

sent. That an escape from their pressure may be expected to follow such reformation is evident from scripture. "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them." Accordingly, we are furnished with many exemplifications of this feature in the divine procedure. Thus God's design in permitting Noah to preach so long to the antediluvians was, that they might be led to that repentance which doubtless would have averted the horrors of that fearful judgment to which they were condemned. But his preaching, like that of many of his successors when warning men of the fatal consequence of impenitence, was treated with contempt and indifference. In consequence of their penitential confessions, combined with the intercession of Moses, the Israelites were provided with a miraculous cure for the bite of the fiery serpents, which God sent among them on account of their murmurings. We find in the book of Judges repeated narratives of gracious deliverances from oppression, afforded them in answer to their prayers, which betokened hearts, in some measure, softened and subdued by divine chastisements. The Ninevites afford another instance of the happy consequences of improvement from threatened or inflicted calamity. On the announcement of their city's destruction on account of their sins, they put on sackcloth, sat in ashes, and "turned from their evil way, and the violence that was in their hands." In consequence of this, God graciously averted from them the threatened calamity. How amiable a feature is this of the divine character. He relents and pities men whom he has marked out for judgements when they shew that they are humbled under his hand. He is never inexorable, but is very pitiful and slow to anger. His language is, "I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth, for the spirit would fail before me, and the souls which I have made." And again, "For the iniquity of his covetousness I was wroth, and smote him. I have seen his way and will heal him. I will lead him, also, and restore comforts unto him." What ample encouragement is this to communities, when trembling under the suspended sword of Jehovah's vengeance, to betake themselves to intercession with Him, and how powerful an inducement to the abandonment of that evil course to which they must ascribe their misery, and to the cultivation of that rectitude which, they have reason to hope, will ensure to them returning prosperity. How plain and easy a course is marked out to them for escaping

evils which, if inflicted, may be of incalculable magnitude; and no time, in such cases, should be lost, for men know not how soon God may be so incensed by their perseverance in sin, amid dispensations highly calculated to reclaim them, as to seal their doom irrevocably, and then all application in their behalf will be in vain. "Pray not thou for this people," God says to one of his prophets, "neither lift up cry or prayer for them, neither make intercession to me, for I will not hear thee." So long, however, as the arm of divine vengeance is still suspended, and the infliction of threatened judgements is delayed, we have reason to hope that application for mercy will not be in vain. Then we may conceive God's language to us to be, "return unto me and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you, for I am merciful."

The above considerations are fraught with instruction to us as a people at the present crisis. God's procedure in regard to nations and communities has been the same in every age. The inspired prophet indeed does not now, as in ancient times deliver to individual nations, the threatenings of God against their iniquities; but the language of his providence is often as distinct and intelligible as if it were uttered by the audible voice of an accredited messenger. The writing on the wall of Belshazzar's palace, though inscribed by a finger in silence and in an unknown tongue, was the herald of approaching horror; so there is a language inscribed on events by the finger of providence which though not discerned, perhaps, by the thoughtless and unconcerned, is intelligible to all who are desirous of knowing the will of Heaven. It becomes us, therefore, as a community seriously to enquire into God's procedure towards us, and whether the language of it may not be that of indignation. Nothing displays greater hardness of heart and impiety than insensibility amid divine judgements. Unless men are atheists, unless they deny the very being and attributes of Jehovah, they must admit that those judgements are sent by him, and that their language is that of anger. If men, therefore, are not disposed to forsake their sins against which God is thus testifying his resentment; if they persist in them, notwithstanding the dictate of conscience that God is punishing them on account of them; they certainly display a bold and reckless defiance of Jehovah; and therefore the manifestation of a general obduracy amid public chastisements may be looked upon as an omen of judgements still more severe. It appears obvious, therefore, that for a considerable period God has been manifesting his displeasure against us as a people. One calamity has succeeded another in rapid succession.—Repeated pestilences, scarcity of food,