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*The right Improvement of alarming
Providences.*

A
S E R M O N

P R E A C H E D A T

Cheshunt in Hertfordshire,

MARCH 18th, 1749-50.

On OCCASION of the

Two late EARTHQUAKES.

By J O H N M A S O N, A. M.



L O N D O N :

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AMOS iv. 12.

Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel : and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel !



HE many judgments with which God hath visited this nation, and the repeated warnings he gives us of greater, are so solemn and affecting to every serious mind, that they render the duty to which we are called in the text, at this time peculiarly seasonable; and all apology for recommending it quite unnecessary. These words are indeed the very voice of those providences, and the language in which we are to conceive the Almighty speaking to us by them; *Now prepare to meet thy GOD.*—And, O, that we might at length be wise, and take the warning, and betimes prepare for the unknown issue of his will!

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This prophecy was deliver'd by *Amos*, a herdsman of *Tekoa*, as he himself tells us at the beginning of it. *Amos*, signifies a *burden*; and his prophecy answers to his name, being chiefly a denunciation of God's *heavy* judgment upon finners. Hence the words of the ancient prophets are so often call'd, the *burden of the Lord* (a). The date of this prophecy we have in the first words. It was deliver'd in the days of *Uzziab* King of *Judah*, and *Jeroboam* King of *Israel*; two years before the *EARTHQUAKE*, chap. i. 1.

This was the earthquake which *Zecbariab* refers to, *Zech. xiv. 5.* which was so terrible that it is there said, the people *fled from it.* The *Jews* say that it happen'd exactly at the same time that *Uzziab* was offering incense in the temple (b); at which action God was so highly offended, that he sent this earthquake as a token of his abhorrence of so bold and impious a profanation of his worship. Be that as it will, it plainly appears to have been a very dreadful shake; for *Josephus* tells us ' that it rent the temple, so that the
' sun shone through the walls of it; and
' that at a place call'd *Eroge*, a mountain
' was cleft asunder, and half of it carry'd
' away to the distance of four furlongs (or
' half a mile) eastward, till it was obstruct-
' ed

(a) *Jer. xxiii. 33.* *Zech. ix. 1.* *Mal. i. 1.*

(b) *2 Kings xv. 5.*

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ed by another mountain that stood in its course; and that all the roads in those parts, and the king's gardens were smothered and choaked up by the ruins (c).'

So that the warning which God gave to his people *Israel* by this prophet, two whole years before this calamity came, it seems had no effect upon them: nor do we find, that the judgment itself after it was inflicted, had any good one; for this people were so often visited with one judgment after another, that they were hardened against the impressions of them; and God seemed even weary of chastizing them, since they were so far from being reformed, that they grew the more incorrigible. *Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more* (d).— This is a terrible case indeed! God grant it may never be our own.

And of this he particularly complains in the verses before my text. He had punish'd them with famine, but to no effect, *ver. 6.* He had visited them with drought, but they remained impenitent, *ver. 7, 8.* He had deprived them of the fruits of the earth, but they acknowledged not his hand, *ver. 9.* He sent the plague amongst them, but to no purpose, *ver. 10.* He terrified them with earthquakes and thunder, by which some of them shared the dreadful fate of *Sodom*, but all to

(c) Vid. *Antiq. Jud.* l. ix. c. 11.

(d) *Isa.* i. 5.

