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RECOMMENDED, BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE
UNITED STATES, TO BE OBSERVED
AS A DAY OF GENERAL

HUMILIATION, FASTING, AND PRAYER.

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THE following discourse, hastily composed, is published at the request of many who heard it delivered. The author is not accustomed to carry political discussion into the pulpit, nor to deliver his sentiments, in his public ministrations, on several points, connected with politics, which are glanced at in the following pages. He supposed, however, that the occasion permitted, and even dictated some deviation from his ordinary habits in this respect. Viewing the present crisis in the point of light which he does, he could not reconcile it either with religion or with patriotism to be wholly silent on the subject. It appears, by the result, that some of his friends concur with him in opinion; and hoping, as they have been pleased to suggest, that the publication may possibly do some good in the small sphere in which it may circulate, he has suffered himself to be prevailed on to commit it to the press.

New-York, May 11, 1798.

A SERMON, &c.

2 TIMOTHY iii. 1.

*This know also, that in the last days perilous times
shall come.*

TO notice the dispensations of Providence, to examine their connection, and to trace, as far as possible, their design, are among the most important duties of man. Through the medium of these dispensations God exhibits his own glories and our duty to us; and, of course, to neglect them is to incur the character and the guilt of those who *do not regard his work, neither consider the operations of his hands*. Thus, when the Pharisees and Sadducees came to Christ, tempting him, and desiring that he would shew them a sign from heaven, he said unto them—*O ye hypocrites! ye can discern the face of the sky;*

but can ye not discern the signs of the times? As if he had said, “ You attend with diligence and
 “ care to the symptoms of the weather, and have
 “ acquired considerable skill in predicting its
 “ changes; but how comes it to pass that you
 “ have so little taste for studying the Providence
 “ of God, and marking the progress of his king-
 “ dom in the world?”

The ignorant and unthinking are struck with present objects only. They neither look back on the past, nor extend their views forward to the future. They contemplate the most stupendous scenes in human life, as they contemplate puppet-show exhibitions, without inquiring who is the prime mover, how far they may be connected with preceding circumstances, or what influence they may have on futurity. To such the lessons of experience are of no avail, because they never commit them to memory:—to such every event is new and unexpected, because they have taken no pains to decypher the intimations of Providence, nor to study that great chain of causes and effects which runs through the moral, as well as the material world. But the wise and discerning contemplate the objects which pass before them with a very different eye. They see the hand of God in every occurrence.

They retrace the divine proceedings in days of old. And they suffer no intimations of what is to take place in time to come, to pass unheeded. Thus they grow wiser and better by every mean of instruction.

Perhaps among all the modes of noticing the dispensations of Providence, and discerning the signs of the times, there is none more interesting, or more plainly incumbent upon us, than comparing the course of human affairs with the predictions of God's word. For this purpose, no doubt, among others, were the prophetic parts of scripture given to us; and we evidently neglect our duty, when we neglect to study them, and inquire into their fulfilment. It is true, indeed, nothing is more common than to mistake in such investigations. But these mistakes, so far from discouraging this species of study, should rather excite us to pursue it with greater diligence;—and while they guard us against hasty decisions and positive modes of speaking on the subject, they should stimulate us to new zeal, and more persevering industry in searching after the meaning of the Holy Spirit.

The words before us are a prophecy. They were intended to warn the church of what was to befall her in the last days—to apprise her of

the troubles and trials which she should be called to endure. God has been graciously pleased, *at sundry times, and in divers manners*, from the beginning, to favour his people with such premonitory intimations of approaching evil, that it might not come upon them unawares, but that they might be looking and preparing beforehand for its arrival.

In considering this passage of scripture, and in applying it to the occasion on which we are convened, three objects of inquiry lie before us, viz.

I. What period is designated by the expression, *the last days*?

II. What is to be the *character* of these days? And,

III. With what temper should we look forward to the fulfilment of this prediction?

I. The first inquiry, then, which claims our attention is—what period is designated by the expression, *the last days*? The most approved commentators, with few exceptions, understand these words as pointing out the times which shall immediately precede the commencement of that happy period usually denominated the Millennium. The expression is, no doubt, sometimes used in scripture in a much more extensive sense, even to signify the whole tract of time

which should elapse between the first and second coming of the Redeemer. It seems, however, to have a more restricted meaning in the case under consideration, and to refer, especially, to those interesting days, when the whole moral and political creation shall *groan earnestly*, expecting the manifestation of the Redeemer's power and grace with more awful solemnity, and with brighter glory than ever they have been exhibited before.

That there is yet to come a time of extraordinary prosperity and happiness to the church of Christ upon earth—a time when *he whose right it is shall take to himself his great power and reign, and when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ*, is an opinion so generally received among christians, that I shall, at present, take it for granted. The declarations of scripture on which this general belief is founded, are so numerous and so unequivocal, that I see not how they admit of doubt or evasion by those who acknowledge their divine authority.

