

A
S E R M O N,

PREACHED IN

LITTLE WILD-STREET,

ON OCCASION OF THE

GENERAL FAST,

FEBRUARY 21, 1781.

NATIONAL CALAMITIES THE EFFECT OF
DIVINE DISPLEASURE.

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F E B R U A R Y 21, 1781.

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S A M U E L S T E N N E T T, D. D.

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[P R I C E S I X P E N C E .]



A M O S III. 6.

— *Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?*



IT must strike every man, upon a moment's reflection, that the solemnities of this day can neither be pleasing to God, nor profitable to ourselves, if they are not accompanied with such repentance as shall have an influence on our future tempers and conduct. It is the duty, therefore, of those who take the lead in these services, to do their utmost, with the blessing of God, to persuade men to repent in earnest of their sins, and heartily set about a reformation of their lives. But these objects are not to be attained, unless we really feel the miseries which have befallen us, clearly perceive the hand of God in them, and are deeply sensible that our sins are the cause of them. There is evil, **great**

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evil,

evil, in the British Empire—God hath done it—and our sins have provoked him to do it, To prove these truths beyond a doubt, and thereby to awaken you and myself to our duty, ere it be too late, is what I have now in view. And may God of his mercy crown the attempt with success!

These were the points, which in regard of Judah and Israel, the prophet Amos meant to establish in the text and context. “ Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it ? ”

They now suffered great miseries, and they had still greater in prospect. “ The God of heaven had given them cleanness of teeth in all their cities, and want of bread in all their places. He had withholden rain from them, when there were yet three months to the harvest. He had smitten them with blasting and mildew : when their gardens, and their vineyards, and their fig-trees, and their olive trees increased, the palmer worm had devoured them. He had sent among them the pestilence after the manner of Egypt : their young men he had slain with the sword, and had taken their horses, and had made the stink of their
camps

camps to come up into their nostrils." (a) —These calamities were quickly to be followed with a tremendous earthquake, and with the invasion of an enraged adversary, who was to compass their land round about, bring down their strength from them, and spoil their palaces. (b) So the ten tribes were to be carried into captivity by the Assyrians, and totally dispersed. And in a course of time the Jews were to be led away captive to Babylon, and remain there seventy years.

Now all this evil the Lord did. A solemn truth this, and a truth which, circumstanced as these people were, nothing but the most extravagant infidelity could dispute. It is, however, affirmed over and over again, and in a great variety of ways. "Thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I WILL DO this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." (c) And the more deeply to impress their minds with the idea of the influence of Divine Providence in these calamities, the prophet particularly recalls their attention to one remarkable fact, "that God had caused it

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(a) Chap. iv. 6, 7, 9, 10.

(b) Chap. i. 1. Chap. iii. 11. (c) Chap. iv. 12.

to rain upon one city, and not upon another." (*d*)

But what was the moral cause of these evils? It was their guilt. This, if not directly expressed in the text, is yet particularly affirmed, and largely commented upon in the context. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." (*e*) —Avarice and oppression, intemperance and luxury, irreligion and profaneness, accompanied with the most shameful dissipation and insensibility, were the reigning vices of the times. "They turned judgment to wormwood, and left off righteousness in the earth. They afflicted the just, took a bribe, and turned aside the poor in the gate." (*f*) "They stored up violence and robbery in their palaces." (*g*) By fornication, incest, and adultery they profaned the holy name of their God. (*h*) They were guilty of the grossest idolatry, and yet dared to sacrifice to the Lord. (*i*) "They despised his law and kept not his commandments." (*k*) "They hated him that rebuked them, and
abhorred

(*d*) Chap. iv. 7. (*e*) Chap. iii. 2. (*f*) Chap. v. 7, 12. (*g*) Chap. iii. 10. (*h*) Chap. ii. 7. (*i*) Chap. v. 22, 26. (*k*) Chap. ii. 4.

abhorred him that spake uprightly." (l) And, all the while, " they were at ease in Zion, and trusted in the mountain of Samaria." (m) " They lay upon beds of ivory, and stretched themselves upon their couches, and ate the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall. They chanted to the sound of the viol, and invented to themselves instruments of musick like David. They drank wine in bowls, and anointed themselves with the chief ointments : but they were not grieved for the affliction of Joseph." (n) In a word, " they put far away the evil day ; yea they boldly said, the evil shall not overtake nor prevent us." (o)

Such was the dissipated, immoral, and profane character of this wretched people. And such were the calamities which their accumulated and unrepented guilt drew down upon them. Would to God there were no resemblance between their character and ours ! Would to God we had no reason to apprehend the like miseries they suffered ! If there be, however, any ground for the comparison, it is unquestionably our duty,

(l) Chap. v. 10. (m) Chap. vi. 1. (n) Chap. vi. 4, 5, 6. (o) Chap. vi. 3. Chap. ix. 10.

duty; interest, and wisdom seriously to consider these three most important and awakening truths.—There is evil in the British Empire—God hath done it—Our sins have provoked him to do it.

