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15
*The proper Improvement of Divine
Judgments.*

A
S E R M O N

Preached before the
MAYOR AND CORPORATION,
A T
St. *Martin's* in OXFORD,
On Friday, February 6. 1756.

Being the Day appointed to be kept as a F A S T,
on Account of the present important Situation
of Publick Affairs, and particularly on Occa-
sion of many dreadful EARTHQUAKES, at
L I S B O N and other Places.

By GEORGE FOTHERGILL, D. D.
Principal of St. *Edmund* Hall.

Publish'd at the Request of the Mayor, Recorder,
Aldermen, and Assistants of the City.

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ISAIAH XXVI. 9.

— *When Thy Judgments are in the Earth, the Inhabitants of the World will learn Righteousness.*

AS it is a standing Evidence of Man's *Natural Imperfection*, that some Degree of *Pain* is often wanted to heighten the Relish of his *Pleasures*; so is it a no less mortifying Proof of his *Moral Degeneracy*, that *Suffering* is equally necessary to rectify his *Temper*, and improve his *Virtues*. If in the *Day of Prosperity* we can be joyful; yet such Rejoicing is seldom either so sincere or so well conducted, as when the *Day of Adversity* hath first made us consider. And accordingly, *GOD hath set the one over against the other; to the End*, that those Persons or Nations, that will not behold the *Majesty of the LORD when Favour is shewed to them*, may however, when His *Judgments are in the Earth*, be disposed to learn *Righteousness*.

How much *the Inhabitants of this Part of the World* are concern'd to make good the Observation in my Text, it will become us to reflect with Seriousness on This solemn Occasion. — For several Years together were the Treasures of this Nation drain'd from it, and its Blood spilt in foreign Lands, in the Course of a tedious

and hazardous, often unsuccessful, and always consuming, *War*: The Calamities whereof were, in a memorable Period of it, severely felt in *one* Part of this Island, and almost brought home to our own Doors in the *other*. When we were scarcely rescued from the Terrors of an *intestine* War, and whilst we yet labour'd under the Burthen of a *foreign* one; it pleased the Almighty to send among us a *Plague* of another Nature, very grievous to many Parts of our Land, and in some measure to the Whole; whilst it has been destroying the *Cattle*, and wasting the Substance of Numbers of its most industrious and useful Inhabitants. And, if our *Colonies* be (as surely they are) entitled to our warmest *Wishes for their Prosperity*, at once on Account of our Mother Country, and *for our Brethren and Companions' sakes*, who reside in or are closely connected with them: *These* also have of late been cruelly infested by the incroaching Spirit of some of *their* Neighbours, now at least avowedly supported by some of *our's*: In the Issue of whose Attempts, how remote soever in their Beginnings, no one can foresee, how deeply not only our Commercial Affairs, but every Thing else that is dear to us, (our KING and our COUNTRY, our LIBERTIES and our Holy RELIGION,) may be involved. Yet as if these Intimations of Divine Displeasure were not enough to admonish us, We are, now last of all, awaken'd by *Warnings* of a yet more peculiar Kind, and such as are alarming beyond all the others; as being more sudden and extensive in their Effects, and less capable of being fore-

foreseen, prevented, resisted, or evaded. You will easily understand me to mean those extraordinary *Agitations* both of *Land* and *Water*, some Strokes whereof have been felt in our own Borders; but by the Violence of which in other Regions the *Lives* of many Thousands, some of them our Country-Men, have been as in a Moment destroy'd, and the *Fortunes* of far greater Numbers irrecoverably ruined. There is something wonderfully striking in the *Descriptions* of *single* Earthquakes, even in *remote* Ages or Countries of the World. But, when such astonishing Concussions appear in our *own* Times, and in Countries wherewith we have particular Connections; when they produce the most tragical Effects, not transiently or in some one Place only, but in many Parts of the habitable World nearly about the same Time, and in some often repeated for Weeks together; such amazing Occurrences call for a more than ordinary Attention. *If the Foundations be destroy'd, what can the Righteous do?* If the whole Globe of Earth and Water be, as it were, in Convulsions under us, whither can we flee for Support? Whither, but to HIM, *who first stretched out*, and who alone can sustain, *the Earth above the Waters*: Adoring His Goodness for having spared us until now: Imploring the Continuance of His gracious Protection: Endeavouring to avert His Judgments from our Country by contributing all we can to its Reformation: And each of us, in View of his own most lasting Interests, asking himself, in the Words of
the

the ^a *Keeper of the Prison* (*awaken'd likewise by a great Earthquake*) "*What must I do to be saved?*"

Such may well be supposed to be the Temper of a Nation not wholly lost to all Sense of a super-intending Providence. And such our Superiours (we hope justly) suppose to be the Temper of this Nation, when They now call upon us, to ^b *turn to the LORD with all our Hearts, with Fasting, and with Weeping, and with Mourning*. Of which seasonable Appointment, I trust, we may in some Measure answer the pious Intention, by considering these Words,—*When Thy Judgments are in the Earth, the Inhabitants of the World will learn Righteousness*.

