

Expostulation

by William Cowper

The sermon warns Britain of the consequences of ignoring God's warning and encourages them to seek His guidance to avoid the same fate as Israel.

Scripture: Psalm 119:9, Proverbs 24:8, Romans 6:11, Romans 8:1, Romans 13:14, Philippians 4:8, Colossians 2:3, Colossians 2:10, James 1:14

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Fleshly Temptation"

Description

The preacher delves into the concept of 'Provision' (pronoia), emphasizing the importance of not making plans that open the door for sin's entry. He highlights the need to carefully consider and eliminate any subtle provisions made for sinful hindrances in our lives, urging believers to deny both gross appetites and refined carnal attitudes. The sermon stresses the significance of guarding our hearts and minds against sinful behaviors by making no provision for the flesh, as sinful behavior often stems from wrong ideas and lustful desires allowed to linger. The preacher uses various biblical examples and quotes from theologians to illustrate the dangers of toying with temptation and the necessity of staying alert to avoid falling into sin.

Transcript

EXPOSTULATION.

Tantane, tam patiens, nullo certamine tolli

Dona sines?

--Virg.

Why, weeps the muse for England? What appears

In England's case to move the muse to tears?

From side to side of her delightful isle

Is she not clothed with a perpetual smile?

Can Nature add a charm, or Art confer
A new-found luxury, not seen in her?
Where under heaven is pleasure more pursued,
Or where does cold reflection less intrude?
Her fields a rich expanse of wavy corn,
Pour'd out from Plenty's overflowing horn;
Ambrosial gardens, in which art supplies
The fervour and the force of Indian skies;
Her peaceful shores, where busy Commerce waits
To pour his golden tide through all her gates;
Whom fiery suns, that scorch the russet spice
Of eastern groves, and oceans floor'd with ice,
Forbid in vain to push his daring way
To darker climes, or climes of brighter day;
Whom the winds waft where'er the billows roll,
From the World's girdle to the frozen pole;
The chariots bounding in her wheel-worn streets,
Her vaults below, where every vintage meets;
Her theatres, her revels, and her sports;
The scenes to which not youth alone resorts,
But age, in spite of weakness and of pain,
Still haunts, in hope to dream of youth again;
All speak her happy: let the muse look round
From East to West, no sorrow can be found;
Or only what, in cottages confined,
Sighs unregarded to the passing wind.
Then wherefore weep for England? What appears

In England's case to move the muse to tears?
The prophet wept for Israel; wish'd his eyes
Were fountains fed with infinite supplies;
For Israel dealt in robbery and wrong;
There were the scorner's and the slanderer's tongue;
Oaths, used as playthings or convenient tools,
As interest biass'd knaves, or fashion fools;
Adultery, neighing at his neighbour's door;
Oppression labouring hard to grind the poor;
The partial balance and deceitful weight;
The treacherous smile, a mask for secret hate;
Hypocrisy, formality in prayer,
And the dull service of the lip were there.
Her women, insolent and self-carress'd,
By Vanity's unwearied finger dress'd,
Forgot the blush that virgin fears impart
To modest cheeks, and borrow'd one from art;
Were just such trifles, without worth or use,
As silly pride and idleness produce;
Curl'd, scented, furbelow'd, and flounced around,
With feet too delicate to touch the ground,
They stretch'd the neck, and roll'd the wanton eye,
And sigh'd for every fool that flutter'd by.
He saw his people slaves to every lust,
Lewd, avaricious, arrogant, unjust;
He heard the wheels of an avenging God
Groan heavily along the distant road;