FIRST. Great and many are the evils which have befallen us.

The truth of this proposition all will acknowledge, though few, it is to be feared, are duly affected with it. Alas! Whilst many among us take the utmost pains, some to exaggerate and others to lessen our calamities, purely with a view to support the political opinions they have adopted, there is but one here and there who so considers, so feels them, as clearly to perceive that they originate from the just displeasure of Almighty God. But, Sirs, the feelings we wish this day to excite are such, and such only, as are influenced by considerations of humanity and religion. Standing as we now do in the presence of the great Governour of the world, at whose hands we have been imploring mercy, we must dismiss a vain, frivolous, contentious spirit, forget the more immediate instruments or causes of our miseries, and be content, by realizing the re-

sentments

sentments of Heaven against our sins, to chasten ourselves before God.

War, especially when kindled within a nation and among the subjects of the same empire, is usually followed with the most ruinous consequences. It affects all sorts of persons, from the prince on the throne to the meanest peasant, extends its influence to the remotest parts of the community, and insinuates its corrosive and poisonous effects into all the concerns and enjoyments of life. It is to the body politick what diseases are to the natural body; defaces its beauty, wastes its strength, subdues its vigour, and, if it proceed to the utmost lengths, dissolves the very constitution itself. Under the frowns of war the arts and sciences languish, trade and manufactures decline, the wealth and opulence of a people are consumed, and their weight and influence among neighbouring powers are lost. It obstructs the regular course of justice, throws down the laws, those sacred fences of society, opens the avenues to fraud, oppression, and rapine, and destroys that subordination among mankind, which is of the last consequence to their honour, happiness, and safety.

Government is an ordinance of God for the good of men : but war, the kind of war of which we are here speaking, weakens the springs of government, and tends to the total subversion of it. It confounds those distinctions among men which God and nature have established, wrests the power from the hands to which reason, justice, and the consent of the community have entrusted it, interdicts the mutual offices of protection and obedience between the magistrate and the subject, and, if it proceed to the extremities to which the lawless passions of men would precipitate it, buries in one common grave both the honour and authority of the state, and the rights and liberties of the people.

But the miseries it brings upon individuals deserve our more particular attention, in order to excite those feelings which are necessary to beget national repentance and humiliation ; the only object I have in view in painting these sad scenes before your eyes. Intestine broils and animosities interrupt the friendly intercourse of society. They embitter men's spirits towards each other, and induce an eager wild fierceness of manners, which can scarce consist with the common principles

principles of good nature and benevolence. They create the most sullen jealousies, inveterate prejudices, and rancorous resentments. They spoil the peace of families, neighbourhoods, and whole provinces. Nay, what is far worse, they make horrid inroads on the sacred rights of religion and conscience. The din of war disturbs the silent pleasures of devotion; and good men tremble while they see religious prejudices mingling themselves with political disputes, and, which is still more shocking, behold men on all sides becoming advocates with God against each other, and daring to profane his holy altar with their cruel anathemas.

How great a matter does a little fire kindle! And how deplorable the sight, to see the infatuated multitude throwing oil upon the spreading flames, amidst all the attempts of wisdom and humanity to extinguish them! When civil discord arises to this height, the scene is almost too horrible to be described. The powers of invention are now racked to procure the instruments of death and destruction. The standard is erected on each side, and thousands crowd to it, impelled with all the desperate fury of revenge, and all the stubborn confidence of
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victory. They prepare for battle, and, amidst the loud peals of thundering artillery, the dismal clangor of arms, and the shouts of opposing squadrons, rush on to the attack. Death now rides on his pale horse, hell following with him. The relentless sword is bathed in vengeance. Multitudes are hurried instantly into eternity, whilst others with unavailing shrieks and groans languish and expire. The ground is stained with the blood of thousands, the plain covered over with mangled corpses, and the grave itself well nigh satiated begins to cry, It is enough.

