

The choice: a discourse, occasioned by the present severe drought; the mortal fever which prevails in Portsmouth, in this near vicinity, and in many of our capital, sea-port towns; and the threatening prospect of a calamitous war with a powerful nation. Delivered at Greenland, Sept. 9, 1798 / By Samuel Macclintock, D. D.

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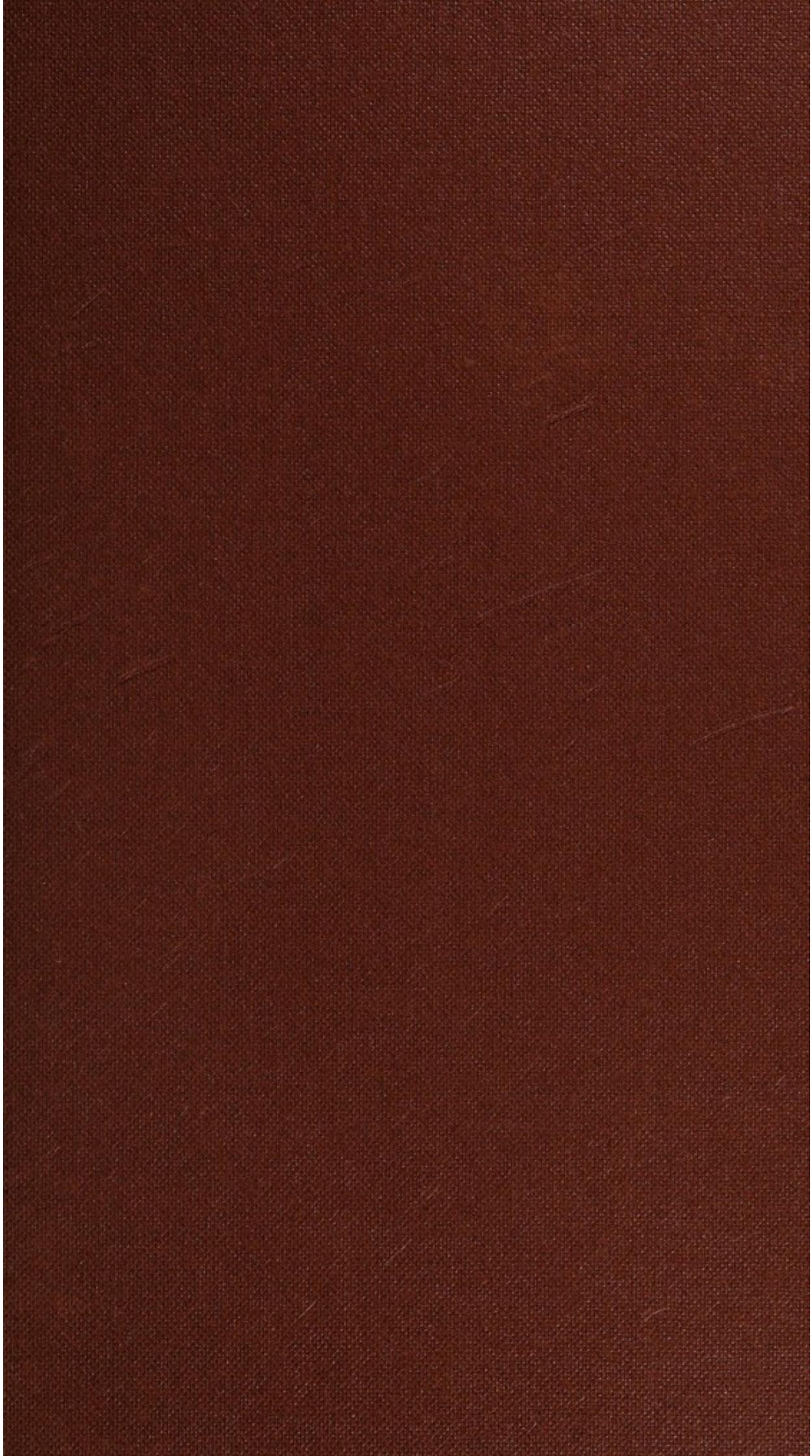
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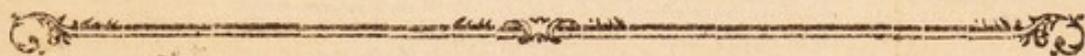




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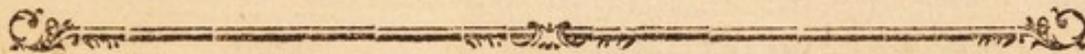
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Dr. *MACCLINTOCK*'s

D I S C O U R S E,

Delivered Sept. 9, 1798.



