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*Christianity as Old as the Creation :*  
OR, THE  
G O S P E L,  
A  
R E P U B L I C A T I O N  
O F T H E  
Religion of N A T U R E.

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*The SECOND EDITION in Octavo.*

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Est autem Jus naturale adeo immutabile, ut ne quidem à Deo mutari potest.

*Grot. de Jure Belli & Pacis. l. 1. c. 1. §. 10. n. 5.*

*The Gentiles, which have not the Law, do by Nature the Things contained in the Law.* Rom. ii. 14.

— *God is no Respector of Persons; but in every Nation, he that feareth him, and worketh Righteousness is accepted with him.* Acts x. 34, 35.

Proinde perfectam illam Religionem, quæ Christi prædicatione nobis tradita est, non Novam aut Peregrinam, sed si verum dicere oportet, primam, solam, veramque esse liquido apparet.

*Euseb. Eccl. Hist. l. 1. c. 4. Valefius's Transl.*

Res ipsa, quæ nunc Christiana Religio nuncupatur, erat & apud Antiquos, nec desuit ab Initio generis humani, quousque ipse Christus veniret in carne; unde vera Religio quæ jam erat, cepit appellari Christiana.

*Aug. Oper. Tom. 1. p. 17. c. --Retract. l. 1. c. 13.*

The Religion of the Gospel, is the true original Religion of Reason and Nature —And its Precepts declarative of that original Religion, which was as old as the Creation.

*Serm. for prop. the Gosp. in ser. Parts, by Dr. Sberlock, now Bp. of Bangor. p. 10, and 13.*

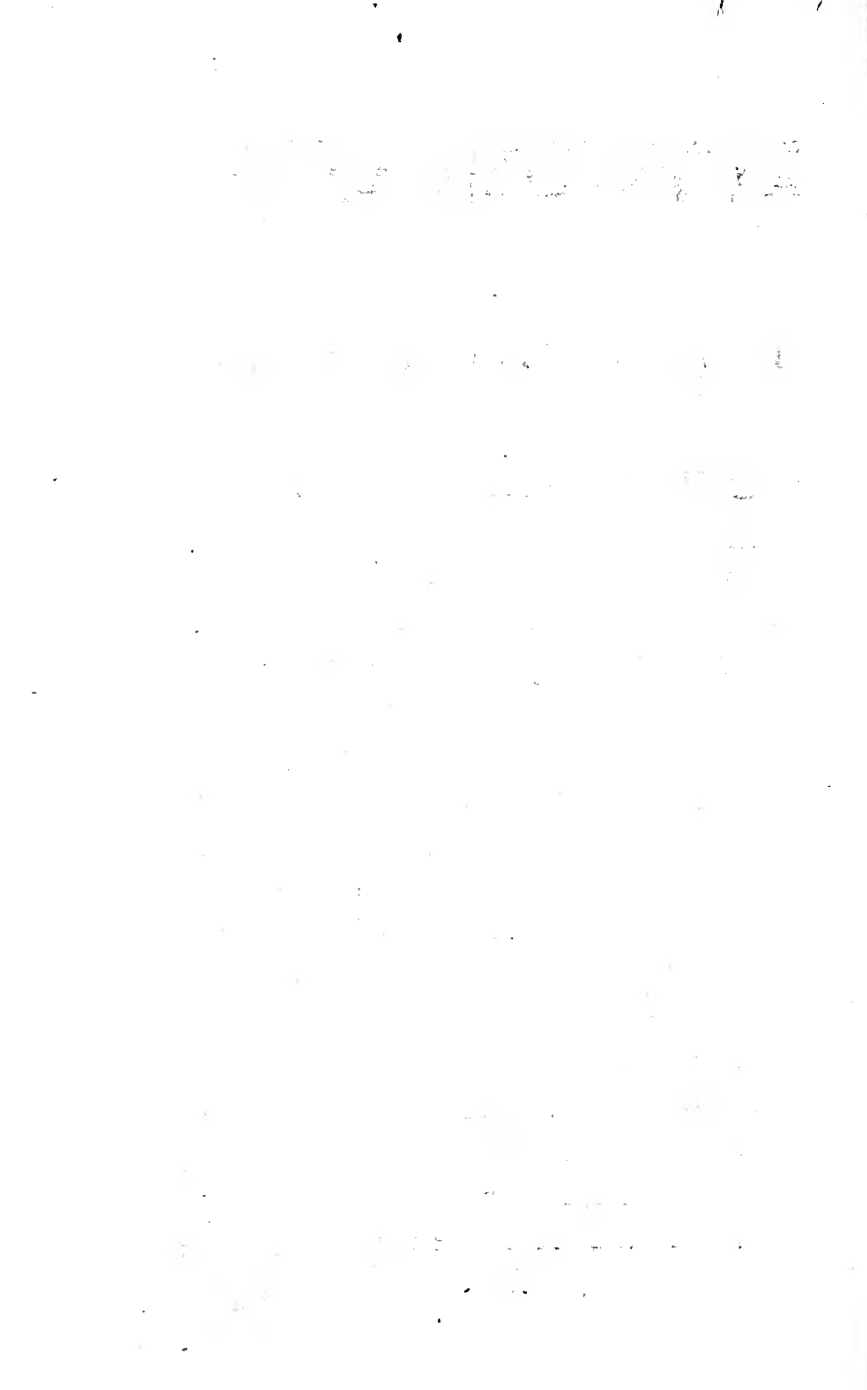
God does nothing in the Government of the World by mere Will and Arbitrariness.—The Will of God always determines itself to act according to the eternal Reason of Things.—All rational Creatures are oblig'd to govern themselves in ALL their Actions by the same eternal Rule of Reason.

*Dr. S. Clarke's Unchang. Oblig. of Nat. Relig. Edit. 4. p. 47, 48, 49.*

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L O N D O N :

Printed in the Year M. DCC. XXXII.