Who? O who can forbear to weep amidst these scenes? Or if our hearts still remain callous, let us retire from this aceldema, this field of blood, to the gloomy habitations of the widow and fatherless, if indeed their habitations escape, and refuse to feel with them if we can. See the silent tear trickling down the eyes of helpless widows and orphans, or else the anguish of the throbbing heart forcing the bitterest exclamations from their lips. See whole families exterminated, the tenderest ties of nature dissolved, the fair hopes of succeeding generations extinguished, the fruits of honest labour blasted, and scarce any thing entailed upon posterity
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but poverty and wretchedness, together with the history of infernal discord, brutality, and revenge, written in letters of blood.

And now, Is this description applicable in any degree to the present war? It is. O may our hearts bleed while we relate the sad story!—It began in suspicion and jealousy, gathered strength from misapprehension and prejudice, and proceeded to rancour and resentment. It hath drawn forces into the field, and armaments on the seas of a magnitude scarce known to former times. It hath precipitated infinite numbers of souls into an eternal world. It hath reduced the once happy and flourishing colonies to beggary, and consumed the wealth of the parent state to a degree that affects the feelings of every individual. It hath created such divisions among us, as have relaxed the nerves of government, and threatened the very existence of decency order, and subjection. The powers of France and Spain, perfidious and haughty to a proverb, have united against us. Their fleets have insulted our coasts: and, whilst they have ignominiously forbore to fight, they have left no measure untried to protract the dispute to the ruin of those whom they would be

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thought to support, as well as of this country upon which they have insolently denounced vengeance. The flames of war have extended yet farther.—Riots of the most daring kind (whatever may have been the cause) and conducted in the most unexampled manner, have been excited to the horror of all in our metropolis.—The West-India islands have been laid waste by a most tremendous hurricane.—In fine, a gloomy imagination, amidst these sad scenes, would be apt to suppose, that God is about to say, as he once did by the prophet Zephaniah, “ Wait ye upon me until the day that I rise up to the prey : for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms to pour upon them my indignation, even all my fierce anger : for all the earth shall be destroyed with the fire of my jealousy.” (*p*)

And now, Ought we not to feel? Can it be pious, can it be virtuous, can it be humane, not to feel? Is it, in short, consistent with common honesty to assemble together, as we do this day, professedly on occasion of these calamities, and yet remain totally stupid? True, indeed, we are at a

remote

remote distance from most of these scenes, Our ears do not hear the hoarse sound of war. Our eyes do not behold garments rolled in blood. We are in peace, each sitting under his own vine and fig-tree, none daring to make him afraid. And, great as the expence is which this war hath entailed on us, it is not felt in the degree that might be imagined, if we may judge by the luxury and dissipation which almost universally prevail among us. But, are these reasons why we should suppress all emotion of heart for the many innocent thousands, who are involved in the horrors of this desolating judgment? O, no. Cursed be the self-love that tears humanity from the breast, and annihilates all bowels of compassion. Let us, my brethren, feel, or cease to be christians, cease to be men.

Insensibility, however, hath too strikingly marked our character hitherto. When we fasted and mourned in the four or five former years of this war, "Did we at all fast unto the Lord?" (g) On the contrary, "Have not the harp, and the viol, the tabret and pipe, and wine been in our feasts? Ah! we have not regarded the work of the Lord, nor

(g) Zech. vii. 5.

nor considered the operation of his hands." (r) But if we are resolved to be still thoughtless and dissipated, to be still insensible to our own interests, and those of our posterity, God will, in his own time, perhaps quickly, make us feel. These things, I say, not merely for the purpose of giving you pain: that would be inhuman. Much less with a view to fan the flame of popular contention, or to rouse your resentments against the authors of these evils: that would be criminal, highly criminal on the present occasion especially. Not to say how humiliating it would be to the majesty of religion, to descend to a discussion of political questions, in a place sacred to the sublime duties of communion with the Deity. No. My view is to prepare you by these impressions to receive, with all becoming seriousness, that weighty truth which we proceed now to consider,

SECONDLY, That all this hath happened by the permission, and through the influence of Divine Providence.

Until we feel the scourge we shall not trouble ourselves about the hand that inflicts it. But we do feel. Now is the
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(r) Isai. v. 12.

time, therefore, to address you in the language of our text. “ Is there evil in the *British Empire*, and the Lord hath not done it ? ” Few, I persuade myself, are so hardened as absolutely to deny the truth of this proposition : yet few, it is to be feared, are duly impressed with it. Permit us then to draw aside the veil of sense, and to fix your attention a moment to that great Being who, drest in all the horrors of just indignation against our sins, deigns himself by these calamities to address us. “ His voice cries, and cries aloud : the man of wisdom will hear it. O that we were all men of wisdom ! O that we all knew the rod, and him who hath appointed it ! ” (r)

The hand of God in these matters is capable of the clearest proof. The evidence is so strong, that only a glance at it must produce conviction. It is the language of reason and scripture : it hath the consent of all wise and good men : and it receives abundant confirmation from the observations, which every pious and thoughtful mind must have made upon our own history.

