

28
THE

Nature, Causes, and Designs

OF

GOD'S JUDGMENTS.

Set forth in a

S E R M O N

P R E A C H E D A T

WARE, in HERTFORDSHIRE,

On FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 1756,

BEING THE

F A S T D A Y.

By *W. WEBSTER*, D. D.
V I C A R.

L O N D O N:

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T O

WILLIAM PLUMER, Esq;

Of BLAKESWARE,

A N D

CHARLES GORE, Esq;

Of TRING,

Knights of the Shire for the County
of HERTFORD.

GENTLEMEN,

I Know not how such a Custom
could ever obtain among Persons
of any Judgment, but it has been
usual, when a Writer intends to *Dedi-*
cate his Work to any One, to shew
his *Patron*, before-hand, what hand-
some Things he has said of Him, and
to ask his Leave for *publishing* Them.
Tho' this Method has had the Sanc-
tion of long Practice, it never was
authorized by *Common Sense*. For, if

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the

D E D I C A T I O N.

the *Writer* intends to do any Sort of Justice to the Character of his *Patron*, one of the most amiable Parts of any Gentleman's Character is, *Modesty*; and the larger Share he has of that Quality, the more he will be disinclin'd to acknowledge, even in *private*, His Title to any other Perfection. But, when any Gentleman's Conduct is propos'd as a *Pattern* for the rest to Copy after, it carries too much of the Appearance of a *Reproach*, for a Person of *good Breeding* and *good Nature* to countenance, by giving his Consent to it. This, Gentlemen, is one of my principal Reasons for not acquainting you with my Design. I do intend to propose *your Examples* to *publick Imitation*; and I heartily wish, that you were *true Representatives* of all the *Gentlemen* in the *County*. That
is,

DEDICATION.

is, I wish that, at a Time when *Religion* and *Virtue* stand so much in Need of the Influence of Persons of *your Fortunes*, all the *Rich Men* in the County would be as regular and orderly in their *Families*; as constantly attend the *publick Worship*, and behave there with the same Decency and Reverence; that all of them were as sober and virtuous; as benevolent in their Disposition, and as affable in their Deportment. I mean to cast no Reflections upon *any Gentleman*; but *none* of them can take it as any Reflection, if I observe, that this is not the *general State* of our *own*, or of any *other County* in the Kingdom. If it were, we should not have so much Occasion for a *Publick Fast*, to deprecate the Anger of the *Almighty* for our *National Wickedness*. But this, how-

D E D I C A T I O N.

however feasonable, is a Subject too difagreeable to you for me to dwell any longer upon.

But, Gentlemen, you must bear with me, while I juſt mention another Thing that relates to myſelf only. As I have this publick Opportunity, I cannot be ſo *Self-denying*, as not to do myſelf the Honour of letting the World know, that Two Gentlemen of *your* Characters, and ſo well *acquainted* with *mine*, are Two of the kindeſt Friends that I have, or ever had (except the late excellent and amiable Mr. *Hale*); and to give myſelf the Pleaſure publickly to expreſs the great Eſteem and Gratitude with which I am, and ever ſhall be, while I retain my Senſes,

GENTLEMEN,

Your moſt Obedient,

Humble Servant,

W. WEBSTER.

T H E
P R E F A C E.

I *Make no Apology for the Publication of this Sermon. Our common Danger is a sufficient Excuse for an Attempt to do Something towards our common Safety. If I bespeak the Candour of the Publick, it shall be only for the many Defects of the Performance. It has pleased the Divine Goodness lately to visit me with a Fit of the Palsy; and the severe Discipline, necessary on such an Occasion, has impaired the small Remains of Strength and Vivacity, which a long Life of Fatigue and Vexation had left me. But if, for this Reason, my Performance be defective in*
other

P R E F A C E.

other Respects, I hope it has received some Advantage in respect to Piety, and Sincerity, which is the natural Effect of Affliction. As to the Justness and Seasonableness of the Sentiments and Observations, I venture to answer for them. Such as the Sermon is, I recommend it to the kind Acceptance and attentive Perusal of the Reader, and to the Divine Benediction for Success. It cannot, I am sure, do so much Good as I sincerely could wish, but if it does any, I shall be more than Repenced for my Trouble in Writing it.

ISAIAH

I S A I A H XXVI. 9.

When thy Judgments are in the Earth, the Inhabitants of the World will learn Righteousness.

IT is implied in the Nature of *Judgments*, that they are *Calamities*. And that the Prophet here speaks of *publick* Calamities, is evident from the Expressions which he makes Use of; he says, when God's Judgments are in the World, the Inhabitants of the Earth will learn Righteousness. If ever God's Judgments *were* in the *World*, if ever the *Inhabitants of the Earth* had Reason to *learn Righteousness*, they have now Reasons as strong and cogent as can well be imagined. The Call upon Mankind to repent, is loud and strong. God grant that our Repentance may be as sincere and hearty. The Piety of his Majesty has appointed a *General Fast*, on Occasion of as *publick* and *severe* Visitations as ever his Anger inflicted upon a sinful *World*. Calamities inflicted, not upon a *particular Neighbourhood*, nor upon a *particular Nation*
B
only,

only, but upon almost *all* Parts of the World; Calamities of *various Kinds*; and some of them of so shocking a Nature, that *Humanity* cannot read the Accounts of them without Tears of Compassion for our suffering Fellow-Creatures; so *very awakening*, that no serious *Christian* can read it without trembling for his own Safety; so *exceedingly awful*, that none but an hardened *Infidel* can be unaffected by it. Nay, I will suppose a Man to be as hardened in *Infidelity* as possible; if you do but suppose him to retain any Share of *rational Thought*, he cannot avoid having some Concern for *himself*; for, let the Cause of these various Calamities be what it will, the same Cause which has produced them in so many Parts of the World, and in Neighbouring Countries, may produce them in *our* own Country, and amongst *ourselves* *.