T H E  
P R E F A C E.

**T**HE Author of the following Sheets, makes no Apology for writing on a Subject of the last Importance; and which, as far as I can find, has no where been so fully treated: He builds nothing on a Thing so uncertain as *Tradition*, which differs in most Countries; and of which, in all Countries, the Bulk of Mankind are incapable of judging; but thinks he has laid down such plain and evident Rules, as may enable Men of the meanest Capacity, to distinguish between *Religion* and *Superstition*; and has represented the Former, in every Part, so beautiful, so amiable, and so strongly affecting; that they who in the least reflect, must be

A 2 highly

highly in love with it; and easily perceive, that their Duty and Happiness are inseparable. Whether he has succeeded in this Noble, and Generous Attempt, the Reader will be better able to judge, if he reads with the same Freedom, and Impartiality, as the Author wrote.

THE Manner of debating a Subject Dialogue-wise, (as this between *A*, and *B*,) was esteem'd by the Ancients the most proper, as well as most prudent Way of exposing prevailing Absurdities; and *Tully's* two Discourses, *de Naturâ Deorum*, and *de Divinatione*, both levell'd against the Superstition of his Country-men, are living Monuments of the Expediency, and Usefulness of this way of Writing. And certainly the Reader may be better entertain'd thus, than by that dry way of Objection and Answer, with which Controversies are usually manag'd.





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# CHRISTIANITY

As Old as the

## CREATION.

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### CHAP. I.

*That God, at all Times, has given Mankind sufficient Means of knowing what he requires of them; and what those Means are.*

A. **T**HIS early Visit, Sir, gives me hopes it will not be a short one.

B. I come to talk with you on a Subject, which may, perhaps, keep me longer than you desire.

A. YOUR uncommon Temper and Candor, in debating even the most important Points, will always make your Conversation agreeable, tho' ever so long; but pray, what is to be the Subject of our Morning's Discourse.

B. I was yesterday in company with a great many Clergymen, it being our Bishop's primary Visitation; where the Complaint was general, of the Coldness and Indifference, with which People received the speculative Points of Christianity, and all its holy Rites; for which formerly they had shewn so great a Zeal. This Coldness they chiefly imputed to those *Low Churchmen*, who lay the main Stress on *Natural Religion*; and withal so magnify the Doctrine of *Sincerity*, as in effect to place all Religions on a level, where the

Professors are alike sincere. The Promoters of these Notions, as well as these Notions themselves, were expos'd with warmth; how justly, I will not determine, 'till we have talk'd the matter over with our usual Freedom: For which reason, I have made you this early Visit, and would be glad to know the Sentiments of so good a Judge, on these two important Points; *viz. Sincerity and Natural Religion.*

A. I thank you for this Favour, and shall freely tell you, I so little agree with those Gentlemen in relation to Sincerity, that I think a sincere Examination into religious matters can't be too much press'd; this being the only way to discover true Christianity. The Apostles thought themselves oblig'd, in making Profelytes, to recommend an impartial Search; they both desir'd, and requir'd Men *to judge for themselves, to prove all things, &c.* this they thought necessary, in order to renounce a Religion, which the Force of Education had impress'd on their Minds; and embrace another directly contrary to the Notions and Prejudices they had imbib'd. Nay, even those very Men, who most ridicule the Doctrine of Sincerity, never fail, on other Occasions, to assert, that Infidelity is owing to the want of a sincere Examination; and that whosoever impartially considers Christianity, must be convinc'd of its Truth. And I might add, That could we suppose, a sincere Examination wou'd not always produce this Effect, yet must it always make Men acceptable to God; since that is all God can require, all that it is in their power to do for the Discovery of his Will. These, in short, are my Sentiments as to this Point; and as to the other, I think, too great a stress can't be laid on *Natural Religion*; which, as I take it, differs not from *Reveal'd*, but in the manner of its being communicated: The one being the Internal, as the other the External Revelation of the same unchangeable Will of a Being, who is alike at all times infinitely wise and good.

B. SURELY, Sir, this must be extremely heterodox. Can you believe, that *Natural* and *Reveal'd* Religion differ in nothing, but the manner of their being convey'd to us?

A. As heterodox as I may seem at present, I doubt not, but by asking you a few Questions, to let you see, I advance nothing in either of these Points without reason; and in order to it, I desire to be inform'd, whether God has not, from the Beginning, given Mankind some Rule, or Law for their Conduct? And whether the observing that, did not make 'em acceptable to him?

B. THERE can be no doubt, but the observing such a Law, must have answer'd the End for which it was given; and made Men acceptable to God.

A. WHAT more can any external Revelation do, than render Men acceptable to God? Again,

IF God, then, from the Beginning, gave Men a Religion; I ask, was that Religion imperfect, or perfect?

B. MOST perfect, without doubt; since no Religion can come from a Being of infinite Wisdom and Perfection, but what is absolutely perfect.

A. CAN, therefore, a Religion absolutely perfect, admit of any Alteration; or be capable of Addition, or Diminution; and not be as immutable as the Author of it? Can Revelation, I say, add any thing to a Religion thus absolutely perfect, universal and immutable? Besides, if God has given Mankind a Law, he must have given them likewise sufficient means of knowing it; he wou'd, otherwise, have defeated his own Intent in giving it; since a Law, as far as it is unintelligible, ceases to be a Law. Shall we say, that God, who had the forming human Understanding, as well as his own Laws, did not know how to adjust the one to the other?

IF God at all times was *willing all Men should come to the Knowledge of his Truth*, could not his infinite Wisdom and Power, at all times, find sufficient means, for making Mankind capable of knowing,

what his infinite Goodness design'd they shou'd know?

*B.* I grant you, that God was always willing, that ALL Men should come to the Knowledge of True Religion; and we say, that the Christian Religion being the Only True, and Absolutely Perfect Religion, was what God, from the Beginning, design'd for all Mankind.

