

A  
**WORD OF ADVICE**  
TO  
THE CITIZENS OF LONDON.  
BY  
JOHN OWEN

## WORD OF ADVICE

THE CITIZENS OF LONDON.

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I do hope you are all sensible of those obligations that are on you, to seek the public good of the city, whereof you are members, in your several capacities; I am sure you ought so to be. For all laws, divine and human, all things that are praiseworthy among men, all your own circumstances in peace, safety, and profit, all your interest in reputation and posterity, with the oaths you have taken to the city, do require it of you. And you know, that this public good of the city, which you are so obliged to seek and promote, cannot consist in the end of any private, separate designs; but in what is comprehensive of the whole commonalty, in its order, state, and circumstances. A steady design and endeavour for the promotion hereof, in all that is virtuous and praiseworthy in you, as citizens; and for which some have been renowned in all ages. Where this is not, men's lusts and passions, and self-interest, will on all occasions be the rule of their actions. Neither hath the city, as such, any other animating principle of consistency or stability. Outward order and law without it are but a dead carcase; and the citizens a multitude living in one perpetual storm, which any external impression can easily drive into confusion. So far, therefore, as this design worketh effectually in you, regulating your endeavours and actions, you are good and useful citizens, and no farther. He who is so intent on his private occasions as to neglect the good of the public, is useless, a character of no reputation; and he who hath any design inconsistent with it, is treacherous.

And this is worth your consideration, that this city, whereof you are members, which now consists of you, hath

been for some ages past justly esteemed one of the most eminent and renowned cities in the world. For although other cities may be the seats of greater empires, and some may exceed it in number of inhabitants; yet take it in all its concerns, of religion, government, and usefulness in the world, by trade and otherwise, and it may be said, without immodesty, that the sun shines not on any that is to be preferred before it.

It is therefore unquestionable, that you can have no greater interest, no more useful wisdom, than in taking care, and using all diligence, that the decay or ruin of such a city be not under your hands, nor in your generation: that you leave not such a detested remembrance of yourselves unto future ages. To forfeit all the mercies that divine Providence hath bestowed on this city, to bury its glory and reputation by and under your miscarriages, would leave such a character of yourselves unto posterity, as I hope you will never deserve.

And you cannot but be stirred up unto your duty herein, by the consideration of the dealings of God with this city in late years, which have been great and marvellous. Never had any city on the earth in so short a time, so many divine warnings, so many calls from heaven, so many distresses, so many indications of God's displeasure, as in plague, fire, war, and the like, and yet continued in its station without a visible compliance with them. Nineveh repented upon one warning, and was not ruined. Jerusalem refused to do so, upon many, and perished for ever. Whatever disputes there may be about the causes of these things, not to take notice of them as indications of divine displeasure, is a branch of that atheism which will quickly turn instructive warnings into desolating judgments. The heathen dealt not so with their supposed deities on such occasions.

Besides, on the other hand, this city hath had no less eminent pledges of divine care and concernment in it. Without them, it had either lain in its ashes, or returned into them again mingled with blood, by the designings of evil men. And these, no less than the former, call for diligent attendance unto your duty, in the seeking the public good of the place, in a neglect whereof God himself will be eminently despised.

But yet after all these divine warnings and mercies, whatever other apprehensions any may have, under a pursuit of their own designs, the present state of your city, in the judgment of all unprejudiced persons, is deplorable, and in a tendency unto ruin. For it is filled with divisions, animosities, feuds, and distrusting, on various occasions, from one end of it unto the other. And whilst it is so, some persons are allowed and countenanced to increase and inflame them, by public weekly libels, full of scandalous, illegal, malicious defamations and provocations, against whole parties of men; a thing never heard of, at least never tolerated in any government, where the subjects of it are at peace, under the protection of the law. And though it may be that which pleaseth men light and vain, or malicious and revengeful, or such as hope for advantage by public confusion; yet is it marvellous that wise men should not observe, how disadvantageous it is unto the government itself. Where a city is thus divided in itself, we have infallible assurance that it cannot stand. Nor can this so do, for unless its divisions be healed, they will one way or other, at one time or another, prove its ruin. At present, it is only divine Providence immediately by itself, supplying the want of an animating union, that preserves it from dissolution.

