

A discourse of the dangers of abusing the divine blessings : shewing, that national calamities are the sure consequences of publick and national iniquities a sermon preach'd before the honourable House of Commons, at St. Margaret's Westminster, on Friday, December the 8th, 1721. Being the day appointed by His Majesty, for a general fast and humiliation, for obtaining the pardon of our sins, and averting the heavy judgment we have most justly deserv'd; and particularly the plague, with which several other countries are at this time visited / By Erasmus Saunders.

Contributors

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A DISCOURSE of the Dangers of Abusing the Divine Blessings; shewing, That National Calamities are the sure Consequences of Publick and National Iniquities.

A
S E R M O N

Preach'd before the Honourable

HOUSE of COMMONS,

A T

St. Margaret's Westminster,

O N

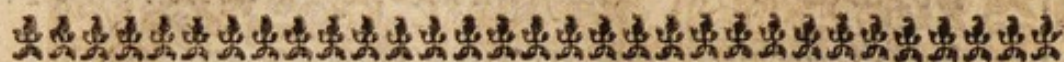
Friday, December the 8th, 1721.

Being the Day appointed by his MAJESTY, for a General FAST and HUMILIATION, for obtaining the Pardon of our Sins, and averting the heavy Judgment we have most justly deserv'd; and particularly the PLAGUE, with which several other Countries are at this Time visited.

By ERASMUS SAUNDERS, D.D.
Vicar of Blockley, in Worcestershire.

L O N D O N:

Printed for JOHN WYAT at the Rose in
St. Paul's Church-Yard.

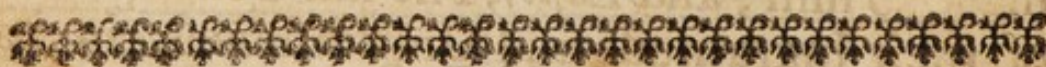


Sabti. nono Die Dec. 1721.

ORDERED,

THAT the Thanks of this House
be given to the Reverend Doct-
or *Saunders*, for the Sermon, by him
Preach'd Yelterday, before this House
at *St. Margaret's Westminster*; and
that he be desir'd to Print the same;
and that *Mr. Sandys* and *Mr. Denton*
do acquaint him therewith.

PAUL JODRILL,
Cler' Dom. Com.





ISAIAH, Chap. v. Ver. 4, 5.

4 *What could have been done more to my Vineyard, that I have not done it? Wherefore when I look'd that it should bring forth Grapes, brought it forth wild Grapes.*

5 *And now go to, I will tell you what I will do to my Vineyard, I will take away the Hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up, and break down the Wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down.*

IN these Words, under the Allegory of a Vineyard, and according to the Elegancy of the Oriental Stile, we have a short History of God's Providence, with Respect to the Jewish Nation; setting forth, *First*, The extraordinary Favours of God vouchsafed to them. *Secondly*, The very ill Returns they made to him; and *Lastly*, The sad Consequences of their Ingratitude and Unfruitfulness, in that they were the Causes of drawing down upon them, not only many severe Judgments, but irreparable Ruin and Destruction.

This History is so well known, as that it needs not long be dwelt upon; However, the better to illustrate the Application, I intend hence to infer, with Regard to our selves, I beg Leave to expatiate a little upon each of the foregoing Particulars. And,

First, If we review the distinguishing Favours of God towards the *Jews*, we find that of all the Inhabitants of the Earth, they were his peculiar Favourites, and crown'd as such with all the Blessings Temporal and Spiritual they could wish for; that the Almighty himself condescended so graciously, as to be their King and Governour; and gave them Laws and Statutes, which he established in a wonderful Manner, to direct their Worship, and to be their Rule of Life and Manners. In brief, he gave them a fruitful and a pleasant Land to dwell in, *a Land that flow'd with Milk and Honey*; he cloathed their Hills with Cattle, and every way increas'd their Stores; he went forth with their Forces, and he fought their Battles; making them, tho' few in Number, victorious over great and powerful Enemies. In a Word, while they were disposed in any Measure to obey his Will, he delighted to do them good, and made them happy and secure; or in the Words of the Psalmist, *He was a God full of Compassion, Gracious and Long-suffering, and Plenteous in Mercy and Truth towards them*, *Psa. 6. 15.* So that it might indeed well be asked, *what could have been done more that was not done, to* en-

engage them to be Good, and consequently to make them Happy.

But, *Secondly*, notwithstanding all this, notwithstanding all the gracious Dispensations, even of inexhaustible Bounty, and of infinite Goodness to endear them, and to oblige them to their Duty, it appears, that they were as distinguishable for their Impieties against God, as for the Blessings and the Mercies they received from him; they impiously rejected even the Divine *Theocracy*; they perverted and annulled the Divine Laws by their wicked Comments and Traditions, even to that execrable Degree, as to invert the Names of Good and Evil, to subvert Justice and Equity, to justify the Wicked for a Reward, and to take away the Righteousness of the Righteous from him. And thus they turn'd their Blessings into Curses, and made the Heavenly Dispensations, intended for their Welfare, the Occasion of their Ruin. For,