Saw Babylon set wide her two-leaved brass
To let the military deluge pass;
Jerusalem a prey, her glory soil'd,
Her princes captive, and her treasures spoil'd;
Wept till all Israel heard his bitter cry,
Stamp'd with his foot, and smote upon his thigh;
But wept, and stamp'd, and smote his thigh in vain,
Pleasure is deaf when told of future pain,
And sounds prophetic are too rough to suit
Ears long accustom'd to the pleasing lute:
They scorn'd his inspiration and his theme,
Pronounc'd him frantic, and his fears a dream;
With self-indulgence wing'd the fleeting hours,
Till the foe found them, and down fell the towers.
Long time Assyria bound them in her chain,
Till penitence had purged the public stain,
And Cyrus, with relenting pity moved,
Return'd them happy to the land they loved;
There, proof against prosperity, a while
They stood the test of her ensnaring smile,
And had the grace in scenes of peace to shew
The virtue they had learn'd in scenes of woe.
But man is frail, and can but ill sustain
A long immunity from grief and pain;
And, after all the joys that Plenty leads,
With tiptoe step Vice silently succeeds.
When he that ruled them with a shepherd's rod,

In form a man, in dignity a God,
Came, not expected in that humble guise,
To sift and search them with unerring eyes,
He found conceal'd beneath a fair outside,
The filth of rottenness, and worm of pride;
Their piety a system of deceit,
Scripture employ'd to sanctify the cheat;
The Pharisee the dupe of his own art,
Self-idolised, and yet a knave at heart.
When nations are to perish in their sins,
'Tis in the church the leprosy begins;
The priest, whose office is, with zeal sincere,
To watch the fountain and preserve it clear,
Carelessly nods and sleeps upon the brink,
While others poison what the flock must drink;
Or, waking at the call of lust alone,
Infuses lies and errors of his own:
His unsuspecting sheep believe it pure;
And, tainted by the very means of cure,
Catch from each other a contagious spot,
The foul forerunner of a general rot.
Then truth is hush'd, that Heresy may preach;
And all is trash that reason cannot reach;
Then God's own image on the soul impress'd
Becomes a mockery and a standing jest;
And faith, the root whence only can arise
The graces of a life that wins the skies,

Loses at once all value and esteem,
Pronounced by graybeards a pernicious dream:
Then Ceremony leads her bigots forth,
Prepared to fight for shadows of no worth;
While truths, on which eternal things depend,
Find not, or hardly find, a single friend:
As soldiers watch the signal of command,
They learn to bow, to kneel, to sit, to stand;
Happy to fill religion's vacant place,
With hollow form, and gesture, and grimace.
Such, when the Teacher of his church was there,
People and priest, the sons of Israel were;
Stiff in the letter, lax in the design
And import of their oracles divine;
Their learning legendary, false, absurd,
And yet exalted above God's own word;
They drew a curse from an intended good,
Puff'd up with gifts they never understood.
He judged them with as terrible a frown,
As if not love, but wrath, had brought him down:
Yet he was gentle as soft summer airs,
Had grace for others' sins, but none for theirs;
Through all he spoke a noble plainness ran--
Rhetoric is artifice, the work of man;
And tricks and turns, that fancy may devise,
Are far too mean for Him that rules the skies.
The astonish'd vulgar trembled while he tore

The mask from faces never seen before;
He stripp'd the impostors in the noonday sun,
Shew'd that they follow'd all they seem'd to shun;
Their prayers made public, their excesses kept
As private as the chambers where they slept;
The temple and its holy rites profaned
By mummeries He that dwelt in it disdain'd;
Uplifted hands, that at convenient times
Could act extortion and the worst of crimes,
Wash'd with a neatness scrupulously nice,
And free from every taint but that of vice.
Judgment, however tardy, mends her pace
When obstinacy once has conquer'd grace.
They saw distemper heal'd, and life restored,
In answer to the fiat of his word;
Confess'd the wonder, and with daring tongue
Blasphemed the authority from which it sprung.
They knew, by sure prognostics seen on high,
The future tone and temper of the sky;
But, grave dissemblers! could not understand
That sin let loose speaks punishment at hand.
Ask now of history's authentic page,
And call up evidence from every age;
Display with busy and laborious hand
The blessings of the most indebted land;
What nation will you find, whose annals prove
So rich an interest in Almighty love?