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no effect, *ver. 11.* What then is at length to be done with such a hardened generation of men, that will hear no calls, see no judgments, take no warnings? why, what can be done, but to proceed to the utmost extremity, and at length let fall the long suspended, fatal blow! And this is what God dreadfully threatens them withal, in the words of the text. *Therefore* (because you would not be reformed by, but neglected and despised my former judgments and warnings,) *thus will I do unto thee, O Israel. Thus!* how? what is it that God here threatens to do? he does not say what, but leaves them to fear the worst. And what might they not fear from almighty justice long provoked, and at length become inexorable? Just like an absolute prince, arguing with a condemned criminal long reprieved, and upbraiding him with the ungrateful abuse of his lenity and patience, ‘and since no methods of mercy, or threatenings of punishment (says he) have had any effect upon thee, therefore **THUS** will I do unto thee, (grasping his sword) *and because I will do THIS* unto thee, (drawing the fatal weapon) *prepare thy self for instant execution.*’

And now justice seems determined, and the sinner's fate irreverfable. And yet mercy interposes again, fufpends the uplifted hand, and pleads for one fhort reprieve more. For
this

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this dreadful threatening itself, absolute as it appears, is conceived in such terms as leave room for hope. For,

1. It's a mercy that any warning at all is given before the fatal blow is struck. And what could this warning mean, but that there was still mercy in reserve for them, if they would take it? Besides,

2. When God here sets himself to pour out the fulness of his wrath upon his people, he remembers his covenant, and calls himself *their GOD*. *Prepare to meet thy GOD, O Israel*. Is not the voice of mercy there? 'They are a generation of Sinners, 'tis true; a stiff-necked, ungrateful race of men: but they are *my people* still; the only people on earth that call upon my name; the people whom I have chosen for my heritage; to whom I have often magnified my mercy, and promised to be their *GOD*; *how shall I give thee up Ephraim!*'

But to come more immediately to the improvement of the words, and the application of them to our own case.

I. I shall consider what is that coming of the Lord, implied in the Text, which we are required to prepare for.

II. How we are to prepare to meet him, when he comes.

III.

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III. By way of motive to this duty, I shall particularly consider, the loud and solemn calls which the providence of God gives us at this time to prepare to meet him.

I. I shall consider what is that coming of the Lord, implied in the text, which we are required to prepare for.

And not to trouble you with the various significations of this phrase in the several places wherein it occurs in Scripture: I shall only observe, that there are two senses of it, in one or other of which it is most commonly taken; both which seems to be intended in the text, and are equally applicable to our own case. And they are these,

1. God's coming in a way of publick judgments, to signalize his justice upon sinners in this world.

2. His coming by death to call them out of it.—In both which senses, men of all characters are very nearly, though not equally concerned.

1. God is said in scripture, to come out against a people when he is about to visit them with his distinguishing judgments. In this sense it is used, *2 Thes. ii. 8. And then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.* In this sense the word is often used in the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew's gospel,

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pel, which is chiefly a prediction of the intire destruction of the *jewish* state and nation, under this notion of the *coming of the Lord*. So when God formerly visited his antient people the *Jews* with one judgment after another, it is frequently denoted by this form of speech, *his coming*, or *coming out* against them. See *Isa. xxvi. 21. Behold the Lord cometh out of his place, to punish the Inhabitants of the earth for their iniquities.* So *Mic. i. 3, 4. Behold the Lord cometh forth out of his place, and will come down and tread on the high places of the earth: and the mountains shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft.* In other places it is called the *day of the Lord*, or the *day of his coming*.

It is a strong and lively metaphor, alluding to a solemn procession at a fatal execution; when the justice of God comes forth with his sword drawn, to take determined vengeance on a rebellious and devoted nation! of which we have many instances upon sacred record.

2. There is another sense in which this phrase, *the coming of the Lord* is sometimes used, *viz.* his coming to particular persons by death. And in this sense are those scriptures frequently and not unfitly applied, *1 Thes. v. 2. The Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.* And *Mat. xxiv. 44. Be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not, the son of man cometh.* Which (if we observe) we shall find verified in the death of

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the most of our acquaintance, who are usually taken off at a time when we little apprehended their great change was so near: and which in all probability will be verified in our own, whenever it happens. Which shews the absolute necessity of a constant, habitual preparation.

Well, these then are those two great events, denoted by the *coming of the Lord*, for which we are required to prepare.