Were they blessed with Plenty and Abundance, this they made the Fuel of their Pride and Luxury; were they prosperous in their Enterprizes, and victorious over their Enemies; how vain and arrogant did this make them, and how confident in their own weak Strength and Policy? Or were they guarded from publick Evils and Disturbances, this they imputed also to their own poor Contrivances, and not to his Goodness who is alone able to make Men dwell in Safety; or did the good God send among them wise Men, Priests and Prophets, to reprove
their

their Wickedness, and to instruct them in their Duty ; Alas ! those they very ill intreated, *stoning Some, and killing Others*, and did not spare the Son of God himself, who came *for their Redemption, but with wicked Hands* did crucify and slay him ; such were the Returns, such the Gratitude of this unhappy Nation. We are now,

Thirdly, and Lastly, to see the Issue of it, when it appear'd, that so many rich Blessings were bestow'd in Vain, that no Kindnesses nor Favours cou'd affect them ; that they regarded not the Calls and Intreaties of a good God ; and that his Tender Corrections made no Impressions on them, but that they were resolute in their Wickedness, and obstinately forsook God ; we then find that God resolv'd to forsake them, having long waited, and by kind and various Ways and Means, often call'd them to Repentance, when all was to no Purpose ; and that they were incorrigible, He then appear'd no less fearful in the Judgments that he brought upon them, than He formerly had been Gracious in His Favours towards them. For,

What Histories are there of the Sufferings of Mankind any where, that seem to be so deeply written in Characters of Blood, as to be compar'd to the dismal Accounts given us of the Destruction of the Jewish Nation ? For with what a fearful Complication of the severest Judgments were they long harra's'd, and at last undone ? With Pestilences the most Depopulating ; with sore Famines, that even oblig'd Nature

Nature to be unnatural, *i.e.* the tenderest Parents to Prey upon their own Offspring; and with such Destructions of the Sword, as shew'd no Mercy to Age, nor Sex; and yet this miserable People, while thus assaulted from without, were so wretchedly divided from within, as to Slay each other, as if they were avow'd Conspirators with the Common Enemy, for the hastening of their own Destruction: Nor did they ever cease from this Rage and Madness, 'till their City and Glorious Temple were destroy'd; 'till their Government was abolish'd; 'till their Country became desolate, and the wretched Remains of them were either banish'd, or sold, as Slaves, or carry'd off as Captives to grace the Triumphs of their Enemies.

This, this, Alas! was at length the Fate of this Favourite Nation; they forsook God, and God forsook them, to the Fatal Consequences of their Sins; and gave them up to that Judicial Blindness, as not to see the Means of their Salvation. An * Infatuation that still rests upon their perverse Posterity, as if design'd to be a lasting Testimony of the Wrath of God against them.

Now from hence let us, and others, learn, what are like to be the sad Consequences, of a long Abuse of the Divine Goodness and Mer-

* Quidnam vero Illi recte sentire et sapere possunt, qui post illam Domini cedem, mentibus capti, non ratione aliqua sed Impotenti Imperu, quocunque eos insitus impellit furor. Epist. Constant. M. ad omnes, Ecclesias. Ex Hiseph. l. 8. c. 25.

cy. To this End these two following useful Observations must be very obvious to us. *First*, That a People or Nation, to whom God vouchsafes great and extraordinary Blessings, are for that Reason oblig'd to a return of extraordinary Piety and Virtue, and to abound in good Works in some Proportion to the abundant Blessings, and the Means of Grace that are conferr'd upon them: It being the Rule in the † Divine Account, that to whom most is given, of them most will be requir'd; and they who have most Talents will be expected to make the best Improvements; so that such as partake most of the Divine Bounty, ought to be the most hearty and zealous in the Divine Service.

Secondly, That when a People shall do otherwise, and in Contempt of the greatest Encouragements given to be Good, shall yet dare to be the most provoking Sinners, they must then expect the greatest Punishments; because an Abuse of most Blessings necessarily calls for a Return of the heaviest Judgments. And since publick States and Societies, as such, are to expect their Retributions in this Life, as was seen in the Case of the *Jews*, we must then conclude, that an Abuse of National Blessings will be visited and follow'd with Publick and National Calamities.

† Luke 12, 48.

Now that we may be the more sensible of our own Concernment in these Doctrines, and be able to make the most useful Applications of them to ourselves, I propose these three Things.

1st, To consider the Great and Extraordinary Blessings and Favours, that the Divine Providence has vouchsafed to us, the People of this Kingdom.

2dly, To consider how very much we have been wanting to our Duty, by making so very ill and unsuitable Returns for those great and signal Blessings.

3dly, To consider, for that Reason, how much we are oblig'd seriously to attend to the Duty now enjoyn'd us; that is, to humble ourselves before God, and to repent us truly of our Sins, that they may not be our Ruin. But,

First, I am to consider the Great and Extraordinary Blessings and Favours, &c.

This is a Subject so very Rich and Copious, as that it is not to be reduc'd into the Compass of this short Discourse; I must therefore content my self, by giving only some general Hints and Intimations of them. For, but upon a very cursory View taken of the several Instances of the Divine Bounty, and of the many Advantages and Privileges, Natural and Civil, Temporal and Spiritual, that we are blest'd with, may it not be ask'd, who are they, what State, what Kingdom, or what Nation under Heaven is there that can vye with us?