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It is the language of reason. If there be a God, and if he hath created the world, (and no one surely in his senses will deny it) it follows, that *that* God upholds and governs it. He is infinitely able, and it is by no means beneath him, so to do. Nay, the supposition that he does not govern the world, or that he concerns not himself at all about it, involves in it the most glaring absurdities. A doctrine this as uncomfortable as it is unreasonable: friendly indeed to the iniquitous views of bad men, but pregnant with every imaginable evil to society. It is a certain fact, therefore, that a divine energy pervades every part of the creation, that all the infinitely diversified orders of Beings around us, and we ourselves too, are at the disposal, and under the controul and influence of him who made us. And though mankind, as intelligent and reasonable creatures, are amenable for their actions to the supreme judge of the world; yet their actions, whether good or bad, are all by his over-ruling influence made to subserve the great purposes of his glory, and the final completion of the grand scheme of Providence. We may be assured then that no events, prosperous or calamitous, happen to individuals, much less to publick bodies of men, but under the superintendence

perintendence of the supreme and all-wise governour of the world.

This, too, is the clear and exprefs language of scripture. That venerable book, written by the divine pen, while it tells us that God hath created the earth, and given it to the children of men, affures us also, “ that he judgeth in the earth, and is governour among the nations; that he doth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What dost thou ?” (t) And when he condescends himself to address us, it is with a simplicity and yet dignity of language that cannot fail, methinks, to impress this great truth on our minds, “ I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God besides me. I form the light, and create darkness : I make peace, and create evil ; I the Lord do all these things.” (u) “ I am God, my counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.” (w) And how natural the reflection of Elihu ! “ When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble ? and when he hideth his face, who then can behold him ?

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(t) Psalm lviii. 11. Psalm xxii. 28. Dan. iv. 35.

(u) Isai. xlv. 5, 7.

(w) Chap. xlvi. 9, 10.

whether it be done against a nation, or against a man only." (x) But it were endless to cite all the passages in our bible in which this important doctrine is held up to our view.

Indeed it hath had the consent of all wise and good men in every age of the world. The pagans themselves, however miserably their theology was distorted with the idle figments of their own vain imagination, yet acknowledged the superintendence of a Providence in human affairs. And, difficult as it hath been to fix the attention of mankind to this great truth, through the wretched depravity of their hearts, yet there have been few comparatively speaking, who have dared to assert and maintain the contrary doctrine. And the few who have done so, have been justly held in contempt for their folly, whilst they have been looked upon with horror for their impiety.

But this divine truth, so consonant with reason and common sense, receives abundant confirmation from a careful review of the principal events recorded in history: especially when we take into our account
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(x) Job xxxiv. 29.

the moral character of the several ages in which they happened, the important consequences which in a course of time they drew after them, and, most of all, the relation they bore to the express, predictions of scripture. This argument, I am sensible, will not have its full effect, till the final consummation of all things, when the scheme of Providence respecting this world shall be compleated. The wisdom of God in adjusting the several parts of this great plan, his power in carrying them into execution, and the grand intent of the whole, will then be clearly understood; and, of consequence, we shall then have the most striking and illustrious proofs of his influence in human affairs. But these proofs we cannot have till that period arrives. In the mean time, however, history throws so much light upon some distinct and separate parts of the plan, as sufficiently to justify the inference, that a wise and powerful Providence governs the world. When I view a curious piece of mechanism in its finished and perfect state, I have at once the fullest proof of the agency and skill of the artist: but, in the mean while, a view only of some few of its movements, in the relation they bear to

each other, furnishes me with a sufficient evidence that it is the product, not of chance, but design.

Who then that considers the principal events that happened to the Assyrian, Persian, Grecian, and Roman empires, considers them with the lights just now mentioned, but must clearly perceive the influence of Divine Providence in them? And surely that influence no one who believes his bible can fail of observing in the administration of the affairs of the Jewish kingdom, from the beginning of its existence to the coming of the Messiah. But the history of our own country will sufficiently confirm and illustrate this grand point. Let us advert a moment to two or three instances among many others.