At the same time, and by the same means, those public funds of money, which should give trust and trade their due circulation, are greatly failed among you. Such things indeed should not be mentioned unto the encouragement of our enemies, could they be concealed. But it is to no purpose to hide that which the sun shines on in the sight of all; nor to be silent in that which is the common talk of all that walk your streets. That renowned name of the chamber of London, the sacred repository and treasury of the fortunes and bread of widows and orphans, who are under the especial care of God, which the city therein have taken upon them to represent, is so shaken in its reputation as to render the thing itself useless. And it will be well, if that which in its righteous administration was the stability of the city, do not now, through the cries and tears of the oppressed (being of that sort of persons who have an especial interest in divine justice and compassion), contribute towards the shaking of its foundations. And it is somewhat

strange to me that men can sleep in peace, in the enjoyment of their private riches, whilst such a public trust is failing under their conduct.

The growth also of penury amongst many, with unparalleled failing of multitudes, whereof there are instances renewed almost every day, in coincidence with the divisions mentioned, hath almost put an end unto the small remainder of private trust, the only sovereign ligament of your being and constitution. For from hence many begin to think, that they have nothing safe but what is by them, or in their own immediate custody; and when they have so disposed of their substance, they quickly begin to fear, that it is most unsafe in that disposal. For when the minds of men are shaken from the true and real foundation of this trust and confidence, they know not where to fix again, until they are pursued by their own fears into farther disorders.

Whereas, therefore, cities stand not on the foundation of their walls, houses, and buildings; but on the solid, harmonious principles of the minds of the citizens, and unity in design for the promotion of its public good: where they are weakened, impaired, perplexed, and cast into such horrid confusions, as they must be by the ways and means mentioned, the least impression on them will rush them into destruction.

Whilst things are in this state and condition among you, it is sufficiently known, that the avowed, implacable enemies of your city, I mean the Papists, are intent on all advantages, improving them unto their own ends; their present design being so open and naked, as that it is the common discourse of all sorts of persons; yet is it such, as nothing but the prudence of the government and patience of the nation can frustrate and disappoint. And not to reflect with any severity on our own countrymen, who are of that religion, beyond what is openly manifest; you are much mistaken, if you know not, that your city is the principal object of the hatred, malice, revenge, and destructive designs of the ruling party of that religion or faction abroad, through the whole world. Unto their conduct of affairs you owe the flames of sixty-six. Nor will they rest, but in your utter ruin, or, which is worse, the establishment of their religion amongst you.

I heartily wish, that there might be one short answer returned unto this representation of things in your city; namely, that they are not so as they are represented; but that these things are only fears, or fictions to promote some sinister ends. I wish all that hath been spoken, might be so at once dissipated and blown away. But the truth is, it is the least part of the ingredients of that direful composition which threatens the ruin of the city, and but a little scruple of any of them that hath been mentioned, or can have any place in the designed brevity of this address. Yea, sundry things of the same nature with them, and some no less pernicious than the worst of them, are, for just reasons, and to avoid all offence, here utterly concealed. There is scarce a man that walks your streets, unless he reel with self-interest and prejudice, but can give you a more dreadful account of the present state of the city, than here is offered unto you.