God hath planted us in a Serene, a Temperate and a Healthy Climate, free from the Terrors and Desolations of Earthquakes and *Volcano's*; free from the frequent Annoyances of Plagues and Pestilences; in a rich and fertile Land, that plentifully yields all we can desire, not only for the Support, but for the Comforts and Delights of Life; and that in such Abundance, as affords Supplies, not only for its Nation, but for many Foreign Countries, and for a beneficial Commerce with the remotest Nations.

To render us as secure, as we are remarkable for so many Advantages, is it not a very valuable Situation given us, that Indulgent Nature Guards us with the Ocean? Which is a Defence certainly much more impregnable than that of Walls and Bullworks; and wou'd free us easily, (were we so wise and good as to be well united to each other) from all the Frights and Dangers of Surprizes, or Invasions; without either the sad Necessity, or Expences, that others are oblig'd to of having numerous Forces to defend their Borders.

But further, that which is our peculiar Glory, and that makes us at once the Envy and the Admiration of the World, is (if I may be allowed to speak of it before those who best know it) the singular Excellency and Happiness of our Constitution. That whereas the Nations that surround us are reduc'd to Slavery, and subjected to the imperious Dictates, of I know
not

not what, arbitrary and lawless Powers; yet a kind and auspicious Providence has still preserved our Liberty (and may God long continue it) that we are rul'd not like Beasts, not like Bond-Slaves, but like Men; and that it is the Glory of our Monarchy to have such its Subjects. * A Monarchy so benign and auspicious, as to know no Tyranny; adorn'd like that of Heaven, with the Prerogative and Powers of doing whatever Good a virtuous Prince can wish for; and as far as may be wisely guarded from the Evils one that might be otherwise should be betrayed into. A happy Government so harmonious! Where the Prince and Subject share so amicably in the mighty Powers of it; being such, that we are allowed that inestimable Privilege, as of being rul'd by Laws of our own making, so of being judg'd by our own Peers. An Ordinance, if any, that merits well to be esteemed Divine, as being the best that can be well devised by Human Wisdom, to promote the mutual Welfare both of the Sovereign and the Subject, to maintain the true Grandeur of the one, and the just Rights and Properties of the other; to influence the Prince to rejoyce in doing Good, and being Beneficent to his Country; as a tender Parent to his People on the one hand, and to Influence the People as his Children to be Dutiful and Obedient to him on the other; and to be

* Βασιλεὺς πείνον ὅτιν ὁ ἄρχων καὶ νόμος ὁ τῷ αὐτῷ ἀρχεῖν ἐκόντων ὅτις
ἐμὴν ἐχων Scit Rex, itaque est ille qui imperat secundum
Leges, et proclūs est Scientiā imperandi volentibus.

true and faithful in that Obedience for Conscience sake ; and not only *for the Fear of Wrath*, but on the noblest Principle, that of Love.

Secondly, As in our Secular, so have we been most eminently favour'd by the Divine Goodness in our Spiritual and Religious Interests. For when in the Fullness of Time God thought fit to reveal his Will by his Son concerning Man's Salvation, and to recal the World from Pagan Ignorance and Idolatry, it is well known that this happy * Island was with the earliest of the *Gentiles* converted to Christianity ; that as it had the Honour of the first Christian Monarch to make it the national and established Faith, so it had of giving Birth to the first Christian Emperor, who made it the Establishment of the Empire.

If afterward the malignant Poison, first of the * *Arrian*, and then of the *Pelagian* Heresy, crept in, or sprung up among us to invade our Quiet, and to corrupt our Faith, and so made way for those Judgments and Delusions that enslav'd us to the *Roman* See, (and God grant that the same Attempts being now reviv'd may not be follow-

* *Britanniam nostram et fidem recepisse mox a Passione Christi, et ab ipsis quidem discipulis suis, multa perhibent Testimonia. Spelm. Con. l. 1. p. 1. Lucium unanimiter ferunt recipisse fidem ab Eleutherio. Ibid. p. 31.*

* *Mansit hæc Christi capitis & Membrorum consonantia suavis donec Arriana perfida atrox, seu anguis transmarina nobis evomens venena, fratres in unum habitantes exitabiliter faceret sejungi. Spelm. Ibid. p. 38.*

ed by the like Confusions) but when I say by these Corruptions, we unhappily relapsed again to almost a Pagan Superstition and Idolatry; so as that Legends and corrupt Traditions, instead of the Divine Oracles; and that the Worship of Men, Women, and Angels, instead of that of the Living God, together with all the absurd Inventions of *Will-Worship*, instead of the pure and rational Religion of the Gospel, were impos'd upon us; when this was the sad Circumstance of all the *Western* Churches, and of all others captivated to the *Roman* Yoke, with what Pleasure should we reflect on that Goodness that delivered us before so many others from that Bondage, by a happy Reformation: A Reformation, that has again settled our Church, upon her old and just Foundations, the Word of God; and thereby restored her to her primitive and ancient Purity, so as to be Orthodox in her Faith and Doctrines, excellently Pious in her Liturgy, and Edifying and Decent in her Ceremonies.