*A.* IF so, it follows, That the *Christian* Religion has existed from the Beginning; and that God, both *Then*, and *Ever since*, has continued to give all Mankind sufficient Means to know it; and that 'tis their Duty to know, believe, profess, and practise it: so that *Christianity*, tho' the Name is of a later Date, must be as old, and as extensive as human Nature; and, as the Law of our Creation, must have been Then implanted in us by God himself.

*B.* IT would be too presuming in us poor Mortals, to pretend to account for the Methods Providence takes, in relation to the Discovery of its Will; and, therefore, a Person of less Moderation might condemn your Questions, as captious, presumptuous, and founded in Heterodoxy.

*A.* IF God never intended Mankind should at any time be without Religion, or have false Religions; and there be but One True Religion, which ALL have been ever bound to believe and profess; I can't see any Heterodoxy in affirming, that the Means to effect this End of infinite Wisdom, must be as universal and extensive as the End itself; or that all Men, at all times, must have had sufficient Means to discover whatever God designed they should know, and practise. I do not mean by this, That All should have equal Knowledge; but that All should have what is sufficient for the Circumstances they are in.

*B.* SINCE you have ask'd me Questions, let me, in my turn, demand of you, What are your Sentiments in this matter? Particularly, *What are those Means, which, you suppose, God has, at all times, given*



*given the whole Race of Mankind, to enable them to discover what he wills them to know, believe, profess, and practise?*

A. I ask'd you those few Questions at present, not to determine the Point; but only to let you see, you had no reason to be surpris'd at my saying, *Natural and Revealed Religion only differ as to the Manner of their being communicated.* I shall now readily answer your Questions: And, as I think it my Duty never to disown my Religious Sentiments, so I freely declare, that the Use of *those Faculties*, by which Men are distinguish'd from Brutes, is the only Means they have to discern whether there is a God; and whether he concerns himself with human Affairs, or has given them any Laws; and what those Laws are? And as Men have no other Faculties to judge with, so their using these after the best manner they can, must answer the End for which God gave them, and justify their Conduct. For,

IF God will judge Mankind as they are accountable, that is, as they are rational; the Judgment must hold an exact Proportion to the Use they make of their Reason. And it wou'd be in vain to use it, if the due Use of it wou'd not justify them before God: And Men would be in a miserable Condition indeed, if, whether they used it, or not, they should be alike criminal. And if God designed all Mankind shou'd at all times know, what he wills them to know, believe, profess, and practise; and has given them no other Means for this, but the Use of Reason; Reason, human Reason, must then be that Means: For as God has made us rational Creatures, and Reason tells us, that 'tis his Will, that we act up to the Dignity of our Natures; so 'tis Reason must tell when we do so. What God requires us to know, believe, profess, and practise, must be in itself a reasonable Service; but whether what is offer'd to us as such, be really so, 'tis Reason alone which must judge. As the Eye is the sole Judge of what is visible; the Ear of what is

audible; so Reason, of what is reasonable. If then Reason was given to bring them to the Knowledge of God's Will, that must be sufficient to produce its intended Effect, and can never bring Men to take that for his Will, which he designed they, by using their Reason, should avoid as contrary to it.

**B. IF MEN**, having done all in their Power, all that God requires of them, to find out his Will, should fall into opposite Sentiments; must it not be the Will of God that it should be so? Can God will such a previous Examination, and not will what he foreknows must be the necessary Consequence.

**A. THERE** is, I think, no way to avoid this Objection, of *God's willing Contrarieties*; but by supposing he requires nothing of Men, but what is founded on the Nature of Things, and the immutable Relations they bear to one another; and what, consequently, they are, as far as concerns 'em, capable of knowing. But this Objection is unanswerable by those who believe the Will of God is not always thus founded; but may contain many merely positive Things: since Men may, after having taken all possible care to be in the right, have very opposite Sentiments, and be oblig'd, by the Will of God, to hold and act Contrarieties.

**B. THO'** this Subject is attended with the utmost Difficulties, yet I find little or nothing said to solve 'em. I, for my Part, know not how to deny Mens being acceptable to God, whatever their Opinions may be, after having used all the Means God has endow'd 'em with for the Discovery of his Will; and yet I don't know how to admit it: For then, what Religion soever Men are of, if they have duly used such Means as God ordain'd for the Discovery of his Will; That, I say, how opposite soever to Christianity, must be the Religion God design'd 'em. And, on the other hand, should I own, that the duly using those Means would have caus'd Men to have been all of one Religion; yet I can't see how that could be the Christian Religion, except it

has existed from the Beginning; and all Men, at all times, have had sufficient Means to discover it. For,

If God was always willing, That *All Men should come to the Knowledge of his Truth*; and there never was a time when God intended Men should have no Religion, or such an imperfect Religion, which cou'd not answer the End of its being instituted by an infinitely wise Legislator; This seems, to my *bewilder'd* Reason, to imply, that there was, from the Beginning, but One True Religion, which all Men might know was their Duty to embrace. And if this is true, I can't well conceive how this Character can consist with *Christianity*; without allowing it, at the same time, to be *as old as the Creation*. And yet, notwithstanding all these seeming Difficulties, I am confident the Christian Religion is the Only True Religion. But since these Difficulties are of your raising, I may, in justice, expect that you should solve 'em.

A. THIS, I must own, is a difficult Point: However, I shall tell you my Sentiments; which I, far from being a *Dogmatizer*, am ready to give up, if you can frame any other *Hypothesis*, not liable to the same Objections, or others equally strong; tho' I may venture to say, that I take mine to be the only one which can give any tolerable Satisfaction to your present Doubts. And therefore I shall attempt to shew you, That, Men, if they sincerely endeavour to discover the Will of God, will perceive, that there's a *Law of Nature*, or *Reason*; which is so call'd, as being a Law which is common, or natural, to all rational Creatures; and that this Law, like its Author, is absolutely perfect, eternal, and unchangeable: and that the Design of the Gospel was not to add to, or take from this Law; but to free Men from that Load of Superstition which had been mix'd with it: So that TRUE CHRISTIANITY is not a Religion of Yesterday, but what God, at the Beginning, dictated, and still continues to dic-

tate to Christians, as well as others. If I am so happy as to succeed in this Attempt, I hope not only fully to satisfy your Doubts, but greatly to advance the Honour of *External Revelation*; by shewing the perfect Agreement between *That* and *Internal Revelation*; and by so doing, destroy one of the most successful Attempts that has been made on Religion, by setting the Laws of God at variance.