That

* For the Truth of this Observation, I appeal to *themselves* and *their own Conduct* a few Years ago, when a slight Earthquake was felt at *London*. A *private Swiss Centinel* pretended to foretel, that at such a Time there would be another, and that a dreadful one; which put them all into such a *Panick*, that they fled from the City in the utmost Confusion. Now, they certainly were in the Right in thinking that *possibly* such an Event *might* happen, but they were not quite so consistent with themselves in *believing* that it *would* happen, upon the Prophecy of an obscure Man of no Character or Credit, when they refuse to believe the Prophecies of *Moses* and the *Prophets*, of *Christ* and his *Apostles*, upon the Credit of *Miracles*. Neither was such a *Panick*, upon so slight an Occasion, worthy of the *boasted* Courage of an *Infidel Philosopher* and *Hero*. But, this
Inconsistency

That I may the better answer his Majesty's pious Intention in calling us together, I shall shew,

I. That all these *publick Calamities* are *God's Judgments*.

II. That God's Intention in inflicting them is, that the *Inhabitants of the Earth* may learn *Righteousness*.

III. I shall bring these general Arguments home to ourselves, and give some Instructions how we are to humble ourselves before God, so as to avert those Judgments which have befallen other Parts of the World, and are likely to befall *us*.

I. I am to shew that all *publick Calamities* are *God's Judgments*, not inflicted by his *Permission* only, but by his *Agency, Direction* or *Commission*. This seems to be a needless Undertaking, because it has been the received Sense of all Nations and Communities, in all Ages, and Countries of the World. This

Inconsistency of Behaviour shews, that a well grounded Belief of *Religion* is the only Foundation for true Magnanimity and Greatness of Mind; and that nothing else can bear up a Man's Spirits in Times of great Danger. This was what lately gave the *English Protestants* at *Lisbon* such Presence of Mind and Composure, when every Thing seemed to threaten them with the near Approach of the Day of Judgment.

has been the Foundation of their Addresses to the Deity in Times of *publick Distress*. This has been the Practice, not only in the Cases of *national* Calamities, but of every *lesser* Community. When they have been visited with Calamities of any Sort, that have spread themselves, or were likely to spread themselves, thro' a Neighbourhood, the People have immediately looked up to *God* as the *original Author* of them. But, as I apprehend, a great many useful Observations may be made upon the Subject of *God's Judgments*, and his *Manner of inflicting* them, and therefore I shall crave your patient Attention while I enlarge a little upon it.

The *omnipotent God*, the Origin of all Power, if he has a Mind to destroy, or distress any Body of Men, could as easily do it by *willing* it to be done, as at first He *spoke* the World into Being, without the Use of any Means at all. But, this has not been His Method of Governing the World. He has created every Thing for his own Glory and Use. All the *Elements* have been employed as his Instruments in punishing Mankind for their Wickedness. If we believe the Scriptures, they are express as to every Particular. The *Psalmist* assures us, that *Winds and Storms obey his Word*. That He sends seasonable Showers to make the Earth *fruitful*, and that, by withholding them, He maketh a *Land barren* for the *Wickedness of them that dwell therein*.

therein. By the *Infection* of the *Air* the *Pestilence* walketh in *Darkness*, and the *Sickness* destroyeth at *Noon Day*. That lofty Writer, *Job*, gives such a magnificent Account of God's Power in the Direction of the Elements, that every attentive Reader must be in the Condition of the affecting Writer; Ch. xxxvii. 1. says he, *at this also my Heart trembleth, and is moved out of his Place.* I shall transcribe a few out of a great Variety of Passages. Ver. 2. "Hear attentively the Noise of his
 " Voice, and the Sound that goeth out of
 " his Mouth. Ver. 3. He directeth it under
 " the whole Heaven, and his Lightning unto
 " the Ends of the Earth. Ver. 4. After it
 " a Voice roareth: He thundereth with the
 " Voice of his Excellency; and, Ver. 5.
 " God thundereth marvelously with his Voice;
 " great Things doth He which we cannot
 " comprehend. Ver. 6. For, He saith to
 " the Snow, be thou on the Earth, likewise
 " to the small Rain, and to the great Rain
 " of his *Strength*.
 " Again, Ver. 9. Out of the South
 " cometh the Whirlwind; and Cold out of
 " the North. Ver. 10. By the Breath of
 " God Frost is given; and the Breadth of
 " the Waters is straitened. And at the 12th
 " Ver. He tells us, that, *it is turned round a-*
 " *bout by His Counsels; that they may do what*
 " *soever He commandeth them upon the Face*
 " *of the World in the Earth.* Ver. 13. *He*
 " *causeth*

