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A
S E R M O N
PREACHED BEFORE THE
LORDS, SPIRITUAL AND TEMPORAL,
ON
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 1807.

Die Jovis, 26° February, 1807.

ORDERED, by the Lords Spiritual and Temporal in Parliament assembled, that the Thanks of this House be and are hereby given to the LORD BISHOP OF EXETER, for the Sermon by him preached before this House yesterday, in the *Abbey Church, Westminster*; and he is hereby desired to cause the same to be forthwith printed and published.

GEORGE ROSE,

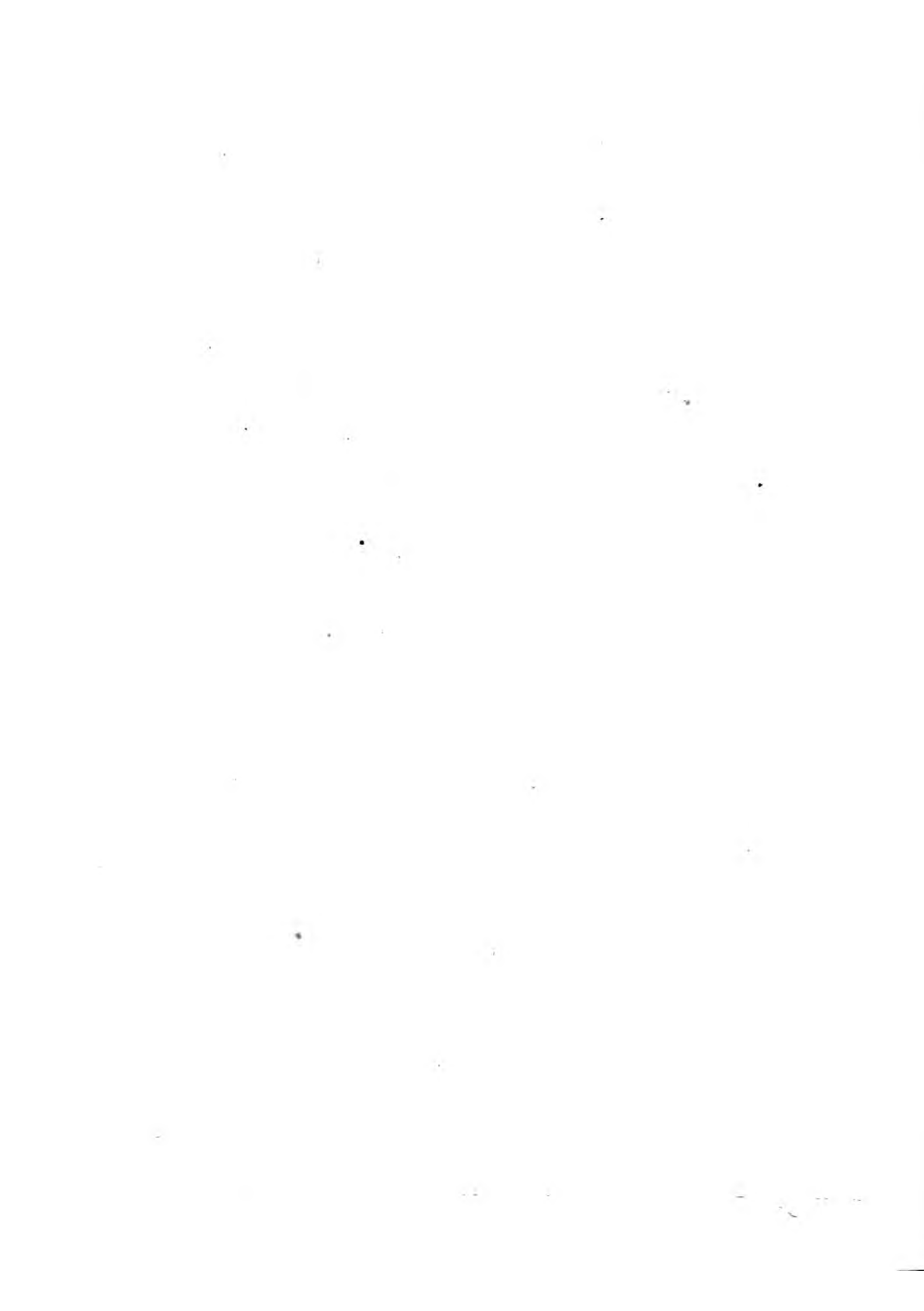
Cler. Parliamentor.

