SERMONS

BY

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And they ſware unto the Lord with a loud voice, and with ſhouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets.—And all the men of Judah rejoiced at the oath.

IT will be neceſſary to give a particular account of what was the occaſion, as well as the nature, of the oath which the men of Judah ſware unto the Lord;—which will explain not only the reaſons why it became a matter of ſo much joy to them, but likewiſe admit of an ap-

plication ſuitable to the purpoſes of this ſolemn aſſembly.

Abijah, and Aſa his ſon, were ſucceſſive kings of Judah.—The firſt came to the crown at the cloſe of a long, and, in the end, a very unſucceſsful war, which had gradually waſted the ſtrength and riches of his kingdom.

He was a prince endowed with the talents which the emergencies of his country required, and ſeemed born to make Judah a victorious, as well as a happy people.—The conduct and great ſucceſs of his arms againſt Jeroboam, had well eſtabliſhed the firſt;—but his king-

dom, which had been ſo many years the ſeat of a war, had been ſo waſted and bewildered, that his reign, good as it was, was too ſhort to accompliſh the latter.—He died, and left the work unfiniſhed for his ſon.—Aſa ſucceeded, in the room of Abijah his father, with the trueſt notions of religion and government that could be fetched either from reaſon or experience.—His reaſon told him, that God ſhould be worſhipped in ſimplicity and ſingleneſs of heart;—therefore he took away the altars of the ſtrange gods, and broke down their images.—His experience told him, that the moſt ſucceſsful wars, inſtead of invigorating, more generally drained away the vitals of

government,—and, at the beſt, ended but in a brighter and more oſtentatious kind of poverty and deſolation: —therefore he laid aſide his ſword, and ſtudied the arts of ruling Judah with peace.—Conſcience would not ſuffer Aſa to ſacrifice his ſubjects to private views of ambition, and wiſdom forbad he ſhould ſuffer them to offer up themſelves to the pretence of public ones;—ſince enlargement of empire, by the deſtruction of its people, (the natural and only valuable ſource of ſtrength and riches) was a diſhoneſt and miſerable exchange.—And however well the glory of a conqueſt might appear in the eyes of a common beholder, yet, when bought at that coſtly rate, a

father

father to his country would behold the triumphs which attended it, and weep as it paſſed by him.—Amidſt all the glare and jollity of the day, the parent's eyes would fix attentively upon his child;—he would diſcern him drooping under the weight of his attire, without ſtrength or vigour, —his former beauty and comelineſs gone off:—he would behold the coat of many colours ſtained with blood, and cry,—Alas! they have decked thee with a parent's pride, but not with a parent's care and foreſight.

With ſuch affectionate ſentiments of government, and juſt principles of religion, Aſa began his reign.—A

reign marked out with new æras, and a ſucceſſion of happier occurrences than what had diſtinguiſhed former days,

The juſt and gentle ſpirit of the prince, inſenſibly ſtole into the breaſts of the people.—The men of Judah turned their ſwords into plowſhares, and their ſpears into pruning hooks. —By induſtry and virtuous labour they acquired, what by ſpoil and rapine they might have ſought after long in vain.—The traces of their late troubles ſoon began to wear out. —The cities, which had become ruinous and deſolate (the prey of famine and the ſword) were now rebuilt, fortified, and made populous.—

Peace,

Peace, ſecurity, wealth, and proſperity, ſeemed to compoſe the whole hiſtory of Aſa's reign.—O Judah! what could then have been done more than what was done to make thy people happy?—

What one bleſſing was with-held, that thou ſhouldſt ever with-hold thy thankfulneſs?—

That thou didſt not continually turn thy eyes towards heaven with an habitual ſenſe of God's mercies, and devoutly praiſe him for ſetting Aſa over you.

Were not the public bleſſings, and the private enjoyments, which every man

man of Judah derived from them, ſuch as to make the continuance of them deſireable?—and what other way was there to effect it, than to ſwear unto the Lord, with all your hearts and ſouls, to perform the covenant made with your fathers?—to ſecure that favour and intereſt with the almighty Being, without which the wiſdom of this world is fooliſhneſs, and the beſt connected ſyſtems of human policy are ſpeculative and airy projects, without foundation or ſubſtance.—The hiſtory of their own exploits and eſtabliſhment ſince they had become a nation, was a ſtrong confirmation of this doctrine.

But

But too free and uninterrupted a poſſeſſion of God Almighty's bleſſings, ſometimes (though it ſeems ſtrange to ſuppoſe it) even tempts man to forget him, either from a certain depravity and ingratitude of nature, not to be wrought upon by goodneſs,—or that they are made by it too paſſionately fond of the preſent hour, and too thoughtleſs of its great Author, whoſe kind providence brought it about.—This ſeemed to have been the caſe with the men of Judah:—for notwithſtanding all that God had done for them, in placing Abijah, and Aſa his ſon, over them, and inſpiring them with hearts and talents proper to retrieve the errors of the foregoing

reign,

reign, and bring back peace and plenty to the dwellings of Judah;—yet there appears no record of any ſolemn and religious acknowledgment to God for ſuch ſignal favours.—The people ſat down in a thankleſs ſecurity, each man under his vine, to eat and drink, and roſe up to play;—more ſolicitous to enjoy their bleſſings, than to deſerve them.

But this ſcene of tranquillity was not to ſubſiſt without ſome change;—and it ſeemed as if providence at length had ſuffered the ſtream to be interrupted, to make them conſider whence it flowed, and how neceſſary it had been all along to their ſupport.—The Ethiopians, ever ſince the

the beginning of Abijah's reign, until the tenth year of Aſa's, had been at peace, or at leaſt, whatever ſecret enmity they bore, had made no open attacks upon the kingdom of Judah.—And indeed the bad meaſures which Rehoboam had taken, in the latter part of the reign which immediately preceded theirs, ſeemed to have ſaved the Ethiopians the trouble.—For Rehoboam, though in the former part of his reign he dealt wiſely; yet when he had eſtabliſhed his kingdom, and ſtrengthened himſelf,—he forſook the laws of the Lord;—he forſook the council which the old men gave him, and took council with the young men, which were brought up with him, and ſtood

before

before him.—Such ill-advised measures, in all probability, had given the enemies of Judah such decisive advantages over her, that they had sat down contented, and for many years enjoyed the fruits of their acquisitions.—But the friendship of princes is seldom made up of better materials than those which are every day to be seen in private life,—in which sincerity and affection are not at all considered as ingredients.—Change of time and circumstances produce a change of councils and behaviour.—Judah, in length of time, had become a fresh temptation, and was worth fighting for.—Her riches and plenty might first make her enemies covet, and then the remembrance

membrance of how cheap and eaſy a prey ſhe had formerly been, might make them not doubt of obtaining.

By theſe apparent motives, (or whether God, who ſometimes over-rules the heart of man, was pleaſed to turn them by ſecret ones, to the purpoſes of his wiſdom) the ambition of the Ethiopians revived, with an hoſt of men numerous as the ſand upon the ſea-ſhore in multitude.—They had left their country, and were coming forwards to invade them.—What can Judah propoſe to do in ſo terrifying a criſis?—where can ſhe betake herſelf for refuge?—on one hand, her religion and laws are too precious to be given up, or

truſted

trusted to the hands of a stranger;—and on the other hand, how can so small a kingdom, just recovering strength, surrounded by an army of a thousand thousand men, besides chariots and horses, be able to withstand so powerful a shock.—But here it appeared that those, who, in their prosperity, can forget God, do yet remember him in the day of danger and distress;—and can begin with comfort to depend upon his providence, when with comfort they can depend upon nothing else.—For when Zerah, the Ethiopian, was come unto the valley of Zephatha at Maretha, Asa, and all the men of Judah, and Benjamin, went out against him;—and as they went,

they

they cried mightily unto God.—And Aſa prayed for his people, and he ſaid,—"O Lord! it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power:—help us, O Lord our God; for we reſt in thee, and in thy name we go againſt this multitude.—O Lord, thou art our God, let not man prevail againſt thee."—Succeſs almoſt ſeemed a debt due to the piety of the prince, and the contrition of his people.—So God ſmote the Ethiopians, and they could not recover themſelves:—for they were ſcattered, and utterly deſtroyed,—before the Lord, and before his hoſt.—And as they returned to Jeruſalem from purſuing,—behold the ſpirit of God

came upon Asariah, the son of Oded. —And he went out to meet Asa, and he said unto him,—Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; —the Lord is with you, whilst you are with him;—and if you seek him, he will be found of you, but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you.— Nothing could more powerfully call home the conscience than so timely an expostulation.—The men of Judah and Benjamin, struck with a sense of their late deliverance, and the many other felicities they had enjoyed since Asa was king over them, they gathered themselves together at Jerusalem, in the third month in the fifteenth year of Asa's reign;—and they entered into a covenant to seek

the Lord God of their fathers, with all their heart, and with all their ſoul :—and they ſware unto the Lord with a loud voice, and with ſhouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets, and all Judah rejoiced at the oath.

One may obſerve a kind of luxuriety in the deſcription, which the holy hiſtorian gives of the tranſport of the men of Judah upon this occaſion.—And ſure, if ever matter of joy was ſo reaſonably founded, as to excuſe any exceſſes in the expreſſions of it,—this was one :—for without it,—the condition of Judah, though otherwiſe the happieſt, would have

been, of all nations under heaven, the moſt miſerable.