Where dwell they now, where dwelt in ancient day
A people planted, water'd, blest, as they?
Let Egypt's plagues and Canaan's woes proclaim
The favours pour'd upon the Jewish name;
Their freedom purchased for them at the cost
Of all their hard oppressors valued most:
Their title to a country not their own
Made sure by prodigies till then unknown;
For them the states they left made waste and void;
For them the states to which they went destroy'd;
A cloud to measure out their march by day,
By night a fire to cheer the gloomy way;
That moving signal summoning, when best,
Their host to move, and, when it stay'd, to rest.
For them the rocks dissolved into a flood,
The dews condensed into angelic food,
Their very garments sacred, old yet new,
And Time forbid to touch them as he flew;
Streams, swell'd above the bank, enjoin'd to stand
While they pass'd through to their appointed land;
Their leader arm'd with meekness, zeal, and love,
And graced with clear credentials from above;
Themselves secured beneath the Almighty wing;
Their God their captain,[1] lawgiver, and king;
Crown'd with a thousand victories, and at last
Lords of the conquer'd soil, there rooted fast,
In peace possessing what they won by war,

Their name far publish'd, and revered as far;
Where will you find a race like theirs, endow'd
With all that man e'er wish'd, or heaven bestow'd?
They, and they only, amongst all mankind,
Received the transcript of the Eternal Mind;
Were trusted with his own engraven laws,
And constituted guardians of his cause;
Theirs were the prophets, theirs the priestly call,
And theirs by birth the Saviour of us all.
In vain the nations, that had seen them rise
With fierce and envious, yet admiring, eyes,
Had sought to crush them, guarded as they were
By power divine and skill that could not err.
Had they maintain'd allegiance firm and sure,
And kept the faith immaculate and pure,
Then the proud eagles of all-conquering Rome
Had found one city not to be o'ercome;
And the twelve standards of the tribes unfurl'd
Had bid defiance to the warring world.
But grace abused brings forth the foulest deeds,
As richest soil the most luxuriant weeds.
Cured of the golden calves, their fathers' sin,
They set up self, that idol god within;
View'd a Deliverer with disdain and hate,
Who left them still a tributary state;
Seized fast his hand, held out to set them free
From a worse yoke, and nail'd it to the tree:

There was the consummation and the crown,
The flower of Israel's infamy full blown;
Thence date their sad declension, and their fall,
Their woes, not yet repeal'd, thence date them all.
Thus fell the best instructed in her day,
And the most favour'd land, look where we may.
Philosophy indeed on Grecian eyes
Had pour'd the day, and clear'd the Roman skies;
In other climes perhaps creative art,
With power surpassing theirs, perform'd her part;
Might give more life to marble, or might fill
The glowing tablets with a juster skill,
Might shine in fable, and grace idle themes
With all the embroidery of poetic dreams;
'Twas theirs alone to dive into the plan
That truth and mercy had reveal'd to man;
And, while the world beside, that plan unknown,
Deified useless wood or senseless stone,
They breathed in faith their well-directed prayers,
And the true God, the God of truth, was theirs.
Their glory faded, and their race dispersed,
The last of nations now, though once the first,
They warn and teach the proudest, would they learn,
Keep wisdom, or meet vengeance in your turn:
If we escaped not, if Heaven spared not us,
Peel'd, scatter'd, and exterminated thus;
If vice received her retribution due,

When we were visited, what hope for you?
When God arises with an awful frown,
To punish lust, or pluck presumption down;
When gifts perverted, or not duly prized,
Pleasure o'ervalued, and his grace despised,
Provoke the vengeance of his righteous hand,
To pour down wrath upon a thankless land:
He will be found impartially severe,
Too just to wink, or speak the guilty clear.
Oh Israel, of all nations most undone!
Thy diadem displaced, thy sceptre gone;
Thy temple, once thy glory, fallen and razed,
And thou a worshipper e'en where thou mayst,
They services, once holy without spot,
Mere shadows now, their ancient pomp forgot;
Thy Levites, once a consecrated host,
No longer Levites, and their lineage lost,
And thou thyself o'er every country sown,
With none on earth that thou canst call thine own;
Cry aloud, thou that sittest in the dust,
Cry to the proud, the cruel, and unjust;
Knock at the gates of nations, rouse their fears;
Say wrath is coming, and the storm appears;
But raise the shrillest cry in British ears.
What ails thee, restless as the waves that roar,
And fling their foam against thy chalky shore?
Mistress, at least while Providence shall please,