BUT first I must premise, That in supposing an *External Revelation* I take it for granted, that there's sufficient Evidence of the Person's being sent from God who publish'd it: And I further own, that this divine Person, by living up to what he taught, has set us a noble Example; and that as he was highly exalted for so doing, so we, if we use our best Endeavours, may expect a suitable Reward. This, and every thing of the same Nature, I freely own, which is not inconsistent with the Law of God's being the same, whether internally, or externally reveal'd.

B. YOUR Design I must own, is highly commendable; but in order to succeed, you are to prove two things. *First*, that the supreme Governour of Mankind has given his Subjects an universal Law, which they, when they come to the Use of their Reason, are capable of knowing. *Secondly*, That the Divine Precepts must be the same, whether internally, or externally reveal'd. If you prove these two Points, you will entirely clear my Doubts; but I almost despair of your doing it, since you seem to me to advance a *New Hypothesis*.

A. HEAR the Evidence, and then judge. But before I produce it, lest the suppos'd Novelty of this Opinion may prejudice you, I shall put you in mind of what Archbishop *Laud* says upon a like Occasion: "That when Errors are grown by Age and Continuance to strength; they who speak for the Truth, tho' far older, are ordinarily challeng'd for bringing in new Opinions: and there's no greater

*Laud's Pref.*  
against *Fisher*.

“ greater Absurdity stirring this Day in *Christen-*  
 “ *dom.*” Now,

By putting me to prove, that there is a *Law of Nature*, you, I suppose, have a mind to hear what I can say on this Subject. Since none then that believe there’s a God, who governs Mankind, but believe he has given them a Law for the governing their Actions ; this being imply’d in the very Notion of Governour and Governed: And since the Law by which he governs Men, and his Government must commence together, and extend alike to all his Subjects ; “ Is it not, *as Bishop Tillotson*  
 “ *observes*, a great Mistake, to think that the Obligation of Moral Duties does solely depend upon  
 “ the Revelation of God’s Will made to us in the  
 “ Holy Scriptures? Is it not plain, that Mankind  
 “ was always under a *Law*, even before God made  
 “ an external or extraordinary Revelation? Else,  
 “ how cou’d God judge the World? How should  
 “ they, to whom the Word of God never came,  
 “ be acquitted or condemned at the last Day? for  
 “ where there is no Law, there can neither be  
 “ Obedience, nor Transgression.”

Pref. to *Wil-*  
*kins of Nat.*  
*Relig.*

If then, it be absurd to suppose, that Men, tho’ they liv’d ever so impiously and immorally, did nothing which God had forbid them ; or if ever so piously and virtuously, nothing that God had commanded them ; must there not always have been an universal Law so fully promulgated to Mankind, that they could have no just Plea from their Ignorance, not to be tried by it. And cou’d any thing less than its being founded on the Nature of Things, and the Relation Men stand in to God, and one another, visible at all times to all, make it thus universally promulgated? But further to illustrate this Matter ; can it be imagined, that if God has been so good to all other Animals, as to give them, not in one Country only, but in all Places whatsoever, sufficient means to act for their own Preservation ; that he has had less kindness for the immortal

tal Souls of those made after his own Image, and has not given them, at one time as well as another, and at one place as well as another, sufficient Means to provide for their eternal Happiness? Or,

CAN it be supposed, an infinitely good and gracious Being, which gives Men notice, by their Senses, what does good or hurt to their Bodies; has had less regard for their immortal Parts, and has not given them at all times, by the Light of their Understanding, sufficient Means to discover what makes for the good of their Souls; but has necessitated them, or any of them, to continue from Age to Age in destructive Ignorance, or Error? To press this Matter further, let me ask you, Whether there is not a clear and distinct Light, that enlightens all Men; and which, the Moment they attend to it, makes them perceive those eternal Truths, which are the Foundation of all our Knowledge? And is it not God himself who illuminates them? What other Reason then can you assign, why infinite Wisdom should act thus; but to give Mankind standing Rules to distinguish Truth from Falshood, especially in Matters of the highest consequence to their eternal as well as temporal Happiness?

THERE has, no doubt, been a great Number of traditional Religions succeeding one another; and, as far as we know, there is no traditional Religion, which has, except in Name, continu'd the same for any long time; and tho' there are a great Number of Sects, who go under the same common Denomination, yet they are almost as much divided among themselves, as if they own'd different Religions; and accordingly charge one another with erring fundamentally; yet all these agree in acknowledging a *Law of Nature*, and that they are indispensably obliged to obey its Dictates: So that this *Light of Nature*, like that of the Sun, is universal; and wou'd, did not Men shut the Eyes of their Understanding, or suffer others to blind them, soon disperse all those Mists and Fogs, which arise either  
from

from false Traditions, or false Interpretations of the true Tradition.

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## C H A P. II.

*That the Religion of Nature consists in observing those Things, which our Reason, by considering the Nature of God and Man, and the Relation we stand in to him and one another, demonstrates to be our Duty; and that those Things are plain; and likewise What they are.*

B. **T**HAT we may the better know whether the *Law*, or *Religion of Nature* is universal, and the Gospel a Republication of it, and not a new Religion; I desire you will give a Definition of the *Religion of Nature*.

