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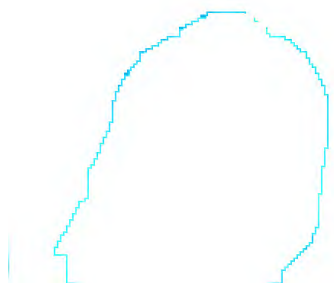
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A

309

SERMON,

Preach'd before the Worshipful the

MAYOR and *ALDERMEN,*

O F

STAMFORD.

In the Parish Church of *St Michael's* on
Thursday the 3d of *December*, 1702.. Being a Day
of Publick Thansgiving for the great success
wherewith God hath been pleased so signally to
Bless the Arms of Her Majesty both by Sea and
Land, and also those of Her Allies this Year a-
gainst *France* and *Spain*.

By *WILLIAM FOSTER*, A. M. Rector of
St Michael's in *Stamford*, and Chaplain to the Right
Honourable, *John Earl of Exeter*.

Printed at the Request of the Mayor and Aldermen.

L O N D O N.

Printed for *Edmond Palmer* at *Stamford*, in *Lincolnshire*, and sold by
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To the Worshipful
THE
Mayor and Aldermen, &c.
OF
STAMFORD.

Gentlemen,

THis Discourse was Prepar'd and
Preach'd at your desire, without the
least thought or apprehension of its
appearing any farther in publick. I am too
sensible of my own Inabilities, to be fond, or
willing to expose anything of my performance
to the Common view, as altogether unable
to bare it.

It was your earnest request that hath forced it abroad ; to which I could not have consented, but that hereby in some measure might more publickly appear, that steady Loyalty, and Dutiful Zeal this Corporation and Town have for her Majesties Person and Government ; and how sincere and great your Joy (express'd upon this occasion) is, for the Glorious success of the Arms of Her Majesty and Her Allies against the Common Enemy and Disturber of the Peace of Europe.

And that at the same time also, I might make this open acknowledgment of the favours I have received from you, and how much I am therefore obliged to be,

Gentlemen,

Your most Faithful

and Obedient Servant,

W. Foster.

Psalm. 126. 3.

*The Lord hath done great things for us,
whereof we are glad.*

THis Psalm is generally thought to be compos'd ^{Flawmond} by *Ezra*, or some other Religious Person of ^{Patrick.} his time, and is a joyful Acknowledgement of Gods Government and Sovereignty over the World, in ordering and disposing of the Affairs thereof, in which God had particularly, and in an extraordinary manner exemplify'd and manifested, by delivering the *Jews* out of a seventy years Captivity, and bringing them back to their own Country.

This mercy the Church of God does here commemorate, confessing the Divine Providence to be the sole Cause and Author of it.

And sure we cannot reflect upon the Happy and Glorious occasion of our meeting here this day, but
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that we also must take up these Words, and with no less reason than the *Jews* did, say, *yea, the Lord hath done great things for Us and our Allies, wherefore we rejoyce and are glad.*

From whence here are two things very obvious to our Consideration, and which I design the Subject of my present discourse.

First, That there is a Divine Over-ruling Providence which *governs* and *directs* the Affairs of the World, which does frequently interpose in an extraordinary manner in behalf of a Nation or People, especially that professes God's true Religion.

Secondly, That this calls for returns of the greatest Joy and Thankfulness from us.

This first proposition can need very little proof, especially among those that have been instructed and bred up in the Christian Religion, and who believe the Truth and Divine Authority of the Holy Scriptures, but because the firm belief of it is so absolutely necessary and conducive to a Religious life, and to create in us a stedfast trust and dependance upon God in all cases and at all times; I shall beg leave to insist a little upon it, especially observing how naturally and unavoidably our thoughts are led unto the consideration thereof, by the *great things* which we do this day thankfully confess that God hath done for us. And First,