They are Part of a *Song* or sacred Hymn address'd to GOD by the *Jewish Church* in the Days of *Isaiab*. It would carry us too far from our present Business, should I attempt to explain at large the Occasion and Import of the *Whole*, or even to illustrate the Connection of my *Text* with what goes before, and what follows, in it. Let me only observe, that the Word render'd "*Judgments*" is well known in *many* other Places to signify those *Statutes, adjudged Cases, or Laws*, of which GOD requires Man's Observance. And, according to this Acceptation, the *Evangelical Prophet* might, perhaps not unfitly, be here consider'd as foretelling the great Advantage in point of *Instruction in Righteousness*, which *the Inhabitants of the World* in general would enjoy, in the Times of the *Gospel*, by that more extensive *Knowledge of GOD's Laws* which would

^a Acts XVI. 26, 30.

^b Joel II. 12.

then

then be *in the Earth*. But, however this be, I chuse, with the *Generality* of Interpreters, (especially on the present Occasion) to understand by *God's Judgments* any *signal or uncommon Manifestations of His Power*, either in the *mercifully corrective* or in the *justly vindictive Way*: Between which, since we can rarely distinguish with *Certainty* in *particular* Instances, there is the less Need to detain You with any Accuracy of Distinction in a *general* Consideration of them. And, if by *Righteousness* we understand, not barely Justice or Exactness of Behaviour towards our Fellow-Members in Society, but Rectitude of Temper upon the whole, and Regularity of Conduct in every Relation, towards God and Ourselves as well as Others with whom We have any Intercourse; my Text will furnish us with a Doctrine, important at all Times, but at present particularly worthy of Attention: Namely, "That the Providential Design and *proper Effect* of Divine Interpositions of the *Judicial* Kind is, to *make the Sufferers*, if They have Time allow'd for it, but especially the *Observers, wiser and better*; by instructing them in, and exciting them to, the Practice of Virtue and Piety and *universal Righteousness*."

Which great Truth I shall accordingly endeavour to illustrate and apply in the plainest Method I can; by pointing out some of those *instructive Lessons*, which *Divine Judgments* convey to Mankind: Whether they be of a more *General and Publick* Nature, or of a more *Particular and Personal* Use and Influence.

I. I begin

I. I begin with such Observations as are of a more *General* and *Publick* Kind : More *General*, in regard to those *Judgments* that suggest them ; and more *Publick*, in regard to the *Communities* concern'd to *learn* and apply them.

1. And here, the *First* Consideration which offers itself is, That we should look up to Almighty God as the *primary* Author and *supreme* Conductor of such Events ; whatever may seem the *subordinate* Cause of them, always acknowledging them to be His *Judgments*.

Thus much is *supposed* in my Text, and should not need to be illustrated to a *Christian* Audience, were it not of too great Importance upon the present Subject to be wholly omitted. It is indeed the Foundation, if not of all the *Moral* Uses, at least of all the *Religious* Improvements, which calamitous Events, either felt or observed, at present intimate to us. Were *Affliction* to be considered merely as *coming forth of the Dust*, or *Trouble as springing out of the Ground*, without any higher Origin, any wiser Direction ; they would leave our *outward* Condition still more uncomfortable than it is, whilst we should lose much of that Assistance they now give Us towards the Improvement of our *Minds*. And, in fact, we usually find those Persons who *have not* GOD in all their *Thoughts*, equally impatient under their own Sufferings and unimproved by those of other Men ; whilst, in their Speculations upon such Evils as arise from human Actions, they rise no higher than to the ordinary
Work-

Workings of human Passions; and treat it as a Weakness to look beyond Material Causes for the Rise of such Calamities as have mere Matter for their immediate Instrument. Whereas Affliction is then only fitted to have its proper Efficacy, when ^a *all that see it shall say, "This hath GOD done;"* and when *They* who feel the Smart of it shall *perceive that it is His Work.*

And thus it is that both Reason and Revelation teach us to consider all Occurrences of this Kind; I may say, of every Kind: For tho' the Great Governour of the Universe ordinarily supports both *Material* and *Moral* Agents in their respective Operations, according to *stated Laws*; yet those Laws were originally framed by His wise Appointment, and are every Moment subject to His sovereign Direction. He it was, who first ^b *measured the Waters in the Hollow of His Hand, and meted out the Heaven with a Span, and comprehended the Dust of the Earth in a Measure, and weighed the Mountains in Scales, and the Hills in a Balance:* And if at any Time this regular Arrangement, this stupendous Order, of Things is, to the Destruction of many, and the Astonishment of all, disturb'd; we may be sure, Nothing of this Kind can happen without the Concurrence or Permission of HIM, who first adjusted it. ^c *Fire and Vapour and stormy Wind,* whether within the Bowels of the Earth, or upon the Surface of it, whether producing Effects common and unheeded, or unusual and surprizing, may be acting (as far as They can be said

^a Psal. LXIV. 9.

^b Is. XL. 12.