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S E R M O N
 PREACHED BEFORE THE
LORDS, SPIRITUAL AND TEMPORAL,
 IN THE
ABBAY CHURCH, WESTMINSTER,
 ON
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 1807,
 BEING THE DAY APPOINTED FOR A GENERAL FAST.

fisher BY
JOHN LORD BISHOP OF EXETER.



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 1807.



S E R M O N .

ISAIAH XL. 31.

They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.

AMONG the various errors into which our fallen nature is apt to deviate, there are none which are more productive of calamity than those which relate to the estimate we form of our strength and weakness. Mistakes are here dangerous, and we are very prone to mistake.

Pride, which is a very governing principle of our moral frame, and ramifies itself into almost all our actions and sentiments, is the engine by which the adversary of mankind effects his purposes.

This is unhappily true in private life: and it is natural to suppose, (though that supposition is seldom adverted to and never acted upon,) that the same habits which ruin individuals, should spread confusion and distraction over communities of men. The turbulent course of human affairs deprives us of that calmness which is a principal ingredient in true wisdom. The elevation of spirits which success produces, is, upon a reverse, apt to sink into dejection, and even despair; and as we overrate our strength in the first instance, so are we backward to discern our real resources in the second.

The words of my text seem calculated, if duly considered, to meet either of these extremes: "They that are desirous " of renewing their strength," must recognise their weakness. Those who are in this state of salutary humiliation, have the means suggested—that of "waiting upon the Lord."

In the creation of man, it appears to have been a primary design of the Almighty, that he should remain in a state of **DEPENDENCY**; that he should in no instance

lose sight of the author of his existence. The desire of independency produced the expulsion of man from Paradise, and his condemnation to a state of labour, sorrow, and anxiety, closed at last by death. The same condemnation which has overtaken us in our moral and natural, has likewise extended to our social and national capacities. The analogy between these states is very striking; and it would be well for mankind, if it were oftener taken into due consideration.

It is a maxim among many, that in civil and political relations religion has little concern: that its influence is confined to the correction, caution, and consolation of private and domestic life, but that the strength and weakness of nations are no way affected by its purity or its corruptions, its progress or decay. There is, perhaps, no opinion which is more contrary to the principles upon which man is constructed,—to the course of experience,—or to the declarations of holy Scripture.

How absurd is this reasoning when applied to the subordinate societies of which a nation is composed!

What order, what regularity, what harmony, what real security doth the practice of true religion introduce into families! If the fear of God is banished from an house, it little matters what is its strength, its influence or opulence. Discord and confusion,—disease and distraction will soon, in varied shapes, invade its tranquillity. Luxury and licentiousness will turn the exuberance of the divine bounty into an “occasion of falling.” The father will experience the contumacy of his offspring; and the mother, like Rachell of old, will “weep for her children because they are not.” The various domestic charities, being deprived of the cement which binds them to each other, will be lost in speedy dissolution. Dissipation will produce disorder and penury—and fully justify the emphatical words of the Psalmist.—“Yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be; yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be.”*

It is not to be supposed that the course of divine providence, with regard to nations, at all differs from the same moral process.

* Psalm xxxvii. 10.

The documents of all history, civil and sacred, conspire to evince this momentous truth, and to illustrate and confirm the same analogy.

When the extension of empire—the growth of affluence, and the refinement of art, have exalted the pride and irritated the passions of men to their highest pitch, then a forgetfulness of God, and a contemptuous rejection of his authority, is too apt to prevail, and to overbear that sober sense of duty which can alone preserve the foundations on which national security rests.

When the empire of conscience ceases, and when its sanctions are impaired, even prosperity itself is but the precursor of ruin; and, in fact, the most splendid appearances of wealth and prowess, are not sufficient to warrant a moment's confidence. I know not whether this is a lesson we have yet learned: But if the transactions of near twenty years have conveyed no instructions to us concerning the danger of a neglect of the ordinances and dispensations of God, what words can effect it?

Consider only the state of Europe as it stood within that short period ; consider the unparalleled and precipitate reverses which have prostrated the most powerful civil communities of the earth since the commencement of that short space. The insufficiency of every varied form of civil polity, to protect itself from ruin, has been most conspicuous.