If we search the Scriptures we shall find no one thing more often or fully attested, than that of a Di-
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vine Providence ordering and governing the affairs of the World. *God is the King of all the Earth, God reigneth over the Heathens. The Lord sitteth upon the Water Floods, yea, the Lord sitteth a King for ever, and it is He that Rules in the Kingdom of Men, and that whatsoever the Lord pleaseth, that doth He in Heaven, and in Earth, and in the Sea, and in all deep places.*

It would be endless to recount to you all the Texts in Scripture, wherein the Divine Providence and his Government over the World is asserted, and that Mankind as well as all the other parts of the Creation are subject unto him. But Secondly,

Reason also assures us of of the same; for the Almighty's creating the Universe, and making all the constituent parts of it, doth give him an absolute and uncontestable Right and Title to the Dominion and Sovereignty thereof, for only that Power which made the World, can still preserve it; and who can have so just a Clame to command and govern us, as He that at first created us and still continues to preserve us?

To this we may add the Universal consent and agreement herein of all People, of all Nations, and in all Ages of the World, that the belief of a God hath been firmly fix'd in the minds of the generality of Mankind, and still is; the Writings of past Ages, and the experience of the present do abundantly convince us.

No Nation so barbarous and rude, says *Tully*, but they

they own and believe some Diety, and the new discoveries in the *West Indies* confirm the same; the most Savage amongst them, acknowledging a Superiour Being, or a God.

And as Men have generally in all ages believed a God, and now do; So have they as constantly Worship'd Him, offer'd up their Prayers and Sacrifice, and perform'd other Religious Rites and Ceremonies to Him; tho it may be in some places, after a Strange and Ridiculous, and sometimes a very Barbarous and Inhumane manner.

Now did they not believe that the Deity exercised a Providence over them, and that it was in his power to do them Good or Harm; to what end could it enter into their Heads to Worship Him? Did they not think that He heard their prayers and regarded them and could grant their requests, and could help assist them; to what purpose should they direct their Petitions to Him, and waste their Time and Treasure in offering up costly Sacrifices, instituting solemn Games, and building stately Temples to his Honour?

But their doing these things upon a Religious Account is a very strong proof, that they believ'd a Divine Providence watching and presiding over them.

And if there is an Universal Providence governing and directing the whole World, then it is certain that every part, every member that goes to the making of the whole, must also be under the same protecting Providence of God.

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Our Saviour tells us of the Fowls of the Air, and Matth. 6. 26. the little Sparrows, and the very grass of the Field are the continual objects of his Care. Nay, he 10. 30 assures us that the hairs of our Head are all number'd, even *they* are under his inspection: and if so, then (as our Blessed Lord hath taught us to infer) much more reason have we to think, that He hath a more particular concern for Mankind and their Affairs, whom he hath created in his own Image, and whom of all sublunary Creatures only. He hath made capable of reflecting upon God their Maker, and returning thanks, honour and religious worship to Him.

And if God be so tender, so watchful over every particular man, well may we then conclude, that larger Bodies of men, that Nations and Kingdoms, as consisting of multitudes of those particulars, are in an especial manner the objects of his more extraordinary providential Care and Goodness.

But above all, those that profess his true Religion, that have enter'd into Covenant with Him, and thereby are become his people, (as the *Jews* once were, and all true Christians be now) are peculiarly under his protection, as he hath promised, *If yee obey my Voice* Jer. 7. 23. *yee shall be my people, and I will be your God,* your Almighty Governour, Preserver and Defender.

And that this is so in Reality and Fact, not only the Records of Ancient Times, but our own happy Experience also doth give us undoubted proof of.

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Which we shall consider as further Evidence of the Truth of this proposition we are now upon.

Therefore, Thirdly, not to trouble you with numerous Instances of this Nature that might be produc'd out of prophane, as well as sacred Writings; I shall recommend to your perusal the whole History of the *Jewish* Church and Nation, from the first beginning of both in *Abraham*, till their utter extirpation by the *Romans*; where you may observe a continual series of an extraordinary and peculiar Providence over that People as well in their Judgments and Calamities, as in their Blessings and Prosperity.