The Choice :

A

D I S C O U R S E,

OCCASIONED BY THE PRESENT

SEVERE DROUGHT; THE MORTAL FEVER

WHICH PREVAILS IN PORTSMOUTH, IN THIS

NEAR VICINITY, AND IN MANY OF OUR

CAPITAL, SEA-PORT TOWNS;

A N D

THE THREATENING PROSPECT

O F A

Calamitous W A R with a powerful Nation.

DELIVERED AT GREENLAND, SEPT. 9, 1798.



By SAMUEL MACCLINTOCK, D. D.



B O S T O N :

Printed for THOMAS ADAMS, COURT-STREET.

1798.

122

D. I. S. C. O. U. R. S. E.

occurred in the patient
with diphtheria; the normal fever
was present in the morning, in the
evening it was absent, and in the
middle of the day it was
present.

THE TREATMENT EMPLOYED

313311



BY SAMUEL MACGILLIVRAK, D.D.

BOSTON:
PUBLISHED BY THOMAS AGNES, CORP. 1878.

1798



A

DISCOURSE.

2 SAMUEL XXIV. 14.

*And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait :
Let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for his
mercies are great : and let me not fall into the
hand of man.*

THE occasion of the alarming judgment, inflicted on the nation of Israel, referred to in these words, is related in the preceding context : It was the sin of David in taking a census of them, from a vain confidence in their number, as his security against foreign invasion, instead of trusting in the omnipotent arm of the God of Israel. For we are informed at the first verse of this chapter, “ That the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them, to say, “ Go number Israel and Judah ;” by which we are not to understand, that God moved him to that measure by any positive influence on his will ; for that would make him the author of sin. In this sense, as the apostle James says,

says,

says, God tempts no man, nor can he himself be tempted of evil : but he permitted Satan to take advantage of the pride and ambition which at that time prevailed in the heart of David, to instigate him to do a thing which would bring on his people a public judgment, as a just punishment of their sins, by which they had provoked the anger of the Lord.

Numbering the people was not in itself sinful and offensive to God ; for this, in civil communities, may be necessary, in order to an equal assessment of taxes, and a due proportion of levies in a necessary war for the common defence : but the sin of David was his trusting in his numbers for safety, putting his trust in creatures instead of the Lord of hosts, and estimating the success of his martial enterprizes by the superior number of his forces. This subjected him to that divine curse, Thus saith the Lord, Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. He had lost a sense of the sovereign influence of the God of armies in the events of war, and of his dependence on the almighty arm for aid, protection, and success. His heart had departed from the Lord, and he was glorying in the number of his forces. Upon reflection he was brought to a sense of his guilt, and penitently confessed his sin and folly. And David's heart smote him after he had numbered the people : and David said unto the Lord, I have sinned greatly in that I have done ; and now I beseech thee to take away the iniquity of thy servant, for I have done very foolishly. But the honor of God made it necessary that he should testify his displeasure at this sin of David, and give Israel an awful demonstration of the impiety and folly of departing from him, and trusting in creatures. Accordingly the prophet was sent to him, to give him his choice of three public judgments ; either *seven years famine in the land*, or to *flee three months before his enemies*, or
three

three days pestilence in the land. In the parallel passage, 1 Chron. xxi. 12, only three years famine are mentioned; but the passages are easily reconciled by observing, that the land had then suffered famine upwards of three years, for the sin of Saul in his attempt to destroy the Gibeonites, in violation of the faith of the solemn treaty Joshua had made with them; and what the prophet proposes is, the famine should be continued three years longer, as a punishment of the sin of David in numbering the people, so as in its whole duration to complete the term of seven years. The account in Samuel comprehends the whole duration of the famine for both the sin of Saul and of David, but in Chronicles only the three additional years of famine for the sin of David are mentioned.

