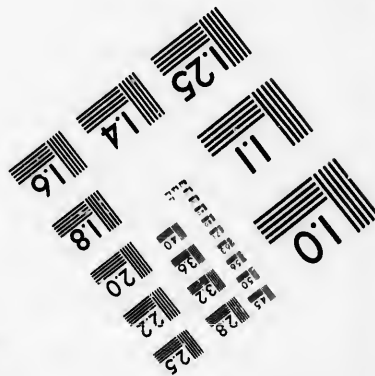
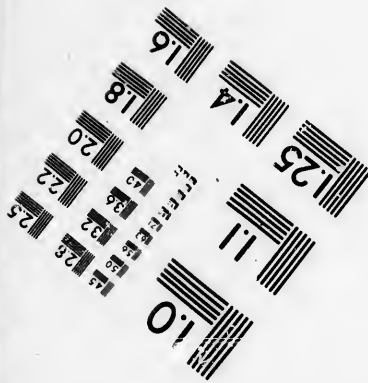
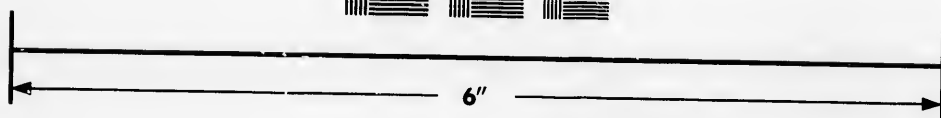
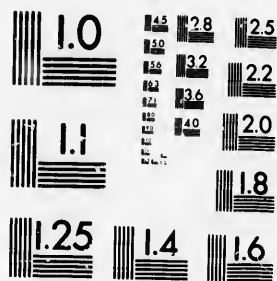


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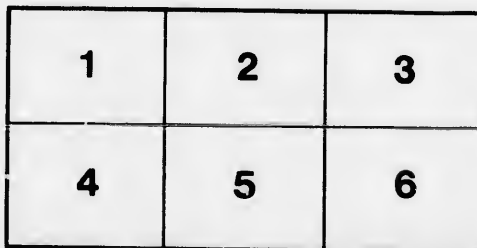
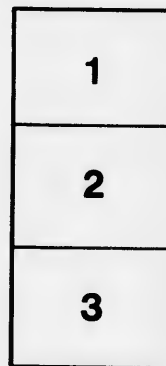
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S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT BROCKVILLE,
UPPER CANADA,

ON THE

18TH DAY OF JUNE, 1816,

BEING A

Day of General Thanksgiving

TO ALMIGHTY GOD, FOR HIS GREAT GOOD-
NESS IN PUTTING AN END TO THE WAR IN,
WHICH WE WERE ENGAGED
AGAINST FRANCE.

BY THE

REV. D. JOHN BETHUNE,

RECTOR OF AUGUSTA AND ELIZABETH TOWN.

—◆—
Montreal,

PRINTED BY W. GRAY.

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1816.

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S E R M O N.

Psalm 124th, 1st, 2d, and 3d,
Verses.

*IF IT HAD NOT BEEN THE LORD WHO WAS ON
OUR SIDE, NOW MAY ISRAEL SAY; IF IT HAD
NOT BEEN THE LORD WHO WAS ON OUR
SIDE, WHEN MEN ROSE UP AGAINST US,
THEN THEY HAD SWALLOWED US UP QUICK,
WHEN THEIR WRATH WAS KINDLED AGAINST
US.*

MANKIND, in times of public danger and distress, have always had recourse to Religion for consolation. It is at such seasons, when they feel the inefficacy of all human assistance, when the wisdom of the world is baffled, that their hearts open to Religion, as the only asylum that

offers protection. It is at such seasons that their usual pleasures appear trifling or disagreeable ; the recreations so commonly practised by the world, appear loathsome and unworthy the attention of rational Beings. To lift up our souls to God, is an employment, which at all times, administers the greatest consolation ; but it has that effect in a peculiar manner in times of public calamity, and is highly becoming, after deliverance from such terrible visitations. When we enter the house of God to pour out our souls before him, in an affectionate address, the recollection of our dependence and our transgressions, combined with our entire confidence in his mercies, elevate our hearts in the sacred service we are performing ; our sorrow is by degrees transformed into confidence ; the fervour of sincere devotion presents God to our minds, clothed in mercy, and inspiring us with the liveliest interest in heavenly things. We feel that we shall "*trust in the Lord for ever ; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength. To him it belongeth to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captive, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.*"

It is only a firm belief in the goodness of God, that he is ever ready to extend his mercy to the repentant sinner ;
that

that he is the father and friend of the human race, that enables us to bear as Christians, the evils of life. This belief assures us, that, though the judgments of God appear grievous, yet is he upon our side, for they are sent for our correction.