*causeth it to come, whether for CORRECTION
“ of His Land, or for MERCY.”*

Thus far, to a sober *Believer*, the Account must needs be satisfactory. But, if we mean to do Justice to this Argument, it must be carried still farther. We must not consider these *Instruments* as *Agents*, whose *Agency* is overruled and directed by *God*; for, properly speaking, they have no more to *do* in the Operations which are the *Means* of inflicting Calamities upon Mankind, than the *Rod* in the Hands of a *Parent* can be said to *correct* the Child. The *Rod* is only a *passive Instrument* of Correction, the *Hand* of the *Parent*, which uses it, is the *only Agent* in the Case. All the *Elements* are as incapable of *Action* as the *innocent Rod*: They can no more give *Motion* to themselves, or *act* upon any Thing else, than they could at first have given *Existence* to themselves. *Philosophers* have introduced an improper Language, which is grown into such an established Fashion, that many well meaning Persons have received it for *Divinity*. They have talked of the *Laws of Nature*, and the *Laws of Matter and Motion*, as if they were some *active Principle* separate from the *God of Nature*; and into these the *Infidels* would fain resolve the dreadful Appearances, which have lately laid waste so many opulent Cities, and done so much Mischief in many Parts of the Earth. Now, in the first Place, I might safely defy the whole Herd of
Infidels

Infidels to account for *all* these Appearances, by what they call the *Laws of Nature*, any more than they can account for *Attraction*, *Gravitation*, *Vegetation*, or *Nutrition*, even supposing Matter to have any such *inherent* Principle of *Action* as they would fain give it, in order to avoid the Acknowledgement of a *God* who governs the World. But, it happens unfortunately for their Scheme, that all their *Operations* directly *prove* a *God* in the same Manner that *Miracles* do, because they could not possibly be produced *without* Him. *Nature*, in their Mouths, is a mere *Cant* Word, and, is no more capable of performing any *Operation* than *Chance* was able to create the World. All the *Elements* are *material* Substances; and *all Matter*, as such, is a *dead, unactive* Thing, absolutely incapable of *doing* any Thing. I would speak of the Power of the *Deity* with the utmost *Reverence*, but there can be no *Irreverence* in saying that *Omnipotence*, itself, cannot make Matter *capable* of *Action*, because He has already made it *unactive* in its *Nature*, and *no* Power is capable of making *Contradictions* to be true. The *established* Laws of *Nature*, usually so called, are nothing more than *God's* usual Method of acting upon *Matter*. At such a Time of the Year, in such a Part of the World, He *usually* produces those Effects which are attributed to *Heat*; in another Part He *usually* produces all those Effects which are attributed to *Cold*;
but

but *all* these are the Effects of *God's Power* operating upon the *Elements*; and, whenever it becomes necessary to the Purposes of his Providence, He can alter the *Climates*, and Seasons. That is, He can produce those Effects at *one* Time of the Year, or in *one* Part of the World, which in the *ordinary* Course of his Providence He has produced in another. This has lately been exemplified, in too convincing a Manner. For God has produced those dreadful Effects in the *coldest* Climates which have *usually* been effected in *hot* Ones; and from under the *Waters* have issued the same Emotions which have *usually* been generated in the Bowels of the Earth. This brings to my Mind the Observation of a very sensible pious Person upon this Occasion, viz. *that if we could see into the Caverns of the Deep, or the Bowels of the Earth, we should see something very extraordinary*; meaning, no Doubt, something that produced these *extraordinary Effects*; No, nothing. There is *something very extraordinary*, indeed, but it is something that no *Eye* can see, no *finite* Understanding can comprehend. He would see nothing but *dead, inactive Matter*; but there, and *every where else*, is the *invisible, ever active, all powerful Creator*, who puts in Motion every Particle of all the Elements, *when*, and in *what Manner* He pleases, and thus makes them the *Instruments* of his Vengeance. The same Reasoning holds with Regard to *Comets*, and all other
Bodies

Bodies whatsoever. In Support of my Sentiments I shall quote the Authority of a most eminent *Christian Philosopher*, and one of the best Writers of the Age *. “ His (God Almighty’s) Power is always working *near us, round us, within us, in every Part of us.* “ And this we may be assured of, if *Demonstration* is to be relied on. In those frightful Things, *Storms and Tempests*, those which look likest the *Want of Government* in the World, *Earthquakes, Volcano’s, &c.* “ This Truth lets us see the God of Nature, wisely, knowingly, for the best Purposes, *pushing, ordering every Particle and every Atom.* Wisdom and Knowledge preside even there ; and all will be well. He hath not given the Reins of the World out of his Hands ; nor planted the Laws by which it is to be governed, in *Brute Matter.* To say, He hath lodged in *Matter* certain Powers, whereby Events are to be effected and directed, is but one Degree removed from *Epicurean Necessity* ; and, to say, He only *superintends* the Execution of these, tho’ it may seem more pious, is scarce better Philosophy. For, besides the Impossibility of planting Powers in Matter inconsistent with the *Nature and Essence* of it, a Being who, by the Excellency of his Nature is necessarily every where present,

* An Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul. Printed for *A. Millar* in the Strand. Vol. I. P. 99.