II. How are we to prepare for them?

It is the same thing that prepares us for both. And that, in one word, is nothing less than a sincere and thorough *Repentance*, evidenced by an universal reformation of life.

And this repentance consists in an actual *turning from*, and a *final forsaking* those sins which make us afraid to meet the Lord when he comes. Nothing less than this can prove it sincere, or be a foundation of any solid hope. It does not lie in confessions and outward humiliations; no, nor in a sorrowful compunction for sin, or a few faint endeavours to avoid it: but in a hatred of, and an actual departing from it.

Usually it begins indeed with serious consideration and a sense of danger, a conviction of the dreadful evil of sin, and some apprehensions of mercy in reserve, if we repent; with these alarms of conscience, and the first workings of repentance, the judgments
and

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I am merciful (m). This was the voice of God by his prophets to his backsliding people the *Jews*, and this is the voice of all his alarming providences to us now.

Thus are we to prepare to meet him in whatever way he comes. Because,

1. This will be the best way to avert impending judgments. God often threatens his people to this very end, that their repentance may prevent the execution of the judgment threatened. And this condition of mercy upon repentance is commonly expressed, and where it is not, it is always implied; even in those threatenings that seem most absolute and unlimited. This appears from the case of the *Ninevites*, against whom an absolute threatening of total destruction was denounced, and that in a short limited time; who had only a *peradventure* of mercy to depend upon, saying, *who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?* They took hold of that, and immediately repented; and God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way, and God repented of the evil that he had said that he would do unto them, and he did it not (n).

It is an affecting story which *Plutarch* tells us in the life of *Alexander*; 'He had received a most dishonourable affront from his *macedonian* veterans, and was therefore
' deter-

(m) Jer. iii. 12.

(n) Jonah iii. 9, 10.

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‘ determined to punish them in the most ex-
‘ emplary manner. A sense of their danger
‘ brought them to themselves. They went,
‘ without their arms, almost naked, crying
‘ and weeping, to offer themselves at his tent ;
‘ and desired him to deal with them as their
‘ baseness and ingratitude deserved. How-
‘ ever this would not prevail ; for though his
‘ anger was already somewhat mollified, yet
‘ he would not admit them into his pre-
‘ sence. Yet they would not stir from thence,
‘ but continued two days and two nights be-
‘ fore his tent, bewailing themselves, and im-
‘ ploring him their sovereign Lord, to have
‘ mercy on them. But the third day he
‘ came out to them, and seeing them very
‘ humble and penitent, he wept a great
‘ while, and after a gentle reproof, spake
‘ kindly to them, and dismissed them not
‘ only with pardon, but magnificent re-
‘ wards (c).’ And can we think, that the
God of boundless mercy is less inclined to
relent, when his offending creatures thus re-
turn unto him with self-abasement, repent-
ance and prayer ? No, we have his solemn
promise for it often repeated, and that veri-
fied by the conduct of his providence in like
cases, that be the judgments with which he
threatens a people or nation ever so deserved,
or ever so near, yet if they truly repent at
last, even at the very instant of execution,
mercy

(c) See *Plutarch's Lives*, Vol. 6. pag. 114.

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mercy will interpose, stay the up-lifted hand, and prevent the fatal blow. However,

2. If desolating judgments be determin'd, if *the decree is gone forth*, and justice is not to be appeas'd, yet this is the best way to prepare for the dreadful stroke. If our personal and particular repentance be not sufficient to prevent a national judgment, yet it will *deliver our own souls*; and though we be involved in the common calamity here, it will prevent our everlasting ruin hereafter, and prepare us to meet the Lord, whenever, or in whatever manner he may come to us at DEATH. And *thus* we are sure it will not be long e'er he comes to every one of us, whatever may be the issue of the present threatening providences with regard to our land.

