to their laws. While *they* are restrained from enacting any laws that are contrary to the laws of God—*those*, it is plain, who refuse to obey *their* laws, do in fact refuse to obey the laws of God. While the laws of the land and the laws of God are one, in breaking the one we break the other, so that if it could be said of the early Christians living under a *heathen* government, "Whosoever resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation,"^[11] with how much more truth may it be said of us, if, living under a *Christian* government, we refuse to "render unto all their dues, tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour."^[12] No, brethren, without obedience to the laws there can be no right submission. Such then is the general outline of the duty enjoined in the text, "Submit yourselves," &c.

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I now pass on to show,

II. *The motive by which the Christian is to be actuated in the discharge of this duty.* Did the Christian look no higher than to his *worldly interests*, he would surely in these find a very powerful motive to comply with the exhortation in the text. Who can estimate the present blessing of a quiet and well ordered government? Who can tell what a privilege it is to be able, to sit, as many of us have done, in this hitherto happy land through a long series of years, "every one under his vine and under his fig-tree, no one making him afraid!" And who, on the other hand, can describe the horrors of a turbulent and disordered state of society? I would ask any well-disposed person, whether in the scenes of disorder and confusion which have prevailed around us for the last few weeks, he has not heard and seen enough to shew him the value of the precept, "Submit yourselves," &c. But these are not the grounds on which the submission of the Christian is founded—it is not from any consideration of mere worldly advantage that his motive to submission is drawn—the Christian has a *higher* and *nobler* motive to submission, and it is this which the apostle urges upon him in the text—"FOR THE LORD'S SAKE." *It is the command of him whom the Christian loves*—that he should submit. The Lord, to whom he owes his life with all its blessings, enjoins it; the Lord who came down from heaven, and "took upon him the form of a servant," "and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross," to "deliver him from the wrath to come," and to restore him to everlasting life and happiness, has commanded it; He who ever liveth interceding for him at the right hand of God, and who is continually procuring for him gracious supplies of his Spirit "to help his infirmities," and to enable him to "fight the good fight of faith," that he may "lay hold on eternal life;" He it is that says to him, "Submit to every ordinance of man." And can the Christian refuse the command of Him who has done, and continues to do, such great things for him? Must not the love he bears his Saviour constrain him to comply with his precepts? Can he think for a moment, that One who gave his life a ransom for him, would ever lay upon him a single command that was not conducive to his everlasting interests? No, brethren: if he has "tasted that the Lord is gracious," if he has felt any thing of his redeeming mercy, in blotting out his transgressions, and restoring him to that spiritual life, and that hope of everlasting life, which he had forfeited by the fall, he will no longer deem "his commandments grievous," but will count them "the joy and the rejoicing of his heart;" and finding this therefore among the number of them, he will be ready, with David, to say, "I delayed not, but made haste to keep thy commandments."^[13]

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But further, not only because it is the command of God, does the Christian submit, but because *his submission tends to the glory and honour of God*. If he were to *refuse submission*, he would bring *disgrace* upon that holy name whereby he is called. Whenever a professor of the Gospel becomes instrumental in stirring up sedition, or in exciting disorder and confusion in his country, all the evils he occasions are immediately charged by the enemies of God upon his principles; they lay it all to the score of *his religion*, as if that had a tendency to make him rebellious and disobedient, and thus the blame of all the mischief he fomented is charged indirectly upon God himself, and thereby his name is dishonoured and profaned. But to the true Christian, brethren, this is matter of deep and unfeigned regret; the name of God is precious to him, His honour is dear to his soul; he cannot bear that He should be lightly esteemed, or that any reflection injurious to his character should be cast either on his word or on his works. And therefore, that he may never be instrumental to this, he submits himself to every ordinance of man.

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Nor is this all: if the name of God is dishonoured by the Christian's refusing submission, it is *honoured by his yielding it*. When he "leads a virtuous and godly life in all quietness and honesty," the power of the principles he holds is seen. Men are constrained to admit, that the religion he professes is something more than an empty name. They cannot deny its efficacy in subduing the unruly will, and regulating the sinful affections of the heart. Religion then appears what it really is, "the power of God unto salvation:"^[14] and thus honour is brought to God's name. Seeing their good works, men glorify God in his people. But this is the point at which all the wishes, and prayers, and endeavours of the real Christian are constantly aiming. This is the object of his most ardent desires; this is the end that he is continually proposing to himself in all his thoughts, and words, and actions, that God, both in him and by him may be glorified; that "His name" may be "great among the heathen," and hence, therefore, as the apostle well expresses it, "he must needs be subject not only for wrath but also for conscience sake."^[15] These then are the grounds on which the submission of the Christian is founded; this is the high motive from which it springs; he submits for *the Lord's sake*.

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And now, brethren, have I made the duty enjoined in the text plain to you? have I shown you in a scriptural manner its nature and extent, and the motive which is to actuate the Christian in the discharge of it?

Suffer me then, in conclusion, to draw from what has been said, a few words of serious *admonition* and *exhortation*, suited to the present circumstances of our country. Let me admonish you to *beware of those who, in these disturbed times, would induce you to think lightly of the duty we have been considering*. Many such are abroad in our land. Many wicked and evil designing men would induce you to believe, that there is no connexion between religion and the submission due to the king and to the governors sent by him. But "to the law and to the testimony!" You will learn from them, that wherever there is true religion, there will of *necessity be submission to civil authority*. A man cannot be a faithful subject to his heavenly King, and at the same time a traitor to his earthly king. If a man "fears God," he will "honour the king;"^[16] and if he fail to honour the king, it may be safely concluded, that he has not at heart "the fear of the Lord."