“ *All-knowing* and *Almighty*, doth not want
 “ to be relieved of any Part of the Task. Such
 “ Philosophy suits only *Lucian’s* Deities.”
 There is another Passage at P. 140, so much to
 my Purpose, that I must take Leave to trans-
 cribe it. “ We ought not to ascribe the Ope-
 “ rations of his Power and Wisdom to any
 “ Cause besides himself, which we do when
 “ we ascribe to *Matter*, Virtues and Activities
 “ which we know not how it got. This
 “ tends to lessen our Respect to Him, or
 “ make us imagine that He may be absent
 “ while this *Viceregent* of his Power per-
 “ forms all; till we incline to think that
 “ these Activities may be *proper*, and *es-*
 “ *sential* to *Matter*; which hath been a grea-
 “ ter Hindrance to our Dependence on the
 “ *Deity*, and Regard for Him, than any other
 “ Notion that ever prevailed in the World,
 “ &c. Our Error in this Case seems to be a
 “ Fear of oppressing the Deity with the
 “ *Multiplicity*, or *Diversity* of Things to be
 “ done; or that these Things are too mean for
 “ Him to be concerned in; but true Philo-
 “ sophy acquaints us better with the Nature
 “ of an infinitely perfect Being.” I have
 been the longer upon this Head, in order to
 obviate the Cavils of industrious *Infidelity*, and
 to correct the Mistakes of honest Minds, who
 may not have had the Opportunity of
 thoroughly considering this Matter. I must
 now mention the other known Means which
 the

the Great Governor of the World has made use of when He has thought fit to inflict temporal Calamities upon *sinful Nations*, tho' I shall have neither Time, nor Occasion, to enlarge so much upon them.

II. From *dead, unactive Matter*, we rise, in the Gradation, to *Animal Life*, to the numerous Tribes of *Insects* which God has employed in the Execution of his Wrath. These have *spontaneous Motion*, and may be considered as *Agents*; but they are as ignorant of the Mischief which they do when they consume the Fruits of the Earth, as the *inanimated Rod* is ignorant of the Pain which it is made the *Instrument* of giving. For Want of *Intellectual Faculties* they are incapable of any *Intention* to hurt any *particular Nation*. They *run to and fro in the Earth*, and wherever they come, they *devour and destroy*, in Consequence of their *Nature*; but, they no more come by *Accident*, than by any *concerted Scheme* of their *own*. Their ignorant *Agency* is directed by the Wisdom of the over-ruling Governor of the World. For which Reason they are stiled in Scripture *God's Hosts*, and *God's Armies*; and God is said to *send* them, to *command* them to go; to chastise a wicked and rebellious People. The Scripture History gives such frequent and particular Accounts of this Method of God's Procedure in the Punishment of Nations, that it would be te-

dious Impertinence to take up your Time with Quotations. I shall therefore go on to the

III. Sort of Instruments, which are *Men*. These *Instruments*, are not only *Agents*, but, having *Intellectual Faculties*, they act by *Design*. They both *know* and *intend* the Mischiefs they do. But, one main Thing they are altogether ignorant of, *viz.* that they are *overled* and *directed* by *God*; and, while they are gratifying their own vicious Passions, they are at the same Time carrying on the Purposes of his Providence. *God has the Hearts of all Men at his Disposal*, and, as our excellent Liturgy expresses it, *Turns them as it seemeth best to his heavenly Wisdom*. Thus in *private* Life God makes Use of the Wickedness of Men in the Punishment of one another; and so with regard to *wicked Princes* we are assured, from Facts recorded in Scripture, that He serves Himself of their *Ambition* and *Cruelty* to chastise other Nations. But, as they are only *Instruments* of Punishment in the Hands of God, when they have answered his Purposes, he has usually destroy'd them. Thus the *Egyptians* were made the Instruments of punishing the *Israelites*, and we know *their Fate*. They were destroyed themselves for their *Cruelty*. God was pleased to make the same Use of the *Babylonians*; and, afterwards, for the same Reasons, made Use of the *Medes* to bring about *their Destruction*. As these are two very remarkable Cases,

Cases,

Cases, it may be proper to turn to them. The Prophecy of the Destruction of the *Egyptians* by the *Babylonians* is written in the 46th Chapter of *Jeremiah*, and is extremely well worth your Reading; but, it is written in a Style so *terribly Majestick*, that it is impossible for you to read it without trembling. But the 10th and 25th Verses inform us, that their Destruction was from the *Lord God Almighty*. Ver. 10. *This is the Day of the Lord God of Hosts, a Day of Vengeance, that He may avenge Him of his Adversaries.* And at Verse 25. *The Lord God of Hosts, the God of ISRAEL, saith, Behold I WILL punish the Multitude of No, and Pharaoh, and Egypt, and I will deliver them into the Hands of those who seek their Lives.* With the same Dignity and Majesty of Style *Isaiab* sets forth the Destruction of *Babylon* by God, in the 47th Chapter; and assigns the Reason why the *Jews* were delivered into their Hands as *Captives*, and why the *Babylonians* were punished. Ver. 4. *As for our Redeemer, the Lord of Hosts is his Name, the Holy One of Israel.* 5. *Set thou silent, and get thee into Darkness, O Daughter of the Chaldeans, for thou shalt no more be called the Lady of Kingdoms.* 6. *I was Wrath with my People; I have polluted my Inheritance, and given them into thine Hand; thou didst shew them no Mercy, &c.* Ver. 11. *Therefore shall Evil come upon thee.* On this Occasion we may justly take up the
rapturous

rapturous Exclamation of the Apostle; *How unsearchable are the Methods of Divine Providence, and his Ways past finding out!*