^c Psal. CXLVIII. 8.

to act) according to their Natures; but are however all the While executing their Maker's Orders, and *fulfilling His Word*. So again, rapacious Men, and savage Nations may, in their Incroachments, Depredations, and Barbarities, be gratifying their own avaritious and cruel Dispositions; and are really provoking a righteous and holy GOD by making so perverse an Use of the Faculties He gives them. But notwithstanding this, they both hold and exert these Faculties in a *perpetual* Dependence upon Him. Without His Leave the most powerful, the most enraged, Enemy ^a *shall not come into any City or Country, nor shoot an Arrow there, nor come before it with Shields, nor cast a Bank against it.* In short, He who first impressed upon Natural Causes all their Tendencies, and granted to Moral Agents all their Powers, must every Moment support, and can at Pleasure controul, the most mischievous of Both; and must therefore be understood as superintending all those Evils, which either single Men or Nations at any Time suffer from the one or the other.

It is, in Truth, one *declared* End of all such signal Interpositions to make us *behold* and revere *the Majesty of the LORD*. Not that Divine Providence is less really concern'd in the ordinary Course of Things, than in these extraordinary Appearances. ^b *The Heavens declare the Glory of GOD, and the Firmament sheweth His Handy-Work: Day unto Day uttereth Speech, and Night unto Night sheweth Knowledge.* The

^a 11. XXXVII. 33.

^b Psal. XIX. 1, 2.

stated

stated Revolutions of the heavenly Bodies, the regular Returns of *Seasons*, and the daily Appearances that succeed each other in the most uniform Order, are (no doubt) continually *bearing Witness* to the Divine Wisdom and Goodness, and *teaching* all who are willing to attend to them our entire Dependence upon G O D's Power and Providence. But still, tho' those Interpositions that seem to us most extraordinary may not require any *more difficult Exertion* of Power in respect to *Him*, yet they bring with them a *Display* of it *more awakening* to us. If a ^a *strong Wind rend the Rocks*, and *after the Wind an Earthquake*, and *after the Earthquake a Fire*; JEHOVAH is *not* indeed more essentially present in any or all of These, but His Operation is more awfully distinguishable, than in *the still small Voice* of the Course of Nature. The Instructions suggested by This latter, being common and familiar, are by the thoughtless overlook'd, or by the vicious eluded. *An unwise Man doth not well consider this; and a Fool or irreligious Person doth not understand it.* He collects (it may be) from what himself sees compared with what he has heard, that, whilst ^b *one Generation passeth away and another cometh, the Earth abideth for ever*: And if he admits of *any* Creation or Beginning of this visible World, he understands, however, that ^c *since the Fathers fell asleep, all Things, in the main, continue as they were from the Beginning of the Creation*; and therefore he sees no Occasion for the vulgar

^a Kings XIX. 11, 12. ^b Eccl. I. 4. ^c 2 Pet. III. 4.

Notion of a superintending Providence. But, *if the LORD maketh a new Thing; if the Earth openeth her Mouth, and the Depths also be troubled,* both of them in so unusual a Manner as to threaten to return to their primitive Confusion: Such Manifestations of the Almighty's Power, in Ways to us strange and astonishing however equally easy to Him, effectually confute, tho' they may not absolutely silence, *the great swelling Words of human Vanity.* The Politician finding his Refinements unaccountably superseeded, and the Philosopher all his Powers of Imitation, all his Skill in Solution, far outdone, now if ever agree in crying out, with the ^a *Magicians of Egypt*, "*This is the Finger of God!*" By thus ^b *arising to Judgment* He makes *the Fierceness of Man turn to His Praise: He refrains or overawes the Spirit of Princes; and is wonderful among the Kings of the Earth!*

2. But our Reflections must not stop here. When the GOD of Nature thinks fit to *depart* from His *usual* Methods of conducting it, He hath, we may conclude, such *Reasons* for so doing as We are concern'd to enquire into with Modesty, and with Seriousness to *lay to Heart.*

GOD is, no doubt, the *absolute Lord* and Proprietor of the Universe: But He is also the *wise* and good *Governour* of it. And, however the Display of His adoreable Majesty may be *one* Great End of His occasional Interpositions, we must not imagine This to be the *only* or the ultimate End of them, especially when employ'd

^a Exod. VIII. 18, 19. ^b Psal. LXXVI. 10, 11.

in producing the Misery, and even Destruction, of Numbers of His principal Creatures in this lower World. ^a *He doth not afflict willingly, or without Reason grieve the Children of Men.* When therefore, beside those Distresses or Diseases which, by His wise Appointment, usually attend upon Folly and Vice as their Natural Consequences, He *makes bare His Arm* in some unusual Infliction; when He delivers up any Country to the Outrages of violent Men; or when He sends into a Land ^b *His own great Army, the Locust and the Caterpillar*, causing some noxious Insect or *noisome Beast to pass through* it; or, in short, when He sweeps away Thousands at once by any of those Instruments, which are always ready to execute His Commands: Men conversant in the Operations of Natural Causes may, it is true, commendably and usefully employ their Sagacity in tracing out the *immediate* Occasions of such Events, and their Skill in providing (as far as human Skill can provide) seasonable Remedies. But then, *whofo is wise will* also, with a yet farther View, *ponder These Things*; with all Humility reflecting, on what Errand such afflictive Dispensations may be supposed to be sent, and what Instructions *the God of Mercy* may be presumed to offer by entering upon This ^c *His strange Work.*

Now the most obvious Errands, upon which Providence may be understood to send among Men the Evils they suffer, are their Admonition and Correction, or their Punishment for the

^a Lam. III. 33. ^b Joel II. 25. ^c Is. XXVIII. 21.