That this Holy Religion might want no Motives, no Endearments to recommend it to us; what a noble Cloud of Witnesses, of Saints, Martyrs, and Confessors, of excellent Bishops, useful Pastors, and other good Men from Time to Time has the Divine Goodness raised up among us? Who by their shining Piety, and faithful Precepts, and by their matchless Writings, polemical and practical, addressed both from the Pulpit and the Press; and who by living innocently, and suffering patiently, even un-

to Death, have gloriously given the utmost Testimony to the Truth and Efficacy of our Faith.

And now if we reflect upon these several Means of Grace, and upon the great Assistan-ces and Incitements to Holiness and Virtue, with which our Church is distinguished to a Degree equal, if not superior, to any in the Universe; what other Nation therefore is there that is on that Account oblig'd to excel in Goodness, and to be distinguish'd by superiour Degrees of Pro-bity and Piety as we are? For to whom is it that the great God hath been so good and graci-ous as to us, with Regard to our Happiness, both Temporal and Eternal? But,

Thirdly, We have yet further Pledges of the Divine Love, and such as ought never to be for-gotten by us, I mean the signal, the almost mi-raculous Deliverances vouchsafed so often both to our Church and State: Our Sins, our Follies have often call'd for Discipline, often provok'd God's Wrath against us, and consequently expo-sed us to be troubled and distressed by those that hated us; but still, with what Clemency, with what Mercy have our Punishments been tem-pered to teach us that not our Ruin, but our Re-formation was thereby intended. And

When (to be the more affected with the Sense of the Divine Clemency and our Delive-rances) we look back upon the various Arts and Methods of our Enemies (Enemies not to be despised either for their Skill, or Power) who
have

have so long labour'd to undo us, sometime by open Violence and Hostility, and sometime by secret Treachery and Villany; and that they have stuck at no Massacres, no Murders, no Seditions, or Conspiracies, no Treasons or Rebellions, and no base Assassinations to effect our Ruin; is it not then a Miracle of Mercy that we have been hitherto preserv'd? and shou'd we not with all Humility ascribe it to God's Mercy, and not our Merits, to God's Providence, and not our Foresight, that so many wicked Devices, so many curs'd Contrivances form'd against us, have been defeated and confounded?

These are Things too well known, to be long insisted on this honourable Audience, which is so conversant in the Histories, not only of our own, but of all Nations, and therefore needs not be appriz'd by me, of the great Things God has done in Ages past, for this Church and Nation, and much less of those within our own Remembrance.

For you that have been Witnesses to the Destructions that have so often threaten'd us, you that have seen our Religion and our Laws in their last Extremities, you that have seen our Animosities and Dissentions almost inflam'd into the merciless Barbarities of a civil War, you that so well know how many and how great our Dangers and Distresses have been, and how strange a concurrence of wonderful and kind Providences have interven'd so often for our rescue. Nay, you that have the Pleasure

sure

sure to reflect, many of you, that in the Hands of Providence, you yourselves have been so much the Instruments of our Deliverances, that your wise Proceedings in the *Senate* and the *Council*, and that your steady conduct and valour in our Fleets and Armies, have happily experienc'd the Divine Beneficence, in the Successes and Victories you have gain'd for the wellfare of your Country. The grateful Impressions of these Things, I say, being as yet so lively, and so well fixt in your Breasts, I shall no longer need to dwell upon them. And,

This may suffice, as to my first Particular: I proceed, 2dly, To consider how very much we have been wanting to our Duty, by making very ill and unsuitable Returns for those great and signal Blessings.

Upon a Review of the foregoing Advantages, and of that auspicious Providence that has taken so much Care of us, might it not be well expected, that we were possess'd with the most grateful Apprehensions of the Divine Bounty towards us; that we were truly sensible of our Happiness, and accordingly thankful, for so easy and so mild a Government, heartily Loyal to our most gracious Sovereign, and as heartily well affected one towards another; and that by a holy Life we study'd to adorn that most holy Religion, which God hath hitherto so wonderfully preserved to us; for such, undoubtedly, ought to be our Acknowledgements for the foremention'd Blessings, but, alas! to our Shames,
and

and God grant, that to our Amendment alſo it be ſpoken, inſtead of thoſe dutiful Returns which the Divine Bleſſings have ſo juſtly call'd for, how undutiful, how ungrateful have we been ! For,

Are there any of the ſad Abominations charg'd upon the *Jews* in the Context, that are not too prevailing among us ? Were they tax'd with Coveteouſneſs, with Oppreſſion, with Intemperance, Drunkenneſs, Pride, Luxury, with Perverſeneſs in inverting the Names of Good and Evil, with carnal Security, and a ſtrange Vanity of thinking themſelves Wiſe, when they were moſt Fooliſh, as being extremely wicked ; are theſe the ſad Enormities complain'd of in the *Jews*, and for which they were to be deſtroy'd ? and can it be deny'd that the ſame, nay, and many other Impieties, are not become the crying Sins of this Land ? For of *what complainings of Oppreſſions in our Streets, and of Violence in our High Ways do we not frequently hear of ?* Of what Mercileſs and *Jewiſh* Coveteouſneſs on the one Hand, and of what boundleſs Luxury and Extravagancies on the other ?