The amazing concurrence of circumstances, passions, and interests which brought about the Reformation; and the political grounds upon which the profession of the Protestant Religion was established, whereby the temporal emolument of the principal families in this kingdom became a lasting and powerful security to it against the attempts of the Bishop of Rome; these very
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marvellous circumstances can scarce be reflected upon, without obliging us to acknowledge that the hand of God was in the matter. Nor can we fail of perceiving the same influence exerted in the most striking manner, at the ever memorable æra of the Revolution. It was felt and acknowledged at the instant that almost miraculous deliverance took place, and when men's minds were in a disposition to be affected with it: and it hath received farther confirmation from the lights which later times have thrown upon the transactions of that period; by which it appears, that contrary interests, views, and passions became strangely subservient to that great event. And, on the other hand, most of the calamities which have befallen this country, in the various stages of its history, have been attended with circumstances which clearly point out the interference of Divine Providence. The calamities themselves, the more immediate causes of them, the vices they were adapted to correct and punish, and the important consequences which in a course of time they drew after them, all abundantly justify this observation.

Can we then be so stupid, so impious, as to imagine, that the great God is an idle spectator of the miseries we this day deplore ; and that they are no way under his direction, influence, and controul ? I hope not. Could we place ourselves at the same distance from our own times, which we are now at from those just adverted to, this truth would perhaps strike us in a more clear and convincing manner than it does at present. But it is wise, truly wise, to observe the hand of God at the instant it is stretched out against us. Nor does his influence in these evils at all exculpate those who are the immediate authors of them. Our business, however, at present is not with them. It is in the presence of Almighty God we now stand ; his voice we are this day called upon to hear, his hand we are this day called upon to observe.

We may be assured then, from the plain dictates of reason and revelation, that all the various passions, views, and interests of men, and all the infinitely diversified circumstances which do any way contribute to bring ruin upon a country, causes innocent and criminal, open and secret, gradual and transient in their operation, within the reach of human foresight and restraint

or otherwise, all these causes, all these circumstances, I say, take effect by the permission, under the controul, and with the influence and direction of the great Arbiter of the Universe. He exercises sovereign authority over all creatures animate and inanimate, all the productions of nature and art, all the force of human skill and strength, and all the instruments of death and destruction. They receive their commission from him, and punctually execute his commands. Nor are the main springs of human affairs, which are generally remote from publick view, less subject to his dominion. The eye of God pierces the inmost recesses of men's hearts, and penetrates into all their counsels, combinations, and resolutions. Their misapprehensions, false reasonings, mistaken informations, prejudices, jealousies, avarice, lust of power, resentments, malevolence, and revenge, he makes, though they are utterly repugnant to his all-perfect nature, the obedient executioners of his will.

Can we think of all this, can we believe all this, and not tremble?—tremble amidst the view we have been taking of the calamities we now deplore. The God of heaven, who made this world and governs it

it in truth and equity, whose counsel shall stand, and whose power none can controul; this great and terrible God is risen from his seat, hath whet his glittering sword, and hath taken hold of vengeance. He is come forth to contend with us. "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." Let every subject of the British Empire, both at home and abroad, hear the summons, and obey.

But wherefore doth he contend with us? That is the next enquiry. Let us then, as was proposed, endeavour

THIRDLY, To impress our hearts with a deep sense of our manifold sins, which are the moral causes of all the miseries we suffer.

But before we proceed to enumerate the vices which prevail through this great empire, let us spend a moment upon the important question of the influence which the moral character of a people hath upon their welfare. If God be the governour of the world, if he hath given men plain laws for the regulation of their conduct, and hath annexed sanctions to them, it follows, that sin, which is a violation of those

those laws, must sooner or later bring after it punishment. There is no separating the ideas. But I am not here speaking of men in their individual capacity; and therefore need not take up your time in solving that seeming difficulty, which has often puzzled some minds, How it is that in many instances the wicked prosper and the virtuous suffer? Let it suffice to observe, that God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world, and that the solemn decisions of that day will effectually silence all atheistical reflections, and fully establish the proposition we have laid down in the whole extent of it, that sin will, must, bring after it punishment.

But the question before us respects mankind in their collective capacity, as forming distinct communities, states and empires. In these views they are dealt with judicially in the present life, and for this plain reason, because they cannot be thus proceeded against in another, these relations then totally ceasing. That great truth, therefore, which scripture so clearly asserts, “ That righteousness exalteth a nation, and sin is a reproach and destruction to

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any people," (y) is no other than the light of nature teaches, reason approves, and the common sense and feelings of mankind attest. And it is a truth, too, which all the great striking events, that stand recorded both in sacred and profane history, abundantly confirm. God is indeed slow to wrath, whence it often happens that national guilt rises to a great height, before the just sentence of his wrath is executed upon it: but, when the measure of it is filled up, judgment no longer tarryes. At that awful period Divine Providence makes that destruction inevitable, which men's vices, by their own natural operation, had been a long while bringing upon them. Such was the fate of the old world. Such was the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. Such hath been the fate of particular kingdoms; and such the fate of all the great monarchies, which make so distinguished a figure in the annals of fame. Read their history, and separate their publick character and final doom if you can. But the story of the Israelitish nation, through a long series of years, is at large recorded in our bibles on purpose to illustrate this grand point. Their prosperity, we find, ever kept pace with their national virtue; and in all the calamities

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that from age to age befall them, down to the dreadful catastrophe of their final destruction, we see their sin written with indelible characters in their punishment.