Evils they have done. Something of this last seems imply'd in the very Notion of *Judgments*. And we are by Scripture as well as Reason warranted in supposing, not only that Sin *was* the *original* Cause of Suffering among Mankind, but that it still is, especially in the Case of Nations *as such*, the *meritorious* Cause of particular Calamities. But then, in the Application of such general Principles to single Instances, it will always become Us to proceed with Caution, and to pronounce with Reverence: As well knowing, *how unsearchable* GOD's *Judgments are*, and *His Ways past finding out*. We shall be most liable to Mistakes about the special Designation of *particular* Judgments against *particular* Sins; but we may easily mistake also in our Estimation from thence of Men's real Characters. We may judge too severely even in *our own* Case; if, upon every Disappointment or Affliction to ourselves or our Country, we presently conclude that we are *cast off by* GOD, and that *He hath forgotten to be gracious* to us. But we shall be more in Danger of erring in our Decisions concerning *others*; by supposing their Sufferings to bear any *exact Proportion* to their *Moral* Deservings; especially, if upon comparing their apparently calamitous Condition with our own present Indemnity, we form a Comparison of our respective Demerits, and real Situations, upon the Whole, in regard to the Favour or Displeasure of Almighty GOD.

Yet this is a Misapplication of Divine Judgments of long standing in the World. We find
it

it remarkably exemplify'd in the ancient Book of *Job*, and zealously defended by Those, who from hence, instead of being *friendly Visitants*, became *miserable Comforters* to that *perfect and upright*, tho' much afflicted, *Man*. It is indeed a Misapplication, to which our Self-Love renders us extremely liable. Gladly do we flatter ourselves upon the Comparison with our Neighbours: And, when any cross Accident or sore Affliction befalls any One, much more any Number, of them, especially if of a Party opposite to our own; whatever we fancy blameable in them, we eagerly press into our Service as a Commendation of ourselves. This however is a Method of Judging evidently erroneous in the Case of those Calamities, in which Men of the most different Characters appear equally involved; and it is in *other* Cases, not only fallacious in itself and uncharitable to others, but presumptuous towards G O D: It is *intruding into Those Things which we have not seen*, and *judging the Servants of another Master*. Besides that We hereby defeat all the good Ends of such Occurrences in regard to ourselves; dealing with publick Judgments as Men are observed to do with general Satyrs: Whilst each is employ'd in remarking how justly the Strokes fall upon those about him, each forgets to apply the Correction and the Caution to himself; and thus is the Benefit lost to All.

The Determination of our *Blessed* LORD upon this Point, tho' well known, is too remarkable to be here omitted. *There were* (we read) *at a*
 certain

certain *Season*, ^a *some who told Him of the Galileans, whose Blood Pilate had mingled with their Sacrifices.* The Relaters seem to have ascribed such an extraordinary Manner of Suffering to some as extraordinary Degree of Guilt on the Part of the Sufferers. What then saith the Answer of Wisdom Itself? *Suppose Ye, that these Galileans were Sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such Things? I tell You, Nay.* To this Instance of suffering from human Cruelty, He Himself subjoins another, no less fatal, from undesigning Matter. *Or those Eighteen, upon whom the Tower in Siloam fell and slew them; suppose Ye, that They were Sinners above all Men that dwelt at Jerusalem? I tell You, Nay.* — The Answer, You see, is in both Cases the same: No Question is here made but that both Instances of Suffering, however they differ'd as to their subordinate Causes, were under the Direction of the same *Moral Governour*. In short, the *Supposal* here corrected is, not that the Sufferers had been Sinners; nor that they had suffer'd for their Sins; but that they *must* have been *Sinners above* those that had been yet spared, *because they only had suffer'd such Things.* And, (which most deserves our Notice,) the Use our Blessed LORD makes of the Whole is, To call home the misemploy'd Reflections of His Hearers from the Case of Others to (what was of far nearer Concern to themselves) the State of their own Tempers and Lives, the Ruin threatening them on that Account, and the only Way by

^a Luke XIII. 1—5.

which

which they could hope to prevent it: — *Except Ye repent, Ye shall all likewise perish!*

3. Which brings us directly to the *principal* Improvement we should make of all Publick Judgments; Namely, to take Occasion from thence to *search and try our own Ways and turn to the LORD*, in order to avert the like Evils from ourselves and our Country.