Reflect upon the shortness of human foresight in anticipating these calamities, and the utter impotence of human strength in controlling them.

“ Is wisdom no more in Teman? Is counsel perished from the prudent? is their wisdom vanished? ”*

But if we consider the moral condition of the different states of Europe at the commencement of the French revolution, we shall be at no loss to discern the real cause and germ of the tremendous series of events which have afflicted so large a portion of the sons of men.

* Jer. xlix. 7.

A contempt of the religion of Christ, and a rejection of Revelation, had for near half a century gradually overspread the Continent. Certainly the first institutors of this baleful school had their origin in France. The levity of manners, the flippant sophistry and refined corruption of morals, which are the distinguishing features of that people, were peculiarly adapted to scoff and blasphemy. But we are much mistaken if we suppose that the mischief had confined itself within the boundaries of that country: the rest of Europe had been willing disciples of the same system, and with a desperate emulation, incorporated the same rancorous poison into their literature, their politics, and their social habits. Christianity was not only rejected—but rejected with scorn; and an acceptance of it universally ascribed to a debilitated and a degraded intellect.*

The human understanding seems to have ingeniously disported itself in devising new modes of profaneness and infidelity. The holy Scriptures were insulted by commentators, who, under the external guise of illustration,

* See Appendix, Note A.

held them up to ridicule as cunningly-devised fables. These were the lessons inculcated in foreign seminaries and universities: and it is remarkable, that some of the most notorious receptacles and depositaries of these principles have been among the sharpest sufferers in the last incursion of the French into Germany.* It is to be feared that the calamities of mankind, wide as they have been, have not reached the spread of their wickedness and apostacy. The prediction of our blessed Lord has, indeed, been verified to the confusion and dismay of these and all other revolters. "Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken: and upon whomsoever it shall fall, it shall grind him to powder."† Surely, if men reflect upon what is now passing around them, they must be hardy indeed in saying—"where is now the promise of his coming, for since our fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the world."‡

But the holy Scriptures, as they exhibit to us the judgments of the Almighty God upon the nations of the

* See Appendix, Note B.

† Luke xx. 18.

‡ 2. Peter iii. 4.

earth,—at the same time remind us of his mercy. “They that wait upon the Lord,” we are told in my text, “shall renew their strength.”

What participation this nation hath had in these baleful habits, which have drawn down the accumulated judgments of the Almighty, is certainly a matter of very serious consideration.

That we have had no inconsiderable share in the works of darkness, the very design of our assembling ourselves on this day sufficiently indicates. We are assembled in humiliation and contrition, or at least in the profession of it. With us, as in the neighbouring nations, infidelity and impiety have made their ravages. We, too, have cherished in our bosoms the enemies of our peace:—our sentiments have been infected with those same deadly tenets which have tainted the sources of literature and philosophy. An evident and general predilection for those writers who have scoffed at Revelation has prevailed, and still continues to prevail among too many of us. These, like the Epicurean teachers in

the schools of ancient wisdom, (if it may indeed be so called,) are in the hands of all those who pride themselves in the cultivation of their understandings. Neither all we have suffered, or all we fear, or the dreadful downfall of others, have recalled us from the error of our ways. We reason upon forms of government; but we reason not upon the dispensations of God. The observances of these periodical acts of devotional exercises, have, I fear, not been productive of the advantage which might have accrued from them. We try all expedients, but that which can alone save us from the tremendous wrecks which appall us wherever we turn our eyes. We have not hitherto "waited upon God." In our wild exorbitances in every species of luxurious and dissipated pleasure, his worship and his ordinances seem to be very slightly regarded by us. In our provision for the encouragement of arts and refinement, we are active and liberal. We are anxious for "many things," but forget that "one thing is needful." It is indeed a melancholy spectacle to a serious mind, that in this great metropolis institutions of various kinds for the furtherance of elegant art should every where abound, that the proudest

structures; for the purposes of dissipated amusement, should in all quarters meet our eyes, but that a great proportion of the population of the country, both here and in various parts of the kingdom, should be precluded from the worship of their Maker, for want of places of assemblage for divine service.—This, surely, is a defect which calls for immediate attention, if we have any regard to the divine protection, or to the permanence of that holy religion which is our only safeguard and consolation in the accumulating perils and struggles through which we are destined to pass. Would to God that such “an excellent spirit” may be found in our legislature as may devise an adequate remedy to this extended evil.* Then, indeed, may we hope that the Almighty will “renew the strength of them that wait upon him’ This would, assuredly, exhibit one instance at least, among many others required at our hands, of our acknowledgment of the supreme sovereignty of a God over the affairs of men.