Let us ſuppoſe a moment, inſtead of being repulſed, that the enterprize of the Ethiopians had proſpered againſt them,—like other grievous diſtempers, where the vitals are firſt attacked,—Aſa, their king, would have been ſought after, and have been made the firſt ſacrifice.—He muſt either have fallen by the ſword of battle, or execution; or, what is worſe, he muſt have ſurvived the ruin of his country by flight,—and worn out the remainder of his days in ſorrow, for the afflictions which were come upon it.—In ſome remote

corner

corner of the world, the good king would have heard the particulars of Judah's deſtruction.—He would have been told how the country, which had become dear to him by his paternal care, was now utterly laid waſte, and all his labour loſt;—how the fences which protected it were torn up, and the tender plant within, which he had ſo long ſheltered, was cruelly trodden under foot and devoured.—He would hear how Zerah, the Ethiopian, when he had overthrown the kingdom, thought himſelf bound in conſcience to overthrow the religion of it too, and eſtabliſh his own idolatrous one in its ſtead.—That, in purſuance of this, the holy religion, which Aſa had

reformed, had begun every where to be evil ſpoken of, and evil entreated:

That it was firſt baniſhed from the courts of the king's houſe, and the midſt of Jeruſalem,—and then fled for ſafety out of the way into the wilderneſs, and found no city to dwell in.—That Zerah had rebuilt the altars of the ſtrange Gods,—which Aſa's piety had broken down, and ſet up their images:

That his commandment was *urgent*, that all ſhould fall down and worſhip the idol he had made:—That, to compleat the tale of their miſeries, there was no proſpect of deliverance for any but the worſt of his ſubjects;—

jects;—those who, in his reign, had either leaned in their hearts towards these idolatries,—or whose principles and morals were such, that all religions suited them alike.—But that the honest and conscientious men of Judah, unable to behold such abominations, hung down every man his head like a bulrush, and put sack-cloth and ashes under him.

This picture of Judah's desolation might be some resemblance of what every of Asa's subjects would probably form to himself, the day he solemnized an exemption from it.—And the transport was natural,—To swear unto the Lord with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with

trumpets, and with cornets;—to rejoice at the oath which ſecured their future peace, and celebrate it with all external marks of gladneſs.

I have at length gone through the ſtory, which gave the occaſion to this religious act, which is recorded of the men of Judah in the text.

I believe there is not one, in ſacred Scripture, that bids fairer for a parallel to our own times, or that would admit of an application more ſuitable to the ſolemnity of this day.

But men are apt to be ſtruck with likeneſſes in ſo different a manner, from the different points of view in which

which they ſtand, as well as their diverſity of judgments, that it is generally a very unacceptable piece of officiouſneſs to fix any certain degrees of approach.

In this caſe, it ſeems ſufficient,—that thoſe who will diſcern the leaſt reſemblance, will diſcern enough to make them ſeriouſly comply with the devotion of the day;—and that thoſe who are affected with it in a ſtronger manner, and ſee the bleſſing of a proteſtant king in its faireſt light, with all the mercies which made way for it, will have ſtill more abundant reaſon to adore that good Being, which has all along protected it from the enemies which have riſen

up

up to do it violence;—but more eſpecially, in a late inſtance, by turning down the councils of the froward head-long,—and confounding the devices of the crafty,—ſo that their hands could not perform their enterprize.—Though this event, for many reaſons, will ever be told amongſt the felicities of theſe days;—yet for none more ſo,—than that it has given us a freſh mark of the continuation of God Almighty's favour to us:—a part of that great complicated bleſſing for which we are gathered together to return him thanks.

Let us, therefore, I beſeech you, endeavour to do it in the way which becomes

becomes wiſe men, and which is likely to be moſt acceptable ;—and that is,—to purſue the intentions of his providence, in giving us the occaſion—to become better men, and by a holy and and honeſt converſation, make ourſelves capable of enjoying what God has done for us.—In vain ſhall we celebrate the day with a loud voice, and with ſhouting, and with trumpets,—if we do not do it likewiſe with the internal and more certain marks of ſincerity,—a reformation and purity in our manners.—It is impoſſible a ſinful people can either be grateful to God, or properly loyal to their prince.—They cannot be grateful to the one, becauſe they live not under a ſenſe of

his

his mercies;—nor can they be loyal to the other, becauſe they daily offend in two of the tendereſt points which concern his welfare.—By firſt diſengaging the providence of God from taking our part, and then giving a heart to our adverſaries to lift their hands againſt us, who muſt know, that, if we forſake God, God will forſake us.—Their hopes, their deſigns, their wickedneſs againſt us, can only be built upon ours towards God.

For if they did not think we did evil, they durſt not hope we could periſh.

Ceaſe,

Ceaſe, therefore, to do evil;—for by following righteouſneſs, you will make the hearts of your enemies faint, they will turn their backs againſt your indignation,—and their weapons will fall from their hands.

Which may God grant, through the merits and mediation of his Son Jeſus Chriſt, to whom be all honour, &c. Amen.

SERMON XIV.

Follow Peace.

SERMON XIV.

HEBREWS xii. 14.

Follow peace with all men, and holineſs, without which no man ſhall ſee the Lord.

THE great end and deſign of our holy religion, next to the main view of reconciling us to God, was to reconcile us to each other;—by teaching us to ſubdue all thoſe unfriendly diſpoſitions in our nature, which unfit us for happineſs, and the ſocial enjoyment of the many bleſſings which God has enabled us to partake of in this world, miſerable

as it is, in many reſpects.—Could chriſtianity perſuade the profeſſors of it into this temper, and engage us, as its doctrine requires, to go on and exalt our natures, and, after the ſubduction of the moſt unfriendly of our paſſions, to plant, in the room of them, all thoſe (more natural to the ſoil) humane and benevolent inclinations, which, in imitation of the perfections of God, ſhould diſpoſe us to extend our love and goodneſs to our fellow creatures, according to the extent of our abilities;—in like manner, as the goodneſs of God extends itſelf over all the works of the creation:—could this be accompliſhed,—the world would be worth living in;—and might be conſidered

by us as a foretaſte of what we ſhould enter upon hereafter.

But ſuch a ſyſtem, you'll ſay, is merely viſionary;—and, conſidering man as a creature ſo beſet with ſelfiſhneſs, and other fretful paſſions that propenſity prompt him to, though it is to be wiſhed, it is not to be expected.—But our religion enjoins us to approach as near this fair pattern as we can; and, if it be poſſible, as much as lieth in us, to live peaceably with all men;—where the term,—If poſſible, I own, implies it may not only be difficult, but ſometimes impoſſible.—Thus the words of the text,—Follow peace,—may by ſome be thought to imply,—

that this deſireable bleſſing may ſometimes fly from us;—but ſtill we are required to follow it, and not ceaſe the purſuit, till we have uſed all warrantable methods to regain and ſettle it:—becauſe, adds the Apoſtle, without this frame of mind, no man ſhall ſee the Lord. For heaven is the region, as well as the recompenſe, of peace and benevolence; and ſuch as do not deſire and promote it here, are not qualified to enjoy it hereafter.

For this cauſe, in Scripture language,—peace is always ſpoke of as the great and comprehenſive bleſſing, which included in it all manner of happineſs;—and to wiſh peace

to any houſe or perſon, was, in one word, to wiſh them all that was good and deſireable.—Becauſe happineſs conſiſts in the inward complacency and ſatisfaction of the mind; and he who has ſuch a diſpoſition of ſoul, as to acquieſce and reſt contented with all the events of providence, can want nothing this world can give him.—Agreeable to this,—that ſhort, but moſt comprehenſive, hymn ſung by angels at our Saviour's birth, declaratory of the joy and happy ends of his incarnation,—after glory, in the firſt, to God,—the next note which ſounded was, Peace upon earth, and good-will to men.—It was a public wiſh of happineſs to mankind, and implied a ſolemn charge

to purſue the means that would ever lead to it.—And, in truth, the good tidings of the goſpel are nothing elſe but a grand meſſage and embaſſy of peace, to let us know, that our peace is made in heaven.

The prophet Iſaiah ſtiles our Saviour the Prince of Peace, long before he came into the world; —and to anſwer the title, he made choice to enter into it at a time when all nations were at peace with each other; which was in the days of Auguſtus,—when the temple of Janus was ſhut, and all the alarms of war were huſhed and ſilenced throughout the world.—At his birth, the hoſt of heaven deſcended, and proclaimed

proclaimed peace on earth, as the beſt ſtate and temper the world could be in to receive and welcome the Author of it.—His future converſation and doctrine, here upon earth, was every way agreeable with his peaceable entrance upon it;—the whole courſe of his life being but one great example of meekneſs, peace and patience.—At his death, it was the only legacy he bequeathed to his followers:—My peace I give unto you.—How far this has taken place, or been actually enjoyed,—is not my intention to enlarge upon, any further than juſt to obſerve how precious a bequeſt it was, from the many miſeries and calamities which have, and ever will, enſue from the

want of it.—If we look into the larger circle of the world,—what desolations, dissolutions of government, and invasions of property!—what rapine, plunder, and profanation of the most sacred rights of mankind, are the certain unhappy effects of it!—fields dyed in blood,—the cries of orphans and widows, bereft of their best help, too fully instruct us.—Look into private life,—behold how good and pleasant a thing it is to live together in unity;—it is like the precious ointment poured upon the head of Aaron, that run down to his skirts;—importing, that this balm of life is felt and enjoyed, not only by governors of kingdoms, but is derived down to the lowest

rank

rank of life, and tafted in the moft private receffes;—all, from the king to the peafant, are refrefhed with its bleffings, without which we can find no comfort in any thing this world can give.—It is this bleffing gives every one to fit quietly under his vine, and reap the fruits of his labour and induftry:—in one word,—which befpeaks who is the beftower of it.—It is that only which keeps up the harmony and order of the world, and preferves every thing in it from ruin and confufion.

There is one faying of our Saviour's, recorded by St. Matthew, which, at firft fight, feems to carry fome oppofition to this doctrine;—I came

not

not to ſend peace on earth, but a ſword.—But this reaches no farther than the bare words, not entering ſo deep as to affect the ſenſe, or imply any contradiction;—intimating only, —that the preaching of the goſpel will prove in the event, through ſundry unhappy cauſes, ſuch as prejudices, the corruption of mens hearts, a paſſion for idolatry and ſuperſtition, the occaſion of much variance and diviſion even amongſt neareſt relations;—yea, and oft-times of bodily death, and many calamities and perſecutions, which actually enſued upon the firſt preachers and followers of it.—Or the words may be underſtood,—as a beautiful deſcription of the inward conteſts and

oppoſition

oppoſition which chriſtianity would occaſion in the heart of man,—from its oppoſitions to the violent paſſions of our nature,—which would engage us in a perpetual warfare.—This was not only a ſword,—a diviſion betwixt neareſt kindred;—but it was dividing a man againſt himſelf;—ſetting up an oppoſition to an intereſt long eſtabliſhed,—ſtrong by nature,—more ſo by uncontrouled cuſtom.—This is verified every hour in the ſtruggles for maſtery betwixt the principles of the world, the fleſh and the devil;—which ſet up ſo ſtrong a confederacy, that there is need of all the helps which reaſon and chriſtianity can offer to bring them down.

