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A
DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED AT THE THIRD PARISH

IN

DEDDHAM,

19th FEBRUARY, 1795.

BEING THE DAY RECOMMENDED

BY THE

PRESIDENT

OF THE UNITED STATES,

FOR

PUBLICK THANKSGIVING.



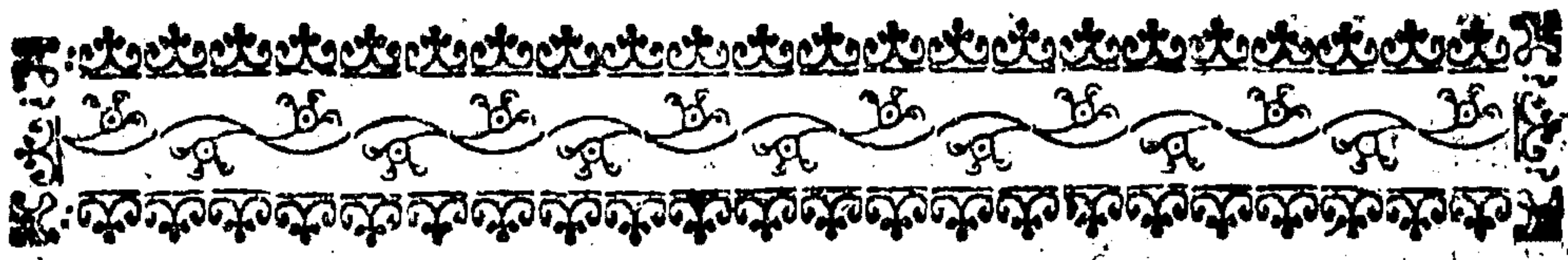
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MDCXCXV.



JOSHUA, xxivth CHAP. 17th VERSE.

“FOR THE LORD OUR GOD, HE IT IS THAT BROUGHT US UP, AND OUR FATHERS OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT, FROM THE HOUSE OF BONDAGE, AND WHICH DID THOSE GREAT SIGNS IN OUR SIGHT; AND PRESERVED US IN ALL THE WAY WHETHER WE WENT, AND AMONG ALL THE PEOPLE THROUGH WHOM WE PASSED.”

THESE words contain the answer and the acknowledgement of the children of Israel to Joshua, who had stated the laws and the constitution of Moses, as an object worthy of their choice. A sentiment and proposition so congenial to their feelings, did not admit of long deliberation. They unanimously answered, “That they would serve the Lord their God—and him only.” At the same time they bound themselves and their posterity, to support that religion and those laws, which had for their Origin and Author the Deity himself.

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But lest from the numbers, which were assembled, this conduct might be suspected of enthusiasm, or popular phrenzy, they assign^{ed} their reasons in the words of our text. They recognized^d the particular providence of God—the singular favours he had conferred upon them—the demonstration to their senses of his power, by signs and prodigies—the continuation of his patronage in all the vicissitudes of their history. These I say, were the causes they assigned for their choice, and for their publick and solemn avowal of their intentions, exclusively to honor and worship the God of their fathers.

The *time* and *place* in which they made this solemn declaration cannot but affect our minds. They had long before been delivered from Egyptian slavery. Under the auspices of divine providence, they had conquered and extirpated the inhabitants of Canaan—They had nothing more to do but to enjoy a fruitful soil and salubrious climate, and reap the harvest of their former toils and danger. Their illustrious leader summoned them to a general assembly—He acquaints^{ed} them that as he had accomplished the great objects they had in view, he should deliver them his last advice. And in this oration, he reminded them of the signal favours of the Deity towards that generation and their immediate ancestors—He ~~goes~~^{revert} back to the time of their great progenitor, who left an idolatrous country and connections, for the sake of worshipping the

the true God—and then enquired ~~of~~ ^{would} them whether they ~~will~~ take so bright a pattern of piety to copy after—or else suffer themselves to be deluded by the contagious examples of those nations around them, whose idols and false gods they had seen destroyed, who had neither power to protect their votaries nor themselves.

There are two remarks that cannot fail to command our attention from this passage of sacred history.—The first is, that they were left to determine by their own reason whom they would make the object of their worship—from whence we infer, That a religion directly descending from heaven must be approved of by men as free agents, and not be forced upon them as an act of necessity or compulsion.—The next is, that Joshua seems to have had a thorough acquaintance with the weakness and instability of his countrymen; otherwise he would never have suspected their dereliction of a religion and code of laws, which were by so many sensible evidences shewn to be a legacy from God.