A. By *Natural Religion*, I understand the Belief of the Existence of a God, and the Sense and Practice of those Duties which result from the Knowledge we, by our Reason, have of him and his Perfections; and of ourselves, and our own Imperfections; and of the relation we stand in to him and our Fellow-Creatures; so that the *Religion of Nature* takes in every thing that is founded on the Reason and Nature of things. Hence *Grotius* defines the *Law of Nature* to be *Dictatum* Lib. I. c. I. par. 10. *rectæ rationis, indicans alicui, ex ejus convenientia aut disconvenientia cum ipsa natura rationali, inesse morelem turpitudinem, aut necessitatem morelem, ac consequenter ab auctore naturæ Deo talem actum aut vetari aut præcipi.*

I suppose you will allow, that 'tis evident by the *Light of Nature*, that there is a God; or in other words, a Being absolutely perfect, and infinitely happy in himself, who is the Source of all other Beings;

Beings; and that what Perfections soever the Creatures have, they are wholly deriv'd from him.

*B.* THIS, no doubt, has been demonstratèd over and over; and I must own, that I can't be more certain of my own Existence, than of the Existence of such a Being.

*A.* SINCE then it is demonstrable there is such a Being, it is equally demonstrable, that the Creatures can neither add to, or take from the Happiness of that Being; and that he could have no Motive in framing his Creatures, or in giving Laws to such of them as he made capable of knowing his Will, but their own Good.

To imagine he created them at first for his own sake, and has since required things of them for that Reason, is to suppose he was not perfectly happy in himself before the Creation; and that the Creatures, by either observing, or not observing the Rules prescrib'd them, cou'd add to, or take from his Happiness.

If then a Being infinitely happy in himself, cou'd not command his Creatures any thing for his own Good; nor an all-wise Being things to no end or purpose; nor an all-good Being any thing but for their good: It unavoidably follows, nothing can be a part of the divine Law, but what tends to promote the common Interest, and mutual Happiness of his rational Creatures; and every thing that does so, must be a part of it.

As God can require nothing of us, but what makes for our Happiness; so he, who can't envy us any Happiness our Nature is capable of, can forbid us those Things only, which tend to our Hurt; and this we are as certain of, as that there is a God infinitely happy in himself, infinitely good and wise; and as God can design nothing by his Laws but our Good, so by being infinitely powerful, he can bring every thing to pass which he designs for that End.



FROM the Consideration of these Perfections, we cannot but have the highest Veneration, nay, the greatest Adoration and Love for this supreme Being; who, that we may not fail to be as happy as possible for such Creatures to be, has made our acting for our *present*, to be the only Means of obtaining our *future* Happiness; so that we can't sin against him, but by acting against ourselves, *i. e.* our reasonable Natures: These Reflections, which occur to every one who in the least considers, must give us a wonderful and surprizing Sense of the divine Goodness, fill us with Admiration, Transport and Extasy; (of which we daily see among contemplative Persons remarkable Instances): And not only force us to express a never-failing Gratitude in Raptures of the highest Praise and Thanksgiving; but make us strive to imitate him in our extensive Love to our Fellow-Creatures: And thus copying after the Divine Original, and taking God himself for our Precedent, must conform us to his Image, who is all Perfection and all Happiness; and who must have an inexhaustible Love for all, who thus endeavour to imitate him. And here

THE difference between the supreme Being, infinitely happy in himself, and the Creatures who are not so, is, That all his Actions, in relation to his Creatures, flow from a pure disinterested Love; whereas the Spring of all the Actions of the Creatures is their own Good: *We love God, because he* 1 John 4. 19. *first loved us*; and consequently, our Love to him will be in proportion to our Sense of his Goodness to us. Nor can we in the least vary from those Sentiments, which the Consideration of the divine Attributes implant in us, but we must in proportion take off from the Goodness of God, and from those Motives we have to love him as we ought.

OUR Reason, which gives us a Demonstration of the divine Perfections, affords us the same concerning the Nature of those Duties God requires; not only with relation to himself, but to ourselves,  
and

and one another : These we can't but see, if we look into ourselves, consider our own Natures, and the Circumstances God has placed us in with relation to our Fellow-Creatures, and what conduces to our mutual Happiness : Our Senses, our Reason, the Experience of others as well as our own, can't fail to give us sufficient Information.

WITH relation to ourselves, we can't but know how we are to act ; if we consider, that God has endow'd Man with such a Nature, as makes him necessarily desire his own Good ; and, therefore, he may be sure, that God, who has bestow'd this Nature on him, could not require any thing of him in prejudice of it ; but, on the contrary, that he should do every thing which tends to promote the Good of it. The Health of the Body, and the Vigor of the Mind, being highly conducing to our Good, we must be sensible we offend our Maker, if we indulge our Senses to the prejudice of these : And because not only all irregular Passions, all unfriendly Affections carry their own Torment with them, and endless Inconveniences attend the Excess of sensual Delights ; and all immoderate Desires (human Nature being able to bear but a certain Proportion) disorder both Mind and Body ; we can't but know we ought to use great Moderation with relation to our Passions, or in other Words, govern all our Actions by Reason ; That, and our true Interest being inseparable. And, in a word, whoever so regulates his natural Appetites, as will conduce most to the Exercise of his Reason, the Health of his Body, and the Pleasure of his Senses, taken and consider'd together, (since herein his Happiness consists) may be certain he can never offend his Maker ; who, as he governs all things according to their Natures, can't but expect his rational Creatures should act according to their Natures.

As to what God expects from Man with relation to each other ; every one must know his Duty, who considers that the common Parent of Mankind  
has

has the whole Species alike under his Protection, and will equally punish him for injuring others, as he would others for injuring him; and consequently, that it is his Duty to deal with them, as he expects they should deal with him in the like Circumstances. How much this is his Duty, every one must perceive, who considers himself as a weak Creature, not able to subsist without the Assistance of others, who have it in their Power to retaliate the Usage he gives them: And that he may expect, if he breaks those Rules which are necessary for Men's mutual Happiness, to be treated like a common Enemy, not only by the Persons injur'd, but by all others; who, by the common Ties of Nature, are obliged to defend and assist each other. And not only a Man's own particular Interest, but that of his Children, his Family, and all that's dear to him, obliges him to promote the common Happiness, and to endeavour to convey the same to Posterity.