But

But this contention is not that againſt which ſuch exhortations in the goſpel are levelled;—for the Scripture muſt be interpreted by Scripture, and be made conſiſtent with itſelf.—And we find the diſtinguiſhing marks and doctrines, by which all men were to know who were Chriſt's diſciples,—was that benevolent frame of mind towards all our fellow-creatures, which, by itſelf, is a ſufficient ſecurity for the particular ſocial duty here recommended:—ſo far from meditations of war;—for love thinketh no evil to his neighbour;—ſo far from doing any, it harbours not the leaſt thought of it; but, on the contrary, rejoices with them that

rejoice,

rejoice, and weeps with them that weep.

This debt chriſtianity has highly exalted; though it is a debt that we were ſenſible of before, and acknowledged to be owed to human nature, —which, as we all partake of,—ſo ought we to pay it in a ſuitable reſpect.—For, as men, we are allied together in the natural bond of brotherhood, and are members one of another.—We have the ſame Father in heaven, who made us and takes care of us all.—Our earthly extraction too is nearer alike, than the pride of the world cares to be reminded of: —for Adam was the father of us all, and Eve the mother of all living.—

The

The prince and the beggar ſprung from the ſame ſtocks, as wide aſunder as the branches are.—So that, in this view, the moſt upſtart family may vie antiquity, and compare families with the greateſt monarchs.—We are all formed too of the ſame mould, and muſt equally return to the ſame duſt.—So that, to love our neighbour, and live quietly with him, is to live at peace with ourſelves.—He is but ſelf-multiplied, and enlarged into another form; and to be unkind or cruel to him, is but, as Solomon obſerves of the unmerciful, to be cruel to our own fleſh.—As a farther motive and engagement to this peaceable commerce with each other, —God has placed us all in one another's

ther's power by turns,—in a condition of mutual need and dependence. —There is no man ſo liberally ſtocked with earthly bleſſings, as to be able to live without another man's aid.—God, in his wiſdom, has ſo diſpenſed his gifts, in various kinds and meaſures, as to render us helpful, and make a ſocial intercourſe indiſpenſable. —The prince depends on the labour and induſtry of the peaſant;—and the wealth and honour of the greateſt perſons are fed and ſupported from the ſame ſource.

This the Apoſtle hath elegantly ſet forth to us by the familiar reſemblance of the natural body;—wherein there are many members, and all have

have not the ſame office; but the different faculties and operations of each, are for the uſe and benefit of the whole.—The eye ſees not for itſelf, but for the other members;—and is ſet up as a light to direct them:—the feet ſerve to ſupport and carry about the other parts; and the hands act and labour for them all. It is the ſame in ſtates and kingdoms, wherein there are many members, yet each in their ſeveral functions and employments; which, if peaceably diſcharged, are for the harmony of the whole ſtate.—Some are eyes and guides to the blind;—others, feet to the lame and impotent;—ſome to ſupply the place of the head, to aſſiſt with council and direction;

direction;—others the hand, to be useful by their labour and industry. —To make this link of dependance still stronger,—there is a great portion of mutability in all human affairs, to make benignity of temper not only our duty, but our interest and wisdom.—There is no condition in life so fixed and permanent as to be out of danger, or the reach of change:—and we all may depend upon it, that we shall take our turns of wanting and desiring.—By how many unforeseen causes may riches take wing!—The crowns of princes may be shaken, and the greatest that ever awed the world have experienced what the turn of the wheel can do.—That which hath happened to one

man, may befal another; and, therefore, that excellent rule of our Saviour's ought to govern us in all our actions,—Whatſoever ye would that men ſhould do to you, do you alſo to them likewiſe.—Time and chance happens to all;—and the moſt affluent may be ſtript of all, and find his worldly comforts like ſo many withered leaves dropping from him.—Sure nothing can better become us, than hearts ſo full of our dependance as to overflow with mercy, and pity, and good-will towards mankind.—To exhort us to this, is, in other words, to exhort us to follow peace with all men:—the firſt is the root,—this the fair fruit and happy product of it.

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Therefore, my beloved brethren, in the bowels of mercy, let us put away anger, and malice, and evil ſpeaking;—let us fly all clamour and ſtrife;—let us be kindly affected one to another,—following peace with all men, and holineſs, that we may ſee the Lord.

Which God of his infinite mercy grant, through the merits of his Son, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

SERMON XV.

Search the Scriptures.

SERMON XV.

St. John v. 39.

Search the Scriptures.

THAT things of the moſt ineſtimable uſe and value, for want of due application and ſtudy laid out upon them, may be paſſed by unregarded, nay, even looked upon with coldneſs and averſion, is a truth too evident to need enlarging on.—Nor is it leſs certain that prejudices, contracted by an unhappy education, will ſometimes ſo ſtop up all the paſſages to our hearts, that the moſt amiable objects can never find acceſs,

or bribe us by all their charms into juſtice and impartiality.—It would be paſſing the tendereſt reflection upon the age we live in, to ſay it is owing to one of theſe, that thoſe ineſtimable books, the Sacred Writings, meet ſo often with a diſreliſh (what makes the accuſation almoſt incredible) amongſt perſons who ſet up for men of taſte and delicacy; who pretend to be charmed with what they call beauties and nature in claſſical authors, and in other things would bluſh not to be reckoned amongſt ſound and impartial critics.—But ſo far has negligence and prepoſſeſſion ſtopped their ears againſt the voice of the charmer, that they turn over thoſe awful ſacred pages with inat-

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tention and an unbecoming indifference, unaffected amidst ten thousand sublime and noble passages, which, by the rules of sound criticism and reason, may be demonstrated to be truly eloquent and beautiful.

Indeed the opinion of false Greek and barbarous language, in the Old and New Testament, had, for some ages, been a stumbling-block to another set of men, who were professedly great readers and admirers of the ancients.—The sacred writings were, by these persons, rudely attacked on all sides: expressions which came not within the compass of their learning, were branded with barbarism and solecism; words which scarce signified

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any thing but the ignorance of thoſe who laid ſuch groundleſs charges on them.—Preſumptuous man!—Shall he, who is but duſt and aſhes, dare to find fault with the words of that Being, who firſt inſpired man with language, and taught his mouth to utter; who opened the lips of the dumb, and made the infant eloquent? —Theſe perſons, as they attacked the inſpired writings on the foot of critics and men of learning, accordingly have been treated as ſuch: and tho' a ſhorter way might have been gone to work, which was,—that as their accuſations reached no farther than the bare words and phraſeology of the Bible, they, in no wiſe, affected the ſentiments and ſoundneſs of the

doctrines, which were conveyed with as much clearness and perspicuity to mankind, as they could have been, had the language been written with the utmost elegance and grammatical nicety. And even though the charge of barbarous idioms could be made out;—yet the cause of christianity was thereby no ways affected, but remained just in the state they found it.—Yet, unhappily for them, they even miscarried in their favourite point;—there being few, if any at all, of the Scripture expressions, which may not be justified by numbers of parallel modes of speaking, made use of amongst the purest and most authentic Greek authors.—This, an able hand amongst us, not many years ago,

ago, has ſufficiently made out, and thereby baffled and expoſed all their preſumptuous and ridiculous aſſertions.—Theſe perſons, bad and deceitful as they were, are yet far outgone by a third ſet of men.—I wiſh we had not too many inſtances of them, who, like foul ſtomachs, that turn the ſweeteſt food to bitterneſs, upon all occaſions endeavour to make merry with ſacred Scripture, and turn every thing they meet with therein into banter and burleſque.—But as men of this ſtamp, by their exceſs of wickedneſs and weakneſs together, have entirely diſarmed us from arguing with them as reaſonable creatures, it is not only making them too conſiderable, but likewiſe

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to no purpoſe to ſpend much time about them; they being, in the language of the Apoſtle, creatures of no underſtanding, ſpeaking evil of things they know not, and ſhall utterly periſh in their own corruption.—Of theſe two laſt, the one is diſqualified for being argued with, and the other has no occaſion for it; they being already ſilenced.—Yet thoſe that were firſt mentioned, may not altogether be thought unworthy of our endeavours;—being perſons, as was hinted above, who, though their taſtes are ſo far vitiated that they cannot reliſh the ſacred Scriptures, yet have imaginations capable of being raiſed by the fancied excellencies of claſſical writers.—And indeed

deed theſe perſons claim from us ſome degree of pity, when, through the unſkilfulneſs of preceptors in their youth, or ſome other unhappy circumſtance in their education, they have been taught to form falſe and wretched notions of good writing.—When this is the caſe, it is no wonder they ſhould be more touched and affected with the dreſſed-up trifles and empty conceits of poets and rhetoricians, than they are with that true ſublimity and grandeur of ſentiment which glow throughout every page of the inſpired writings.—By way of information, ſuch ſhould be inſtructed:—

There are two ſorts of eloquence, the one indeed ſcarce deſerves the name of

of it, which consists chiefly in laboured and polished periods, an over-curious and artificial arrangement of figures, tinsel'd over with a gaudy embellishment of words, which glitter, but convey little or no light to the understanding. This kind of writing is for the most part much affected and admired by people of weak judgment and vitious taste, but is a piece of affectation and formality the sacred writers are utter strangers to.—It is a vain and boyish eloquence; and as it has always been esteemed below the great geniuses of all ages, so much more so, with respect to those writers who were acted by the spirit of infinite wisdom, and therefore wrote with that force and majesty with which

which never man writ.—The other ſort of eloquence is quite the reverſe to this, and which may be ſaid to be the true characteriſtic of the holy Scriptures; where the excellence does not ariſe from a laboured and far-fetched elocution, but from a ſurpriſing mixture of ſimplicity and majeſty, which is a double character, ſo difficult to be united, that it is ſeldom to be met with in compoſitions merely human.—We ſee nothing in holy writ of affectation and ſuperfluous ornament.—As the infinite wiſe Being has condeſcended to ſtoop to our language, thereby to convey to us the light of revelation, ſo has he been pleaſed graciouſly to accommodate it to us with the moſt

natural

natural and graceful plainneſs it would admit of.—Now, it is obſervable that the moſt excellent prophane authors, whether Greek or Latin, loſe moſt of their graces whenever we find them literally tranſlated.—Homer's famed repreſentation of Jupiter, in his firſt book;—his cried-up deſcription of a tempeſt;—his relation of Neptune's ſhaking the earth, and opening it to it's center;—his deſcription of Pallas's horſes; with numbers of other long-ſince-admired paſſages,—flag, and almoſt vaniſh away, in the vulgar Latin tranſlation.