* See Appendix, Note C.

In truth, the whole of the exercises of this day are only so far available as they humble the hearts of the proud, and lead us to a solemn national recognition of our utter helplessness and destitution without the divine aid and protection.

We have hitherto been almost miraculously exempted from a considerable portion of those sharp and agonizing calamities which other nations of Europe have undergone. God hath given us "space for repentance," but "we have repented not." This is a fact too well established. But let us remember, that by continuing in our vices, in our revelry, in our luxury, in our atrocious contempt of the Gospel, in our bold and ostentatious profanation of the Sabbath, we deliver over our dearest relatives into the cruel grasp of the most sanguinary tyrant that God ever raised to fulfil his vengeance on a sinful and apostate generation.

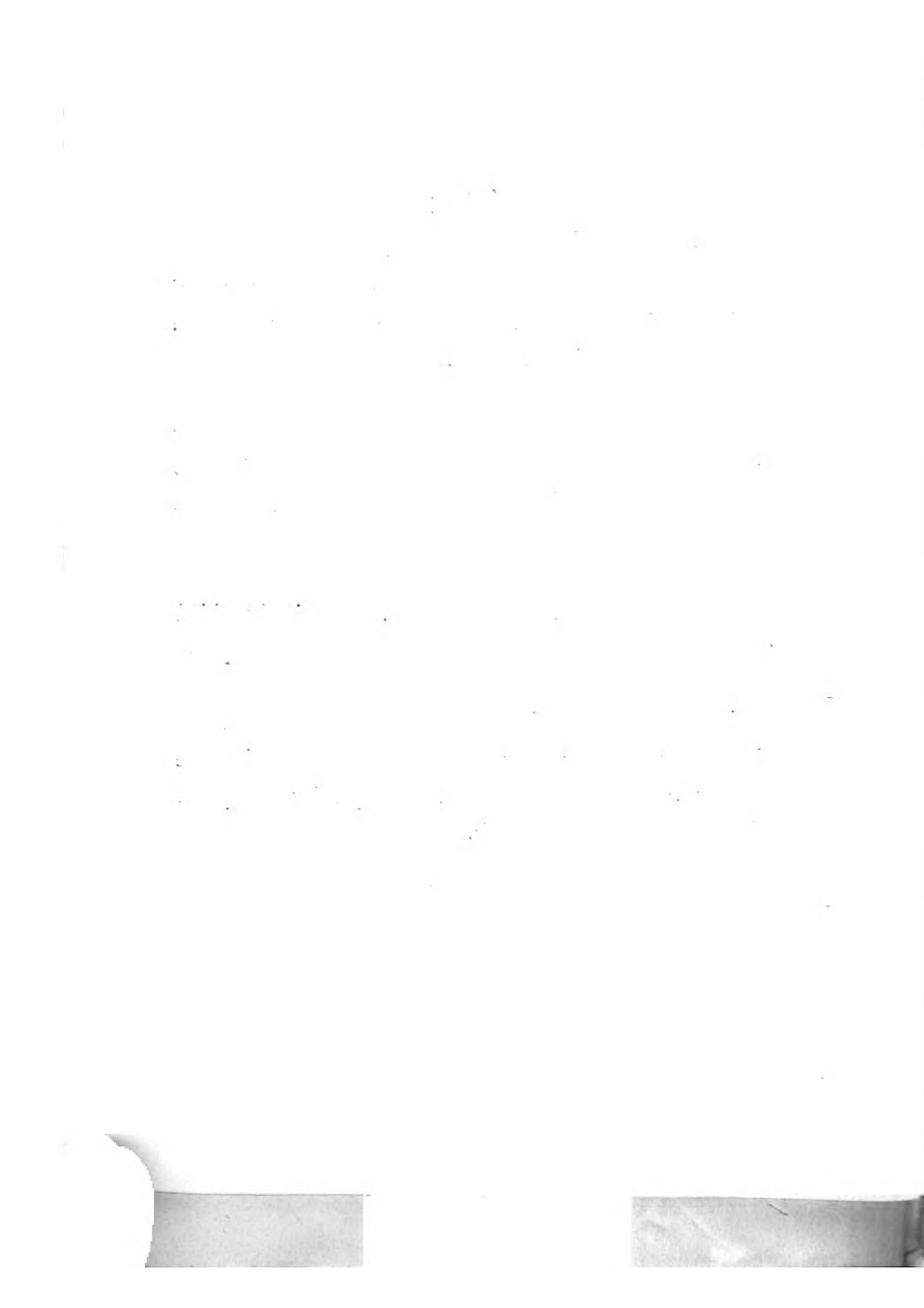
The awful events now passing before us, like the handwriting on the wall, call us all, high and low, rich and