IV. All the Instruments of the *Divine Vengeance*, which I have hitherto mentioned, are upon *Earth*; the *last* are in *Heaven*; where they constantly attend before the Throne of God, ready to execute his Orders: These are as much more powerful, as they are more excellent in their Nature; and act, not as *Men* do, from *themselves*, but by a *special Commission* from God. They know *why* the *Judgments* which they inflict are sent. That the *holy Angels* have been employed in the Punishment of sinful Men, is as certain, as that the Word of God is true; and we have abundant Reason to believe, that they are *still* employed for the same *angry* Purposes, as well as to protect and comfort *good Men*. But, as they are *invisible* in their Nature, their *Operations* are so too. If God wanted Instruments, and thought fit to employ them, He has likewise all the Powers of *Darkness* at his Command. It is *my* Opinion, that wherever *Christianity* prevails, they have no Power over *human Bodies*, or over any of the *Elements*, and that God never gives them any *Commission* to afflict *Christians* in the Manner that He *commissioned* the Devil to afflict *Job*. The Argument lies in a little Compass, and is unanswerable. All *material Bodies* being *unactive* in their Nature, whenever we see them in Motion, we are certain

certain that they are actuated by some *immaterial* Being. This must be either *God*, or a *Creature*. But it is the highest Absurdity to suppose that the *Creator* would grant any Power to a *Creature*, *independent* of Himself. It is impossible that He should do it. For, that would be making the *Creature* to be *God*. But whatever the *natural* Powers of good or *bad* Spirits may be ; this, however, we know most assuredly, that neither of them are ever suffered to inflict Calamities upon Mankind without a *Commission* from God.

Here it may not be improper to pause a little, and reflect upon the amazing Perfections of the *Deity*. If *Job's* Heart *moved out of its Place* when he considered God's Power over the *Elements*, how must ours *fail us for Fear* when we consider him as directing and governing, not only all the Elements, and every Creature upon our Earth, but all the heavenly Bodies, all the heavenly Host, all the evil Spirits, all the Creatures of more Worlds than our Imaginations can conceive ; when we consider Him as present with them all at all Times ; *preserving* them in *Being* ; *sustaining* them in the Use of all their several Powers and Faculties ; co-operating with them ; and over-ruling them whenever, and in what Manner, he pleases. And yet, such an *incomprehensible*, such an *amazing* Being there *must* be, or else nothing, no not any of our *Infidels* ever could have *existed*, or could
subsist

subsist one Moment. What a solid Foundation is this of Comfort to a *good* Man, and of Confusion to the *Wicked*, in a Time of Distress or of Danger ! But to proceed.

From the whole of what has been said, I think, it appears very plainly that we of this Nation can have no Security against the *Judgments* of God, either from the *Situation* of our Country, or the *Nature* of our Climate ; but that our only Security must lie in making a *Friend* of the *Almighty*. We are an *Island* ! it is true, which has a *natural* Advantage in it, in Respect to *foreign Invasions* ; our *Climate* is temperate ; our Country produces more of the *Necessaries* of Life than any other Country in the known World ; and these, properly improved, are the *Riches* of a Nation, as our *Fleets* are our great Bulwark ; but, what are all these, what are all other Advantages, against *incensed Omnipotence* ? *God's infinite Knowledge and Wisdom* can find out proper *Ways* of *punishing* us, and His infinite *Holiness* makes Him so jealous of the Honour of his Laws, that He will not suffer any *national* Violation of them to go *unpunished*, even in *this* World. Would we, therefore, be safe from the Dangers that threaten us ? We must, from God's *Judgments* that are in the World, *learn Righteousness*. This naturally leads me to the second Head of my Discourse. I have laid before you the several *known* Methods of God's inflicting
publick

publick Calamities. We are next to consider the *Design* of them.

II. The Design of God's Judgments is
Twofold.

The *first* Design of *publick Calamities* is, the *Punishment* of *publick Vices*, and thereby the publick Vindication of the Honour of God's Laws. The *next* World will be the proper Time and Place for an exact Distribution of Rewards and Punishments, to every *particular* Person according to his Works; but in the mean while God *will* shew, that He governs the World, and that He is a *Righteous* Governor, by making a Distinction between *wicked*, and *pious* and *virtuous* Nations; which can only be done in their *national* Capacity. This has always been the Sense of all Mankind who believed a *God*. This is agreeable to the whole Tenor of Scripture, and to the History of God's publick Dispensations, as we find it in the *Bible*. Infomuch, that I do not recollect, that there is upon that sacred Record a single Instance of a *wicked* People who have not been visited with some *publick Calamity*, as a *Punishment* of their *Wickedness*, tho' the *wickedest* Nations may be long spared, either as the greatest Punishment that God can inflict upon them by suffering them to fill up the Measure of their Iniquity, and so become ripe for *total Destruction*; or, because God intends to make use of them as