Let any one but take the pains to read the common Latin interpre-

tation of Virgil, Theocritus, or even of Pindar, and one may venture to affirm he will be able to trace out but few remains of the graces which charmed him ſo much in the original.—The natural concluſion from hence is, that in the claſſical authors, the expreſſion, the ſweetneſs of the numbers, occaſioned by a muſical placing of words, conſtitute a great part of their beauties;—whereas, in the Sacred Writings, they conſiſt more in the greatneſs of the things themſelves, than in the words and expreſſions.—The ideas and conceptions are ſo great and lofty in their own nature, that they neceſſarily appear magnificent in the moſt artleſs dreſs.—Look but into the Bible, and

we ſee them ſhine through the moſt ſimple and literal tranſlations.—That glorious deſcription which Moſes gives of the creation of the heavens and the earth, which Longinus, the beſt critic the eaſtern world ever produced, was ſo juſtly taken with, has not loſt the leaſt whit of its intrinſic worth; and though it has undergone ſo many tranſlations, yet triumphs over all, and breaks forth with as much force and vehemence as in the original.—Of this ſtamp are numbers of paſſages throughout the Scriptures;—inſtance, that celebrated deſcription of a tempeſt in the hundred and ſeventh pſalm; thoſe beautiful reflections of holy Job, upon the ſhortneſs of life, and inſta-

bility of human affairs, ſo judiciouſly appointed by our church in her office for the burial of the dead;—that lively deſcription of a horſe of war, in the thirty-ninth chapter of Job, in which, from the 19th to the 26th verſe, there is ſcarce a word which does not merit a particular explication to diſplay the beauties of.—I might add to theſe, thoſe tender and pathetic expoſtulations with the children of Iſrael, which run throughout all the prophets, which the moſt uncritical reader can ſcarce help being affected with.

And now, O inhabitants of Jeruſalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard.—

yard.—What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done?—wherefore, when I expected that it ſhould bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?—and yet, ye ſay, the way of the Lord is unequal.—Hear now, O houſe of Iſrael,—is not my way equal?—are not your ways unequal?—have I any pleaſure at all that the wicked ſhould die, and not that he ſhould return from his ways and live?—I have nouriſhed and brought up children, and they have rebelled againſt me.—The ox knows his owner, and the aſs his maſter's crib;—but Iſrael doth not know, my people doth not conſider.—There is nothing in all the eloquence of the heathen world

comparable to the vivacity and tenderneſs of theſe reproaches;—there is ſomething in them ſo thoroughly affecting, and ſo noble and ſublime withal, that one might challenge the writings of the moſt celebrated orators of antiquity to produce any thing like them.—Theſe obſervations upon the ſuperiority of the inſpired pen-men to heathen ones, in that which regards the compoſition more conſpicuouſly, hold good when they are conſidered upon the foot of hiſtorians.—Not to mention that profane hiſtories give an account only of human atchievements and temporal events, which, for the moſt part, are ſo full of uncertainty and contradictions, that we are at a loſs

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where to ſeek for truth;—but that the ſacred hiſtory is the hiſtory of God himſelf,—the hiſtory of his omnipotence and infinite wiſdom, his univerſal providence, his juſtice and mercy, and all his other attributes, diſplayed under a thouſand different forms, by a ſeries of the moſt various and wonderful events that ever happened to any nation, or language:—not to inſiſt upon this viſible ſuperiority in ſacred hiſtory,—there is yet another undoubted excellence the prophane hiſtorians ſeldom arrive at, which is almoſt the diſtinguiſhing character of the ſacred ones; namely, that unaffected, artleſs manner of relating hiſtorical facts,—which is ſo entirely of a piece with every other

part of the holy writings.—What I mean will be beſt made out by a few inſtances.—In the hiſtory of Joſeph, (which certainly is told with the greateſt variety of beautiful and affecting circumſtances) when Joſeph makes himſelf known, and weeps aloud upon the neck of his dear brother Benjamin, that all the houſe of Pharoah heard him;—at that inſtant, none of his brethren are introduced as uttering aught, either to expreſs their preſent joy, or palliate their former injuries to him.—On all ſides, there immediately enſues a deep and ſolemn ſilence;—a ſilence infinitely more eloquent and expreſſive, than any thing elſe could have been, ſubſtituted in its place.—Had

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Thucydides, Herodotus, Livy, or any of the celebrated claſſical hiſtorians, been employed in writing this hiſtory, when they came to this point, they would, doubtleſs, have exhauſted all their fund of eloquence in furniſhing Joſeph's brethren with laboured and ſtudied harangues; which, however fine they might have been in themſelves, would nevertheleſs have been unnatural, and altogether improper on the occaſion.—For when ſuch a variety of contrary paſſions broke in upon them,—what tongue was able to utter their hurried and diſtracted thoughts?—When remorſe, ſurprize, ſhame, joy and gratitude ſtruggled together in their boſoms, how uneloquently would their lips have performed

formed their duty?—how unfaithfully their tongues have ſpoken the language of their hearts?—In this caſe, ſilence was truly eloquent and natural, and tears expreſſed what oratory was incapable of.

If ever theſe perſons I have been addreſſing myſelf to, can be perſuaded to follow the advice in the text, of ſearching the Scriptures,—the work of their ſalvation will be begun upon its true foundation.—For, firſt, they will inſenſibly be led to admire the beautiful propriety of their language:—when a favourable opinion is conceived of this, next, they will more cloſely attend to the goodneſs of the moral, and the purity and ſoundneſs of

of the doctrines.—The pleasure of reading will still be increased, by that near concern which they will find themselves to have in those many important truths, which they will see so clearly demonstrated in the Bible, that grand charter of our eternal happiness.—It is the fate of mankind, too often, to seem insensible of what they may enjoy at the easiest rate.—What might not our neighbouring Romish countries, who groan under the yoke of popish impositions and priest-craft, what might not those poor, misguided creatures give, for the happiness which we know not how to value,—of being born in a country where a church is established by our laws, and encouragad by our prin-

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ces; which not only allows the free ſtudy of the Scriptures, but even exhorts and invites us to it;—a church that is a ſtranger to the tricks and artifice of having the Bible in an unknown tongue, to give the greater latitude to the deſigns of the clergy in impoſing their own trumpery, and foiſting in whatever may beſt ſerve to aggrandiſe themſelves, or enſlave the wretches committed to their truſt. —In ſhort, our religion was not given us to raiſe our imaginations with ornaments of words, or ſtrokes of eloquence; but to purify our hearts, and lead us into the paths of righteouſneſs.—However, not to defend ourſelves,—when the attack is principally level'd at this point,—might give

give occaſion to our adverſaries to triumph, and charge us either with negligence or inability.—It is well known how willing the enemies of our religion are to ſeek occaſions againſt us;—how ready to magnify every mote in our eyes to the bigneſs of a beam;—how eager, upon the leaſt default, to inſult and cry out,—There, there! ſo would we have it:—not, perhaps, that we are ſo much the ſubject of malice and averſion, but that the licentious age ſeems bent upon bringing chriſtianity into diſcredit at any rate; and, rather than miſs the aim, would ſtrike through the ſides of thoſe that are ſent to teach it.—Thank God, the truth of our holy religion is eſtabliſhed with ſuch

ſtrong evidence, that it reſts upon a foundation never to be overthrown, either by the open aſſaults or cunning devices of wicked and deſigning men.—The part we have to act is to be ſteady, ſober and vigilant; to be ready to every good work; to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all long-ſuffering; to give occaſion of offence to no man; that, with well-doing, we may put to ſilence the ignorance of fooliſh men.

I ſhall cloſe all with that excellent collect of our church:—

Bleſſed Lord, who has cauſed all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning,—grant that we may in ſuch-

wiſe

wiſe hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digeſt them, that, by patience and comfort of thy holy word, we may embrace, and ever hold faſt, the bleſſed hope of everlaſting life, which thou haſt given us in thy Son, our Saviour, Jeſus Chriſt.

Now to God the Father, &c.

SERMON XVI.

SERMON XVI.

PSALM XCV. 6, 7.

O come let us worſhip and fall down before him :—for he is the Lord our God.——

IN this pſalm we find holy David taken up with the pious contemplation of God's infinite power, majeſty and greatneſs :—he conſiders him as the ſovereign Lord of the whole earth, the maker and ſupporter of all things ;—that by him the heavens were created, and all the hoſt of them ; that the earth was wiſely faſhioned by his hands ;—he

had founded it upon the ſeas, and eſtabliſhed it upon the floods:—that we likewiſe, the people of his paſture, were raiſed up by the ſame creating hand, from nothing, to the dignity of rational creatures, made, with reſpect to our reaſon and underſtanding, after his own moſt perfect image.

It was natural to imagine that ſuch a contemplation would light up a flame of devotion in any grateful man's breaſt; and accordingly we find it break forth, in the words of the text, in a kind of religious rapture:—

O come let us worſhip and fall down before him:—for he is the Lord our God.