I shall only instance only in that particular case to which the Text relates, and that was their deliverance out of their seventy years Captivity at *Babylon*.

Josephus
Lib. 11. Cap. 11.

Cyrus the *Persian* King reading the 44th and 45th Chapters of the Prophet *Isaiah*, there meets with predictions concerning himself, and foretold of him two hundred and ten years before his Birth. Whereupon he was so transported, that immediately he encourag'd the *Jews* to return home, and furnish'd them with Money and other Necessaries to rebuild their City and the Temple of the most high God. He restor'd all the rich and sacred Vessels of the Lord's House that had been carry'd away by *Nebuchadnezzar* and put into the house of his Gods, and permitted them to live again according to their ancient Laws and Customs.

Ezra, 1.

Josephus ibid

This

This was so surprizing, so unexpected to the *Jews* themselves, that they could scarce think it true, but thought that they had only seen a Scheme and Prospect of such a happy State of their Affairs in a Dream or Vision. *When the Lord turn'd again the captivity of* Ps. 126. 1 *Zion, then were we like unto them that Dream.* Nay, so extraordinary was this thing, that the Heathens themselves could not but confess that it was the Lord's doing; *then said they among the Heathens the Lord hath* ibid. 2 *done great things for them.*

But since that the *Jews* for their infidelity are cast off, and God hath gather'd to Himself a people out of all Nations by the preaching of the Gospel; the Christian Kingdoms are now become his more peculiar Care, and no part, no Country of the Christian World hath had more remarkable and evident instances of Gods Favour and Mercy towards them than we of this Kingdom.

We have reason to glory in the constitution both of our Church and State. Our Reformation in Religion was made both by publick Authority, and was also fram'd as near as possible to the primitive purity and pattern of the Apostolical Age. And as to our civil Constitution, I believe I may without vanity say, that it is the best upon Earth, for securing the Rights, the Properties, the Priviledges, the Ease and Liberty of all that live under it, or are concerned in it.

And both these God hath been pleas'd to preserve

to us in a most wonderful manner against all the furious attempts of our Enemies and wicked men to destroy them.

But at present we need go no further for any particular Instances of Gods more than ordinary mercy to us, than the Great and Glorious occasion of this day, which hath brought us hither unto the House of the Lord to give thanks to his Holy Name, for the Many as well as Great things He hath done for us and our Allies ; especially for that which will be for ever memorable, not only in the *English*, but also in the *French* and *Spanish* Calendars, tho writ in different colour'd Letters, viz. the glorious Expedition and Victory at *Vigo*.

Many, I say, as well as Great are the things that God hath vouchsaf'd to do for Us and our Confederates this year.

The *French* King, we know hath all his life time been pushing and furiously driving on at Universal Monarchy, and whom nothing will content but to be saluted Emperor of the West, for the compassing of which, what Seas of Blood hath he not spilt ? how many Millions of poor Creatures Lives, as well as Treasure hath he not sacrific'd to that Idol ? and having lately by Treachery and Falshood, by violating the most solemn Oaths and Treaties, by a pretended Will justly suspected of Forgery, made a fair step to this ambitious height, by adding the Kingdom of *Spain* with all its dependencies to his own
Crown,

Crown, together with the Treasure of the *Indies* ; What did he not then hope for ? What did he not then grasp in his haughty mind ? especially when in *March* last, it pleas'd God to take from us his late Majesty of glorious Memory, who us'd to go out and in before us and to fight our Battels : This without doubt, no less rais'd his hopes, than it dejected ours, who at first stood like men agast, scarce knowing what to speak or what to do, then we apprehended the danger of an approaching War to be greater than ever, having lost our common Head and Father, our Leader and our Captain, and the only person who we thought could firmly unite and cement our Confederates together.