This will be, in the most proper Sense, to *learn Righteousness*, and is an Use of such Occurrences, in which we cannot be mistaken. Would to GOD, that *We* of *This* Nation had less Need to apply it to ourselves! If indeed, upon an impartial Scrutiny, *We should* find ourselves, even comparatively, *without Sin*; we might then have more Leisure to gratify our Curiosity, and might with more Propriety indulge a censorious Humour, in regard to the Moral or Religious State of our *Suffering Neighbours*. But, alas! we should in such an Imagination greatly *deceive ourselves*; nor will the Delusion be less palpable or less fatal, should we grow secure upon finding ourselves guiltless in some Instances where They are obnoxious, unless we stand *equally clear* in all others of equal Importance. — If, for instance, we are not generally chargeable with *Superstition* (which however may appear in very *different Shapes*;) we shall do well to reflect, whether we are also free from *Profaneness*. If we are not unreasonably fond of Pomp, and have even an *Abhorrence of Idolatry*, in Publick Worship; let us not presently conclude ourselves spared, whilst our Neigh-

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bours

hours have been punished, purely on That Account; unless we can equally acquit ourselves and our Country-men of a *sacrilegious* Misapplication of GOD's own *holy Day*, and a scandalous Contempt of *all* Publick Worship. If, once more, we stand clear of the *justly heinous* Charge of *persecuting* the faithful Servants of CHRIST, and *torturing* many sincere Professors of His Truth: Yet *where is* our *Boasting*, *should* We be fallen into the opposite Extreme of *Caring for none of these Things*: *Should* wanton Scoffers, whensoever They are so minded, find an unmolested Licence to scatter among the Vulgar their poisonous Notions, those worst of *Firebrands, Arrows and Death*; ridiculing the most sacred Truths, and reviling (if not *persecuting*) those that teach them; nay sometimes even *blaspheming that worthy Name by which we are called*: Or (as if all this were not sufficient to *subvert whole Houses*, and to set the Body of the People as free from the Checks of Conscience as possible) *should* the *first Principles* of All Religion be openly degraded into stated Topicks of *vain Jangling*; by Way of Seasoning to the low Merriment of *Those*, who, on Subjects of such a Nature at least, can hardly be supposed to *understand either what they say or whereof they affirm*.— Surely, a *blind Zeal* for the Religion of CHRIST however mistaken in some Articles of it, or even an intemperate Heat against Opposers which can at most *kill the Body*, cannot be more provoking to Its Divine Author than such audacious

a Jam. II. 7.

b 1 Tim. I. 6, 7.

Insults upon Himself, such cruel Neglect of the *Souls for whom He dyed*. ^a *Hath any Nation so used their Gods, which yet were no Gods?* To introduce *Religion*, and (as far as in them lies) its *adoreable Object*, into such Debates, at such Seasons, and for such Purposes, as those now hinted at, too nearly resembles the Malice, and exceeds the Impiety, of the *Philistines* when they ^b *called for Sampson to make them Sport*. And, what can be so reasonably expected, as that Omnipotence thus affronted should pull down upon the Heads of such Mockers, and (may I not add?) upon the Place that harbours them, *swift Destruction!*

I delight not in pursuing this melancholy Theme of our publick *Impieties* thro' their destructive Consequences upon the *Morals* of the Nation. Otherwise, it were but too easy to enlarge upon that insatiable Thirst after sensual Pleasure, that Luxury and Lewdness which overspread the Land: That Avarice, Venality, and Want of Publick Spirit, which are complain'd of in Some; and that Jealousy, Suspiciousness, and Want of Candour, in Others: That Eagerness for Profit or Power or Pre-eminence, which enflames Men's interfering Pursuits into implacable Enmities: That Prevarication with the most solemn Stipulations, and Profanation of the most sacred Ordinances, by which (it is to be feared) too Many are first tempted to elude the well-intended Laws of their Country, and then harden themselves in such Viola-

^a Jer. II. 11.

^b Judg. XVI. 25.

tions by charging all the Guilt upon the Legislature itself: Above all, That notorious Disregard of Oaths, which renders it impossible to secure to *All their Dues*, or even to procure satisfactory Evidence in Courts of Judicature — But I forbear. Nor has thus much been said (You will believe) in order to prevent our becoming wiser from the Example of our Neighbours, or our Guarding against any Thing blameable in *their Principles or Conduct*; but by Way of finding more seasonable Employment for our serious Reflections, where we are more concern'd. And I would hope also, if ^a *our Lot is fallen to us in a Ground* hitherto firm under us, what has been said may remind You, *Whom We are to thank for giving Us Warning*; and to whose unmerited Goodness it is owing, that ^b *the Earth hath not yet swallow'd Us up also*.

4. Let me add (and it is the *Last* Consideration I shall offer under this Head) that, whatever our *Transgressions* may be, they will, *if persisted in after repeated Admonitions*, be highly aggravated, and become yet *more exceeding sinful*.

It is *not even supposed* in my Text, that GOD's *Judgments* will fail of producing the *Reformation* of Those that come within the Reach of their *Instruction*. When therefore any Persons or Nations neglect to make this Natural Improvement of them; *Their Guilt* must exceed all *ordinary Measures*, and (we may reasonably conclude) will be visited with a proportionable Severity. ^c O LORD (says the Prophet *Jeremiah*) *are not*

^a Psal. XVI. 6, 7

^b Num. XVI. 34.

^c Jer. V. 3.

Thine Eyes upon the Truth? Thou hast stricken them, but They have not grieved; Thou hast consumed them, but They have refused to receive Correction; They have made their Faces harder than a Rock; They have refused to return. The Holy Man, upon observing the incorrigible Obstinacy of his People, in appearance triumphing over all G O D's repeated Chastisements, seems astonish'd at His Forbearance so long continued towards them, and almost ready to give up the Belief of His Moral Government. But he soon recovers himself, and foretells their Doom, when he perceives them adding *Shamelessness* to their *Impenitence*: And he lived to see all his Doubts fully removed, and his Denunciations against them abundantly verify'd.