When this millennial glory will take place, is a point concerning which various opinions have been formed. And although it be acknowledged that no absolute decision can be had as to the pre-

cise day or year of its commencement ; yet it seems reasonable to suppose, that the design of God in delivering so many prophecies, and especially so many chronological notices on the subject, was, that we might employ ourselves, in the mean time, in studying their interpretation, and endeavouring to ascertain, as nearly as possible, when these great things shall be, and *what shall be the signs of their coming to pass*. Accordingly, great have been the learned and the pious labours bestowed upon this subject : and although these labours have produced very different results ; yet nothing is more certain than that a large majority of the most respectable authorities have been substantially agreed as to the point in question. They have generally concluded, that about the end of *six thousand years from the creation* will be the commencement of that glorious prosperity promised to the church :—that, like the weekly return of the christian sabbath, after six days of servile labour ; so, after six millennial days of spiritual labour, the church shall enjoy an holy sabbath,—when *the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the depths of the sea ; and when there shall be nothing to hurt nor destroy in all God's holy mountain*. In support of this opinion many distin-

guished and venerable Names might be adduced, were there time or necessity for the purpose;—Names, the memory of whom has been long embalmed in the hearts of the pious, and whose opinions, and interpretations of scripture, I am persuaded, would not be lightly received by an individual of this assembly.

If this opinion be true, then, we are not more than TWO CENTURIES, and even, according to some very respectable calculations, not more than half that length of time distant from the happy period under consideration. And, if it be also granted, that the *last days* refer to the times immediately preceding its commencement, THE DAYS IN WHICH WE LIVE MAY BE CONSIDERED AS THE LAST DAYS. The solemn time is hastening on, and even is already commenced, which the sacred writer describes in the prediction now before us.

Methinks, my brethren, I see you startled, and filled with uneasiness at the suggestion. The generality of mankind are disposed to apply prophetic descriptions to distant times, especially when they involve distressing events. They would put far off the evil day. Hence few are willing to believe the interpreter of scripture, who brings such days very near, and represents

evil as *at the door*. It is easy to see that this is a very improper temper. If prophecy assigns our own times as the period of awful events, and of singular difficulty and trouble, it becomes us, instead of cavilling, to receive the intimation with readiness, and to employ ourselves rather in preparation for what is before us, than in contriving to evade the prediction. However solemn, then, and however even alarming, on some accounts, the sentiment may be viewed, I repeat the declaration,—There seems good reason to conclude, that the *present times* are, in a peculiar and emphatical sense, the *last days*;—that God has been pleased to cast *our lot* in that unusually serious and awful part of his dispensations toward our world, which is described in the passage of his word now under consideration.

The next object of our inquiry is—

II. What is to be the *character* of these last days? Our text tells us they shall be *perilous times*; that is, as the original expression indicates, they shall be times of *difficulty, trouble, and danger*; times which shall “try men’s souls,” and prove especially distressing and dangerous to those who love the truth, and who wish to obey God rather than man.

That the period for some time preceding the

latter day glory shall be more than commonly dark and gloomy, is by no means a new opinion. It is an opinion which, I believe, the most of those who have undertaken to explain the prophecies on this subject, have decidedly maintained.—They have differed, indeed, materially upon descending to minute details of description concerning this period ; but they have been almost unanimous in the general idea, that it will be marked with unusual degeneracy and wickedness. They have supposed this idea to be countenanced, not only by many direct and plain passages of scripture, but also by a review of the course of divine Providence from the beginning of the world.

It has been observed by ecclesiastical historians, that almost all remarkable revivals of religion, and all signal interpositions of divine power and grace, to vindicate the cause of truth, have been preceded by times of more than common darkness and iniquity. This was the case before God interfered to destroy the world by a flood. This was the case immediately before *the Lord of glory* came in the likeness of sinful flesh. And this was no less eminently the case before the reformation from popery, in the sixteenth century. If, then, God's usual mode of acting is, not to interfere by his power and grace in an extraordinary

manner, until there is extraordinary need of it, it follows as probable, upon the principle of analogy, that before the introduction of the Millennium, there will be *a great falling away*, and a general defection from the cause of truth.

But that we may be able to conceive more justly of the character of these last days, the inspired writer goes on to describe them in the verses immediately following our text; which he does in this remarkable language. In those days, *men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those who are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.* Corresponding to this description are the accounts which are given of these days in other parts of scripture. Thus, in writing to Timothy, the Apostle expresses himself in this manner—*Now, the Spirit speaketh expressly that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their consciences seared as with a hot iron.* And again, in the second epistle of Peter, we read,—*that there shall come, in the last days, scoffers walking after*

their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

It is true, indeed, these descriptions may be considered as more or less applicable to every period which has elapsed since the incarnation of the Redeemer. There have, doubtless, been many such characters, and much of this conduct to be found in every age of the christian church. But there seems to be a plain intimation, in the passages which have been recited, that such characters will be far more numerous in the last days—their wickedness more bold and outrageous—and the destructive consequences of their conduct more dreadful and extensive, than in any preceding times.—To be more particular,