And tho' the glorious Light of the Goſpel has ſhin'd ſo long upon us, in ſo bright a Manner, yet good God ! to how little Purpoſe ; for what Returns have we made in any meaſure ſuitable to ſo plentiful a Diſpenſation of it ? How often is that Holy Religion which was given to be our Rule of Worſhip, and which is *the Wiſdom of the great God* daringly made the Subject of pro-
C phane

phane Railery? How is that holy Religion, that lays upon us all the Tyes imaginable of being united in the Bonds of Charity one towards another? How is it perverted to quite another Purpose, and made to be the common Topick of Disputes and Wranglings? And that sometimes by such, whose Time and Pains undoubtedly might much more usefully be employed, more to the Edification of the People, more to the Tranquillity of Church and State, in inculcating uncontroverted Duties, than (for the sake, perhaps, of shewing more their Parts than Piety) in reviving old, or creating new Disputes, or Heresies.

But not to insist too long on so disagreeable a Subject, whither it be from the Licentiousness arising from Practices of this Kind, or from the incorrigible ill Example of others, and the Impunities allow'd to so many ill Men, by the Remissness and Neglect of civil Magistrates (which are Faults not to be dissembl'd whomever they affect) or from whatever other Cause, or Causes, it proceeds; it is plain the Consequence is too visible, that our Impieties, our Immoralities are very gross and enormous; too provoking towards God; too pernicious in their own Nature to consist, or to be compatible with the Favour of God, or our Safety; since it is so manifest that there are among us so many vicious Libertines, so many prophane Scoffers of Religion, so many perjur'd Wretches, that act in Opposition to their most solemn Obligations,

tions, and so many that daringly avow their Infidelity, and indulge themselves without controul in their Extravagances ; for these are Things that can't go long unpunished in any State, if they are not repented of.

'Tis true indeed, (and God be praised for it) that these Impieties are not yet so spreading as to be universal (God forbid they ever should) for to our Comfort be it spoken, there are among us also many worthy Persons, no less distinguishable for their Piety and Vertue, than others for their Impiety and Debauchery ; Men that fear God, and that obey the King, detesting both the Guilt of Hypocrisy toward the one, and Disloyalty toward the other ; Men that have a due Regard to their Oaths and Promises, that eschew Evil and do Good, that are not ashamed of their Religion, and shew it, not by loud Pretences, not by extolling Parties, but in serving God truly, in doing Justice, in loving Mercy, in studying to be quiet, and to do their own Business ; and in a Word, by heartily endeavouring, not only to save their own Souls, but the Souls of others too.

These, these are surely the most propitious and the best Guardians of our Land ; these are they that have hitherto stood between us and Destruction, and warded off the Thunderbolts of the Divine Vengeance. And we should pray that it may please God by the Efficacy of his Grace, to add daily to the Number of those Holy and Tutelar Patriots, seeing we have so much Rea-

son to believe it to be owing to their Goodness and their Piety, to the Interest that they have with God, and their powerful Intercession for us that we are yet preserv'd. But

Tho' God, for their Prayers, and for his own Mercy's sake (*which should lead us to Repentance*) doth as yet with-hold his Vengeance, and wait for our Amendment, yet, let us not be so deluded as to imagine that even infinite Mercy can endure for to be still abused. For God hath plainly told us that when a People proves incorrigible, *He will visit them in the severest Manner, that his Eye will not spare, nor will he pity, but that he will judge them according to their Ways, and recompence upon them their Abominations.* Nay, and that tho' Saints so illustrious, and so dear and valuable to him, as *Noah, Daniel, and Job*, should be the Members of a State, or Nation, that was incorrigibly corrupt and vicious, they should deliver but their own Souls, — *That the Righteousness of the Righteous should be upon him, — but that the Wickedness of the Wicked should be upon them.* It behoves us therefore to look well to it, least we be thought incorrigible, and least our Impieties encrease and multiply to that Terrible degree, as in the Divine Estimate, to be accounted ripe for Vengeance.

That we may be justly sensible of this Danger, it becomes us often to remember on the one hand, by what a multitude of Obligations we are engag'd to be a Virtuous and Religious People, and on the other, how far short, as to in-
fi-

finitely the greatest Number, we are from answering of this Character; and when we seriously think of this, and read the Fate of God's Rebellious People, whom we imitate so much, what a Concern and Terror should the Apprehension of our Danger strike into us? For can we think that the just God, the Righteous Judge of all the Earth, will not be aveng'd of those who dare presumptuously to insult his Laws; and if we ask the Generations of old, and the Ages that are past, what State, what Kingdom ever was there, when once 'twas over-run with Vice and Immorality, that was suffer'd to go unpunished? No, hence arose the Ruin, hence the certain Desolation of all the Empires in the Universe; when no other Enemy could effect it, their own Sins and Wickedness, grown to a Height, have never fail'd to ruin them; being forsaken of the Divine Blessing, they commonly fell a Victim to their own Corruptions and Dissentions.

Seeing then that the just God did not spare his own peculiar People, and that he even forsook *Jerusalem his Delight among Men*, when it was defiled with Wickedness, can we think that he will not deal with us, and others, in the like Manner, when our Abominations shall be equally provoking? But this brings me to my

Third and Last Particular, which is to shew that the Sense of our Transgressions should oblige us in the most solemn Manner to attend to the Duty of this Day; to humble ourselves be-

fore God, and to repent us of our Sins, that they may not be our Ruin.