One or other of the three judgments must be inflicted for the vindication of the divine holiness. David was left to take his choice. On this occasion his mind was thrown into a state of great agitation. The reason of his distress was not any hesitation to determine which of the judgments to prefer, but that his people should suffer a public desolating calamity for his sin and folly. This reflection pained his heart, and by a sense of justice and a paternal regard to them, he earnestly prays that the threatened calamity might be averted from them, and that he might be made the victim of divine vengeance. "And David spake unto the Lord when he saw the angel that smote the people, and said, Lo, I have sinned and done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house." He seems to think that the people ought not to suffer for the sins of their rulers, and that these alone, in such cases, should be the subjects of divine punishment. But, though he was the principal criminal in the affair of numbering the people, from a sinful confidence in their strength and numbers, yet they also had provoked the Lord to anger

ger by their sins, and among other things, by their demand on Samuel to make them a king, to judge them like all the nations, by which they rejected the Lord that he should not reign over them. For these reasons he permitted David, under the influence of a criminal ambition, to number the people, that he might bring upon them that punishment for their sins, which justice demanded.

One of the judgments proposed was to be inflicted by the instrumentality of men; the other, by the immediate hand of God. David chose the latter, from a full conviction, the calamity would not be so great and distressing, if inflicted by the hand of God, as it would be if they should be delivered up to the will and power of their cruel, inveterate enemies.

From this view of the words, in their connexion with the context, the following observations naturally arise for our instruction and improvement, viz.

That the infliction of temporal judgments on sinful, impenitent nations, is necessary to serve the wise ends of the holy government of God over this world; to testify his just displeasure at sin, and to maintain in the minds of his intelligent creatures, a reverence of his laws and authority: and,

That when judgments are necessary, it is to be desired that they may be inflicted by the immediate hand of God, rather than that we should fall into the hands of men, and be given up to their pleasure.

On the first of these propositions I would observe, that the government of God, over this world, is moral, as well as natural. He not only supports and preserves the life and being of all his creatures by the energy of his power, and overrules all the events of time, to subserve the purposes of his most holy will; but also governs his rational creatures by good, just, and holy laws, adapted to their capacities, and to their obligations to him and to one another; founded in the reason and relations of things: and
God,

God, as the just and holy Governor of the world, hath enforced these laws, to which mankind are subjected as the rules of their moral behavior, by the promises of rewards to the obedient, and threatenings of punishments against the transgressor; and the wise design of the penal sanctions annexed to his laws, is to encourage virtue, to discountenance vice, maintain order, and promote the good and happiness of his moral creation, as well as the manifestation of his own glory. Hence results the necessity of inflicting due punishment on the impenitent transgressors of his laws. That would not be esteemed a wise or just government, which suffered the flagrant transgression of the rules of order, peace, and justice, to go unpunished. Such a government would be inconsistent with the very end for which government is instituted; the maintaining of order and public virtue, and promoting the good and happiness of society. Instead of being a terror, it would be an encouragement to evil doers; and it would be much the same, where laws are guarded with the best sanctions, if those laws are never executed; they would be regarded only as scare-crows, and would prove the occasion of increasing the vices they were designed to prevent; and if vice were not punished, but the wicked were always suffered to go on and prosper in their wickedness, how would it appear that the Lord loveth righteousness and hateth iniquity?