Having thus shewn you what those events are, which we are called in the text to prepare for, and in what manner we are to prepare for them, I proceed now,

III. To endeavour to excite you and myself to this duty, from a particular application and consideration of those providences by which God is at this time, in a very affecting and signal manner, calling us. And

1. The providence of God is now loudly calling us to prepare to meet him, by threatening to come out against us in a way of national judgment.

On

of alarming Providences. 15

On the 8th day of the last month, viz. *February*, there was felt a very surprizing and unusual shake of the earth, in and about the cities of *London* and *Westminster*; which spread a just and general astonishment among the inhabitants of this part of the Island. On the 8th day of this month (just four weeks, wanting seven hours, after the first) there was felt another, much of the same kind, but by all accounts more strong and extensive than the former; which not only renewed, but redoubled in our minds the terror created by the first, and hath raised in many the apprehensions of a third more violent than either of the other two.

Now, to what natural causes these surprizing events may be immediately owing, and what stress may be reasonably laid upon the particular time at which the second happened after the first, I shall not pretend here to say. Only so much is certain, that whatever be the cause or may be the consequence of these events, they are a loud and solemn call of Providence, and ought to be regarded and improved by us as such. And by the remarkable repetition of this alarming shake, God seems to be speaking to us as he did to *Moses*, (by whom he shewed signs of his almighty power to *Pharaoh* before he sent down his judgments upon him) *And it shall come to pass, that if they will not hearken*
to

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to the voice of the first sign, that they will believe the voice of the latter sign. And it shall come to pass, that if they will not believe also the voice of these two signs, neither hearken to my voice, that then—I will immediately begin to execute the judgments I have threatened (p).

Let us consider then,

1. What is the true light in which we are to look upon the late alarming event. And

2. What is the right use we are to make of it.

1. Let us consider what is the true light in which we are to look upon the late alarming event.

‘ And here (as the late excellent and reverend Mr. *Showers* observed,) (q) our great difficulty in reflecting on such providences will be to avoid the two extremes, of *Atheism* on the one hand, and *superstition* on the other: not to make too little nor too much of such events: not to overlook the divine agency and warning thereby, as if they had no meaning: nor on the other hand, to be bold, and positive, and particular in determining what they signify, and what we may expect to follow.’

(1.) Upon such occasions we should guard against too terrifying apprehensions and superstitious fears. We should not affect to
make

(p) Exod. iv. 8, 9.

(q) See the preface to his *discourse on earthquakes*.

make things appear worse than they are, by readily receiving every groundless report, retailing and aggravating every particular circumstance we hear, with a view only to astonish and frighten the minds of others. Nor should we be over forward to interpret the particular design of these providences, and predict the consequences. But especially should we guard against a spirit of censoriousness, by looking upon those who may suffer most by publick calamities, as greater sinners than other men ; against which our Lord hath particularly cautioned us in this case (r).

These are the abuses which some weak, superstitious, and fearful minds are apt to make of such extraordinary providences ; which too often prevent their making that just, and wise, and right improvement of them which they ought. But

(2.) Let us not on the other hand despise such warnings. This is a worse abuse of them than the other, it is attended with worse effects, and is at least an equal sign of weakness and want of judgment.

Some affect to be thought persons of greater depth and solidity than others, only on the merit of thinking lighter, and believing less ; or of being proof against the impressions which others feel. But believe it, merely to be insensible, is not to be wise ;

C

and

(r) Luke xiii. 2.

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and incredulity is no more a sign of a good judgment, than profaneness is of a great wit. And in truth, nothing is weaker than to mistake these as some do.

