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AN  
ARGUMENT  
FOR THE  
CHRISTIAN RELIGION;  
DRAWN FROM A  
COMPARISON OF REVELATION  
WITH THE  
NATURAL OPERATIONS of the MIND:

Being the SUBSTANCE of  
TWENTY-FOUR SERMONS

PREACHED AT  
The LECTURE founded by the Hon. ROBERT  
BOYLE, Esq; in the Parish-Church of St. MARY-  
LE-BOW, in the Years 1778, 1779, 1780,

IN FOUR BOOKS.

BY JAMES WILLIAMSON, B. D.

*Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of  
heaven.*

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L O N D O N :  
Printed for P. ELSLEY, in the Strand.  
M.DCC.LXXXIII.



TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

LORD GEORGE CAVENDISH,

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

LORD FREDERICK CAVENDISH,

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

LORD JOHN CAVENDISH,

TRUSTEES for the Lecture founded by the  
Honourable ROBERT BOYLE, Esq;

THIS DISCOURSE

IS MOST HUMBLY DEDICATED,

BY

THEIR LORDSHIPS

MOST OBLIGED,

AND MOST OBEDIENT,

HUMBLE SERVANT,

JAMES WILLIAMSON.





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A N  
A R G U M E N T  
F O R T H E  
C H R I S T I A N R E L I G I O N.

---

B O O K I.

*Containing an Inquiry into the Rise and Progress of those Religious Opinions which seem natural to all Mankind.*

C H A P. I.  
O f P R E J U D I C E.

**T**HE most remarkable circumstance in the human character seems to be that great uniformity of powers and inclinations which is found among men; by which they are enabled to act in concert, to extend their social union from one extremity of the world to another, and to join in any general effort to improve their nature and faculties. Without this *sameness* of constitution there could have been no knowledge, for it is this that enables one man to judge of the wants and views of another, and of the probability of his succeeding in any undertaking, almost with  
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the same certainty as if the particular case had been his own; and thus also, our feelings being similar, we can substitute ourselves in the place of another; and, by making his schemes our own, partake of all his hopes and fears. And what is more, even our artificial habits, as a consequence indeed of this, are nearly the same; or if this is not naturally the case, from the great pliability of the human mind, we have very little doubts of being able to make it so: and our education must be undertaken upon such a belief; for the very attempt to educate supposes that a man can form the same habits in another which have been formed in himself. And thus the firmest foundation seems to be laid for the greatest harmony of efforts and opinions among men. By exhibiting only one side of human nature, a rational creature, who knew nothing of man but what he could learn from that view, ought to be convinced that there never could be such a thing as a dispute in the world; nothing but wisdom and ignorance listening and instructing each other.

Yet notwithstanding this general uniformity of character and abilities discoverable in the human species; it is no less true that, in many respects, the faculties and inclinations of men are extremely different, indicating, whenever occasions offer, strong inclinations to different pursuits, from the earliest infancy. And although mankind are all formed with the same faculties, and should happen to have the same seeds of instruction sown in their minds, yet they will neglect some and cultivate others without any reason of preference, apparent to themselves or others; and this will produce many different opinions and views of things, which, we say, very properly, spring from prejudice.

Nor is this any blemish in our constitution, when it is considered, that we are in a state, where much of our improvement is left to ourselves. And the attentive observer will accordingly find, that much of the business, and much of the improvement of the world, has no other spring to put it in motion, but prejudices of one kind or another. A genius, bent or inclination for particular employments, arts or pursuits; the prejudice of rank, profession and education, to say nothing of national prejudice, are such powerful instruments in human affairs, that the actions of mankind would be deprived of the great principle which governs them and keeps them in vigour, if these prejudices made no part of our constitution. In short, we are formed with such a variety of talents and dispositions, seemingly on purpose to teach us, that by the very nature and adjustment of the several parts of our constitution, we are predetermined, and as it were, formed for certain purposes; and that it never was the intention of our Creator, in our present imperfect state, to have all mankind of the same opinion; but that the rich and the poor; the foolish and the wise; the active and the indolent, should misjudge, despise and envy each other's situation, attainments, and circumstances. For, with the ordinary infirmities of human nature, and deprived of the advantages arising from prejudices of different kinds, man, in all probability, would have been a stupid, splenetic, sensual and unteachable animal; as the improvement both of the individual and of the species, according to the present state of the world, seems chiefly to be carried on by jarring principles and false or inadequate prospects of things: And human frailty makes this almost the surest way to

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truth,

truth, so little are we influenced by the naked reality of things.

It is upon this ground that it might be said, that much mischief may be done, by endeavouring hastily and injudiciously to remove real prejudices. For, it is extremely probable that, instead of substituting truth in the place of them, we are only exchanging one prejudice for another: and the consequence may be much worse, if nothing be substituted in their room, because thus all our principles of action may be destroyed; and many, whose worldly circumstances place them at their ease, have their principles of action, in reality, thus destroyed. For when you have once convinced a man, in a few instances, that what he took to be a serious and well-founded truth is only prejudice, there will be very little difficulty in persuading him to rank a troublesome truth among prejudices. Tell a rich man that Religion is nothing but priestcraft; that patriotism is a farce; and that he himself is a fool, if he do not enjoy his wealth, in every way which his appetites prompt him, and, if your opinion has any weight or credit with him, he will soon lose sight of every duty, and forget that he himself is supported by society, sinking gradually into a sensual creature, until he becomes (as the scripture very emphatically expresses the state of the Antediluvians) *nothing but flesh*.

And yet surely prejudices ought to be removed, though not in the superficial manner practised by modern reformers. The reasoning of ages, corrected and supported by a frequently varied experience, is necessary for giving a firm establishment to some truths, especially such as have had a general prejudice against them: As, on the other hand,

hand, those truths, which are a check upon the passions of men, will be readily turned over to the class of prejudices, upon the strength of a joke, or of the most fanciful and ill-founded reasonings: and therefore every wise, or even prudent, man will reject those absurd or at best inadequate methods of levelling prejudices, however fashionable, which are borrowed from theoretical speculations, ornamented, but not supported, by facts; and proposed to the world in this form chiefly, because they are supposed to fall in with the humour of the times, which, at present, is by no means that of searching whether the things proposed to our consideration have a firm foundation in experience, or depend upon well-attested facts.

Truths ought to be examined by the nature and circumstances of men and things, and not according to the limited, fanciful and partial notions of true and false, in the establishing of which mankind seem to have discovered a more than ordinary degree of folly, at the very time when they are producing themselves as models of wisdom, and standards for regulating the judgement of the whole world. Mankind have a certain sphere allotted them, within which they may act with propriety and judge with certainty, but when they attempt excursions beyond this, they bring nothing back but proofs of their vanity and folly.

Nor is this without its use, when it is considered, that it is only by comparison that we can regulate or change our opinions: and therefore right and wrong, truth and falshood, wisdom and folly must be plentifully sown over the world, merely as the necessary means of improvement to rational and limited creatures, in all those circumstances, where

their conduct and opinions are to depend upon themselves, acting as free agents, and without supernatural instruction. And if our errors were merely of a speculative nature, implying only greater or less degrees of wisdom or folly, time and chance, or the several accidents of the world, would go a great way towards correcting them.

But our weak side is where our morals are concerned; and it is here that, in a particular manner, we are apt to delude ourselves, and are exposed to the attacks of delusion. It is true God has particularly guarded us from such errors, by strong natural sentiments, in favour of virtue; but, in an improved state of society, our duties multiply upon us, and become more difficult to perform, from the increase of temptations; and finding them burthensome, we are easily disposed to listen to any reasons for neglecting them. Yet, if the fact were not certain, it would seem very extraordinary that Reason and Religion should have often been employed to furnish arguments for such a neglect, and to eradicate the natural sentiments, implanted in the mind by God himself.

It is undoubtedly true, that our morals may be corrupted or improved, by human reason and Religion: they are both dangerous instruments, when in improper hands, because in their natural and original state, as formed by men to supply their most pressing necessities, they are little better than the blundering operations of ignorance, passion and prejudice; and consequently are more dangerous than these, being a composition made out of them vested with a kind of authority; and may do good or harm according as they are employed to counteract or support the failings and imperfections of mankind.

Not

Not that I consider both as equally in the power of men to regulate. The circumstances of the world continually improve or corrupt the reason of men, so that it can hardly ever be stationary, except where human nature is degraded almost below the rational level, while their religious opinions never vary from their original absurdity. And had there never been a real revelation, I question whether there ever had been such a thing as a religious dispute in the world, in the sense in which that word is understood among Christians. Men would have changed their religious opinions, with as little difficulty, and even with as little consequence, as they do the fashion of their cloaths. And thus it happens that by their rational exertions alone, we can trace the progress, refinement and corruptions of nations; but even where mankind have exhibited the greatest variety of extraordinary abilities, we find their Religion during all these changes the same inanimate mass of corruption as we found it at the beginning.

I said the circumstances of the world improve, but I think they are even sufficient for perfecting human reason, though a deliberate and extensive observation is necessary for this purpose, instead of the hasty way of voting every thing a prejudice, which does not agree with the mode of thinking which may be in fashion at the time. Many truths are relative, and suited to particular circumstances; and if the circumstances be changed, these truths must vary with them. They may be relative to our sensations: Thus the same water may convey, the different and even opposite sensations of heat and cold, to the same person at the same time: and bodies at rest may appear to be

in motion or the contrary. Truths of this kind partake of the nature of prejudice, and are only to be assented to, when referred to a particular standard. A standard derived from the nature of heat, or the nature of motion, would be more accurate than our senses: and yet no man, with impunity, can neglect his sensations; and he would lose too much by having his body converted into a thermometer.

There are truths also which have the human faculties for their standard, which must be very variable, as they will depend upon that view of the subject, which different people may take, which will be as various as their faculties and improvements; and yet all such are truths in a certain sense, and are by no means to be neglected; it is only necessary to know the true nature of such truths, so as to be able to refer them to their proper class. We have likewise artificial truths which mankind have made such arbitrarily, and in many of them seem to have consulted nothing but their own humour. Those who would confine truth to mathematical demonstration, do not consider that human nature cannot afford that all the world should be mathematicians, with their views confined solely to the properties of extension and number.

Yet, amidst such a chaos of opinions and prejudices, it is possible to arrive at a consistency in thinking; for the natural progress of society cures such prejudices, or rather shews them in their proper light, and more perfect notions of things are the consequence of every improvement, which is generally grounded upon a more accurate and extensive experience, founded however upon the first imperfect notions, so that a progress through  
them;



them seems to be necessary: for I am certain that a man who never had any prejudices, never had, nor can have any real knowledge. And thus by attention mankind may, in proper circumstances, gradually shake off their prejudices, and gain ground upon every subject which reason can improve; either making their notions more accurate or their views more extensive, arriving at what might be called the perfection of reason. In short this seems to be a talent, with the improvement of which mankind may be safely entrusted, nor ought they in this case to look for supernatural assistance.

It is very different however with Religion; for the prejudices arising from superstition seem beyond the power of man to correct, and the task seems to have been put into his hands for no other purpose but to convince him of his inability. Or all our natural propensities the call to be religious, both from our faculties and circumstances, appears to be the strongest; and thus it comes to pass, that the hasty notions which we are obliged to take up with at first, are but little in our power to regulate afterwards, being chiefly suggested by the imagination, prompted by fear, which creates prejudices of a very different kind from those, which have their first beginnings in the imperfection of our senses. The improvements of society may give our religious notions a fashion, or be the occasion of adding or taking away something; which it is easy to do without skill or without producing any improvement, when you have a confused mass to work upon: It may change its size or shape without gaining or losing any thing in proportion, utility or beauty, there being no standard to which it can be referred.

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The prejudices of sense are founded in facts, and may be corrected by facts, but the prejudices of superstition are founded in the imagination, and can only be changed for new fancies equally extravagant and groundless as the former, and this never could produce any improvement. And thus it happened that the heathen superstitions were become a monster which was to be crushed and annihilated by an irresistible power, as being irreducible to any consistent or rational shape; and the memory of it only preserved as a proof of human weakness and extravagance.

And to supply its place the Christian Religion presents itself to us, though in a very different manner. It produces itself as a fixed truth, an unalterable and determinate matter of fact, to which nothing can be added, and from which nothing can be taken away by men; demanding credit, and, at the same time, professing itself to be above human comprehension; disdaining to be tried by any test of human invention, but, forcing a new kind of evidence upon us, the evidence of faith; which hurts our philosophic pride, and creates it great opposition from the wise men of this world, who think that every subject is to be new modelled to advantage by their faculties. And this Religion, refusing to accommodate itself to circumstances, by favouring the vices and views of mankind, breeds no less enmity against itself among the worldly-minded, whose passions and wishes are generally at variance with its doctrines.

This is a yoke that mankind never could have laid upon their own necks, and therefore must owe its beginning, progress, and support to some foreign cause: and what that cause may be is an inquiry of more importance to us than any thing whatever.

Superstition

Superstition and a true Religion are equally unmanageable by reason. Nevertheless human reason is very capable of examining their different characters, even so accurately that a man may chuse with certainty between them. And as we have no direct standard of revelation in our minds to appeal to, a comparison of the Christian Religion with the superstitions natural to men, and the operations of the human understanding, seems to be the most general and rational ground of conviction upon this subject, at least it is almost the only effectual method for removing all religious prejudices, which equally enslave the Christian and the philosopher. And for this purpose, I propose to lay before you, what I take to be the natural operations of the human mind, under the dominion of passion and the guidance of reason, upon the subject of Religion: and, by shewing what a different system would be produced, prove that the Christian Religion comes from God.

But here there are a class of prejudices which stand in our way, very different from those already mentioned, as they are not marks of weakness of understanding, but of the strength of passion. A prejudice against a person, a prejudice against a subject, and others of the like kind. *Is not this the carpenter's son? These are hard sayings, who can bear them?* Such prejudices when they are without malice, and taken up merely as a pretence to indulge an indolent disposition or to remove a disagreeable truth out of sight, are far from being innocent. A man's ears should always be open to conviction, and our attention should be more especially roused to disagreeable truths. Even he who thinks he has reason to wish

with that the contents of the Bible may not be true, ought not to let his wishes, so far get the better of his understanding, as to neglect attending to the evidence offered to his consideration, and implicitly believe those, who tell him that there is no difference between Christianity and the superstitions of the heathens. A man who suffers himself to be deluded into such an opinion, upon the partial representation of a few detached facts, is exactly in the situation of one who could be led to despise the most excellent composition of human genius, by having it represented to him, that all the words in it were to be found in the dictionary; only with this difference, that the one would be the subject of human ridicule, but the other of divine vengeance.

## C H A P. II.

*Of the Nature and extent of Superstition, as derived from the Faculties and Circumstances of Men.*

**S**UPPOSE mankind left to disperse themselves in this world, with such faculties as we find them possessed of at present, and under the dominion of their ordinary passions; making their way through dangers and temptations, without any other aid or impediment than what they may receive from one another; and in this situation, we know that they would soon be sensible of many wants, and liable to many apprehensions, and much the greatest number of those impossible to be relieved or removed by any of the objects which presented themselves. Nay, whoever should hap-  
pen

pen to be so much master of circumstances, as to be able to chuse any particular situation, even the most favourable to health and happiness which this world affords; and together with this could place himself in the most distinguished rank in life; if he promised himself compleat happiness even from these singular privileges, he would find by experience that he was but little acquainted with himself. Because it appears from the passions implanted in human nature, that man, instead of being formed to have his views fixed upon any determinate set of objects, is intended for various stages and states of existence; and not like the beasts to have his wishes confined to the present moment. And although every climate, every age, every rank in life furnish certain enjoyments and gratifications; yet no climate, no period of time, no rank or station in life can fully gratify all his affections and desires, and secure him against the accidents of futurity; his satisfactions also arising more from his future prospects than from any present enjoyments. And therefore a man will depend upon the future, more than upon any thing which he possesses for the present; and the things of futurity being contingent, and even the present uncertain, especially in the early periods of society; hopes and fears will engage most of his attention; for it is only by these that uncertain things and the things of futurity are to be estimated.

In the early period, of which I am now speaking, mankind would have no experience to direct them; they could learn no lesson from the history of the success or failures of others; and from a consciousness of their own weaknesses, with the help of a few disappointments, no scheme that they could devise

devise would appear after a little experience, by any means certain to bring about the ends they might have in view. I say after a little experience, because, before mankind had any settled rules or plans to direct them, they would be continually blundering, even in their most ordinary business, which would very much weaken any natural confidence which they might have in themselves, to a degree that when they happened to succeed, the accomplishment of their schemes would be referred to something besides their own ingenuity. And very slight things indeed will have some influence in a state of suspense and uncertainty, for a throw of the dice, coinciding with a man's own wishes, will give him some spirits, and even determine him to act, so naturally have we recourse to secret and unseen influence; and that degree of prudence, which is to deprive Fortune of her rank as a divinity, could not be reached by the Romans in their highest state of improvement, which is owned by Juvenal in these lines:

Nullum numen habes, si sit prudentia: sed te  
Nos facimus, Fortuna, Deam, cosloque locamus.

We who have the laws of nature and the principles of Religion reduced to a kind of certainty, which in some sense makes us independent, can hardly conceive the perplexity and anxiety of mankind in a state of nature, or during the first beginnings of society, especially when agitated by those hopes and fears, which are raised by the certainty of death, and the uncertainty of the time when it will happen. Now, upon trying occasions, where a man's own powers and all the natural means which his reason can suggest have been exhausted,

where

where is he to look for assistance? Certainly it seems natural that a man in real or imaginary distress, after he has done his best in a natural way, will set his own imagination or that of others to work, in order to form some *Being* with such powers and attributes as his particular circumstances require, and his immediate wants stand in need of. I have mentioned the imagination of others, because there is some reason to think, that the imaginations of his neighbours would be chiefly employed in this god-making business; for a man in dread or danger rejects no advice that is offered him, and has a better opinion of every body's understanding than of his own. His neighbour might recommend it to him, to do any thing in jest or earnest; and as things are often apprehended to be worse than they turn out to be, the superstitious man ascribes it to some invisible interposition, that his misfortunes did not come up to the measure of his own fears.

But such *Beings* cannot answer the superstitious man's purposes without a will and a kind of free agency, superadded to a power of producing effects; and as such a *Being* cannot be compelled, he must be entreated to lend his assistance, or perhaps bribed to do it, so much are men disposed to make their Gods after their own image: Because this cannot be such a power as produces effects by the application of one material agent to another, in such a manner that its assistance may be regularly expected whenever certain means have been used. For the discovery of such powers is not the work of the imagination, but the effect of a regular and attentive experience.

Now, a supernatural Being endued with free agency will never submit his actions to the test of experience;

experience; and this very circumstance carries such delusions beyond the reach of experience to remedy. For after a thousand failures and disappointments, the superstitious man will still continue to vary the mode of his application, with a constant and firm persuasion that there is a remedy somewhere, although he has not been so lucky as to find it.

His Deity, that he applied to, may want inclination or perhaps power from the business being out of his province: he will therefore have recourse to some other Gods; and will furnish himself with an excuse for every disappointment; and the large class of seemingly contingent events, will feed his hopes, alarm his fears, and keep up his delusions.

And thus it comes to pass that no rational creature can enjoy life, or even support it, without religious opinions of one kind or another: if a Religion be not communicated to him, he will make one for himself which must serve him for a temporary relief, though it should happen not to be of that determinate or durable kind which his circumstances may require. For even the unbeliever himself will readily acknowledge that he was in some part of his life a superstitious creature; and that the triumph over superstition was only the last effort of his rational faculties.

To suppose a people without Religion seems to me the same thing as to suppose a people without hopes and fears; for it is impossible to gratify and keep up those passions, but by such objects as will lead men beyond their own natural abilities, even to such a degree as to make them put their trust in any thing sooner than relinquish all hopes.



It is true, the religious principle taken in this sense is very general, and may be gratified and supported by any thing whose powers we are not acquainted with. Any thing animate, or inanimate, real or imaginary to which credulity or knavery has ascribed any supernatural or extraordinary powers, may be the object of superstition; and the less we are acquainted with the nature of things, the sifter will they be, for being turned to superstitious uses. For this and other obvious reasons the heavenly bodies are most likely to challenge the attention of a superstitious man; and as life would appear to him an advantage, he would likewise suppose the stars endued with life and spontaneous motion, which would be readily believed of *Brings* so far beyond the reach of vulgar knowledge.

Nor would mankind be content with gods simply to protect them; but they would require others to assist them in the gratifications of their passions, in short as this kind of supernatural assistance could be so easily had, they would not be very scrupulous in having recourse to it, upon almost every occasion.

This representation, it is true, describes mankind as given over to delusion, from the very nature of their faculties, passions and affections; and that to such a degree, as would overpower their reason, corrupt their morals, and prevent all improvement, unless some circumstances should concur to moderate or correct this infatuation.

## C H A P. III.

*Of the natural Remedies of Superstition.*

**B**UT it is to be observed that all our hopes and fears cannot be immediately grounded on Religion. Mankind would find that some wishes were to be gratified even fully, by a proper use of their natural faculties, and by the application of one material agent to another; and that some evils were to be avoided by the same means, in a more regular and effectual manner than by any mode of superstition.

This discovery, it might be pretended, would be the occasion of a division of events into such as were in our own power, and such as exceeded it; and that the province of superstition would thus come to be marked out, though by very arbitrary limits; as mankind might rather be said to have found out a rule for settling it, than to be possessed of sufficient means or materials, to ascertain the proper bounds: having recourse to superstitious practices when they ought to use their own natural powers; or joining the superstitious practices to the exertions of their natural powers, they would allow the superstition a large share of the merit of the success. And though this would retard the progress of their improvement at first, yet taking it once for granted that they could do something of themselves, it might be said, that the more they improved their faculties, the dominion of superstition would be proportionably lessened, and why not in time compleatly abolished.

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But those who reason in this manner seem to forget that such reformers have no materials to work with, at least none fit for such an undertaking. Their building would become a castle in the air, which the least blast of the boisterous passions would demolish. The truth of this assertion will be best determined by tracing the progress of superstition, and by considering the additions and impediments which it is likely to receive from the circumstances of men and things.

Those who have proper notions of the power of a stock or a stone, even when dignified with the honour of being the representative of an imaginary supernatural *Being*, will readily believe that such as put their trust in them would be frequently disappointed. Yet, when they had once gone so far as to honour them as gods, instead of ascribing the failure to the true cause, they would naturally conclude that the disappointment originated from something in themselves; so much do mankind work in the dark, when they work with superstition. They would suppose that they had been deficient in respect to this supernatural *Being*, or were ignorant of the proper way of approaching him, so as to render him propitious. Cunning men, and perhaps cunning women, would take advantage of this disposition of the people, and making pretences that they were in the secret, or perhaps fancying themselves to be so, would turn the credulous humour of the multitude to their own advantage, by setting up the trade of consulting oracles, and influencing supernatural powers.

Nor would it be long before such instances of great weakness would be daily presented to them, as could not fail to lead them to conceive a very

high opinion of the credulity of mankind, though a more contemptible one of their understanding than they had before. For instead of requiring art to deceive the multitude, they would find every hour furnishing them with dupes, presenting themselves, and tempting them to deceive them from the easiness of the undertaking, or rather who would go more than half way to deceive themselves.

A man's natural superstition is a very heavy load, which he would be very glad to transfer somewhere else with the first opportunity: and thus any kind of public creed, would be such a relief, of which he could not fail to take the first advantage. For though the pride of man, when he is entirely at his ease, is continually lifting him up to independence, yet when he is allowed to feel his real situation, he is glad to be directed, and is fond of living in a crowd professing the same sentiments with himself, either from a sense of weakness, or an aversion to trouble.

Nothing therefore could be more agreeable to any one in such circumstances, than to have his superstition so well regulated, that he had only to repair to a certain place, and do as he was instructed, or as he saw others do; which would keep his mind at ease, and flatter his indolence.

Nor would the philosophic spirit, prevailing in a Nation, be able to give any check to superstition. For philosophy requires an adequate cause to produce an effect, and such as will always produce the same effect, and neither one greater or less; whereas, according to the superstitious man, a few words may bring down the Moon: *Carmina vel celo possunt deducere Lunam*; which is sufficient to shew the absurdity of attempting to overcome

by any fixed rules, a prejudice which disdains all rule.

But I should be glad to know how the philosophers themselves, were to escape the general infection: that they did not is an undoubted fact; for the most ancient philosophers had their reasonings about natural things strongly tinged with superstition, and were no less absurd in the causes which they assigned, than the most superstitious of the vulgar. What shall we say of Cleanthes's opinion as handed down by Cicero, which shews his understanding to have been so perverted, that it is not easy to conceive by what steps it could have been rectified. "Ali autem  
" Solem, Lunam, reliqua astra, aquis alia dul-  
" cibus, alia marinis. Eamque causam Cleanthes  
" affert, cur se sol referat, nec longius progre-  
" diatur solstitiali orbe, itemque brumali, ne lon-  
" gius discedat a cibo." Thus we find according to this philosopher (whose opinions, absurd as they are, antiquity thought worth the preserving) the sun is a free agent, and like an animal goes to the different sides of the equator in search of food. Surely such philosophers were much more likely to increase than to diminish the stock of vulgar superstitions.

If it should be said that such a philosophy as Newton's might cure mankind of the greatest part of their superstitions, as it would at least give them true and proper notions of that *host of heaven*, which was so general an object of their superstition. But it seems impossible to conceive that such speculations would have been tolerated or relished, or even thought of, among a people addicted to the superstition of regarding the heavenly bodies as divinities.

And if a philosopher had been possessed of such a discovery, he never durst have published it; for certain death would have been the consequence of such a daring and impious thought, as the reducing such glorious bodies, to the same condition as the dirt and rubbish which we trample under our feet. Such powerful patrons are the people of the idols which they set up, whether gods or men. They feel their own weakness to such a degree, as will not suffer them to allow the least inquiry into the nature and qualities of their Idols.

However, let us suppose such a discovery made and published to the world; I think it would in this case have no effect; because one thing is certain, that the true knowledge even of those general laws which take place in the solar system, must always, as it is at present, be confined to a very few, not taking in at a moderate computation the thousandth part of those that are generally reputed learned; and therefore could never banish from the world the notions of planetary influence, and other superstitions depending upon the stars. And if it had not been for the Christian Religion, instead of making use of Eclipses for settling the longitude of places, we should have still been beating drums to relieve the Moon in labour.

This glimmering of light, which had to pass through the dark medium of intricate computation, would soon have been extinguished and overpowered by the clouds that would have been raised to intercept it.

The sophistical reasonings of such as might happen to have a command of language, and a turn of argument suited to the humour of mankind, would have soon got the better of every thing that could have been alledged in favour of  
such

such a system. Tradition, a flight of the imagination, and a certain fanciful art of representing things by similitudes, would make their way very readily to such heads, as shew themselves but ill disposed to follow the steps of a mathematical demonstration. This discovery made its way but slowly, and with difficulty, in an age when mankind seemed to be panting after that kind of knowledge: such a discovery, therefore, in the dark ages of superstition would have vanished, leaving human nature at liberty to resume all its antient superstitions. And even from a view of what at present is called natural philosophy, I see great reason to apprehend that Newton's discoveries will become traditionary tales; the preserving and communicating the principles of them requiring a greater expence of thought than the present age can afford to bestow.

It has also been said that politicians invented Religion; and of course, when they pleased, might have destroyed their own inventions, and extirpated superstition, by letting the world into the secret of the imposition that had been put upon them. It would be just as wise and reasonable to say that they invented hunger and thirst, or any other natural appetites, for all these are equally the gift of nature, and have been, upon occasion, converted by politicians to answer their purposes. They have been *often* able to regulate the modes of gratifying the appetites of hunger and thirst, and legislators have *sometimes* modified superstition, in order to make it, as far as they could, consistent with the good of society; and the little morality, that is sometimes discoverable in the heathen Religion, is probably their work: For a man of himself would never have recourse to supernatural as-

sistance for the regulation of his morals, this being a want that individuals never feel.

But the misfortune is, that legislators and philosophers had no standard for directing themselves in their alterations, had they been never so well disposed, but the good of society, which they all conceived to be consistent with a multitude of the worst kinds of superstition. A legislator might be able, so far to lay the man aside, while he was considering any scheme of policy, as to keep his own weaknesses out of sight; but he had neither knowledge nor authority to go any farther than to modify the superstitions.

If the people were disposed to claim a general indulgence of certain passions, from the example of their gods, the magistrate might so far prevail, as to persuade them that this indulgence was to be confined to a certain time and place, and perhaps carried on in the form of a religious ceremony.

Even if the supreme magistrate had the power of destroying certain superstitions for a time, as he had not the ability to put any thing more rational in their place; a superstition so checked would only undergo a temporary cessation, and after a little while human nature would be the same as before. Thus we find legislators and philosophers attempting to act a part for which they were by no means qualified.

Nor does any thing that they have either said or done, in the least convince me, that they were not themselves extremely superstitious. If he had not told us so himself, one could have hardly been brought to believe, that Lord Herbert, the father of the Deists, and the great reasoning champion that was to destroy the Christian superstition, was a firm believer in the *animation* of the stars: and  
thought



though too acute a reasoner to be fit to be a disciple of Christ, would have made a figure as one of Cleanthes's. And this was his opinion in the only philosophical age that the world has ever seen. So unfair is it to form a judgment of the entire state of the human mind, by a solitary ray of reason issuing from it.

A man by accident may have fallen into some lucky train of thought, which might produce speculations that would raise him not only above the vulgar, but even above himself; and make it become a point of honour with him to keep himself as much as possible above the weaknesses of common men. But when this becomes impracticable, the character must be supported by dissimulation; and it is only in unguarded, or very trying moments, that we lose sight of the philosopher and discover the man; at least he acts his part but indifferently, if he discover himself in his writings. Socrates sacrifices a cock to Esculapius, and by so doing proves himself to be as superstitious as the vulgar.

We go to consult the ancient philosophers, with the same disposition and turn of mind, that the vulgar go to a conjurer: we wish to find them of the same opinion that we ourselves have adopted or wish to establish; and thus contrive to make them deliver us back our own knowledge, and then wonder how they became acquainted with it; concluding that little obscure hints, which we force a meaning upon, that never entered into the heads of the authors, ought to have reformed the whole human race. The pagan philosophers are made to write good morality, and a rational natural Religion, by the same art that Ausonius makes Virgil write obscenity.