It is true, as to individuals, that they are seldom dealt with in this world according to their real characters, and no judgment can be made of their state, whether they are objects of the divine love or hatred, from the common dispensations of Providence: on the contrary, the righteous are often visited with great and manifold afflictions, while those who live without God in the world prosper, and spread like a green bay-tree. And it cannot be otherwise in the

present probationary state ; for if individuals were treated according to the rule of strict distributive justice, there would be no room left either for the trial of virtue, or the exercise of mercy : Therefore, the rewards and punishments proportioned to their respective characters and deserts, are chiefly reserved for a future state, in which God will render to every one according to his works, whether they have been good, or whether they have been evil. But as to communities, or collective bodies of men, united by the bonds of civil society, and under the regulation of certain laws, the rectitude of the moral Governor of the world engages him to treat them according to their general moral character ; to bless the obedient and virtuous with temporal prosperity and happiness, and to punish a sinful, impenitent people, with temporal judgments. This is the standing rule of his providential government over the nations of this earth. (Jerem. xviii. 7—11.) “ At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down and 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.” Conformable to this solemn declaration, has been the conduct of divine Providence toward the nations of the earth through every past age. When a nation has been obedient to the voice of God—when public virtue has been their general character, they have been blessed with peace, prosperity, and happiness ; and when a nation, who have become corrupt and degenerate, have been visited with judgments, and threatened with ruin, have repented of their sins, and turned from their evil ways, God has
 averted

averted from them the threatened destruction ; but when his judgments have proved ineffectual to reclaim them, they have finally been given up to ruin. All history confirms the truth of these observations, and presents to our view instructive examples and warnings of the destruction which vice, persisted in, brings on nations and kingdoms.

The common calamities individuals suffer, and the ruin brought on impenitent nations for their sins, is no evidence that God is an austere being ; on the contrary, our own experience, as well as the declarations of his word, may satisfy us that he is gracious, and full of compassion. He solemnly assures us, that he delights not in the death of sinners, and with bowels of tender mercy beseeches them to turn unto him, in the only way of reconciliation through Jesus Christ, that they may live and be happy. His compassionate language to those who are trampling on his authority, and provoking him to anger, is, Turn ye, turn ye ! why will ye die ? As I live, saith the Lord, I have no delight in the death of the sinner, but that he should turn unto me, and live. But if men will, in contempt of the divine authority, and abuse of his goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering, and notwithstanding all his merciful calls, warnings, and entreaties, persist in ways which they are forewarned will end in their ruin, is God unrighteous if he takes vengeance ? Surely, no. It is fit, it is right, and necessary for the honor of his government, that he should visit such impenitent sinners with his judgments ; and if they refuse to hearken to his voice, and turn from their evil ways, that he should bring utter destruction upon them, to testify his holy displeasure at sin, and to shew that it is an evil and bitter thing to depart from him ; for should he suffer them to go unpunished, it would not appear that he is that pure and holy Being which his word declares him to be, and that sin is the abominable thing which
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he stateth. Their being visited with judgments is necessary to shew the holiness of his nature and rectitude of his government, and to put a restraint on the lusts which reign in the hearts of men ; to prevent evil, and to promote order and virtue in the world.

Let us remember, with fear and trembling, the ancient nations of the earth, who were prosperous and happy while virtue was their character, but have long since been destroyed, and are set forth as examples to us of the righteous vengeance of God, and warnings of our danger ; for we should not think that they were sinners above all others, because they were destroyed by the judgments of Heaven ; but attend with solemn awe to that alarming declaration from the lips of Eternal Truth—I tell you, nay ; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. The same sins are found in the midst of us, which have brought ruin on other nations in ages past. Is there not a visible declension of religion, and depravity of manners ? open contempt of Christ and his gospel ? Are not profanity, pride, covetousness, hatred, malice, revenge, intemperance, uncleanness, slander, fraud, injustice, and oppression, prevailing sins ? And may we not expect that these sins, persisted in, will finally bring ruin upon us, unless God should deviate from the stated rule of his providential government ? especially as all our sins are attended with peculiar aggravations, arising from the superior light and privileges we enjoy above others, which make us deserving of a sorer punishment. It is in vain to hope we shall escape ruin, unless we repent ; for if we will not be reformed by the judgments we are suffering, we may expect to be punished yet more for our iniquity, till we shall be either reformed or destroyed. The united power and policy of creatures cannot frustrate the determination of the Almighty. Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished. God
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has power and means to accomplish his threatenings, as well as his promises. He has a variety of judgments to punish and destroy an impenitent people; some are inflicted more immediately by his own hand, as drought, famine, and pestilence. Those who are visited with these judgments, may be said, with peculiar propriety, to fall into his hands. Other judgments are brought on impenitent nations, by the instrumentality of creatures, such as the sore calamity of war, which proceeds immediately from the lusts of pride, ambition, and revenge, which are at war in the hearts of men. Yet war is one of the most dreadful judgments of Heaven. God, by permitting the lusts of men's hearts to break forth in wars and fightings, makes use of the nations, as instruments in his hand, to execute his vengeance, and to punish one another for their sins. Thus, Nebuchadnezzar was prompted to engage in war, and invade the territories of his peaceable neighbours, by the reigning lust of lawless power and domination. At the same time, the sacred volume teaches us to view him as an instrument in the hand of God, to accomplish the ends of his moral government. God expressly calls him the *rod of his anger*, his *battle-axe* and *weapons of war*, to punish and destroy the nations which refused to obey his voice.