This, therefore, being the state of things among you, it is but a reasonable inquiry, whether you judge not yourselves obliged in conscience, honour, and interest, to postpone all your private inclinations, animosities, designs, and desires, arising for the most part from things foreign to the city, unto the public good thereof, and the ways whereby it may be promoted; or, whether you had rather sacrifice the city unto utter ruin, than to forego those inclinations and aims, which are suggested unto you by the interest of others, no way belonging unto the peace thereof. And you may be prompted to make this inquiry of yourselves, because in the peace of the city you shall have peace, and not otherwise. There is no assurance unto any of an escape in public calamities. And those who have most, are most concerned in the preservation of order. It is a fatal mistake in men of high places, and plentiful enjoyments in the world, to suppose that all things must bow to their humour, that there is not more care and diligence, more of condescension, compliance, and self-denial required in them, for the composing of public differences, and the preservation of tranquillity, than is of others. Nothing but necessity can countenance wise men to venture much against nothing.

Give me leave, therefore, to offer two things unto you, the one in general, the other more particular, with respect

unto your present duty, and that in order unto the proposal of other things of the like kind, if this find acceptance.

And I am in the first place sure enough, that if we are Christians, if we are not ashamed of our religion, and the conduct thereof, if we believe either the promises or threatenings of God in his word, it is your present duty, and that which you must give an account of hereafter, to endeavour in your places and capacities the promotion of all those things wherewith God is well pleased, and whereon he hath used to turn away impendent, threatened, deserved judgments from cities and nations. What they are, your teachers can instruct you, and if they do not, it will be no excuse unto you in the neglect of them. If the city perish for want of reformation, or a compliance with divine warnings in turning unto God, the ruin of it in part will lie at your doors. And if such considerations are despised, as usually they are, as impertinent preachments, you will find ere long your condition remediless.

This is premised only in general, to prepare the way for an enumeration of the things that belong unto it, that may be offered hereafter. At present, I shall propose only one thing unto you in particular; and that is, whether the present prosecution of Protestant dissenters in the city, be not diametrically opposite unto that public good of it, in all its concerns, which you are obliged to promote? You will say, it may be, that this is not your work, but the work of the law. But I am sure such things are done in your streets every day, as no law mentioneth, or giveth countenance unto. Let the matter of fact be rightly stated, and it will appear, whether any of you have a blameable accession thereunto or no.

There is no complaint intended against the law about religion, which have the stamp of authority upon them. Yet is it no offence to say, that at present they are suited neither to the good of religion, nor of the city. For this is the condition of all penal laws, that they have their sole use from the circumstances which they do respect, and not from any thing in themselves. And as there may be mistakes in their first enacting, rendering them destructive unto the ends which they are designed to promote; so the alteration of circumstances may make their execution pernicious; as

I wish it be not in the present case, as wise men have judged it would be. However, the present proceedings against Protestant dissenters, under the pretence of law, are accompanied with so many unparalleled severities, as no good man, unbiassed by interests, can possibly give countenance unto. And hereof we may give some instances.

The prosecution and execution of the laws against dissenters, are not left unto the ordinary process of the administration of justice, as those against the Papists are, and all penal laws ought to be ; but the vilest and most profligate villains, that the nation can afford, are entitled, encouraged, and employed for their own advantage, under the name of informers, to rule and control all civil officers, to force them to serve their known, base ends, in searching after, finding out, pursuing, and destroying of such as are supposed to be offenders against those laws. Although their persons are known to be profligate, and their ends to be only their own gain ; yet no ordinary magistrate dares deny them his ready obedience and service, in the intimations of their pleasure, which makes many men of generous spirits weary of all public characters and employments. A way of procedure this is, which the greatest, and wisest pagan emperor, who ever suffered any persecution of the Christian religion, did forbid ; and which hath ever been infamous in all nations, as that which tended unto the dishonour of the government, and the disturbance of public tranquillity, having had formerly a fatal catastrophe in this nation itself.