The

The Christian Religion has something grand in the very manner that it sets about reforming the world; it makes the attack upon the great mass of the people, who began, supported, and spread the delusions of superstition, and who were entirely out of the reach of philosophic improvement.

The more this subject is examined, the more it will be found, that neither philosophy, nor any kind of human learning could do any thing towards correcting or extirpating the vulgar superstitions, as they could substitute nothing in the room of the superstition to supply its place in the mind. The detection of religious impositions seems to be the only thing likely to stop the progress of superstition. Such discoveries, if very frequent, would run the half-thinkers, and such as had received strong provocation from imposters, into a kind of occasional atheism. And many people of abandoned principles would be glad to creep under such a shelter, where they might indulge their passions without controul. But sober men, and such as took pains to weigh consequences, would see that such inferences were the effects of passion, and not of argument; or that what argument there was, did by no means conclude against religious opinions in general; for they would find that it proved nothing in fact, but that one man would cheat another when he had it in his power: and when the prejudices thus raised were worn away, the same opinions would again prevail as powerfully and extensively as before.

Even those who made objections to the most trifling superstitions, might expect to be answered in the words of Appius Claudius, or to the same purpose: “*Eludant nunc licet religiones. Quid enim est, si pulli non pascentur? Si ex cavea*  
*“ tardius*

“tardius exirent? Si occinuerit avis? Parva sunt  
“hæc: sed parva ista non contemnendo majores  
“nostri maximam hanc rem fecerunt.”

## C H A P. IV.

*Of the Attributes of the Gods.*

THE rule, which I mean to direct myself by, in this argument, is to allow every thing to be of human invention, which mankind can so fully comprehend, that in certain circumstances they would necessarily act the same things over again, without any other information than what a proper exertion of their own faculties would give. Thus, I think, they might have invented language and writing, and several other things which we have good reason to suppose were communicated supernaturally to the first man; because I feel in myself a power of inventing such things; and it seems hardly worth while to dispute whether I could have been put into a situation which would have forced this power to act.

Nor are our notions of the wisdom of God in the least debased by such a concession; for the invention might have taken up more time, if mankind had been left to the exertion of their natural abilities, than was consistent with the circumstances of the world, or the plan which was then carrying on; especially as, by their dispersion afterwards, they had full opportunity of exerting and displaying this part of their abilities.

In the same manner, though God revealed himself to the first man, every thing that was truly supernatural was lost amidst the general corruption which

which ensued ; this introducing as great a confusion among the moral and religious principles of mankind, as was afterwards made in their language, so that nothing but a few insignificant forms remained, analogous to what a common alphabet might be in languages essentially different.

It is true an antiquarian might trace a connection between two nations in some former period, from their making use of a common alphabet, though the languages were totally different. And it might be shewn from sacrifices, and some other customs, that the heathen superstition sprung originally from the first revelation. But as I reason only upon facts that are allowed on all sides, without pretending to establish directly such as are controverted, by unbelievers, I shall allow the whole of the heathen superstition to be of human invention, because they retained nothing but what suited their fancies ; and I can see nothing in it above the power, or more properly, the weakness of man.

The heathens, therefore, would have the making of their own gods ; and I am now to consider the materials that they would probably make use of for this purpose. The character of the gods would be formed according to the prejudices of mankind as to happiness, and the use and occasions which they had for their interpositions.

The gods could not answer the ends of their votaries, unless they were supposed able to do every thing which could be required of them ; having at the same time every advantage which any man could wish for.

They would ascribe powers and faculties to their gods, not by reasoning from effects to causes ; or, in other words, they would not, by considering what  
they

they had done, infer what they might do, but from prejudice and passion; that is, from their own wants and wishes they would give their gods every power and every enjoyment which their own circumstances required, or their most extravagant wishes could suggest. Because, whoever attends to the notions of the vulgar among ourselves (and there was a time when all mankind belonged to that class, in point of understanding) will find that the powers which they conceive to belong to the supernatural beings of their own formation, are such as every one may have been fool enough to wish for in some part of his life: the power of conveying themselves readily from place to place; of rendering themselves invisible and invulnerable; a great capacity of doing mischief, and also of conferring benefits and favours. The witches of the vulgar among us, ride through the air, plunge to the bottom of the sea, and perform other feats of the same kind.

Mankind would make their gods omnipotent in a certain sense; at least the chief of the gods would be so. For the world would never be content with one; though it may be said that the idea of many, supposes first the idea of one: but mankind could never be supposed to rest here, unless a man could be supposed to place his confidence for support and protection in one rather than in a multitude, and prefer a solitary situation to the mirth and jollity of society.

The chief of the gods therefore (for there would undoubtedly be a chief) would have absolute power over gods and men, as far as was consistent with the nature of such *beings*: In short, he could do what Homer allows to Jupiter, or rather what Jupiter takes to himself in the beginning of the  
eighth

eighth book of the Iliad. And I consider Homer as much better authority for the natural and generally received attributes of the gods, than any philosopher whatever; for what this poet delivers was certainly the general opinion upon these subjects; nor is it to be imagined, that an author who has represented his human characters with such propriety, would have done less justice to his gods.

Instead of being at the trouble of going so very high as refined speculations, for discovering the source of the notions, which the heathens had of their gods, it even appears that we shall not be much out of our way, in supposing that they copied them directly from the great and rich men of this world, with such an increase of power as their nature and situation gave them. And if these notions were once established, legislators would labour in vain to remove them, even when they felt their pernicious effects in a society. For as Cato says in Livy, “ Nihil enim in speciem fallacius est quam prava religio; ubi Deorum numen prætenditur sceleribus, subit animum timor, ne fraudibus humanis vindicandis, divini juris aliquid immixtum violemus.” Here it is to be observed, that the wickedness of the action could not be alledged as any proof that it was not committed by their gods; for the stress is not laid upon the *scelus*, but upon the *fraus humana*: if the gods did the wicked action there was no help, nor did they run any hazard of losing their character; or rather from the expression *divini juris*, it seems as if the Romans considered the committing of wicked actions as a part of the privileges of the gods. And so far would this prejudice be carried, that I am persuaded it would be in vain to look for morality as making any part of the character

of the heathen gods. Nor is it probable that Cicero, who was a very religious man, intends any reflection upon Jupiter, when he says of Clodius, with a sneer, that he might call himself Jupiter, because he had his sister for his wife.

It would be impossible for men to live together in society, unless they had the same general notions of morality; and the rules derived from the most obvious and necessary of these, would make the very terms of their union, and which they must agree to preserve inviolate, or ruin would be the consequence; though each individual might, upon occasion, look upon the observance of such rules as a great hardship; and would, in all probability, endeavour to confine the observance of them to as narrow limits as possible: as for instance, first to his own society, regarding himself as excused from the observance of them, when any member of another society was concerned, especially where it could be done with impunity. And notwithstanding this privilege, he would find his morality still too heavy for him, without some farther indulgences: and accordingly he would easily get the better of many scruples where his inferiors were concerned; who would be obliged to yield from a sense of inferiority and want of protection.

This liberty of relaxing his rules of morality, every man would certainly consider as an advantage, and a total exemption of course, he would regard as the greatest privilege; “*Qui nolunt occidere quenquam posse volunt.*” It is not therefore to be imagined, that mankind would degrade their notions of the gods, by annexing to their character such a troublesome thing as morality.

Without

Without passions, according to vulgar conception there could be no enjoyment; and this enjoyment would be confined to the gratification of passions, resembling the most turbulent of their own: and a *Being* who could not indulge his passions, could never come up to the vulgar idea of a god.

A heathen god, therefore, is exempted from being a moral agent strictly speaking, though he might be obliged to conform to some rules among his own fraternity, and be liable to have some demands of gratitude made upon him for the assiduous attendance and respect of mortals. And the system of Epicurus, which I think is absurdly considered as a system of Atheism, is only the refinement and farther prosecution of the same principles, carried indeed so far as to be inconsistent with the very ends of all religion. Laertius commends Epicurus for many virtues, particularly for his piety and devotion towards the gods: in which I can easily conceive he might be sincere, for I see just as good a foundation for his piety, as for his natural philosophy; both of which are only instances of the extravagance and inconsistency of the human mind.

We may therefore hold it for a rule, that while the power of the gods remained unquestionable, their morality would never be inquired into. And borrowing all their notions from the same source, men would very naturally ascribe to the gods all the capricious foibles of the rich and powerful. And to this purpose, there is a remarkable passage in Valerius Maximus; it is the reflection which he makes upon the religious exercises of the Romans, which they performed after the battle of Cannæ,  
in



in the following words: “*Qua quidem constantia*  
“*obtinendæ religionis, magnus injectus est cœ-*  
“*lestibus rubor ulterius adversus eam sæviendi*  
“*gentem; quæ ne injuriarum quidem acerbitate*  
“*ab eorum cultu absterreri poterat.*” And when we add concerning this boasted devotion, that a part of it, as we learn from Livy, consisted in the sacrifice of two men and two women, it will not greatly raise our notions of the morality of the heathen gods.

And this will enable us to account for a wonderful circumstance in the heathen creed, namely, that the most devout never supposed their own moral actions could influence their deities. Politicians and moralists made many attempts to graft something of morality upon the common superstitions, but the stock was so unnatural, that it never produced any fruit. Their priests told them that they must sacrifice such a victim, which must be killed in such a place; in such a manner, and with such a knife; but not a word is to be found of their promising them the favour of the gods, if they repented of their sins, and led better lives.

Now this being the character of the gods, and as men chuse to have as many friends as possible among the great, so a number of divinities would be the wish of the multitude; and the number of the gods would be also increased, according to the notion which they had of their power and dignity; some offices would be too mean and inconsistent with the rank of some gods, which is very evident from the heathen *mythology*; and likewise they would increase their number, not chusing to overload them with a multiplicity of affairs, which might distract their attention, or interrupt them in the course of their pleasures or amusements.

Abſurd as theſe notions may appear to be, and certainly are, whoever examines human nature attentively, will nevertheless ſee reaſon to think them juſt. We who have the advantage of the light diſfuſed through the world by the Chriſtian Religion, form a very wrong eſtimate of the human character upon ſuch ſubjects as theſe; and will not allow ourſelves to ſee into half its weakneſſes; for where fear and uncertainty both take place and aſſault the mind, it is aſtoniſhing what idiots mankind are, and what extravagant imaginations they will adopt for truth. Nothing but the Chriſtian Religion can, or ought, to drive ſuch phantoms from the minds of men. Human nature wants their aid, impotent as they are; nor can any degree of knowledge, which we are capable of acquiring naturally, ſupply their place. And I am well perſuaded that many of the heathens, even the wiſeſt of them, were really in earneſt, when it has been ſuppoſed that they were acting a part, and humouring the vulgar. The vulgar, which properly ſpeaking, includes every body, and who have been the inſtruments of making and unmaking all the idols in the world, according as they have been inſtructed or miſſed. So that a knowledge which was not in ſome way or other ſuited to their capacity, could bring about no great revolution or reformation in human affairs. The opinions of the philoſophers were only a cloak to conceal their ignorance; and if they were able to ſupport an opinion of greater knowledge, this was all that they deſired: Real knowledge was never communicated by mankind in the form of myſtery; when we have made a real diſcovery, we are even anxious that all the world ſhould know it.

When

When the Christian Religion had entirely destroyed the heathen gods, the different sects of philosophers joined in the triumph, particularly the Epicureans, and seem to put on an appearance of independence, by new modelling their systems, with the assistance of this light.

The human mind is not capable of receiving such contradictions, as that a thing should be longer and shorter at the same time than another thing; but it is very capable of reconciling the reasonings of Plato, or even of Epicurus, with the gods of the vulgar.

From the light which we have got at present, we may be able to shew, that many things are absurd and inconsistent, two of which ought not to be believed at the same time; yet it will by no means follow that they were not both universally believed. If you invent philosophic principles, which in their consequences ought to destroy certain superstitions, the hopes and fears of mankind, and perhaps your own hopes and fears, will bid defiance to the consequences.

Even while a man is labouring to overturn one species of superstition, he may not have leisure to consider, what other kinds he is exposing himself to if he succeed. And if he were asked, supposing his work compleated, what he meant to substitute in its stead? He might be very much puzzled with consequences, whether he answered something or nothing.

The truth is, the faculties and circumstances of men require something, and no one has a right or authority to substitute his visions in preference to those of others; or if they were substituted, they would be but new modes of superstition, it being above human power to apply the proper remedy to this infirmity.

## C H A P. V.

*Of the Religious Principles of the Jews.*

THE account, which has been here given of the religious opinions of mankind, will be found to be agreeable to experience, as far as the nature of this argument requires, without any exception, speaking of bodies of men or nations, but the people of the Jews; and probably upon a nearer inspection, even they will serve to confirm this reasoning, at the same time that they stand an exception to the conclusion drawn from it.

I have considered such opinions as flowing naturally from the joint operation of our faculties and circumstances in this world, and consequently incapable of reformation by any human power, though it is the very nature of such opinions to be unstable, and variable, and continually shifting from one absurdity to another. And the probabilities, possibilities, inconsistencies, contradictions, and imaginary principles of the different sects of philosophers, were least of all likely to fix the opinions of mankind. If the Jews had dealt in the same kind of principles, even if the whole nation had equalled the refinement of the most acute philosophers, I never should have thought it necessary to consider them as a distinct class of men from the rest of the world.

But we find among the Jews a positive assertion, that there is only one God, the Creator, the Maker, the Preserver of every thing: Eternal as to his duration; Omnipotent as to his power; and essentially present every where: lording it  
over

over every thing according to his will and pleasure, yet executing every thing according to infinite power, wisdom, goodness and justice: No respecter of persons, but, without caprice or partiality, rewarding every one according to his deeds. Not even the possibility, much less the slightest probability of the interference, or the existence of any other god is allowed in the Jewish scheme of Religion.

But do these sublime, and as I may call them, unnatural truths, appear to be the fruits of the speculations and observations of this people? By no means, quite the contrary: for every circumstance in their history confirms us in a different opinion. Nay, so far was this from being a natural sentiment, that it required very extraordinary, or rather supernatural means, to impress them with it at first, and preserve it among them afterwards, even when delivered as the most important of all truths.

And indeed, so remarkably singular did their opinions and behaviour appear to those who contented themselves with a superficial view of the Jewish policy, that they could hardly believe the Jews to be of the same species with the rest of mankind. And this seems to have been the opinion of every nation who knew them, founded upon that unfociable disposition, which made it impossible for them to incorporate with the rest of mankind.

Antiquity was well acquainted with their opinions and character, as far as they chose to inform themselves, or rather as far as their prejudices would suffer them to receive information. And it was not for want of opportunity, but because they had not abilities to comprehend it, that such a pure system of *Theism*, or what has been absurdly called

natural Religion, had no effect towards curing the antients of their superstitions. Nay, the rest of mankind received the principles and pretensions of the Jews not with a bare indifference, much less with the spirit of philosophers, but with the most absurd and malignant interpretation, which the most outrageous prejudice could invent.

Nor is this by any means to be wondered at, according to the view of the subject which I have taken, but is rather to be expected, since such opinions proceeded from nothing in human nature, and consequently must have been unintelligible to those who trusted entirely to that for their guide. Such of the antients as might be disposed to examine them, would consider opinions so very different from their own, as the effect of some capricious humour in this people; and instead of regarding the positive and consistent nature of this Religion, as the marks of a conviction derived from extraordinary evidence, they would suppose it the fruits of an obstinate temper, which led them to contradict the Reason, Feelings, and Religion of the rest of mankind. And measuring every thing by their own unsettled notions, the best established truths would appear the most unreasonable.

The patrons of what is called natural Religion, ought to read with astonishment those parts of Tacitus in which he treats with the greatest indifference, or rather contempt, the religious opinions of the Jews. This man of a philosophic turn of mind, gives the following account of the Jewish Religion; “*Judæi (says he) mente sola,*  
 “*unumque numen intelligunt. Profanos qui*  
 “*Deum imagines, mortalibus materiis, in spe-*  
 “*cjem hominis effingunt. Summum illud et*  
 “*æternum,*

“ æternum, neque mutabile neque interiturum.  
“ Igitur nulla simulacra urbibus suis, nedum  
“ templis sunt.” And the reason which he gives for their adopting these simple and elevated notions so worthy of the Deity, and so agreeable to right reason, shew the powerful effects of prejudice over the minds of men of the greatest abilities; and that all men, when carried beyond the little circle of their knowledge, are as it were carried back to their infant state, with this only difference, that they have lost their teachable disposition.

The heathen deities, according to Tacitus, are not forsaken by the Jews, upon any rational conviction of the falsity and absurdity of idolatry and superstition: for it seems they had no better reason to induce them to change their religious opinions, and take up those just now mentioned (which this author seems to look upon, as a kind of Atheism) than this, that Moses advises them to forsake both gods and men, because they themselves were abandoned by both. For he adds, “ Plurimi auctores  
“ consentiunt, ut orta per Ægyptum tabe quæ  
“ corpora sceleret, regem Ocharin, adito Ham-  
“ monis oraculo, remedium petentem, purgare  
“ regnum; et id genus hominum, ut invisum  
“ diis, alias in terras avehere iussum. Sic conquæ-  
“ situm collectumque vulgus, postquam vallis  
“ locis relictum sit, ceteris per lacrymas torpen-  
“ tibus, Mosén, unum exulum, monuisse ne  
“ quam deorum hominumve opem expectarent,  
“ ab utrisque deserti, sed sibimet ut duci cœlesti  
“ crederent, primo cujus auxilio credentes, pre-  
“ sentes miseras pepulissent.”

According to this account it might be expected, that Moses would either abolish all religious cere-

monies, and establish a nation of Atheists, or else take such measures as would put all things in readiness for his own *Apotheosis*. However, this it seems was not the case; for he adds, “Moses  
 “quo sibi in posterum gentem firmaret, novos  
 “ritus, contrariosque cæteris mortalibus indidit.  
 “Profana illic omnia quæ apud nos sacra. Rursum  
 “concessa apud illos quæ nobis incesta.”

Here we see, in as clear a manner as words can express it, that this author, though one of the acutest of antiquity, has no conception of the truth, simplicity, and sublimity of the Jewish Religion; but imagines that it was the invention of a man, not even himself convinced of its truth, nor sensible of its purity and sublimity: who adopted it not from reason, or plausibility, or any intrinsic merit or fitness in the opinions themselves to answer any ends which he might have in view; but he adopted them from a spirit of contradiction, in a splenetic humour, merely out of opposition to other nations, who held the Jews in detestation for these very principles. Which makes it highly improbable that the heathens could have shaken off their idolatry and superstition, by the assistance of any natural means, even by the greatest degree of cultivation of which the human faculties are capable without supernatural assistance: for the man who first did it would have been regarded as a person of a despicable and abandoned character: As the same author says, speaking of the same people, and the same religious principles, that it was only the most profligate and unprincipled who adopted such opinions. “Nam pessimus quisque, spretis religionibus patriis, tributa et stipēs illuc congregabant.” And again, “Transgressi in morem eorum, idem usurpant,  
 “ nec



“ nec quidquam prius imbuuntur quam contem-  
“ nere deos, &c.” So that we find this con-  
tempt of the gods constantly insisted on, as the  
circumstance upon which the chief stress is laid:  
and it appears of itself of such weight, as to de-  
termine this author to conclude that those, who  
became converts to such opinions, were lost to  
every thing that is good.

Tacitus, perhaps, might have been able to ac-  
commodate his reason to the principles of Epicu-  
rus, and think that he was paying a compliment  
to the gods, by taking the government of the  
world out of their hands; but his prejudices  
could not bear that contempt of them, which is  
the very first step to a proper knowledge of the  
true God. But here some pert infidel will be apt  
to interrupt me, by asking, can I believe that a po-  
litician so very acute could be liable to so much  
weakness? Why not: when this very same poli-  
tician has given us a proof of the most contempti-  
ble weakness, besides shewing himself to be a slave  
to the lowest vulgar prejudice, in his pretence to  
assign a cause for the length of our days in sum-  
mer. And the same excuse for his absurdity would  
serve upon both subjects; namely, that he was  
ignorant of the true principles of Religion and  
Astronomy.

Those who had nothing but the common su-  
perficial observation to direct them, and who  
looked at the Jews through such a thick mist of  
prejudice, had no other conclusion to draw, but  
that they were a different species from the rest of  
the human race. And yet if we turn to their  
history, as we have it authentic in the Bible, they  
will appear to be the same kind of men with the  
rest of the world, yet deserving the most serious  
attention of all mankind.

In

In this history, it is easy to be seen that they are exactly of the same disposition with the rest of the world, and at least as prone to idolatry as their neighbours; because it requires supernatural efforts frequently repeated to bring them to a sense of their situation, which they never rightly understood, and to preserve those important truths communicated to them, and which they were to be the means of preserving, and communicating to the world at a time appointed. Nay, those who will read with care, the awful threatnings, and actual interpositions of heaven, must be surpris'd to find that they had no greater effect; as they were, by no means, sufficient for keeping this nation from falling into all the idolatrous and superstitious practices of their neighbours.

Nor was it the mere vulgar only who had occasion to be thus restrained; but the very wisest of all their kings falls into the same snare; which, besides proving many other things, clears this plan of all suspicion of human contrivance; as one of its greatest visible supporters as a king and an inspired writer, deserts his charge, and falls in with the abominations of the nations.

The great and constant care taken to keep the Jews from mixing with strangers, and that even this was often ineffectual, proves how natural the grossest kinds of superstition are to the human mind. When it is seen that the immediate presence of the Deity in signs and wonders, and exemplary punishments, could not keep this people to right principles, and preserve them from the infection of idolatry. And surely this is sufficient to prove that proper notions of God and his attributes, are beyond the power of man to attain to, by any effort of his own; or even if they were delivered

to him as the truths of natural Religion, that his circumstances and his passions, would be leading him daily to pervert and corrupt them.

In affairs which come properly within our power, mankind make a very respectable figure: there is a progress and variety in the world as to government, arts, and sciences; even human actions and events are connected together, and follow consequentially, leading from small and insensible beginnings, to such conclusions and improvements, as could never have been expected or imagined. Here the human race shew that they have been in action, and that what has been done, must have been the work of time and opportunity; the employment of many hands, and the invention of many heads. But when we turn to the subject of Religion, we even discover a barrenness of invention, and a poverty of imagination, and instead of variety and connexion, a number of dull, senseless, detached conceits, which might have been the conception of a moment, and the simultaneous production of a distempered imagination. Human nature seems so completely exhausted by the birth of such a *monster*, that she has no farther power to provide for this offspring of hers, than by bestowing upon it some of the worst of her own passions.

THE END OF THE FIRST BOOK.

B O O K

## B O O K II.

*Containing a Philosophical Estimate of the Situation and Circumstances of Men, as to temporal Advantages, by considering them as under the Protection, though Subject to the arbitrary Disposal of God.*

## C H A P. I.

*The Idea of this Book.*

**A** Philosophical inquiry may be carried on upon different principles, and with a view to answer different ends.

The question may be, Is the effect an adequate measure for the cause assigned, so that in subjects of computation the one may be substituted for the other? And whenever this can be shewn to be the case, I conceive the discovery to be within the reach of the human faculties. But it is to be observed, before this can be done with propriety, that the cause must be such as can produce that effect only, and neither one greater or less; that is, the cause must exhaust itself in the effect, and cannot avoid exhausting itself, otherwise it would be impossible to draw any certain conclusions. To prove supernatural things to be cause and effect in this manner, would be to destroy all distinction between natural and supernatural events: as the effects produced

duced would not be the voluntary act of any agent, but would follow necessarily from some determinate system of things: and then, the discovery of any such operations ought not to be considered as a revelation, seeing it would depend upon the accidental or intentional placing the cause in the situation proper for producing its effects.

A certain quantity of water will move a certain machine; the resistance of the machine is a proper measure for the force of the water: a certain space of ground produces a certain quantity of grain; the quantity of grain is a measure for the fruitful force of the ground, and so in other instances. Such discoveries increase the powers of man, and give him a kind of command over nature, by putting him in a certain degree into a state of independence. And this makes us wish to reduce every thing to this kind of knowledge, being in hopes of acquiring, as it were, a little dominion of our own, where we might have nothing to fear but mechanical causes and their necessary consequences.

A little experimenting philosopher, by drawing a few sparks from an *electrical machine*, takes up the conceit that he has disarmed heaven of its thunder, and thinks the most prudent thing the world can do is to renounce the protection of God, and put themselves under his. If we were careful to make a proper estimate of our knowledge, we would stifle in their birth, a number of such little, impious conceits, which are produced by the force of novelty instead of demonstration. For as far as my experience reaches, I find knowledge despised in proportion to its certainty. Whether it be that the human imagination must have something to work upon, and would be entirely out of its element in a state of certainty,

certainty, or whether it arises from a restlessness of mind, which will not suffer us to be contented in any condition. However this may be, it is my opinion, that, if we were rendered independent of all the *material* agents in the universe, there is fuel enough in the human passions to set the world in a flame, and disturb the peace of individuals and whole societies.

But the very serious part which every one feels he has assigned him, joined to the small progress which has been made in tracing effects to their real causes, obliges us to give up such conceits of independence, and view the universe in a very different light from a machine, which may be taken to pieces, and put together again by human power, or even by human imagination. And this sense of our weakness, gives rise to another kind of philosophical inquiry, which directly adds nothing to our command over nature, but rather shews us how dependent we are: and is particularly useful for giving us a command over ourselves, and especially necessary for our circumstances and situation in the world.

This inquiry does not consist in an attempt to discover the causes of things, so as to measure the causes and effects by each other; but rather, taking the facts as we find them, without inquiring into the mode of making things, to content ourselves with forming a character of the cause or causes that produced them: and this is all that can be done when the cause is a free agent: because a designing intelligent cause can never be investigated to perfection by its effects. To pretend that it can produce nothing but what it has produced, and must produce at stated times; or such things as follow by way of natural consequence, destroys every idea of design or intelligence, unless we  
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should suppose the cause so impotent as to have its effects counteracted by the nature of things, or the power of man ; and thus confined to certain limits, and a certain manner of acting. But instead of pretending to comprehend the *Supreme Being* in this manner, a man will often find occasion to repent of his rashness, in being too confident that he could thus comprehend his fellow-creatures.

We may examine whether, to the best of our apprehension, there is that consistency among the things of this world, that they can stand together as parts of the same plan ; and also whether they have such a harmony with the feelings and faculties of mankind, as to create in us a great degree of pleasure : for if this be true, it ought to lead us to conclude, that we were not overlooked in the contrivance of this mighty fabric of the universe. However, we ought constantly to keep in mind, what almost every thing tends to teach us, that our business in this world is not to look for palaces, but to seek for shelter from the storm which the turbulence of our passions, and the weakness of our understanding have raised.

To be obliged to live in a world with every thing contradicting our senses and feelings, if it failed to produce idiotism, would be a state of absolute torment ; though to other *beings* of a different species, every thing might appear to be disposed according to the greatest wisdom and regularity. Our opinions, therefore, upon such a subject as the attributes of God when in such circumstances, though they would be melancholy truths to us, yet would they be relative to our views and sensations, rather than to the real nature of things, and might lead us to fix a general character upon the Author of nature which he did not deserve.

Nay,

Nay, if we were only ignorant of our *original* and *destination*, many things might be disagreeable to us as sensible creatures, which would appear to be wise and good, when the ends which they were to answer came to be known and understood. And all this might depend upon our being *arbitrarily* placed in certain circumstances, which could neither be foreseen nor inferred from any thing, having no other cause but the bare sovereign will and pleasure of the Author of nature.

And this consideration takes the subject entirely out of our hands, and reduces us to the character and office of *spectators*, who can only take such a view of the universe as it has pleased God to present to us, and indulge us with faculties to comprehend. And the great probability that this is true, ought to convince us that any system which we can build, would rest upon too sandy a foundation to give us the least encouragement to be confident or dogmatical. A sensible creature fixing absolute truth, is the man with his candle examining the sun-dial to discover the hour of the night.

In the last book I have observed how unfit we are naturally, from our passions and circumstances; even to form a character of the causes which produce the different effects in this world, particularly such as more immediately concern ourselves. The gods into whose hands the heathens delivered up the government of the universe, are imaginary and impotent, and their characters immoral, contradictory and absurd; and yet in certain circumstances, such is the weakness of human nature, the wisest men put themselves under their protection.

Mankind are disposed in speculation to extend their reason very far, but in practice they always contract



contract it to its natural and narrow limits ; and upon the most important and pressing occasions abandon it entirely. We may be trusted with the choice of our food, or to settle the proportions and dimensions of our habitations ; but we require a supernatural direction and information, when our own character, and that of the Supreme Being, is the subject of our consideration. And as God has condescended to reveal to us both his own character and ours, in as far as we are concerned, it will be much to our comfort and advantage, to take a view of ourselves and the universe, assisted by this new light. But as a gradual emergence from our natural darkness, seems to agree better with our faculties, and will shock our prejudices less than a sudden fall into broad day-light, I propose in this book to consider the general revealed character of God, and the real positive, present and temporal advantages which we enjoy by being under the protection, though subject to the government, and left to the arbitrary disposal of God. And although the fact and truth will remain the same, whatever may be the result of our speculations, yet if we see reason to be content with our situation, and discover rational grounds for future hopes, the change will be very considerable in ourselves, as such meditations will prepare the mind for receiving the evidence of the Christian Religion with less prejudice ; and are besides of wonderful service for enabling a man to regulate his own imaginations, which, if not restrained within proper bounds, are capable, in certain circumstances, of doing infinite mischief to himself and the world, whether he acts the Atheist or the Enthusiast.

## C H A P. II.

*Containing some general Observations upon the Manner in which it has pleased God to reveal himself to the World.*

WE find in the history of the Jews, that they were taught to believe in one God only, who is represented as the Creator and Preserver of the whole Universe, infinitely powerful, wise, good and just, acting through all ages and every where without restraint or controul. But we find at the same time, that these principles were not discovered or communicated to the Jewish nation, in the same manner as we are taught or discover such things as human reason and ingenuity, aided by the common appearances and accidents of the world, may discover, invent, and communicate.