1. The prophetic descriptions which have been quoted, seem to intimate, that these last days shall be eminently characterised by INFIDELITY. This is doubtless meant when we are told, that in the days referred to, *men shall depart from the faith*—that they shall *give heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils*—that they shall be *scoffers, mockers, and blasphemers* of divine truth—and *despisers of all that is good*. Nay, our Lord, when describing these days, intimates, that

when he shall appear, to put an end to this darkness and degeneracy, he shall scarcely *find faith on the earth*. Some he will certainly find. The divine promise secures to us, beyond all doubt, that there shall be, in the worst times, a remnant of faithful adherents to the service of God. But the spirit of prophecy plainly informs us, that when the period shall arrive, of which we are speaking, great defections from christianity are to be expected; that a proud opposition to revealed truth will generally pervade the world, especially those parts of it in which the religion of Jesus has been long planted and acknowledged; and that contempt for every thing sacred will stalk abroad, with a more dauntless front, and a more extended authority than we have hitherto seen.

It has long been the opinion of many, that as literature and science make advances in the world, real religion must also, in the same proportion, gain ground. This opinion would certainly be well founded, were not man a depraved being;—were not the human heart filled with prejudice against the truth;—and were not the tendency to abuse natural gifts, when not accompanied by moral correctives, almost universal. Science, properly so called, is the daughter of Reason, the

friend of Virtue, the handmaid of Religion, to whom she bows her head with affectionate and submissive reverence. But, even this child of wisdom, venerable and dignified as she is, when committed to the hands of depraved man, is liable to be deformed, abused, and converted from a blessing to a curse. Mere intellectual cultivation, instead of softening and improving, will always be found to harden the heart. If, therefore, you increase the natural light and knowledge of the unsanctified mind, already mad with hostility against the God of heaven;—if you extend the capacity and the range of his intellectual powers, without the addition of renewing or restraining grace, you will but inflame his zeal against the truth; you will but add to his delirious hatred and opposition to every thing that is holy. None will imagine, that these remarks are designed to undervalue knowledge, or to oppose diligence in the pursuit of it. It is an infernal policy which would keep men ignorant with a view to make them religious. But my design is, to urge the too commonly rejected sentiment, that no natural advantages, taken alone, will ever be found to promote the moral improvement and the real welfare of their posses-

for ;—that all the treasures of science which can illuminate the mind, unless regulated and directed by holy principles, will but seduce more and more from God, and from happiness.

Persuaded of this truth ; convinced that it is taught in scripture, and that experience daily confirms it ; I look for no such effect from the progress of science, as many anticipate. I rather believe, that the pride of presumptuous reason, and the deceitfulness of a vain philosophy, will be suffered to go forth, deceiving the nations, unhinging the faith of men, setting themselves in opposition to all revealed truth, and substituting in its place those miserable dreams, with which men may live in misery, and die in despair ;—those *doctrines of devils*, which are calculated only to corrupt and destroy. We see much unbelief and irreligion in the world at present. But, from the prophetic descriptions which have been recited, we learn, that the times which are approaching will be, in this respect, much darker than those which are past. The number of *travellers to Zion, with their faces thitherward*, will be fewer and fewer : and this awful degeneracy will progress, until religion shall be, in a great measure, banished from the ordinary walks of life ; until those who hold fast the profession of their faith

shall only be found in the shades of retirement, and in obscure corners of the earth.

Mistake me not, my brethren. I would not be understood to say, that *the church is in danger*. It were blasphemy against God to admit the idea. She is in no danger. Her glorious Head will never suffer the gates of hell finally to prevail against her. But he will probably suffer her, for wise reasons, to sustain adversity for a time—to sit in sackcloth—to be surrounded and attacked by numberless foes—and to be almost overcome by them,—that his power and grace may be more illustriously displayed in raising her from the dust—in putting her enemies to shame—and in causing her, from a state of so much mourning and gloom, to come forth, *clear as the sun, fair as the moon, and terrible as an army with banners*.

2. Again; the prophetic descriptions which we are considering, all intimate to us, that these *last days* will be, in a remarkable and unprecedented degree, characterised by IMMORALITY. For men, says the Apostle in the context, shall be *covetous, blasphemers, treacherous, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God, walking after their own lusts, and having their consciences seared as with an hot iron*.

This licentiousness of morals will naturally flow from the rejection of religious principle. For, whatever may be said of the irreproachable lives of a few philosophers in their closets, it is plain, that the mass of mankind, when they have cast off the restraints of religion, are prepared for the perpetration of the worst crimes. What, then, may we not expect, when *infidelity shall become general*?—when it shall not be confined to a few speculative pretenders, who imagine that they are the men, and that wisdom shall die with them; but when it shall pervade all ranks, unhinge every mind, and dissolve every moral tie? If we may judge by the specimens which we have already seen of infidel morality, the result will be dreadful indeed! Human society will exhibit little but the reign of appetite and passion;—and depraved reason, instead of moralizing and reforming the world, as many visionary minds fondly imagine, will but fill it with disorder, injustice, and violence.