And trident-bearing queen of the wide seas--
Why, having kept good faith, and often shewn
Friendship and truth to others, find'st thou none?
Thou that hast set the persecuted free,
None interposes now to succour thee.
Countries indebted to thy power, that shine
With light derived from thee, would smother thine.
Thy very children watch for thy disgrace,
A lawless brood, and curse thee to thy face.
Thy rulers load thy credit, year by year,
With sums Peruvian mines could never clear;
As if, like arches built with skilful hand,
The more 'twere press'd the firmer it would stand.
The cry in all thy ships is still the same,
Speed us away to battle and to fame.
Thy mariners explore the wild expanse,
Impatient to descry the flags of France:
But, though they fight as thine have ever fought,
Return ashamed without the wreaths they sought.
Thy senate is a scene of civil jar,
Chaos of contrarieties at war;
Where sharp and solid, phlegmatic and light,
Discordant atoms meet, ferment, and fight;
Where obstinacy takes his sturdy stand,
To disconcert what policy has plann'd;
Where policy is busied all night long
In setting right what faction has set wrong;

Where flails of oratory thresh the floor,
That yields them chaff and dust, and nothing more.
Thy rack'd inhabitants repine, complain,
Tax'd till the brow of labour sweats in vain;
War lays a burden on the reeling state,
And peace does nothing to relieve the weight;
Successive loads succeeding broils impose,
And sighing millions prophesy the close.
Is adverse Providence, when ponder'd well,
So dimly writ, or difficult to spell,
Thou canst not read with readiness and ease
Providence adverse in events like these?
Know then that heavenly wisdom on this ball
Creates, gives birth to, guides, consummates all;
That, while laborious and quick-thoughted man
Snuffs up the praise of what he seems to plan,
He first conceives, then perfects his design,
As a mere instrument in hands divine:
Blind to the working of that sacred power
That balances the wings of every hour,
The busy trifler dreams himself alone,
Frames many a purpose, and God works his own.
States thrive or wither as moons wax and wane,
E'en as his will and his decrees ordain;
While honour, virtue, piety, bear sway,
They flourish; and, as these decline, decay:
In just resentment of his injured laws,

He pours contempt on them and on their cause;
Strikes the rough thread of error right athwart
The web of every scheme they have at heart;
Bids rottenness invade and bring to dust
The pillars of support, in which they trust,
And do his errand of disgrace and shame
On the chief strength and glory of the frame.
None ever yet impeded what he wrought,
None bars him out from his most secret thought;
Darkness itself before his eye is light,
And hell's close mischief naked in his sight.
Stand now and judge thyself--Hast thou incurr'd
His anger who can waste thee with a word,
Who poises and proportions sea and land,
Weighing them in the hollow of his hand,
And in whose awful sight all nations seem
As grasshoppers, as dust, a drop, a dream?
Hast thou (a sacrilege his soul abhors)
Claim'd all the glory of thy prosperous wars?
Proud of thy fleets and armies, stolen the gem
Of his just praise, to lavish it on them?
Hast thou not learn'd, what thou art often told,
A truth still sacred, and believed of old,
That no success attends on spears and swords
Unblest, and that the battle is the Lord's?
That courage is his creature; and dismay
The post, that at his bidding speeds away,