Sure

Sure never exhortation to prayer and worſhip can be better enforced than upon this principle,—that God is the cauſe and creator of all things;—that each individual being is upheld in the ſtation it was firſt placed, by the ſame hand which firſt formed it;—that all the bleſſings and advantages, which are neceſſary to the happineſs and welfare of beings on earth, are only to be derived from the ſame fountain;—and that the only way to do it, is to ſecure an intereſt in his favour, by a grateful expreſſion of our ſenſe for the benefits we have received, and a humble dependance upon him for thoſe we expect and ſtand in want of.—That we have in heaven, ſays the Pſalmiſt,

but thee, O God, to look unto or depend on, to whom ſhall we pour out our complaints, and ſpeak of all our wants and neceſſities, but to thy goodneſs, which is ever willing to confer upon us whatever becomes us to aſk, and thee to grant;—becauſe thou haſt promiſed to be nigh unto all that call upon thee,—yea, unto all ſuch as call upon thee faithfully;—that thou wilt fulfil the deſire of them that fear thee, that thou wilt alſo hear their cry, and help them.

Of all duties, prayer certainly is the ſweeteſt and moſt eaſy.—There are ſome duties which may ſeem to occaſion a troubleſome oppoſition to the natural workings of fleſh and blood;—

blood;—ſuch as the forgiveneſs of injuries, and the love of our enemies;—others, which will force us unavoidably into a perpetual ſtruggle with our paſſions,—which war againſt the ſoul;—ſuch as chaſtity,—temperance,—humility.—There are other virtues, which ſeem to bid us forget our preſent intereſt for a while,—ſuch as charity and generoſity;—others, that teach us to forget it at all times, and wholly to fix our affections on things above, and in no circumſtance to act like men that look for a continuing city here, but upon one to come, whoſe builder and maker is God.—But this duty of prayer and thankſgiving to God—has no ſuch oppoſitions to encounter;

—it takes no bullock out of thy field, —no horſe out of thy ſtable,—nor he-goat out of thy fold;—it coſteth no wearineſs of bones, no untimely watchings;—it requireth no ſtrength of parts, or painful ſtudy, but juſt to know and have a true ſenſe of our dependance, and of the mercies by which we are upheld:—and with this, in every place and poſture of body, a good man may lift up his ſoul unto the Lord his God.

Indeed, as to the frequency of putting this duty formally in practice, as the precept muſt neceſſarily have varied according to the different ſtations in which God has placed us;—ſo he has been pleaſed to determine nothing

nothing preciſely concerning it:—for, perhaps, it would be unreaſonable to expect that the day-labourer, or he that ſupports a numerous family by the ſweat of his brow, ſhould ſpend as much of his time in devotion, as the man of leiſure and unbounded wealth.—This, however, in the general, may hold good, that we are bound to pay this tribute to God, as often as his providence has put an opportunity into our hands of ſo doing;—provided that no plea, drawn from the neceſſary attention to the affairs of the world, which many men's ſituations oblige them to, may be ſuppoſed to extend to an exemption from paying their morning and evening ſacrifice to God.—For it

ſeems

ſeems to be the leaſt that can be done to anſwer the demand of our duty in this point,—ſucceſſively to open and ſhut up the day in prayer and thankſgiving;—ſince there is not a morning thou riſeſt, or a night thou layeſt down, but thou art indebted for it to the watchful providence of Almighty God.—David and Daniel, whoſe names are recorded in Scripture for future example:—the firſt, though a mighty king, embaraſſed with wars abroad, and unnatural diſturbances at home; a ſituation, one would think, would allow little time for any thing but his own and his kingdom's ſafety;—yet found he leiſure to pray *ſeven times* a day:—the latter, the counſellor and firſt miniſter of ſtate to the great

great Nebuchadnezzar; and though perpetually fatigued with the affairs of a mighty kingdom, and the government of the whole province of Babylon, which was committed to his adminiſtration;—though near the perſon of an idolatrous king, and amidſt the temptations of a luxurious court,—yet never neglected he his God; but, as we read,—he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before him.

A frequent correſpondence with heaven by prayer and devotion, is the greateſt nouriſhment and ſupport of ſpiritual life:—it keeps the ſenſe of a God warm and lively within us,—

which

which ſecures our diſpoſition, and ſets ſuch guards over us, that hardly will a temptation prevail againſt us. —Who can entertain a baſe or an impure thought, or think of executing it, who is inceſſantly converſing with his God?—or not deſpiſe every temptation this lower world can offer him, when, by his conſtant addreſſes before the throne of God's majeſty, he brings the glorious proſpect of heaven perpetually before his eyes?

I cannot help here taking notice of the doctrine of thoſe who would reſolve all devotion into the inner man, and think that there is nothing more requiſite to expreſs our reverence to God, but purity and integrity

grity of heart,—unaccompanied either with words or actions.—To this opinion it may be juſtly anſwered,—that, in the preſent ſtate we are in, we find ſuch a ſtrong ſympathy and union between our ſouls and bodies, that the one cannot be touched or ſenſibly affected, without producing ſome correſponding emotion in the other.—Nature has aſſigned a different look, tone of voice, and geſture, peculiar to every paſſion and affection we are ſubject to; and, therefore, to argue againſt this ſtrict correſpondence which is held between our ſouls and bodies,—is diſputing againſt the frame and mechaniſm of human nature.—We are not angels, but men cloathed with bodies, and, in ſome

meaſure,

meaſure, governed by our imaginations, that we have need of all theſe external helps which nature has made the interpreters of our thoughts.—And, no doubt, though a virtuous and a good life are more acceptable in the ſight of God, than either prayer or thankſgiving;—for, behold, to obey is better than ſacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams;—nevertheleſs, as the one ought to be done, ſo the other ought not, by any means, to be left undone.—As God is to be obeyed,—ſo he is to be worſhipped alſo.—For although inward holineſs and integrity of heart is the ultimate end of the divine diſpenſations;—yet external religion is a certain means of promoting it.—

Each

Each of them has its juſt bounds; —and therefore, as we would not be ſo carnal as merely to reſt contented with the one,—ſo neither can we pretend to be ſo ſpiritual as to neglect the other.

And though God is all-wiſe, and therefore underſtands our thoughts afar off,—and knows the exact degrees of our love and reverence to him, though we ſhould with-hold thoſe outward marks of it;—yet God himſelf has been graciouſly pleaſed to command us to pray to him;—that we might beg the aſſiſtance of his grace to work with us againſt our own infirmities;—that we might acknowledge him to be, what he is, the

ſupreme Lord of the whole world;—that we might teſtify the ſenſe we have of all his mercies and loving kindneſs to us,—and confeſs that he has the propriety of every thing we enjoy,—that the earth is the Lord's, and the fulneſs thereof.

Thus much of this duty of prayer in general.—From every individual it may be reaſonably expected, from a bare reflection upon his own ſtation, his perſonal wants, and the daily bleſſings which he has received in particular;—but, for thoſe bleſſings beſtowed upon the whole ſpecies in common,—reaſon ſeems further to require, that a joint return ſhould be made by as many of the ſpecies as

can conveniently aſſemble together for this religious purpoſe.—From hence ariſes, likewiſe, the reaſonableneſs of publick worſhip, and ſacred places ſet apart for that purpoſe; without which, it would be very difficult to preſerve that ſenſe of God and religion upon the minds of men, which is ſo neceſſary to their weil-being, conſidered only as a civil ſociety, and with regard to the purpoſes of this life, and the influence which a juſt ſenſe of it muſt have upon their actions.—Beſides, men, who are united in ſocieties, can have no other cement to unite them likewiſe in religious ties, as well as in manners of worſhip and points of faith, but the

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inſtitution of ſolemn times and public places deſtined for that uſe.

And it is not to be queſtioned, that if the time, as well as place, for ſerving God, were once conſidered as indifferent, and left ſo far to every man's choice as to have no calls to public prayer, however a ſenſe of religion might be preſerved a while by a few ſpeculative men, yet that the bulk of mankind would loſe all knowledge of it, and in time live without God in the world.—Not that private prayer is the leſs our duty, the contrary of which is proved above; and our Saviour ſays, that when we pray to God in ſecret, we ſhall be rewarded openly;—but that prayers which are

publicly

publicly offered up in God's houſe, tend more to the glory of God, and the benefit of ourſelves:—for this reaſon, that they are preſumed to be performed with greater attention and ſeriouſneſs, and therefore moſt likely to be heard with a more favourable acceptance.—And for this, one might appeal to every man's breaſt, whether he has not been affected with the moſt elevated pitch of devotion, when he gave thanks in the great congregation of the ſaints, and praiſed God amongſt much people?—Of this united worſhip there is a glorious deſcription which St. John gives us, in the Revelations, where he ſuppoſes the whole univerſe joining together, in their ſeveral capacities, to

give glory in this manner to their common Lord.--Every creature which was in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and ſuch as were in the ſeas, and all that were in them, heard I, crying,—Bleſſing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that ſitteth upon the throne.

But here it may be aſked, that if public worſhip tends ſo much to promote the glory of God,—and is what is ſo indiſpenſably the duty and benefit of every chriſtian ſtate,—how came it to paſs, that our bleſſed Saviour left no command to his followers, throughout the goſpel, to ſet up public places of worſhip, and keep them ſacred for that purpoſe?—It

may be anſwered,—that the neceſſity of ſetting apart places for divine worſhip, and the holineſs of them when thus ſet apart, ſeemed already to have been ſo well eſtabliſhed by former revelation, as not to need any expreſs precept upon that ſubject:—for tho' the particular appointment of the temple, and the confinement of worſhip to that place alone, were only temporary parts of the Jewiſh covenant; yet the neceſſity and duty of having places ſomewhere ſolemnly dedicated to God carried a moral reaſon with it, and therefore was not aboliſhed with the ceremonial part of the law.—Our Saviour came not to deſtroy, but to fulfil the law;—and therefore the moral precepts of it,

which promoted a due regard to the divine Majesty, remained in as full force as ever.—And accordingly we find it attested, both by christian and heathen writers, that so soon as the second century, when the number of believers was much increased, and the circumstances of rich converts enabled them to do it,—that they began to erect edifices for divine worship;—and though, under the frowns and oppression of the civil power, they every Sabbath assembled themselves therein, that with one heart and one lip they might declare whose they were, and whom they served, and, as the servants of one Lord, might offer up their joint prayers and petitions.