Another cause which, it is probable, will unite with that already mentioned, as a fruitful source of corruption in morals, is, the *spirit of commerce and speculation*, which is every day gaining ground. It is a prevailing opinion, that commerce has a tendency to polish men, and to

render them more social, tranquil, and happy; and that from its extension hereafter we have great things to hope, as well for the happiness as the strength of society. But does not experience lead us to expect a contrary result? Has not a spirit of commercial enterprize, in all ages, while it ministered to the wealth and the aggrandizement of nations, increased their luxury, and undermined their virtue? Do not these evils grow in proportion as it is extended? And is there not reason to apprehend, that both the morbid cause, and the destructive effects, will proceed much farther, before men will learn to be wise? If this be the case, while the praises of commerce are chaunted on every side; and while the great object of individuals and of governments seems to be to multiply and enlarge its channels, the friend of virtue will drop a tear over the scene, as likely to afford another proof that *the prosperity of men destroys them.*

If ever, therefore, the time shall come, as there is too much reason to fear it will, before the career of human folly is closed, when the principles of scepticism and unbelief shall become general, and when the commercial and speculating spirit, already too prevalent, shall have gained that absolute sway to which it seems to be hastening, we

may expect to see the body politic, though, *like a whited sepulchre, it may appear beautiful outward, yet, within, full of all uncleanness.* We may expect to see every odious temper, every malignant passion, and every species of violence, deform and darken the face of society. We may expect to see all the amiable charities which sweeten and animate life, trampled upon as pusillanimous feelings; and the various moral ties, by which men are bound together, dissolved as vulgar prejudices. We may expect to see the chaste, the upright, the meek, and the humble, laughed to scorn; and to hear of the innocence of revenge, plunder, duelling, adultery, and lewdness. We may expect to see—but I forbear—I would draw a veil over the rest of the scene; and God grant that it may prove but a groundless representation!

3. There seems to be an intimation, that these last days will be remarkably characterized by TEMPORAL JUDGMENTS of a distressing and destroying nature. This idea is evidently countenanced by innumerable passages of scripture. Out of many which might be quoted, for proof and illustration here, I shall only select the account which is given in the Revelations of John the divine, of the circumstances attending the pouring out of *the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth.*

The three last of these are represented as accompanied by sore judgments, calculated exceedingly to afflict the children of men. And, what is still more remarkable, there is a plain intimation, that these judgments, instead of humbling and softening the hearts of the wicked, will but render them more obdurate—lead them to oppose Jehovah with greater boldness—and fill them with all the malignity and violence of despair. While they *gnaw their tongues for pain*, they will *blaspheme the God of heaven*, and *will not repent of their deeds*.

But that extraordinary judgments may be expected to accompany an unusual degree of moral degeneracy, while it is intimated in prophecy, is also consonant with reason and experience. In many cases, the former are the natural and necessary consequences of the latter, as might be shewn in a variety of particulars, were there time for entering into detail. In others, they are, no doubt, the result of more immediate and supernatural interference. But whether afflictive providences flow from the ordinary operation of what are called natural laws, or from an agency which appears more direct and miraculous, God is to be equally acknowledged as the author of both. He who created the universe; who continually

preserves it ; and who guides all its complicated movements, foresaw every occurrence, adjusted every instrument, and interwove with his plan, from the beginning, every event in the natural world which he designed to use, either to reward the righteous, or to punish the wicked.

What may be the *kind* or the *measure* of those judgments which we are to expect in the last days, it were presumptuous to decide. Probably famine, pestilence, earthquakes, and every species of convulsion and calamity, will be more frequent, extensive, and dreadful, than in preceding times. It seems not unreasonable to suppose, that the whole natural world will partake something of the gloom and agitation which will affect the moral. When man fell, the ground was cursed for his sake ; and in cases of extraordinary wickedness since, the elements have been converted into tremendous executioners of divine justice. Similar events, there is reason to believe, will constitute a part of the *perils* of the *last days*. In the progress of that degeneracy which we are to expect, Jehovah will probably reprove men by the terrors of his Providence, as well as by the threatenings of his word. He will give numberless displays of his power, and his wrath against sin ; but they will be disregarded.

He will exhibit, in his judicial dealings with the wicked, abundant testimony in favour of his truth; but they will not believe. He will make their *plagues wonderful*; but they *will not repent to give him glory*.

4. Once more; the prophetic descriptions which we are considering, plainly intimate that the *last days* will be remarkably characterised by **POLITICAL DISORDERS AND POLITICAL MISERIES**. Where infidelity and immorality reign, with a combined force, it is impossible there should be permanent and happy civil government. The politicians of this world, indeed, fondly persuade themselves, that as mankind increase in knowledge, they will also advance in political wisdom and happiness. Their heated imaginations, teeming with deceitful phantoms, seduce them into the belief, that a period is fast approaching, when men will become, by the natural progress of human wisdom, too reasonable to need the precepts of law, and too regular to require the coercions of power.