How long the great Governour of the Universe may, in any particular Instance, think fit to suspend the Execution of the dreadful Sentence against a guilty Land, it is not possible for us to say; because it is not possible for us to take in the *whole Scheme* of His Providence, or even *all the Reasons* which may hasten or retard His Judicial Proceedings. And accordingly, we find in the *sacred History* (the most complete History of Divine Providence) more Examples than one of abandon'd Nations, that had the Sentence against them respited for some Ages, after they appear to have been devoted to Destruction. But in *no History*, sacred or profane, can we find an Account of any Nation remarkably immoral or impious, which was not, *sooner or later*, as remarkably punish'd, and if finally incorrigible

corrigible as remarkably extirpated. The *Judge of all the Earth* will, we may be assured, never let His Corrections *return to Him vain* or ineffectual; nor suffer either Personal or National Impenitence *finally* to prevail against His righteous Government. *Personal Wickedness may*, it is true, and often *does*, in *present Appearance*, escape His Vengeance; because Personal Wickedness may, and most certainly will, receive its deserved *Wages in another State*. But this cannot be the Case of *National Impiety*. *Nations* cannot be punish'd, because They will not *as Nations* subsist, in another World. And therefore, Those of them, which will not glorify GOD by a willing Compliance with His repeated Admonitions till the Measure of their Iniquities is fill'd up, shall *then* most assuredly, however unwillingly, glorify Him by their exemplary Destruction.

May no such Fate ever attend These, hitherto highly favour'd, Kingdoms! May we *see* and adore *the Majesty of the LORD* in all His Dispensations; acknowledging in particular *the Rod* of His late Correction, *and who hath appointed it!* May we with all Humility *lay to Heart* the Instructions He may be presumed to intend by it! And, as the surest Improvement we can *learn* from it, may we ^a *Repent and turn* ourselves from *All our Transgressions; that so Iniquity may not be our Ruin!*

As to *Ourselves*: We are indeed but a small Part of a large Community, and each of us by

^a Ezek. XVIII. 30.

himself

himself a still smaller. Yet something every one of us may contribute towards a general Amendment by reforming *himself*, and many of us still more (more than can well be computed) by Authority, or Example, or Influence upon those about him: Nor can our Endeavours be too earnest, if prudently conducted, nor will they (I would hope) be wholly unsuccessful, on this important Occasion.—But if, after all, neither our fairest Hopes, nor our most earnest Endeavours, should find the desired Concurrence of others; We must then be allow'd to remember, that *One Thing* is still more *needful* to us all, *separately* consider'd; which is also, by the Assistance of Divine Grace, more within our Power: Namely, That each of us should *for himself* make a proper Application of publick Warnings, and at least *deliver his own Soul by his Righteousness*.

II. You will permit me, therefore, besides the foregoing *instructive Lessons*, which Societies or Nations are concerned to learn from Divine *Judgments*, briefly to point out a few others, of a more *Personal Influence*, which *the Judgments* now *in the Earth* seem fitted to teach the *particular Inhabitants* of it. And,

First, What can be a more obvious Deduction from the Occurrences in View, than *The exceeding great Frailty of human Life*, and of every Thing belonging to it?

Every Day's Observation, 'tis true, affords us abundant Instances of *This*; indeed such nume-

a Ezek. XIV. 14.

rous Instances, as render the Thought too familiar to make a proper Impression upon Us. A Thought however it is, for its Use and Importance, at all Times worthy to make the strongest Impression: And it must surely become yet more affecting, when by any uncommon Cause, *a Thousand fall beside us, and Ten Thousand, as it were, at our Right-Hand.* But, when *the Earth itself openeth and swalloweth up,* not only Thousands of our Fellow-Creatures, but large and opulent and populous Cities; *laying low the strongest and most stupendous Edifices, the Works of human Industry, and the Boast of human Pride, for many Ages: When (in the Prophet's Language) ^a the Day of the LORD shall be upon every Thing that is proud and lofty, upon every high Tower, and upon every fenced Wall:* When wealthy Potentates and mighty Princes, finding no Shelter in their most stately Palaces, no Sanctuary in their most magnificent Temples, shall be forced to flee ^b *to the Clefts of the Rocks and to the Tops of the ragged Rocks; for Fear of the LORD, and for the Glory of his Majesty; when He ariseth to shake terribly the Earth!* —How natural, how unavoidable, must the Reflection be; ^c *“Cease Ye from Man, whose Breath is in his Nostrils! For wherein is he to be accounted of!”* And hence,

Again, We are led to reflect upon *The Presumption of confidently projected Schemes of Gain,* and the Vanity of an over-proportioned Eagerness in the Pursuit of them.

^a Isai. II. 12.

^b Ibid. v. 21.

^c Ibid. v. 22.