Yet even in these gloomy and difficult circumstances God hath been pleas'd to let us taste plentifully of his gracious Care and Providence over us, and to shew that he reigns in the Kingdoms of men ; by placing upon the Royal Throne of her Ancestors so excellent a Princess, so admirable a Governour, who hath evidenc'd that her whole Study, her whole Delight is to promote the general good of her people, and the common safety of *Europe*, to support and defend its invaded Rights and Liberties, by putting a stop to the boundless and unsatiable Ambition of a proud, insulting Enemy.

And God in his wonderful Providence hath so bless'd her Majesties prudent Councils and Conduct,

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that as strange or rather firmer Alliance than ever is now formed against him; whereby all his worldly policy hath hitherto been defeated, all his power and strength hath hitherto prov'd ineffectual to bring about his ambitious and unjust designs; for losses and disgrace (the thing next death most grievous to him) have every where attended his Arms this year.

The blessing of God upon the Imperial Forces in *Italy* may teach him the vanity of his self confidence, and boasting in his own strength, as if he alone was a match for almost all the World besides; and that he is *Pluribus Impar*; and may convince him, that *the*
Eccl. 9. 11: *Race is not to the Swift, nor the Battel to the Strong; nor victory and success always to the number of Troops, or to the variety and change of Generals.*

That brave *Imperial* Commander Prince *Engene* of *Savoy*, having with scarce half the number of Men, worsted his Army in the Field, and kept his Footing in *Italy* beyond the hopes of his Friends, and to the utter confussion and disappointment of his Enemies, who could talk of nothing under the total defeat of that Gallant Man, and driving him back again cross the *Alps* into *Germany*.

Of what consequence *Landau* is, (which the Emperor hath gain'd this Summer on the *Rhine*) the vast expence of Treasure and Labour which the *French* have been at since it was in their possession, to make

it one of the strongest Fortresses in the World, does evidently shew.

In the *Netherlands* how great the success of the Confederate Arms hath been under the Noble *English* Commander; a Grandson and a Mareschal of *France* can testify, wherein the greatest share of Action and Glory fell unto the *English*.

All that I shall observe here is, that where we fear'd we should have been in a particular manner sensible of the loss of his late Majesty, *viz.* in Heading and Commanding the Confederate Army in the Low Countries; even there, hath God made it appear, that his Providence and Blessing is all-sufficient, and can abundantly supply the greatest Losses to us, by giving such a current of success against the *French* in *this one Campaign*, as was scarce ever before obtain'd against them, during the *course* of a *whole War* in those parts.

With what great success God hath bless'd Her Majesties Arms in ruining the Enemies Settlements in *Newfoundland* (the Nursery of their Seamen) and in other parts of the *West Indies*, and in the annoying of them in their Trade with the extraordinary preservation of our own, you cannot but have heard, I need not repeat it to you here.

But what in the last place Crowns all this is, that ever Famous and Glorious Action and Victory at *Vigo*. A Victory indeed which perhaps in all its circumstances

cumstances cannot easily be paralleled in History; and was so great, so surprizing, that at the first news of it, we as the *Jews*, were like unto men that dream, tho we wish'd it, yet we could scarce at first believe it to be true; but now it hath filled our mouths with laughter and our tongues with joy.

A Victory! wherein (without the utmost obstinacy and ingratiude) we must own that God hath signally interpos'd in our behalf, as in the first providential notice given to our Fleet of the arrival of those Ships at *Vigo*, and then in the amazing and wonderful success of this noble attempt upon them, against so much Strength and Force as our men had to encounter with. Where the great *Ormond* by his Courage and Conduct hath added fresh Honour to his illustrious Name and Family, and the bravery of our Admirals, and the undaunted boldness and resolution of our Officers and Souldiers both by Sea and Land, hath acquir'd lasting Reputation to themselves, and Glory to the *English* Nation.

A Victory! than which, perhaps since that famous one in 1588 against the *Spanish* Armado, which they presumptuously styl'd the Invincible, and that too under the Conduct and Government of another Glorious Queen of this Land; the *English* never obtain'd a greater at Sea, nor of more consequence. Great is the number and loss of Ships and Treasure that the Enemy hath suffered, and so cheap to us, that in comparison it costs us

nothing ; never so few men lost in gaining so compleat and entire a victory.