Ghastly in feature, and his stammering tongue
With doleful humour and sad presage hung,
To quell the valour of the stoutest heart,
And teach the combatant a woman's part?
That he bids thousands fly when none pursue,
Saves as he will by many or by few,
And claims for ever, as his royal right,
The event and sure decision of the fight?
Hast thou, though suckled at fair freedom's breast,
Exported slavery to the conquer'd East?
Pull'd down the tyrants India served with dread,
And raised thyself, a greater, in their stead?
Gone thither, arm'd and hungry, return'd full,
Fed from the richest veins of the Mogul,
A despot big with power obtain'd by wealth,
And that obtain'd by rapine and by stealth?
With Asiatic vices stored thy mind,
But left their virtues and thine own behind?
And, having truck'd thy soul, brought home the fee,
To tempt the poor to sell himself to thee?
Hast thou by statue shoved from its design,
The Saviour's feast, his own blest bread and wine,
And made the symbols of atoning grace
An office-key, a picklock to a place,
That infidels may prove their title good
By an oath dipp'd in sacramental blood?
A blot that will be still a blot, in spite

Of all that grave apologists may write;
And though a bishop toil'd to cleanse the stain,
He wipes and scours the silver cup in vain.
And hast thou sworn, on every slight pretence,
Till perjuries are common as bad pence,
While thousands, careless of the damning sin,
Kiss the book's outside, who ne'er look within?
Hast thou, when Heaven has clothed thee with disgrace,
And, long provoked, repaid thee to thy face
(For thou hast known eclipses, and endured
Dimness and anguish, all thy beams obscured,
When sin has shed dishonour on thy brow;
And never of a sabler hue than now),
Hast thou, with heart perverse and conscience sear'd,
Despising all rebuke, still persevered,
And, having chosen evil, scorn'd the voice
That cried, Repent!--and gloried in thy choice?
Thy fastings, when calamity at last
Suggests the expedient of a yearly fast,
What mean they? Canst thou dream there is a power
In lighter diet at a later hour,
To charm to sleep the threatening of the skies,
And hide past folly from all-seeing eyes?
The fast that wins deliverance, and suspends
The stroke that a vindictive God intends,
Is to renounce hypocrisy; to draw
Thy life upon the pattern of the law;

To war with pleasure, idolized before;
To vanquish lust, and wear its yoke no more.
All fasting else, whate'er be the pretence,
Is wooing mercy by renew'd offence.
Hast thou within thee sin, that in old time
Brought fire from heaven, the sex-abusing crime,
Whose horrid perpetration stamps disgrace,
Baboons are free from, upon human race?
Think on the fruitful and well-water'd spot
That fed the flocks and herds of wealthy Lot,
Where Paradise seem'd still vouchsafed on earth,
Burning and scorch'd into perpetual dearth,
Or, in his words who damn'd the base desire,
Suffering the vengeance of eternal fire:
Then nature, injured, scandalized, defiled,
Unveil'd her blushing cheek, look'd on, and smiled;
Beheld with joy the lovely scene defaced,
And praised the wrath that laid her beauties waste.
Far be the thought from any verse of mine,
And farther still the form'd and fix'd design,
To thrust the charge of deeds that I detest
Against an innocent unconscious breast;
The man that dares traduce, because he can
With safety to himself, is not a man:
An individual is a sacred mark,
Not to be pierced in play, or in the dark;
But public censure speaks a public foe,

Unless a zeal for virtue guide the blow.
The priestly brotherhood, devout, sincere,
From mean self-interest and ambition clear,
Their hope in heaven, servility their scorn,
Prompt to persuade, expostulate, and warn,
Their wisdom pure, and given them from above,
Their usefulness ensured by zeal and love,
As meek as the man Moses, and withal
As bold as in Agrippa's presence Paul,
Should fly the world's contaminating touch,
Holy and unpolluted:--are thine such?
Except a few with Eli's spirit blest,
Hophni and Phineas may describe the rest.
Where shall a teacher look, in days like these,
For ears and hearts that he can hope to please?
Look to the poor--the simple and the plain
Will hear perhaps thy salutary strain:
Humility is gentle, apt to learn,
Speak but the word, will listen and return.
Alas! not so; the poorest of the flock
Are proud, and set their faces as a rock;
Denied that earthly opulence they choose,
God's better gift they scoff at and refuse.
The rich, the produce of a nobler stem,
Are more intelligent, at least--try them.
Oh vain inquiry! they without remorse
Are altogether gone a devious course;