The words of the text may be very naturally applied to ourselves.—Our ancestors and we have received signal marks of the divine goodness. In all the periods of our history we may find evident marks of the singular protection of heaven.—We have been conducted through events of an extraordinary

ordinary kind, and at last are in the possession of peace and prosperity. On the present occasion, we find ourselves invited by our illustrious First Magistrate to commemorate divine bounty, and express our national gratitude. We will readily engage,—and the memory of past and present mercies will lead us to adopt the language of the people of Israel.—*God hath preserved us in all the way whether we went, and among all the people through whom we passed.*

In order for prosecuting the design we shall,

First, Consider the propriety and utility, that national gratitude should be publickly expressed.

Secondly, Let us attempt to enumerate some of those many mercies of divine providence which deserve to be celebrated in a publick and solemn manner.

Thirdly, Let us examine how far we have improved them aright, or what publick or private errors are to be corrected.

I. We shall endeavour to show that a publick acknowledgment of national mercies is rational and becoming, and is productive of common utility.—The proof and illustration of this proposition will be a demonstration of the fitness of our assembling on this occasion.

National

National mercies and those received by individuals are nearly connected. When the great body of the community is afflicted the members must suffer pain. If then war, famine, pestilence, or internal commotions rage through a country, it is impossible but that far the greater part of the inhabitants must be in distress. Or, on the contrary, if peace, health and plenty—if a flourishing commerce are to be reckoned among their advantages, by far the greater part will feel the effects. I say by far the greater part—because there may be some instances where a few individuals fatten on the spoils and ruin of their country, and these may be so totally selfcentered as to rejoice at the common calamity. But of these little account is to be made. We hope, at least in our own country, there are so few instances as not to destroy the force of our general observation.

Another argument which we offer in defence of our general proposition is—That our Country usually comprises within itself all private good. “It contains our parents, our children, our fortunes, our wives, our neighbours and friends.”—In a word, all the social endearments of life. I would not however wish to have this principle carried so far as to preclude that benevolence which we owe to mankind at large: But still, this should be a prior object of affection. For, by the same motive that a man is obliged to provide for his own family,

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before he bestows alms on the poor, he is obliged to engage himself in promoting the advantage and felicity of his country, in preference to a remote and distant corner of the earth.

If then the prosperous condition of the community conveys so many personal advantages, we are all interested personally in its tranquility and good. And as far as we have evident tokens that this is the case, we have the greatest cause to be grateful to the Supreme Being, and of consequence could not neglect such institutions as the present, without exhibiting ourselves in the eye of heaven, as void not only of piety but of sensibility.

But we add, that by contrasting our own country with other parts of the world, we may deduce a farther reason for national gratitude. If then we contrast our situation with that of despotic kingdoms, it may serve as an exemplification of the point in hand. Compare then a free and happy country, where every man is a part of the common sovereignty—where the climate is salubrious, and the soil fruitful; where there is such a mediocrity of population as precludes a multitude of the wretched, and where there are so many invitations to industry by reaping the exclusive fruits of it. Compare such a community as this with Turkey, Persia, or China—nay with most of the civilized parts of Europe, and we shall find motives to publick thanksgiving.

giving. And if we apply it to ourselves, we may use the pious language of the Psalmist, "Our lines have fallen to us in pleasant places and goodly hath been our heritage."

But I proceed to remark, that by neglecting to cultivate religious festivals, which are designed for the purpose of expressing national gratitude, we naturally become indolent and thoughtless, and by these means habits of vice and dissipation are formed. This will appear evident, because at least one branch of religion is neglected, and social obligations are soon forgotten; for the man who supposes no thanks are due to his common parent will soon conclude that none are due to his fellow creatures; thus not only piety is obliterated—relative duties are forgotten, but the mind is so far emasculated, that he thinks of little else beside mere animal enjoyments. And as a natural consequence, not only the morals of the people at large are rendered worse; but the mechanical arts and habits of industry decay. I add, the utility of these institutions was such that we find them practiced among the ancient heathen. If we look back to the extreme periods of antiquity, we find that publick festivals in favour of the superior powers, and expressions of gratitude to the memory of some deceased and deified hero, are some of the first grades towards civilization and refinement. We find marks and vestiges of the same custom among
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the Jews, it was made a part of their religion by a divine prescription. And the common sense and reason of mankind have determined in their favor. They animate mankind to consider the advantages which they enjoy. "And passions are the elements of life." They are awakened to reflection, they are excited by the presence and countenance of each other to remember the divine providence—and, pleased with the memory of his goodness, they are awakened to moral and social virtue. And to close our remarks upon this head, the custom of our fathers, renowned for piety and the pure worship of heaven, who felt themselves implicitly authorized by the precepts of the gospel, cannot fail to have weight in exciting us cheerfully to attend to the duty we have urged; and I doubt not but the enumeration of the many favors of a publick nature which we enjoy will excite within us sentiments and reflections which are correspondent.