When we examine with an impartial eye, the evils to which we are subject in this life, we find very few of them absolutely unavoidable. Those which are implanted by nature, are few, partial, and transitory, and if we except those which men bring upon themselves, our most sanguine conceptions of human happiness might be realized. It is the passions of men, and not human nature, that are to be charged with the guilt which we find so prevalent among mankind. They, like the impetuous torrent, which swells beyond its limits, are always dealing destruction and death around them. Even those who have learned to regulate their own affections, cannot escape their baleful influence, but are plunged into calamity, by the rashness of others. In the midst of the scenes of disorder and confusion, which are the inevitable consequences of the conflicting passions of men, the true Christian can trace the hand of the Almighty. Enlightened by Revelation, he discovers the true causes, and the hidden springs of victories and overthrows; the grandeur

grandeur and declension of nations, and the rise and ruin of states. He sees what judgment the Almighty forms both of Princes and Empires, and, consequently, what idea he himself ought to entertain of them. The mighty empires both of Nineveh and Babyion furnish a thousand proofs of this truth. Their most powerful Monarchs were so many instruments in the hands of God to punish the transgressions of his people.

“ He lifted up an ensign to the nations from far, and hissed unto them from the end of the earth, to come and receive his orders.” He himself put the sword into their hands, he regulated their marches, he breathed courage and ardour into their soldiers, made them indefatigable in labour, invincible in battle; and caused terror and consternation to go constantly before them. The Christian walking in the meridian light of the Gospel, perceives the hand of God conducting these conquerors through fields of blood and carnage. Puffed up with the rapidity of their conquests, instead of ascribing them to the true cause, instead of receiving a single glimpse of the invisible hand that conducted them, they exclaim; *“ By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom: for I am prudent, and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures,*

ures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man."

But "*the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands.*"

This monarch so august, and wise in his own eye, appeared in that of the Almighty, only as a subaltern, a servant sent by his master to chastise, not to extirpate his children. At the very moment that he fancied himself possessed of Jerusalem, the Lord, with a single blast, disperses all his proud hopes; and in one night, destroys an hundred and fourscore thousand of his force. "*He puts his hook in his nose, and his bridle in his lips, and turns him back by the way by which he came.*" It is thus that his Almighty power directs the passions of men to the accomplishment of his judgments. Well might the sacred writer say, "*the wrath of man shall praise thee.*" This it hath done in all ages. It has always been a part of the moral government of God to mix the evil with the good; to pour his blessings upon mankind, when, by their conduct, they show themselves worthy of his Almighty protection and favour, and to send abroad his judgments at other times to punish their transgressions. God had a peculiar regard for the children of Israel, which he manifested in choosing them for his own. How often, notwithstanding this, did he raise up enemies to them, to chastise them for their sins, and when they amended their
ways,

ways, and turned again to the Lord with all their hearts, their mourning was turned into joy—the calamities which they suffered, were the corrections of a father, who desired to reclaim them.

We are not, however, to suppose, that temporal prosperity and adversity are always the sure indications of divine approbation or wrath, for the ways of God are past finding out. But although we see but as through a glass darkly, we must feel for what we do see, that calamity is full of instruction. When we are regaling in the bowers of pleasure, basking in the sunshine of prosperity, and gliding pleasantly along the stream of life, we are apt to forget our dependence upon God. At such seasons, when we neither experience want, nor pain, we are little inclined to serious reflexion or moral improvement. Our minds are too much dissipated, and we do not sufficiently feel the imperfections of our nature, to believe that we are in want of assistance. At such a time as this, God makes choice of a sterner messenger for our relief; the suggestions of reason on the one hand, and the powerful warnings of revelation on the other, have been equally disregarded. What then shall bring us back to the knowledge of ourselves? The sweet but nauseating cup of prosperity is changed for the bitter draught of adversity.

versity. It is then, if the most latent spark of virtue be left within us, that we discover our dangerous situation.