This, it is to be feared, is a vain illusion! To think of any community advancing in political greatness, or in political felicity, without good morals, is to think of *gathering grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles*. And to look for good morals,

without the aid of religion, is to look for an *effect*, without any adequate *cause*. Where the restraints of religious and moral principle, therefore, are thrown aside, there must be *confusion and every evil work*. Where this is the case, power will be used but to oppress and destroy—liberty will be turned into *a cloak of maliciousness*—and disorder will succeed to disorder, until the body politic sinks into dissolution. In short, the natural tendency of infidelity in religion, is to weaken the force of every law—to cherish the selfish principle, more destructive than fire or sword—and to render government nothing but the conflict of opposing interests. Hence, if, as the scriptures inform us, the *last days* be distinguished, in an unprecedented degree, by infidelity and wickedness, we have reason to expect, as the natural consequence, that they will be no less distinguished by political convulsions and revolutions. We have reason to expect, that war, change, and distraction, will be more than ever prevailing and extensive. That nation will, with more and more frequency and malignity, rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; that national faith and honour will be generally trampled upon, and *power* become the universal law; and that the struggles of ambition, grasping and de-

vouring every thing within his reach, and the fury of contending passions, will convert the earth into an *aceldama*, a field of blood. Accordingly, it is plainly intimated, in the second psalm, that before the time come when God shall *give the heathen to his Son for an inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession*; he will *break the nations with a rod of iron; he will dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel*.

For these dreadful explosions human folly has been long laying the train. It has been building up systems of civil and ecclesiastical tyranny, which *must*, and which assuredly *will*, come down; but which, depraved as men are, cannot be expected to fall without disorder, crimes, and blood. The ambitious, the designing, and the mistaken, have, in every age, been erecting fabrics of superstition and despotism, loading the bodies and the minds of men with oppressive burdens, and laying undue restraints on the exercise of the human faculties. These systems of unnatural domination are probably drawing to an end. But, alas! the evil has gone too far to be remedied without means as grievous as the disease. The time seems to be hastening on, when men will no longer endure the chains of superstition; but they threaten to cast off the just ties of religion and morality

with them. Abused so long with counterfeits of truth, they are learning to despise the glorious reality. The period appears to be at hand, when every despotic throne will be levelled to the dust; but such is the infatuation of depraved man, that, vibrating from one extreme, they will probably rush to another, and become impatient of submission even to wise and equitable government. Poor human nature! how low art thou fallen! doomed forever to abuse the gifts of a benevolent God, to convert blessings into curses, and in attempting to remedy the evils which thy folly has brought upon thee, to plunge deeper and deeper into crimes and misery.*

How far the degeneracy which has been described shall proceed, before the tide shall turn,

* The candid reader will not construe these, or any of the foregoing remarks, as designed to imply, that all revolutions are wrong, or that the reformation of bad governments cannot, with propriety, be attempted in any case. The opinion of the author is directly the reverse. He is now reaping the happy fruits of one revolution, in which he can never cease to exult. And he cannot adopt the views of those who declaim against all innovation, as foolish and dangerous. He would only be understood to express, what appears to be too little realized, but which he firmly believes to be truth of practical importance, and especially at the present crisis—that the human mind, in every part of the civilized world, seems to be daily growing more impatient of every species of controul—that the galling yoke of tyranny has been one of the principal causes of this morbid irritation—and that, in avoiding one extreme, much is to be feared, in the present febrile state of the moral world, from their falling into the opposite—anarchy, and intolerance of all rule.

is a question which we are not competent to decide. The scriptures only give us general views of the subject, and leave us to be informed of the rest by the awful event. They plainly give us to understand, however, that the corruption and wickedness of men will rise to a higher pitch than they have ever yet risen—That irreligion, disorder, and violence, will be more extensively and dreadfully prevalent than they have appeared since man was an inhabitant of the earth—And that, as at the close of this period, the LIGHT which shall break in upon the world shall be more illustrious than ever before shone; so the preceding cloud will set with more than ordinary thickness and gloom over the nations.

Some have supposed, that the degeneracy and corruption which have been described will not equally pervade every part of the earth. It is a favourite hope with many, that AMERICA, as she has so lately become the residence of civilization and christianity, and as she has been so signally favoured of heaven, is destined to be the depository of divine truth, and the seat of much religious and political happiness, even to the end: while they imagine, that all the old states, and every ancient establishment, ecclesiastical and civil, will be pulled down, and trodden in the

duft. How far this view of the subject may be just, cannot, with certainty, be pronounced at present. On the one hand, it is scarcely probable, that a country which has made, comparatively, so small progress in that *mystery of iniquity* which has long been the disgrace of many old governments, should be so deeply involved in its consequent evils as they. But, on the other hand, our sins, as a nation, are so numerous and aggravated, our abuses of divine goodness so frequent and inexcusable, and our demerit in the sight of infinite Justice so great, that it were presumptuous to hope for a total exemption from his frowns and judgments. O Lord! thou hast done great things for us, whereof we are glad. Continue thy guidance and protection. Save us from our own infatuated counsels. *If it be possible, let the cup of bitterness, of which other nations are drinking so deeply, pass from us, that our souls may bless thee!*