ALL *Moralists* agree, that human Nature is so constituted, that Men can't live without Society and mutual Assistance; and that God has endow'd them with Reason, Speech, and other Faculties, evidently fitted to enable them to assist each other in all the Concerns of Life; that, therefore, 'tis the Will of God, who gives them this Nature, and endows them with these Faculties, that they should employ them for their common Benefit and mutual Assistance. And the *Philosophers*, who saw that all Society would be dissolv'd, and Men soon become destitute of even the Necessaries of Life, and be a Prey to one another, if each Man was only to mind himself, and his own single Interest; and that every thing pointed out the Necessity of mutual Benevolence among Mankind; did therefore rightly judge, that Men were by their Nature fram'd to be useful to one another; *Ad tuendos conservandosque homines hominem natum esse*, says *Cicero*. Therefore, every

De fin. 1. 3.  
cap. 20.

not to disable his Body or Mind by such Irregularities, as may make him less serviceable to them.

IN short, considering the variety of Circumstances Men are under, and these continually changing, as well as being for the most part unforeseen; 'tis impossible to have Rules laid down by any *External Revelation* for every particular Case; and therefore, there must be some standing Rule, discoverable by the *Light of Nature*, to direct us in all such Cases. And we can't be more certain, that 'tis the Will of God, that those Effects which flow from natural Causes should so flow; than we are, that 'tis the Will of God, that Men should observe, whatever the Nature of Things, and the Relation they have to one another, make fit to be observ'd; or in other Words, we can't but know, if we in the least consider, that, whatever Circumstances Men are plac'd in, by the universal Cause of all things; that 'tis his eternal and immutable Will, by his placing them in these Circumstances, that they act as these require. 'Tis absurd to imagine we are oblig'd to act thus in some Cases, and not in others; when the reason for acting thus in all is the same. This Consideration alone will direct a Man how to act in all Conditions of Life, whether *Father, Son, Husband, Servant, Subject, Master, King, &c.* Thus we see how the reason of things, or the relation they have to each other, teaches us our Duty in all cases whatever. And I may add, that the better to cause Men to observe those Rules, which make for their mutual Benefit, infinite Goodness has sown in their Hearts Seeds of Pity, Humanity and Tendernefs, which, without much difficulty, cannot be eradicated; but nothing operates more strongly than that Desire Men have of being in Esteem, Credit, and Reputation with their Fellow-Creatures, not to be obtain'd without acting on the Principles of natural Justice, Equity, Benevolence, &c.

IN a word, as a most beneficent Disposition in the supreme Being is the Source of all his Actions in relation to his Creatures; so he has implanted in Man, whom

whom he has made after his own Image, a Love for his Species ; the gratifying of which, in doing Acts of Benevolence, Compassion, and Good Will, produces a Pleasure that never fatiates ; as on the contrary, Actions of Ill-Nature, Envy, Malice, &c. never fail to produce Shame, Confusion, and everlasting Self-reproach.

AND now let any one say, how 'tis possible God could more fully make known his Will to all intelligent Creatures, than by making every thing within, and without them a Declaration of it, and an Argument for observing it.

HAVING thus discovered our Duty, we may be sure it will always be the same ; since Inconstancy, as it argues a Defect either of Wisdom or Power, can't belong to a Being infinitely wise and powerful : What unerring Wisdom has once instituted, can have no Defects ; and as God is intirely free from all Partiality, his Laws must alike extend to all Times and Places.

FROM these Premises, I think, we may boldly draw this Conclusion, That if Religion consists in the Practice of those Duties, that result from the Relation we stand in to God and Man, our Religion must always be the same. If God is unchangeable, our Duty to him must be so too ; if Human Nature continues the same, and Men at all Times stand in the same Relation to one another, the Duties which result from thence too, must always be the same : And consequently our Duty both to God and Man must, from the Beginning of the World to the End, remain unalterable ; be always alike plain and perspicuous ; neither chang'd in Whole, or Part : which demonstrates that no Person, if he comes from God, can teach us any other Religion, or give us any Precepts, but what are founded on those Relations. *Heaven and Earth shall sooner pass away, than one Tittle of this Eternal Law shall either be abrogated, or alter'd.*

To sum up all in few words : As Nature teaches Men to unite for their mutual Defence and Happiness, and Government was instituted solely for this End ; so to make this more effectual, was Religion, which reaches the Thoughts, wholly ordain'd ; it being impossible for God, in governing the World, to propose to himself any other End than the Good of the Governed ; and consequently, whoever does his best for the Good of his Fellow-Creatures, does all that either God or Man requires. Thus from the Consideration of our own Imperfections, which we continually feel ; and the Perfections of our Creator, which we constantly find in all his Works ; we may arrive at the Knowledge of our Duty, both to our Creator and Fellow-Creatures. Hence, I think, we may define True Religion to consist in a constant Disposition of Mind to do all the Good we can ; and thereby render ourselves acceptable to God in answering the End of his Creation.

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### C H A P. III.

*That the Perfection and Happiness of all rational Beings, supreme as well as subordinate, consists in living up to the Dictates of their Nature.*

**T**O make This, (since all our Happiness depends on it) if possible, more plain : The Principle from which all human Actions flow, is the Desire of Happiness ; and God, who does nothing in vain, would in vain have implanted this Principle, This only innate Principle in Mankind, if he had not given them Reason to discern what Actions make for, and against their Happiness.

B. WHEREIN do you take the Happiness of rational Creatures to consist ? Without knowing That, this Controversy can't be determin'd ; and when 'tis known, our Dispute must soon be ended.