The consequence whereof is of the last importance to us, and the safety of *Europe* : if we consider either the blow the *French* have receiv'd in their Shipping and naval Strength, whereby they began to rival and dispute the Sovereignty of the Ocean both with us and *Holland* together. *Spain* never recovered the blow which *Queen Elizabeth* gave them in 88, and *Queen Anne* seems to be rais'd up by Heaven to humble the more haughty Monarch of *France*, of which this stroak is a happy omen. Or if we look at the Treasure here destroyed and taken, whereon they built all their future Schemes and Projects, whereon they so entirely depended for the carrying on all their designs and enterprizes, but see them all dash'd, all disappointed in a few hours time, by the taking and destroying that *Armour* and *Strength* wherein they trusted.

And now after all these Blessings and Success, not to acknowledge the superintendency of Gods Providence over us, and that it was not possible for us to have effected such mighty things without his peculiar Mercy to us ; would be to shew our selves the greatest Monsters of Ingratitude, and therefore the most undeserving Creatures upon Earth. No! these things are too great to be ascrib'd to Humane Power and foresight, they were the Lords doing, and are truly marvellous in our Eyes : They are such that our Enemies
them-

themselves must be forced to say (as the Heathen did in relation to the Jewish deliverance) *the Lord hath done great things for them.* And we have no less reason than the *Jews* had, to answer and echo back again, *Yea, the Lord hath done great things for us already, whereof we rejoyce.* Which brings me to the second proposition, *viz.*

Secondly, That the consideration of Gods Providence, governing and ruling the World, and his frequent interposing in the behalf of his Church and People; does call for returns of the greatest Joy and Gladness from us.

Now to offer to prove the truth of this, would be to hold a Candle to the Sun at noon Day, and to prove we ought to do *that*, which it is not in our Power or Nature scarce to forbear, for sure it is impossible to reflect upon the great Mercies of this Day, but our Hearts must be fill'd with the greatest Joy and Gladness.

I shall therefore endeavour briefly to shew you how we ought to express our Joy upon this happy occasion, so as it may be acceptable and well pleasing unto God; which shall be the application of this Discourse. And

First, This we must do by being sensible of Gods great Goodness and Mercy to us for these extraordinary Favours and Blessings, and give unto Him all the Glory and Honour and Praise thereof. And that
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First, By ascribing them to his Power, and not to our own Strength and Force. For *there is no King saved by the multitude of an Host, a mighty Man is not deliver'd by much Strength, a Horse is but a vain thing for safety, neither shall he deliver any by his great Strength; but Salvation only is of the Lord.* And therefore, says David, *Thou, O Lord art my Strength, the Lord is my Rock and my Fortrefs.* Ps. 33. 16. 17. Ps. 18. 1.

Second, By confessing his Wisdom, the Author of these things and not our own Foresight or Contrivance. *It is He that bringeth the Counsel of the Heathen to naught, and maketh the Devices of the People of none effect.* He giveth Wisdom unto the simple, and scattereth the Proud in the imagination of their Hearts. He Counsels our Councillors, and teaches our Senators Wisdom. But how short our Wisdom and Contrivance is in laying Schemes and Projects, and how unable our own Strength alone is to effect them; our experience must force us to confess from our late Expedition at Sea. We equipt out a powerful and formidable Fleet, with a considerable number of Land Forces on board, under a brave Commander. Their design was kept with the greatest and unusual secrecy till they landed near Cadiz, the taking of which Town was, no doubt, proposed and thought of the utmost importance to us, and the greatest advantage we could, at present, obtain over our Enemies. Now here was a Scheme but all in all Humane prospect, as was p...