It is delivered as a fact by Moses, that God had revealed himself to him, in a manner, which conveyed an information to his mind, of the same kind as that which one man receives from another by words, to distinguish it from that kind of knowledge which we acquire consequentially. It is true the rest of the Jews were kept at a greater distance; and yet they were not left to general consequential reasoning; and therefore Moses does not prepare them to expect arguments only in the way of scientific inference, as proofs of his assertions; but to look for a full and sensible confirmation of them in the signs and wonders which were to be exhibited; which would be suited to, and demonstrative, of the character which God had assumed to himself. And the whole Jewish policy

lity may be regarded as contrived by God, on purpose to give a proper display of his character to mankind. And in the course of the history of the Israelites, we have his unity, power, wisdom, goodness and justice asserted and proved by facts; but chiefly that he has a will, or is a free agent in the most extensive sense of the word, acting by no necessity either of nature or principle, but according to his own sovereign will and pleasure.

When the Jews neglected or disregarded those important truths, their attention was not called to the common arguments of reason to convince them of their mistake, or as grounds for censuring and punishing them for their neglect; but their passions were applied to and alarmed by signs and wonders addressed immediately to their senses. The power of God was not left to reach their minds as it might appear in argumentative consequences, from the general plan of the world, but was majestically exhibited to their senses, and by them conveyed directly to their minds by an occasional exertion of his almighty power. And these were so frequent, and so well established among this people, as to form a regular habit of thinking, in the same manner as our education leads us to wish for a certain habitual form of argument upon which we have been taught to ground our conviction. The Jews sought after a sign, just as naturally as the Greeks expected systematical reasoning.

And notwithstanding what has been said to the contrary, such an evidence as this which the Jews received seems absolutely necessary; for the present world which is at enmity with God could furnish nothing adequate to this purpose. For properly speaking, it was such arguments as tend to prove that there are gods which misled mankind, for they

never seem to have been blind to the common arguments of natural Religion. It was the existence of one God only, with a particular character, of which they needed to be informed and convinced : and this conviction human reason, fettered as we find it by human passions, and blinded by prejudices, never could attain to, nor indeed even bear it after it was discovered, as appears remarkably in the case of the Jews, who have it forced upon them by irresistible evidence contrary to their inclinations. God's dealings with them is not to bring them to a conviction or belief, that there are some god or gods; but to cure them, and the whole world by their example, of that natural propensity which all mankind have to idolatry. " I am the Lord, and there is none else," is the doctrine constantly insisted on : and that this doctrine is true, is proved to them by signs and wonders : that as they were convinced by the appearances of nature, and their own sensations and reflections, that there must be gods, or active and intelligent natures, producing, directing, and influencing the things of this world, whom for want of information they endued with passions fitted to the grossness of their own conceptions and wishes, so the only possible means by which this prejudice could be removed, would be by exhibiting a stronger evidence in proof that there was but one God of such a particular character.

And it is this character which mankind dislike, as they can have no prospect of indulging their passions, or gratifying their particular evil humours while the government of the universe is in such hands. The heathens heard with pleasure every story in which their gods were represented as capricious, and without morality. We have a  
dread

dread of perfection from a consciousness of our own infirmity: and provided he had sufficient power to protect us, we would place ourselves under the government of a man subject to passions like our own, instead of chusing a perfect character, who would curb our passions, and be a critique upon our conduct.

The Supreme Being may be considered in the plan of Religion, as creating a new world, and exhibiting it for the inspection, information, and conviction of mankind, upon a subject to which they are naturally so averse, and in which they alone of all this lower creation are any way interested. A world in which this nation of the Jews were at first to be the principal actors, strongly supported and carried through all dangers and difficulties; and these not such as fall in the way of the generality of mankind; but which this people were evidently led into for a particular purpose. And yet every thing yields before them, without almost any effort of their own, or rather to efforts which, according to the regular course of human affairs, were totally inadequate to the purposes intended and the effects produced.

But this world of Religion is not made after the model of the natural world, which came completely into being at once *by the word of his power*; and as soon as God had said *let there be light*, all its parts were fit for the inspection of men. Religion has a gradual progress, proceeding from small and obscure beginnings, and growing up to perfection by degrees, which shews that God can perform his work slowly and in time, as well as instantaneously; and this work is not yet prepared for human comprehension, being a plan that the angels desire to exercise their speculations upon.

The reasonings from final causes and the fitness of things, as exhibited in the material world, will give us no information upon this subject, even if the plans were entirely similar; unless one could say, that a man by reading the history of the Jews, was qualified to write the history of England without any other materials. It is true the general attributes of power, wisdom and goodness, are deeply marked in what exists, and is exhibited to us every day; but, unless we could be satisfied with the present moment, we are left to guess and conjecture about our future condition. And the wisest of the heathens furnish us full proof how distant these guesses and conjectures would be from the real matter of fact.

The arguments for a providence and the final causes of things, is as full in Cicero's book *De natura Deorum*, as can be desired; and it does not appear to me, setting aside what has been borrowed from revelation, that any thing really new has been added to the argument since: and therefore some people have imagined, from the conviction that they themselves have found from this reasoning, that many important questions might be determined and finally settled among mankind, independent of revelation.

But they ought to have drawn a quite contrary conclusion: for as these arguments in fact did not settle the opinions of the antients upon such subjects, they should have rather inferred that such arguments of themselves are incapable of fixing the opinions of men.

We deceive ourselves upon such questions: the mind is wonderfully prepared by revelation to listen with attention, and I may even say with prejudice to this argument, and a conviction, which

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if accurately traced to its source, will be found to spring from revelation, we are very well disposed to consider as produced by an effort of our own understanding, and this is a weakness which the infidels themselves are particularly subject to.

It is the antients alone who could feel the force of such arguments, uninfluenced by any other principles : and Cicero owns that they never produced a solid and determinate conviction, either in himself or any of his cotemporaries, upon the most important and necessary points : for their minds were bewildered amidst probabilities and absurdities ; which left them to chuse not what was true, but what was most probable or least absurd. And as they had no facts to build upon, they were forced to share the designs and contrivances of the affairs of this world, and the preservation and regulation of things among a number of *divinities*.

The Christian Religion, if it has not every where made mankind believers, yet it has extinguished idolatry and superstition, in the antient sense of these words, wherever it has been received. And this makes a material difference between us and the heathens, even when we are examining the same question, by the same light, and upon the same principles, because many prejudices are removed out of our way, which they found it impossible to conquer. And therefore revelation, whether true or false, has been of great service to the world, and even to the infidels themselves, for which they ought to make proper acknowledgements, by leaving them only a single prejudice to combat, instead of such a multitude as presented themselves to an infidel in the ages of idolatry ; instead of the labours of Hercules, they have got things reduced to the wish of Caligula.

## C H A P. III.

*Of the Power of God.*

**T**HE first thing which we find ascribed to God, is a creative power. He made every thing out of nothing, not in the way of natural generation, nor as a cause produces its effects, so that in the same circumstances the same effects must necessarily be produced; or in other words, not by the ministry of second causes; but he made every thing, as it is expressed, by the word of his power. This expression, though it does not teach us how to make a world, yet appears to me highly proper for correcting those errors which we naturally fall into upon this subject. For it conveys to us very distinctly the idea, that the making of the universe was an arbitrary act, and not performed from necessity, nor according to any eternal relations, so as to be a work of contrivance in fitting and adjusting means to ends; but that the things and their relations came into existence together: or more accurately, perhaps, that the relations were posterior to the things. It seems to me impious to suppose that there were laws of gravitation, and that God placed and adjusted the material worlds according to those laws. I know the general prejudices and habits of mankind are against this opinion; because this is a power of which we can have no experimental proof, and for this reason the thing itself is beyond human conception, and consequently the notion itself is not likely to be of human invention.

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But this power of creation, though it can make and destroy ourselves and every thing else, is not what is apt to fill the mind with the greatest dread and terror; because we are not sufficiently acquainted with it, or its operations, to derive matter of fear from them. Yet in the operations of natural things, we meet with such constant exertions of destructive power, as might be sufficient to drive to distraction such a *being* as man, so sensible of his situation, and so liable to accidents. And therefore we may naturally imagine that this attribute of God, would be the first to make a deep impression upon mankind. We may make our first notions upon this subject, more rational and consistent with the other parts of the character of the Supreme Being, but we can scarcely enlarge them so as to make this attribute of power an object of greater terror. Man is a timorous animal, and in his fright will give up or acknowledge any thing. The truth is, that even to the most rational courage, and the best informed understanding, the notion of irresistible power must be terrible, and without some alleviation, would be inconsistent with every idea of happiness.

#### C H A P. IV.

##### *Of the Wisdom of God.*

**W**E shall now consider the most natural and obvious method which the mind can probably take to ease itself of those dreadful apprehensions in the most effectual manner, which the discovery of an infinite power, acting only with such materials as are to be found in the universe (to say nothing

nothing of the unlimited power of creating others) would necessarily occasion to a creature so sensible of its situation as man is known to be : a creature who not only feels in the moment of danger, but who has the impression of the past, and the dread of the future, strongly imprinted on his mind : whose hopes and fears keep his mind in such a constant agitation, as can only be rendered tolerable, either by sinking into a stupid insensibility, or by rational meditation upon his situation and circumstances.

Now it seems natural to imagine, that those men whose faculties were sufficiently acute to perceive the full effort of that power which is discoverable in the visible operations of the universe, would exert their ingenuity, and apply their observation, to find out in what manner this power produced its effects ; whether at random, or according to any regular method, from which something like fixed rules might be formed.

If they found any reason to suspect that there was no harmony among the things of the material world, we may easily conceive the state of their minds, by recollecting our own condition and feelings when in situations where we are liable to accidents from things that we apprehend to be acting at random. For if the terror which a single instance produces be so unsupportable ; how dreadful must it be if we were so situated with regard to every thing.

And yet, could it only once be perceived, that this power acts according to fixed rules, whatever those rules might be ; and although in many situations we were more certain of our destruction than if we knew no such rules ; if we could only be pretty confident of our safety in some others,  
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the very consideration, that things are governed by fixed laws, will afford a satisfaction to the mind which cannot be had from more favourable, but more uncertain circumstances. And this makes many people wish to be exposed to the blows of blind fate, who, they think, can only strike according to the laws of matter and motion, than to put themselves, with resignation, under the direction of a powerful, intelligent being, who may reasonably punish them for their offences.

Farther, if it should appear that things are not only fixed to a certain degree, but that the laws by which the appearances of the universe are regulated, are in a kind of active state, extending their tendency beyond the immediate effects produced; that is, that such a thing is done for the sake of something to be done afterwards, or in consequence of something that has been done before, so as to furnish us with the notion of contrivance, this immediately leads us to an intelligent cause or causes: and a farther examination into the manner according to which these means are made to bring about their ends, will suggest different degrees of wisdom, according as the means seem to be more or less fitted for answering their particular ends.

Now, if this wisdom should appear to be infinite, we have then got a rational and proper balance for an infinite power; and must conclude that the whole of this power will be put into action, and made to produce the best effects possible; and that we have nothing to fear from blind fate, or the ungovernable nature of things, because these can do nothing against infinite power directed by infinite wisdom.

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It is true, it is impossible for us to reach to a knowledge of infinite wisdom, though we have sufficient instances before our eyes of astonishing degrees of power and wisdom, displayed in the general structure of the world, the regular motions of the heavenly bodies; and the means made use of to preserve the brittle and complicated parts of animal bodies, together with their formation, furnish astonishing instances of wisdom to the attentive and rational observer: and the connection and dependence which the things have upon each other, exhibit demonstrative marks of a plan. This view of the universe would certainly lead our minds up to God, were we not so strongly connected with this world from our earliest infancy.

For, first, we are connected with the inanimate parts of the creation by our bodies, which, in many respects, are subject to the same laws that the grossest parts of matter obey; a human body, and a log of wood, fall from the top of a precipice exactly in the same manner; and many such laws as this we are very well acquainted with, before we are capable of any very deep reflection. Self-preservation, the idea of which is so strongly implanted in our nature, will not suffer us to delay the acquiring a knowledge of the most obvious and necessary properties of matter, until we can be certain that this knowledge is derived from proper principles. And, secondly, we are connected with the material world by our passions, the most turbulent and craving of which have their gratification in the enjoyment of earthly things; and the ravenous nature of some passions prevents any nice discernment in the choice of such gratifications.

On the other hand, we are connected with heaven immediately only by our reason, and but remotely by our passions; and after habits acquired by an uniform experience have given us a conviction, or rather a confidence (for there is no argument in the case) of the stability of the laws of nature, even before the use of reason; and when the experimental gratification of the passions by sensible things, have led us to consider spiritual gratifications as unsubstantial, or perhaps visionary, reason has too hard a task, when set to combat such habits and prejudices. A man who has such strong conviction of the stability and certainty of the things of this present world, cannot readily fall in with the thoughts of a new heaven and a new earth. And nothing but a clear and positive revelation can conquer such natural prejudices, by exhibiting greater rewards and punishments as a consequence of our behaviour in what concerns the other world. And as remote and distant prospects affect us but little, how admirably are these promises and threatenings brought forward by the uncertainty of death; for to the man of understanding they are always present, as every moment may be his last.

If any one should think that it might have been better not to have the material world governed by such fixed laws, and that a succession of new things would have exhibited more wisdom and power than to bring back the same things in a constant rotation. Probably there are beings to whose faculties such a scene might be suited, but we enjoy great advantages by having the inanimate parts of the creation subject to very fixed laws. For even the dead and inactive parts of matter, from the very circumstance of their being  
dead

dead and inactive, discover wonderful contrivance; when it is considered how by this means they are fitted for the convenience of animals, and especially of man.

It requires time and attention to get acquainted with the nature and disposition of animals; nor, when once discovered, is it always the same; for they are sometimes mischievous, and sometimes harmless: or if the nature of all animals was as difficult to know as that of man, this world would be uninhabitable or intolerable.

What a condition should we be in, if we were doubtful, after a thousand experiments, whether we might thrust our hand into the fire or the water with most safety, upon a well-grounded apprehension, that they might have changed their nature since our last experience of their qualities.

But all our knowledge that is properly our own acquisition, is founded in habits which it is impossible to form, but by presenting the same things again and again to our observation. And when we consider what a wonderful harmony, what a beautiful and magnificent scene this universe presents to us, and how nicely all its parts are balanced by the single law of gravitation, a design sufficiently extensive presents itself to our view, though the same appearances are repeatedly exhibited to us, yet not oftener than is necessary for the instruction of such a frail and transitory creature as man. And the farther consideration, that the law of this gravitation regulates the motion of the planets, and also of the comets, which make so large a circuit, and pass over a kind of immensity of space, furnishes a beautiful argument to our purpose; the operations being carried on upon a scale sufficiently large to enable us, upon seeing  
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the motions of the bodies that come within our observation, so nicely adjusted, and the harmony, order, and dependence of the parts of so large a system preserved, to assent with reason as well as faith to those sublime expressions of *Scripture*, in which those attributes of power and wisdom are revealed; such appearances being a *sensible*, intelligible, beautiful, and pertinent commentary upon Revelation.

And thus the power of God, though infinite, acting upon matter according to fixed laws, and such as discover infinite wisdom and contrivance, loses, by that circumstance alone, much of the terror which it would otherwise occasion to such a creature as man.

## C H A P. V.

### *Of the Goodness of God.*

**T**HE sentiments, which naturally arise in our minds, upon considering the power of the Supreme Being as infinite, even when moderated, and all the terrors of them as it were subdued by the reflection, that this power is directed by wisdom equally uncontrouled and unlimited, would nevertheless be mixed with much of dread, before a conviction that we ourselves are so particularly the objects of God's regard, that we may believe upon good grounds, that both his power and his wisdom will be finally directed to procure us the most solid and lasting advantages.

But if we are not only in the hands of a powerful, but likewise of a wise and good *Being*, who enjoys these perfections, not as confined by the circum-

circumstances of time, place, or opportunity, but in an unlimited degree, we may rest well assured, that he will make every thing, even the most unfavourable circumstances, turn to the advantage of his sensible and rational creatures.

The power and wisdom of God could have been sufficiently displayed in this world, by the contrivance and arrangement and creation of mere inanimate matter; but it would have been impossible, from the most exquisite contrivance of this kind, to have ever arrived at any notion of goodness. Yet when we find so much of the creation consisting of sensible creatures, capable of pleasure and pain, happiness and misery; by observing the provision that is made for gratifying the desires of such creatures, and by considering the nature and number of those desires, we may, in some measure, pronounce the principle or *Being* to which they owe their existence to be either perfect or imperfect; and the motives of the Maker of such a world to be either good or evil; though such conclusions ought always to be drawn, with a strong impression upon our minds of our own shortsightedness, and how little we are qualified to judge of infinite perfections.

However, we cannot err according to my plan, which recommends such speculations only as a commentary upon the Scriptures, and proposes a view of natural appearances, and our own situation in this world, as the most effectual, and even the only method for bringing down to our capacities any conception of that character of himself which God has been pleased to reveal. And this ought to be considered as an instance of his goodness, that he does not oblige us to live entirely by faith; or if that could not well be consistent with our  
nature



nature and faculties, yet it is wonderful condescension to have set his character before us in such a clear light, making it the immediate object of our senses in such numberless instances, when he might have put us upon the necessity of taking his own word for it. And nothing can be a greater proof of our happiness in this respect, than that it is considered as an instance of such ingenuity to find out matter of discontent, that any seeming discovery to that purpose, is sure to place the man who makes it in the rank of philosophers, as having the penetration to spy out a blemish, which, so far from hurting, had never been perceived by mankind. Nay this world, which is only intended for a temporary lodging, is found by most men so convenient and comfortable, that they are well disposed to make it their everlasting habitation.

Nor is this to be wondered at, when we consider the nature of man, and the ample display of his goodness which God has been pleased to make in the world. For if we examine that part of the *Creation*, which is subject to our observation, we shall find it filled with an infinite variety of living creatures, every one of them amply provided for, and all of them discovering signs of enjoyment. Their bodies, by the formation of them, discovering marks of infinite power and wisdom or contrivance, by being wonderfully adapted to their circumstances, and so formed as most effectually to preserve the life of the animal, by securing it against those dangers to which, by its way of life, it is most exposed.

Add to this, the wonderful provision for preserving the *species* of each different rank of animals in a stated proportion: the prolific nature of  
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those

which are most useful, and liable to the greatest hazards, and the care taken, as it were, to curb the propagation of the most ravenous and destructive kinds. If lions and tygers were to breed like rabbits, the whole earth must soon become a desert. The fiercer sort of animals are a check upon one another, and upon the other animals, otherwise the beasts would have been in possession of the earth; a very useless prerogative to them, though it would have been attended with the destruction of the human race. But according to the good and providential care of God, the different parts of this world were kept in such a state as to be fit for the cultivation of man, as he came to take possession of them.

Late discoveries have given us such an insight into the animal œconomy and the constitution of the world, that he must be a novice in reasoning who should pretend to say, that our ignorance of the use of any species of animals would even be a sufficient ground of suspicion that it is not created to answer the wisest and best purposes; because we find, that the farther we extend our inquiries, we are able not only to discover admirable contrivance, even where we least expected it, but are likewise frequently taught to correct our presumption for suspecting a want of utility in many things which have an unfavourable appearance at first sight.

The wonderful contrivances for preserving the lives of animals; their different senses for giving a variety to their gratifications, the great pleasure they all take in existence, as appears by the high value they all set upon life and its enjoyments, to which nothing can make them indifferent, are full proofs that the author of their nature is a good  
*Being.*

*Being.* And with regard to man, I would add, that the little attention which he pays to this very subject, is a proof of his happiness, as it shews how much he is at his ease, when he has no occasion to draw consolation to himself from such speculations as these.

Nor have we any reason to think that the happiness of animals is in the least diminished by the mutual aid which they lend each other: and even perhaps the very circumstance of their preying upon each other, though so very unfavourable at first appearance, increases their happiness: because the apprehensions they are in from a dread of danger, put them upon exertions, which may make their condition very different from a state of misery, perhaps the very reverse: as we often find from our own experience, that a state of action and danger is attended with many agreeable sensations; and that a state of indolence and repose, though so pleasing in prospect, and so generally coveted by all mankind, has often no small share of misery annexed to it, and never fails to be attended with weariness and almost an indifference about life. Nay, even the very painful sensations may be regarded as adding to the pleasure of the animal, or at least as necessary for the preservation of it in health and spirits. And this œconomy seems unavoidable, unless the animal were to be acted upon as a mere machine, without any principle of action within itself. Painful sensations therefore ought to be looked upon as the springs and principles of action in animals, rather than as any real evil in themselves. But with regard to man they have a still higher use, being the chief instruments by which we are taught mo-

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rality,

rality, and brought to a proper sense of our condition.

Nor is it any objection against the goodness of God, that he has fixed a period to the life of animals: because it seems evident from the structure of their bodies, that their enjoyments in a great measure end before the natural period of their lives, if they meet with no accident. Successive generations of animals therefore seem more likely to multiply and augment happiness, than a continuation of the same race of animals. Besides the care taken to propagate and keep the different kinds of animals distinct, and to preserve any particular species from being lost, presents us with one of the most surprising instances of the wisdom and goodness of God which it is possible to conceive; for many comforts and enjoyments depend upon this part of the divine œconomy: such as the pleasure and anxiety discoverable in the parents of the different kinds for the preservation of their offspring, and the comfortable care and support which the young derive from those instincts.

But moreover, all the animal sensations, we may be certain, from our own experience, are instruments of convenience, or pleasure, or of both; and become instruments of pain only by accident, or for the wisest purposes, as tending to the preservation of the animal. Thus the sensation of hunger, which is intolerably painful to all animals, is at the same time one of the most general sources of pleasure. And what is still more extraordinary, even the imperfect senses of some animals, as the sense of seeing in moles, is a proof of goodness and contrivance, this sense being better fitted, from the very circumstance of its imperfection, for their way of life.

But

But the man who would impress upon his mind a strong sense of the goodness of God, ought to enlarge his views, and take in, as far as we can, the whole visible creation, and consider how much the happiness of animals depends upon each other, and upon the inanimate parts of the creation, as this will furnish a boundless display of the goodness of the author of nature. For instance, what a dreadful desert would this earth be, if not enlightened and cherished by the rays of the Sun? What comfort do all animals enjoy by the agreeable returns of day and night, marking out the times for action, and the times for repose? The various seasons of the year, contrived for producing a succession of the things necessary for life and animal enjoyments, to say nothing of the mental pleasure which this variety gives; the numberless things with which this earth is stored for the pleasure and comfort and convenience of animals, such as vegetables, air, and water, and the means used to keep up a constant and regular supply of these fresh and fit for use; all these, and many other things too obvious to need to be mentioned, furnish us with the fullest proof, that God “openeth his hand liberally, and supplieth the wants of all his creatures.”

In short, so universal and extensive is his goodness, that almost from our own experience we may affirm, that there is no part of this earth, either land or water, but what may be considered in some way or other as contributing to the happiness of the animal creation. And the benefits which all animals, and even vegetable productions, and perhaps minerals, derive from the light and heat of the Sun, are a convincing proof how much very distant objects promote the happiness of  
F 3 animals,

animals, and influence the things of this world: and thus a very extensive plan becomes the immediate object of our senses. For a *Being* with power and knowledge sufficient to make this earth, and every thing in it, would have done but half his work, and must have left a wonderful but lamentable proof of his power and weakness, wisdom and folly.

Powerful and convincing as these arguments are, yet the power, wisdom, and goodness of God are still more visible, or rather more clearly to be understood by real, positive, and pertinent instances in his creation of rational creatures, who are a kind of image of himself, and partake, in some measure, of several of his attributes; especially when we compare our faculties with the means provided for their improvement. For instance, how admirably is every thing contrived in the universe for gratifying the faculties of man, and also for improving them; and on the other hand, how well are the faculties of man fitted for receiving such gratification? besides the present enjoyment, we can anticipate the future, and recollect the past, with great pleasure. What various kinds of pleasure is communicated to the mind, by the eye of a rational creature, when every thing is illuminated by the glorious light of the Sun! What sublime entertainment is afforded us by a proper exertion of our rational faculties, when employed upon the different objects to which we have access by our senses, even after we have withdrawn ourselves from the scene of action, retiring, as it were, from a material to a spiritual world! And here we exercise our thoughts, not upon the *individual* things, like the beasts, but in comparing new objects with those already known, observing

observing their relations, discerning what they have in common, and marking in what circumstances they differ. And to shew, that this use of our faculties is pleasing to God; he has made wise and ample provision for such an exercise of our reason. For if things had been more uniform, what a fund of amusement and rational enquiry, and means of improving our faculties, would have been lost: and if things had been more diversified, by their too great variety they would have been quite unmanageable by the human mind; as they would have produced nothing but that kind of distraction, which prevents us from fixing our attention upon any thing. Either extreme would have produced a state of idiotism, but this *golden mean*, which is preserved in the present system, is fitted for bringing our rational faculties to the highest perfection. Even the apparent evils in the physical world are contrived for furnishing us with means for the proper exercise of our faculties. How many of our noblest discoveries would have never been attempted, had not the necessity of our situation put men upon an extraordinary exertion of their abilities? And thus the very physical evils of life, are a proof of the power, of the wisdom and goodness of God, as having no inconsiderable share in the improvement of human nature.

## C H A P. VI.

*Of Sin.*

**T**HUS far we have the greatest reason to be satisfied with the world, as perfectly consistent with that character of himself which God has been pleased to reveal; and worthy of being considered as the workmanship of an infinitely powerful, wise, and good Being: and the order and connexion which is kept up in the universe, shew that every thing is under the providential care of God; especially as physical evil is so easily to be accounted for, that it may be safely produced as a proof of the wisdom and goodness of the Deity.

But though we can reconcile all other natural appearances with the attributes of God, yet we cannot reconcile our own conduct and behaviour *to them*: nor do we think our actions and motives of conduct fit to be trusted with our corrupted brethren, without disguise; nor, when we examine ourselves, can we satisfy our own partial consciences. Reduced to such a situation as self-condemnation, the thoughts of our being in the presence of a God who knows our most secret devices, and who cannot behold iniquity without a detestation of the guilty person, must be peculiarly distressing, and, upon some occasions, intolerable; for in committing sin, we carefully shun the sight of our fellow-creatures, and, so far as we can, try to blind our own conscience.

We are naturally in a state of ignorance concerning the cause of this unaccountable part of our character, namely, that we should have “ a  
“ law



“ law in our members warring against the law of  
“ our minds, and leading us captive to sin and  
“ death.” And we, who are informed of the true  
cause, and also of the remedy, are well assured  
that this disorder in human nature could never  
be cured by such efforts as men make for the im-  
provement of their faculties, and that such an un-  
dertaking was considered as desperate, even in the  
opinion of angels.

However, our natural sentiments are sufficiently  
strong to impress us with a dread of certain pu-  
nishment for our evil actions, evil in the worst  
sense, as being judged and determined to be so  
before the partial tribunal of our own minds.  
And as this world exhibits constant instances of  
prosperous villainy, the natural notions of man-  
kind carried them to a future state, where every  
one was to meet with that treatment which his  
actions deserved.

Other evils are alleviated, and sometimes en-  
tirely removed, by the associated abilities of man-  
kind; but we can have no hopes of a reformation  
from sin by any such means; for the more men  
associate together, the more vicious they become.  
When they have once made the discovery, that  
they stand in need of mutual allowances, it is na-  
tural to suppose that a party will soon be formed  
sufficient to keep each other in countenance. And  
when their natural reason failed them, their super-  
stition would be found a very fit instrument for  
compleating their corruption. The heathens, in  
their prosperity, are loud in their praises of the  
goodness of the gods, and by making *them* par-  
takers of their vices and enjoyments, they thought  
themselves sure of escaping with impunity; and  
even the natural notion of a future state, being  
left

left to be new modelled, according to the imaginations of men, became an object of terror to very few; and when the ideas that suggested the persuasion of the existence of such a state were overpowered by vicious habits, a total disbelief of such a state would become very common.

The present world is a permanent thing, created perfect, and, as it were, in full maturity; not left like a plant or animal to grow up from a diminutive to a more perfect state: every day exhibiting the same appearances as another, or what little variety is discoverable in the material world, seems to be no more than is necessary for keeping up the attention of mankind. Now it would be forming a very unworthy notion of the Supreme Being, to imagine that he could not reform and correct human nature, without a constant violation of the fixed laws of the material world; for instance, that a stone was not to follow the law of gravitation, but tumble down whenever a wicked man came in the way; or that money should lose its nature and use as soon as it came into the possession of the thief. This would not be to reform, but to destroy. Instead of rooting out the evil disposition from the mind, this would only remove every temptation out of the way. But the trial of true virtue is only in a state where temptations are to be found. And thus the prosperity of the wicked in this world, that great stumbling-block to Jew and Gentile, is perfectly consistent with the attributes of God, and the plan of the material world; and consequently nothing which this world presents to us can cure human nature of its imperfections. Proper notions of the attributes of God, would undoubtedly free the mind from a great deal of folly and idle superstition, and would certainly  
prepare

prepare our minds for receiving, and even expecting farther instruction; but neither these notions, nor a future state *in idea*, could do any thing towards a reformation of human nature: so that another world *in reality*, and a farther interposition of the Supreme Being, are absolutely necessary for accomplishing this great work. But before I attempt an explanation of the scheme of revelation, it will be proper to remove some prejudices of education; for we are educated, in general, upon a tacit supposition that this world is every thing.

THE END OF THE SECOND BOOK.

B O O K

## B O O K III.

*Containing an Inquiry into the Origin and Extent of learned Prejudice ; and an Examination of the Atheistical Systems which this Kind of Prejudice seems calculated to support.*

## C H A P. I.

*The Idea of this Book.*

**T**HE reader has, no doubt, observed already, that the same force is not here allowed to some methods of argumentation, which the world in general appears disposed to allow them ; and particularly it may seem a little singular, that I have affected nothing of demonstration. And as, in the examination of the evidence of the Christian Religion, I shall be obliged to deviate still farther from the received modes of reasoning, and lay the stress of my argument upon very different principles from those upon which the several sciences are established, it will be necessary to explain the reason of this innovation.