But you will, perhaps, ask, my brethren, how will all this be brought about? What should make men more wicked, and fill the world with more disorder and violence, for a considerable time to come, than have been exhibited in times past? I answer, that for bringing about the designs of God, in this respect—for carrying the

prophetic notices of his word into most dreadful execution—there seems to be a natural preparation in the present state of the world. Have not events taken place in Europe, within ten years, on which all civilized society is gazing with astonishment? Have not the seeds of universal confusion already begun to shoot, and even to spread abroad pestiferous branches? Who can contemplate the present awful derangement of the old world, the growing atheism, the profaneness which is increasing every hour, the progress of luxury, which is constantly corroding the morals of society, the dissolution of social ties, the selfish and mercenary spirit, which is arming so large a portion of the community against the rest of their kind, and the contempt, daily gaining ground, for all regular principles and institutions—who can mark the rapid strides which all these evils are making, without anticipating some tremendous result? Yes, brethren, God has cast our lot in solemn times! The evils which our ears have heard are but *the beginning of sorrows*. He who expects to see the speedy establishment of peace and happiness in the transatlantic world, expects a course of miracles. No; humanly speaking, it cannot be. A leaven has begun to operate, which will never stop till it has leavened

the whole mass. “A GREAT ARMED DOCTRINE” has gone forth, which will be permitted, by a sovereign God, *to overturn, and overturn, and overturn, until he whose right it is shall take to himself his great power and reign, and become King of nations, as he is King of saints.*

The design of God, in suffering this, is by no means obscure. The ultimate end of all his dispensations, from the beginning, has been to exhibit his own infinite Excellence, in opposition to all other objects of trust and confidence. And as wisdom is never more completely displayed than when contrasted with folly, power with weakness, and holiness with sin, so Jehovah, in order to make a more perfect and impressive exhibition of his own wisdom, power, and holiness, to the intelligent universe, has suffered depraved reason to go great lengths, to *seek out many inventions*, and to expend its proud ingenuity, in order to shew its utter insufficiency to secure happiness without God. This is a lesson which the Creator has been teaching mankind from the moment of the fall. But, *like Jannes and Jambres, who withstood Moses*, though they have been *ever learning*, they have *never yet come to the knowledge of the truth*. There is reason, therefore, to believe, that this truth will yet be placed in a still

stronger point of light. Human wisdom has not yet acted out all its impiety and folly. It has still some inventions to exhibit, more wonderful than we have hitherto seen ; some strokes of policy to attempt, more mad and daring than it has yet aspired to ; some ingenious modes of warfare against God and virtue, the nature and effects of which are, at present, but little realized. When the measure of all these impious efforts shall be full—when human wisdom shall have exhausted its infernal devices, and human pride shall have gone its utmost length—when all the vain schemes of those who would govern the heart without religion, and regulate society without God, shall be sufficiently exposed—when the hearts of the few remaining believers shall begin to fail them for fear—and when universal disorder shall proclaim the necessity of divine interference—Then *he who has all power in heaven and in earth*, will appear for the vindication of his cause—will sweep away his enemies with the besom of destruction—*will build up the waste places of Zion*—and thus exhibit himself more glorious and powerful than if this opposition to his character had never been made.—*Surely the wrath of man shall praise God, and the remainder of wrath he will restrain.* It is his prerogative and his glory to bring good out

of evil, light out of darkness, order out of confusion, and a kingdom of the greatest holiness and felicity out of beings who were totally depraved.

It only remains to inquire—

III. With what *temper* and *views* should we look forward to the fulfilment of the prediction in our text?

Out of many remarks which might properly be introduced under this head, suffer me to select the following for your serious consideration.

1. If it be true that God has warned us of such days, we should be *aware of their approach, and realize that they are before us*. It will, perhaps, be asked, admitting that the representation which has been given of this subject were just, what *good* would it do to torment ourselves before the time, by anticipating the gloomy scene? I answer, my brethren, it would do *much good*. To have suitable views of this interesting point would be practically useful. It would serve to explain the present mysterious aspect of Divine Providence: for who, without adopting, in substance, the doctrines which have been delivered, can form any satisfactory opinion, or cherish any rational hope, concerning the singular posture of the moral and political world, at the present mo-

ment? It would, farther, serve to modify our conduct in a variety of respects, and would enter deeply into the business and intercourse of every day. Accordingly, we find, in all those instances related in the sacred history, in which God's people did not realize and lay to heart predicted evil, they were severely reprov'd and punished for their unbelief. A solemn lesson to those who will not be persuaded to believe any thing unpleasant or gloomy, though undeviating veracity declare it ! *The prudent man, says Solomon, foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the foolish pass on, and are punished.*

But, even admitting that we could not see the practical utility of such belief ; yet, if it be once ascertained that God's word has revealed the truth in question, who will dare to say it is of no importance to be known? Such a declaration would be charging infinite Wisdom with making predictions to no purpose, and calling our attention, frequently and solemnly, to objects unworthy of regard.