Where beckoning pleasure leads them, wildly stray;
Have burst the bands, and cast the yoke away.
Now borne upon the wings of truth sublime,
Review thy dim original and prime.
This island, spot of unreclaim'd rude earth,
The cradle that received thee at thy birth,
Was rock'd by many a rough Norwegian blast,
And Danish howlings scared thee as they pass'd;
For thou wast born amid the din of arms,
And suck'd a breast that panted with alarms.
While yet thou wast a grovelling, puling chit,
Thy bones not fashion'd, and thy joints not knit,
The Roman taught thy stubborn knee to bow,
Though twice a Caesar could not bend thee now.
His victory was that of orient light,
When the sun's shafts disperse the gloom of night.
Thy language at this distant moment shews
How much the country to the conqueror owes;
Expressive, energetic, and refined,
It sparkles with the gems he left behind;
He brought thy land a blessing when he came,
He found thee savage, and he left thee tame;
Taught thee to clothe thy pink'd and painted hide,
And grac'd thy figure with a soldier's pride;
He sow'd the seeds of order where he went,
Improved thee far beyond his own intent,
And, while he ruled thee by the sword alone,

Made thee at last a warrior like his own.
Religion, if in heavenly truths attired,
Needs only to be seen to be admired;
But thine, as dark as witcheries of the night,
Was form'd to harden hearts and shock the sight;
Thy druids struck the well-hung harps they bore
With fingers deeply dyed in human gore;
And while the victim slowly bled to death,
Upon the rolling chords rung out his dying breath.
Who brought the lamp that with awaking beams
Dispell'd thy gloom, and broke away thy dreams,
Tradition now decrepit and worn out,
Babbler of ancient fables, leaves a doubt:
But still light reach'd thee: and those gods of thine,
Woden and Thor, each tottering in his shrine,
Fell broken and defaced at their own door,
As Dagon in Philistia long before.
But Rome with sorceries and magic wand
Soon raised a cloud that darken'd every land;
And thine was smother'd in the stench and fog
Of Tiber's marshes and the papal bog.
Then priests with bulls and briefs, and shaven crowns,
And griping fists and unrelenting frowns,
Legates and delegates with powers from hell,
Though heavenly in pretension, fleeced thee well;
And to this hour, to keep it fresh in mind,
Some twigs of that old scourge are left behind.[2]

Thy soldiery, the Pope's well-managed pack,
Were train'd beneath his lash, and knew the smack,
And, when he laid them on the scent of blood,
Would hunt a Saracen through fire and flood.
Lavish of life, to win an empty tomb,
That proved a mint of wealth, a mine to Rome.
They left their bones beneath unfriendly skies,
His worthless absolution all the prize.
Thou wast the veriest slave, in days of yore,
That ever dragg'd a chain or tugg'd an oar;
Thy monarchs arbitrary, fierce, unjust,
Themselves the slaves of bigotry or lust,
Disdain'd thy counsels, only in distress
Found thee a goodly sponge for power to press.
Thy chiefs, the lords of many a petty fee,
Provoked and harass'd, in return plagued thee;
Call'd thee away from peaceable employ,
Domestic happiness and rural joy,
To waste thy life in arms, or lay it down
In causeless feuds and bickerings of their own.
Thy parliaments adored, on bended knees,
The sovereignty they were convened to please;
Whate'er was ask'd, too timid to resist,
Complied with, and were graciously dismiss'd;
And if some Spartan soul a doubt express'd,
And, blushing at the tameness of the rest,
Dared to suppose the subject had a choice,