While, therefore, we condemn and detest the evil principles which lead men to make war, we should look to a higher cause, and consider them as instruments in the divine hand to punish us for our sins. God is to be acknowledged and adored as the Author of all our afflictions, whether they come immediately from his hand, or from the lusts of men by his permission.

The hand of the Almighty Sovereign is stretched out over this guilty land at the present day, in a variety of public judgments, some of which we feel, and others we have reason to fear. In such an alarming

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ing situation, when these judgments are necessary for our correction and amendment, and to vindicate the honor of the divine government,

We are directed, by the example of the royal speaker in the text, what choice we should make: We should prefer those judgments which are inflicted by the more immediate hand of God, to our falling into the hands of men; being given up to the power and will of vindictive mortals, to unsheathe the destroying sword against us; and for this weighty reason, that his mercies are great. We therefore have the highest reason to hope for more favorable treatment from a merciful God, whose nature is infinitely remote from cruelty, than from sinful, imperfect creatures, who are apt to be governed more by furious passions than calm reason, in their acts of revenge.

We have the highest assurance, from the absolute perfection of the divine nature, that God cannot do injustice to his creatures, and from his benevolence and mercy, that he is ever ready to pardon the offences of the most unworthy and ill-deserving, for the sake of Christ, and to confer upon them all the good they are capable of enjoying. This is agreeable to the doctrine of Scripture, and verified in our own daily experience. Though we are in the hand of God, as the clay is in the hand of the potter, to do with us as seemeth good unto him, and he could easily crush us to destruction in a moment; yet, because he is God, a being of infinite goodness and mercy, as well as power and justice, therefore we are not consumed, but spared year after year, under all our provocations of his justice; and not only so, but we are loaded with benefits from his liberal hand, even while we abuse them to the dishonor of his great name.

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We have the greatest reason to say, that his mercies are great, and that he hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. So great is he in mercy, and so ready to pardon, that he turns away his anger from his rebellious creatures, whom he corrects for their sins, upon their supplication for mercy, and the appearance of repentance. Thus, when the Ninevites believed his word, by the prophet denouncing their destruction, and humbled themselves by prayer and fasting; (though it cannot be supposed that their repentance was unto life, but only a worldly sorrow and outward reformation, occasioned by the apprehension of impending ruin) God mercifully spared them; and in like manner he often forgave his chosen people, and turned away his anger from them, when they confessed their sins, and humbled themselves before him, even when they were insincere in their professions of sorrow and repentance—when they lied to him with their tongues, and flattered him with their lips, yet he forgave them, and did not execute upon them all the fierceness of his wrath.