Besides, the present procedure in the execution of these laws is accompanied with clancular convictions, judgments, and determinations of penalties, with the infliction of them, for a first, second, third time, and so on, without any the least notice given of the first pretended offence, without summons, trial, or hearing of the parties concerned. Now whatever any may pretend, whose places may give countenance unto their judgments, this way of procedure in the execution of penal laws, is contrary unto the example given by God himself unto all mankind in such cases ; contrary to the light of nature and all principles of equity ; contrary to the usage of all civilized nations in all ages ; contrary to



the true use and end of all penal laws, with the ordinary administration of justice in this kingdom. An invention it is to make justice abscond itself in corners, like robbers on the highway, to watch for the ruin and destruction of unwary men; than which nothing is more adverse unto its nature, use, and end. That pretence of justice in the execution of penal laws, whose first and principal end is not the warning of men to avoid the penalty enacted, is oppression, and nothing else. Not to reflect any thing therefore on the laws themselves, it is manifest that in this part of their present execution, there hath been high oppression, to which too many in the city have made an accession.

Again, the laws made against Papists, or that of the 23d of Eliz. is applied unto these Protestant dissenters. For that that law was made against popish recusants only is so notoriously evident, from the time wherein it was made, with all the circumstances of that season; the known interest, dangers, and counsels of the kingdom at that season; the reason of its making as expressed in the preamble; the full description in the law itself of the persons intended; the interpretation of it in practice for so long a time; the providing of another law many years after, with respect only unto such dissenters as were not Papists, from whose penalties the Papists were excepted, because of the provision made for their restraint and punishment; that it would be marvellous that any person of an ordinary understanding, from some general and ambiguous words in an occasional passage in it, should countenance the application of it unto Protestant dissenters, but that we know that the whole souls of some men are forced to bow and yield obedience unto prejudice and interest.

And the execution of these laws, as managed by the informers, hath been accompanied for the most part with so much rage and violence, profane swearing, and bloody menaces, as hath occasioned the terror and unspeakable damage of many, if not in the city itself, yet in its suburbs. Whether this be acceptable unto God, of good report, and praiseworthy among men, judge ye.

But that which exceeds all other exorbitancies in this

kind is, that whilst these dissenters are thus pursued, under the pretence of the execution of civil penal statutes, there is set on foot a course of excommunications, in order unto the deprivation of their liberties and livelihoods, wherein a divine institution is so shamefully prostituted unto secular ends, as that it is highly scandalous unto the Christian religion.

And this is continued to be offered, notwithstanding the presentment of the late jury amongst you. They pretend their judgment to be, that the best way for the obtaining peace and quietness in the city, in its present circumstances, is the diligent severe execution of the penal statutes against dissenters. They might also have presented as their judgment, with an equal evidence of truth and prudence, that in time of public danger from fires, by reason of their unparalleled frequency, the best way for the quenching of them, is the diligent casting of fire balls into the houses that do remain. They might have given an equal credit to both by their authority, in the judgment of all men of any tolerable understanding.

And of the same sort, with the like mixture of good nature, is their officious inhumanity, in desiring the prosecution and ruin of all nonconforming ministers who live in or about London; though under great mistakes as to some of them, whom they thought meet to name in particular. There are penal laws which respect evils, that are so in their own nature, antecedently unto the constitution of the penalties contained in them. Such are murder, adultery, perjury, profane swearing, drunkenness, cheating, and the like. It is consistent with the Christian religion, and that common candour and ingenuity which is required among mankind, for every man in his station to press for the diligent execution of those laws. But there is another sort of them, which first constitute evils and then penalties. They make things to be faults, which otherwise on no account are so, and then punish them. Such is the law prohibiting nonconforming ministers to live in corporations; this is made a particular crime by that law, and is so no otherwise. Before the making of that law it was as lawful for them so to do, as for any of this jury; and it will be so again, when the voice of pub-

lic good for its legal suspension, or abrogation, shall be heard above the outcries of some sort of persons. And where public good is not the only rule and measure of the execution of such laws, they are all oppressive; nor are they otherwise interpreted in any righteous nation. For men voluntarily to press for the severe execution of such laws, argues a fierceness of disposition, which hath ever its stamp and character upon it; which the gentlemen of the jury, the next time they meet, may do well to inquire whose it is. .