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Are there then any here, who are dissatisfied with the government they live under? who are

disposed to listen to those "that are given to change," and that would stir them up to acts of violence and outrage, not only in opposition to the authority of their governors; but to the disturbance of the public peace and tranquillity? The religion of such men, whatever be their pretensions to it, is *false*, and *unscriptural*, and *vain*. You have never yet been taught (if I speak to any such) "the truth as it is in Jesus." You have never been brought with the simplicity of children—to listen to the instructions of the word of God—you have never been enlightened by the influence of his Spirit, to "behold wondrous things out of his law"—you have never learnt, under the teaching of his Spirit, "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ." If this had been the case with you, if you had been humbled, enlightened, and sanctified by his Spirit, his commandments would be no longer grievous to you; you would "esteem all his commandments concerning all things to be right."^[17] And the precept of the text, therefore, would be as dear to you, and as respected by you, as any of the rest.

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But, brethren, unhumiliated, unenlightened, unsanctified by the Spirit of Christ, reflect upon your condition and prospects! You may resist the authority of man, and may escape for a season the penalties incurred by it; but can you resist with similar impunity the AUTHORITY OF GOD? Can your hands be strong, or your hearts endure in the day when he shall deal with you? No! "Be not deceived, God is not mocked."^[18] If you are not now humbled under the sceptre of his grace, you will, ere long, be crushed by the rod of his power. If you are not now brought in the humility of faith to the cross of Jesus, and there taught by the renewing of your minds, that the yoke of his commandments is easy, and the burden of them light, when he comes, as he will quickly, "to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe;"^[19] but "taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not his Gospel;"^[19] you will be "punished with everlasting destruction from his presence, and from the glory of his power."^[19]—"Turn ye, turn ye, then at his reproof, for why will ye die?" Rest not in an empty profession of the Gospel, that does not bring you into submission to its precepts. Get, while the means are afforded you, a *practical* knowledge of its truth. Receive *Christ*, as He is continually offered to you in the Gospel,—a Prophet to teach, a Priest to atone for you,—a King to reign over, and to govern you. And, oh! if you are once brought to such a reception of Christ as this; vain will be the efforts of evil designing men to seduce you from the submission due, either "to the King," whom God's providence has set over you as "supreme," or "to the governors" that are "sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and the praise of them that do well." If Christ rules "in your heart by faith," you will certainly be ready, *for His sake*, to tread the same path that Prophets, Apostles, and Martyrs have trodden before you. You will feel with St. Paul, that "rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil"—that they "bear not the sword in vain"—that they are "the ministers of God to you for good"—"avengers to execute wrath upon every soul that doeth evil."^[20] You will be ready, in a word, as well in *civil*, as in spiritual matters, "to obey them that have the rule over you, and to submit yourselves."^[21]

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And "should tribulation arise, because of the word;" should those days be at hand, which, we are told, *will* arrive, before the end cometh,—when "there shall be on earth distress of nations with perplexity," and "men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things that are coming upon the earth."^[22] Should these days be at hand, look back for your *direction* and *encouragement* upon that cloud of witnesses, who through faith have obtained the promises. Recollect, how the Jewish youths walked unhurt, through the presence of the Saviour with them, amid the flames of Nebuchadnezzar's furnace—how "their faith quenched the violence of fire."^[23] Recollect how the faith of Daniel "stopped the mouths of lions."^[24] Recollect how the faith of the Apostle Paul enabled him to say, in the face of bonds, and imprisonment, and death, "none of these things move me;" neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus to testify the Gospel of the grace of God."^[25] Recollect how thousands of others, "of whom the world was not worthy," were enabled to go to the cross, to the rack, and to the stake—"rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name."^[26] And bear in mind, that the same faith in a crucified Saviour, which made them "more than conquerors," and secured to them, "through the blood of the Lamb," a crown of immortality and life,—if it produce in you similar effects, "working in you both to will and to do of God's good pleasure, whatsoever is well pleasing in his sight," and making you willing "to suffer the loss of all things," rather than rebel against any ordinance of man, or disobey any precepts of God, is still able to secure for you a similar victory. Never be induced, therefore, by any artifices, or any threatenings of the enemies of God's truth, to let go your dependance on the Saviour, or to renounce your allegiance to his laws; but, "building up yourselves in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life;"^[27] and then will the promise at last be yours—"if we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him."^[28]

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THE END.

J. Dennett, Printer, Leather Lane, London.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Jude, ver. 8 and 19.

- [2] Psal. xii. 1.
- [3] Prov. viii. 15.
- [4] See Dan. iii. 16, &c.
- [5] See Dan. vi.
- [6] Acts v. 29.
- [7] Prov. xxiv. 21.
- [8] Matt. xii. 30.
- [9] Its exact situation is unknown, as modern travellers inform us that no traces of it now remain.
- [10] Isaiah i. 16, 17.
- [11] Rom. xiii. 2.
- [12] Rom. xiii. 7.
- [13] Psal. cxix. 60.
- [14] Rom. i. 16.
- [15] Rom. xiii. 5.
- [16] See 17th verse of chapter whence the text is taken, and Prov. xxiv. 21.
- [17] Ps. cxix. 128.
- [18] Gal. vi. 7.
- [19] 2 Thess. i. 8, 9, 10.
- [20] See Rom. xiii. 3, 4.
- [21] Heb. xiii. 17.
- [22] See Luke xxi. 25, 26.
- [23] Heb. xi. 34.
- [24] Heb. xi. 33.
- [25] Acts xx. 24.
- [26] Acts v. 41.
- [27] Jude 20, 21.
- [28] 2 Tim. ii. 12.

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