Our feeble nature, and our manifold transgressions make us feel, that without the assistance of God, we are absolutely wretched. Adversity ever leadeth to repentance; we begin to enquire into the causes of these corrections, with a conviction that God never chastiseth his children without reason.

Have we not, we begin to ask ourselves, indulged in the pleasures of this world, rather than placed our affections on Heavenly things—has not the praise of men rather than the approbation of God been the object of our pursuit—has the grave, which to the true Christian, is the inlet to Heaven, and every day opening to receive some friend or acquaintance, induced us to make the necessary preparations for approaching death; or have we not rather conducted ourselves as if invulnerable, by its shafts. And have not the apprehensions of the pains of death, rather than the fear of an after reckoning, given us uneasiness on the bed of sickness. In our ordinary concerns, have not the arts of dissimulation and deceit, rather than honest dealings, put us in possession of wealth, and opened the way

to earthly promotion. Have we exercised a proper vigilance in regulating our temper, and in restraining our passions—have no sallies of indignation and resentment ever betrayed us into revenge—or has the corroding poison of envy never polluted the sacred temple of our hearts; and have the thoughts of our hearts been turned to meditations suitable to the dignity of our nature, and our high vocation—have our children and dependents been convinced, by that example which edifieth and provoketh to good works, that Christianity is not an empty name, but a rule of life, that leadeth to salvation. Have we, in our relation to God, impressed upon our minds that deep sense of his Almighty perfections, which must inspire us with proper and becoming notions of our own comparative insignificancy—have we learned to admire his infinite wisdom—to adore his never-failing goodness, and to fear his Almighty power; and has the conviction of his just administration inspired us with contentment amidst the vicissitudes of this chequered scene. Who can ask himself these questions, and remain ignorant of his guilt? If God, who knows the secrets of our hearts, perceives that, through our depravity, we have disregarded his most gentle admonitions—and that we have wilfully shut our eyes against the light of his Gospel, shall he not administer a harsher remedy—shall he not

not, before we have wandered so far into the labyrinth of wickedness, as entirely to lose all hope of returning, let loose his judgments upon us, and awaken us from our delusion? If we feel that, as individuals, we have merited such treatment—what was our situation as a nation previous to the late war with France.

Mankind have always indulged a strange disposition to undervalue what they possess. The comforts which are lavished upon us by the bountiful hand of nature, are beheld with a stupid indifference. Every day of our lives affords a fresh proof of the invigorating influence of the sun, and yet this blessing excites no praise nor gratitude. But were the sun to forget to rise for a single day, we would then become sensible of the advantages which we derive from his presence. It is thus that we never know nor feel the advantage of what we enjoy, till we are taught by its loss. The same inconsistency marks our conduct in what more directly concerns ourselves. We rise from the downy couch, refreshed by a sweet and balmy repose, and we never thank the great Bestower of it—we enjoy it as a matter of course, but forget its inestimable value. But when the blessing of health hath forsaken us for a season—when recovering from the bed of sickness, how did the whole crea-
tion

tion seem to smile before us—did not all nature seem to be decked with unusual charms—and did we not pour out our hearts in gratitude, for the return of a blessing of which we had never before perceived the value.

Have we not treated in the same manner, the advantages which we have long possessed as a nation—have not the blessings of a free Constitution been productive rather of licentiousness than gratitude—did not the greatness of our power lull us into security, and the extension of our commerce sink us into luxury—and what were their effects? Was not a taste introduced for empty show, and idle parade? This is an evil which quickly spreads through all ranks—beginning with the higher classes it descends to the middle stations of life, and these are always copied after by the lower orders. In this state of things, people are more solicitous to discover expedients for the support of their extravagance, than to seek for religious and moral improvement. The desire of self gratification opposes itself to that pure principle of patriotism which is the best foundation of liberty. This breeds discontent, which is quickly followed by the spirit of change and innovation. It has been well observed that mankind are so apt to change their manners and disposition with the change of their fortunes, that