From the Sense of our Unworthiness we can't but see the absolute, the indispensable Necessity of Repentance : And happy for us that we are allow'd that Privilege to prevent our Ruin ; Repentance being the Sanctuary, being the sure and happy Refuge, and the last Support and Comfort of distressed Sinners ; for when their Sins with-hold good Things from them, when the dreadful Judgments of Heaven are ready to break out upon them, and that they are upon the Brinks of Ruin, the only Hope then left whereby to avert the Storm, and to conciliate the Peace and Favour of the offended Deity, is Repentance. And,

What Repentance means, you know, is to enter into a strict Examination of the Evil of our Ways, not after the Manner of Dissemblers with God, for God will not be mock'd, but so as to beget in us a just Abhorrence of our Abominations, and to be heartily afflicted and grieved for them, humbly to acknowledge them, with all the Aggravations that attend them, to deprecate that Wrath and Vengeance which we deserve ; to resolve upon a better Obedience for the future, and to beg for Grace to be confirm'd in these our Pious Resolutions. And,

If by these penitential Exercises we afflict ourselves in some Proportion, to the Heinousness of our Guilt, 'till we break the Bonds of Wickedness, cease to do Evil, and learn to do well, and
add,

add, hereto our most importunate Supplications at the Throne of Grace, for the Pardon of our Sins, and of the crying Sins of these Kingdoms; we may then humbly hope that God will still rejoice to do us Good, have Mercy upon us, and avert the heavy Judgments that our Sins so loudly call for; it being written for our Comfort, *That he who confesseth his Sin and forsaketh it shall have Mercy; and that to the Lord our God belong Mercies and Forgivenesses, tho' we have rebell'd against him.* Nay, and that should the Case be such, as that the Divine Judgments should be actually issued forth, as, *that the Heaven should be shut up, and there be no Rain, or that the Locusts be commanded to devour the Land, or that a Pestilence be sent among the People.* Even in those dismal Circumstances, the Gracious God hath promised, *That if my People, says he, who are call'd by my Name shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my Face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from Heaven, and will forgive their Sin, and will heal their Land.*

2. Chron. 7. 13. 14,

So then, as our whole Welfare, Happiness, and Security is to come from God, so the Means, we see, of being entitl'd to it, is Repentance. But we shall be the better able to see our great Concernment in this Duty, the Necessity of Recourse to it at this Time, and in some Measure after what Manner it should be done, if we attend to these Two following Considerations.

First, To the Consideration of the Aggravations that our Sins do admit of.

Secondly, To that of the Judgments that we are at present threat'ned with. And,

First, Of the Aggravations that our Sins do admit of; of those I crave to instance but in only Two, *viz.* That they are committed in Contempt of the Divine Goodness, that should have obliged us to our Duty; and *Secondly*, in Despight of those fartherly Corrections, that should have reclaim'd us to it.

First then, It behoves us to reflect how egregiously we have abused the Divine Goodness; for as much, as that we have not been only barren of good Works, but abounded in those that are Wicked, in Despight of all that the Divine Goodness hath done for us. That Immorality and Impiety, and all the Works of Darkness, should be the Produce and Growth of the dark and unlighten'd Parts of the World is not to be admir'd, while they are unhappily so destitute of divine Knowledge, and of the Means of Grace. But God be bless'd, the Case is otherwise with us, we are not thus forsaken, nor left to go astray in the Paths of darkness, or to be benighted in the gloomy *Regions of the Shadow of Death*.

And yet, if we, who have been rescu'd out of this miserable State, if we, who have so long enjoy'd so serene and clear a Light of the most divine and purest Informations; if we that have the Oracles of the living God speaking in our own Tongue; if we that have a Religion so establish'd on Credentials, so worthy of a God to give, and so worthy of the most exalted Reason to acquiesce

acquiesce in; if we that have not only the best Instructions set before us, but are call'd upon so often, and in so many Ways, in Books and Sermons, with the most Affectionate and Pathetick Exhortations, to the Observation of them and that have such strong Engagements in the bright Examples of so many excellent Persons, to excite us to our Duty; if, notwithstanding all these rich Cultivations, we have been not only barren of good Fruit, but like the degenerated Vine in the Text, we have brought forth *four Grapes*, that is, if in despite of all those Means that have been us'd to make us Good, we have daringly sin'd against Light, as it were in contempt of Grace, in contempt of our own solemn Vows and Engagements, and in contempt of all the Threats and Promises of the Gospel. Alas, if this be indeed our Case, ought we not to stand amaz'd at the Riches of that Mercy, that has hitherto spar'd us? Ought we not to adore that Goodness that has not yet remov'd our Candlestick for so base a Neglect, and so daring an abuse of it? And ought we not to have an Indignation against ourselves, and to be overwhelm'd with Shame and Sorrow at the Remembrance of having been so undutiful and disobedient to so gracious and so good a God? We that stand in need of so much Forgiveness, ought to be more earnest in our Repentance; and we that have experienc'd so very much of the divine Goodness ought (according

to our Saviour's Rule) to be by so much the more intent and fervent in our Love of God.