2. Again ; we should contemplate this subject with *the deepest abhorrence of sin*, as the procuring cause of all the evils which we suffer, or which we have any reason to fear ; and with *the deepest humiliation before God*, for the depravity and folly

of fallen man. As long as man remained innocent, his life was tranquil and happy. Calmly reposing under the blissful bowers of paradise, he knew nothing but enjoyment. What a contrast to its present character would society exhibit, if made up of such beings! But when Sin, that odious and execrable monster, appeared, he quickly changed the scene. From that fatal hour the earth has been a continual theatre of disorder, confusion, misery, and tears. From that hour *the whole creation has groaned, and travailed in pain.* In departing from God, man wandered into an endless labyrinth, seeking rest, but finding none; the farther he has gone from the Source of good, the farther he has removed from happiness; nor can he ever regain that grand object of human pursuit, but by a humble return to the allegiance which he left.

Sin, then, or departing from God, and seeking our chief good among creatures, is the source of all our troubles. Whether afflictions befall us as individuals—whether they enter our families, and gather blackness on the faces of the social circle—or whether they come upon us in a national capacity, sin is the parent of them all. Does a dark cloud hang over us, as a people, at the present moment? Reason and true philo-

sophy concur with the word of God, in ascribing it to our sins as the cause. Do appearances portend greater evils in future? Be assured, Jehovah *does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men*; so that if we were not eminently sinful, we should have no reason to expect extraordinary judgments.

There cannot, therefore, be a more suitable exercise for this day, than to come before God with *deep humiliation*, for that depravity of our natures, which has produced so much wickedness and misery among men; than to come before him with *sighing and mourning for all the abominations which are done in our land*, and throughout the world. For, on the one hand, as national guilt is made up of individual transgression, so it becomes each of us to consider ourselves involved in the general charge of iniquity. And, on the other hand, as national penitence consists in floods of individual holy sorrow, it is the duty of all to be covered with shame, and to repent, in dust and ashes, at the footstool of grace. Brethren, to little purpose do we keep a Fast, and make confession of sin with our lips, if its evil and odious nature do not pierce us to the heart, and humble us before God. To little purpose do we *bow down our heads as a bulrush*, and come to

the throne of mercy, imploring forgiveness, if that *bitter and accursed thing*, which Jehovah hates, be not renounced by us with penitential grief and sorrow.

3. Is there reason to believe, that times of more than ordinary peril and trouble are coming on? Then let every friend of truth and virtue *resolutely set himself against the torrent, and endeavour, by every exertion, to oppose the progress of vice.* The persuasion that perilous times are approaching should not discourage a single good resolution, nor paralyze a single virtuous effort. We evidently abuse prophecy, and construe it erroneously, when we suffer it to interfere with the use of ordinary means; or when it tempts us to sit down in despair. No view of the purposes of God can be just, which tends to diminish our holy activity in his service. A good man can never be placed in a situation in which it is not his duty to strive against sin, and to seek, by every mean in his power, however feeble and unpromising, the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom. On the contrary, the more prevailing and triumphant the cause of Satan may be, the stronger should such an one consider his obligations to oppose it with zeal.

Do you charge me with inconsistency here? I

answer, in the language of inspiration—*Let God be true, and every man a liar.* Nothing is more certain than that the purposes of God are fixed. *His counsel standeth firm, having this for its seal, that God is true.* But, at the same time, it is equally certain, that his purposes are not to be the rule of our conduct; for this plain reason, that we know not what they are. Even with respect to those designs which are the subject of prophetic disclosure, there are many things still left in the dark, because the knowledge of them could not be useful. For instance, though it be granted that *perilous times* are predicted, and represented as about generally to prevail, yet who knows but many parts of the earth may be much more favoured in this respect than the others? What holy man knows but that the district in which his lot is cast may be, in a great measure, exempted from the surrounding calamities—and that his exertions in the cause of virtue are to be used as means for securing this exemption? It were easy to shew, by a variety of similar illustrations, that the firmest persuasion of the truth of what has been delivered, should not diminish, or discourage our diligence in the cause of righteousness, and in striving to avoid the evil which we fear.

In looking forward, then, to the times which have been described, every believer should realize, that he is called upon to double his diligence, to walk with increasing circumspection, and to put on new armour. Christians! the time is approaching which shall try you! *Gird up the loins of your minds; be sober, and watch unto prayer. Quit yourselves like men; be strong. Count not even your lives dear unto you, that you may finish your course with joy; and that, having overcome, you may sit down with Christ on his throne, even as he also has overcome, and sat down with the Father on his throne.*

4. Again; are perilous times coming on? And have we reason to believe that many nations, especially in the old world, will become the melancholy victims of disorder and wickedness? Then prudence, religion, sound policy, and every consideration, dictate that we should endeavour to *keep at as great a distance from those nations, and have as little to do with them, as possible.* My brethren, I came not to this place to commend or to censure the systems of party politicians, or to enter into the warmth of those controversies which have so long agitated my fellow-citizens. I stand not here to pronounce a panegyric upon any one of the nations alluded to, at the expence

of another. With respect to all of them, in a mass, I am persuaded, it may be said, that they offer few examples but those of rapine and violence—little intercourse but such as is calculated to corrupt and destroy. European connections have already been a curse to us. They are every hour growing more dangerous. And if we should finally fall a prey to political disorders and miseries, to the continuance and extension of these connections we shall probably, in a great measure, owe the catastrophe. Had I, therefore, a voice that could be extended to the extremes of the Union, I would exert it in proclaiming—My beloved countrymen! keep at a distance from those seats of disorder, lest you be sharers in the general wreck. Behold the combustible materials which are accumulating in every part of their guilty land, and threatening, every moment, to explode with volcanic fury! What will it profit you to join in a struggle of which no one can count the cost, or see the end—and with parties who are all hostile to our national welfare? Come out from among them, then, lest you be partakers with them in their plagues! Let nothing tempt you to connect your interests with theirs, or to run the risk of being involved in their convul-

sions, if, peradventure, God will have mercy upon us, that we perish not with them !