*A.* THE Happiness of all Beings whatever, consists in the Perfections of their Nature; and the Nature of a rational Being is most perfect, when it is perfectly rational; that is, when it governs all its Actions by the Rules of right Reason; for then it arrives at the most perfect, and consequently the happiest State a rational Nature can aspire to: and every Deviation from the Rules of Right Reason, being an Imperfection, must carry with it a proportionable Unhappiness; and a Man's Happiness and Duty must consist in the same things, since no One can be oblig'd to do any thing that does not some way or other contribute to his Happiness; and consequently, according to the Sense Men have of their own Happiness, and of the Means which will naturally procure it, they may assuredly attain the Knowledge of their respective Duties.

*B.* IF we know wherein the Happiness of God, who is necessarily happy, consists, we might judge wherein consists the Happiness of Man made after God's own Image; and whether Happiness, or Misery, are the necessary Consequence of his Actions.

*A.* BECAUSE this is a Point of the highest Consequence, I shall speak my Sentiments (that they may the better pass with you) in the words of the judicious *Dr. Scott*, who says, "That which renders God so infinitely happy in himself, is not so much the Almighty Power he has to defend himself from foreign Hurts or Injuries, as the exact Agreement of all his Actions, with the all-comprehending Reason of his own Mind. God loves not himself merely because he is himself, but because he is in all respects morally good, and his Will and Power perfectly compliant with the infallible Dictates of his own Reason: Hence arises his infinite Complacency in himself, that there's nothing in him but what his own Reason perfectly approves; no Inclinations in his Will or Nature, but what are exactly agreeable to the fairest Ideas of his own Mind."

*Christ. Life,*  
*Part 2. Vol. 1.*  
*Ch. 1.*

IF the Perfection, and consequently the Happiness of God, consists in the Purity and Rectitude of his Nature, we, as far as we can arrive to a like Purity and Rectitude, must be so far necessarily happy; since by living according to the Rules of Right Reason, we more and more implant in us the moral Perfections of God, from which his Happiness is inseparable. We then, if I may so say, *live the Life of God*; that is, we, in our Place and Station, live after the same manner, and by the same Rules as he does in his; and we do what God himself would do was he in our place; and there would be no other difference between his Life and ours, but what arises from our different States and Relations; since the same Rules would determine our Wills as determine his Will; and by our repeated Acts of Virtue, we should be continually making nearer and nearer Approaches to the most perfect, and the most happy Being. By this Conduct, we, as the Scriptures assure us, shou'd be made Partakers of the *Divine Nature*, *be born of God*, and *be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect*; and can that be without being as happy as we are perfect? Hence we may contemplate the great Dignity of our *Rational Nature*, since our Reason for Kind, tho' not for Degree, is of the same Nature with that of God's; nay, 'tis our Reason which makes us the Image of God himself, and is the common Bond which unites Heaven and Earth; the Creatures, and the Creator; and if our Happiness is limited, 'tis because our Reason is so: 'Tis God alone, who has an unlimited Reason and Happiness.

THE excellent Author just now mention'd, says,  
 Christ. Life, " The best thing we can receive from God is Him-  
 Part 2. Vol 1. " self, and Himself we do receive in our strict Com-  
 Ch 1. " pliance with the eternal Laws of Goodness; which  
 " Laws being transcrib'd from the Nature of God,  
 " from his eternal Righteousness and Goodness, we  
 " do, by obeying them, derive God's Nature into  
 " our own; so that while we write after the Copy  
 " of his Laws, we write out the Perfections of his  
 " Being;



“ Being ; and his Laws being the Seal on which he  
 “ has engraven his Nature, we, in obeying them,  
 “ take Impression from them, and stamp his blessed  
 “ Nature on our own.” Which, certainly, must  
 make us necessarily happy, as a contrary Conduct  
 would make us unhappy. And, I think, I may  
 venture to say, that could we suppose God himself  
 to act otherwise, he would then be as unhappy as  
 he now is happy ; and his Omnipotency could not  
 hinder him from being continually expos’d to the  
 Reproach of his own infallible Reason.

FROM these Premises, I think, we may conclude,  
 that Men, according as they do, or do not partake  
 of the Nature of God, must unavoidably be either  
 happy, or miserable : And herein appears the great  
 Wisdom of God, in making Mens Misery and Hap-  
 piness the necessary and inseparable Consequence of  
 their Actions ; and that rational Actions carry with  
 them their own Reward, and irrational their own Pu-  
 nishment : This, I think, can’t be deny’d, as long  
 as there are some Actions naturally beneficial to us,  
 and others as hurtful ; and that there’s no Virtue,  
 but what has some Good inseparably annex’d to it ;  
 and no Vice, but what as necessarily carries with it  
 some Evil : and if our rational Nature is to be the  
 same in the next Life, as it is in this, our Actions  
 must produce Effects of the same Kind and that  
 too in a much higher degree.

IN this Life, ’tis true, we can’t be perfectly hap-  
 py ; as subject to Diseases and Disasters : We are  
 imperfect ourselves and have none to converse with  
 but imperfect Creatures ; and yet if we act accord-  
 ing to the Dictates of Right Reason, we shall re-  
 ceive, even here, true inward Comfort and Satis-  
 faction ; and hereafter, when we are freed from  
 those Imperfections, compleat Happiness : On the  
 contrary, the Man who abandons his Reason, besides  
 the Misery of all sorts an irrational Conduct will  
 bring on him, must feel in his Mind, Pain and An-  
 guish even in this Life ; and in the Life to come,

when there are no sensual things to divert his Thoughts, insupportable Grief and Misery.

Tho' human Law-givers are forced to have recourse to Punishments, which are not connected with the things they forbid; yet a Being of infinite Power is not thus straiten'd, but may make one the necessary Consequence of the other: And, indeed, how can it be otherwise, since Good and Evil have their Foundation in the essential Difference of Things, and their Nature is fix'd and immoveable: And consequently, our Happiness depends on the intrinsic Nature of the one, and our Misery on the intrinsic Nature of the other.