In punishing sinful nations, the great power of God, in all its operations, is under the direction of unerring wisdom and impartial justice, and his judgments are tempered with mercy. However great the calamities they suffer, they are punished less than their iniquities deserve. The divine nature is infinitely remote from that insatiable revenge and cruelty which possess the breasts of weak, imperfect, sinful men: such fury is not in him. The judgments inflicted on his sinful creatures are, in their nature and design, disciplinary, adapted to promote their good, by making them sensible of their sin and folly in departing from him, and recovering them to the way of righteousness and peace. It is not for his pleasure, but for their profit that he afflicts them; it

it is to make them wise, sober, and virtuous. And when the end of divine correction is answered, the rod is removed, and they are restored to his favor, and treated with marks of kindness and tender mercy. God has no pleasure in the misery of his sinful creatures, but his desire is that they would return unto him and be happy in the enjoyment of his favor. So great is his mercy to those who have forsaken him, and by their evil deeds provoked him to anger, that like the compassionate father of the prodigal, he meets them with bowels of mercy, receives them with loving kindness as if they had not offended, and confers upon them tokens of distinguishing goodness. The invariable conduct of his providence as well as our own experience confirm the truth of the position in the text.

But on the contrary, the tender mercies of men are cruelty. Their revenge is brutal rage, which has no other restraint or limits but the want of power: It is cruel as death, and insatiable as the grave. There are no creatures in this world so inimical and cruel to one another as men are. When their passions are kindled into rage, they will treat those who are the objects of their resentment like furious beasts of prey, or devils incarnate, rather than rational beings, and brethren of the same family; and not satisfied with killing those they hate, will rack their invention to put them to the most exquisite tortures, the bare recital of which is enough to freeze the blood and harrow up the soul of one who has any feelings of humanity. Were we to form our judgment of the origin of the human race from their treatment of one another, we should be ready to think they are the children of Moloch, rather than the offspring of the infinitely benevolent Deity; who wills that all his children should dwell together in unity as cometh brethren. From this view of the depravity
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of human nature, the immortal Milton makes this pathetic exclamation :

O shame to men ! Devil with devil damn'd
 Firm concord holds, men only disagree
 Of creatures rational, though under hope
 Of heavenly grace, and God proclaiming peace,
 Yet live in hatred, enmity, and strife,
 Wasting the earth, each other to destroy.

It were to be wished for the honor of human nature that this was only the language of declamation, but indisputable facts prove it to be a sad reality. The miseries which proceed from pride, ambition and revenge, have in all ages made this earth a field of slaughter and a valley of tears. From the first murderer, Cain, down to the present day, the history of mankind presents to our view a continued series of hatred, enmity and strife ; treacheries, treasons, rapine, assassinations, murder and indiscriminate carnage. And what is remarkable, those nations which have made the greatest boast of their civilization and humanity, stand first in the black catalogue, and have exceeded other nations as much in the arts of cruelty as in civilization. For instance, the French have long been considered as the model of politeness and humanity to all Europe, yet by the account of the conduct of their armies in Germany, which is industriously propagated in this country under the title of the *Cannibal's Progress*, they have committed such acts of savage barbarity as are a disgrace to human nature. Indeed some facts are so contrary to nature, and so inconsistent with the gratification of those brutal lusts which reign in the most degenerate of the human race, that to an impartial reader they carry in them their own confutation, and must appear to be published for a particular purpose at the present crisis of our public affairs. No doubt the
 lawless,

lawless, unprincipled soldiery in their armies have been guilty of detestable acts of violence and barbarity; but this is not peculiar to them; nations who make as high pretensions to civilization and politeness have equalled them in like violences, not excepting even those who are most celebrated for their humanity. The British boast of their superior bravery in war and their humanity to the conquered, yet among a multitude of instances of the barbarities committed by their soldiery on the defenceless inhabitants of those countries into which they have carried their arms, to mention but one will be sufficient, and which it is presumed will appear to the impartial fully equal to the Cannibal's Progress. It is the account given by their own celebrated historian Hume, of the progress of the British army in the Highlands of Scotland, in the year 1745. After the rebels, as they are called, were subdued in the battle of Prestonpans, he says, "In the month of May, the Duke of Cumberland marched his armies into the Highlands as far as Fort Augustus, where he encamped, and sent off detachments on all hands to hunt down the fugitives, and lay waste the country with fire and sword. The Castles of Glengary and Lochiel were plundered and burned; every house, hut and habitation met with the same fate without distinction; all the cattle were carried off. The men were either shot upon the mountains like wild beasts, or put to death in cold blood, without form of trial; the women, after having seen their husbands and fathers murdered, were subjugated to brutal violation, and then turned out naked with their children to starve on the barren heath. One whole family was inclosed in a barn and consumed to ashes. These ministers of vengeance, he adds, were so alert in the execution of their office, that in a few days, there was neither house, cottage, man nor beast to be seen