5. Have we reason to believe that times of unusual wickedness and disorder are at hand? Then let us *cleave to the religion of Christ*, as the best defence, and the surest consolation. This is the great *sheet anchor* upon which absolute reliance may be placed, in the most violent storm. And if we would escape the fury of the billows which have risen, and are rising still higher, in the moral and political world, it will be our wisdom never to part with it; but to use every means of extending its influence.

This religion is the only effectual cure for moral depravity: the only system of truth that can purify the polluted recesses of the heart, that can curb irregular appetites, and restrain the impetuosity of passion. It confirms its precepts by the most powerful sanctions. It penetrates to the thoughts and intents of the soul. It excites to obedience by the most engaging and operative motives. It reaches to an extent to which human laws can never go. The native tendency of this divine system is, to check the insolence of power; to restrain the encroachments of oppression; to give energy to the wise prescriptions of government; to secure liberty with order;

and to bind men together as a band of brethren, having no other wishes than to promote their common happiness, and to glorify their common God.

My brethren, consider, then, the men who would rob you of this religion as your enemies, and the enemies of all social happiness. Be assured, whatever may be their motives, and whether they realize it or not, they are madmen, *scattering firebrands, arrows, and death*. They may tell you, “that in casting off religion, you will only free yourselves from chains which cramp your faculties and degrade your nature; that you will never rise to the true sublimity of the human character, till you throw from you the cumbrous load.” They may tell you this; and they may believe it all. But, O, fellow mortals! examine well before you commit yourselves to their delusive guidance. Are you patriots? and will you embrace principles which tend to dissolve all the ties of social order? Are you fathers of families? and will you adopt a system, which prostrates every law of domestic happiness? Are you accountable beings? and will you chuse a road which conducts to *the chambers of death*? No, brethren. Whatever difficulty or trouble may arise, *hold fast the profession of your*

faith firm without wavering. For the name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.

6. Farther; are perilous times hastening on? Then *let us be earnest and importunate at the throne of peace, that these days may be shortened.* Our prayers can never, indeed, alter the divine plans. They are formed with infinite wisdom, and are therefore immutable. But Jehovah having originally intended, and having given a kind of promise that the days of which we are speaking should be short, still declares, that he will be inquired of by his people, to do as he hath said. In conformity with this view of the subject, is the following remarkable language of our Lord. *And except these days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; but, for the elect's sake, whom I have chosen, these days shall be shortened. Ye that make mention of the Lord, then, keep not silence, and give him no rest until he make Jerusalem a name and a praise in the earth—until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth.*

7. Lastly; have we reason to apprehend, that there is a period of unusual degeneracy and wickedness soon to be passed through? Let us look forward to it with a firm faith, that better

times, and a glorious display of divine power and grace will immediately succeed. *Though sorrow endure for a night, joy will come in the morning.* Though infidelity, profaneness, moral disorder, and political convulsion, may have their day; yet we have no reason to be discouraged. Their time will be short. Their triumph will soon be over. He who has *the government upon his shoulder*, will speedily interfere to destroy the inventions, and the opposition of his enemies, and to establish the universal reign of righteousness and peace on the earth.

Be not dismayed, then, believer! Your cause is good. Your Redeemer is almighty. And his faithfulness will never fail. Look through the gloom, and see beyond those intervening clouds, the Sun of righteousness rising, to shed upon the earth his meridian glory. See peace, love, and truth, attending him with smiles, and hastening to adorn "the blest Immanuel's gentle reign!" Every instance, therefore, in which the infidel opens his mouth in blasphemy, should confirm your faith, as it is a testimony that the scriptures are fulfilling. Every symptom of growing degeneracy should encourage rather than dispirit you, as it is a kind of pledge that God is carrying on his work of grace. Every po-

litical convulsion should lead you to fix the eye of faith more intently upon that glorious kingdom, where no party spirit shall ever prevail, and into which no disorder, violence, or schism, shall ever intrude. Every weapon that is formed against the Redeemer's interest should lead you *to buckle on your harness* with new ardour, and with increasing confidence; assured, that in a little while, he will make his people *conquerors, and more than conquerors.*

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Be not weary in well doing; for in due season, ye shall reap if ye faint not. But be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord. In a little while, he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Come, Lord Jesus! come quickly—even so come, Lord Jesus! AMEN.

THE END.