This solemn truth then, that whatever evils befall a people they are the just and natural consequences of their sins, is proved, I persuade myself, to a demonstration. And in this light the present calamity is to be considered. But at the same time it is to be remembered, that one calamity is often sent as a warning of others yet more terrible impending, unless averted by timely repentance and reformation: in which case there is a mixture of mercy with judgment. The great God, in such visitations, deigns to expostulate with men ere he proceeds to extremities. And his authoritative, but mild and gentle language is this, “ At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it: if that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom to build and to plant it: if it do evil in my sight

that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them." (z)

This being the case, it is our indispensable duty, as we tender the honour of God and the real welfare of our country, to contribute all in our power towards the effecting a general repentance and reformation. To which purpose let us spend a few moments in taking an estimate of the present times, I mean the moral state of the British Empire. I am aware that this is a difficult, as well as unpleasing task; and the rather, as too many are disposed to treat what is said upon these occasions in the light of mere popular declamation. But, God forbid! that we should be intimidated from our duty by apprehensions of this sort.

Every just and reasonable concession ought to be made to the prejudices of mankind, the better to secure their attention. Let all appeals to the passions, then, be withdrawn, while the character of the present age is tried at the bar of impartial truth. Be it admitted, that there is no nation under heaven, nor ever was, exempt from publick vices.

(z) Jer. xviii. 7---10.

vices. Be it admitted, that some good men, as Solomon complains, are too prone petulantly to enquire, “What is the cause that the former days were better than these?” (a) Be it farther admitted, that there are periods to be fixed upon in our own history, in which some vices were more prevalent than in the present. Let it also be acknowledged to the honour of this age, that public charities, whatever may have been the motive, have received more countenance and encouragement for the last half century than any before. It will likewise be granted, that a liberal way of thinking, respecting the rights of conscience in matters of religion, hath got the better of the stubborn and unnatural prejudices of former times. And I will add, which is matter of infinite joy, that there are yet many among us who truly fear God, and are patterns of sobriety and virtue. All this may and ought to be acknowledged: whilst at the same time we do not overlook those increasing advantages of light and knowledge we derive from the history and experience of former ages, and that national prosperity with which, for a course of years previous to this war, we were distinguished.

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(a) Eccles. vii. 10.

And now this said, I am at liberty, without the hazard of being charged with partiality, to reverse the scene, and hold up to your view the horrid guilt which as a nation we have contracted, with the heinous aggravations of it.

Atheism and infidelity usually take the lead in an enumeration of publick vices. And it is well known to those who are conversant in the literary world, that scepticism, in the affected habit of modest diffidence, hath of late years obtruded upon us opinions which directly tend to destroy all distinction between good and evil, to tear up the foundations of moral virtue, and to deprive men of the powerful restraints which natural religion lays upon their consciences. Nor have these laboured essays of false philosophy, absurd as they are, failed of meeting with considerable success among many in superior life, who wish to preserve a consistency between their opinions and practices. Whilst Heaven is thus insulted, and the interests of society invaded, what serious sensible man but must suffer pain for the dishonour offered to the one, and the mischief done the other?

To the christian his religion is the most invaluable blessing he enjoys ; and though he is not apprehensive of its being wrested from him by the open assaults of infidelity, yet he cannot but deeply feel for the injury that may be done to unwary minds, as well as for the affront that hath been offered to the great author of his noblest hopes, by the insidious attacks which have lately been made upon it. Nor is it to be enough lamented, that too many who admit the divine authority of scripture, have by their false reasonings thrown a veil over the distinguishing glories of the gospel, and taken pains to reduce christianity to a system of mere morality. Whilst others, in all the wantonness of unmeaning enthusiasm, have so treated the great truths of religion, as if they judged it the highest honour they could do them, to set them at variance with the dictates of common sense. But, whatever ill influence this various treatment of scripture may have had upon the minds of men, whether more or less, it is evident beyond a doubt, that the evil practices of which atheism and infidelity must ever be considered as the ablest patrons and defenders, prevail far and wide.