D Scourges

Scourges to correct *other* Nations. Both these Cases, we are assured from God's Word, have been verified in Variety of Instances; and, I verily believe, *will* be once more verified in a certain *ambitious, subtle, deceitful, and powerful* Prince now living, and living a good deal too near us for our Quiet and Security. It is the same with Regard to *pious and virtuous Nations*. God does not suffer them to be *totally destroyed*, as a Nation, by any wicked Prince, tho' He may inflict *Judgments* upon them by way of *Correction*, in order to *reform* them. It is with Respect to *Nations*, as it is in the Case of *private* Persons. A Child, for Instance, may stand in Need of *Correction*, and it may be consistent with the *truest paternal Indulgence* to chastise it, when it would be an Act of the most *unnatural Cruelty* to abandon it while there are reasonable Hopes of reclaiming it by proper Discipline. Thus it may be with Respect to any *wicked Nation*; it may be an Act of *great Mercy* in God to visit it with *publick Calamities*, and very severe ones too, when gentler Methods will not do; but, He never visits them like hardened, abandoned *Rebels*, with utter *Ruin*, till they have totally forsaken *Him*. The Case of *Judah* under the Reign of good *Josiah* may seem to disprove the Truth of my Observation; but, when considered, it confirms it. He did, indeed, a great deal towards the Reformation of a most wicked People. By his *Regal Authority* He destroyed the
idolatrous

idolatrous *Priests* and *Altars*; by his *absolute Power* He caused the *Passover* to be observed and made the People *outwardly to renew the Covenant*; but the *Minds* and *Morals* of the Nation in general were so thoroughly debauched by his Predecessor, *Manasseh*, that he could not cure them of their inward Proneness to Idolatry, and of their habitual vicious Inclinations. They rather complied with him in his Reformation out of Fear, than from any Affection to it; and the innocent Blood shed by the idolatrous Father, of which the *Bulk* of the People probably approved, was unpardonable; and so they fell under an irreversible Sentence of Destruction: Yet to shew how acceptable *national Piety* is to God, this *Attempt* to bring about a *Reformation* induced the Almighty to defer the Execution of the Sentence during all *Josiah's* Time. But to return to the Position which I laid down at the Beginning of this Head, *viz.* that all *publick Calamities* are *Judgments* inflicted by God as a *Punishment* for *publick Wickedness*, and intended as *publick Tokens* of His *Anger*, tho' in all Communities innocent Members suffer with the Guilty; and my Text is a direct Proof of the Truth of my Position. For, if *Judgments*, like the *common* Dispensations of Providence, fell equally upon *all* Nations, without any *Discrimination*, how should they carry any Lesson of *Instruction* to the *Inhabitants of the Earth*, from whence to learn *Righteousness*; but, when they

are considered as *Tokens* of the *divine Displeasure* they are a *Warning* to others, and a *Call to Repentance*. This is the other Intention of God's Judgments.

Secondly, They are not only inflicted as *Punishments* upon those who suffer them, but that other Nations may read their own Fate, if they publickly incur the Displeasure of the Almighty, or having publickly offended Him, do not make Haste to reconcile themselves to Him, by a *publick Reformation*. It does not follow from hence, that those Nations who feel the heavy Wrath of God in his *Judgments*, are *Sinners above all Nations, because they have suffered such Things*; God only knows upon whom to send his Judgments, so as may best answer the Ends of his Providence; and our blessed Saviour has taken Care to prevent any such uncharitable Construction; but, at the same Time He has taught us the true Use that ought to be made of such *publick Judgments*, by assuring us, that *unless we repent we shall all likewise be visited*. This brings me to my third Head, by way of Conclusion, which is,

III. To bring the Doctrine, and the present afflicted State of other Nations, home to ourselves, and give you some Instructions concerning the Use we ought to make of it in this melancholy Juncture. In *one* Respect the Nation has acted a most *Christian* Part, by shewing so seasonable a Compassion to our suffering *Neighbours* and *Friends*. It was a
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most noble Example, worthy the Generosity of the *British* Nation; such as must excite the Admiration of our Enemies, the Love of those who feel the Benefit of it, and, we humbly hope, dispose the Almighty to shew *Mercy to the Merciful*. But, having shewn our *Christian Charity* to others, let us not forget to shew our *Piety*, by taking Warning from the dreadful *Judgments that are in the World*, and endeavour to avert them from ourselves, by a timely and sincere Repentance. They have not only reached our *Neighbours*, but, as his *Majesty* observes in his *Proclamation*, *They have been felt in some Degree* (and I may add, in various Shapes) in several Parts of these *Dominions*. Without taking upon us to enquire into the sinful Condition of those who have felt the Weight of the divine Vengeance, it is enough for us to know, that all *national Calamities* are *divine Visitations*; that all *national Vices*, sooner or later, will be *publicly visited* by God; and that what his *Majesty* says of this Nation is true, *viz. That our manifold Sins and Wickedness have most justly deserved heavy and severe Punishments from the Hand of Heaven*; are not then all these Considerations sufficient to awaken our Fears, and make us bethink ourselves how we may appease the *Divine Wrath*? If, as his Majesty goes on to observe, the *Almighty*, out of his *great Mercy*, hath not only been our *Defence in Times of Danger*, but hath pro-
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ected and preserved us from imminent Destruction at this Time; unless we make the right Use of his Forbearance and long Suffering, our Visitation, when it comes, will come with the greater Severity. We have, besides the *Protection and Defence* of Heaven in *Times of Danger*, enjoyed a long Series of the greatest Blessings, of all Sorts; and if we go on to add *Ingratitude*, the legitimate Offspring of *Pride*, to our other Sins, the Load of our Guilt, and the Weight of our Punishment, will be the heavier. We seem to have been, like the *Jews* of old, the *chosen, the favourite People* of God; and, if we follow their Example, in the *Abuse* of such uncommon Favours, we may read the Consequence in the Destruction of that ungratefully rebellious People. *Let Favour be shewn to the WICKED* (saith the Prophet in the Words following my Text) *yet will he not learn Righteousness*. But, hear the solemn Declaration that follows; *Lord, when thy Hand is lifted up, they will not see, but they SHALL see, and be ashamed*.