II. We shall apply the language of the text to ourselves, and attempt to make a publick acknowledgement of some of the most distinguished favors we enjoy, particularly those of a publick and national kind.

As we have already on the annual thanksgiving taken notice of our religious privileges, in which are included the blessings we derive from divine
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revelation, and temporal mercies of a local nature, we shall limit our observations to such as are merely of a national kind.

The first of these which merit our notice is that we are a free and independent people. This no doubt is included in the first clause of the proclamation, wherein we are directed to *compare our own prosperous* condition with the calamities which affect other nations of the earth. Not the least cause of their calamity is their being either the provinces of some foreign country, or else under the dominion of some arbitrary despot. Wretched, truly wretched is their condition. The productions of industry are the exclusive harvest of the subalterns of a court. The soil is tilled in vain, and the miserable inhabitants, although the comforts and the necessaries of life are torn from them, cannot by their utmost efforts supply the calls of an unfeeling luxurious master. While we call to mind the arduous struggle made by our country in order to obtain so great a blessing as sovereignty and independence, we cannot be unmindful of our obligations to the Lord God of armies, who raised up illustrious characters both in the council and the field; who defeated treasons at the crisis of their execution, and who disposed the heart of a great potentate at the head of a foreign nation to afford us his alliance, and who finally procured for us the blessings of an honourable peace. The text seems to point out

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an acknowledgement of the like kind, where the Jews speak of their fathers as brought out of the house of *bondage*. They acknowledged it in behalf of their fathers; but we of the present generation have experienced the salvation.

And if we consider what a plenitude of political evils would have befallen us had we continued our connection with Britain, we shall want no motive for our gratitude. How many wars? What a weight of debt? How many connexions foreign to our local interest? What a worthless prince, corrupted court, and nobility to support? What an obstruction to the commerce—industry—to the learning and morals of the people would naturally have arisen from their jealousy and suspicion? Shall we not be grateful that we have escaped from a nation who have avowed corruption to be a necessary engine of their government; whose avarice and rapine the wealth of the Indies cannot satisfy, and who feed upon the tears and misery of mankind?

The next object pointed out to our attention as a cause for publick gratitude, is “the blessing of peace and tranquility.” Such a blessing is by no means to be slighted. We have felt the want of it within our own memory. We may farther conceive of the advantages by recurring to the situation of the greater part of Europe at this day.

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When we behold the multitudes which have been sacrificed to the ambition or interest of a few tyrants, we may well rejoice that our local situation exempts us from being concerned therewith. Though we ought to sympathize with the miseries of the human species, and lament their misfortunes, yet when we compare our condition with theirs, we cannot but experience an additional felicity which arises from contrast. While they are subject to every vicissitude of fortune, we sit down beneath the shadow of our *own vine*. We have been rapidly advancing in wealth and enlarging our commerce; nor can we withhold our approbation from those publick measures which extended no farther than to continue our tranquility. But let us, like wise and considerate beings, prepare for its reverse. A state of torpitude or inaction is as inconsistent with the health of the political as the natural body. If our wishes for peace arise from the sordid motives either of enjoying the spoils of other nations, or giving ourselves up to luxury and dissipation, they may be viewed as criminal. Plenty may produce not only effeminacy of manners, but irreligion and vice. Against these effects the people of Israel were cautioned. “When thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses and dwelt therein, and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; then thine heart be lifted up,

up and thou forget the Lord thy God which brought thee forth from the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”

“The prospect of a continuation of the same tranquillity,” is a circumstance which farther calls for our gratitude. Since a state of alarm and fear is not only pernicious to our happiness, but to our fortunes.

The next thing mentioned as a reason for our gratitude is, the suppression of a dangerous rebellion in one of the neighbouring states.—This is a mercy truly important, as we have been thereby delivered from the horrors of a civil war.