I wish

I wiſh there was no reaſon to lament an abatement of this religious zeal amongſt chriſtians of later days. —Though the piety of our forefathers ſeems, in a great meaſure, to have deprived us of the merit of building churches for the ſervice of God, there can be no ſuch plea for not frequenting them in a regular and ſolemn manner.—How often do people abſent themſelves (when in the utmoſt diſtreſs how to diſpoſe of themſelves) from church, even upon thoſe days which are ſet apart for nothing elſe but the worſhip of God;—when, to trifle that day away, or apply any portion of it to ſecular concerns, is a ſacrilege almoſt in the literal ſenſe of the word.

From this duty of public prayer arifes another, which I cannot help fpeaking of, it being fo dependant upon it;—I mean, a ferious, devout and refpectful behaviour, when we are performing this folemn duty in the houfe of God.—This is furely the leaft that can be neceffary in the immediate prefence of the Sovereign of the world, upon whofe acceptance of our addreffes all our prefent and future happinefs depends.

External behaviour is the refult of inward reverence, and is therefore part of our duty to God, whom we are to worfhip in body as well as fpirit.

And

And as no one ſhould be wanting in outward reſpect and decorum before an earthly prince or ſuperior, much leſs ſhould we be ſo before him, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain.

Notwithſtanding the obvioufneſs of this branch of duty,—it ſeems often to be little underſtood; and whoever will take a general ſurvey of church behaviour, will often meet with ſcenes of ſad variety.—What a vein of indolence and indevotion ſometimes ſeems to run throughout whole congregations!—what ill-timed pains do ſome take in putting on an air of gayety and indifference in the moſt intereſting parts of this duty,—

duty,—even when they are making confeſſion of their ſins, as if they were aſhamed to be thought ſerious with their God?—Surely, to addreſs ourſelves to his infinite Majeſty after a negligent and diſpaſſionate manner, beſides the immediate indignity offered, it is a ſad ſign we little conſider the bleſſings we aſk for, and far leſs deſerve them.—Beſides, what is a prayer, unleſs our heart and affections go along with it?—It is not ſo much as the ſhadow of devotion; and little better than the papiſts telling their beads,—or honouring God with their lips, when their hearts are far from him.—The conſideration that a perſon is come to proſtrate himſelf before the throne of high heaven,

heaven, and in that place which is particularly diſtinguiſhed by his preſence, is ſufficient inducement for any one to watch over his imagination, and guard againſt the leaſt appearance of levity and diſreſpect.

An inward ſincerity will of courſe influence the outward deportment; but where the one is wanting, there is great reaſon to ſuſpect the abſence of the other.—I own it is poſſible, and often happens, that this external garb of religion may be worn, when there is little within of a piece with it;—but I believe the converſe of the propoſition can never happen to be true, that a truly religious frame of mind ſhould exiſt without ſome

outward

outward mark of it.—The mind will ſhine through the veil of fleſh which covers it, and naturally expreſs its religious diſpoſitions; and, if it poſſeſſes the power of godlineſs,—will have the external form of it too.

May God grant us to be defective in neither,—but that we may ſo praiſe and magnify God on earth,—that when he cometh, at the laſt day, with ten thouſand of his ſaints in heaven, to judge the world, we may be partakers of their eternal inheritance. Amen.

SERMON XVII.

The Ways of Providence juſtified to Man.

SERMON XVII.

PSALM lxxiii. 12, 13.

Behold, these are the ungodly who prosper in the world, they increase in riches.

Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.

THIS complaint of the Psalmist's, concerning the promiscuous distribution of God's blessings to the just and the unjust,—that the sun should shine without distinction upon the good and the bad,—and rains descend upon the righteous and un-

righteous man,—is a ſubject that has afforded much matter for enquiry, and at one time or other has raiſed doubts to diſhearten and perplex the minds of men.—If the ſovereign Lord of all the earth does look on, whence ſo much diſorder in the face of things?—why is it permitted, that wiſe and good men ſhould be left often a prey to ſo many miſeries and diſtreſſes of life,—whilſt the guilty and fooliſh triumph in their offences, and even the tabernacles of robbers proſper?

To this it is anſwered,—that therefore there is a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments to take place after this life,—wherein all theſe inequalities

ties ſhall be made even, where the circumſtances of every man's caſe ſhall be conſidered, and where God ſhall be juſtified in all his ways, and every mouth ſhall be ſtopt.

If this was not ſo,—if the ungodly were to proſper in the world, and have riches in poſſeſſion,—and no diſtinction to be made hereafter,—to what purpoſe would it have been to have maintained our integrity?—Lo! then, indeed, ſhould I have cleanſed my heart in vain, and waſhed my hands in innocency.

It is farther ſaid, and what is a more direct anſwer to the point,—that when God created man, that he

might make him capable of receiving happineſs at his hands hereafter, —he endowed him with liberty and freedom of choice, without which he could not have been a creature accountable for his actions;—that it is merely from the bad uſe he makes of theſe gifts,—that all thoſe inſtances of irregularity do reſult, upon which the complaint is here grounded,—which could no ways be prevented, but by the total ſubverſion of human liberty;—that ſhould God make bare his arm, and interpoſe on every injuſtice that is committed,—mankind might be ſaid to do what was right,—but, at the ſame time, to loſe the merit of it, ſince they would act under force and neceſſity,

and

and not from the determinations of their own mind;—that, upon this ſuppoſition,—a man could with no more reaſon expect to go to heaven for acts of temperance, juſtice and humanity, than for the ordinary impulſes of hunger and thirſt, which nature directed;—that God has dealt with man upon better terms;—he has firſt endowed him with liberty and free-will;—he has ſet life and death, good and evil, before him;—that he has given him faculties to find out what will be the conſequences of either way of acting, and then left him to take which courſe his reaſon and direction ſhall point out.

I ſhall deſiſt from enlarging any further upon either of the foregoing arguments in vindication of God's providence, which are urged ſo often with ſo much force and conviction, as to leave no room for a reaſonable reply;—ſince the miſeries which befal the good, and the ſeeming happineſs of the wicked, could not be otherwiſe in ſuch a free ſtate and condition as this in which we are placed.

In all charges of this kind, we generally take two things for granted;—1ſt, That in the inſtances we give, we know certainly the good from the bad;—and, 2dly, The reſpective ſtate

ſtate of their enjoyments or ſufferings.

I ſhall, therefore, in the remaining part of my diſcourſe, take up your time with a ſhort enquiry into the difficulties of coming not only at the true characters of men,—but likewiſe of knowing either the degrees of their real happineſs or miſery in this life.

The firſt of theſe will teach us candour in our judgments of others; —the ſecond, to which I ſhall confine myſelf, will teach us humility in our reaſonings upon the ways of God.

For though the miſeries of the good, and the proſperity of the wicked, are not in general to be denied;—yet I ſhall endeavour to ſhew, that the particular inſtances we are apt to produce, when we cry out in the words of the Pſalmiſt, Lo! theſe are the ungodly,—theſe proſper, and are happy in the world;—I ſay, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew, that we are ſo ignorant of the articles of the charge,—and the evidence we go upon to make them good is ſo lame and defective,—as to be ſufficient by itſelf to check all propenſity to expoſtulate with God's providence, allowing there was no other way of clearing up the matter reconcileably to his attributes.

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And, firſt,—what certain and infallible marks have we of the goodneſs or badneſs of the bulk of mankind?

If we truſt to fame and reports,—if they are good, how do we know but they may proceed from partial friendſhip or flattery?—when bad, from envy or malice, from ill-natured ſurmiſes and conſtructions of things?—and, on both ſides, from ſmall matters aggrandized through miſtake,—and ſometimes through the unſkilful relation of even truth itſelf?—From ſome, or all of which cauſes, it happens, that the characters of men, like the hiſtories of the Egyptians, are to be received

and read with caution;—they are generally dreſſed out and disfigured with ſo many dreams and fables, that every ordinary reader ſhall not be able to diſtinguiſh truth from falſehood.—But allowing theſe reflections to be too ſevere in this matter,—that no ſuch thing as envy ever leſſened a man's character, or malice blackened it;—yet the characters of men are not eaſily penetrated, as they depend often upon the retired, unſeen parts of a man's life.—The beſt and trueſt piety is moſt ſecret, and the worſt of actions, for different reaſons, will be ſo too.—Some men are modeſt, and ſeem to take pains to hide their virtues; and, from a natural diſtance and reſerve in their

tempers,

tempers, ſcarce ſuffer their good qualities to be known:—others, on the contrary, put in practice a thouſand little arts to counterfeit virtues which they have not,—the better to conceal thoſe vices which they really have;—and this under fair ſhews of ſanctity, good-nature, generoſity, or ſome virtue or other,—too ſpecious to be ſeen through,—too amiable and diſintereſted to be ſuſpected.—Theſe hints may be ſufficient to ſhew how hard it is to come at the matter of fact:—but one may go a ſtep further,—and ſay, that even that, in many caſes, could we come to the knowledge of it, is not ſufficient by itſelf to pronounce a man either good or bad.—There are numbers

of

of circumſtances which attend every action of a man's life, which can never come to the knowledge of the world,—yet ought to be known, and well weighed, before ſentence with any juſtice can be paſſed upon him.—A man may have different views and a different ſenſe of things from what his judges have; and what he underſtands and feels, and what paſſes within him may be a ſecret treaſured up deeply there for ever.—A man, through bodily infirmity, or ſome complectional defect, which perhaps is not in his power to correct,—may be ſubject to inadvertencies,—to ſtarts—and unhappy turns of temper; he may lay open to ſnares he is not always aware of; or, through igno-