poor, ministers and people, to a serious consideration of our ways. Without this our prayers are mockery, and only call down upon us a severer and more accelerated visitation of the divine wrath.

But we still trust that the God of our Fathers will be with us, if the design of a pious Sovereign, who has called us to this salutary act of national humiliation, be conscientiously complied with.

Let not then the abuse of our solemn service be added to the trespasses of the nation.

May it be available, through the mediation of our Redeemer, to the preservation of ourselves and those dearer to us than ourselves, from captivity, slaughter, famine, and untimely death.



APPENDIX.

NOTE A.

THE Editors of the *Dictionnaire de la Philosophie ancienne et moderne faisant Partie de l'Encyclopedie methodique*, in their life of Bacon, after having passed the highest encomium upon the sublimity of his genius, the profundity of his judgment, and the extensiveness of his erudition, conclude the article with this passage :

“ Au reste, toutes les fois que Bacon parle du Christianisme, l'homme de genie dispaeroit, et l'on ne voit plus qu'un *vieil enfant* qui repete avec une *confiance aveugle* les *contes absurdes* dont sa nourrice l'a bercé.”

NOTE B.

THE Universities of Jena and Halle, two of the principle nurseries of infidelity, have experienced all the calamities of war.

In the neighbourhood of the former was fought the dreadful battle which caused the immediate downfall of the Prussian monarchy.

NOTE C.

THE magnitude of the evil complained of will appear more striking, by bringing into one point of view the prodigious disproportion between the number of inhabitants in six of the principal parishes of the western part of this great metropolis, and the small provision made for divine worship, according to the rites of the established Church, within those parishes.

Parishes.	Number of Inhabitants.	Number of those whom the Church and the several Chapels within the Parish can contain.
St. George's, Bloomsbury -	13,000	1,260
St. Giles's - -	23,000	2,000
Pancras - -	32,000	3,600
Marybone - -	64,000	7,050
St. James's - -	32,000	3,700
St. George's, Hanover Square	40,000	6,700
	<hr/> 204,000 <hr/>	<hr/> 24,310 <hr/>

1. Parish of *St. James.*

Number of Inhabitants, about	—	32,000
<hr/>		
The Church will contain about	—	2,300
King Street Chapel	—	1,000
Berwick Chapel	—	400
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2. Parish of *St. Giles*

	—	23,000
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The Church will contain	—	1,000
The free Chapel	—	1,000
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3. Parish of *St. George, Bloomsbury*

	—	13,000
<hr/>		
The Church will contain	—	860
One Chapel	—	400
<hr/>		

4. Parish of *Pancras*

	—	32,000
<hr/>		
The Church can contain	—	200
Kentish Town Chapel	—	300
Wooburn Chapel	—	900
Fitzroy Chapel	—	1,000
Percy Chapel	—	1,000

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5. Parish of <i>Marybone</i>	—	—	64,000
			<hr/>
The Church contains	—	—	250
Oxford Chapel, Vere Street		—	600
Portland Chapel	—	—	700
Welbeck Chapel	—	—	800
Portman Chapel	—	—	1,100
Bentick Chapel	—	—	1,100
Quebec Chapel	—	—	1,400
Brunswick Chapel	—	—	700
St. Margaret's Chapel	—	—	400

6. Parish of <i>St. George, Hanover Square</i>	—	—	40,000
			<hr/>
The Church will hold		—	1,000
Grosvenor Chapel	—	—	900
Park Street Chapel	—	—	800
Trinity Chapel, Conduit Street		—	500
Charlotte Street Chapel, Pimlico		—	750
Ebury Chapel in the Five Fields		—	700
Berkeley Chapel, John Street		—	800
Knightsbridge	—	—	500

A Chapel belonging to St. James's Parish, situated
in Pancras, contains — — 800