‘ There is nothing miraculous in the late
‘ surprising shocks of the earth, they hap-
‘ pen according to the course of things, and
‘ may easily enough be accounted for from
‘ natural causes.’—Be it so; are no provi-
dences then to be seriously acknowledged,
but those that are purely miraculous? Tem-
pests, conflagrations, wars, and epidemical
distempers, all owe their rise to the concu-
rence of natural causes; but are they for
that reason not to be acknowledged as divine
judgments? Nay, whatever calamities God
is pleased to bring upon a nation for their
sins, he always (at least in these days) makes
use of natural causes as his instruments to
effect them. And if men will not believe
the hand of God to be in any extraordinary
and threatening events, purely because they
are brought about by the concurrence of se-
cond causes, it is in effect to say that they
will not believe without a miracle. Nor
would a miracle (it is to be feared) have any
good effect upon minds so sceptical. Has
not he, who first established the order of se-
cond causes, the direction of them? are not
the reins of them in his hands? and cannot
he guide their motions to such a concurrence
as to bring the most desolating evil upon a
sinful

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sinful land? and when he does so, have we no reason to hear and fear? God knows, we have reason enough to fear; to fear the worst our apprehensions can suggest upon such a publick alarm.

This humour of seeing no judgments, hearing no calls, and taking no warnings, was the sin and folly, and at length the ruin of God's antient people the *Jews*. They shut their eyes against all the tokens of God's displeasure, till *wrath came upon them to the uttermost*, and then it was too late to open them. Thus we see it was in the chapter where my text is; they were visited with famine, with excessive drought, with unfruitful seasons, with the pestilence, and all to no purpose, they would not acknowledge the hand of God in any of them. Then the *earthquake* came; and though it destroyed some of them, yet it was despised by others. 'It was surprising indeed, but it happened only *according to second causes*.' And after the mention of each of these judgments, it is expressly said—*Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord*: plainly implying, that their repentance was the great end designed by every one of those calamities, but was defeated by their inflexible stupidity. Either they would not acknowledge them to be the judgments of God, or would not seriously attend to them as such, or had recourse to all means but the right,

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for the removal of them ; they would not in the least be reformed by them, or however would only for a while refrain from some of their most heinous vices ; but would not be perswaded in good earnest *to return unto the Lord*, which was the great end for which those judgments were sent. This provoked the most high so far, that he seemed determined at length to rouse them effectually, by pouring out the full vials of his wrath upon them. *Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel : and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.*

God hath been dealing with this nation much in the same way, and by his late providences seems to speak to us much in the same manner.— ‘ I have chastised that insolent and prophane people with the sword, and plunged them into a destructive war, which hath drained much of their blood and treasure ; yet have they not returned unto me, saith the Lord.—I visited them with a severe season, and threatened to lock up the earth, and prevent the usual produce of it for a year, yet have they not returned unto me, saith the Lord.—Nay, I sent the sword of the enemy into the very heart of their country, and shook the foundation of all their boast and joy, their liberty and property ; they were amazed, they trembled, they called upon me, and I saved them ; yet have they not returned
‘ unto

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‘ unto me, saith the Lord.—Neighbouring
‘ countries I laid waste by armies of locusts,
‘ and sent some harbingers of that destructive
‘ host into their borders, by way of warning
‘ to them; yet they would not take it, nor
‘ return unto me, saith the Lord.—I sent the
‘ murrain amongst their cattle, and made
‘ their herds amazed and desolate, and con-
‘ tinued that visitation among them year
‘ after year; yet they hearkened not, nor
‘ returned unto me, saith the Lord.—And
‘ *therefore* (since so many judgments and
‘ warnings have been neglected and despised)
‘ *thus will I do unto thee*, (shaking the earth
‘ under our *metropolis*) *and because I will do*
‘ **THIS** *unto thee* (then the earth shook
‘ again) *prepare to meet thy God, O ENG-*
‘ **LAND.**’

There is no particular judgment expressly threatened in the text, no more is there in the alarming providence: but something very terrible is intimated in both. They deserved a sudden, total, and inevitable overthrow; and so have we: for we have hardened our hearts against his former judgments, as they had done. And therefore he leaves them in a sad suspense to fear the worst; and in this manner he leaves us!— ‘ Turn away from
‘ us, O merciful God, thy just displeasure,
‘ reform our guilty land, and do not destroy
‘ it.’