and every way promised an answerable success, and such was the general expectation from it. But see all this fair Model, all this hopeful project, baffled and disappointed, and that too by *Spaniards*; and we obliged to draw off from thence, and to return with disgrace back again. But while we were under a concern for this, and for the advantages our Enemies might have by the safe arrival of the Plate-Fleet at *Vigo*: God almost by a miracle, directs our (before baff'd) Fleet and Forces to the same place, blesses this Undertaking, which was of his own forming with the utmost success; whereby we have wounded them in a more sensible part, and given them a blow, in all probability, of much more fatal consequence to their present posture of Affairs, than the taking of *Cadix* could have been, so that well may we say with the Apostle, *O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!* but,

Third, We must give God the Honour and Praise hereof, by ascribing these things to his mercy and not to our desert. *Moses* gives the *Israelites* frequent warnings of this, and God knows, how wicked and sinful we be, little deserving the least of all these mercies; nay, quite the contrary should God deal with us in strict justice.

Wherefore let us joyfully confess, that it was not our merit, but his Mercy; not out foresight, but his Providence that hath done all these things for us, and there-

therefore not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy Name be ascrib'd all Honour and Glory.

Secondly, We must testify our Joy by a most solemn return of our Praises and Thanks unto Him, extolling his divine Providence for all these Favours He hath vouchsaf'd unto us, and here let our Joy and Thanksgiving be sincere, as the cause thereof is real ; as here are no imaginary Victories, no feigned Triumphs, so is there no Temptation to mock God with hypocritical *Te Deums* only to keep up the drooping, sinking Spirits of an inflav'd and miserable people.

Thirdly, Let us express our Joy, not so much by outward Mirth and Jollity, however not by running into excess of Riot and Drunkenness ; for that will be highly offensive unto God, and destructive to our selves, by provoking Him to withdraw his divine Care and Protection from us, and to leave us to our selves, and what then can we expect but to be made a prey to our Enemies, and to be baffled in all our Enterprizes.

But let our Joy appear in walking worthy of these Mercies in newness of Life, and in universal obedience to Gods commands ; and let us behave our selves in our conversations, as those that have obtain'd favour at the hands of the Lord ; It will be in vain to thank him in words, unless our Actions and Lives be answerable.

