

**DISCOURSES ON INTEMPERANCE:
PREACHED IN THE CHURCH IN BRATTLE
SQUARE, BOSTON APRIL 5, 1827, THE
DAY OF ANNUAL FAST, AND APRIL 8,
THE LORD'S DAY FOLLOWING**

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Discourses on Intemperance: Preached in the Church in Brattle Square, Boston April 5, 1827, the Day of Annual Fast, and April 8, the Lord's Day Following by John G. Palfrey

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JOHN G. PALFREY

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CHURCH IN BRATTLE SQUARE,
BOSTON, APRIL 5, 1827,
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THE LORD'S DAY FOLLOWING.

—
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Some of the statements in the following pages are derived from the documents of the Massachusetts Society for the Suppression of Intemperance, and others from various sources. The sermons were prepared in the course of an interrupted week, and are faulty in many respects. But the author has no time to correct them, and if they are capable of doing any thing to open the eyes of the publick to the tremendous scourge under which it is suffering, he would not withhold them, from any sensibility to criticism. If there are any over-statements, he will be most heartily glad to see them disproved.

DISCOURSES.

JEREMIAH VI. 8.

Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee; lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited.

THE piety of our ancestors has transmitted to us the usage of assembling year by year, at the opening of the season, to seek, with prayer and fasting, a blessing from the God of harvest. Elsewhere, such a solemnity is considered as appropriate to occasions of great publick distress, and a stranger coming among us, might ask what reason of this kind we could have for observing it. He had found, he would say, a numerous people, living on a bountiful soil, in a temperate climate, with every thing called for by the reasonable wishes of man, within the reach of their industry; with a free and at the

same time well established government, relations of extended and profitable intercourse abroad, and the rights of person and reputation, property and conscience, protected by equal laws and just magistrates at home. He had heard of no interruption of any of the channels of publick prosperity; no intestine broil, nor wide devastation of flood or fire, storm or earthquake; no famine, pestilence, nor war.

The observation, however, would be superficial, and the inference groundless. If seasons of publick distress and peril call for publick fasting, humiliation and prayer, we have cause to keep a fast this day. It is truly a day for a reflecting man to 'afflict his soul,' to 'bow down his head as a bulrush, and spread sackcloth and ashes under him.' Not less than ten thousand citizens of this nation, as there is good reason to believe, have fallen during the year now past, victims to one mortal scourge, prematurely cut off, cut off in the midst of their days.

They did *not* die by pestilence. How happy if they had! Their sufferings then would have been short and innocent. They did not fall by the sword. Their bones might have been worthy then to repose in the fair soil they had defended, by their fathers' graves which they had kept sacred from an invader's footstep. They did not waste away in the lingering torments of starvation. O how much less heart-wringing would then have been the sorrow that burst in long stifled sobs by their last home. They died by self-administered poison; by that cup of guilty excess, compared with which war, famine and pestilence, are merciful plagues. Famine? Should we hear of one tenth part, one hundredth part, of ten thousand persons likely to perish of hunger, we should be possessed with horror by an event so unprecedented, and the whole country would be subsidized for their relief. Pestilence? The most awful visitation of

that kind ever known in our nation,* one which made the ears of all that heard of it to tingle, one of those fearful providences that come at long intervals from one another, did not extend its ravages beyond one city, and was content with less than four thousand victims. War? Our last war was not reckoned a comparatively bloodless one; but, in the three years it lasted, the sword devoured in our armies considerably less than five hundred in a year,† while, in a time of profound tranquillity, another destroyer takes from us two hundred in a week, and this great mortality is almost unobserved. To other great afflictions of communities, there is commonly a speedy end. When the hardships of war become intolerable, peace on some terms is made, and the hearts of

* The yellow fever at Philadelphia in 1793.

† According to	Niles' Register,	there fell in our	
armies	495	in the campaign of	1812,
	422	"	" - 1813,
-	505	"	" 1814.

the distressed people revive. If our borders had been wasted in the past year by epidemick sickness or scarcity, we should now be looking and praying with good hope for a healthy and abundant season. But who sees any reason to expect, that fewer will perish this year by the slow suicide of guilty excess, than perished the last? What has been done to avert the same fate, from at least an equal number? Rather, what is not already done to ensure it? The habits are formed,—*formed*, with many thousands of our countrymen, which with moral certainty will bring them to this end. Some thousands will not reach it till the next, or a following year, but other thousands are riper for destruction, and they will find it in this. They are already close to the precipice, and every hour they rush towards it with a madder speed. Can they not be arrested? Try it; try it with all the force and tenderness of pity; but who is so inexperienced as to flatter himself that