By this Time, I presume, you are disposed to hear a Word of Advice concerning the right Manner of observing this Time of *Fasting and Humiliation*. We are under the Displeasure of the *Almighty*; we have abundant Reason to expect some *publick* Tokens of it; and can we entertain such unworthy and blasphemous Thoughts of the Deity, as to hope
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to appease his Anger with Abstinence from a *Meal's Meat*, or with any Thing less than an Amendment of those Vices which have provoked Him to *threaten* us? Any *Man* of *common Sense* would think it an Indignity offered to his *Understanding* to have such Folly and Weakness ascribed to him, as to imagine him capable of forgiving the greatest Affronts and Injuries, only for one formal Acknowledgment of our Faults, without studying to make Satisfaction by a better Behaviour? To expect his *Friendship* upon one cold Application to Him, when we take no Care to render ourselves worthy of his Kindness, by the Tenor of our Behaviour to him? If, upon this Occasion you come to *Church*, out of Curiosity to hear what the Preacher has to say, or in the Hurry of your Fright upon the Prospect of an impending Danger, and immediately afterwards return to your Vices, and live as it were without God in the World, by never, or seldom, making any Application to him by *private Prayer*, and an Attendance upon *publick Worship*, this *occasional* Appearance will be a mere *Mockery*, and an *Insult* upon *Providence*. If we mean in good Earnest to make our Peace with God, and contribute our Share towards averting these *Judgments*, which we deserve and fear; which we *fear*, because we are conscious that we *deserve* them; we must all go Home and search our *Hearts*, and examine our *Lives* with
Sincerity,

Sincerity, that we may have a thorough Knowledge of the Number, the Nature, and Heinousness of our Sins; and then labour with the utmost Industry to rectify our vicious Inclinations, and to subdue our stubborn bad Habits. This is our Duty as *private Christians*; this the *Nation* expects from us as Members of the *Community*. *National Wickedness* is made up of *personal* Sins, spread throughout the Kingdom, till they become *General*; so that every *private* Member of the Community, by his Vices, helps to make us a *wicked People*, and to bring down God's Judgments upon us; and every Member that is a good *Christian* helps to *avert* them. Let every one of us humble our proud and wicked Hearts before our offended God, and provide for our own and the Nations Safety, by contributing whatever we can towards a *national Reformation*.

Upon the last *publick Fast* I drew out, from the Scriptures, a fair Account of the Sins for which God visited other Nation's of old, and by comparing them with the then State of this Nation, shewed what Reason we had to expect the like Visitations. I shall not repeat the same *black Catalogue*. I shall only observe, that if other *private* Parts of the Kingdom be no better than this, the *present* State of it is worse than it was. But, tho', as I have observed, *private, personal* Sins, when spread throughout the Nation so as to become *general*,

general, may constitute *national Wickedness*, yet Sins of a more *publick Nature* do more particularly contribute towards it. Some of these, therefore, demand particular Notice on this Occasion.

First, I shall mention *Perjury*, of several Kinds. *Subornation* of Perjury is a very *growing Vice*, infomuch that no Man's *Property*, or *Liberty*, or even *Life*, can be said to be safe from the pernicious Effects of it. And it is a Vice as provoking to the Deity, as it is destructive of *social Happiness*.

Secondly, An *Oath* upon great Occasions is absolutely necessary; but, where they are *multiplied* to such a Degree as they are at present, it must unavoidably bring in a Flood of *Perjury*; for, when Men swear to do any thing which they do not *know* whether they shall be able to perform, or without considering the *Nature* of the Oath, they are as much *perjured*, as if they *intended* to break it, or neglected afterwards to *perform* it. I need not say what Sort of Oaths I mean. I hope those who *impose* them, as well as those who *take* them, will consider, that thus *publickly trifling* with *God* as a *Witness*, and an *Avenger*, of Falsehood, is a *publick Indignity* that must greatly swell the Account of our *national Wickedness*. Besides, if this *Multiplication* of *unnecessary* Oaths, were not an almost necessary Introduction to much *Perjury*, it is taking the Name
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of God *in vain* by *publick Authority*, which all Persons, especially all *Legislators*, ought studiously to prevent.

There is another Sort of *Perjury*, not unfrequently practised, which very few dare to own, and I wish none dared to commit ; I mean, they who take the Oaths to the Government against their *Inclination* and their *Conscience*.

The Neglect of *publick Worship*, and the Breach of the *Sabbath*, especially by Persons of *Fashion*, are become *genteel Vices*. People of any Consequence in civil Life would be ashamed to be seen at *Church*, especially at the *Sacraments* ; and, if they want to go a *Journey*, no Day so convenient and agreeable as the *Sunday*. These are *publick Vices* in a *double Sense* ; as they are of a *publick Nature*, and committed by Persons of the most *conspicuous Character* *. If the Honour of God's *Authority*, as the *Creator* and Governor of the World, be not nearly concerned in the *Violation* of such *public Ordinances* as these, it will be an idle Thing ever to mention the *Authority* of God, or the *Honour of his Laws* ; or, indeed, to say any Thing *about God*, as the *Creator* and Governor of the World.