Now, as a few words would not be sufficient for this purpose, it is my intention to point out the origin, limits, use and abuse of such arguments as may be properly termed scientific ; and from hence endeavour to shew, that it is really a prejudice,

a prejudice, which may be called a learned prejudice, to apply such reasonings, unless to certain things, and in certain circumstances.

My plan is not to destroy, nor even to weaken, the force of any method of argumentation which mankind have invented for their use or improvement, but only to confine artificial reasoning to its proper channel, and prevent those unnatural overflowings of it, which may prove pernicious to Religion; and which will certainly hinder reason itself from producing the beneficial effects, which it is naturally calculated to produce, by converting into an instrument of vanity, sophistry, and destruction, those faculties which were bestowed on mankind for their mutual assistance, comfort, and improvement.

The whole course of our lives, from the cradle to the grave, leads us through various prejudices: and the very means made use of to remove antient prejudices, generally create new ones. Not that this life is to be considered as a delusion, or a dream; it is a reality, and often a sad reality. The mistake consists in this; that we expect more fruit, and a greater variety in kind, from our improvements, than the nature of things can allow them to produce. "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" Can the little partial and contracted systems of human wisdom, regulate the extensive plan of the redemption of mankind?

## C H A P. II.

*Of the Habits of Thinking acquired by grammatical Study and classical Reading.*

EDUCATION gives an acknowledged superiority : but this advantage does not arise so much from a more extensive acquaintance with things, as from a more accurate arrangement of them, by which we have the use and command of our knowledge, and a power of communicating it to others ; and especially whoever has had the advantage of a regular education, is in possession of the ready faculty of enlarging his knowledge by the habits of attention which he has formed.

The very giving names to things, if it be done with any tolerable distinctness and propriety, is a considerable acquisition of knowledge. But this knowledge being necessary and common to all mankind, in a certain degree, would not be the first thing to distinguish and divide the world into the two classes of learned and unlearned : something more artificial was necessary for this purpose, and the invention of letters furnished sufficient scope for the ingenious to distinguish themselves.

Things that are natural, however useful or ingenious, would never draw the attention, nor gain the admiration of uncultivated minds ; but to be able, by a few strokes, to communicate one's own thoughts, or to discover the thoughts of another, by the inspection of such *characters*, has something of that kind of wonderful in it which has a powerful effect on the human mind ;

and the man possessed of such a secret could not fail to draw a number of admirers after him.

The respect paid to this art, added to its extensive use and application, made mankind exhaust their invention and abilities in bringing it to perfection. Particularly the Greeks brought their language to such a degree of perfection, and exhausted so much reasoning and ingenuity in the formation of it, that the human mind, in the present state of affairs and opinions, hardly requires any farther cultivation, than what an accurate, grammatical knowledge of this language will give.

For we ought not so much to be put upon storing our minds with facts, which are daily forcing themselves upon us, as in acquiring early habits of arranging and classing them. The artificial man of society, is neither the divine, mathematician, or artist, but the grammarian. Every man has thoughts, but what he finds himself deficient in, is a ready and accurate method of arranging them, and communicating them to others. And for this purpose, our plan of education is remarkably judicious; because such habits may be very compleatly acquired, by attending to the grammatical arrangement of words in the Greek and Latin languages, the most perfect, general, and unexceptionable, perhaps, in the whole *circle* of the sciences, if we except the properties of extension and number.

All language is reduced to eight parts of speech, and new divisions of these arise from the different use and inflection of the several parts: and after this business is finished, the classing of the words to make a sense or sentence, gives new scope to the ingenuity of the grammarian, and  
furnishes

furnishes new exercise for the genius of the scholar; and lastly, the division of composition into prose and verse, affords fresh exercise for this arranging faculty. And thus it comes to pass, that the habits formed during a regular course of education, spent upon the grammatical arrangement of a very complicated language, are stronger and more extensive than can be well imagined. And the first effects of it is, that we can relish nothing but what appears in some such regular form. So natural, after a time, does this appear to us, that we are apt to consider the habits thus acquired to be but powers that the mind was always in possession of, though indeed they are in the highest degree artificial; and this any one may convince himself to be the truth, by trying to form such habits in a mind come to maturity.

A boy, who has been properly educated, leaves school with his mind stored with the principles of all knowledge, yet loaded with prejudice, which experience, reflection, and an extensive intercourse with the world, must correct, enlarge, and draw out into use. That his knowledge, even at that early period, is very extensive, must be allowed by every one who considers that he has been taught to form a very compleat system of philosophy, according to the most regular form. The rules of grammar are so many principles to which a boy is required to reduce the whole system of a language; for this purpose, he searches authors as a philosopher examines the appearances of nature, in confirmation of his principles; he arranges the words as they occur under his different principles, and forms in fact, or at least is taught to form, a body of science. And it is worth observing, that this mighty fabric is raised chiefly  
and



and directly by the assistance of the memory, a perfect faculty in our earliest infancy : whereas it is just the contrary in geometry, where the judgement is kept upon the stretch, and the memory has only a second part to act. But when the judgement is come to maturity, it is only supposing his grammar lost, and the scholar perceives in himself a power, and the means of forming a new one for that or any other language, and understands perfectly how the first grammar might have been formed. And it is now that he feels himself to be a philosopher. And this, though it is not generally attended to, is what gives the advantage to a man whose mind has been prepared and cultivated by a regular education. It is not the acquiring the language in any manner, that would produce this effect ; for I am well persuaded, that a man might speak both Greek and Latin like a living language, and by long habit, with propriety, yet with very little improvement to his understanding.

It is next to be observed, that as language is the work of man, in a certain sense, the arrangement or classing of words, is a subject perfectly suited to his capacity, and may acquire from his hands all the perfection of which such a system is capable. The essentials of it, indeed, such as that there are eight parts of speech, and other things of the same kind, seem to be derived from the nature of things, or at least from the circumstances of men ; but as to every thing else, fashion and reputation might change them at pleasure ; so that the making a perfect language, is at least a thing conceivable as within the power of man : and this will necessarily make our grammatical arrangements much more regular and consistent

sistent than our other performances, when we attempt to methodize and reduce to system subjects of which we have less command: so that a deficiency, in this respect, is not to be ascribed to the subject's being deficient either in truth or importance, nor does it prove any thing else, but only that the matter of it is not so much in the power of man.

The Greeks were an extraordinary people in many respects, but in none more than in their manner of writing and thinking; nor does it appear to me, from any thing I have ever seen, that any other nation had an idea of philosophical arrangement. A system of geometry, not borrowed from them, I should consider as the greatest curiosity. All the civilized part of mankind have been content to be their imitators in the system-making business; the Romans first, and after them other nations. And thus the reading of the *classicks* forms us to a certain manner of thinking, and makes us often fix our opinions upon subjects before we have opportunity or abilities to examine the principles upon which they are founded. They come to us in the shape in which we have been taught to believe that truth appears; and if this be preserved, we are not very solicitous to examine whether they be shadows or substance. At the same time our taste is formed; and without a certain order of arrangement, and a certain manner of expression, we are disgusted with a composition; and, according to the nature of the subject, are disposed to treat it with contempt or ridicule. And thus the style, subject, and arrangement of the Scriptures come to be examined with no small prejudice; being so very different from those

those models upon which a man of any learning has formed his thoughts and taste.

Nobody can think that I mean to advance, that the Greeks were the only nation who reasoned or drew consequences. What I say, is this; that I could never find any reason to think that the other nations ever reasoned systematically, by forming definitions, and deriving their consequences, not immediately from facts, but from scientific principles. But this the Greeks always did, upon every subject that would admit of such reasoning, setting such conclusions at least upon an equal footing with matter of fact, and often adopting them in direct opposition to facts.

Things occur naturally to the minds of all men, in much the same form and order, and always encumbered with more circumstances than the particular occasion requires, and of such circumstances the most trifling will be crowding foremost. The separating the necessary from the unnecessary circumstances, frees the mind from much obscurity, and gives a simplicity to the subject, by removing such things out of the way as tend only to perplex and bewilder the understanding. And where the subject admits of a regular systematic form, the mind is made wonderfully sensible of its powers, by the ready management which it thus acquires, of very complicated subjects. Yet the object of such systems is not truth, but consistency, and the end answered by them, is not to change the nature of things, but only to enable the mind to comprehend a greater variety of natural knowledge: and the instruments made use of for this purpose, form a kind of artificial knowledge, which very effectually distinguishes the learned from the illiterate; for

when they cannot distinguish themselves by real knowledge, the learned can always silence the vulgar, or raise their admiration, by talking a different language.

But after so much pains, which had procured such a creditable distinction among mankind, the man of learning will not be easily brought to think that, by all this tedious *apparatus*, he was not got nearer the truth, or the real causes of things, than the vulgar, but had been only learning to arrange the different kinds of knowledge which experience, or observation, or reflexion might throw in his way, and to give his own thoughts a consistent form, and bring them before the world with more decency, gravity, and propriety, than they ramble about in his own head. But instead of being satisfied with such distinctions and advantages, the man of learning would be disposed to consider himself as capable of deciding upon every question which might be proposed; at least to think that every composition is nonsense, which is not formed upon his rules: and at this pitch of conceit the man is very apt to rest, who finishes his studies with his grammatical education.

In consequence of what is here said, if any one should ask me, whether I disapprove of this plan of education? I answer; by no means, for although it necessarily produces such prejudices, it is certainly the best that could be imagined; because it is better to have prejudices upon some subjects, than to be ignorant upon every subject; for ignorance implies in it every kind of prejudice. To be able to think accurately upon any subject, even if our opinions should have no better foundation than a consistency with some imaginary

ginary principles, is a considerable point gained, and is even a step towards a proper examination of the truth of facts, though our opinions lead us to contradict it. For the error does not consist in having gone so far, but in not going farther. Because a little experience would soon teach us, that things really existing are not so much in our power as our own fancies and imaginations; and therefore in arranging them we must proceed upon different principles, without being surprized if our work goes on but slowly, and at last stands still, and entirely disappoints our expectations. Several failures of this sort, will bring us to a proper sense of our situation and abilities, and convince us that we must turn to facts upon most occasions, and lay theory aside; and instead of pretending to be operators in the universe, to sit down contented with the character of rational spectators.

I shall finish this chapter with taking notice of the gross mistake of those who declaim against this method of education, which they say occasions the loss of so much time spent in learning grammars and mere words, when it is supposed the mind might be better employed upon things. It has certainly been found by experience, that those have succeeded very ill, who have substituted any thing else in place of this method. The cause of which failure will be obvious from what has been here said; for instead of being employed upon words, in the sense of these objectors, if what I have advanced be true, and if we are taught to the purpose, we are in reality taught to philosophize and form systems, and (which in the eye of a philosopher is no inconsiderable system) we are taught directly to make a language.

Some writers, it is true, forgetting or mistaking the means of their own improvement, have attended only to the last part of their education, or what was conducted by themselves, and concluding that all their knowledge was derived from that, set down the other parts, which they could not recollect with pleasure, as an useless drudgery, and of course to be shunned in the plan of education which they would form. We see books written, and very well written, by people who have adopted these opinions; but shew me a book written by a man educated according to such opinions; for that would be the only thing to the purpose.

### C H A P. III.

*Of the Habits of Thinking acquired by the Study of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy.*

**B**ODIES have situation, size, shape, force, and a great variety of qualities, relations, and properties, which are the immediate objects of our senses; but yet our senses are by no means qualified to give them an accurate investigation, even in those particulars which it is in our power to discover. Our senses are liable to real and imaginary deceptions; a body at rest may be mistaken for a body in motion; the quality of heat may seem to one person to be the predominant quality in a body, when another person pronounces it to be cold; nay, the same person may pronounce the same water to be hot and cold, by putting both hands in it; and yet this fallacious sensation will lead to a true conclusion, namely, that the one  
hand

hand is hotter than the other. The natural measure of distance, size, and shape, is very inaccurate; and also of force and motion. Thus it comes to pass, that although the senses are the direct instruments for acquiring knowledge, especially of the natural kind, yet the philosophical examination of natural bodies requires an amazing *apparatus*, mechanical and intellectual. For this purpose, the sciences of extension and number must be perfectly understood, and still there will be great room for ingenuity in applying them as occasion may require.

The great multiplicity of objects, with which we are every where surrounded, distract the attention, and their resemblances and differences perplex, bewilder, and deceive the understanding. Thus a faculty of classing things as they resembled each other, or differed from each other, would be one of the most useful for improving and advancing human nature, above its original infirm condition. Where the resemblance was very great, the curious inquirer would have to look for some difference by which the things could be distinguished from each other; and where the difference was very visible, the philosopher's search and ingenuity would be employed in finding out resemblances. These differences and resemblances are of various kinds; a resemblance in shape, size, colour, and structure of parts, with various other differences and resemblances which are the immediate objects of our senses, such as are the foundation of the arrangements in natural history.

Or the subject of inquiry may be concerning a resemblance or difference of effects and internal qualities, which become sensible only by experiment; that is, by the application of some third

thing, or else appear only in particular circumstances ; and these are the foundation of the arrangements in natural philosophy.

But let us carry these speculations and operations as far as we please, and dignify them with the name of discoveries, yet we can never properly become *operators* in the universe ; for, after we have done our best, we ought to rest contented with the humbler title of rational *spectators*. The proudest philosopher will never arrive at the skill of making an herb or a tree, much less will he ever be able to make a grub or a worm : and if he knows more facts than another concerning their component parts, or manner of life and generation, he is only a more rational spectator, but cannot proceed a step towards the formation of a plant or animal, nor advance any thing beyond experience.

Let us now suppose a student, after finishing his grammatical studies, to enter upon these speculations, he would soon find himself in a new world, and ought to be persuaded, that if he reasoned upon his former principles, and trusted entirely to the internal operations of his understanding, that his speculations would be no better than dreams ; and this is, in fact, the case with regard to all those systems which have been formed independent of experiment ; you see the school-boy or grammarian every where, but no traces of the natural philosopher.

Yet, being once convinced of the necessity of a change of sentiments, by finding that the properties and qualities of bodies are not whatever we may be pleased to suppose them, but what they may prove to be in fact, or by experiment ; the instruments of his former knowledge must be laid  
aside ;



aside; and his habits of attention and observation only made use of. He would find it in vain to attempt to form a new world by his observations of the old; as he might form a new language from his skill in another. No assumed principles would lead him to the formation of things; but they must be taken to pieces if we would know how they are formed. Or to have any certainty for our assumed principles, we must have instruments for measuring the effects which bodies have upon one another, as far as these depend upon force, situation, figure, number of parts and quantity of matter. If these measures could be accurately expressed, the instruments would be so far perfect, and experience would then certainly determine whether the principles assumed were really in nature. Now, all our measurable knowledge must be brought to the test of immediate experiment, or examined by mathematics. The natural philosopher, therefore, must first of all be a mathematician. A natural philosopher, without mathematics, is a painter without eyes, and a statuary without hands.

The study of mathematics, therefore, which is a necessary branch of education of itself, becomes so also from this secondary view, that it is the only rational instrument of philosophical inquiry, when things and their powers or effects are to be exactly measured.

This science of mathematics is apt to create some prejudices as to the nature of evidence, and the form of demonstration; which will, however, be removed in applying the science to any practical purposes. For, whoever proceeds to measure the surface of the earth, if he attempts to keep to the truth of demonstration, his science will be  
found

found to be to no purpose; because this science knows no lines, but such as are drawn upon an even surface; and besides, these lines are either straight or uniformly and regularly crooked, according to some few determinate rules. But unluckily for the purpose of the man, who might be disposed to apply the rigour of demonstration to practice, the surface of the earth is no *plane*, nor is it regularly crooked, if we speak of it with respect to the science of geometry. Yet if we chuse to be a little humbler in our prospects and pursuits, and content ourselves with considering the subject, not according to scientific accuracy, but only as far as the necessity or rational curiosity of mankind requires, we shall find, that with this limitation we may be said to be able to measure the earth, and also the effects of many powers that operate in nature.

Besides curiosity and the improvement of our understanding, our circumstances in this world force us upon such speculations, as tend to make us acquainted with the nature of things, in the material world. We find ourselves particularly connected with the bodies which surround us; and these are often unmanageable and dangerous; capable of being used as offensive or defensive weapons; and may be applied, in various ways, to minister to our convenience or necessity. This makes it very useful, or even necessary, to be pretty well acquainted with them and their natures, in as far as we may be either benefited or injured by them: and our own nature would be imperfect, if we were not capable of acquiring this degree of knowledge.

If we set out with a resolution to discover how a tree or a stone is made, we shall certainly lose  
our

our labour, but if we content ourselves with observing the differences and resemblances that have place among trees and stones, we shall be able to class them according to their different kinds, and thus, upon all occasions, to distinguish one kind of tree or stone from another.

Now, although this kind of knowledge will not enable us to make a tree or an animal, yet it will help us to talk more distinctly and intelligibly about them, and to have them more ready at hand to answer our different purposes.

We ought to rest very well satisfied, if those things, which go by the same name, always exhibit the same qualities or effects; for the discovery of this is as far as human ingenuity is able to proceed in investigating the nature of things, and this degree of knowledge comes up to the wants of mankind, though not to their wishes. A comfortable *dependence*, under the government of an infinitely powerful, wise, and good Being, ought to bound all our desires; but we are so absurd as to look for *independence* under the protection of the laws of matter and motion. “The fool hath said in his heart no God” *for him*: his corruptions are so great, that he cannot endure the thought of being always exposed to the observation of a God of infinite perfections.

There are, indeed, some instances, where we get beyond our immediate experience. The operations of gravity are very extensive, and very regular. One may certainly tell in what manner, and in what circumstances, a stone will fall to the ground, and yet Newton was the first who thought of deriving, from such a regular and obvious appearance, a rule for making the force of gravity

gravity a standard measure for determining the motion of bodies.

This discovery has subjected natural appearances more to the power of man, than all other discoveries put together ; that is, it has given man greater power over himself, by freeing the mind from a number of the most dangerous, and, at the same time, most silly prejudices. The timidity of mankind is astonishing ; we are apt to dread an enemy in every natural appearance ; and in proportion as natural appearances are shewn to be innocent or beneficial, we gain, as it were, a triumph over nature, and in reality over our own weakness.

Yet it must be owned, that such discoveries as these may indirectly create a great many new prejudices : for by overturning some deeply-rooted superstitions, such discoveries will beget, in the mind of the superficial student, some notions which he may be disposed to carry beyond all bounds, by concluding that all Religion is but superstition of one kind or another, whose foundations may be entirely shaken by fresh discoveries. And the very report of such a thing will open a glorious prospect of independence to superficial thinkers, who can expect nothing less than to see the gates of heaven and hell shut for ever. At least those who are disposed to consider material agents as the only instruments of divine vengeance, consider every discovery as a disarming of God. It is true, this can only be the opinion of the superficial, who are incapable of making a proper estimate, or taking a distinct prospect of the real addition that is made to their knowledge by such discoveries.

But

But even the sober-minded will leave this study with some prejudices. Because, as the classical scholar will be constantly examining the universe by the rules of his grammar, so the natural philosopher will be trying to find out, or imagine, accurate measures for every thing. And a little misconception of this proceeding, may easily lead those, who trust to report for their information, to take up an opinion, that the laws of nature are of themselves *necessary* and sufficient for governing the universe. But it is proper, for the sake of such reasoners, to make a distinction between a law *of* nature, and a law *in* nature. And without this distinction, the first proposition in Newton's *Principia* might be made to put on a very formidable appearance, by being so interpreted as if the things there demonstrated and their consequences must follow from all possible systems of things; and that any *being*, who was to become an *operator* in the universe, must work according to these rules. But this is not true: the consequences only follow in the present system of things; for that proposition depends upon, and is derived from, the laws of motion laid down before; and these laws are derived from our experience in the present system of things, and are therefore only the consequence of the facts which occur to our daily experience and observation: and the great extent of such consequences, prove nothing more than this, that the author of such laws has, it is true, given them a connection and consistency; but it does not appear, that this is done from necessity, or according to absolute wisdom, but according to a wisdom *relative* to the state and condition of creatures capable of improvement by experience.

A state

A state of things is conceivable, in which the same fact, or the same appearance, was never to be repeated: but mankind, according to their present circumstances, could not exist in such a state. Laws of nature, fixed to that degree which we find them at present, seem to be necessary for enabling us to make a proper display of our abilities; but, instead of understanding them in this sense, which would be a means of teaching us proper notions of God and ourselves, we are but too apt to found a presumption of independence upon them.

What then do we learn from such discoveries as Newton's? We extend our knowledge very considerably by them: we can correct many of our former prejudices; we can class things more naturally and simply. The falling of a stone to the earth; the motions of the planets; the ebbing and the flowing of the sea, are all appearances classed by the vulgar under different heads, and are supposed to proceed from different causes, that is, are supposed to be regulated by different rules; whereas Newton has traced them all to the same principle, and this principle not an imaginary one, but such as every one's daily experience convinces him does exist. Yet, what this principle is, any farther than that it proves its existence, by producing effects, and that it does produce them in such a particular manner, is no part of his business to determine. So that even here, where most has been done to the purpose, after a man of no common abilities has exerted his faculties to the utmost, he can never raise himself, properly speaking, above the character of a spectator. One man may have prospects more or less confused than another; and one man may see farther than another,  
but

but still they differ only as spectators. A clown carried to the surface of *Jupiter*, would see the stones fall there exactly in the same manner that Newton demonstrates that they do; so that this journey would set them upon an equal footing in this respect.

#### C H A P. IV.

*Containing some general Remarks upon this Plan of Education.*

**T**HE conclusion, therefore, to be drawn from this view of our progress in the different sciences, is this: that by means of such an education, we are better fitted for our station in the world, we are made capable of more enjoyments, and rendered less liable to accidents. And notwithstanding the frail and transitory nature of man, these advantages of education are not temporary, but permanent, as it is not a single individual, but the whole species, which may be improved: learning not only gives a character to individuals, but also to nations; for by their attention to, or ignorance and neglect of, such studies, nations are justly denominated civilized or barbarous. And as to the prejudices which we are apt to contract, the experience of the world will remove them, unless we are careless or conceited observers.

The man of attentive observation will soon perceive, that school-boys are, with great propriety, taught according to such systems, but that men of the world must act and think upon different principles. All teaching should undoubtedly be carried

ried on according to the simplest principles possible; and for this purpose, a liberty may be taken, of modifying things to that simplicity which is suited to our capacity in youth; and thus by the help of definitions we may form systems, by omitting every thing which is not immediately to our present purpose; but it is very absurd to think that our omitting such circumstances will annihilate them and all their consequences.

Language, laws, and the different forms of a commonwealth, are very much in our power to modify, with various other artificial *beings*, which men have created for themselves; though the misconception or misapplication of the powers and faculties of men may be attended with the most serious consequences. But as to the real causes and nature of things, it is easy to perceive that we are not advancing any nearer them by such discoveries or improvements as we are able to make, either in the rational or the natural world. We have powers and faculties sufficient for our present condition; but our freedom and independence, as far as we enjoy them, ought only to convince us that we are dependent upon such a *Being* as every wise man would chuse for his *protector*. For a careful examination of the state of our minds during the different stages of our education, and the consequences which follow from the different improvements of which our faculties are capable, may lead us to conclude, that the arrangement of the present system of things seems to have been made, in many respects, with a view to our improvement; or if this may seem to make us of too much importance, that our faculties have been made in conformity to the nature of things. And thus the Supreme Being may be considered



considered as setting men tasks, like a teacher, to try and improve their faculties ; setting things before them in such an order, that if they make a proper use of their abilities, they shall be able to make great and important discoveries, when these are compared with our powers and circumstances ; but which fall away, and are to be considered as nothing, when compared with God's plans and designs. Or rather, in fact, they are nothing, unless relatively considered ; it is the supposing such a creature as man to exist, that gives them their truth and importance. And to pretend to extend our knowledge beyond these bounds, shews that we are but little acquainted with the nature of our own discoveries. And yet all those who pretend that the schemes of Providence are in any respect subject to their examination and judgement, discover this ignorance ; I mean, all those who speak of them in the style of criticism.

Our education is carried on upon a supposition that the things of this world are fixed, or in a regular and continual rotation ; and that we have only the same things to see and do which have been seen and done before, or to rectify what our predecessors did amiss, from want of attention only, without a suspicion that there is any progress in the affairs of this world ; that is, that any improvement might have happened in any one period as well as another, mankind having been always in possession of the means of this improvement : and, in this respect, the whole course of our education, and the general course of the affairs of this world, create a strong prejudice against a plan begun by God, and gradually unfolded to mankind supernaturally, and without the instrumentality of the wise men of this world :

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and

and it is of the greatest importance that we should be put upon our guard against the consequence of this prejudice. And for this purpose, when any thing is proposed, upon which we are to exercise ourselves, that we may form a rational belief, we are not to consider whether it be the work of God *directly*, because here, in this sense, we have no standard for examination, no determinate rule by which we can proceed; for this purpose, all our philosophy is in vain; we are therefore to consider the subject only *indirectly*, and see whether it is any human imposition, which is proposed to us as coming from a supernatural origin; and of these impositions, the more experience we have, we are so much the better enabled to judge; and by what we can know of man, we may be pretty positive in our decisions concerning his works and views.

But it is the highest absurdity, not to call it impiety, when we pretend to apply our reason in order to settle what plan it might be fit for the Supreme Being to pursue with regard to mankind, or to say what is proper or improper for him to do. And yet this is a prejudice very natural to the mind of man, and is not to be got the better of, as some have imagined, by keeping men in ignorance, but by improving their faculties; by considering the nature and weakness of them; by attending to the circumstances of man in this world; and by making a proper estimate of the different degrees of knowledge which we are capable of acquiring, and of the several ends it may answer.

With the vulgar every thing is a matter of fact, which is admitted upon the evidence of testimony, as well as upon the evidence of their own senses,  
with

with hardly any faculty of distinguishing between truth and falshood. It is in a book, or such a one has said it, is sufficient evidence for any thing. Such a fund of credulity would expose mankind to continual impositions.

On the other hand, the learned, with a strong impression of this weakness upon their minds, would wish to determine every thing by scientific principles, affecting to believe or disbelieve every thing as it can or cannot be reduced to some mode of argumentation, with little regard to fact. It follows from such principles, your facts are nothing to the purpose, shew me the fallacy in the reasoning, says the man of science.

The prejudices of the vulgar are corrected by learning; and the prejudices of the learned may be corrected by sober-thinking, when they come to apply their reasonings to matter of fact: thus falling back again among the vulgar, after their heads have settled from that fermentation which the novelty of scientific knowledge is apt to occasion.

## C H A P. V.

### *Of Atheism.*

**T**HE origin of ourselves, and of the world, seems to be the most natural, and the most interesting question upon which the mind of man can employ itself. For besides gratifying a very natural, and a very laudable curiosity, the propriety of our conduct in all circumstances and stations of life; our hopes and fears are to be entirely regulated by rational opinions about our

origin and destination. To be left entirely in the dark, with regard to a subject of such importance, would be a great misfortune to a rational creature. But we are not left so, for God has distinctly and historically delivered the facts to us, as fully as is necessary for us to know, and in a manner perfectly satisfactory to a vulgar understanding; yet not in such a form as to please the artificial understandings of the learned. For the prejudices arising from the modes of education which I have been explaining in this book, put all learned men upon attempts to reduce every inquiry to some or other of the forms according to which they have been taught. And this prejudice is best removed, not immediately, by urging the authority of facts, which their minds are not prepared to receive, but by giving the question a fair examination, according to their own philosophic principles; because when these are found insufficient, every man ought so far to get the better of his reasoning pride, as to have the modesty to own that he is, in this respect, but one of the vulgar.

Being as much a friend to reason as any one, but fully convinced, not barely, of the insufficiency of it, in the solution of the present question, but even of the absurdity of applying it upon this occasion, I shall, however, in compliance with prejudice, examine the several atheistical suppositions, and give them a fair trial, according to the commonly received modes of argumentation, which ought to discover the strength or weakness of such suppositions to the satisfaction of the present generation, if the received forms of reasoning be adhered to.

If

If the plan and nature of things be deducible from mechanical principles, it must be from those principles, and according to that method of reasoning, adopted by those philosophers who have been most successful in their inquiries into natural appearances. My intention, therefore, is to examine, according to such principles as have been so judiciously applied by Newton, the different suppositions that have been made concerning the cause and manner of the existence of things, as far as they are supported by experience; rejecting only those principles, which are not true, that is, which do not discover their existence by experiment, or by their natural effects; or if they are true, and do exist, are nevertheless insufficient for explaining the appearances referred to them as effects proceeding from such causes.

And this method must be observed, otherwise we do nothing but dream; because it is an indispensable rule, that in assigning a cause for any thing, it must be such as is known to produce effects, or by experiment may be made to produce effects; and is also sufficient for explaining all appearances referred to it as a cause; that is, the effects must be an accurate measure for its known operations. Thus, when it is said, that gravity is the cause of the ebbing and flowing of the sea, before that this can be admitted philosophically, it must be shewn that there is such a thing as gravity producing effects; and moreover that gravity is known to operate in such a manner as to produce exactly the effect ascribed to it, and neither one greater or less.

In the same manner, it seems but reasonable to require, that, if any thing be assigned as the cause of the existence of the world, it must be such a

one as has powers and qualities in it, capable of producing all the various effects observable in the universe. For without this precaution, we suffer ourselves to be deluded in a manner that discovers greater weakness than the vulgar shew when they give credit to every thing that is told them as a fact. I believe such a thing, because it is the supposition of such a man. It would be just as reasonable to do it, because it is the dream of such a man.

But this kind of weakness is supported by an opinion, that any hypothesis is fully, or at least satisfactorily proved, by such an evidence as is sufficient for supporting the credit of an historical fact. But this is not true: circumstances alone are sufficient often to establish the certainty of an historical fact, instances of which will readily occur to every one: whereas circumstances, if there be nothing else, ought always to render an hypothesis suspicious; for the hypothesis has no separate existence from the inventor, and therefore must come from the head of the inventor in all its possible perfection: and circumstantial proof shews directly that its foundation is weak, this being its only support; and for this reason I class all such hypotheses among the more rational kind of dreams.