Secondly, It is to be also fear'd, that the little or no Effect which the Afflictions and Punishments we have been already visited with for our Sins, may be another Aggravation of them; for *since Afflictions spring not from the Dust*, are not the Effects of a blind chance, but of a wise and steady Providence. For, *It is I, saith the Lord, that make Peate and create Evil, and shall there be any Evil [i. e. of Affliction] in the City, and the Lord hath not done it. Amos 3. 6.* We shou'd then remember that when Afflictions come, to look upon them, as sent from God, either to try our Vertue, or to correct our Folly.

When we then reflect upon our own Demerits, and upon the Troubles and Calamities that have befallen us, we ought from thence to be assur'd both of our Provocations against God, and of his Displeasure against us. 'Tis true we shou'd not hence infer, that we are not the greatest Sinners, because we have not been the greatest Sufferers, for sometimes God allows a longer Time to some than others for Repentances; yet if we attend either to the Number, or Nature, of the Troubles wherewith we have been exercis'd, we shall have little Reason to infer thence that in the divine Estimate, we are not look'd upon as very great and provoking Sinners.

For tho' (God be prais'd) we have not a late Experience of Pestilence, or Famine, nor of the
bloody

bloody Outrages of a civil War, nor of the merciless Desolations of Fire and Sword, scatter'd by a Foreign Enemy within our Borders; but tho' we have not felt those sore Calamities, (and God grant we never may), yet how often have they threaten'd us, and how narrowly have we escap'd (at least some of) them? How long have we been menac'd and insulted by the Popish Power? How for more than Thirty Years together, have we been engag'd as it were, but in one uninterrupted contest in the Defense of our Religion and our Laws? How many Thousands of our dear and brave Country-Men have sacrific'd their Lives on the one Hand, and what an inestimable Expence of Treasures on the other, have we been oblig'd to, for the Support of it? Again, how great are the Damages and Losses, that we have sustain'd by Sea and Land, and not only by Foreign Depredations, but by the Fraud and Rapine of Domestick Bubbles and Impostures? And when we consider of those and whatever other Evils that have befallen us, which have affected so many Thousands of Families; can we think that the Wise and Good God did inflict those Evils, or send those Punishments for nought? Or can we imagine, that that gracious Being who grieves not willingly the Children of Men, wou'd afflict and discipline us thus severely, if our Sins and Wickedness did not make it necessary? May we not in many of our Sufferings, read the sinful Causes of them, and observe the Finger of God in the

Punishment pointing out the Wickedness that occasion'd it? But have we seriously consider'd these Things? Have they made any just Impressions upon us; or can we say that we have been duly humbl'd under the mighty Hand of God, in those his Punishments; or have they wrought any considerable Reformation among us? Have the Confederacies of so many Foreign Enemies against us, united us to one another, and cur'd us of our civil Discords and Animosities? Has the Sense of the great and heavy Debts we have contracted, made us better Husbands or more Frugal? Or have the Damages and Losses we have suffer'd abated our Pride, or retrench'd our Luxuries? Or *Lastly*, have the Dangers we have been in of losing our Religion oblig'd us to a better and stricter Observance of it? Alas, if all our Punishments and Corrections have had so little or no Effect upon us, as the Heinousness of our Guilt must be thereby inanc'd; so must it follow, that for being thus obdurate and Impenitent, we shall treasure up unto our Selves greater Degrees of Vengeance against the Day of Wrath: Which brings me in the

Last Place to observe, That the Consideration of the dreadful Judgments we are at present threaten'd with, is another Motive that calls upon us to a very strict and unfeigned Repentance. If we consider our selves in our present Circumstances, we have reason to imagine, that the great God looks upon us with much of that Concern that our Blessed Lord was in, when
he

he beheld *Jerusalem*, and said, *Oh! that thou hadst seen in this thy day the things belonging to thy peace.* -- That he Condoles our Obstinacy and Perverseness, and, as it were, wishes and desires our Repentance and Conversion before it be too Late. But if no Threats, if no Promises, if no Mercies nor Corrections are available to reclaim us, we must not then think, *that God will still strive with man*; for when Men prove Incorrigible, Mercy then ceases, and Justice will take Place. And if it comes to this Extremity, if the Righteous God, *who is arm'd with the terrors of almighty power, who has heaven and earth, with all the powers therein, with the Issues of life and death at his command; who is a consuming fire to destroy the works and workers of iniquity*; if this Tremendous Being comes forth to Judgment, Alas, *Who can stand before his Indignation, or who can abide the Fierceness of his Anger?* Hab. I. 6.