The Words of St. *James* are very remarkable to this Purpose. ^a *Go to now, Ye that say, "To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a City, and tarry there a Year, and buy and sell and get Gain." Whereas Ye know not what shall be on the Morrow: For what is Your Life? Or (let me add) what is the City, where Ye propose to traffick? Your Life is but as a Vapour, that appeareth for a little Time, and then vanisheth away: And as to the City, That may, with all its Wealth and all its Splendor, be in a Moment laid waste into ruinous Heaps. Not that the Apostle is here discouraging a prudent Forecast, or honest Activity, in our proper Business: He not only afterward approves of them, when exerted in Dependence upon the LORD's Will, but may be understood to require them in Consequence of the Uncertainty of Life, when He concludes, Therefore to him that knoweth (that seeth an Opportunity or fit Occasion) to do Good, and doeth it not, to him it is Sin.* You see, the Temper here censured is, not that of a provident Industry, but of a rash Presumption, in our Pursuits: In which, however, we must ^b *take Heed, that our Hearts be not overcharged with the Cares of this Life.* Cares we may innocently have, of one Kind or other, during our Abode in this World; nor shall we ordinarily do our Duty to GOD or Man, to ourselves or our Country, without them. The Danger, to be guarded against, is that of being *over-charged with* them, of letting them have too great a Share of our Attention, too fast

^a Jam. IV. 13, 14, 15, 17.

^b Luke XXI. 34.

Hold of our Affections. And a Danger this is, against which we cannot be too well guarded. ^a *For as a Snare* must any unforeseen Disaster, any unexpected Call, especially the last decisive Call, unavoidably *come on all them that dwell, those more especially, who in their Hearts and Affections dwell, on the Earth!* But,

Farther, We may hence also infer The Danger of Sensuality and Selfishness, but especially of Intemperance, in the Use of such Good Things as we may have accumulated.

There is not in fact any Thing, which naturally more indisposes Men for the Exertion of their Powers against impending Evils, more disables them from bearing up *when Distress or Anguish* of any Sort *cometh upon them*, or more disqualifies them for the amazing Arrest of Death, whilst it most of all exposeth them to it; than an habitual or excessive Self-Indulgence in sensual Gratifications: A Sin, *which easily besets* Those, who not only imagine they are at present ^b *rich, and are increased with Goods and have Need of Nothing*, but flatter themselves that they *have much Good laid up for many Years yet to come*; and then, by too natural a Transition, fondly suppose, they have nothing left to think of but to *take their Ease, eat, drink and be merry*: Little considering, that *the same Night their Souls may be required of them*; or however, that *Those Things which They have provided* may as soon be demanded by the *real Proprietor* of them, and themselves left *wretched, and miserable and*

^a Luke XXI. 35. ^b Comp. Rev. III. 17. with Luke XII. 20.

poor *and naked*. Yet, of how many *Thousands* has the one or the other of these lately been the Case! And how forcibly must such Examples impress upon the Minds of wealthy Persons the Direction our *Blessed LORD* hath given them; (a Direction, important at all Times, but on a *Day of Fasting* peculiarly seasonable) to convert their perishable Superfluities into *a better and an enduring Substance*, by employing a due Proportion of them in Works of Beneficence and Piety. For this is what He inculcates in those emphatical Words, *“I SAY UNTO YOU, Make to Yourselves Friends of the Mammon of Unrighteousness; that, when Ye fail, Ye may be received into everlasting Habitations.* Yet,

Once more, We must not forget *The Wisdom and Necessity of constant Prayer and habitual Watchfulness*, in order to prevent our being fatally surprized by our last Hour.

This is indeed a most important Improvement to be made of the disastrous Events We have been considering. The Consequences of any such unexpected Stroke, so far as they affect our Fortunes or our Lives only, will soon be over: But the Consequences of the State we are found in by our *Judge* will follow us much farther, and affect us *for ever*. Of *These* we have the fullest Intimation from Himself in one of His latest and longest and most remarkable ^b Discourses to His beloved Apostles: Which no one, surely,

^a Luke XVI. 9. See also the same Advice more fully express'd, 1 Tim. VI. 17, 18, 19. ^b Recorded in Matt. XXIV, and XXV. Mark XIII. and Luke XXI.

can read or hear, without being deeply affected with the Calamities there foretold, as also with the Descriptions of some other Appearances, that can hardly be explain'd but by supposing a Reference to *the End of this World* itself, and to His own second *Coming to Judgment*. But what I would here chiefly observe to You is That Variety of Illustration, under which He sets before His Hearers the sad Consequences of being *overtaken unawares* on any such Occasion; and That Earnestness, with which He recommends the Exercises of *Watching and Praying always*; as the only secure Preparatives for *those Things that were coming to pass*, and such as could alone enable them to stand before the Son of Man. Now, we know that, in this Instance particularly, ^b *what He said unto His Apostles He said unto All*. And never surely can His Admonitions be more applicable, than to a Season of such extensive Warnings, as the World has lately been alarm'd with: Which, altho' we have no Authority to interpret them, yet may well carry our Thoughts forward to that tremendous Period; when HE who hath, in a Manner so extraordinary, *shaken the Earth*, ^c *shall yet once more shake not This Earth only but also Heaven*.

Mistake me not, as if, under the Duties of Watching and Praying *always*, I were exhorting You to be *every Moment* of your Lives *thinking* of Your great Master's Approach, or even for the greatest Part of them *actually* upon Your Knees for fear of being surprized by Him. No: The

^a Luke XXI. 36.