Keeping these things in view, let us consider the different suppositions that have been made to account for the origin of the world. And first, it has been said, that a fortuitous concurrence of atoms produced every thing. Now this supposition labours under every possible difficulty, and is chargeable besides with ignorance and absurdity. For, first, it shifts the question, as if the inquiry was not about the cause of the existence of things,

but only about the modes of their existence : and even here it fails, for there is no evidence that things were ever in such a state ; or even if that were to be granted, there is the same difficulty in accounting for the motion of atoms, as of the largest bodies ; and the thinking otherwise arises from a childish and vulgar prejudice : because we can move a grain of sand easier than a mountain, a child would be excused for supposing the original source of motion different in bodies of different bulk : yet nothing is more certain than this, that a single grain of sand would revolve in the orbit of the moon, exactly in the same manner that the moon herself does.

But there is no necessity for talking so philosophically upon the present occasion. For let any one read Lucretius with care, and he will be convinced that the poet is so far from being able to compute the effects of mechanical principles, that he does not know even how to describe them. So that his atoms, instead of forming sensible and rational creatures, if they had followed his directions, they never could have formed any of the crudest parts of matter.

This system is the effort of a child to philosophize, upon the first opening of its eyes, discovering something like a capacity for thinking, but without the power, the imperfection of its organs converting every thing into prejudice. Thus we constantly hear of up and down, perpendicular and oblique, as if these existed in the nature of things, and were not entirely relative.

## C H A P. VI.

*The same subject continued.*

A Second supposition is, that a *plastic* nature, designing but unintelligent, has formed every thing. And as this supposition pretends to be founded upon a kind of experience, it will be proper to examine how far appearances will support it, or what circumstances have led men to rest contented with such conclusions.

Now, allowing the most that we can to the maintainers of this opinion; nothing more is to be discovered in this plastic nature, than a power of continuing the species of things; which is very different from accounting for their coming into being at first, or shewing us how this nature acquired those powers by which it is enabled to preserve these several kinds. For if this designing, unintelligent, plastic nature has a power in itself to produce new kinds of things, it is impossible that it should ever stop, but it must go on producing new kinds of things without end, which is expressly contrary to experience. For design in the sense here made use of is inconsistent with free agency.

But moreover there must be as many plastic powers, as there are different kinds of things to be produced, or more properly there must be a plastic power in every individual thing. And even when monsters are produced, it is only two designing natures counteracting each others designs, and by their united efforts producing something directly contrary to the designs of each, with-



without a power to vary their designs, and accommodate them to circumstances, so as to make something new and not monstrous; that is, something that can generate a new species. Which proves that these powers are not agents, but instruments, and that God, by permitting monsters to be produced, means to exhibit to mankind an experimental refutation of this system, by shewing what would be the consequence if these plastic powers were made to act of themselves.

However, let us suppose that a tree designs to produce a tree; an animal, or rather two animals, an animal of the same kind; and that a body at rest, or in motion, designs to persevere in its present state; how can we be said, by all these concessions, to be come the least nearer our conclusion, which was to account for the origin of things; because it still remains to be shewn whence these agents are themselves, and whence they derived their powers, which are too visible in their effects to suffer us to regard them as *non-entities*.

And more especially it remains to be shewn what it is that makes all these various, and even contrary natures or designs, co-operate in producing a regular system, every part of which tends regularly and orderly to the same end. For allowing that the random exertion of all these natures, however contradictory, must produce something, yet surely the man who would expect from such a fortuitous concurrence of designs, so much of life, sense, and rationality, which are so liable to accidents, and must, according to this supposition, be so much exposed; such a man, I say, would have little claim to rationality, of which he has so inadequate a conception.

For

For even if we consider this world as a machine, it is nevertheless a machine which required an artificer, who in its formation must have proceeded according to a plan, the proper execution of which necessarily implies a perfect knowledge of the parts of which his system was to be formed, and a perfect acquaintance with the nature of his materials: that is, it required at least an intelligent *Being*, whose knowledge must be as unlimited as the materials which he has to work with; and without a creative power, it will be difficult to say where he got his materials, otherwise the materials which he had to work with, admitting the absurd supposition of a *chaos*, might and would certainly counteract his designs; which would certainly happen likewise, as they are supposed to have powers in themselves, if he had not a command over their natures. This supposition, therefore, of a plastic power, being also totally unfit for explaining the appearances of nature, is to be rejected upon the principles before laid down, because even a general *plastic* power in the earth could do nothing without the concurrence of the sun, or perhaps of the whole solar system.

Indeed such an hypothesis could only be taken up for this reason, that as the vulgar are naturally disposed to believe every thing that is proposed as a fact, so the first smattering in philosophy disposes us to receive whatever comes to us in any form of reasoning. A giant swallowing windmills, is food for a vulgar understanding, and a philosopher, laying aside the antiquated methods of measuring time by the sun and stars, which were appointed by God "for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years," and portioning it out with a leis sparing hand by *stratum of lava*,

is delicious entertainment for the learned, especially when seasoned with a little impiety. Surely a particular providence presided over this new instrument of computation, making the winds always blow with the same force, and in the same direction, with a particular provision for always keeping the same quantity of burning matter within, and of earth upon the sides of the mountain to be washed down by the rains which must always fall in the same proportion, and with the same force, with a thousand other supplies too tedious to mention, but absolutely necessary for setting this new chronometer in motion.

## C H A P. VII.

*The Subject continued.*

**B**EING thus necessarily brought to acknowledge a designing intelligent cause, before we can give any thing like a rational account of the formation, or even of the preservation of the universe, we may be considered as having got clear of Atheism and its consequences. However, we find authors maintaining all these principles, and yet endeavouring to draw such consequences from them, as will leave mankind (at least in as far as they are rational creatures) in much the same situation as if there was no God. For it is supposed, that the whole universe is made up of a chain of *Beings*, the parts of which chain are all linked together in such a manner, and in such an order, as to be absolutely necessary for the support of each other in that very order and manner, without the possibility of admitting any change: and that this chain not only binds the things together,  
but

but likewise, if it does not bind, yet it confines the author, however powerful or intelligent, so far, at least, that he cannot change their order or nature, without degrading his own character, which, being perfect, say they, any change is impossible. Neither, according to this supposition, can he have any proper motive for preferring one part of his works before another; but manifests himself as fully and as perfectly in a *hair* as in a *heart*; and sees, with equal indifference, a *hero perish*, and a *sparrow fall*. I should be glad to know if any man, who has proper notions of free-agency, would not think himself degraded by being so confined. But these opinions are the effects of sin, and such speculations are the *artificial* fig-leaves which philosophical ingenuity is sewing together to hide the nakedness of mankind.

The misfortune is, that these opinions, by dropping the absurdest parts of Atheism, are calculated to have great weight with those who are only smatterers in philosophy, and pick up their opinions from accidental conversation and superficial reading. And where discoveries and systems are the subject of general discourse, every one is desirous to know something of the matter; particularly where religion is concerned; because its threats are sufficient to draw the attention of every one, so far at least as to make him seek for arguments to engage him heartily in a compliance with its precepts, or such as may induce him to disregard them. And to gratify the humour of those, who have reason to wish that religion should be found to be an imposition, little systems are formed, in which every thing difficult is omitted, and where the authors are very careful to keep out of sight whatever might occasion the  
least

least doubts: and a man has only to shut his eyes, and he may be perfectly satisfied that he comprehends the whole course of nature: and this we are well disposed to do: for a man finds himself much more at his ease, by trusting to such systems, than when he has to combat with all the scruples of his own conscience, and all the imperfections of his own understanding; especially as this business is so easy, for he has only to learn a kind of philosophical language, and the work is done.

What we know of the prodigious size of the heavenly bodies, their splendour, situation, and regular motions might furnish much moral and religious instruction. But without resting where we ought, by keeping within the natural limits of the human understanding, even the philosopher himself is often hurried out of the path of experiment, observation, and computation, into a region where he has nothing to do but gaze with the vulgar; and perplex his understanding upon infinite space and time, and fatigue his mind with speculations upon the operations which infinite power and infinite wisdom may perform in these.

This is a true *fairy land*, as much as the imaginations of the vulgar, only we separate ourselves from them, by making a parade with the laws of nature. Every thing must have its laws; nor is the Supreme Being himself exempted from this necessity. During this amazement of the understanding, the passions, which never *slumber nor sleep*, put in their claim for a *plenary indulgence*, as a thing of no account, where so much has been given, or rather this indulgence is declared to be a law of nature also. And to support the claim, advantage has been taken of this state of mind, to give us a mean opinion of human nature,  
by

by rallying us upon the absurd supposition that such a creature as man, or such an atom as his habitation, could be supposed without the most extravagant partiality, and the most ridiculous self-conceit, to be, as it were, the particular care of Providence.

This is to take advantage of that natural love of order which is so agreeable to the mind, (because, without order, things would be unmanageable by such limited creatures) to lead us from attending to our own circumstances, and engage us in the admiration of an imaginary harmony and gradation, which, if true, would deprive us of every distinguishing privilege, except that of being extremely miserable, by having our noblest faculties baffled, and left without any objects to gratify them; because the advocates for this system pretend that God *acts by general, not by partial laws*. Hence their doctrine is, that if we could see ourselves without partiality, we have no right to consider ourselves in any other light but only as making a part in the present system of things, in the same manner as the sun and moon, or any other of the parts and appendages of the universe, and consequently as liable to those accidents, and capable of receiving those benefits, which the general laws of the system produce, without having any thing farther to hope or fear. And according to this reasoning, a resurrection of the dead would be the most absurd of all expectations.

This is an error that it very much concerns us to remove, or at least to be well assured that it is no error; because, if this be a true state of the case, our chief wisdom would be shewn in making it our constant maxim, “ Let us eat and drink,  
“ for

“ for to-morrow we die.” For any man, with his maxim of *whatever is, is right*, might very consistently answer to the most solid demonstration of the existence and attributes of God, *this is all very fine, and very true; but it is no concern of mine;*

“ I am but part of one stupendous whole,  
“ Whose body nature is, and God the soul;”

*and what conceit and presumption would it be in me to expect that this great harmony and order is to be broke through on my account.*

This is not the language of a man who has inquired carefully into natural appearances, but rather that of a superficial novice in natural speculation, who believes in the discoveries of others, without the least acquaintance with the principles which led to them; and taking the conclusions upon trust, draws some unphilosophical consequences from them, to humour his own disposition or circumstances; and therefore may very naturally be supposed to overlook the abilities necessary for making such discoveries. Otherwise it must seem very strange, if a man should return from such a noble exertion of his abilities, as the weighing the solar system in a balance, with a notion that he himself was too contemptible to be *particularly* regarded by the great Creator, who had given such proof of the contrary by bestowing upon him faculties so admirably fitted for comprehending his works.

But the truth is, Newton had never the least glimpse of this chain; it was borrowed from Plato, who, for want of better information, was reduced to amuse himself with such reveries, and gilded over with some of the most solid matter of modern discovery,

discovery, by a man whose knowledge was not the effect of regular study, but gleaned up from random reading, and random conversation, among wits, buffoons, politicians, and philosophers. Such an education, joined to a lively imagination, and principles and practice which ought to make a man wish to render Atheism palatable to himself and the world, might give some prospect of brilliancy and daring observation, but little of solidity or consistency.

The dangerous tendency of such a system as this, is undoubtedly very great to those who are naturally disposed to believe only what suits their convenience. For it leaves no morality either with God or man, and yet pretends to give an order and regularity to the affairs of the universe, sufficient to satisfy those who are disposed to pass through this world with their eyes shut.

But the order and regularity which we see in the world, will be found, by the attentive observer, rather a necessary compliance with human weakness, which requires it, than any way directing and influencing the plans of God, which can depend upon nothing but his own will and pleasure, and least of all upon the foolish imaginations of men. And a proper attention to the dignity of human nature, will go a great way to cure every one of this extravagant folly.



## C H A P. VIII.

*Of the Dignity of Human Nature.*

**I**T is no doubt a lawful, and even a proper use of speculations upon the nature of things, to apply them as arguments for curing us of our pride and presumption; but if they be carried so far as to give us a mean opinion of mankind in general, the destruction of morality and religion will be the consequence, as far as it is in the power of man to destroy them. The contemplation of nature is proposed, with great propriety, as a proper exercise for making us humble, and sensible of our dependence upon God, and thankful for the great things which he has done for us: yet, that man knows but little of his own faculties, who thinks that he has reason to look upon himself as degraded by a comparison of the human species with the other parts of the creation.

Whoever finds himself in danger of falling into such an opinion, should look out for arguments to inspire him with a proper sense of the dignity of human nature, and of the perfection of which it may be capable, notwithstanding its present degeneracy: as without proper notions upon this subject, it is impossible to behave with propriety in the different relations in which we stand to our Creator and fellow-creatures, or to have our minds prepared to receive the instructions which God may condescend to give us in a supernatural way.

For if we have assumed to ourselves a rank in the creation to which we have no title, and should

be deservedly degraded below the place which we had assumed; it is an obvious consequence from this, that all our relations in which we stand to the Creator and his works, will be changed, and a new conduct and behaviour will of course become our duty.

This, indeed, the infidels are so sensible of, that they despair of making a man a convert to their opinions, before they have given him a mean opinion of himself. And for this purpose, it is their constant aim to debase human nature as much as possible, treating the hopes of immortality as a vain conceit, engendered by pride, and a strong prejudice in favour of our own importance. Thus it is the general practice of infidel writers to dwell upon the weaknesses and corruptions of human nature, not with a view to reform them, or even to express any indignation against them, but rather to palliate them, by insinuating slyly, that were it not for a competent share of hypocrisy, all the world would put on the same appearance that the worst part of it does at present.

And, indeed, if we give up the dignity of our nature, according to the infidel plan, all the arguments, either for natural or revealed religion, are nothing to us. For we are no more concerned with the existence of God, than the beasts of the field, until we have some conviction from the superior excellence of the faculties that he has bestowed upon us, and the many things that are obviously made to be subservient to us, that he regards us so particularly as to justify us in presuming that he has vouchsafed to govern us by laws which are neither reducible to those of matter and motion, nor yet to mere sensation, which is what these philosophers labour to prove by arguments

ments very weak when referred to an accurate standard of truth, but very powerful when addressed to certain passions and prejudices.

Although they pretend that their God is an intelligent Being, yet it is clear that he is not the God of the Psalmist, who “hath made man to  
“ have dominion over the works of his hands,  
“ and hath put all things under his feet, all sheep  
“ and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field: the  
“ fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and what-  
“ soever passeth through the paths of the seas.”

If these things are facts, it is plain that the suppositions of these philosophers are so far from being sufficient for explaining the appearances of nature; that the appearances of nature directly contradict them, and consequently they are to be rejected. And how far they are facts, deserves to be considered by every one who pretends to depend upon reason for his instruction, as the consequences of this examination ought to direct the rational conduct of such a one's life.

I shall, therefore, endeavour to shew, that man is endued with faculties which naturally, and in a certain sense, make the whole creation subject to him, or subservient to his purposes; and that, as to what has been advanced concerning a chain of *beings* rising in gradation, it is intirely unsupported by experience: the human race being so unlike every thing in this lower world, that nothing but the most senseless partiality and prejudice could ever consider man as making a link in any chain of *beings*, but as the lord of this lower world, and, under God, the disposer of the things in it.

The people that I have to do with at present, allow of intelligence and design in the *first cause* of

all things. Matter, therefore, as such, being senseless and inanimate, and consequently incapable of enjoyment, could never have been created for its own sake, but for the convenience of some other *being* capable of enjoyment. And as the same authors will allow of no such thing as a revelation, the excellence or superiority of one kind of *being* above another, must be determined by the perfection of their different faculties. And upon this principle it will be very evident that the brute animals are created for our use, upon a comparison of our faculties with theirs.

And to begin this comparison from our birth, we may observe that man is brought into the world in a very helpless condition, compared with the other animals, who are born with the intire use of their faculties, and seem perfectly acquainted with their situation very soon after their entrance into the world. But we, on the other hand, are so much strangers to our habitation and situation in the world, and so little acquainted with the instruments that we are to work with, that it requires time and experience and care and teaching to bring our faculties to perfection; and in those instances where we are left to ourselves, it is no easy matter to find out the proper means of acquiring such knowledge as may enable us to make a proper judgement of our circumstances; and ages and generations of men have been exhausted in experiments to teach us how to turn our faculties to the best account, without discovering the extent of them. And whilst we are drawn aside by a thousand circumstances and temptations out of those paths which the experience and ingenuity of others have marked out as leading to truth and happiness; the beasts, by trusting to their sensations,

tions, without experience or teaching, act agreeably to their nature and faculties; which makes it a general law of this nature of theirs, that they have no other means of excelling one another, but in bodily strength, and in the number and qualities of their organs of sensation: for they have literally nothing but what they have received, no talents to improve; and are as much determined in their actions by the force of their sensations, as the movements of a machine are determined by the weights which put it in motion. It is impossible for them to give up a present good for a future one in prospect. It is true, these sensations do not act so regularly as the weights of a clock; for the senses of animals, from the delicacy of their organs, are more liable to be out of order than the grosser parts of matter. Their organs of sensation are no doubt oftener out of order than we may apprehend, which accidents may occasion deviations from the original laws of their nature; but upon this account they are no more answerable for their actions, than a blind man is for missing his way. And yet deviations arising entirely from a change in their sensations, may be mistaken by superficial observers, for a kind of free-agency, and the effect of a kind of intellectual principle. But if we consider this subject attentively, we shall find all appearances justifying us in concluding that the brute creation are connected with each other, and with the different parts of the universe, only by their sensations, and consequently incapable either of morality or religion. One action of theirs may be more pernicious than another; but one of their actions cannot be said to be better than another, in such a sense as that it could be styled virtuous or vicious.

And as their passions and affections can never be carried beyond the immediate objects of their senses, they can never form any bond of union among themselves, or resolve upon any future projects, or acquire notions of relations; and this makes them incapable of what is called knowledge; neither can they either make or acquire an artificial language. In short, all their powers and faculties fully prove that they have no more connection with the Supreme Being, than the inanimate parts of the creation, and particularly that a future state would be useless to them. Every attempt to communicate knowledge to them, furnishes new arguments in support of this opinion; for nothing can draw them from their senses; and if we would take off their attention from the objects of one sense, we have no other means of doing it, but by fixing their attention upon the objects of another sense: for that kind of persuasion will not avail here, which engages the attention by the prospect of a *general*, absent or future good.

Therefore, though there may be different and more excellent faculties enjoyed by one animal than another, yet this difference is only perceivable by a rational creature, and has no existence in the opinions of the creatures themselves. They never envy the faculties of each other, nor repine at their own situation: we cannot, therefore, with propriety consider one of them as excelling another in knowledge, but rather that they are all equally without understanding: the seeming difference in their actions arising entirely from the difference in their sensations, and any change in their actions only following from a change in their sensations.

It is even left to man to put their powers and faculties to their proper uses; so that their excellence and defects may be considered rather as having place with relation to him than themselves; which gives him a natural, and consequently a lawful dominion over them, by applying them to the different purposes for which such faculties are fit, being only obliged to use them as sensible creatures.

Now let us consider, on the other hand, the nature and condition of man. Our connection with the body, is not only less than that of the brutes, upon our entrance into the world; but even through life we carry on our views often undisturbed by the most earnest solicitations of the senses. And there are evident marks, as soon as we come into the world, that the soul perceives itself in a strange habitation, and in rather unnatural circumstances: and this one may be allowed to advance from experience, without pretending to enter into any of the opinions concerning the origin of the soul; for if tears and crying be any indication of uneasiness, the human race, at their first appearance in this world, exhibit the signs of the junction of two substances together which do not well accord, the mind at least expressing all the marks of discontent then in its power.

As we advance farther in life, we are found employing ourselves upon trifles for which no motives can be discovered, either from reason or sensation: so that the follies of the idlest coxcomb, no less than the sublime discoveries of a Newton, prove that we possess faculties which cannot possibly derive their origin from the laws of matter and motion, nor even from sensation, which makes it impossible to account for the most trifling and

foolish actions of men, without having recourse to something residing within the body, not essentially connected with it, endued with a will and faculties of its own; and making use of the body and its different senses, often in such a foolish, and often in such an ingenious manner, as proves sufficiently that the powers and organs of the body are only instruments for executing its purposes. And the substance endued with these powers and faculties, is what we call mind; and it is worth our particular notice, that this mind, instead of being confined to observe the laws of matter and motion, or even of sensation, it always can, and often does act expressly contrary to both. And even the most foolish stare of an idiot, has an expression in it which distinguishes him remarkably from the brute creation, and clearly discovers something labouring to work with improper instruments.

There is a mode of moral instruction drawn from a comparison of the behaviour of men and beasts, much used by satyrists and writers of fables, which I can by no means approve of, as it has a tendency to debase human nature, instead of improving it. Neither are these applications just, their faculties are so different from ours. I am the more confident that this is the right opinion, because our Saviour, who instructs by parables, never makes use of this method. He never sends men to improve their morality by observing the actions of the beasts; it would have been to offer an insult to human nature, which could not be expected from one who, though sorry for its imperfections, yet has shewn by what he did for us, that he had too high a sense of its dignity, to make such an insulting comparison.

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But let us consider a little more particularly the powers and peculiarities of the human mind. And first, we may observe, that whoever attends to its operations in infancy, will be very apt to consider the mind as equally infirm with the body, exhibiting little or nothing of those powers by which one could judge of the uncommon faculties of a human soul. Yet no sooner has it received, from external objects, materials to work with, than it displays its extraordinary powers, not only by the eagerness which we discover in seeking after knowledge, but also by the several new faculties which make their appearance; when circumstances call them forth into action, in order to arrange, to judge of, and communicate the knowledge which has been acquired. The different associations of our notions, according to their resemblance, contrariety, and other relations, discover surprizing abilities, and give us a great command over our own thoughts, and likewise over many of the things with which we are connected. For these associations are the foundation of artificial language and written characters, by means of which we are enabled, at any distance of place and time, to communicate our sentiments to each other. And thus the powers of the human mind are greatest where it has seemingly no materials to work with, for language and written characters are arbitrary things: and yet certain sounds and characters have, in a wonderful manner, the power of conveying to us distinctly the thoughts of others, not only when our mind is employed about material objects, but also when the objects are barely mental conceptions, or even nonsense.

This power of inventing language and writing, or even the capacity of acquiring a skill in them,

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wonderfully characterizes our *species*, and distinguishes us remarkably from all other animals, and, as it were, fixes a boundary between us and them. And yet, language and writing being common to mankind in general, at least the faculty of acquiring them, we are apt to overlook their high importance, and likewise the prodigious extent of abilities which the invention, or even communication of them discover.

But in making an estimate of the dignity of human nature, they ought to be particularly considered, especially as the brutes discover no such powers, or rather shew that they are entirely without them; and as these very powers are those by which mankind particularly display their abilities.

Some brute animals may be brought to associate objects with sensations, which, being naturally associated, require no supposition of abilities to perform it, but only to be susceptible of habits; but they are totally incapable of those arbitrary associations, which so fully demonstrate the powers of man.

Let us next observe the faculty of memory, if its operations were not so familiar to us, they would appear not only incredible to us, but even impossible for us to comprehend; and according to our usual self-sufficiency, we would be pronouncing the very supposition of such powers an absurdity. For instance, how faithfully does this faculty represent past transactions, a single vestige of which is no where else to be found or seen: and what variety of different kinds of knowledge may the mind lay up in store by its means, without producing the least confusion. If, indeed, we attempt to account for the operations of this faculty, we can give no more reason why we remember a  
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thing,

thing, than if we had it suggested to us by inspiration, or in any supernatural way.

Let us next observe the vast powers of the imagination, which makes us, in some respects, *creators*; for by this faculty we are enabled to mould our conceptions into whatever shape we please, and thus we can make, as it were, creations of our own, and communicate distinct ideas of them to others. And although we are naturally confined to a very small spot of ground, and a short period of time, yet by the assistance of the imagination, we are able to surpass these narrow limits, being qualified by its powers to make ourselves, as it were, spectators of past and distant transactions, throwing off, in some measure, the incumbrances of matter.

How wonderfully is the mind furnished with faculties for giving us a relish of natural and artificial productions! How forcibly are we led to improvement of every kind, by that strong propensity which we discover to any thing new or uncommon, and which becomes a spur to all our inquiries! What awful impressions do we receive from grandeur and magnificence, and from every thing that has a tendency to inspire sublime notions! What pleasure do we receive from the beauty of colour and proportion: and how is the mind elevated and soothed with the harmony and melody of sounds! But more especially, what a wonderful uniformity of contrivance is exhibited in the formation of man; that all minds should be formed so nearly alike in their faculties, as to receive exactly the same notions and impressions from the same objects, and likewise from the same exercise of the thinking faculty! And this uniformity is so great, that where the subject has  
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been attentively considered, and comes properly within the reach of our faculties, it requires all our ingenuity to create matter of difference, by distinctions and ambiguous language, when our passions or interest seem to make a diversity of opinions useful. Or else the difference arises from our meddling with subjects beyond the reach of our faculties, or applying an imaginary, though perhaps a fashionable test of truth.

This affords occasion, materials, and opportunity for a new faculty called reason, to exert itself: whose office it is to adjust and regulate our notions according to the particular nature of every subject; which produces first a diversity of sentiments, and, it is to be hoped, in time will produce that harmony among our opinions, which is so agreeable to the mind.

But farther, when men come to be united together in societies, this union gives rise to various relations, which furnish scope for a new set of faculties to exert themselves, which must have lain dormant in the individual, for want of proper opportunities to call them forth. And these form what we call the moral part of our nature, at least it is this which gives scope to the moral faculties to operate. And without society, it would have been impossible for the acutest understanding to have formed any notion of them. It may be said, indeed, that without society none of our faculties could exert themselves; but this cannot be said in the same extensive sense that it may be applied to our moral powers. And this is an important consideration: for as the mind is not limited in its capacity, it is hard to say how far our faculties may be enlarged, and new ones brought into view, by associating with *beings* of different orders,

orders, which intercourse may give rise to new relations, and new sources of information, without end.

Here we leave the beasts entirely behind us, who are not able to improve their faculties, or extend their relations, even by the opportunities which they have of associating with mankind, who are so much their superiors.

The dignity of human nature even appears in our refusing instruction, as it shews that our improvement is not so much a natural consequence of our faculties and circumstances, as a free act of our own will.

Many a man has neglected to acquire some branch of useful knowledge, for no better reason, than that it was possessed in perfection by a man whom he disliked or despised, or because some person, whose abilities he held in high estimation, was ignorant of it. And many such things, which are real imperfections in the individual, serve to characterize us and give a dignity to human nature, by raising it above the laws of matter and motion, and the no less constant ones of sensation.

But upon another account, it is of great importance to dwell upon this consideration of our capacity for improvement; as it must be a very pleasing prospect for such creatures as we are to look forward into futurity, which it is so natural for man to do, and to imagine the improvement which our mind may receive in the society of various orders of beings; or if this may be too much a work of fancy, it ought at least to open our ears to the revelation which God has been pleased to grant us, which prejudices and worldly wisdom have been but too successful in shutting.

And

And thus I think that proper meditations upon the dignity of human nature, according to such a plan as is here only hinted at, will convince every one that there is no foundation in nature for that hypothesis, which links the present system of things together so as to form a chain which must be destroyed if any link be broken.

The gradation among the beasts is imaginary with respect to themselves, for they are totally insensible of excellence and defect; and never compare themselves with each other, in order to derive from the comparison matter of pride or humiliation; discontent or satisfaction; nor do they discover any signs of an improving nature: an additional sense gives them no advantages of which they seem to be sensible, neither is the loss of one an occasion of repining; in short, what they possess seems to be the measure of every thing to them. And as all their excellence and defects are relative to man; this proves, in the strongest manner, that one great end of their creation was for the use of man; notwithstanding the quaint repartee;

“ And man for mine replies a pamper'd goose.”

THE END OF THE THIRD BOOK.

B O O K

## B O O K IV.

*Of the Evidence of the Christian Religion.*

## C H A P. I.

*Of Infidelity.*

**T**HE vices of the ancients were enormous, whether we consider their cruelty or their lusts. Among them human nature was degraded, vilified, and corrupted to the last degree. Their very religion was contrived on purpose to free the mind from the natural stings of conscience, by giving them a systematic method of indulging all their passions upon principle occasionally, and from the example of their gods, whenever they had an opportunity. The observance of their religious ceremonies consisted only in feasting and indulging their passions, without laying any restraint upon their lives, and consequently could be no great hardship upon the votaries. And upon such easy terms, who would not be religious. All these things Christianity has abolished, and in their stead has laid great restraints upon human nature, which produce great and visible effects in the world.

It is true, individuals may be found now that indicate strongly a disposition to be as cruel and

as vicious as the worst of the antients. But they are obliged to stop short, because the world will not bear them out, and countenance them in their vices, nor suffer any thing to be done openly that greatly contradicts the genuine principles of Christianity. So that however corrupted and licentious we may be as individuals in private, yet publicly, and as nations, we are Christians; that is to say, when a man's own prejudices and passions do not come in the way, he is sensible of *the truth*. and of the improvement which the world has received from the Christian Religion, though he may find "a law in his own members warring against this law of his mind." And thus many an idle talker may be much more a Christian than he himself suspects; and even those who affect (for there is such affectation) to be considered as unbelievers, will find themselves restrained by this Religion in a thousand instances, and their indignation kindled against crimes which they would have beheld with indifference, had they not lived among Christians.

The Christian Religion has a firm establishment in the world, so that the gates of hell cannot prevail against it; and if this establishment is not general over the world, perhaps it is the intention of Providence to give it but a partial extent at first, though the propagation was general, that its good and powerful effects may appear more evident, from its gradually subduing the whole world, by the improvement and advantages which those nations should visibly exhibit who professed it.

It is true, we have the writings of infidels, as a sort of direct testimony, from the reception that they meet with, that we are very far from being all Christians. But when it is considered, that



every thing in the material world, and the whole course of our education, is contrived to form an opinion of the stability and importance of earthly things, it is not to be wondered at that a bad man should be tempted to write against Revelation, and that there should be prejudices enough in the world to encourage him to this abuse of his talents. And yet, if such writings met with a more general reception than they do at present, it would be so far from proving that we are not Christians, that it seems to prove just the contrary; and that our Christianity is a yoke which is too heavy for us to bear; which leads us to look every where for some decent excuse to throw it off. Besides, such writings, instead of answering the direct intention of the authors, have produced something very different, being perhaps instruments, though indirectly, in the hands of Providence, for spreading and propagating the gospel.