that to make a new man, no more is commonly requisite than to make him prosperous—and may not the same observation apply to Governments. The virtues which commonly raise a nation to prosperity, are diligent industry and strict economy. The exertions necessary for their support are palsied by luxury, and gradually decay. The diligent discharge of severe duty becomes the subject of ridicule—Patriotism becomes a name, and is only exercised from interest. The internal disorders which agitated our Mother Country shew but too plainly, that these rank weeds had been nourished to a very considerable degree by the long train of prosperity, which she enjoyed, and no doubt contributed to place her in that perilous situation, from which she has so lately and so happily escaped. The most perfect of the works of human ingenuity must still bear the marks of the infirmity of man—faults were therefore found with the Constitution. Discontented with the ease and affluence which they so long enjoyed, many exerted themselves to discover imaginary improvements, which, had they been adopted, might have been productive of endless confusion. The effects of such remedies and changes were fully exemplified in the situation of France about that period—in the scenes of anarchy, bloodshed and confusion which ended, at length, in the most unexampled despotism.—God, to chastise

tise us for our sins, sent abroad his judgments upon the earth. War is, at all times, a grievous calamity, by the horrors which it excites, and the numbers which it destroys. When Nathan commanded David to make choice of a judgment, because of his numbering the people, he chose rather to fall into the hands of God than of man, and thus pronounced war to be the most destructive of the three. This is the awful judgment with which it has pleased Providence to visit us, and to offer up our most solemn thanksgivings for the escape of the Mother Country from this terrible calamity, we are this day assembled.

For the last four and twenty years, the world has been convulsed with the most violent commotions ever witnessed. Even China, hitherto remarkable for her quietness and freedom from intestine divisions, became subject to the miseries of civil war. The commotions of Asia however excited very little interest at this immense distance, more especially as the attention of all Europe became rivetted by the most astonishing revolution ever recorded in the history of nations. France, destined to be the nursery of the most terrible scourge that ever the world beheld, was convulsed by a revolution, which ended in the establishment of a power that threatened the liberties of the world. It had
long

long been the opinion of political writers, that France, from her many physical and moral advantages, was better fitted than any other country in Europe for the attainment of universal dominion. This opinion has been confirmed by experience. If we refer to the history of the last two centuries, we shall find that the growing power of France had excited universal jealousy. That it was the policy of the surrounding nations to arrest her progress, and to curb her ambition, is fully exemplified in the confederacy which employed their united efforts against the designs of Louis XIV. Since that period, the maintaining a permanent balance of power in Europe, has been the object of the greatest politicians. By this means, war had its "peculiar code of morality." The surrounding nations of Europe formed a species of tribunal, to which those who were at war, pretended to refer the justice of their respective claims.

While this state of things continued, France found it impossible to maintain a military establishment of sufficient extent and permanence for the accomplishment of her purposes, upon the resources of an invaded enemy, because the desire of plunder was checked by the fear of retaliation.—While the other nations of Europe continued to be governed by the same maxims, France, by the period of her revolution,

tion, was in a manner freed from the restraints imposed by her former habits, and was prepared to take any new direction which her rulers might think proper to give. It became the project of the first revolutionary leaders, and afterwards steadily pursued by the Emperor, to plunge her into incessant war, and to goad her on to universal empire. Their ruling maxim was that pernicious and destructive one of Machiavel, that "a prince should have no other design nor thought, nor study, than war." To this maxim, Bonaparte found himself obliged to adhere, as much, however, from the force of habit and inclination, as from a conviction that it became now necessary for the support and preservation of his dominion.

No man could be better suited to the difficulties of his station, from his personal character. His restless ambition, his bold and comprehensive plans, the uninterrupted succession of great enterprizes in which he was engaged, gave no time for domestic dissensions. While his military renown, superior to that of any of his generals, acquired, for him, the entire confidence of the soldiery. Splendid achievements kept his subjects in constant admiration and subsistence, and undistinguishing pillage became the soul of his army.