Voluptuousness is another *publick Vice*. If any Vice can be *national*, this is ; because it

* If any one has a Mind to see the Nature and Heinousness of these Vices set forth at large, they may please to peruse my Scripture History of the *Sabbath*, and my Book upon *Prayer* and the Sacrament.

has spread itself thro' *all* Ranks. *Pleasure* is become the *great Business* of Life. If any Vice can be of pernicious Consequence to the Welfare of a *trading* Nation, this is *the* Vice. If any Vice can be offensive to the *Almighty*, no Vice can be more so than this Spirit of *Voluptuousness*, because it is utterly inconsistent with any *Religious* Frame and Disposition of Mind. It is no less a Vice than *Idolatry*; and a worse Sort of *Idolatry* than was ever practiced by the *Jews*, or the *Papists*: Together with their *Idols*, the *Former* paid *divine Honour* to the *true God*; together with the *Idolatrous* Objects of their Worship, the *latter* do not forget to worship *God*. But our *Voluptuaries* worship *nothing* but their *Pleasures*. They worship their *Pleasures*, as we are commanded to worship *God only*, with *all their Souls*, and with *all their Strength*. Their *whole Heart*, with all its *Affections*, are engaged to this *Idol*. And can we think that the *Jealousy* of *God's Wrath* will pass over such a *publick* Departure from Him without doing Himself *publick Justice*.

If the *Goddeſs* of *Pleasure* has any considerable *Rival* in this Nation, it is *Mammon*. This *God* has his Numbers of *Votaries*; and they are all true to the Interest of their *Maſter*. The *great Bent* of their Minds, and the main *Drift* of all their *Schemes*, seems to be, to get as much of *this World* for *themselves* and *Families*, as poſſibly they can. If they

can serve their *Maker* and *Redeemer*, by promoting the Interest of *Christianity*, consistently with their Duty to their *supreme* God, *Mammon*, it is all very well; but, if the *true God* and the *Idol* be *Competitors* for their Service, I can pretty well tell which of the Candidates will have their *Vote* and *Interest*. To be very serious (for it is a very serious and a very melancholy Affair) suffer me to ask a few short Questions; we have been supplicating the Assistance of Heaven in our Distress, but what Reason have we to expect it? What Reason have we to expect that God will concern Himself about our Safety, when we have concerned ourselves so little about his Honour, and the Interest of his Religion? Or how can we be said to have had his Honour, and the Interest of his Religion at Heart, when proper Encouragement and Assistance have not been given to those who were able and willing to promote them? Let the Great and the Wealthy lay their Hand upon their Heart, and, if they can say that in *general* proper Encouragement and Assistance *have* been given to such Persons, I will with Shame lay my Hand upon my Mouth, and never offer to complain any more of the Times. And now, upon the most impartial View of the State of the Nation, I am fully confirmed in the Truth of his *Majesty's* Observation, viz. *That we deserve the Vengeance of Heaven*; and feel it we most undoubtedly shall, unless we prevent it by
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a *national Reformation*; which, I think, is *morally impossible* to be effected without the Assistance of a very *sharp* and *lasting Visitation*.

I shall conclude with a Consideration recommended to us from the *Throne*, and therefore worthy our Attention, but of such Importance in its *Nature*, that it must needs recommend *itself* to the Attention of every serious Person; upon the Success of his Majesty's *Councils*, his *Fleets* and *Armies*, depends the Preservation of our *Religion*, our *Freedom*, our *Trade*, our *every Thing* that is dear to us. By the Sincerity of our *Repentance* for our *past Sins*, by the Piety and Virtue of our *future Behaviour*, and by the Ardency of our *Prayers*, we may do something (and this is all that we can do) towards averting the *Judgments* of God; the *Earthquakes*, the *Inundations*, the *Storms* and *Tempests*, that are *in the World*; but there are other Dangers as imminent; there are other *Judgments* no less dreadful in their Consequences, towards averting of which we *may*, and *must* (if we mean to do our Duty) do something *more*. We are in Danger from a *near*, from a *restless*, from a *potent* and *determined Enemy*; and therefore if we sincerely desire to be successful against his unwearied Attempts to ruin us, to our *Piety and Virtue* we must add our united Zeal to *strengthen* the Hands of his Majesty, instead of fomenting *private Animosities*, and
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party Divisions, which cannot but weaken them.

As to those who have taken *Oaths* to the *Government*, and yet endeavour all they can privately to obstruct the Measures taken for our Safety, by propagating *Discontent*; I know that there are such Monsters, or else I could not believe it; however, they act consistently with *their political Scheme*, tho' they act the most *irreligious* and *knavish* Part that can be conceived; the most *irreligious*, because they are Guilty of the most *deliberate* and *habitual Perjury*; the most *knavish*, because they live in *Hypocrisy* and a *Breach of Trust*, by *seeming* and *promising*, in the most solemn Manner, to be *Friends*, while they are *determined Enemies*; and, if they wish well to the *Church of England*, and their *Civil Liberties* (as they would be thought to do) they act a most *weak Part too*; for, a *Po-pish Prince* and a *Protestant Constitution* are an *absolute Inconsistency*. But, as for those who do *not* mean to *overturn the Government*, and yet refuse to aid the Measures of his *Majesty*, I must look upon *them* as *downtright Idiots*, or *Madmen*: I am willing, therefore, to hope that every one of us in our private Station will act at this critical Juncture, with a Zeal and Unanimity becoming a Cause so just, so honourable, and important to us as *Christians*, as *Protestants*, as *freeborn Englishmen*. Amen.

F I N I S.