Such writings have certainly been the occasion of a more serious examination into the grounds of our faith; and many a one will read an infidel book, who would never think of the Bible, or what it contains; and thus, at least, the subject of religion becomes more generally known than, perhaps, it would otherwise have been: and if the subject is once considered at all, there is no man can set his mind at ease upon a point, which, if he discovers any thing, he must see so nearly concerns himself, even by the reasonings of infidels about it. For if we allow their writings the utmost force, they prove nothing more than this, that the Christian Religion is neither discoverable nor supportable by the principles of human sciences. But this, in my opinion, even if they make it good, is proving very little, or rather, if they

cannot destroy the proper foundation of Revelation, is actually proving that it comes from God, and cannot be the work of man.

The world is amused with every novelty, and when the writer shews to the grammarian, and those of like prejudices, that he has tried to reduce the Christian Religion to a grammatical arrangement, but finds his labour in vain, and no possibility of giving rules for every thing advanced in it, and from thence concludes that it is false, all those who have made this kind of arrangement their standard of truth, and who, for reasons best known to themselves, may wish to be infidels, may talk very plausibly as such, though very little to the purpose. The mathematician, metaphysician, and natural philosopher, may, in like manner, produce their respective evidence as a standard, and advance the like *well-founded* objections; all of which may be true, and nothing to the purpose. And yet such objections serve to amuse mankind; and, what is better even than amusement, help to keep a disagreeable truth out of their sight.

I am no great admirer of scientific consequences, unless when formed into systems for teaching boys to think accurately, nor do I expect they can ever be carried very far, when confined to the real truth of matter of fact, as I have explained myself at large in the last book; nevertheless I shall produce an instance, to shew that principles which mankind might think very certain, would lead to strange conclusions, if traced to their scientific consequences.

It would, for instance, be easily granted me, that two lines upon an even surface, no matter whether crooked or straight, continually approach-  
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ing one another, must meet somewhere, if produced. Where is the man, unskilled in geometry, who would think of refusing me this reasonable principle: and yet, by the assistance of this principle, I shall undertake to overturn almost every thing that has been demonstrated in geometry. But there is no occasion for the qualification of an *almost*: by this principle I destroy the properties of the *asymptotes* of the *hyperbola*, and from them I can easily get at the general properties of the *conic sections*; and by proceeding thus, I can overturn the whole fabric of geometry from its very foundation, and establish in its stead a scientific system of absurdity and nonsense, which would be greedily received by the world, if it could help to ease mankind of such a restraint as the Christian Religion imposes. Meditate upon this instance, ye who are admirers of consequential reasonings.

These things are not said from a disposition to undervalue human sciences; if they can answer their own ends, it is all that can be expected from them; and the expecting more from them, shews that we are not well acquainted with the nature of them. And perhaps many of the objections to Christianity have derived their force from the attempts that have been made to give it this systematic teachable form; an objection against the systematic arrangement is considered, however improperly, as an objection against the thing itself.

But systems are necessary evils, springing from the weakness of men. We must teach, if any thing to the purpose, according to system, and where there may be improper teachers, the system should be prescribed. Thus it would not be

proper, where any attention was paid to the interests of learning, to trust to men of very poor abilities to form a grammar for their pupils, who might be sufficiently qualified to teach by a grammar formed by another. But if the subject is of general importance, and liable to be misunderstood, the teachers and learners should be equally obliged to keep to some system established by public authority. Only in the case of religion, objections to such a system ought never to be considered as objections to Christianity; "let God be true, but every man a liar."

Modern infidelity has something very remarkable in it, and it must seem a very unaccountable appearance, that the more information mankind have received upon this subject of religion, the less attention they should pay to it; and especially that in Christian countries, men have dared more openly to set themselves against the true God, than the heathens ever did against the grossest of their idols. This, to a superficial observer, might seem, at first sight, to justify an opinion, that the world was become more irreligious by the propagation of Christianity, which, by abolishing the kingdom of Satan, had even given mankind a more unbounded liberty of indulging their passions, than they enjoyed before: but this is so far from being the case, that the attentive observer will find that Christianity has humanized the world; that is, wherever it has been received has made us *men* and brethren.

Man, it is true, is the most timorous of all animals, as he has more sources of fear, than any other sensible creature; but by associating into communities, this fear comes to be gradually diminished, for every one has a much greater con-

confidence in another than in himself, because we know our own weakness better than that of others; and thus by mutual support and confidence, we are able to perform miracles of courage: and as the Christian Religion has destroyed those numberless sources of superstition which the fears of mankind had opened for their own torment, many now are become so fool-hardy as to extend this courage to heaven itself, not indeed in the impious style of making war, but by trying to hide themselves from the sight of such a perfect being as God, seeking for a kind of independence under the shelter of the laws of nature.

Though we naturally love perfection, and admire it, yet from a consciousness of our own weakness, folly, and vice, we are very unwilling to put ourselves under the inspection and direction of a perfect character. This might be proved from the history and daily practice of mankind: and this makes the most vicious chuse fate and nature, which are blind, to have dominion over them, rather than God Almighty.

But this important *election* is not left to ourselves, for God claims his dominion over us, and has given us sufficient manifestations to this purpose: and more particularly the Christian Religion is founded upon a kind of evidence which human discoveries can never invalidate; and this evidence besides has an extent and stability which the principles of human sciences cannot bestow.

## C H A P. II.

*Of the Origin of the World and of Mankind.*

THOSE are but ignorant pretenders to science, who set out with considering an inquiry into the origin of mankind and of the world, as a philosophic question: for such a proceeding, instead of indicating a turn for discovery, rather indicates that kind of weakness of mind, which shews itself by a disposition to work without materials; and is most in its element when employed upon such dreams as the speculations about infinity. For all our discoveries in the way of natural speculation, tend to nothing else, but the making observations on the things already formed, and classing them either for particular uses, which we may discover experimentally, without knowing any thing of their real natures, or turning the observations which we have made to the improvement of our faculties, by giving us a ready means of becoming acquainted with things. We know that fire and air and water are powerful instruments in nature, but we know nothing but a few of their effects; and from what we can see, we may be pretty certain that they are not instruments employed by God for the creation, but only for the preservation of things; they are agents for separating and compounding things already made, but nothing farther.

If left to ourselves, we are, therefore, completely shut out from this important information; and consequently being able to investigate neither our beginning or end, we must be left in a very imperfect

imperfect state, to die like the brutes, or at best to support our spirits with endless conjectures, derived from our natural feelings and apprehensions.

Thus far, indeed, we may be certain, from our own experience, that neither mankind, nor the other animals, are the spontaneous production of the earth, and have reason to be firmly convinced, that if all the animals were compleatly extirpated from off the face of the earth, that there are no powers in nature which could repair this loss. The probable opinion, therefore, would be, that some *Being*, equal to the task, has performed this great work, and who, as we have certain proofs that he knew when to stop, must have intelligence, and all other powers sufficient for such a work; and farther than this conjecture we cannot pretend to go of ourselves. And we should be in endless perplexity when we came to consider what could be our reason for hiding ourselves from the sight of a *Being* of infinite perfections. Who told us that we were naked? And whence did this nakedness proceed?

But we have a book professing, not in the natural way of human invention, to give a true account of all these particulars. It at the same time adds many other circumstances, of which, without this history, we must have remained for ever ignorant. Now in this book it is said, that God created every thing out of nothing, and not from any pre-existing materials, nor by the ministry of second causes, but by the word of his power: and particularly, that he formed man of the dust of the earth, but that he breathed a soul into him, and gave him dominion over all the other animals; and that out of man woman was formed.

Mankind thus made, are then tried, to see whether they are really fit for that state of nature which was thus formed: and it appears upon trial, that they were not: they had not their appetites sufficiently under subjection to their reason, considering the temptations to which they were exposed. And therefore it seemed good to God, that they, and all their posterity, should be tried in some other state before they could be fit for such an exalted rank as was at first intended for them. Though it is not said but, by this trial, they may be fitted for a much more glorious state than that in which they were placed at first. The history of the progress of mankind, and of the means by which they were to be prepared for this state, is contained in the same book; which is proposed to our consideration, not as a human composition, but is recommended to us as a divine revelation. And its contents are proposed to us as our rule of conduct, under the severest penalties in case of neglect, either in believing, or in complying with the injunctions and directions given in it.

Undoubtedly the effect which this ought to have upon the mind of every rational and serious man, ought at least to be a determination to give such an information a serious and rational examination. And certainly the very first appearance of the book carries with it a very important air; for the consideration of its contents, and even a compliance with them, is proposed to us at our peril. The different writers make no apology for want of information, nor for want of abilities; which, by the bye, is a very singular circumstance, and even without example.

Nor



Nor can we produce any rational excuse if we neglect this important examination; we cannot pretend to excuse ourselves upon a supposition that we want abilities to judge of this matter; the subject is not made up of consequences derived from an intricate, artificial, systematic arrangement; but consists of plain matter of fact, level to the capacity of all mankind, and, which is very singular, is made up of facts equally interesting to all mankind, which is a thing that cannot be said of any other collection of facts. Nor is there any occasion for our cautious and suspicious temper to take the alarm, because we have nothing to guard against but the cunning of our fellow-creatures. In short, our satisfying ourselves that this book is no human composition, or rather, to speak more accurately, that it contains no human project, is, in fact, proving it to be supernatural or divine. Our fellow-creatures, it is true, might be disposed, either from selfish considerations, to impose upon us, or merely to divert themselves with our credulity; nay, all this has been done, and, what makes us masters of this subject, the instances are upon record.

### C H A P. III.

#### *Of the Nature of this Subject.*

**B**UT this account of the nature and condition of man, if true, is confessedly above human invention, and therefore, in a certain sense, is above human comprehension; and is besides a subject of such a nature as no man, even if it had accidentally come into his head, was likely to propose

propose for the delusion of his fellow-creatures, as the scheme has nothing human in its end or manner. For if the things related be taken for facts, their evidence rests entirely in faith, or in a belief of the things related upon the authority and testimony of this book, and that in a particular sense, as the facts can have no collateral support, because of their singularity, nor do they admit of experimental proof, because they can never be repeated, neither can their proof be sought for nor examined by the principles of science. And all these are strong marks of a supernatural original. For if the things followed one another, according to the common course of human events, or might be deduced regularly and consequentially, like scientific inferences, there seems no great difficulty in conceiving, that they are the inventions of men; because this implies such a natural connection, that whoever luckily got into the train of thinking, might have prosecuted the subject: for human nature has produced many instances to this purpose. So that to such as think with me, a consequential, consistent scheme of religion, all perfectly intelligible, and containing no difficulty, would be a very suspicious thing, whatever might be its merits in other respects.

But on the other hand, nonsense is perfectly unintelligible, and incapable of being reduced to any scientific arrangement: and hasty reasoners are always for reducing, under this head of *nonsense*, whatever they cannot thus arrange. And to the majority of mankind, Newton's *Principia* is the most nonsensical book in the world, except perhaps the Bible.

It may be said, must religion be irrational? Is there no way by which supernatural knowledge  
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can be conveyed to mankind, agreeable to the principles of reason? If this question means, Is there no way of inferring the whole of Revelation from simple and settled principles within the reach of the human capacity; I affirm, that if there were any such, I should no longer consider it as a Revelation, but as a human discovery or plan, however ingenious I might allow that plan to be: because, whatever one man can fully comprehend, I can conceive no difficulty in supposing another to invent. But if by this question be meant, Does this subject admit of rational evidence; that is, such an evidence as a man ought to found his conviction upon? In my opinion it has stronger evidence than any subject with which I am acquainted, though not so formal as many others. But as it is not a philosophic scheme, this want of formality of evidence is immaterial: and it is only necessary to prove that it is a scheme, or in other words, as it is not suspected of worldly wisdom by our reasoners against it, we have only to clear it of the imputation of worldly folly.

It is true, all the facts taken singly, that is, if there were but one single fact must be incredible, and if either of them were to be proposed singly to mankind, every wise man ought to consider it as an imposition, unless where he was an eye-witness: for the nature of man is such, that he can propagate a single lie, however bold; but its want of connection with any thing else, discovers the falshood, and it is but making a right use of our reason, to receive every such story with suspicion. Besides, if the facts were credible of themselves singly, they would no longer have a right to be considered as supernatural, and yet, taken all together, they may be considered as capable of producing

ducing the most rational conviction: the not attending to this, seems to me to be one of the great causes of infidelity.

The schemes of mankind we may be perfectly acquainted with, and can very positively speak to the motives of them; and may besides, with a very little pains, be well enough informed to calculate the duration of them, and form an opinion, from the very beginning, of what will probably be their end.

But more particularly, there is no scheme of human contrivance, but, when all the facts are laid before us, we can account for the motives of the actors, and the progress of the scheme. And one very remarkable circumstance attends all human schemes, that they are limited to a very small portion of time, many of them only the lie of a day, to answer a particular and pressing purpose: and all of them discover the eagerness of the contriver to bring them to perfection, by forcing as much as possible of them into view, to engage adherents by the plausibility of the projects: and we always observe strong marks of a disposition to catch at the fruit of them, joined to an anxiety about the favour and good opinion of the world. The plans of the most cunning *artists* are very plausible upon the first appearance, and carry an air of public-spiritedness along with them: yet, however artfully the contrivers may endeavour to conceal their motives, we always find something selfish at the bottom.

And another peculiarity of such schemes is, that if they are not brought to some perfection by the first planners of them, we shall probably hear nothing more of them. If a desire of dominion, or even of reputation of any kind, spur  
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on a man to make an attempt to distinguish himself, we naturally expect even from the wisest (or rather, if he acted otherwise, we should be apt to consider him as foolish) a prudent haste to bring his schemes to perfection, but particularly an unwillingness to deliver up the execution of them to another, when they were in a manner brought to perfection; but especially in the disposing of the advantages of them, we should look upon him as unnatural if he did not discover a strong partiality to his own family and descendants. There is a certain selfish vanity attending man, which contracts his sentiments, and of course contracts all his schemes; instead of the citizen of the world, and the general benefactor of mankind, you discover a creature grasping at every thing, and confining his acquisitions to the gratification of a vanity which is to separate him from the rest of the world.

These are prejudices, but they are human nature; and what is more, in our present imperfect state, they are the very principles by which human societies subsist, and are kept together and improved.

#### C H A P. IV.

##### *Of the History of the Jews.*

**T**HIS history begins with a short and simple account of a thing far out of the reach of all philosophical investigation; namely, the history of the origin of all things, and particularly of man, with the account of a disorder very soon introduced

troduced into this lower world by the ungovernable passions of mankind.

As the inhabitants had now no longer faculties suited to the world in which they were placed, the face of nature is made to undergo a change, that it may be fitted for their changed circumstances. There is, therefore, according to this account, no vestige left of what man himself or the world was, before the fall : and for this reason, there is great propriety in just telling us, that such a change was brought about by something of which we have now no means left to enable us to form any judgement ; the only things by which we could have measured the truth or falsehood, or if this be too presumptuous, by which we could comprehend what then happened, being vanished and gone. And therefore the most regular and minute description would convey just as much knowledge to us, as a dissertation on colours to one born blind. It was a species of intemperance ; and to this day mankind discover their depravity by nothing so soon or so naturally, as by intemperance in eating and drinking, with its consequences.

But if a mere human writer had invented this story, how would he have taken advantage of this very circumstance, to embellish it with all the ornaments of fiction, to raise the wonder and admiration of men ; or if he had received it as a tradition, there was still great room for invention, and he could have added much of his own to extend his reputation ; and, if he had been able, he would have given it something of a philosophic air, in order to suit it to the taste of the reasoning part of mankind.

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By this history, however, it appears, that the world was left in a state rather favourable to mankind; and it seems the ground was not so completely cursed, but that they had the means of corrupting themselves to an intolerable degree; which there is some reason to think was left so to prove experimentally the impropriety and inconsistency of such faculties with such circumstances; for before the flood, mankind had become entirely sensual: God, therefore, by a *deluge*, destroys the old world, and produces a new face of things, the passions and faculties of mankind being better adapted to the state of nature which was then produced. And this is the only one of which we are capable of judging, being that which remains to this day, with only the changes which mankind themselves have made.

After the deluge, mankind are dispersed by a confusion of languages introduced among them; and after this we find them left to the use of their own faculties, which have to struggle with the laws of nature, in the form of climate, soil, and the ungovernable nature of some materials which they had occasion to use, according to their desires and situation; but their chief struggle has been against the effects of their own unruly passions, and those of their fellow-creatures.

Only we find that God takes under his immediate protection one single family, and their descendents. But this choice, it is clear, does not proceed from partiality, but is made the means of carrying on his plan for the instruction and improvement of the world; which reformation is all along conducted in such a manner, that men may put in of their own as much as possible, and

make the work, in some measure, appear to be their own.

It is true, we find great encomiums upon the character of that man of whom God made choice; but this says no more than that it suited the scheme of God better to make use of a man naturally disposed for such a work, than to dispose one supernaturally for it. Because if that had been done, he could not, with any propriety, have been proposed as an example to future generations, which is very reasonably done, as the case stands at present.

The nations which were scattered over the face of the earth, may be considered just as much under the guidance of the Supreme Being, as the nation of the Jews; and when we think otherwise, it is not an essential, but a relative consideration which determines us to such an opinion.

The growth of the nation of the Jews, amidst an oppression which ought to destroy them; the manner of gathering them together; the circumstances would make them leave the most fertile country in the world; their march through the sea; the forty years that they wandered in the wilderness; and their settlement afterwards in Canaan, exhibit one continued scene of miraculous power. And during this space of time, there were such divisions among them, as would have shewn themselves sooner in the detection of any supernatural pretences, than in the manner that they did: for Korah and his company would have then found a much better objection against Moses and Aaron, than that they *took too much upon them*.

After their settlement they are left more to themselves, and the supernatural interpositions are only  
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only occasional. They are carried away captive into other nations; sometimes afflicted, and sometimes forsaken of God: and the nearer the days of the Messiah approach, the more they are reduced to the state of the rest of the world.

## C H A P. V.

*Remarks upon this History.*

**T**HE Jews, their opinions, and history, were matters of wonder and curious speculation to the antients; but as they had not the true principles, their reasonings about them are extremely absurd.

And it must be acknowledged, that if the whole body of the Jews had vanished with the ten tribes, or, like other nations, had left no traces behind them, by which they could be distinguished, the books of Moses would have been a very unaccountable composition; and even if the historical facts had been too well authenticated to be denied, there must have appeared an extravagant waste of supernatural power for any visible effect which it had produced.

For, speaking according to the principles of the rest of mankind, they could never be a happy people, as they were continually in unnatural circumstances; not being allowed to act upon the motives which commonly influence the actions of men, or even often to indulge such passions as are reckoned innocent and natural: and these restraints were not political or partial, for the whole nation was bound by them from the highest to the lowest. For even Moses himself does nothing of importance

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from the common feelings of humanity: he has no views of aggrandizing himself or his family; nor even of finishing the scheme which he himself had been so long engaged in; which, in a certain sense, he had begun, and saw to be so near its conclusion: the final execution of it, however, he gives over to another; not in a fit of despair, or during a time of danger, but deliberately and coolly: and this other person, to whom he delivers up his commission, is so far from being a near relation of his own, that he is not even of the same tribe: so that Moses himself seems perfectly to have understood his own character and commission, which was this, that he was able to do nothing of himself; or rather, that he had nothing to do of himself, it being no scheme or plan of his, but one, as it were, at first forced upon him.

This is a very consistent character, according to our belief of this history, but would be an absurd and inconceivable one, according to the supposition which makes the scheme his own contrivance; and of course the supernatural powers pretended on purpose to delude the credulous multitude into a compliance with his views; if that could be called, in any sense, his views, from which he was to derive no advantage, either real or imaginary, as mankind consider advantages. If this be the truth, Moses would have certainly been the most extraordinary impostor that can be conceived, not only on account of the ends which he proposed to himself, and the means he made use of, but also from the circumstances in which he chose to exhibit his impositions. To make choice of the court of a powerful monarch to perform in; and this choice not directed by such motives

motives as might be expected from the scene of action; for, in such circumstances, an impostor would certainly, at least naturally, have paid his court to the prince, instead of threatening him. And what had he to threaten him with as a mere human agent? The action would have been that of a madman.

It would have been a very bad piece of policy in Moses, if this had been a scheme of human policy, to harden Pharaoh's heart by the stumbling-block which is thrown in his way, and which has ever since stood in the way of infidels, in beginning his supernatural exertions, with those very things which the king's subjects could imitate by slight of hand, with sufficient dexterity to deceive the multitude. But God, who has inexhaustible sources of power, might act thus with great propriety, and gradually clear the sight of the Ægyptians, and open their eyes to distinguish a true miracle; for the juggler's art consists in taking people by surprize, before they have had time to fix their attention.

But supposing all the difficulties in Ægypt overcome, (which could not have been very easy for an impostor, where the kind of imposition that he must use was brought to such perfection) and even the red sea passed; a wilderness of scorching sands would have been a strange place to chuse for exhibiting acts of leger-de-main to a hungry, thirsty, disappointed, enraged and obstinate multitude. And all this while, this very artful impostor, running all this hazard, and discovering no signs of any passion that he had to gratify, except he had been a monster of ingratitude, and did all this in return for the preservation of his

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life, and the advantage of an education at the court of Ægypt.

But the infidels alledge, that the whole history is improbable. They should explain particularly what they mean by improbable: surely they would not bring down things professedly supernatural to a natural standard: if this could be done with the present subject, its credit would be entirely destroyed. The history has every mark of authenticity that the nature of the subject admits. We meet with none of the common, nay, general prejudices of mankind here. There is no boasting of supernatural descents, in the manner of the heathens. All mankind have justice done them in being derived from one common stock, as they enjoy one common nature. We here find no attempts to palliate or conceal the defects of the people of the Jews; nay, their vices are related with a plainness and faithfulness which have given scandal to some well-meaning people, as they think some of them improper to be told, much more to be committed by a people so highly favoured of heaven.

But these very circumstances answer a good purpose, and are even necessary to enable us to make a proper estimate of the character of this people, which we would be very apt to mistake from their possessing such extraordinary privileges and gifts, by shewing us more evidently that they were only instruments for a particular purpose; and, in all other respects mere men, and in many instances very bad men.

The interpositions of God have something singularly characteristic; the heathen gods act entirely upon human ideas; which shews that they have no real existence, but are only notions bred in  
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in human imaginations; and in the business of the world, they support only a secondary part, being introduced to assist or elevate some favourite character; they have nothing to do on their own account, but are for ever impertinently interfering in human affairs. In the fables of the heathens, the gods are the *machines*, but it is men that act this part in the scheme of revelation.

The history of our redemption, to be read to the purpose, must be read with a disposition to learn, and not with a disposition to cavil and criticise. A human composition we may think we have some right to criticise, and to judge of the probability or truth of the things contained in it. But a revelation, which claims an authority more than human, and assumes a dignity, which shews that it does not court the approbation of men, but demands their attention at their peril, ought to be received in a different manner, and its pretensions must be examined by a very different standard from human criticism. Just as in the material world, where we must content ourselves with such a knowledge as is suited to our circumstances, without pretending to say, that the crooked should have been made straight, we must content ourselves with alledging, that it will answer our purpose as well to reason upon a supposition that it is straight; not that this is better in the nature of things, but because this simplicity is better suited to our faculties. And as this is what we are necessarily led to in examining natural appearances, even where we have the most accurate measures that human ingenuity can invent; so our wisest and most prudential scheme will be to understand the Bible with the same allowances and limitations, and as nearly as we can according to the plan and

level of the human understanding, as best answering our purposes, and suiting our weaknesses; making use of our *natural* understanding as the means of coming at a rational knowledge of the subject, but watching with caution against the intrusion of our *artificial* understanding, which will be forcing itself upon us as an instrument of criticism; rather concluding that the difficulties here may be thrown in our way on purpose as a trial of our faith, and an exercise of our abilities; or perhaps as a test, to prove that we are of the proper teachable disposition, which is not consistent with a conceit of knowledge.

If it should be said, how do we know, or how can we be certain that events are supernatural, if we do not use the utmost freedom in examining them, approving or rejecting them according as we find them to be worthy or unworthy of God? This is, no doubt, very flattering, and very plausible; but I should be glad to know where this test is to be found, by which we can determine what is worthy or unworthy of God. Are our faculties sufficient for this inquiry? I think they are the farthest from it possible: and though human reason has been acting the plagiarist, and borrowing from Revelation ever since the propagation of Christianity, yet it has discovered nothing but its own insufficiency. There is then no remedy but implicit faith, if our faculties be found insufficient for the task. Certainly there is; we may use our reason to very good purpose upon this subject: for though we do not know the power and councils of God, any farther than he chuses to discover them to us, yet it is very possible for us to make ourselves pretty well acquainted with the powers and councils of men; and may thus come  
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by a proper and modest use of our reason, to form a very satisfactory conclusion where human impositions are concerned ; for the whole dispute here is, whether this work be of God or man. But it will be necessary to inquire a little more particularly into the evidence proper upon such a subject.

## C H A P. VI.

*A farther Consideration of the Kind of Evidence proper for this Subject.*

THE Christian Religion can neither be refuted nor defended upon the principles of those narrow systems formed and shaped to the human faculties, which have been contrived to improve the understanding, by giving a regularity and order to our thoughts, and to curb the extravagant flights of the imagination, which would otherwise throw the affairs of this world into confusion and disorder.

I have explained, in the last book, the ends to be answered by such systems, and the prejudices which they are likely to produce. But they all lead to a general prejudice against revelation, as their very end is to make men content with this world ; besides a revelation comes in the suspicious form of a work of imagination, and can expect no justice, where scientific arrangement is to judge. So that we must have recourse to a different tribunal, if we would chuse to be informed of the truth ; and whoever would lay a firm foundation for his faith, or even for his infidelity, must conduct himself upon a more extensive plan ; and get

into the wide world of things, and not confine his views within the little circle made by human science.

Even the man who begins the study of geometry, will find that he must proceed upon very different principles from those according to which he had acquired his grammatical knowledge. Or if he persisted in his error, the world would hardly compliment him so far as to believe that the geometrical conclusions were false, because they did not fall in with his prejudices; but they would rather suppose that he wanted a capacity or disposition for attending to the proper evidence.

Here is a scheme of religion laid before us; the question is not, Is it formed according to, and derived from what we call philosophical principles? But is this scheme a human contrivance? Is it a plan of human artifice and cunning? Or is it an instance of human extravagance and folly? The man who sets about this examination, should forget that he is a grammarian, mathematician, or natural philosopher, and only endeavour to keep up the character of a reasonable creature.

If the Christian Revelation be of human contrivance, it is a very extraordinary scheme indeed. The life of man, nor the life of families, and, I may add, nor even the life of nations, is equal to an imposition of this kind, even were it calculated to gratify the highest pitch of vanity of which the human heart is susceptible. This plan begins in the obscurest manner, consisting at first only of promises very remote and perfectly unintelligible, humanly speaking, by those to whom they were addressed. The same plan is carried on, and is continually improving, and gradually unfolding itself for a space of between five and six thousand years,



years, according to the testimony of the book which explains it; and for the space of three thousand, according to collateral testimony. But what is very wonderful, the different improvements do not follow consequentially or naturally, but are brought about by means and instruments totally inadequate to the purpose, as men speak and judge when they form their opinions upon the soundest reasonings and most accurate experience.

Besides, it promotes the designs of no particular men or families or nations; but takes in impartially the whole human race; and treats mankind according to their real nature, and not according to the fanciful distinctions of human vanity; always speaking to them from beginning to end in a style of authority, and, in a certain sense, in a style of contempt and pity.

Even the people to whom this scheme is first opened, and who are the ostensible instruments for carrying it on, have only faint and obscure hints given them, and such as they might set their imaginations to work upon, but could not comprehend. The Jews seem rather to be called to bear testimony to a plan that is going forward, than to be any way interested in its progress: for when it was more fully laid open, they even thought it their interest to stop it: here they make an effort of themselves, violent indeed, but ineffectual.

And the little that the prophets themselves understood of the matter, appears from what our Saviour himself says of John the Baptist, whom he declares to be equal to any of the prophets, but more ignorant of this scheme than the least informed Christian.

Mankind, however, cannot be made mere machines; and the Jews, though they understood nothing of the real plan, formed one to themselves. Men, in such circumstances, being confined to certain prospects, would be apt to draw matter of pride and consolation from them, right or wrong, whether they understood them or not. A people particularly chosen by God would be apt to be insolent, without considering the purpose for which they were chosen. And this we find was actually the case with the Jews, who from such a prepossession, misunderstood the whole plan, applying every thing to the gratification of their own vanity, by concluding that this scheme, mysterious as it was, foreboded nothing but the gratifying of their ambition in the persons of their descendants. And perhaps this misconception was necessary to make them act their part in this business with propriety, and in a natural manner, but it certainly proves that they were mere instruments in conducting it. And their example ought to be a lesson to us against the dangerous consequences of such prejudices as spring from a conceit of our importance, when we think that we are distinguished, or have distinguished ourselves from the bulk of mankind. For such prejudices are generally so powerful, as to resist every kind of evidence, and to destroy the teachable disposition in mankind, which was what happened to the Jews. And this is particularly dangerous upon the present subject; for God never condescends to accommodate his dispensations to the conceit and and pride of particular men.

Now, let me ask any one, who considers this plan as an imposition upon mankind; Who is carrying it on? It cannot be the Jews, for they  
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know nothing of the matter; and when the strength of its evidence awaked them from their ambitious dream, they set themselves violently to oppose it.

It may, however, be pretended, that schemes have extended themselves by natural means, and have received gradual improvements from one age to another, without any intention to bring them to what they have accidentally arrived; the improvements being only the natural consequence of the operations of the faculties of men in certain circumstances. This, for instance, is generally the case with the improvements in science: and why, it may be said, may not religion have proceeded and improved by the same means?