An

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An earthquake is for certain the most terrible *Phenomenon* in our world of nature, and often brings with it the most sudden and sweeping desolation. The year 1692 was famous for them. On *June* the 7th of that year, happened that dreadful one at *Jamaica*, of which I have thrown into the margin a few extracts from the accounts published of it in the philosophical transactions, and preserved by Mr. *Chambers* *.

In

* ‘ In two minutes time it shook down and drowned
‘ nine tenths of the town of *Port-Royal*. The houses
‘ sunk out-right thirty or forty fathom deep. The
‘ earth opening, swallowed up people, and they rose
‘ in other streets, some in the middle of the harbour,
‘ and yet were saved ; though two thousand people were
‘ lost, and a thousand acres of land sunk. It was at-
‘ tended with a hollow, rumbling noise, like that of
‘ thunder.—In less than a minute, three quarters of
‘ the houses, and the ground they stood on, with the
‘ inhabitants, were all sunk quite under water ; and
‘ the little part left behind, was no better than a heap
‘ of rubbish.—The shake was so violent, that it
‘ throw’d people down upon their knees or faces as they
‘ were running about for shelter.—The ground heaved
‘ and swelled like a rolling sea : and in many places the
‘ earth opened and shut, quick and fast ; of which
‘ openings two or three hundred might be seen at a
‘ time : in some whereof the people were swallowed
‘ quite up ; others the closing earth caught by the
‘ middle and pressed to death ; in others the heads only
‘ appeared ; whilst the larger openings swallowed up
‘ houses. And out of some would issue whole rivers of
‘ waters, spouted up to a vast height into the air, and
‘ threatening a deluge to that part the earthquake
‘ spared.—The whole was attended with stench
‘ and offensive smells, the noise of falling mountains
‘ at

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In the same year (*Sept. 8.*) there happened one at *London*, which throw'd the inhabitants into much the same consternation they are now in from those two which they have so lately felt. Only with this difference, that *that* was the more terrifying as it succeeded so soon after that very dreadful one at *Jamaica*, and *these* the more astonishing, as the second shake so soon succeeded the first, and hath raised a general apprehension of a third.

Within half a year after (*viz. in February 1692-3*) happened that prodigious earthquake in the Island of *Sicily*, which was much more destructive than that in *Jamaica*. I have not time nor inclination to give you the particulars of the destruction it made. Let it suffice to say— ' That the whole Island
' was

' at a distance. And the sky in a minute's time was
' turned dull and red, like a glowing oven.—Yet as
' great a sufferer as *Port-Royal* was, more houses were
' left standing in it than in the whole Island beside.—
' After the first great shake, those people that escaped,
' got on board ships in the harbour, where many con-
' tinued above two months; the shakes all that time
' being so violent, and coming so thick, (sometimes
' two or three in an hour, accompanied with frightful
' noises like a ruffling wind, or a hollow rumbling
' thunder, with brimstone blasts) that they durst not
' come ashore.—The consequence of this earthquake
' was a general sickness, from the noisome vapours
' belched forth; which swept away above three thou-
' sand souls.'—*Who shall not tremble, O Lord, for
fear of thee, and of the glory of thy majesty, when thou
arisest to shake terribly the earth?*

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was in a manner reduced to a heap of rubbish. That fifty four cities and towns, beside an incredible number of villages, were either wholly destroyed or greatly damaged. That in particular, the magnificent Town of *Catania* was wholly swallowed up; so that there was not the least footsteps of it to be seen afterward; and that eighteen thousand inhabitants in it all perished at once. And *Bonajutus*, from a computation of the number of inhabitants in the whole Island, affirms, that out of two hundred fifty four thousand nine hundred, near sixty thousand were consumed (s). *Then the earth shook and trembled, the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth: there went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured; coals were kindled by it. Then the channels of waters were seen, the foundations of the world were discovered; at thy rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils (t).*

And have we, who have been twice so lately threatened with this dreadful calamity, no cause to fear? nay, have we not the greatest reason to acknowledge the hand of God, to apprehend his just displeasure, and
to

(s) See *Chambers's Dictionary* under the word *earthquake*.