A government founded upon the union of so many commonwealths, cannot but be esteemed sacred by every lover of his country. Against this government, free as we trust both in its form and essence, a dangerous insurrection took place, instigated by men of desperate condition, and probably encouraged by a foreign government in the vicinity. But by the alacrity with which citizens of different sentiments engaged in its suppression, we may infer, that however men may differ on lesser points, all the wise and virtuous among us wish to preserve entire the legal and constitutional energies of the general Government. Our wish and prayer is, that a patriotick militia may ever be sufficient

cient for our protection, that we may be never so depraved, as to suffer or need a standing army in time of peace.

National prosperity, in general, is another subject for which we are invited to express our thanks. And it will be readily admitted, that a great and uncommon degree of it is enjoyed at the present. The readiness which the people at large discover to obey their rulers, is at least one mark of it. It is in periods of general calamity, that the greater part of them are induced to changes and convulsions. Our commerce hath encreased, and many citizens have risen to great and flourishing fortunes. The demand for our portable commodities hath added to the value of more permanent property. It would be uncandid to deny, that we have reaped many advantages from a general Union.

But as fair serene weather is ominous of the tempest, so a more than usual degree of prosperity and plenty may portend its reverse. It is justly remarked by a great writer that, "sleep precedes slavery." Ambition, joined with overgrown wealth, may be, in the hand of some pestilent citizen, a formidable weapon in destroying our rights—or it may produce that intoxicating licentiousness, which will terminate in civil slavery. The "merchants" of Tyrus were reckoned among "the princes and honourable of the earth," but they and their country

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resembled the victim gilded for the sacrifice. The republick of Carthage overflowed with wealth, but the pride and luxury of their citizens prevented them from sparing any part of their abundance for the defence of their country. Among other causes, under heaven, of our present tranquillity we may reckon the success of the arms of the Republick of France, as one of the most important. And as it was the means of delivering us from the rapacity and piracy of the British, it hath a claim to our publick thanks. Their hatred and rancour, could only be equalled by their plunder and robbery. The insolence with which our mariners were treated—the losses which our merchants sustained, were publickly avowed by their king. And though the commercial benefits we are said to derive from our intercourse with them be great, yet they cannot be viewed as a compleat expiation for the cruelty and indignity with which our brethren have been treated. And although at the present time they are specious in their professions of affection, and probably sincere in their wishes for peace: Yet had it not been for the success of our allies, they would have been disposed to have continued the same system. Their penitence naturally resembles that of a felon smarting under the wholesome correction of the lash. However, it may be wise and prudent to believe them sincere; as it is not probable they will be in a condition to repeat their injuries.

While

While we speak upon the important revolution in France, we must be so just and candid as to condemn its excesses.

While we flattered ourselves that the temple of liberty was raised in the old world, we are grieved that the portals of it have been stained with blood. We lament that the blood of patriots and martyrs to the cause of freedom has flowed from the same scaffold with those of parricides and traitors. And we rejoice that the principal authors of them have shared the fate they deserved from an injured people: Yet notwithstanding these stains to the cause of equality and liberty, we cannot but think the man, and particularly the American, who would wish to see that noble portion of the globe conquered by the combined powers, must not only bear the greatest malignity to his own country, but be viewed as the common enemy of mankind.

Their rashness, their selfish ambition, contributed more to the destruction of the unfortunate prince Lewis xvi, than the most turbulent of his own subjects. In what manner have they treated Poland, for no other crime than chusing a government for themselves—which government was planned and agreed to by all the constituted authorities of their nation. How much cruelty have they exercised towards the virtuous and brave La Fayette, who ventured his life in defence of limited royalty?

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With what treachery did they engage in a secret league to parcel out the late kingdom of France into provinces? Hitherto their efforts have produced little else except the destruction of their own dominions. And we cannot but hope, notwithstanding their future attempts, they will not be able to prevent our allies from establishing their republick, and obtaining such a constitution as will convey the rights of man to the latest posterity. We cannot but further express our wishes that the time may come when the sacred image of God will no longer be debased with national or *personal* slavery. When light and knowledge and the spirit of truth, being diffused through the earth—the thrones of despots shall become their sepulchres.

But time obliges me to hasten to the third general head, in which we shall enquire in what manner we have used the divine mercy, or what publick errors are to be corrected.