But we must observe, that the most intricate sciences appear no longer mysterious after they are discovered: And this is so much a truth, that we can hardly conceive a person, with a proper use of his faculties, and these properly prepared, to have been in the same circumstances, and in the same train of thinking, without making the same discovery. And all mankind, who are capable of understanding any discoveries in science, may be conceived in circumstances which would infallibly have led them to make the discoveries themselves. Every one who knows any thing of arts and sciences, must feel himself so much at his ease upon such subjects, that he would never think of referring the discovery of them to a supernatural power. Besides, the first steps in any science are perfectly clear and intelligible, and always the easiest to be understood; they are only deficient in extent and *generality*.

But this is so far from being the case with our religion, that it is all darkness till we come to  
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the times of our Saviour; and if he had never come, the whole would have been nothing: but this is not the case with human improvements and projects; they are always something, as far as they go; and the supposing them to stop at any part, will exhibit a certain degree of perfection, and afford a lesson to mankind either of what they are to follow or shun. But if the Christian scheme had stopt short, no use could have been made of it by man; for there is no probability that any body would think of threatening and terrifying a king by plagues and miracles, and then proceed to carry off the most laborious of his subjects, leading them through an arm of the sea, and keeping them forty years in a wilderness to be fed and cloathed miraculously. In short, mankind can neither imitate, nor apply to any worldly purpose, any part of this plan.

It has been said, though by very weak people indeed, that the whole is a fiction, resembling the extravagance of romance: but it has produced too many consequences in the world to allow any one to dwell a moment upon such a supposition: and what is immediately to our purpose, we have ample proof of what mankind have been able to do upon religious subjects, when left to themselves, and to their own inventions; and by the specimens that they have given us, we see that their inventions are poor indeed.

Romances are always the invention of one head, and the actors are obviously imaginary *beings*, adorned with an appearance of supernatural power, and yet employed in nothing but bringing about human events in a very unnatural manner. But in the Bible, supernatural events are brought about by the instrumentality of mere men; and even the part that our Saviour himself has to trans-

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act, he performs in the person of a man. The nature of fabulous compositions is so well understood, that it may be reduced to rules: And I can form as determinate a judgement upon reading a romance, as when I examine the solution of an algebraic problem.

Does any body believe in the existence of the actors in fables? Does any one doubt of the existence of the nation of the Jews; or of the existence of the Christians, who have been the instruments in conducting this plan since it was taken out of their hands? Believe as little as you please upon this subject; no man of common sense can help believing so much as will support the opinion that a plan has been carrying on. And although it be conducted according to the principles of no human sciences or compositions, this is no argument of its want of proof, but only conveys to us this necessary information, that we must become as *little children*, laying aside our scientific prejudices, which tend to destroy the teachable disposition in us, and prepare ourselves for learning a new science founded upon new evidence.

## C H A P. VII.

### *Of the Nature of this Plan.*

WHEN we discover a scheme begun in the remotest ages, and which has been every day opening and enlarging itself, not according to the plan of human discoveries, but by methods singular and impossible to human ingenuity to contrive, or rather, which in human hands would have produced no effect, it becomes absolutely necessary

necessary to go beyond this world for the author and conductor of such a work.

Even the human agents who have their parts to act in it, do not engage in them like men prosecuting their own views, but they have something of an appearance of being forced into the service, or at least like a man waiting for, and acting by, the direction of a master: so much does every thing put on a supernatural air.

Such a scheme would be worthy of the attention of a philosopher in the highest degree, as a matter of mere curiosity. But when it is of the most interesting nature to man, as setting life and death before him in the highest sense of those words, this scheme ought to be considered, in a certain sense, as every thing: and if the book does really unfold it, all other circumstances are to be set aside: criticisms founded upon our systematic modes of arrangement, or upon our forms of expression, are trifling and impertinent, speaking with no more reverence than we do of human compositions. But when we consider ourselves and the subject, and the author of the plan, such a conduct is to the last degree hazardous and absurd and impious\*.

The natural world is a scheme or system of which we may comprehend enough to answer our

\* Even a man of abilities may speak with contempt of the impertinent criticisms made upon his works by a weak man: thus there seems no impropriety in Montesquieu's saying, "A l'égard du plan que le petit ministre de Wittemberg voudroit que j'eusse suivi dans un ouvrage qui porte le titre d'*Esprit des lois* repondez-lui que mon intention a été de faire mon ouvrage, et non pas le sien." But language cannot convey the contempt that any man deserves who would pretend to direct God Almighty.

necessary purposes, besides furnishing matter to exercise our reason and ingenuity upon. Yet when we would attempt to comprehend every thing, we soon meet with such difficulties as ought to make us sensible of our short-sightedness. But instead of learning such an useful lesson, the Theorist is disposed to consider whatever occasions such difficulties, as foreign to the purpose, and would have been much better pleased with a world formed according to some hypothesis of his own.

In the same manner our theoretical moralists, pretend to find insurmountable difficulties in the Bible, much matter that will not fall in with their schemes, and therefore, as they pretend, foreign to the purpose; much of the style and arrangement not reducible to the generally received modes of composition, and therefore absurd.

But the course of nature, and the course of religion, keep on their stated progress; and with an awful indifference seem to be telling such objectors, that it is the intention of God to execute his own plan, and not theirs.

We are taught by God that he made mankind and every thing else, not by laws, or according to any established necessary course of things: that is, there was nothing done at that time, which, if it were done again, we have any reason to think would produce the same effect by way of natural consequence. Laws of nature, then, are posterior to the creation, and consequently depending upon the will of God. But mankind always proceed upon the absurd supposition, that the laws which preserve things in being, made them at first, which shews that the idea of a creation is not a human idea. Man, and we have no reason to think otherwise of the whole animal creation, was formed

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contrary to the laws of nature ; instead of a gradual progress from infancy to maturity, he is made perfect at once. After this, the laws of nature commence : that is, instead of a succession of continually varying objects ; things either remain invariably the same, or generations of men, plants, and animals, succeed each other according to a stated rule ; or, after a time, the same objects are exhibited again in the same circumstances. All these appearances form habits in us. And upon these, taken in the most extensive sense, all our improvement, as rational creatures, depends. But some people are so absurd as to think that our very mind depends upon them, and is only a composition of such habits. What a human mind would be without the knowledge that it receives from sensation and reflection, it is impossible for us to say, though it seems but reasonable to suppose, that the knowledge which we are capable of acquiring at present depends upon the will of God, and is not a necessary consequence of any laws of nature. The Scripture makes the formation of the soul and body two distinct acts of God, and the composition of which they are made, two distinct substances ; the one is called the dust of the earth, the other the breath of God.

But to quicken our attention to the laws of nature, which God had established, and hasten our improvement, we are put into a state of trial and temptation ; things may be properly used or abused by us ; pleasure and pain are annexed to the application of certain things, often not immediate but consequential, and in some distant period of time, on purpose to engage us to look forward into futurity.



What the first laws of nature were with respect to man, is not said in the Bible, only it appears, upon trial, that human nature, even in its perfect state, was not equal to the temptations to which it might be exposed, and a particular event seemed to have completed the ruin of mankind; and, if left to themselves, they must have gone on propagating a race naturally devoted to eternal damnation; which state the Scripture, as it calls natural death sleep, calls eternal death.

Instead of creating a new race of men, who might stand in need of no reformation, God makes, as it were, a new creation with regard to man, curses the ground, and thus begins the reformation of the race, which had degenerated; and this reformation will undoubtedly be carried on and completed in a way which, in the end, will set his power, wisdom, and goodness in the strongest light that man, or perhaps angels, can behold them.

His plan, as we may collect it from what he has been pleased to discover, seems to be this; to make mankind as much as possible the instruments of their own reformation, only helping them on, where it was impossible for them to do without help. Thus condescending to be the teacher of mankind, and suiting his lessons to their capacities, faculties, and circumstances, as a school-master would try and exercise and improve the capacities and faculties of his scholars. And to keep to the same figure, if I were to teach a boy something directly, which I knew his abilities could not reach of themselves; but with regard to another, only put him into circumstances, where he could not fail to learn of himself what he wanted, if he made the proper use of his facul-

ties; the first would consider himself as obliged to me for his instruction; whereas the second would ascribe the knowledge which he had acquired entirely to himself.

In the same manner God is condescending to teach us in two different ways; in the natural, he has put fixed laws before us, which we may examine; and improve by the examination, if we attend to their regular and stated consequences; and these are well proportioned to the length of our lives. If the annual course of the sun had only been an hundred times as great as at present, no man could have experienced the variety of the four seasons.

On the other hand, in the supernatural world God has condescended to discover to us what, of ourselves, we never could have found out; however, not in such a manner as to encourage our indolence, but encumbered with such difficulties as require a very considerable, and, at the same time, a very prudent exertion of our faculties, to turn to proper account.

Even the matters of fact are mysterious; they do not follow stated laws, like those to which such events as are proportioned to the life and faculties of man are subject. The life of the world is only the regular period of them; so that new worlds, like new years, must pass away, before any principles for establishing laws could be found; and therefore our conviction cannot, upon such subjects, be grounded in habit, but in faith.

In the material world, the regular returns of certain appearances, that are variable to a certain degree, and the qualities and properties of matter being fixed, all these form very strong habits; their frequent appearance, and the constant oppor-  
tunities.

tunities which we have of examining them, wear off all air of mystery in natural things, and a familiarity with them we mistake for an acquaintance with their natures: and although we see only the constant effects and regular appearances, yet we find this a knowledge that gives us great satisfaction, and we are apt to conclude, that the foundation of such appearances is immoveable, though we cannot tell what it is. And those who confine their views to this world, labour only to make their circumstances and expectations consistent with each other.

But, on the other hand, though the things in the spiritual world are no more mysterious than in the material, yet no habits of this kind can be formed; we have only a succession of appearances, all different, and which we are only told tend to a very remote, though a very important end: and how they are means to bring about that end, we cannot tell; and therefore the mysterious air can never forsake even the matters of fact, and we have nothing for it, but to put an entire faith and confidence in God, not that he is carrying on such a scheme, for we have sufficient natural evidence for that, but that he will bring it to perfection in the way which he has promised, and that we ourselves are as much interested in it, as it is said in the Bible that we are; and as the event can only give us the natural conviction upon these points, their evidence must, at present, be the evidence of faith.

Yet even this spiritual plan, is made as level as possible, at least as level as necessary to our capacities, by being, in a great measure, put into the hands of human actors; and brought forward, not silently and suddenly, so as to escape our observa-

vation, but with such a gradual opposition from worldly-minded men, as could not retard its progress, yet was sufficient to draw the attention of mankind, and keep them sensible that such a scheme was going forward.

And for this purpose, it first of all pleased God to make the two grand divisions of the world into Jew and Gentile: and though the Jews seem more immediately under the protection of God, yet we have no reason to look upon the heathen part as neglected; and a man would judge very erroneously, who should ascribe God's dealings with the Jews to partiality, or to think that this conduct exhibited him in the character of a respecter of persons. For, upon a nearer inspection, it will be found that God does not so properly protect the Jews as his own scheme; because the separation of the Jews from the rest of the world, was not intended as the means of making them a flourishing nation, but only to preserve the worship of the true God, and proper notions of his attributes, and to be such a proof as all mankind could comprehend, that God was carrying on this plan of religion; at the same time that the rest of the world, in all variety of circumstances, were to exhibit what human nature is of itself, and what it is *capable* of doing, and *able* to do, when left to itself. And thus, by a comparison of all circumstances, the rational and teachable part of the world, in the fulness of time would be able to ground their faith upon the soundest reasonings.

This view of the subject accounts very fully for God's suffering the greatest part of mankind, for so long a time, *to walk after their own ways*; and it will also have a tendency to moderate the very high opinion which we are apt to form of  
super-

supernatural endowments, by making us put a value upon them according to the circumstances of the man who receives them, and not according to the excellence of the endowments themselves, which is what we are naturally disposed to do. For a man who has nothing but what he has received, may be as weak and frail, though entrusted to work miracles upon occasion, as another whom the Supreme Being only puts in proper circumstances to exert what are considered as his natural powers.

If this plan had been the work of men, their tampering with it would have soon discovered its nature: for when objections of any seeming consequence had been made, those who thought themselves interested in its preservation, would have been trying to accommodate it to every new hypothesis, and this must have exposed its *human* foundation to the eyes of the whole world. And I suppose, that the well-wishers to religion, in every age, have heard objections against it, which they could have wished to see properly refuted, and when that could not be done, even that the very occasion of them had been taken away. Whence this great respect for an imposition? And why this fear of meddling with the works of their own hands? Or rather, does not this prove beyond contradiction, that it is a supernatural work; the very stumbling-blocks in it, having too awful an appearance to be touched with sacrilegious hands?

God's plan seems to be the same in his natural, and in what, for distinction's sake, we call his supernatural dispensations: we may destroy or neglect the proper means for our bodily preservation, by not paying a sufficient attention to the laws of

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nature.

nature ; in the same manner, our spiritual welfare is entrusted to our own care. We have a part assigned us to act, and we are put into certain circumstances, and find that we have so much power over ourselves, and the nature of things, that we are the first to blame ourselves for a neglect of our duty in any respect. We find ourselves conducted, but not compelled. All things exhibit the appearance of an improving nature in man, and this, not from necessity, but voluntarily, as appears by the neglect of too many. And this improvement, we have reason to hope, may be carried to a degree which is hardly conceivable in such limited, corrupted, and dependent creatures, by God's interposition, according to the plan of Christianity.

What a lesson will the general judgement afford to the well-disposed, when the secrets of all hearts shall be laid open! Sufficient, we may suppose, to preserve the new world from such a fatal accident as happened to this.

The more such a plan as this is put into the hands of men, and, where that may be impossible, the more it is made to pass through the hands of men, the more likely it appears to be to answer the ends which the Supreme Being seems to have in view, namely, that of perfecting human nature by the operations of men, in one sense or another.

## C H A P. VIII.

*Of the Character of Christ.*

**I**F what has been said in the last chapter be properly considered, the appearance of the Son of God in the person and character of a man, will be found neither improper nor unnecessary. To confirm this, let us take a view of his character and behaviour whilst among men. But here we shall err egregiously, if we pretend to judge of his conduct according to those rules by which mankind are influenced and governed, on the one hand; or on the other, by those according to which we judge of the attributes of God; these are the two extremes which ought to be avoided.

The proper light to view him in, is that of a person acting a part assigned him, or here more properly a part which he has been pleased to take up; neglecting his own natural powers, or concealing them to accommodate himself to the character which he had undertaken to represent. And thus it must become a part of his character to conceal his powers, except in as far as was necessary for the work which he had to perform. His character is not to be tried by the attributes of God. It is to be tried by the circumstances of mankind, and the nature of his office; and if this assumed character be suited to these, his divinity is by no means affected by it. And, if the dignity of the subject was not above all comparison, I would add, no more than the wisdom of a man could be called in question, because he had represented to advantage the character of a fool.

This seems to me to account very fully for the great caution used by our Saviour to conceal himself from the people, in every circumstance which might discover him to be the Messiah, except those which could be collected from his foretold character; not, I think, as Locke says, that he was afraid to discover himself before the time; for his prophetic character seems to me to be what he wants to discover himself by, and he wants the inference to be made from this character; and this is the reason why it is said such a thing was done that the Scriptures might be fulfilled; as if he had no other motive for doing those things, but only to furnish the considerate and attentive reasoner with full evidence, that *his* was no new scheme, but that he was carrying on the scheme delivered in the Old Testament; or, to use his own expression, that he was not come to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfil them.

And if he had appeared in any other character, and exerted the most amazing powers in wonders and miracles of every kind daily, he might have forced a reception of himself upon mankind, for whatever he pleased; but he never could have been considered as carrying on the Jewish scheme, which had been begun so many ages before, and bringing it to perfection: and his miracles, had they been never so numerous, could not have produced so strong an argument as we have at present, nor would the conviction have been so rational, as that which is forced upon the mind from a long connected plan, carried on through the whole of time, and which we have good reason to conclude will only cease with time. Such a connected plan removes all suspicion of any temporary



nary delusion, to which it might be pretended a whole nation might be subject occasionally.

His whole character, indeed, is the most wonderful that can be conceived, every circumstance of it manifesting the commission which he had undertaken. If he had exhibited more or less power, it could not have answered his purpose so well. His prophetic character is contradictory to the principles of human nature, but is accurately preserved by him. His station in the world was such as is looked upon with contempt. But he who knew so well what was in man, knew also that the difference was immaterial whether he acted the king or the beggar.

Even a mind properly tutored by philosophy, comes to acknowledge the vanity of all human distinctions; though it cannot arrive at such perfection as to be above being influenced by them. And thus we may easily conceive, that the most splendid of human titles would have been particularly degrading to the Son of God. It was wonderful condescension to take our nature upon him, without the humiliating circumstance of being still farther encumbered with our vanities.

I shall conclude, with observing the extraordinary testimony which he has left us of the innocence of his character, by choosing, as his constant companion, and witness of all his actions, the worst man, we may suppose, that ever this world produced, who was present with him in public and private, and who would have been forward enough to produce any thing that could have been laid to his charge.

## C H A P. IX.

*Of the Miracles of Christ.*

**T**O the careful observer, and unprejudiced reasoner, even the less obvious circumstances of our Saviour's character and behaviour will carry irresistible conviction along with them; though to the dull apprehensions of those who cannot go a step beyond the immediate objects of their senses, miracles were necessary; and not only necessary for this reason, but also because they make a part of our Saviour's character, that he was the Son of God with power.

But even these are not merely wonderful works; for whoever considers his miracles with attention, must acknowledge, if he knows any thing of human nature, that the very selection of them is by no means so very obvious. They are not of the kind which an impostor could or would try to put upon mankind; and indeed they are of such a kind as he could not possibly succeed in, among the most credulous people. Though they appear to be great and truly supernatural when considered attentively, yet they are not such as have a tendency to raise the wonder and admiration of a multitude. No showy miracles are performed, nor such as are calculated to dazzle and alarm mankind. Diseases are healed, and, in one instance, the dead is raised, which was certainly done to support his character, as he professed to have power to raise the dead; for in his answer to the  
disciples

disciples of John the Baptist, the dead being raised is a circumstance mentioned.

All his miracles are more than barely supernatural wonders; they have besides their supernatural character, a particular application to our Saviour's character and mission; and cannot be fully understood, unless this circumstance be properly attended to. They were not merely necessary to gain credit to him as a supernatural teacher, for they must be considered in relation to the plan which was carrying on, if we would see them in their full force.

The objections made to miracles in general, are nothing to the purpose. For the nation of the Jews afford as strong a proof of their existence as human nature is capable of giving and receiving upon any subject. For the wonders to which they had been eye-witnesses, form the character of the nation, and which could not have been formed without real miracles. Whenever the characters of nations are different, we have no doubt that circumstances did exist to form that character. There are many things done and said in this country, that will always prove that we enjoyed a free constitution; even if a time should come when no such thing as a free constitution was to be found any where. And to my apprehension, the behaviour and opinions of the Jews prove as fully that they were directed by supernatural appearances; as the behaviour and opinions of the rest of the world shew that they have formed themselves upon natural appearances. For the character of the Jews is entirely distinct from the general superstitious character of mankind.

The weakness, knavery, credulity, and above all, the disposition to lying, merely to gratify the  
delight

delight which most men take in hearing and reporting marvellous stories, seem to have perplexed the opinions of mankind upon this subject. It would not in the least surprize me to hear a person affirm, that he himself has seen whatever has been reported to have happened upon any occasion. But the world knows how to make a proper estimate of such stories; and mankind in general were never so weak as to be deceived by such things. For such reports have universally lost their credit, sometimes from the very beginning, and always in a short space of time, either from their want of importance, or their want of credibility; and are now only to be heard of because they furnish an argument for infidels against the miracles related in the Bible.

How comes it to pass that these stories are so universally acknowledged to be false, that they can be safely used as instruments for undermining the foundation of the gospel miracles? The real truth is this; where mankind were in earnest, they have always thought miracles too hazardous a foundation to build upon; and accordingly no impostors, who have had any important scheme in hand, have ever meddled with miracles. Private intercourse with supernatural *beings* they have often ventured to feign, because in such cases they run no hazard of detection, but the performing miracles openly in the face of the world, is what no impostor ever attempted.

But if the things performed be not of the nature of those which mankind are apt to forge, and are not imitations of others, and are performed openly before friend and foe, without any expectation raised beforehand, but only occasionally; and especially if they make a part of a plan begun  
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long ago, and are attended with consequences quite out of the reach of human foresight, and also foreign to human purposes, these things are all to be taken into consideration, and where all or most of these circumstances concur, the most miraculous facts will support their credit with every one who knows any thing of sound reasoning: and then even the very extraordinary nature of the facts will support and confirm that very plan by which these supernatural events are in a certain sense supported.

Every revelation must from the nature of the thing, and the faculties and circumstances of men, be delivered with such difficulties as would at first destroy its credibility, merely from the nature and singularity of the facts; or if this be not so proper an expression to convey my idea, it must put mankind upon inquiring after new grounds of conviction: for the opinions of mankind are founded in habits formed by the nature of things and by the whole course of our education, which will directly stand up against these supernatural facts, and will certainly overpower them unless some strong motive rouse the attention.

## C H A P. X.

### *Of Christ's Kingdom.*

**B**UT it has been matter of surprize, that miracles, which ought to have carried universal conviction along with them, being suited to the capacity of the most ignorant spectators, had no more effect upon the Jews, who were eye-witnesses

nesses of them, than we find they had. And this makes it necessary to consider what were the circumstances which so blinded the Jews as to prevent that conviction from being produced, which was naturally to be expected; and this seems principally to have arisen from the mistakes of the Jews concerning the nature of Christ's kingdom. The manner in which the Christian dispensation is spoken of in the prophetic language of the Old Testament, joined to their own vanity, led the Jews into a great mistake concerning the nature of this kingdom. Such expressions as this, "and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end;" seem to foretel great temporal power and dominion.

Our Saviour takes the greatest pains to correct their prejudices on this head, both by his conduct and doctrine. And in order to make his character a consistent one, and to agree with the predictions concerning him, it was necessary that he should not raise the jealousy of the Romans; for if he had been tried by them as a seditious person, and condemned, he could not possibly have been the Messiah of the prophets; and how necessary he himself thought it to keep up to this character, appears evidently from his using the expression so often, that he did such a thing that the Scriptures might be fulfilled. And the many prudential steps which he is observed to take, have all the same tendency: for he declares, that it is not from any power or dread of his enemies, but only to keep up to the character foretold of him, that he takes such steps as seem to imply some apprehensions for himself.

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Nor need we doubt but the Roman governor would have been alarmed if our Saviour had been followed by multitudes of tumultuous people: and accordingly we find his doctrines particularly calculated to discourage such; and we may fairly conclude, that this, among other ends, was the intention of some of his longest addressees to the people. And the expression which introduces the sermon on the mount, is express to this purpose: "And seeing the multitudes, &c." And it is very probable, that after the clear and positive manner in which he declares his sentiments, as we find them delivered in this sermon, these multitudes dispersed very quietly, and with no small disappointment, upon finding that he was not the person they had taken him for.

Now, although from seeing his miracles they might be well satisfied that he had power to gratify all their wishes, yet, after such an explicit declaration of his principles, they well knew that he never would comply with their inclinations. And the perverse notions which the whole body of the Jews entertained upon this subject, give a particular force and propriety to the doctrines contained in the sermon on the mount, when considered as intended to cure their prejudices concerning the nature of Christ's kingdom. And it was certainly a necessary part of his office, upon all occasions, to set the Jews right in this particular, to shew them the impropriety of the Messiah's taking such measures to establish his kingdom, however great his power, which instead of reforming the manners of mankind, would give the Jews a licence for indulging themselves in all kinds of excess, and would become a standing  
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authority for the practice of tyranny in all succeeding ages.

For if we consider the state of the Jews at the time of our Saviour's coming, we may easily imagine with what *spirit* many of the people followed him, upon seeing the miracles which he performed. Especially as his miracles could leave them no room to doubt, that he had certainly the power, provided he had the inclination of restoring the kingdom to Israel. And the common principles of human nature will tell us what would be their expectations, when such an event took place. No less, we may believe, than the expectation of trampling their enemies under their feet; indulging themselves in revenge for real or supposed injuries; shaking off the Roman yoke, and expecting besides an opportunity of gratifying every sensual appetite.

A people in such circumstances, and with such expectations, stood in need of constant admonitions and informations to draw them out of their error. And there must have been a particular air of authority in our Saviour's teaching, that they could even bear to hear a doctrine carrying such a particular sting with it, when considered as disappointing their fondest hopes and expectations.

And that these reproofs and admonitions were continued through the whole of our Saviour's ministry, may, among other reasons, be owing to this, that the wiser sort of Jews might for some time imagine that he used policy to conceal his real designs, and only waited for a fit opportunity to put them in execution; which was particularly the case with his disciples: though it is also true



that the Jews, of the higher rank, were scandalized at the mean character which he assumed.

But at length the whole nation, putting all circumstances together, gave up all hopes of deliverance through his means; having been frequently disappointed both by his miracles and doctrine: the former confirming them more and more in their notions of his irresistible power, and the little occasion which he had for watching favourable opportunities to put any scheme in execution; while the latter would convince them that they could expect no benefit from him in the only way which they wished.

And thus the joint influence of his doctrine and miracles produced a most extraordinary, though a very natural effect among the Jews, and what neither of them could have done singly. For their minds, having been so long agitated between hope and fear, they felt their disappointment so sensibly, that it was followed by the hatred and detestation of the whole people, which shewed itself with aggravated maliciousness, unparalleled in the history of any nation. For their behaviour when he was condemned, and at the time of his crucifixion, shews the spiteful gratification which they enjoyed in thinking that they had been able to destroy a power which they could not turn to their own advantage.

And thus the very worst part of the behaviour of the Jews is a strong proof that they had seen and believed the miracles of our Saviour; and the reality of the miracles is one of the causes why the Jews reject Christ for their Saviour. Even Barabbas, or any sower of sedition, would answer the expectations of such a people better, than the mild and upright Jesus, with the power of working miracles.

## C H A P. XI.

*Of the Propagation of the Gospel.*

WE are told by St. Mark, that before our Saviour left the world, he gave this commission to his disciples; “ And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” This is certainly a very extraordinary commission, in whatever point of view it is considered. For an undertaking of this sort has numberless difficulties attending it, from the extensive nature of the plan, even if the execution were to be attended with every favourable circumstance; such as a people naturally disposed to learn, and teachers properly qualified to execute the orders which they had received. What opinion would a thinking man be apt to entertain of the success of such a scheme, upon taking into the account the obstinacy and unteachable disposition of mankind, joined to a natural aversion from the principles which it was proposed to communicate to them? Surely he would be apt to conclude from the perverse nature of man, and his proneness to evil, that this task, though it was nothing but laying goodness and virtue before all mankind, could never be enjoined by one “ who knew what was in man,” but ought rather to be looked upon, as the benevolent effusion of a heart conscious of its own uprightness, but without the least experience of human affairs.

But when the character and learning of those to whom this commission is delivered are taken  
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into consideration, every one would be ready to declare, that this was certainly a very harmless commission, but the most ridiculous that ever was given, and a thing that, in the event, must ruin the character of its author, if he had any to lose.

We find Livy producing the following argument as conclusive against the common opinion, that Numa received his instruction from Pythagoras; “ Ex quibus locis, etsi ejusdem ætatis fuisset, “ qua fama in Sabinos aut quo linguæ commercio “ quæquam ad cupiditatem discendi excivisset; “ quove præsidio, unus per tot gentes, dissonas “ sermone moribusque pervenisset?”

With what propriety might these questions have been asked upon the occasion of this mission of eleven fishermen, from so small a corner of the globe as Judea, and even from the most contemptible part of that little spot, which had been industriously separated from the rest of the world, both in religion and language.

Well might it have been asked, What reputation had these fishermen acquired, either for learning, or the arts of persuasion, (for they could not speak their own language with propriety) that they, of all others, should be employed, with the least probable expectation, that even their own countrymen would listen to their doctrine, had it been in no wise inconsistent with their prejudices.

Yet what are we to think when their commission extended not only to the instructing of their own countrymen, nor indeed simply to the teaching of all mankind, but to no less an object than the reformation of the whole world; not from ordinary ignorance and corruption, but from those corrup-

tions and errors which have the deepest root in human nature, as springing directly from those passions and enjoyments which mankind are most greedily addicted to.

Surely it might very naturally be made a question, By what intercourse of language, were they to deliver their sentiments in such a manner as to be able to raise the expectations, and fix the attention of those to whose language they were perfect strangers, and whose morals, religion, and settled customs they were to abolish or reform?

Or, Who was to guard them in their journey through so many nations, differing not only from them, but also from one another, in their language and manners?

If we had nothing but report, that such a scheme had been set on foot, and that it had succeeded, notwithstanding all these unfavourable circumstances; and if any stress should be laid on such a story, as an argument for bridling the passions of mankind, how loud would our present race of freethinkers be in their declamations, and how positive in their reasonings, that human nature was by no means able to support the credit of such a story; and that the very mention of such a thing as the work of man, carried a direct and positive lie along with it; or, to use the expression of a free-thinker, that the argument against it was as strong as any argument from experience could be.

But now that the fact is evident and certain, and even sensible to our daily experience; all this turns out to be the craft and cunning of those simple and illiterate fishermen; working upon the minds of simple people violently addicted to their  
own

own prejudices, whose language and manners they were strangers to.

Now, although this opinion of the free-thinkers can never be taken up by any rational creature, who is in the least acquainted with the circumstances of this history; yet the passions and inclinations of mankind, and the whole course of worldly affairs, are such enemies to the truths which the gospel conveys, that the thoughts of men may be easily turned away from paying a proper attention to such subjects, by the little plausible cavils of infidels, did not Christian societies keep up a succession of men to watch over the interests of religion, and refute such objections as might daily arise.

And this seems to me to be most effectually done, by pointing out the extensive plan of religion, and particularly by explaining and insisting upon those points which distinguish this scheme from natural events and human projects, and particularly by fixing our attention upon those grand events, when God seems compleatly to have taken this work out of the hands of men.