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in the compass of fifty miles. Nor did the cruelty stop there; fifty officers were dragged in captivity to a strange country; denied the privilege of trial in the country where the act of treason was said to have been committed, and there, far from their friends and connexions, and destitute of means to produce evidence in their favor, even if they had been innocent of the charge, being found guilty, suffered an ignominious death. Notwithstanding they pleaded on their trial, that they submitted on the promise of pardon, Lord Mansfield said it availed them not, though in the same breath, he assures the parliament that the commanding officer had full power to receive their submission and to grant pardon."

If, then, the armies of a nation famed for their humanity, have committed barbarities of which savages would be ashamed, and which we in this country have experienced in the late revolutionary war, what may we not expect from the French soldiery, should we be invaded by them, whose barbarity exceeds even that of cannibals, if we are credulous enough to believe the unsubstantiated accounts now in circulation?

It is remote from my design to criminate either the French or British nations. The great body of the people in those nations, are brave, humane and generous, and no doubt condemn and detest such barbarities as much as we do; but they have it not in their power to prevent them. They have no hand in the affairs of the civil government, or the regulation of their armies, and therefore it would be unjust to take our idea of the character of a nation from the conduct of a licentious soldiery, or to entertain an odium of them on that account. To hate other nations is no test of love to our own country. For the "basest communities detest their enemies
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the most. Noble nations respect, and savage tribes devour, each other.”

My only view in setting before you the instances of cruelty mentioned is to show the wisdom of the choice of judgments made by the royal speaker in the text, rather to be subjected to those which are the more immediate acts of divine power, than to fall into the hands of men, and to be subjugated to their sovereign pleasure; because the history of all ages, as well as our own experience, teaches that we may not expect any favor from men, and that if we fall into their hands, nothing short of our destruction will satiate their vengeance and boundless lust of power. No doubt, if either the French or British government, the modern Rome and Carthage, had second causes at their command, such is their implacable enmity to each other, they would exterminate their rival power, either by sinking them with an earthquake into the depths of the sea, or commanding the clouds that they should give no rain upon them, or sending pestilence into all their borders. The most humble submission, and importunate supplication for mercy would not avail. The language of revenge would be, *Carthago est delenda*; that hostile, perfidious nation must be blotted out of existence to secure our own tranquillity; but both the word and providence of God teach us that we may expect more favorable treatment from him—that, how many or aggravated soever our offences against him are, upon our confession and reformation, he will turn away his anger and receive us with tender pity.

Let us then deprecate, as the most dreadful judgment, our falling into the hands of men, and being abandoned to the power of a licentious, brutal soldiery, who, inured to scenes of blood and carnage, steeled against every sentiment of humanity, freed from the restraints of civil law and government, and
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incited by their leaders to every act of vengeance, would spare neither the hoary head, the delicate woman, nor the helpless infant ; and let us humbly beseech our merciful God and Father to take us into his own hand, and to correct us by his more immediate judgments. And may the correction we are under at present, be effectual to answer the gracious design for which it is appointed—to awaken this degenerate people to a serious consideration of their ways, and a just apprehension of the ruin which awaits them, as the certain consequence of sin, finally persisted in, and to dispose them to return to him who is smiting them, and with shame and sorrow confess before him that they have sinned and done wickedly, and that he is righteous in his judgments, resolving, in a dependence on his grace, that wherein they have done wickedly they will do so no more.

O that there were such a heart in this people. Every friend to his country wishes it. The merciful God wishes it.—Then would the present dismal scene soon be changed—the dark cloud which overspreads our political horizon, big with threatening dangers, would be dispelled, and light arise to us in darkness, and our public tranquillity be lengthened ; which may God grant for his mercy's sake, through Jesus Christ.—AMEN.