Fourthly, Let us show our selves joyful for God's

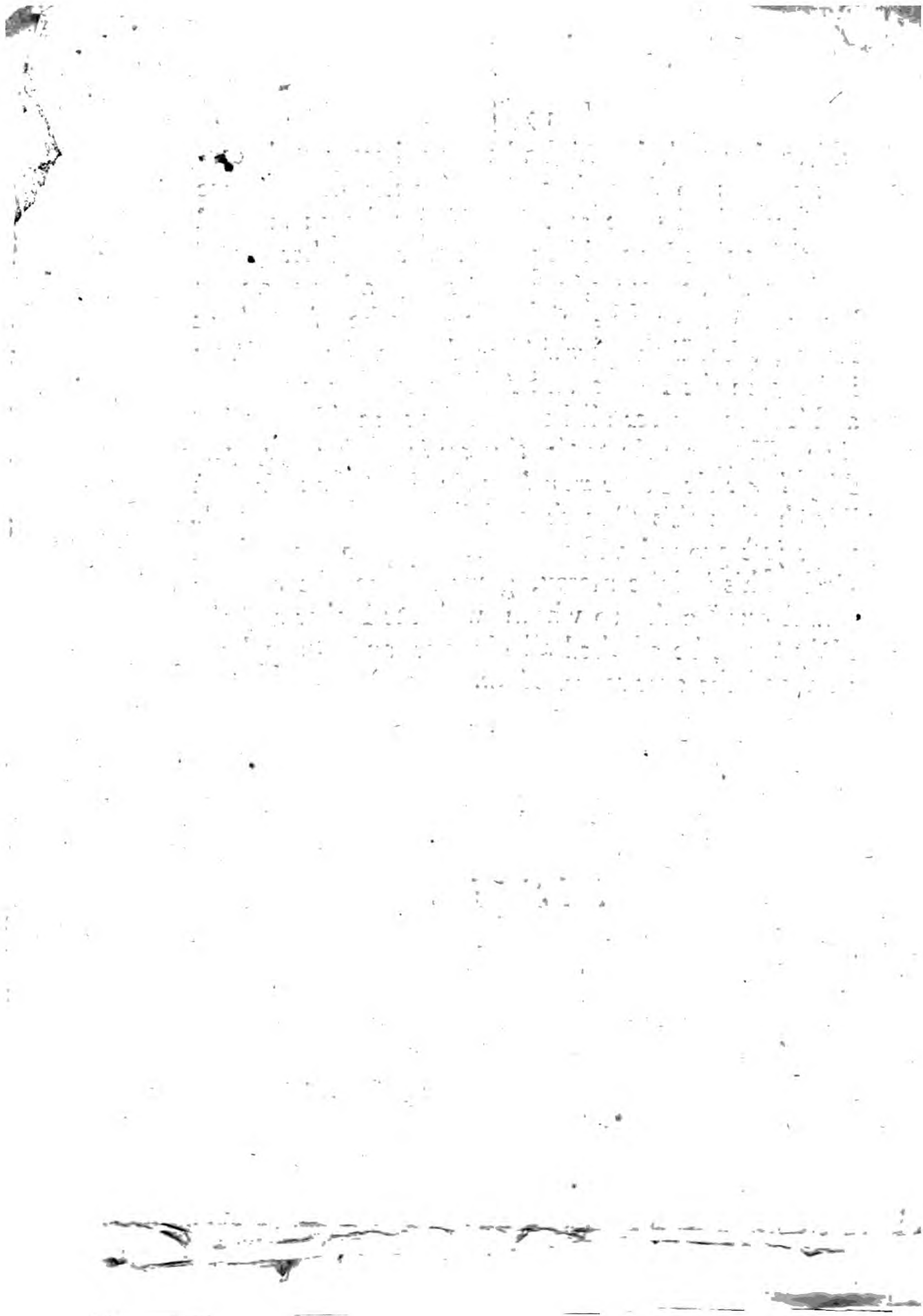
providence over us, by entirely trusting and depending upon Him in all cases and circumstances, and for all future Blessings and Advantages. When this Psalm was penn'd, the restoration of the *Jews* was very imperfect, a great many staying still behind at *Babylon*, and therefore the Church of *Jerusalem* in the verse after my Text, prays for the return of the rest of their Brethren, to compleat their happy and prosperous state: *turn our Captivity, O Lord.*

Great indeed are the things that God hath done for us already, and if we are wanting to our selves in Joy and Thankfulness, in Duty and Obedience unto Him; we need not fear, but that he will still continue his Care and Mercy to us; making one blessing and favour, an earnest and pledge of another, till he hath finished the good work he hath begun in and for us, by restoring a lasting and a glorious Peace to Europe upon such a firm basis and foundation, that it shall not be in the power of *France*, either easily or quickly to overturn it. And,

Lastly, Let our Joy for the blessing of this day appear, by our Loyalty and Dutiful Behaviour to our most gracious Sovereign, under whose auspicious Reign and Conduct God hath done these things for us. Let us make constant returns to Her of Love and Duty, for her Princely and great Care and Protection of us; and contribute what in us lyes to make her Reign as easy and glorious to Her as may be,
and

and to that end, let us send up our hearty and earnest prayers to Almighty God for the continuance of his watchful Care and Providence over us: and especially that He will be pleas'd to crown her Sacred Majesty with a happy, a prosperous, a long, a very long reign over us; that she may be *belov'd* at Home, *esteem'd* and *fear'd* Abroad; that she may Rule intirely in the Hearts and Affections of her People, and Triumph over all her Enemies as at this Day, and then *Happy are the people that are in such a case, yea, Blessed are the People who have the Lord for their God.* Which that this Church and Nation may have always just ground and reason to apply to themselves. God of his infinite mercy, grant for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost be ascribed all Honour and Glory, both now and for ever more. *Amen.*

FINIS.



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