And now we are to remember, that while we are impenitent, we are at Enmity with this most dreadful *Being*, who can at once deprive us of all that we enjoy, and all that we can hope for, and inflict upon us all the Evils we are capable of enduring, or that we can fear. That while we are at Enmity with him, his sorest Judgments stand in Array against us; that one of them is, as it were, at this Time brandish'd over our Heads; I mean that raging Pestilence, now let loose to spread its Desolations in the next Kingdom to us; and we should remember,

ber, that the Meaning of that is, to tell us, *That they are not greater Sinners than we are, but that if we repent not, we must likewise perish.* And,

That we may be so affected as we ought to be at the Greatness of our Danger, we should consider, at least, a little of the dismal Desolations that we hear of; consider as well of the Strangeness, as the Terrour of seeing Men in their best Age and Vigour, as it were by Multitudes falling dead in the Streets and High-ways; of seeing Crowds of noisome Carcasses lie unburied, and rotting above Ground for want of Hands to remove them; of seeing populous Towns and Cities almost quite depopulated, and of seeing Rich and well Inhabited Provinces in so short a Time made destitute of Inhabitants, and almost turned into a Desert. And if at this distance these Miseries can't but appear very moving to us; Good God, how unspeakable would our Terrour and Concern be, if they were our own? Or, what more deplorable Idea can we form to ourselves, than if this Contagion came among us, and that we in our Turn should be also forc'd to see our Friends and Neighbours fall by Thousands at our Sides, and by Ten Thousands at our Right-Hand, to hear at once on every side the Cries and Groans of the Dying and the Living; to have our Habitations converted into noisome Prisons; and to see this great *Metropolis*, this famous Mart of Nations, spew out her Inhabitants, and the like spreading Desolation over-run our Country? Now when we turn
our

our Thoughts to these black and Tragical Views, and remember how very nearly they approach us, unless the wonted Miracles of the Divine Mercy interpose on our Behalf; can there be any Apprehensions more awakening, to oblige us with the utmost Diligence to make our Peace with God? In a Word, If we have any Regard for the common Good, any Concern for the Welfare of our Native Country, or for those in it that are dearest to us, and for our selves; it behoves us without Delay, and before it be too late, to conciliate his Favour who can alone preserve us.

Thus does it appear as well from a View of the Judgments wherewith we are threatened, as from the Aggravations that our Sins do admit of, how sincere and extraordinary our Humiliation and Repentance should be.

To sum up all; If in a just Light we set before us these several Considerations. *First*, How much we have to answer to God for having so long abus'd his Goodness, and making such ill Returns for all the Instances of his Love toward us; how much we have to answer for being so obdurate and harden'd against Correction; and profiting so little by the Discipline whereby his Mercy would reclaim us; and how much therefore God must be incens'd against us, as we have Reason to believe also from the terrible Judgments that are presented before us. If the Sense of these Things have a due Effect upon us,

us, we shall be necessarily convinc'd of our Obligation to the following Rules.

First, With the deepest Humility, and with a Holy and Religious Fear to prostrate ourselves before God, *To acknowledge that we have not walked in his Laws which he hath set before us, to acknowledge that to him belongeth Righteousness, but to us Confusion, to our Kings, to our Princes, to our Fathers, and our selves, because we have sinned against him.*

Secondly, In the devoutest Manner to implore God's Mercy, to contend with him with strong Cries and Tears, *That he correct us not in his Anger, least he bring us to Nothing, that he may not remember the crying Sins and Offences of these Kingdoms, but that according to his Mercy he may think upon us for his Goodness sake, preserve us from the noisome Pestilence, deliver our Souls from Death, and from all the Evils that we have deserv'd.* And,

Thirdly, To be qualified, and made fit Objects for that Mercy ; to resolve to forsake the Evil of our Ways ; to pursue the Things that make for our Peace ; to abhor all Prophaneness and Irreligion ; to be asham'd of our Civil Discords and Contentions, which tend to render us so pernicious to ourselves, so useless to our Friends, and so contemptible to our Enemies ; and in a Word, to repent us truly of all our Sins, and unfeignedly to turn to God in Newness of Life : so shall we escape the Evils we are afraid of ; enjoy the Continuance of God's Mercy and loving

ving Kindness towards us, and so doing, whether Life or Death befall us, we shall be ascertained of our Happiness.

I have now dispatch'd what I propos'd, and endeavour'd with that Plainness and Simplicity which I think best becomes the Occasion, to set before you the heinous Nature of our Guilt; the Judgments they are likely to bring upon us, and the only Means whereby we may escape them, namely by Repentance and Reformation. And now,

Of what mighty Force, Illustrious Patriots, your *Example* and your *Authority* will be to accomplish and bring about this Blessed End, you need not be informed. What remains for me is to supplicate, that that Wisdom which is from Above may direct you to the best Means for the Attainment of our common Good; and may inspire you with Zeal and Resolution equal to this Glorious Undertaking; and may enable you most effectually to suppress all Vice and Impiety, (which are our worst Enemies) and to maintain God's true Religion and Vertue among us. And,

Because God rejoices to shine upon the Councils of the Just and Good, may no sinful, or unbecoming Imputations, may no partial, no sinister or mean Views be the Reproach of any one who has the Honour to be of your august Assembly; But may the *British* Senate ever be renowned for their inviolable Adherence to that noble Principle, of sacrificing all other Consi-

derations to that of the Publick Welfare; and may you be as much rever'd and honour'd for your Piety and your Vertue, as you are justly dreaded for your Power and Authority. In a Word, and to conclude in the Words of our Holy Mother the Church, *May your Consultations ever tend to the Advancement of God's Glory, to the Good of his Church, to the Safety, Honour and Welfare of our Sovereign and his Kingdoms; that all things may be so order'd and settled by your Endeavours upon the best and surest Foundations, that Peace and Happiness, Truth and Justice, Religion and Piety, may be established among us for all Generations, and till Time shall be no more. Amen.*

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