And

And now, What in regard of manners, is the true and proper character of this country? Let any man look around him a moment, and he will not be at a loss for a reply. It is, AN INSATIABLE THIRST FOR PLEASURE. This fatal evil hath long prevailed among us, but hath now spread its baleful influence through all orders of men. It hath for a course of years operated like slow poison upon the constitution, by degrees corrupting the blood, and wasting the strength: but it now makes a rapid progress to the vitals, and threatens, if not speedily checked, destruction to our very existence. The symptoms of this sad disease are too many to escape the notice of a common observer, and the effects of it are felt through the whole empire.

Not to speak of those numerous and deplorable instances of intrigue and seduction, lewdness and debauchery, adultery and divorce, intemperance and luxury, which are notorious to all the world: what daily hourly proofs have we, wherever we go, with whomsoever we converse, and whatever businesses we are employed about, of the idle, vain, frivolous cast of the times! The prodigious resort of people to the metropolis,
merely

merely for the purpose of dissipation; the new entertainments imported at a prodigious expence from foreign countries, and countries too whose national characters we were used to hold in contempt; the vast variety of fashionable amusements, as they are called, particularly masquerades; the houses of pleasure planted in all parts of the town; the kind of publications every where greedily received; and, I may add, the very dress of the people, all prove it. There are infinite numbers among us, whose time, ingenuity, strength, health, substance, and all are exhausted in the restless pursuit of this wretched Demon of pleasure, yea, truth, virtue, conscience, and every thing sacred and venerable among men, are sacrificed to it. Satiated with one species of gratification, invention is racked to find out another. And, eager to outvie those above them in splendour and gaiety, no means, however base and unworthy, are neglected or forgone to acquire the objects of their ambition. Hence that venality and corruption, that mad spirit of gaming, that fraud and oppression, that violence and rapine which abound among us. Hence those licentious inroads which are made on all order and decency in society, contempt of magistracy, slander and

defamation, duelling and suicide, and frequent failures among men of trade and business. Of these evils, too, it is deserving of particular remark, that some of them are not accounted criminal, but rather considered as innocent and reputable; that most of them prevail among all ranks of men; and that all of them are committed with an effrontery scarce known in former times. Many instances might be adduced as proofs and illustrations of these charges: but we must not enter into particulars—the sad detail would carry us too far. (*b*)

Such, in regard of social manners, being the character of the times, the masculine sense and virtue derived to us from our ancestors having been enervated, the ties of humanity weakened if not dissolved, and the barriers of publick decorum thrown down, is it to be wondered that, in respect
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(*b*) One instance, however, must not be omitted, as the case is of a publick kind, and the guilt most atrocious; I mean, the horrid sacrifices which have been made for a course of years past, in our East-India settlements, to this cursed lust of wealth and pleasure. Posterity will shudder when they are told, that an immense number of lives have been wantonly spent in the service of lawless ambition and insatiable avarice. This national sin, written with bloody characters in the book of God's
God's

of the duties we owe more directly to the great God, a flood of impiety and profaneness is come in upon us? Is it to be wondered, that swearing, perjury, contempt of divine ordinances, and a total disregard among great multitudes of people to the worship of God, are become fashionable? Irreligion is the great source of all the vices just mentioned; wherefore in proportion as piety declines immorality will always prevail.

And this naturally leads us to bring matters home to ourselves, and seriously to enquire, How far we have contributed to this enormous load of guilt that lies upon our country? We, Protestant Dissenters, are bound by our profession to a peculiar regularity and strictness of manners. We enjoy the most invaluable liberties—liberties which have not been infringed, and

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God's remembrance, remains there, I fear, unblotted out: whilst we feel the effects of it in the miserable abuse of those prodigious treasures of ill-gotten wealth which have been imported hither. And what are those depredations, which have of late been committed in such abundance upon our roads and in our houses, and which have bid defiance to all the exertions of magistracy, but so many imitations of those greater and more desperate robberies we have been speaking of?

which, however all good subjects are entitled to them, our ancestors were denied: and liberties, too, which have lately been confirmed and enlarged. We are obliged, therefore, by motives of duty and interest to demean ourselves with all reverence and gratitude to the great God, attention and deference to our governours, and integrity and benevolence towards one another. We have the ever blessed gospel preached among us, the ordinances duly administered to us, and frequent and warm admonitions to our duty.