(t) Psa. xviii. 7, 8, 15.

to grow very serious under the apprehensions (u).

Having thus at large shewn you in what light we ought to look on the late surprising event, I shall now more briefly consider,

2. What is the right use we ought to make of it. And

(1.) The first and principal thing, to which such awakening providences call us, is *personal* repentance. I observed before, that a national repentance was the great design intended by such publick admonitions; and there can be no national without a personal repentance. We have by our particular sins added to the publick guilt, we should therefore by our personal repentance contribute what we can to the national reformation :

D

and

(u) It may not be amiss just to observe here, that there are four remarkable circumstances that attended the late concussion which hath so much alarmed us. 1. That it was so soon repeated; and the latter shake exactly a month after the former. *The Lord hath spoken once, twice have we heard this, that power belongeth unto God.* Psal. lxii. 11. 2. That the last shake was much stronger than the first. And had it been but a few degrees stronger than it was, what destruction would it have made! And how suddenly might *London* have been what *Lima* is! 3. Another remarkable circumstance is, that both these shakes were much more violent in the cities of *London* and *Westminster*, than in any place beside. *Lastly*, That they both happened at a time when there was the greatest concourse of people there out of the country.—These are facts, and we are at liberty to make what use of them we please. And a very serious one, I think, we ought to make.

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and wherein that consists I have already shewn.

(2.) A solemn threatening of such formidable catastrophes should awaken in our minds the most awful apprehensions of God's almighty power and anger; which we are too apt to forget till we are roused to a proper sense thereof by such extraordinary signals. But, O! *who can stand before him when he is wroth? The pillars of heaven and earth tremble, and are astonished at his rebuke. Who knows the power of thine anger?* (saith the Psalmist) *even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath* (x). That is, the effects of thy vengeance, when thou comest out in judgment against a sinful people, are equal to all the most terrible apprehensions we can form of them. And it is an observation not to be despised, that *earthquakes* are amongst those signs which were expressly mentioned by our Saviour himself, as the fore-runners of the total dissolution of the *jewish* state and nation (y).

(3.) How should this excite in us all the most ardent desires to secure and cultivate an interest in the favour of God through the intercession of Jesus Christ? which will be our only refuge in a day of general calamity. Then will that almighty power which comes armed for the destruction of his enemies, be our sure defence and safety. *When God is*
our

(x) Psa. xc. 11.

(y) See Mat. xxiv. 7.

our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble, we need not fear though the earth be removed, and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof (z).

Lastly, Such awakening providences loudly call for prayer; especially whilst God is holding his rod over us, and keeping our minds in a painful suspense. But come what will, we can never meet it better than in a penitent, praying frame. Not to say, that this is the very best means to secure to us and ours, a singular preservation. Remarkable is the story which is related concerning an earthquake at *Bern* in *Switzerland*, A. D. 1584; by the violence of which, a mountain was carried to a considerable distance, and covered a whole village that had ninety families in it; one half house only excepted, wherein the master of the house with his wife and children were earnestly calling upon God. This story is related by *Polanus*, who was an inhabitant of those parts (a).

But to conclude this part of the subject, (on which perhaps I have dwelt too long already) supposing the best that can happen, that God will be better to us than our fears, that these awful tokens of his displeasure are not the fore-runners of a national calamity,

D 2

and

(z) P^sal. xlvi. 1, 2, 3.

(a) *Polani Syntag.* 841.