If we pass over many events of minor importance, and take a view of the world, at a period when France had attained the summit of her glory, we shall find Great Britain alone standing between her and universal dominion. The powers of Europe had fallen one by one an easy prey to the machinations of Napoleon—and even Russia, although she had not yielded to the overwhelming power of France, found herself obliged, from the want of allies, to join in the general coalition against England. The British isles seemed, at this period, to stand alone in the world. The arms of all were lifted up to give her the last fatal stab. The friends of Napoleon, open as well as secret, rejoiced in the prospect of her approaching ruin. Even her ungrateful children endeavoured to disable her by cutting off her limbs. No event recorded in the annals of history is marked with so much inconsistency as the conduct of the Americans upon this occasion. America was the only nation on earth, who at that period, might have afforded the most essential service to Great Britain. Boasting of a freedom superior to that of all other nations of the world, it was certainly her duty to stand up in defence of a cause, of all others the dearest to her. She could not surely have been so blind, after the examples which were every day presenting themselves

in Europe, that the friendship of Napoleon could be any other than a bait to lure her to her doom. Yet such was the rancorous hatred of the ruling faction towards Great Britain, that they deserted the cause of humanity, and joined the tyrant. She joined her arms with her only enemy, against the only friend who stood between her and the misery to which she must otherwise certainly have become a prey. This was a most extraordinary infatuation—it displays such a blindness to their own interest, such black ingratitude goaded by the most wicked ambition, and such a total want of principle, as, had we not felt its effects, we never could have believed. “It appears,” says an American writer of that period, “something not less than impious to desire the ruin of this people, when you view the height to which they have carried the comforts, the knowledge and the virtue of our species—the extent and number of her foundations, of charity, their skill in the mechanic arts, by the improvement of which alone they have conferred inestimable benefits on mankind, the masculine morality, the lofty sense of independence, the sober and rational piety which are found in all classes, their impartial, decorous, and able administration of a code of laws, than which none more just and perfect has ever been in operation, their seminaries of education, yielding more solid and profitable instruction

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instruction than any other whatever, their eminence in literature and science; the urbanity and learning of their privileged orders, their deliberative assemblies, rendered illustrious by so many profound statesmen and brilliant orators. It is worse than ingratitude in us not to sympathize with them in their present struggle, when we recollect that it is from them we derive the principal merit of our own character, the best of our institutions, the sources of our highest enjoyments, and the *light of freedom itself*, which if they should be destroyed, will not long shed its radiance over the country." But this was far from being the language of all America. Hatred, rage, and party spirit, were the principles which governed the ruling faction. This assertion is fully verified by the treaty of Ghent, in which not a single point is even glanced at, which was held out as a cause of the war. They even made a horrid boast to the Tyrant of the evils which it was in their power to inflict upon Great Britain, by excluding her entirely from this continent, and secretly rejoiced at the prospect of drawing their dagger to stain it in the blood of the *Empress of the sea*.

Such was the deplorable state of the world, when the splendid achievements of the British armies in Spain, be-

gan to rouse the slumbering spirits of the North. It was now that Russia, tired of insult and oppression, began to perceive the dawning of the day-star of freedom. The successful opposition of the Spaniards roused their drooping spirits, they appealed to arms, and in two campaigns the Tyrant was overthrown, peace was restored to Europe, but it was only for a moment; scarcely had the nations who had so long groaned under the iron yoke of the Despot, began to congratulate themselves upon the bright prospects which were opening before them, when the same tyrant was again brandishing his sword of fire, and threatening them with a return of their former miseries. Upon his arrival in France, new armies, and a new state of things, appeared at his magic touch. But Britain ever watchful of the liberties of the world, and even foremost to protect them, had her armies marshalled in the very territories of the Tyrant, to crush his plans in the blossom. Napoleon, with his usual rapidity, put himself at the head of his armies, and appeared on the plains of Belgium. The genius of the immortal Wellington, already raised above all the Captains of his age, here shone forth with superior lustre. He hastened to meet the Tyrant, though with numbers vastly inferior, and at the ever memorable battle of Waterloo, eclipsed not only his own fame, but that of all the

the former achievements of his Country. Never was there seen so sanguinary a field; for two successive days did Napoleon drive his enemies before him. The Prussians could not withstand his impetuosity, and the vast superiority of numbers. This day, my friends, is the anniversary of a period which will ever be engraven on the hearts of Britons, and which will never be forgotten by a grateful and admiring world; a day on which the scourge of the earth, after two days continued success, when his troops, among the bravest in the world, and flushed with victory, met the iron hearts of Britons on the field of Waterloo. The impetuosity and insatiable ambition of Buonaparte, hurried him to this his last field. It was here that his last hopes were crushed, and that, as he himself expressed it, by "his most constant and generous enemy." The more that obstacles seemed to multiply, towards the close of the day, the more his obstinacy increased. He became indignant at these unforeseen difficulties. He did not fear to push to extremities an army whose confidence in him was boundless; he continued to pour down his troops, and when he was repeatedly informed that the day was turning against him, he only answered, by giving orders to march forward, but all was in vain. No persuasion nor authority could prevail on the French

French troops to stand the shock of the British line, when rushing to the charge.