^b Mark XIII. 37.

^c Heb. XII. 26.

Condition of Your Nature renders the Former impracticable; and a proper Discharge of *those Good Works*, those honest Employments, *which* GOD hath ordain'd that we should walk in them through Life, will as little admit of the Latter. But thus much You will permit me to recommend to *All*, that You never let a Day pass without many serious Thoughts upon that unchangeable State, into which every Day may finally introduce You; and to *Masters of Families* in particular, that You fail not regularly to call together Those under Your Care to a *joint Acknowledgment* of Your continual Dependence upon Almighty GOD, and a *joint Application* for His Protection and Favour. Nothing, I am perswaded, would have a more beneficial Influence, even upon Your temporal Concerns, than such domestick Exercises of Piety: not only as they would naturally tend to secure the Faithfulness of those, upon whose Faithfulness You must perpetually rely; but as they would recommend You to *That Blessing*, which alone *maketh* truly *Rich*. But, beyond this, such Addresses, if equally constant and devout, will in all Events make HIM Your Friend, whose Friendship will be of more Value to You and Your's, than that of the whole World besides. We have, indeed, no Commission from Him to promise You an Exemption from the ordinary Casualties incident to human Affairs and human Life; or that, if the *destroying Angel* should be authorized to *visit the Houses around You*, he shall have it in Charge to *pass over* Your's. This would be a Discrimination,

nation, for which the Retributions of the present State were never intended. But it should be sufficient, that, with regard to Retributions of infinitely greater Moment, ^a *the Foundation of GOD standeth sure*: Should Your Habitations and Your Lives, with Those of all that are dear to You, be involved in the same Ruin with Those about You; amidst all this Confusion, *the LORD knoweth them that are HIS*, and will publickly own them as such ^b *in that Day when He maketh up His Jewels*: When He will put a final Difference, and enable Men and Angels to discern, *between them that have served Him and them that served Him not.*

To Conclude: We of this Nation have, for some Years past, been awaken'd by many awful Calls upon Us of various Kinds. And we now seem to be upon the Brink of a *War*: A State, burthensome and uncomfortable at best; in which, notwithstanding the commendable Activity of our Preparations, and our supposed Strength at Sea, I presume, no wise Man would, at *any* Time, pronounce Us superiour to Danger. But, if *Glorying in our own Might* ever can be peculiarly unseasonable, it must be so at a Time, when Variety of Terrours, still farther surpassing all human Efforts, have lately alarm'd us on every Side, and may be to us also (how soon we know not) *the Beginnings of Sorrows*. — At such a Juncture, very highly must it become Us, *as a Nation*, thus publickly to humble ourselves

a 2 Tim. II. 19.

b Mal. III. 18.

for

for our manifold Transgressions before *the LORD of Heaven and Earth*; and thus devoutly to recommend ourselves and our Cause to His Protection and Blessing? And, if these seasonable Acts of Devotion be but accompany'd with a sincere Repentance for our Personal Sins, and succeeded by a lasting Reformation of our National Conduct: We may then securely ^a *Trust in the LORD for ever; for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting Strength*: We may then humbly hope to avert His *Judgments* now in the *Earth* from falling upon our own Part of it; as also, by His Assistance, either to dispose our *Enemies to be*, upon reasonable Terms, *at Peace with us*, or effectually to defeat their unreasonable Enterprizes against us. — However, since we can neither be answerable for the Resolutions of Men nor the Events of Things; so long as we conscientiously discharge the Duties of our respective Stations, we shall the less need to ^b *be afraid of any sudden Fear, or even of Desolation itself when it cometh*. Our proper TREASURE is beyond the Reach of such Casualties. And ill would it become Us *Christians*, to be *terrify'd* on such Occasions as if our ALL were at-stake, or to be *inconsolable* for any Losses we may happen to sustain, *like Men without Hope* of any future Reparation. ^c *We know, that, if our earthly House of this Tabernacle were dissolved, we have a Building of GOD, an House not made with Hands, eternal in the Heavens*. If this ancient City (which may Providence ever preserve!) *should* share the Fate

a If. XXVI. 4.

b Prov. III. 25.

c 2 Cor. V. 1.

of other flourishing Cities lately as little apprehensive as Itself: Yet ^a *We look for a City, that hath Foundations, truly so called, whose Builder and Maker is GOD.* Nay, should That great DAY of the LORD come, whilst We ourselves are alive and remain; ^b *in the which (we are assured) the Heavens shall pass away with a great Noise, and the Elements shall melt with fervent Heat, the Earth also with all the Works that are therein shall be burnt up! —* ^c *Nevertheless We, according to His Promise, look for new Heavens and a new Earth, wherein dwelleth RIGHTEOUSNESS.*

“Of which Righteousness, O merciful GOD, may the Inhabitants of the World so learn the peaceable Fruits from Thy Judgments here on Earth, that thy CHURCH may joyfully serve Thee in all Godly Quietness; ’till We finally come to the perfect Exercise, the full Fruition, of It in Thy Everlasting Kingdom: Through JESUS CHRIST, our LORD.” Amen.

a Heb. II. 10. b 2 Pet. III. 10. c Ibid. v. 13.

F I N I S.