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and that the Almighty is not coming out against us (as we apprehend) in a way of public and distinguishing judgments; yet he is ever coming nearer to us by *death*. This we cannot avoid. And therefore I would observe,

2. That God is now loudly calling us by his providences to *prepare to meet him* in this way.

The sudden and unexpected death of our friends in one place and another (especially if there be a distinguishing hand of providence visible therein) (b), are intended as solemn admonitions to us, to rouse us out of that thoughtfulness of dying, which is often occasioned by a too great thoughtfulness about living. Such providences have a loud voice: and what is it but this? *Prepare to meet thy God; for in such an hour as ye think not, the son of man cometh*. In general then, these private providential warnings, are solemn calls to repentance, a thorough, unfeigned, and particular repentance; which is the only thing that can fitly prepare us to meet that dreadful enemy of nature, and disarm him of his sting and terrour. And, O! that by a serious consideration of such melancholy

(b) *N. B.* This sermon was preached at *Chestnut*, the 18th of *March*, soon after the death of two of my friends; each of which was preceded by circumstances of remarkable affliction.

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melancholy events, they may have an happy effect upon us all! More particularly,

(1.) May we hereby be taught to remove our dependance from creatures. They are but *broken reeds*. And if we lay too much weight upon them, they will but break the sooner. We have no security, we see, of our dearest comforts. How soon may those blessings and those friends, on which we build our greatest earthly satisfaction and hope, be snatched away by the hand of God that gave them!

(2.) Let us hence be persuaded to commit our lives, interests, comforts, concerns, and friends into the hands of God, to be disposed of by him at his pleasure; content with his disposals. For *indeed* they are not ours, but his: not given, but lent to us: and for how long we know not.

This is a very seasonable thought to abate the grief of parting with near and dear, and useful friends; and tends to turn our sorrow for their death into thankfulness, that God was pleased to continue them to us so long. For did we not know all the while, that they were in his hands? He takes but what he gave: and however things may at present appear, we know not but he takes away in as much mercy as he gave. For who can fathom the depths of the divine designs, or enter into the views of infinite wisdom?

(3.) Such

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(3.) Such providences should fix in us the most deep and serious impressions of our own mortality. *One is taken, and another left.* ‘ And why is my neighbour taken and I left? had that fatal shaft which passed by me and struck him, past by him and struck me, where and what should I at this instant have been?’—The common stupidity of mankind in this point is really amazing! That creatures born to die, designed to spend but a few years here on earth, and then be gone from hence for ever, and who almost every day see or hear of others dying round them, should yet so seldom think of death or its consequences. I mean, that the thoughts of it should have so little effect on the minds of men to cure their pride, presumption, and folly; and make them wise, and good, and serious.

(*Lastly,*) Let us hence be excited in good earnest, to examine what state of preparation we are in, to meet that most important change. Have we indeed sincerely repented of the past iniquities of our lives? O let us now particularly recall them, bring them back again to our minds, and see what they have been; and see what our repentance for them hath been too; that we may not deceive ourselves with false and fatal hopes. Let us consider what good reason we have indeed to hope, that they are cancelled by the blood of Christ; that he is our Advocate

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Advocate and Friend, and God, through him, our reconciled Father. For believe it, without this we shall never be able to die in peace. And O! the horror of that soul that goes out of this world in a sad state of uncertainty. How it is like to go with it for ever in another!

But if we have this foundation for our hope to rest upon, if we can discern, by a holy change wrought in our tempers and lives, some good tokens of a sincere and thorough repentance, then we may be sure, that *Jesus Christ* is our Advocate and Saviour; that the interest of our souls are safe in his hands, that our unwilling frailties will not be imputed, that God is our reconciled Friend and Father, and that we are prepared for *all events*; prepared to meet him in whatever way he comes; whether he is about to visit our guilty land with the most *destructive judgments*, or (which will be equally terrible to us) to call us out of it by an unexpected death, we are safe and happy, and may meet the great event in peace. And the Lord of his infinite mercy grant, that the late warnings we have had, may bring us all to a right sense of things, and effectually excite us to such an habitual *Preparation* to meet our COMING GOD.

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