He was a traitor by the general voice.
Oh, slave! with powers thou didst not dare exert,
Verse cannot stoop so low as thy desert;
It shakes the sides of splenetic disdain,
Thou self-entitled ruler of the main,
To trace thee to the date, when yon fair sea,
That clips thy shores, had no such charms for thee;
When other nations flew from coast to coast,
And thou hadst neither fleet nor flag to boast.
Kneel now, and lay thy forehead in the dust;
Blush if thou canst; not petrified, thou must;
Act but an honest and a faithful part;
Compare what then thou wast with what thou art;
And God's disposing providence confess'd,
Obduracy itself must yield the rest.--
Then thou art bound to serve him, and to prove,
Hour after hour, thy gratitude and love.
Has he not hid thee and thy favour'd land,
For ages, safe beneath his sheltering hand,
Given thee his blessing on the clearest proof,
Bid nations leagued against thee stand aloof,
And charged hostility and hate to roar
Where else they would, but not upon thy shore?
His power secured thee when presumptuous Spain
Baptized her fleet invincible in vain;
Her gloomy monarch, doubtful and resign'd
To every pang that racks an anxious mind,

Ask'd of the waves that broke upon his coast,
What tidings? and the surge replied--All lost!
And when the Stuart, leaning on the Scot,
Then too much fear'd, and now too much forgot,
Pierced to the very centre of the realm,
And hoped to seize his abdicated helm,
'Twas but to prove how quickly, with a frown,
He that had raised thee could have pluck'd thee down.
Peculiar is the grace by thee possess'd,
Thy foes implacable, thy land at rest;
Thy thunders travel over earth and seas,
And all at home is pleasure, wealth, and ease.
'Tis thus, extending his tempestuous arm,
Thy Maker fills the nations with alarm,
While his own heaven surveys the troubled scene,
And feels no change, unshaken and serene.
Freedom, in other lands scarce known to shine,
Pours out a flood of splendour upon thine;
Thou hast as bright an interest in her rays
As ever Roman had in Rome's best days.
True freedom is where no restraint is known
That Scripture, justice, and good sense disown.
Where only vice and injury are tied,
And all from shore to shore is free beside.
Such freedom is--and Windsor's hoary towers
Stood trembling at the boldness of thy powers,
That won a nymph on that immortal plain,

Like her the fabled Phoebus woo'd in vain;
He found the laurel only--happier you
The unfading laurel, and the virgin too![3]
Now think, if pleasure have a thought to spare;
If God himself be not beneath her care;
If business, constant as the wheels of time,
Can pause an hour to read a serious rhyme;
If the new mail thy merchants now receive,
Or expectation of the next, give leave;
Oh think, if chargeable with deep arrears
For such indulgence gilding all thy years,
How much, though long neglected, shining yet,
The beams of heavenly truth have swell'd the debt.
When persecuting zeal made royal sport
With tortured innocence in Mary's court,
And Bonner, blithe as shepherd at a wake,
Enjoy'd the show, and danced about the stake,
The sacred book, its value understood,
Received the seal of martyrdom in blood.
Those holy men, so full of truth and grace,
Seem to reflection of a different race,
Meek, modest, venerable, wise, sincere,
In such a cause they could not dare to fear;
They could not purchase earth with such a prize,
Or spare a life too short to reach the skies.
From them to thee convey'd along the tide,
Their streaming hearts pour'd freely when they died;

Those truths, which neither use nor years impair,
Invite thee, woo thee, to the bliss they share.
What dotage will not vanity maintain?
What web too weak to catch a modern brain?
The moles and bats in full assembly find,
On special search, the keen-eyed eagle blind.
And did they dream, and art thou wiser now?
Prove it--if better, I submit and bow.
Wisdom and goodness are twin-born, one heart
Must hold both sisters, never seen apart.
So then--as darkness overspread the deep,
Ere nature rose from her eternal sleep,
And this delightful earth, and that fair sky,
Leap'd out of nothing, call'd by the Most High;
By such a change thy darkness is made light,
Thy chaos order, and thy weakness might;
And He, whose power mere nullity obeys,
Who found thee nothing, form'd thee for his praise.
To praise him is to serve him , and fulfil,
Doing and suffering, his unquestion'd will;
'Tis to believe what men inspired of old,
Faithful, and faithfully inform'd, unfold;
Candid and just, with no false aim in view,
To take for truth what cannot but be true;
To learn in God's own school the Christian part,
And bind the task assign'd thee to thine heart:
Happy the man there seeking and there found:

Happy the nation where such men abound!
How shall a verse impress thee? by what name
Shall I adjure thee not to court thy shame?
By theirs whose bright example, unimpeach'd,
Directs thee to that eminence they reach'd,
Heroes and worthies of days past, thy sires?
Or his, who touch'd their hearts with hallow'd fires?
Their names, alas! in vain reproach an age,
Whom all the vanities they scorn'd engage;
And his, that seraphs tremble at, is hung
Disgracefully on every trifler's tongue,
Or serves the champion in forensic war,
To flourish and parade with at the bar.
Pleasure herself perhaps suggests a plea,
If interest move thee, to persuade e'en thee;
By every charm that smiles upon her face,
By joys possess'd, and joys still held in chase,
If dear society be worth a thought,
And if the feast of freedom cloy thee not,
Reflect that these, and all that seems thine own,
Held by the tenure of his will alone,
Like angels in the service of their Lord,
Remain with thee, or leave thee at his word;
That gratitude, and temperance in our use
Of what he gives, unsparing and profuse,
Secure the favour, and enhance the joy,
That thankless waste and wild abuse destroy.

But, above all, reflect how cheap soe'er
Those rights, that millions envy thee, appear,
And though resolved to risk them, and swim down
The tide of pleasure, heedless of his frown,
That blessings truly sacred, and when given
Mark'd with the signature and stamp of Heaven,
The word of prophecy, those truths divine,
Which make that heaven, if thou desire it, thine
(Awful alternative! believe, beloved,
Thy glory, and thy shame if unimproved),
Are never long vouchsafed, if push'd aside
With cold disgust or philosophic pride;
And that, judicially withdrawn, disgrace,
Error, and darkness, occupy their place.
A world is up in arms, and thou, a spot
Not quickly found, if negligently sought,
Thy soul as ample as thy bounds are small,
Endur'st the brunt, and dar'st defy them all;
And wilt thou join to this bold enterprise
A bolder still, a contest with the skies?
Remember, if He guard thee and secure,
Whoe'er assails thee, thy success is sure;
But if He leave thee, though the skill and power
Of nations sworn to spoil thee and devour,
Were all collected in thy single arm,
And thou couldst laugh away the fear of harm,
That strength would fail, opposed against the push

And feeble onset of a pigmy rush.
Say not (and if the thought of such defence
Should spring within thy bosom, drive it thence)
What nation amongst all my foes is free
From crimes as base as any charged on me?
Their measure fill'd, they too shall pay the debt,
Which God, though long forborne, will not forget.
But know that wrath divine, when most severe,
Makes justice still the guide of his career,
And will not punish, in one mingled crowd,
Them without light, and thee without a cloud.
Muse, hang this harp upon yon aged beech,
Still murmuring with the solemn truths I teach;
And, while at intervals a cold blast sings
Through the dry leaves, and pants upon the strings,
My soul shall sigh in secret, and lament
A nation scourged, yet tardy to repent.
I know the warning song is sung in vain;
That few will hear, and fewer heed the strain;
But if a sweeter voice, and one design'd
A blessing to my country and mankind,
Reclaim the wandering thousands, and bring home
A flock so scatter'd and so wont to roam,
Then place it once again between my knees;
The sound of truth will then be sure to please;
And truth alone, where'er my life be cast,
In scenes of plenty, or the pining waste,

Shall be my chosen theme, my glory to the last.

[1] Vide Josh. v. 14.

[2] Which may be found at Doctor's Commons.

[3] Alluding to the grant of the Magna Charta, which was extorted from King John by the barons at Runnymede near Windsor.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/william-cowper/expostulation/>

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