The Tyrant's cup was overflowing with iniquity, and the judgments of God were upon him. The annals of history do not furnish an example of so rapid, so entire an overthrow. We clearly perceive the hand of a superintending providence, in this terrible catastrophe, and may trace his punishment to the silent operation of those moral causes which in the end always exalt virtue upon the ruins of vice.

War is certainly at all times, a dreadful calamity, but it is sometimes necessary, both as corrections from the hand of God, and to rectify disputes between different nations. The world is constantly in a state of change. How many empires and kingdoms have we seen to rise up, and disappear in rapid succession, of which not the smallest vestige now remains. Within the last 24 years, what mighty changes have taken place. All Europe has been a scene of blood and slaughter. Whole Countries have been laid waste, and Cities laid in ruins. The blighted face of the world has worn the withering trace of desolation. Triumph and sorrow have successively assumed their empire. The most

Most tender ties of affection have been torn in sunder by
 the ruthless hand of war. Here those who have perhaps
 been long united by the most tender bonds of friendship, are
 overwhelmed in one common slaughter. There, the father
 that never again shall strain his orphan to his heart. The
 son who shall never be greeted on his native shore by the
 happy voice of his parent, and the husband who shall ne-
 ver more gladden the heart of her with whom he had long
 lived in mutual happiness. There, on the other hand, might
 be seen cities wrapped in flames, while the wretched inha-
 bitants were flying in all directions for shelter from the
 withering wintry blast. There might be seen some fair
 city threatened by the approach of an invading army, shroud-
 ed in gloomy horror, the inhabitants pale with terror, hold-
 ing their breath in silent suspense, while they hear conti-
 nued peals of thunder from the sanguinary field, the fore-
 runners of undistinguishing pillage. The mother's burst-
 ing tears, streaming when she hears the sound of the
 distant drum, reminding her of her slaughtered children, while
 the more manly grief of the father is ready to burst his la-
 bouring breast. These, my Brethren, are the scenes which
 have been a thousand times acted over in the eventful pe-
 riod of four and twenty years past. How grateful, then

should

should we be at the recollection, that the fell destroyer of the human race, who has caused all those miseries, is now placed in a situation, which, it is to be hoped, will mock his farther attempts at desolation.

Such are the effects of all destroying time, which is continually sweeping successive generations from the cradle to the grave. The gay and thoughtless votaries of pleasure gliding smoothly down the stream of life, the sober and rigid moralist supporting his steps by a firm confidence in Heaven, and the wicked shrouded in horror and gloomy despair, are all gliding with equal rapidity along its capacious tide, to the same dark and silent mansion. Never since time began to roll, has there been a more eventful age than the present. The frail barks of this generation have been tossed upon a rough and stormy sea ; they have been driven through all the vicissitudes of hope and fear, of terror and dismay, the most unexpected bursts of joy and grief have successively filled the world. The most fearful battles have been fought, and the most splendid conquests achieved. In the midst of all this dreadful fluctuation of empires, Britain alone has escaped the unhallowed touch of an invader's footstep. She stood and maintained the cause of justice and humanity with equal constancy and perseverance, both
when

when the powers, the strength, and the skill of half the world were arrayed against her, and when the noblest blood of Europe streamed in torrents by her side. When we reflect upon these mighty events; when we compare Europe to what she was six years ago, when we behold those nations who were then held in the vilest bondage, and overwhelmed with despair, now enjoying their ancient constitutions, and the balance of power in Europe completely restored, and that, next to Providence, England has been the happy instrument of this mighty change, our joy is full, and we feel ourselves forced to exclaim—"If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us, then they had swallowed us up quickly, when their wrath was kindled against us."