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rance and want of information and proper helps, he may labour in the dark:—in all which cases, he may do many things which are wrong in themselves, and yet be innocent;—at least an object rather to be pitied than censured with severity and ill-will.—These are difficulties which stand in every one's way in the forming a judgment of the characters of others.—But, for once, let us suppose them all to be got over, so that we could see the bottom of every man's heart;—let us allow that the word rogue, or honest man, was wrote so legibly in every man's face, that no one could possibly mistake it;—yet still the happiness of both the one and the other, which is the only

only fact that can bring the charge home, is what we have ſo little certain knowledge of,—that, bating ſome flagrant inſtances,—whenever we venture to pronounce upon it, our deciſions are little more than random gueſſes.—For who can ſearch the heart of man?—it is treacherous even to ourſelves, and much more likely to impoſe upon others.—Even in laughter (if you will believe Solomon) the heart is ſorrowful;—*the mind ſits drooping, whilſt the countenance is gay:*—and even he, who is the object of envy to thoſe who look no further than the ſurface of his eſtate,—may appear at the ſame time worthy of compaſſion to thoſe who know his private receſſes.—Be-

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ſides this, a man's unhappineſs is not to be aſcertained ſo much from what is known to have befallen him, —as from his particular turn and caſt of mind, and capacity of bearing it.—Poverty, exile, loſs of fame or friends, the death of children, the deareſt of all pledges of a man's happineſs, make not equal impreſſions upon every temper.—You will ſee one man undergo, with ſcarce the expence of a ſigh,—what another, in the bitterneſs of his ſoul, would go mourning for all his life long:—nay, a haſty word, or an unkind look, to a ſoft and tender nature, will ſtrike deeper than a ſword to the hardened and ſenſeleſs.—If theſe reflections hold true with regard to

misfor-

misfortunes,—they are the ſame with regard to enjoyments:—we are formed differently,—have different taſtes and perceptions of things;—by the force of habit, education, or a particular caſt of mind,—it happens that neither the uſe or poſſeſſion of the ſame enjoyments and advantages, produce the ſame happineſs and contentment;—but that it differs in every man almoſt according to his temper and complection:—ſo that the ſelf-ſame happy accidents in life, which ſhall give raptures to the choleric or ſanguine man, ſhall be received with indifference by the cold and phlegmatic;—and ſo oddly perplexed are the accounts of both human happineſs and miſery in this

world,

world,—that trifles, light as air, ſhall be able to make the hearts of ſome men ſing for joy;—at the ſame time that others, with real bleſſings and advantages, without the power of uſing them, have their hearts heavy and diſcontented.

Alas! if the principles of contentment are not within us,—the height of ſtation and worldly grandeur will as ſoon add a cubit to a man's ſtature as to his happineſs.

This will ſuggeſt to us how little a way we have gone towards the proof of any man's happineſs,—in barely ſaying,—Lo! this man proſ-

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pers in the world,—and this man has riches in poſſeſſion.

When a man has got much above us, we take it for granted—that he ſees ſome glorious proſpects, and feels ſome mighty pleaſures from his height;—whereas, could we get up to him,—it is great odds whether we ſhould find any thing to make us tolerable amends for the pains and trouble of climbing up ſo high.—Nothing, perhaps, but more dangers and more troubles ſtill;—and ſuch a giddineſs of head beſides, as to make a wiſe man wiſh he was well down again upon the level.—To calculate, therefore, the happineſs of mankind by their ſtations and

honors,

honours, is the moſt deceitful of all rules;—great, no doubt, is the happineſs which a moderate fortune, and moderate deſires, with a conſciouſneſs of virtue, will ſecure a man.—Many are the ſilent pleaſures of the honeſt peaſant, who riſes chearfully to his labour:—look into his dwelling,—where the ſcene of every man's happineſs chiefly lays;—he has the ſame domeſtic endearments,—as much joy and comfort in his children,—and as flattering hopes of their doing well,—to enliven his hours and glad his heart, as you could conceive in the moſt affluent ſtation.—And I make no doubt, in general, but if the true account of his joys and ſufferings were to be

balanced with thoſe of his betters,—that the upſhot would prove to be little more than this,—that the rich man had the more meat,—but the poor man the better ſtomach;—the one had more luxury,—more able phyſicians to attend and ſet him to rights;—the other, more health and ſoundneſs in his bones, and leſs occaſion for their help;—that, after theſe two articles betwixt them were balanced,—in all other things they ſtood upon a level;—that the ſun ſhines as warm,—the air blows as freſh, and the earth breathes as fragrant, upon the one as the other;—and that they have an equal ſhare in all the beauties and real benefits of nature.—Theſe hints may be ſufficient

ficient to ſhew what I propoſed from them,—the difficulties which attend us in judging truely either of the happineſs or the miſery of the bulk of mankind,—the evidence being ſtill more defective in this caſe (as the matter of fact is hard to come at)—than even in that of judging of their true characters; of both which, in general, we have ſuch imperfect knowledge, as will teach us candour in our determinations upon each other.

But the main purport of this diſcourſe, is to teach us humility in our reaſonings upon the ways of the Almighty.

That things are dealt unequally in this world, is one of the ſtrongeſt natural arguments for a future ſtate,—and therefore is not to be overthrown: nevertheleſs, I am perſuaded the charge is far from being as great as at firſt ſight it may appear;—or if it is,—that our views of things are ſo narrow and confined, that it is not in our power to make it good.

But ſuppoſe it otherwiſe,—that the happineſs and proſperity of bad men were as great as our general complaints make them;—and, what is not the caſe,—that we were not able to clear up the matter, or anſwer it reconcileably with God's juſtice and providence,—what ſhall we infer?—Why, the

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moſt becoming concluſion is,—that it is one inſtance more, out of many others, of our ignorance:—why ſhould this, or any other religious difficulty he cannot comprehend,—why ſhould it alarm him more than ten thouſand other difficulties which every day elude his moſt exact and attentive ſearch?—Does not the meaneſt flower in the field, or the ſmalleſt blade of graſs, baffle the underſtanding of the moſt penetrating mind?—Can the deepeſt enquirers after nature tell us, upon what particular ſize and motion of parts the various colours and taſtes of vegetables depend;—why one ſhrub is laxative,—another reſtringent;—why arſenic or hellebore ſhould lay waſte this noble

frame of ours,—or opium lock up all the inroads to our ſenſes,—and plunder us in ſo mercileſs a manner of reaſon and underſtanding?—Nay, have not the moſt obvious things that come in our way dark ſides, which the quickeſt ſight cannot penetrate into; and do not the cleareſt and moſt exalted underſtandings find themſelves puzzled, and at a loſs, in every particle of matter?

Go then,—proud man!—and when thy head turns giddy with opinions of thy own wiſdom, that thou wouldſt correct the meaſures of the Almighty,—go then,—take a full view of thyſelf in this glaſs;—conſider thy own faculties,—how narrow

narrow and imperfect;—how much they are checquered with truth and falſehood;—how little arrives at thy knowledge, and how darkly and confuſedly thou diſcerneſt even that little as in a glaſs:—conſider the beginnings and ends of things, the greateſt and the ſmalleſt, how they all conſpire to baffle thee;—and which way ever thou proſecuteſt thy enquiries,—what freſh ſubjects of amazement,—and what freſh reaſons to believe there are more yet behind which thou canſt never comprehend.—Conſider,—theſe are but part of his ways;—how little a portion is heard of him? Canſt thou, by ſearching, find out God?—wouldſt thou know the Almighty to perfection?—'Tis as high

as heaven, What canſt thou do?—'tis deeper than hell, how canſt thou know it?

Could we but ſee the myſterious workings of providence, and were we able to comprehend the whole plan of his infinite wiſdom and goodneſs, which poſſibly may be the caſe in the final conſummation of all things;—thoſe events, which we are now ſo perplexed to account for, would probably exalt and magnify his wiſdom, and make us cry out with the Apoſtle, in that rapturous exclamation,—O! the depth of the riches both of the goodneſs and wiſdom of God!—how unſearchable are his ways, and his paths paſt finding out!

Now to God, &c.

SERMON XVIII.

The Ingratitude of Israel.

SERMON XVIII.

2 KINGS xvii. 7.

For so it was,—that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt.—

THE words of the text account for the cause of a sad calamity, which is related, in the foregoing verses, to have befallen a great number of Israelites, who were surprized, in the capital city of Samaria, by Hosea king of Assyria, and cruelly carried away by him out of their own country, and placed on the deso-

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late frontiers of Halah, and in Haber, by the river Gozan, and in the city of the Medes, and there confined to end their days in ſorrow and captivity.—Upon which the ſacred hiſtorian, inſtead of accounting for ſo ſad an event merely from political ſprings and cauſes; ſuch, for inſtance, as the ſuperior ſtrength and policy of the enemy, or an unſeaſonable provocation given,—or that proper meaſures of defence were neglected; —he traces it up, in one word, to its true cauſe;—For ſo it was, ſays he, that the children of Iſrael had ſinned againſt the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt.—It was ſurely a ſufficient foundation to dread ſome evil,—that

they

they had ſinned againſt that Being who had an unqueſtionable right to their obedience.—But what an aggravation was it—that they had not only ſinned ſimply againſt the truth, but againſt the God of mercies,—who had brought them forth out of the land of Egypt;—who not only created, upheld, and favoured them with ſo many advantages in common with the reſt of their fellow creatures,—but who had been particularly kind to them in their misfortunes;—who, when they were in the houſe of bondage, in the moſt hopeleſs condition, without a proſpect of any natural means of redreſs, had compaſſionately heard their cry, and took pity upon the afflictions of a

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diſtreſſed people,—and, by a chain of miracles, delivered them from ſervitude and oppreſſion;—miracles of ſo ſtupendous a nature, that I take delight to offer them, as often as I have an opportunity, to your devouteſt contemplations.—This, you would think as high and as complicated an aggravation of their ſins as could be urged.—This was not all;—for beſides God's goodneſs in firſt favouring their miraculous eſcape, a ſeries of ſucceſſes, not to be accounted for from ſecond cauſes, and the natural courſe of events, had crowned their heads in ſo remarkable a manner, as to afford an evident proof, not only of his general concern for their welfare, but of his

particular

particular providence and attachment to them above all people upon earth. —In the wilderneſs he led them like ſheep, and kept them as the apple of his eye:—he ſuffered no man to do them wrong, but reproved even kings for their ſake.—When they entered into the promiſed land,—no force was able to ſtand before them; —when in poſſeſſion of it,—no army was able to drive them out;—and in a word, nature, for a time, was driven backwards to ſerve them; and even the Sun itſelf had ſtood ſtill in the midſt of heaven to ſecure their victories.