But, permit me to ask, Are these advantages acknowledged and improved, or slighted and abused by us? Let us in the fear of God ask ourselves, Do we make conscience of private devotion? Do we maintain religion in our families? Do we regularly attend the places of worship to which we belong? Do we instruct our children and our servants in their duty? Do we set them examples of piety, justice, and sobriety? Do we, or do we not, conform to the manners of the times? Is it our aim and endeavour to subdue in our breasts the love of the world, and to promote, as far as our abilities will admit, the interests of religion, virtue, and benevo-

benevolence among all around us?—Ah! my brethren, I fear, some of us can give but poor answers to these questions, and, am well persuaded, there are none of us but are more or less defective. And how sad, how tremendous must their reflections be on this occasion, if conscience does its office, who have in a publick and gross manner violated their vows, and brought a scandal upon their profession!—Our sins, then, make up a part of that guilt for which God is contending with us. Indeed we have all sinned, our princes, our nobles, our magistrates, the ministers of religion, and men of all ranks and conditions among us. “The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in it.” (c)

But there is one circumstance more of a very threatening kind that must be added, and that is, the inattention of men in general to the influence of Divine Providence in our affairs; and to that accumulated guilt we have been describing, which hath brought these miseries upon us. Alas! how few, amidst the warmth with which they enter into questions of a political kind, do
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(c) Isaiah i. 5, 6.

at all advert to the hand of God, or are at all grieved for the impieties which abound among us? We can hear of the confederacies of foreign powers against us, of the blood of thousands shed in battle, of whole countries laid waste by tremendous tempests, and of the most alarming riots in our metropolis; and all the while be deaf to the authoritative language of the text, "The Lord hath done it," and deaf to the voice of reason and conscience, "Your sins have provoked him to do it." It was the complaint of the prophet Jeremiah, respecting the Jews, "No man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?" (*d*) And is not the like complaint too applicable to us, if not to every individual, yet to the people of this country in general? We know how in all the heat of resentment to say, of our enemies, of those in authority over us, of the various differing political parties among us, of the Established Church and of Dissenters, of the several denominations of christians, of the ministers of religion and they again of the people, "What have THEY done?" But ah! we know not how to frame our lips, or how to find it in our hearts, each one to say to himself, "What have I done?"

And

And now, taking all these considerations into view, must we not, will we not admit, that we have every imaginable cause for humiliation? With such an enormous load of guilt upon us, infinitely beyond that of our national debt, do we not feel ourselves oppressed? Under the awful apprehensions of divine resentment, do we not tremble? Look upwards, behold the angel of justice standing before the throne of God, see him holding up to the view of omniscience the long scroll of our national sins, and thus pleading against us —

“ How long, O God, holy, just and true,
 “ ere thou wilt avenge thyself of this un-
 “ grateful, perverse, and rebellious people!
 “ Arise in thine indignation, and scatter
 “ these thine enemies. Let pestilence, fa-
 “ mine, tempest, and sword devour them.
 “ Tear up the very foundations of their
 “ glory, happiness, and safety. Spread
 “ desolation through their whole empire.
 “ And let surrounding nations know,
 “ amidst the terrors of thy justice, that
 “ thou art God.”

What, O what, my brethren, shall we say? Is there no faithful Abraham, no friend of God, to plead for us?—Yes, I trust
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there yet is, even the angel of mercy himself, with whom Abraham interceded for Sodom. The divine Jesus, whose character hath been insulted, and whose religion hath been neglected and despised among us, hath still, I hope, compassion for this country. O may his cries prevail against the demands of justice!

But can we hope for so great a boon as this, whilst we remain totally impenitent and unreformed? This, this is the point to which all we have been saying hath been directed. O may we be persuaded, by the terrors and by the mercies of God, by our duty and by our interest, by a concern for our own happiness and that of our posterity, to repent and reform! Let us, each one, set about this great work in earnest, and in a dependance upon the grace of God. “Let us break off our sins by righteousness, and our iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor, if it may be a lengthening of our tranquillity.” (e) “Let us fear God, and honour the king.” (f) “Let us be subject to the higher powers, and that not only for wrath, but also for conscience-sake. Let us render
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(e) Dan. iv. 27.

(f) 1 Pet. ii. 17.

to all their dues, tribute to whom tribute, custom to whom custom is due." (g) Let us lead peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty, cherishing in our breasts the warmest gratitude to God, and a due sense, too, of the obligations we owe to our civil governors, for the invaluable blessings of religious liberty we enjoy. And, whilst we are labouring by our influence and example, to promote union and reformation among all around us, Who knows but the British Empire may yet arise out of the present calamity into its former prosperous and happy state? Who knows but songs of joy and praise may succeed to the tears of genuine contrition and sorrow, we have this day poured out before God?

(g) Rom. xiii. 6, 7.

T H E E N D.