Now, the manner in which the Christian Religion has been propagated, is undoubtedly one of the strongest arguments for its divine original; and the wonderful gift of tongues is certainly one of the chief instruments of its propagation: it may therefore be proper, in this argument, to inquire a little particularly into the nature, dignity, and influence of this extraordinary gift, as a proof that this religion comes from God, by shewing that it never could have suited human purposes to feign pretensions to such a gift; and that it is only in the hand of God that its use and importance can be seen.

It is reasonable to conclude, from the behaviour of the disciples, at the time when our Saviour delivered their commission to them, that this extraordinary injunction of teaching all the world, did not appear to them to be by any means above their power to perform: they make no remonstrances, as we find Moses doing upon a much less affair, and in very different circumstances. For although they had no conception of the manner or means by which this great work was to be brought about, yet instead of shewing any backwardness to undertake it, we have good reason to think, that they were disposed to set about its execution without the proper qualification; otherwise it could not have been necessary to give it them in charge not to depart from Jerusalem, but *wait for the promise of the Father*.

This confidence is not difficult to be accounted for, because it seems naturally to have arisen from the frequent supernatural exertions of power to which they had been accustomed, or rather habituated; and which they could have no doubt would be sufficient for any purpose; and as they had experienced already in themselves the power of working miracles, they might conceive this power to be adequate to all their purposes; and so we may believe the generality of mankind would have thought. And although their Master had told them that the speaking with tongues was to be one of the signs of those who were to believe, yet I am well persuaded that they were not then fully sensible of the great advantage of this gift; much less of the necessity of it for the purpose of their mission.

But God, who knows the nature of man, knew also that the fullest power of working miracles or wonders,

wonders, would not be sufficient for this grand purpose of destroying the kingdom of Satan, and reforming the world.

If, indeed, there had been nothing farther proposed, than to raise the wonder and admiration of the nations, (which would have been the only end which an impostor could propose to himself) and to play upon their credulity, and to turn their fears and simplicity to worldly advantage, the working of wonders would have been the desirable gift. And this gift of tongues would have appeared so inadequate to the schemes and views of an impostor; that the feigning of it never could have been suggested to him by his wants, upon any occasion, as his design is only to deceive, and not to reform, and therefore could hardly be supposed to enter into his head; or if it had, the advantage of it would have appeared so trifling, that he never could have entertained a wish for a qualification, of which he could neither conceive the use nor importance.

This, however, will be still more evident, if we take a cursory view of the ends proposed by the different pretenders to supernatural power, or the particular favour and assistance of the gods. The plan of such impostors is not to teach mankind; to what purpose then would it be to pretend to a gift, which could be only of use where something was to be communicated to the people of a strange language? Especially when we consider such pretensions as coming from one who could have no other scheme than what was, in some way or other, to answer his own temporal purposes; which would certainly be brought about most effectually by exciting terror, wonder, or admiration. And surely to hear a stranger speaking

in one's own tongue, is not the likeliest means of raising these passions.

The fruits of an impostor's labours must be near in prospect; whatever was to look very far into futurity, could have no charms for him, but more particularly with so dismal a prospect as the Christian Religion exhibited at its first setting out in the world. For this religion, even after our Saviour's ascension, had a great deal less than nothing to engage the attention of a deceiver, supposing his ambition to have been of that moderate kind which is to be gratified by the distant view of propagating an opinion once to become general, for even this small gratification had every human probability against it.

But let us consider those uses to which mankind have applied their pretensions to supernatural power or aid; and by examining these, it will be easy to conjecture of what account such pretenders would have held the gift of tongues.

Princes and rulers made use of such pretensions, to ease themselves of the very great trouble of governing a passionate, ignorant, and disorderly multitude; or, to speak more properly, perhaps such pretensions were necessary to render such a government by any means practicable; because the passions of a lawless, ignorant multitude, could never be kept within any bounds by pretensions merely human; ignorance not being capable of listening to reason, but only of being affected by such things as raise wonder and dread. Peace, therefore, would be the object of such pretenders to supernatural power; and terrible things, such as alarm the minds of men, would be the instruments necessary for this purpose, and such as princes and rulers would wish for the possession



of: and what they had not in their power, their whole art and industry would be employed in feigning, as far as they could hope for credit, such pretensions being absolutely necessary for their purpose: and liars by profession would make an essential part of such a government, not the enthusiastic liar, but the sober, sedate impostor.

When his subjects became clamorous or unruly, a prince would never think that the faculty of speaking to them in an unknown tongue was what his government, upon that emergency, required: all his wishes and ambition would be to have the darting of Jupiter's thunder; and all his lying and imposition would tend to propagate an opinion among mankind, either that he was possessed of it, or if that could not be, at least that he could command it; as there were certain actions that would infallibly bring it down. And by such lying wonders was the kingdom of Satan established in the world.

There have also been in the world an inferior kind of pretenders to supernatural power, known by the name of forcerers, whose sole end was to delude the vulgar, and such as have vulgar understandings, out of a little money, in exchange for their art; whose influence could never extend beyond the procuring a precarious subsistence from the credulity and admiration of the multitude.

Dread and terror, therefore, would be the passions which princes and rulers would endeavour chiefly to inspire into their subjects; and the whole force of the forcerer's art would be employed in raising the wonder and admiration of the multitude; and thus it would become the aim and interest of both these kinds of pretenders, that  
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many stories should be propagated to raise and keep up these several passions; which would all contain much of the marvelous to gratify the natural desires of the people, who in their rude state are only to be pleased with such narrations; and these stories would, in some measure, form the characters of their gods, who indeed are easily traced to the mould in which they were cast. Nothing, therefore, could have been so useless, or so hazardous, as the pretension to a gift of tongues, for all the purposes which impostors and pretenders to supernatural aid or power have had to answer by their forgeries.

Let us next consider how well it suits with the Christian scheme, and how essentially necessary it was for carrying on God's plan in the world. This, indeed, is very different from the views either of kings or forcerers, being such as are by no means suited to mere human wants or human prospects. By this scheme mankind were neither to be terrified, surprized, or amused, but they were to be taught and reformed; nor was this object the reformation or instruction of a few individuals; but the command is to teach all mankind; "go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."

But how is this task to be performed? Even the working of miracles would be, by no means, sufficient for this purpose; for it could answer no good end to alarm the fears, and rouse the attention of mankind, if nothing was to follow: for their attention would be gained to no purpose, if no instruction or reformation was to follow or accompany such marvellous works; the teacher would nevertheless be a barbarian among those whose language he was ignorant of. The gift of  
tongues

tongues, therefore, was absolutely necessary for the propagation of the gospel in that full manner which was intended and accomplished.

The Supreme Being seems but little careful to suit his dispensations to those forms which most readily draw the attention, and gain the admiration or approbation of men; and therefore it is that the wise men of this world are not taken with the most signal marks of God's interposition, as they are passing before their eyes; but nevertheless they seem to be admirably calculated for engaging the wonder and admiration of the serious and thinking part of mankind, particularly of posterity, when they are properly disposed to take a serious view of the subject: and especially we of this age have much greater opportunities, and are better qualified to judge of the greatness and good effects of this miracle of the gift of tongues, than if we had lived at the very time when it happened; and, I may add, than if we had heard the Apostles speak with those very tongues. For we can trace the good effects of it through many regions of the earth, and thus form a proper notion of its use and importance, and also come to be fully persuaded that this commission of teaching all nations was the most important, the most necessary, and the hardest to be put in practice of all others.

For although it was a necessary, it was not an easy lesson which the nations were to be taught; it was not a bare ignorance which was to be overcome, but rooted and inveterate prejudices which were to be got the better of: in short, the kingdom of Satan was to be abolished, which had got such a firm footing in the hearts of men, that no human power was a match for it. Indeed,

as to human arts, the kingdom of Satan was already in possession of them; and *the rulers of the darkness of this world*, had applied every one of them to their own purposes, in some shape or other: and because particularly at the time of our Saviour's coming, if we take an impartial view of the state of the heathens, this kingdom seems to have been the most firmly established, having, besides the arts, got all the most violent human passions and desires on its side.

Now it can hardly be doubted that proper meditations upon such a victory as this ought to operate more effectually upon a well-informed and well-disposed mind, than any transient acts of power exhibited to the senses, however great they might be.

And thus, this single gift of tongues, considered in its causes and its consequences, appears of itself to be a conclusive argument for the truth of the Christian Religion, serving admirably to distinguish the immediate works of God from the forgeries and pretended wonders of impostors of all kinds. And this argument I consider as conclusive; because, if the finger of God is to be seen for certain in any part of this work of the propagation of the gospel, I do not consider the proof as in the least affected by objections brought against particular parts of this scheme: not even if it should be shewn that human arts had no small share in the propagation of Christianity, and other means which have little appearance of a divine original.

The truth or falshood of such assertions, I am not concerned with at present, because I contend that if they were even true, my argument is not in the least affected by them, as they may be conceived

ceived as parts of a plan very consistent with God's method of governing the world. For it is not so much the things that are said, as the manner of saying them, that can give any just grounds to conclude that such objections are made with any view or intention unfriendly to religion.

But there is a very unphilosophical way which the free-thinkers have got into of supposing particular attributes to belong to God, not like the faculties of a free agent, but rather as moulded into the form and nature of definitions, from which notions every thing relating to the Deity is to be derived consequentially; like mathematical conclusions from the properties of extension. And thus they set about trying the circumstances of a revelation by these notions of their own: and very impiously pretend to say, that particular things or plans are unworthy of God, without paying any attention to matter of fact. Now this is not simply bad divinity, but it is according to the plan of the very worst philosophy that ever appeared in the world. But if such reasoners, laying aside their own imaginations, would attend to facts as delivered in Scripture, they will find a consistent plan carrying on through the whole: and that this plan is not so much carried on according to the glorious attributes which we very justly ascribe to God, as according to that weakness which we find in man. In dispensing the blessings of a revelation, the Supreme Being does not so much appear in his majesty, as in the more humble character of a teacher of the human race; neither overpowering their understandings, nor forcing their wills. It is only "he that hath ears to hear, let him hear;" leaving men free agents, and yet throwing circumstances in  
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their way, which, by a proper use of their senses and understandings, will certainly lead them to happiness, and bring human nature to as great a degree of perfection as it is capable to be brought, making every thing as much as possible seem to be the work of men. And therefore this very scheme, to a superficial observer, might seem to partake of human weakness, when it is, in fact, the greatest proof of condescension and wisdom.

And besides, the providence of God appears to permit that men should mix in this plan, what may be properly called their own, when it will answer the purpose; and these parts the infidel fixes upon, and contends that all the rest is to be referred to the same original.

But surely it is no difficult thing to conceive, that it may be very easy for such a *Being* as the Deist himself allows God to be, to make a perfect creature: therefore he might, no doubt, at once have given human nature all the perfection of which it is capable. Yet surely it is a much greater display of wisdom to contrive matters so as to make such a being as man, with all his imperfections about him, so very instrumental in perfecting his own nature, as he is made to be according to the plan which I have been endeavouring to explain.

Eleven fishermen set out from Judæa, without learning, and even without any proper notions of the business they were about, as appears from the very last question that they ask our Saviour, "Lord, wilt thou, at this time, restore the kingdom to Israel?" They set out to instruct the world in a new religion, and, what was more difficult, to destroy the old, which had the support of power, prejudices, passion, and interest, being modelled

modelled according to the wishes of mankind. Nobody surely but God, could give the least prospect of success to such an unreasonable undertaking.

How different were the schemes of philosophers for improving mankind, so very excellent in themselves, that they will never perhaps appear mean, upon any occasion, except upon a comparison with this teaching. A philosopher thought it practicable to communicate a few notions, which were at variance with no particular passions or appetites; and this he had hopes of doing with success, to a few only of those who spoke the same language, and who had also the same manners and dispositions.

But what would he have thought of the proposal of teaching the whole world; all nations, however different their language, and however various their manners and humours? And to teach them, not such things as are suitable, and even agreeable to human frailty, or might flatter human pride; but such things as every one to whom they were proposed, would be ready to say, "these are hard sayings; who can hear them?"

In short, this is such a plan as hath nothing in common with the learning of philosophers, or the schemes of politicians, or the tricks of impostors; nor indeed hath it any thing in it of the nature of man: and yet, what is very surprizing, so much hath God accommodated himself to the nature of man, in the several human instruments that he has made use of, that an argument has been formed sufficient to mislead those, who take only a partial view of things, into an opinion as if the whole was a work of human contrivance. Now this dispensation, on the contrary, appears to have a  
wonderful

wonderful beauty in it, at the same time that it displays the wisdom of God, by setting that wisdom in a point of view, in which it could not have appeared without such a frail creature as man to work with. For by permitting men to mix of their own, provided it was true, and to the purpose, with whatever he communicates to them, God has beautifully adapted this scheme to the human capacity, by making as much of it as possible the work of man.

So that whatever human interposition can be shewn to have taken place in the propagation of the gospel, appears to be a beauty in this system, and is what one might expect from the general plan of God's providence: the main argument not being in the least affected by this concession, so long as the entire scheme is beyond the power of human contrivance, and even after it was contrived beyond the power of man to execute.

## C H A P. XII.

### *Of the Perfection of the Christian Religion.*

**T**HE Christian Religion, if once believed to be true, affords the compleatest satisfaction to the mind; and leaves us nothing beyond either to hope or fear: for it fully satisfies the passions both of hope and fear, which are by no means the easiest to gratify of those found in human nature.

To say nothing of the heathen superstitions, even the Jewish dispensation is very imperfect, and can afford no real satisfaction to the mind: it is  
only



only a scheme in *embryo*, though supported and carried on by divine assistance and authority, and is by no means capable of satisfying the mind with regard to any of those material points upon which we want information most. It does not bring life and immortality to light. It exhibits God as partial, condescending to become the teacher and conductor of a particular people, very small in comparison of the bulk of mankind, at the same time that he leaves the rest of the world to follow their own inventions.

But the Christian scheme is compleat from the time that our Saviour said, "It is finished;" there was nothing farther necessary but to publish to the world what had been done; and this was particularly the office of the Holy Spirit to do. We have no farther information to expect on this subject, nor is it probable that human nature is capable of receiving any more; what remains being such things "as eyes have not seen, nor ears heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive."

The great plan for the redemption of mankind is finished in this world whenever this religion is universally understood and acknowledged; when mankind are made sensible of the nature and cause of their infirmities, and the proper remedies for them: and then human nature will be so far corrected and reformed, and all irregular passions subdued, so far at least that we may begin another world with much greater advantages, than we should have done this, even if Adam had not fallen: so that the whole will doubtless appear a beautiful and wise and good and consistent plan; and the evils which we see, or pretend to see, will be found to be imaginary, or perhaps real good,

or else will be rectified or done away. What an insight into human nature will the day of judgement alone give, when the secrets of all hearts will be laid open! What a lesson will this be for our future behaviour in the state where we may be placed. This world will then appear to advantage, as a state of probation, and we shall be able to proceed with confidence, by seeing experimentally what human nature, assisted by the Christian Religion, can do, or has been able to do; and by having a perfect sense of the ill behaviour of ourselves and others, this will be sufficient warning against becoming the slaves of temptations however artfully engaging.

No man that believes sincerely in the Christian Religion, can want any farther information; he knows his beginning, and is also sufficiently informed of his end: he sees that God has interested himself too much in the affairs of this world, not to be fully persuaded that he will finish consistently what he has conducted so far. And from the wonderful display of power which has been made in this world, we may be persuaded that a situation will be prepared for us, of which at present we can form no conception, it being far beyond the reach of human imagination, and essentially different from those notions which the heathens had of a future state, which obviously betray their original, by the resemblance which they bear to the little partial prejudices of mankind. But there is one extraordinary weakness that sticks to their scheme, which is this, that though they strip mankind of their bodies in a future state, yet they were obliged to confine their happiness to sensual pleasures, or at least such as were enjoyed by them in this world; and these, for want of  
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organs, they are reduced to the necessity of abridging very much, so that a heathen future state is nothing even to this world for enjoyment.

But mark, on the other hand, the difference between this and the rewards proposed by the Christian Religion: though the grand doctrine of this religion is the resurrection of the body, yet we are carried to gratifications entirely spiritual, and such as we, while inhabitants of this world, can have no conception of. No resemblance to any thing in this world, is promised us in the next, it will be something entirely new: and thus only could it be worthy of the mighty *apparatus* which has been made for it.

We may know from our own experience, that none of the fabulous accounts of the elysian fields could afford us the least satisfaction, and that every rational man must turn from them with contempt, even if he believed them to be true; and with very unfavourable notions of the attributes of the gods, for not being able to provide for mankind a future state equal in enjoyment to this world.

And this ought to give great satisfaction to a Christian, and even strengthen his faith, that he has something to expect which must far surpass any thing which his own imagination can reach. And thus God's ways will be found wonderfully wise, both with regard to what he discovers to us, and in what he conceals, thus raising our expectations upon good grounds, from earthly to heavenly things, and from material and corporeal to spiritual enjoyments. And even this dispensation, if seriously considered, will make a very strong argument for the truth of our religion, by discovering that the whole plan is wonderfully of a piece.

No steps taken to pre-engage the attention of mankind, no flattering them with gaudy prospects, or with the gratification of such passions as engage our chief attention in this world. The whole system keeps one uniform tenor, every thing is set fairly before man, and he may attend to, or neglect this information at his peril.

The necessities and circumstances of men urge them on to a speedy execution of their projects, and make them force prematurely into light every thing that can engage the attention of the world. And this is their wisdom, being only children of a day, and even ignorant what that day may bring forth. But the Supreme Being, who has all eternity at his command, can execute his plans in whatever manner he pleases, and is not likely to condescend to humour the unreasonable with that kind of evidence which they fancy should be laid before them, which is very *modestly* requiring that God should work after their plan: but he goes on to act according to his own, which we are required to attend to, and expect nothing else.

And the human agents whom God has employed in this work of our redemption, discover the original from whence they derive their knowledge, by their manner of acting. The important office with which they are entrusted, never raises their pride so as to make them forget that they have this gift in earthen vessels, and therefore they discover no impatience, but wait for their information with all due humility. But this is never the way by which impostors proceed; they shew not only a willingness, but even a forwardness to gratify those whose attention they would engage; and by professing and promising too much, discover that they can do nothing.

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Human nature may, in this world, exhibit all the different temptations to which flesh and blood can be liable, and they may all have been resisted by different men, though that degree of perfection is not to be expected from any single individual; and this may be a kind of practical standard of what human nature can do, or at least prepare us for the reception of those favours which our Saviour will certainly bestow upon those who sincerely believe in him.

And thus men may be prepared by the discipline of this world, so as to be fit for the future state in which they are to be placed, with a power over their passions acquired by experience. And they may be made capable of the greatest enjoyment, without any danger of running into excess, and abusing the favours of Christ; having their faculties so suited to the means of gratification, that they may be safely allowed the prospect of all sorts of enjoyments, and objects of temptation, without the danger of committing such a sin as the eating the forbidden fruit.

T H E  
C O N C L U S I O N .

**I** Have now finished my argument, in which the very difficulties which we find in Revelation, are considered as one very strong proof of its divine authority. My principles do not lead to any dogmatical conclusions, but rather to engage the mind, at an awful distance, to take a prospect of the natural world, of mankind, and of religion. They are all the work of God, and may all three be studied to the great improvement of human nature.

The facts, upon which the evidence for the Christian Religion rests, are so singular, so striking, so numerous, and connected together for such a length of time, that there seems nothing to prevent the opinions of mankind from being more uniform upon this subject, than upon any other whatever. The candidates for the kingdom of heaven have no occasion for harbouring any of those jealousies that perplex and inflame the little factious contests of worldly-minded men.

However, when we consider that the world has been so often deluded by false pretences to inspiration, and supernatural assistance, it is both necessary, and for the credit of our religion, that the grounds of our belief should undergo a very serious and impartial examination. And although

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I have endeavoured to shew that human reason is very unequal to the task, either of discovering or propagating a true religion, yet it is the best natural means which we have of securing ourselves from being imposed upon by a false one. And we are even commanded in Scripture to “ be ready to give an answer to every one who asks us a reason of the hope which is in us.”

Nor has the present age been backward in furnishing us with occasion for practising this part of our duty. For we have been harrassed by infidel writers with objections physical, metaphysical, and philological; and in the characters of Jews, Turks, and Buffoons.

It is not the objections made to the Christian Religion that I find fault with, it is the manner in which they are made and received. One might at least expect that a pure religion, calculated to supply every defect which the mind finds in itself, would at least be as favourably received as an ordinary piece of good news, and would only leave the mind in a state of anxiety and suspense, but with our ears open to every argument which could strengthen our conviction, from an apprehension that it might not be true. But many write, and are heard against Christianity, with such a spirit and disposition, as could only be justifiable if the whole scheme and intention of it was to bring destruction to the human race.

A second thing deserving blame in the conduct of infidel writers, is their discharging their arrows at random, without any settled scheme but that of doing mischief. The most plausible pretence for infidelity being the dangerous and pernicious consequences of superstition, if the free-thinkers were true to this principle, they ought to join with

us in establishing Christianity, as we have the proof of experience, as I have shewn in this argument, that it is the only sure bulwark against superstition.

For the absurd notions which even the wisest men of antiquity entertained upon religious subjects, prove beyond all dispute, that no degree of mere human wisdom is a sufficient guard for us against becoming the dupes of the grossest superstitions. They, therefore, who are for bringing down religion to the test and standard of human reason, would do well to consider, that if they were to succeed in their scheme, and destroy the credit of the Christian Religion, mankind would naturally fall back into their original superstitions, and become the dupes of their own fears and of fresh impostors.

The infidels, therefore, if they understood their own scheme, (which makes me suspect that they have no other besides that of bringing a railing accusation against religion) ought to confess that a belief in the Christian Religion, is the greatest advance that ever has been made towards perfecting their plan; and therefore they ought to take breath and look around them, and consider whether this is not as much as human nature can bear in the way of a reformation from superstition. Because, without proper notions of God, and a well authenticated account of his manner of dealing with mankind, we shall always be slaves to endless superstitions. We contend, that the Bible contains all this in the greatest perfection; the infidels should either produce a more authentic account than ours, or if they find that impossible, try to overlook or mend the flaws which they pretend to discover in ours, as this is the best  
remedy



remedy which the nature of things can bear. Pulling to pieces and demolishing, is a good mob amusement, but a time will come when every one must seek for shelter: and therefore it would be but rational and proper to look forward, and take a view of the habitation which is preparing for us by these projectors.

But neither this world, nor the next, can subsist upon the infidel plan: for if we were to allow that a solitary Atheist might exist, a nation of Atheists is as great a contradiction to uniform experience, as any absurdity which can be imagined: and it would be just as wise a project to set about twisting ropes of sand, as to try to unite Atheists in a society. An Atheist may cling to a society, as some creeping weeds do to trees, and while he is corrupting it, may be considered by fools as an ornament to it. Freethinkers and subtle thinkers are the froth of society, which is only kept at the top by the fermentation of the *substance* below.

Mankind will, therefore, always have gods of some kind or another, and consequently a religion; and it lies upon the infidels to prove that it will be such a rational one as Christianity. We find that every species of knowledge has its proper organ of conveyance to the mind: sounds come in by the ear, and colours by the eye, but to judge of Religion as some men do, seems to be acting as wisely, as if one were to judge of the smoothness of a surface by his smell.

We should be told particularly what the discoveries are which would compleatly overturn the Christian Religion, and then one could form some estimate how near the infidels are to the compleating of their task. Because in an affair of such

general importance as religion, it is absolutely necessary that every man should have some settled opinion; and it therefore becomes his duty, after the most diligent search, to sit down contented with the best opinion which he has been able to form, and to rest satisfied with that evidence which the nature of the subject will admit of, without trifling with himself, or suffering himself to be trifled with by others: but especially before he determines against the Christian Religion, it may be useful for him to consider, that whenever things admit of demonstrative proof, it can be proved with equal clearness, that one thing is false, and another true; therefore, if one determine to rest satisfied with nothing less than demonstration, why fall in with the opinions of infidels? How do they prove that there is no God? How do they prove that he does not conduct the affairs of this world? They ought not to be satisfied with making objections to our scheme of revelation; let them take the positive side, and establish a system of infidelity, without supposing that there ever was such a thing as religion in the world; I mean, to write a system of faith for mankind, without taking any notice of revelation. Nothing could more effectually shew the poverty of infidelity, than an attempt at a work of this kind, which would be found to consist of negatives without a single positive fact to rest upon: and it is at least as great a reflexion upon infidelity to be supported by weak arguments, as it would be for religion to be defended by such. God we say has delivered this religion to the world, we do not pretend to be the authors of it, nor even to comprehend it; and therefore are neither obliged, nor capable to explain it fully: if it was our own work, we might  
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be reasonably asked to account for every thing in it. Now the system of infidels is their own work, and therefore they ought to be able to give a full and rational account of it, and fix the opinions of their disciples upon something positive, and not content themselves with denying things to be facts which we alledge are so; they must have a poor claim to be facts indeed, if they would not be ill exchanged for the dreams of infidelity. And until the infidels can produce stronger arguments in proof of their principles, even if nothing were alledged against them, it is not so clear a point that religion is an imposition upon mankind, as that a prudent man would depend upon it.

And indeed I would require no more of a man when he examines the arguments for and against revelation, than to carry his worldly prudence along with him, and to act with the same caution in his spiritual concerns, as he does in his temporal affairs, about which, I am sorry to say it, mankind are more sincere and in earnest than about religion.

But if the view of the Christian Religion, which I have taken, be a true one, it carries a very alarming appearance with regard to such unbelievers, and a very serious appearance with regard to the whole human race. The scheme seems fairly and fully laid before mankind, and they may attend to it or neglect it as they please, without any further information or warning. No disposition is shewn to humour conceited men with occasional satisfaction. This religion keeps on its course with a solemn and awful steadiness, as far above all partiality. And having accompanied human nature, and seen all its powers and weaknesses, its perfections and imperfections, the  
Christian

Christian Religion is then with awful majesty to shut up the scene of mortality.

The sporting of an infidel with such a plan as this, is a serious madness : and the serious attempt to fetter it in human systems, would be but badly represented by the folly of him who should think of stopping the waves of the ocean with a grain of sand.

Let us therefore examine with care and awful attention the progress of such a religion, which both promises and threatens so much ; nor suffer ourselves to be laughed out of our hopes of immortality by the unseasonable buffoonery of wits and libertines, nor try to rest that faith upon human systems, nor upon any such principles, which stands upon FACTS, and ought to stand upon no other foundation than that of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.

Another thing very proper to be attended to by every serious inquirer after religious truth, is this ; that the condition in which we are here placed, naturally supposes that we should not have the clearest evidence for things belonging to revelation : but rather such as would have a tendency to keep the mind in a state of suspense. For as the providence of God is carrying on two schemes at the same time, by the same agents, it is impossible for us to say how far a clear discovery of the one might be consistent with the other.

We find that sometimes even imaginary views of a future state are sufficiently engaging to destroy all relish for the enjoyments of the present : how much more, then, might we expect the same consequence from a clear view of the reality ? the joys of which the Scripture confirms to be so  
great

great, that it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive them.

Besides, the very nature of a state of probation, in the sense in which it has been explained in this argument, seems to imply an evidence encumbered with many difficulties, both from the part that mankind are allowed to take in carrying on this scheme, and also from the various instruments made use of in carrying it on. And where would be the merit in resisting a temptation to gratify an ordinary appetite, in order to obtain a great and durable good, unless the prospect of it was both remote, and attended with some uncertainty.

We may, therefore, rest assured, that God in his infinite wisdom intended his revelation should be incumbered with, and involved in all its present difficulties, as a trial of our faith, an exercise of our patience, and a proof of our teachable disposition; and that even thus it is better fitted for answering our purposes, than if it had less of the mysterious in it.

Lastly, when we are engaged in a subject of such importance as this, we should do our utmost endeavour to conquer that fickleness of mind which so strongly characterizes all our extravagant desires, but shews itself particularly in our scruples about religious evidence. This disposition is in no case a proof of want, but rather proceeds from a mind rendered wanton by abundance. Overlooking the happiness which our present circumstances might furnish us with, we think if we were in such a situation we should be compleatly happy.

In the same manner it happens with regard to religious evidence: many of us, I dare say, think that if we had been favoured with the same evidence which our Saviour gave the Jews in con-

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firmation of his divine commission, it would have satisfied us compleatly ; and that the works which he did in his Father's name would have been to us an undoubted testimony that his Father had sent him.

But the Jews, on the other hand, had their minds so prepossessed with the temporal power of the Messiah, that they shut both their ears and eyes against the clearest evidence.

To strengthen our faith, besides all other evidence, we have the full completion of a very distinct and particular prophecy of our Saviour concerning the obscure beginning, and future flourishing state of his kingdom against all human probability. And by the wonderful providence of God, the very infidelity of the Jews is become a standing argument for the truth of that very religion which they deny.

A careful attention to the fulfilling of prophecies, and the progress of the Christian Religion, seems to be the additional evidence reserved for these latter days, by which we are to discover that God is still active in carrying on his purposes for the redemption of the world. But as the completion of prophecies must keep pace with the affairs of mankind, the ordinary life of an infidel, who gives no credit to any testimony beyond his own possible experience, will hardly upon this ground furnish matter for a rational conviction. But if the Supreme Being would condescend to accomplish a few prophecies to humour him, he would believe.

In the same manner, the Jews would not condescend to attend to the ordinary course of our Saviour's miracles ; but expected that he was to descend from his dignity and character so far as to humour every scrupulous inquisitive fool with a  
sign

sign from heaven, and then they would believe. “Nay but, father Abraham, if one rose from the dead, they would believe.” But Abraham knew too well this disposition in mankind against which I am now speaking, to think that it would have been of any use to comply with the request. “If they believe not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.”

This is an alarming part of our character, as it makes our opinions so unstable, that different times of life, different circumstances, and different humours, require fresh arguments in proof of our religion. The ways of God are fixed and uniform, and are not to be suited to our capricious humours. Let us, therefore, seriously consider our condition, and not think ourselves of such importance that Heaven ought to work miracles to remove our unreasonable scruples. Let us only attend with modesty to the arguments which may be derived from the manifestations of himself which God has already condescended to give us, and we shall find them sufficient for establishing a solid and rational conviction.

T H E   E N D.