A people with ſo many teſtimonies of God's favour, who had not pro-

fited thereby, ſo as to become a virtuous people, muſt have been utterly corrupt;—and ſo they were. —And it is likely, from the many ſpecimens they had given, in Moſes's time, of a diſpoſition to forget God's benefits, and upon every trial to rebel againſt him,—he foreſaw they would certainly prove a thankleſs and unthinking people, extremely inclined to go aſtray and do evil; —and therefore, if any thing was likely to bring them back to themſelves, and to conſider the evils of their miſdoings,—it muſt be the dread of ſome temporal calamity, which, he prophetically threatened, would one day or other befal them;—hoping, no doubt,—that if

no principle of gratitude could make them an obedient people,—at least they might be wrought upon by the terror of being reduced back again by the same all-powerful hand to their first distressed condition;—which, in the end, did actually over take them.—For at length, when neither the alternatives of promises or threatnings,—when neither rewards or corrections,—comforts or afflictions, could soften them;—when continual instructions,—warnings,—invitations,---reproofs,---miracles,—prophets and holy guides, had no effect, but instead of making them grow better, apparently made them grow worse,—God's patience

at length withdrew,—and he ſuffered them to reap the wages of their folly, by letting them fall into the ſtate of bondage from whence he had firſt raiſed them;—and that not only in that partial inſtance of thoſe in Samaria, who were taken by Hoſea, —but, I mean, in that more general inſtance of their overthrow by the army of the Chaldeans;—wherein he ſuffered the whole nation to be led away, and carried captive into Nineveh and Babylon.—We may be aſſured, that the hiſtory of God Almighty's juſt dealings with this froward and thoughtleſs people—was not wrote for nothing;—but that it was given as a loud call and warning of obedience and gratitude, for all

races

races of men to whom the light of revelation ſhould hereafter reach:—and therefore I have made choice of this ſubject, as it ſeems likely to furniſh ſome reflections ſeaſonable for the beginning of this week,—which ſhould be devoted to ſuch meditations as may prepare and fit us for the ſolemn faſt which we are ſhortly to obſerve, and whoſe pious intention will not be anſwered by a bare aſſembling ourſelves together, without making ſome religious and national remarks ſuitable to the occaſion. —Doubtleſs, there is no nation which ever had ſo many extraordinary reaſons and ſupernatural motives to become thankful and virtuous, as the Jews had;—which, beſides the daily

bleſſings of God's providence to them, has not received ſufficient bleſſings and mercies at the hands of God, ſo as to engage their beſt ſervices, and the warmeſt returns of gratitude they can pay.

There has been a time, may be, when they have been delivered from ſome grievous calamity,—from the rage of peſtilence or famine,—from the edge and fury of the ſword,—from the fate and fall of kingdoms round them;—they may have been preſerved by providential diſcoveries of plots and deſigns againſt the well-being of their ſtates, or by critical turns and revolutions in their favour when beginning to ſink.—By ſome

ſignal interpoſition of God's providence, they may have reſcued their liberties, and all that was dear to them, from the jaws of ſome tyrant; —or may have preſerved their religion pure and uncorrupted, when all other comforts failed them.—If other countries have reaſon to be thankful to God for any one of theſe mercies, —much more has this of ours,— which, at one time or other, has received them all;—inſomuch that our hiſtory, for this laſt hundred years, has ſcarce been any thing but the hiſtory of our deliverances and God's bleſſings;—and theſe in ſo complicated a chain, ſuch as were ſcarce ever vouchſafed to any people beſides, except the Jews;—and with regard to them,

though inferior in the ſtupendous manner of their working,—yet no way ſo—in the extenſive goodneſs of their effects, and the infinite benevolence and power which muſt have wrought them for us.

Here then let us ſtop to look back a moment, and enquire what great effects all this has had upon our ſins, and how far worthy we have lived of what we have received.

A ſtranger, when he heard that this iſland had been ſo favoured by heaven,—ſo happy in our laws and religion,—ſo flouriſhing in our trade,—and ſo bleſſed in our ſituation,—and ſo viſibly protected in all of them by

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providence,—would conclude, that our morals had kept pace with these blessings, and would expect that, as we were the most favoured by God Almighty, we must be the most virtuous and religious people upon earth.

Would to God, there was any other reason to incline one to such a belief!—would to God, that the appearance of religion was more frequent! for that would necessarily imply the reality of it somewhere, and most probably in the greatest and most respectable characters of the nation.—Such was the situation of this country, till a licentious king introduced a licentious age.—The court

of Charles the Second firſt brake in upon, and, I fear, has almoſt demoliſhed the out-works of religion, of modeſty, and of ſober manners;—ſo that, inſtead of any real marks of religion amongſt us, you ſee thouſands who are tired with carrying the maſk of it,—and have thrown it aſide as a uſeleſs incumbrance.

But this licentiouſneſs, he'll ſay, may be chiefly owing to a long courſe of proſperity, which is apt to corrupt mens minds.—God has ſince tried you with afflictions;—you have had lately a bloody and expenſive war;—God has ſent, moreover, a peſtilence amongſt your cattle, which has cut off the ſtock from the fold, and left

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no herd in the ſtalls;—beſides,—you have juſt felt two dreadful ſhocks in your metropolis of a moſt terrifying nature;—which, if God's providence had not checked and reſtrained within ſome bounds, might have overthrown your capital, and your kingdom with it.

Surely, he'll ſay,—all theſe warnings muſt have awakened the conſciences of the moſt unthinking part of you, and forced the inhabitants of your land, from ſuch admonitions, to have learned righteouſneſs.—I own, this is the natural effect,—and, one ſhould hope, ſhould always be the improvement from ſuch calamities;—for we often find, that numbers

bers of people, who, in their prosperity, seemed to forget God,—do yet remember him in the days of trouble and distress;—yet, consider this nationally,—we see no such effect from it, as, in fact, one would expect from speculation.

For instance, with all the devastation and bloodshed which the war has occasioned,—how many converts has it made either to virtue or frugality?—The pestilence amongst our cattle, though it has distressed, and utterly undone, so many thousands; yet what one visible alteration has it made in the course of our lives?

And though, one would imagine, that the necessary drains of taxes for the

the one, and the loſs of rent and property from the other,—ſhould, in ſome meaſure, have withdrawn the means of gratifying our paſſions as we have done;—yet what appearance is there amongſt us that it is ſo?—what one faſhionable folly or extravagance has been checked?—Are not the ſame expences of equipage, and furniture, and dreſs,—the ſame order of diverſions, perpetually returning, and as great luxury and epicuriſm of entertainments, as in the moſt proſperous condition?—So that, though the head is ſick, and the whole heart is faint, we all affect to look well in the face, either as if nothing had happened, or we were aſhamed to acknowledge the force and natural effects

of

of the chaſtiſements of God.—And if, from the effects which war and peſtilence have had,—we may form a judgment of the moral effects which this laſt terror is likely to produce,—it is to be feared, however we might be ſtartled at firſt,—that the impreſſions will ſcarce laſt longer than the inſtantaneous ſhock which occaſioned them:—And I make no doubt,—ſhould a man have courage to declare his opinion,—"That he believed it was an indication of God's anger upon a corrupt generation,"—that it would be great odds but he would be pitied for his weakneſs, or openly laughed at for his ſuperſtition.—Or if, after ſuch a declaration,—he was thought worth ſetting right in his miſtakes,--he would

be

be informed,—that religion had nothing to do in explications of this kind;—that all ſuch violent vibrations of the earth were owing to ſubterraneous caverns falling down of themſelves, or being blown up by nitrous and ſulphureous vapours rarified by heat;—and that it was idle to bring in the Deity to untie the knot, when it can be reſolved eaſily into natural cauſes.—Vain unthinking mortals!—As if natural cauſes were any thing elſe in the hands of God,—but inſtruments which he can turn to work the purpoſes of his will, either to reward or puniſh, as ſeems fitting to his infinite wiſdom.

Thus

Thus no man repenteth him of his wickedneſs, ſaying,—What have I done?—but every one turneth to his courſe, as a horſe ruſheth into the battle.—To conclude, however we may under-rate it now,—it is a maxim of eternal truth,—which both reaſonings and all accounts from hiſtory confirm,—that the wickedneſs and corruption of a people will ſooner or later always bring on temporal miſchiefs and calamities.—And can it be otherwiſe?—for a vicious nation not only carries the ſeeds of deſtruction within, from the natural workings and courſe of things,—but it lays itſelf open to the whole force and injury of accidents from without;—and I do venture to ſay,—

there never was a nation or people fallen into troubles or decay,—but one might juſtly leave the ſame remark upon them which the ſacred hiſtorian makes in the text upon the misfortunes of the Iſraelites,—for ſo it was,—that they had ſinned againſt the Lord their God.

Let us, therefore, conſtantly bear in mind that concluſion of the ſacred writer,—which I ſhall give you in his own beautiful and awful language :

" But the Lord, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, with great power and a ſtretch'd-out arm, him ſhall ye fear, and him ſhall ye worſhip,

worſhip,—and to him ſhall ye do ſacrifice :—And the ſtatutes, and the ordinances, and the commandments he wrote for you, ye ſhall obſerve to do for evermore.—The Lord your God ye ſhall fear,—and he ſhall deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies."

Now to God the Father, &c.

FINIS.