And first, must it not be admitted, that in consequence of the natural and artificial wealth, which hath circulated through the land, a spirit of luxury—and I fear we may add of irreligion and vice, hath spread and increased? We need not recur to all parts of the United States to produce evidence, for we may find sufficient within our own Commonwealth. Let our publick assemblies for amusement—let the extravagance and dissipation of private families—let the attention paid to theatrical exhibitions—

tions—let the increase of intemperance, lewdness and profligacy—let our pride in dress and external ornaments—let our neglect of the publick institutions of religion, testify. In how few places can we find any vestiges of the former simplicity of manners; or that manly virtue, for which this land was once honoured by the wise and good? If effeminacy and softness, if a passion for the tinsel instead of the ornaments of life prepare mens' minds for slavery, what shall we predict respecting the rising generation? And that more especially since the language as well as the manners of true republicans appear to be growing more and more obsolete, and exposed to the ridicule of many every day.

Secondly, Have we not neglected paying proper honors to the memory of those who fell as martyrs in the late war for the liberties of their country? Although erecting monuments to some of the most distinguished military characters who died in the field of battle was pointed out by the old Congress* as the first duty of the country, when a settled government should be established: Yet five years have elapsed of peace and prosperity, and although the publick revenues have been represented as respectable, yet no motion or advance towards this debt of gratitude hath been made; while publick debates have been employed upon largely providing
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* "Ite, ait: egregias animas, quæ sanguine nobis hanc patriam
"peperere suo, decorate supremis muneribus." VIRGIL.

for the most unimportant officers of government—the ashes of these Heroes have been left without any memorial of their names or actions. Still, however, we hope the historian will preserve their fame and publish their glory to after ages. And all the lovers of freedom and publick happiness will inscribe their obligations on their hearts, altho' the heath should grow over their grave, or their bones be suffered to whiten on the mountains or plains where they expired.

Thirdly, Have we not great cause to lament a spirit of faction and division? On the one hand, a part of the community *are charged* with “popular ambition—with desiring to create tumult and patronize insurrection—with a strong desire to overturn the constituted authorities of the people—and to reduce every part of the union to anarchy and disorder—That if their influence be prevalent, we shall lose all the advantages of our government, be in a state of civil war with each other, and become an easy prey to any foreign invader who might seize upon the country.” The same characters are said to be “of a restless discontented temper, so capricious that no form or administration of government will please them—and rather than not obtain power and influence, are ready to sacrifice mens' lives or their property, by means most unjust and tyrannical.”

Another

Another class are *retorted upon* as holding principles equally pernicious, and with designs equally hostile to the rights and the interests of their country. “Such men as have made immense fortunes by the publick debt—who have associated with the late enemies of the country; and who neither content with the immense wealth they have so easily acquired, nor with those publick honors with which they have been entrusted, are planning the destruction of our present republican system, and wish for an hereditary monarch and nobles—and aim at those titles for themselves and offspring—that they take every opportunity to undervalue the late revolution, and the cause of our allies—that they have adopted the corrupt phrasology of a court—and treat every man who recurs to the great and first principles of government as laid down by Lock, Sidney and Milton, as incendiaries and traitors.” We would hope there are few of either of these classes of men among us. And they are both to be avoided and reprobated as the enemies of their country.

The events of the last summer have proved that the former are not possessed of weight or moment sufficient to injure the community. And as to the latter, the genius, spirit and manners of their countrymen are insurmountable obstacles to their claims. The man who would be so weak or wicked as to plan out monarchy or aristocracy for the people of
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America, would resemble him who would wish to introduce the Devil to the garden of Eden. In the mean time, let us cultivate a spirit of concord, order and publick peace. Let us reverence equally the rights of persons and property. We have a constitution, which is a bond and centre of union, if we cultivate the true republican principles which it contains. Let us abhor anarchy and licentiousness: Let us on the other hand never be ashamed of the principles of freedom, or be ridiculed or cajoled out of them by artful ambition. Let us equally despise and reprobate the lawless ruffian, who is hostile to legal authority delegated by the people, and the overgrown worldling who wishes to import for himself and country the Gothick rotten furniture and fabrick of European kingdoms. Cultivate a spirit of religion, and let publick and social virtue be honoured and practiced. And may the great Governor of the universe direct our councils, correct our errors, and continue his bounties. May he never suffer us to be sacrificed either to foreign conquest or domestick usurpation. May his wisdom enlighten our minds, may his grace correct our hearts; by the influence of each may we be trained up to be citizens of the new Jerusalem, the city of the great King, where we shall feel no evils nor apprehend vicissitudes.