As God, whose infinite Wisdom sets him above being deceiv'd, or influenc'd by any wrong Affections, acts in constant Conformity to the Reason and Nature of Things; and 'tis a Contradiction to his Nature for him to do any thing that is not fit and reasonable; so he would have fram'd our Nature in contradiction to his own, if he had oblig'd us to act otherwise. No, God can never give us Commands repugnant to his own Nature, or require us to do what he himself abhors to do. The End for which God has given us Reason, is to compare Things, and the Relation they stand in to each other; and from thence to judge of the Fitness and Unfitness of Actions; and could not our Reason judge soundly in all such Matters, it could not have answer'd the End for which infinite Wisdom and Goodness bestow'd that excellent Gift; and for which we can't enough adore the Goodness of God.

HAD God, from time to time, spoke to all Mankind in their several Languages, and his Words had miraculously convey'd the same Ideas to all Persons; yet he could not speak more plainly than he has done by the Things themselves, and the Relation which Reason shews there is between them: Nay, since 'tis impossible in any Book, or Books, that a particular Rule cou'd be given for every Case, we must even then have had recourse to the Light of

of Nature to teach us our Duty in most Cases; especially considering the numberless Circumstances which attend us, and which, perpetually varying, may make the same Actions, according as Men are differently affected by them, either good or bad. And I may add, that most of the particular Rules laid down in the Gospel for our Direction, are spoken after such a figurative Manner, that except we judge of their Meaning, not merely by the Letter, but by what the Law of Nature antecedently declares to be our Duty, they are apt to lead us wrong: And if Precepts relating to Morality are deliver'd after an obscure manner, when they might have been deliver'd otherwise; what Reason can you assign for its being so, but that infinite Wisdom meant to refer us to that Law, for the explaining them? Sufficient Instances of this nature I shall give you hereafter; tho' I must own, I can't carry this Point so far as a learned Divine, who represents the Scriptures more obscure (which one would think impossible) than even the *Fathers*. He tells us, "That a certain Author (viz. *Flaccus Illyricus*) has furnished us with one and fifty Reasons for the Obscurity of the Scriptures;" adding, "I think, I may truly say that the Writings of the Prophets and Apostles abound with Tropes and Metaphors, Types and Allegories, Parables and dark Speeches; and are as much, nay, much more unintelligible in many Places, than the Writings of the Ancients." 'Tis well this Author, who talks of People being stark *Bible-mad*, stopp'd here; and did not with a celebrated Wit cry, *The truly illuminated Books are the darkest of all.*

THE Writer above-mention'd supposes it impossible, that God's Will should be fully reveal'd by Books; "Except, says he, it might be said perhaps without a Figure, that even the World itself could not contain the Books which should be written." But with Submission to this Reverend Person, I can't help thinking, but that (such is the

Prof. to  
Reeve's Apol.  
&c. p. 45, 46.

Prof. concern.  
right Use of  
the Fathers,  
p. 11.  
Tale of a Tub.

Prelim. Dis-  
sert. to *Vin-  
cent. Lirinens.*  
p. 199.

divine Goodness) God's Will is so clearly, and fully manifested in the Book of Nature, that he who runs may read it.

THIS can't be deny'd, if the Book of Nature shews us in Characters legible by the whole World, the Relation we stand in to God and our Fellow-Creatures, and the Duties resulting from thence; for then it must teach us the whole of our Duty, since it would be unjust and tyrannical in any Being, to require more of others than the Relation they stand in to him makes it their Duty to pay; it being that Relation alone which gives him his just Power and Authority. We are encompass'd with many artificial Relations, such as *Governour* and *Governed*, *Master* and *Servant*, *Husband* and *Wife*, &c. and the End of these Relations teaches us what they require; and they being enter'd into for the sake of each other's Assistance, either Party is injur'd by the others not observing what these Relations demand, or by exacting more than the End of entering into them requires.

THO' the Relation we stand in to God, is not artificial as most are amongst Men, who want each other's Assistance; but is natural at least on our part; yet this does not hinder, but that we may know by Reason, the End he had in being related to us as Creator and Governour; and what he requires of his Creatures and Subjects: This the divine Nature, which contains in itself all Perfection, and all Happiness, plainly points out to us. And if we are once certain of the End of God's entering into this Relation with Man, we may be as certain from his Wisdom and Goodness, and all his divine Perfections, that he will require no more of us than the End he had in entering into this Relation requires.

If it would be unjust and tyrannical in an earthly Governour, to exact Things of his Subjects, that do not contribute to the End for which this Relation between them was enter'd into; can we suppose a Governour of infinite Wisdom and Goodness, who  
has

has always in his mind the End for which he governs Mankind, will act the Tyrant, and put them under severe Penalties for not observing such things as have no relation to the End for which he created, and governs them ?

THERE'S no Relation among Men without a mutual Obligation arising from it ; Parents owe a Duty to Children as well as Children to Parents ; but are not we in a stricter Sense, the Children of God, and Parents only Instruments in his hands ? since 'tis God, who from Nothing brings us into Being, frames us after the Manner that best pleases him, imprints on us what Faculties, Inclinations, Desires and Passions he thinks fit : And is not God from his innate Goodness and Equity, under an Obligation to treat us more kindly than earthly Parents do their best-beloved Children, who beget them without designing it ? Whereas God, whose Actions are govern'd by infinite Goodness, could have no Motive to bring us into Being (which of itself is no Blessing) but our Good ; and for the same reason preserves us in Being : nor can so kind and tender a Parent play the Tyrant, and impose Commands on us, which do not flow from the Relations we stand in to him, and to one another.

If we consider what our Reason will inform us, of the Nature of our great Creator and Governour, we can't fail of knowing our Duty ; for as Dr. *Scott* justly observes, “ If you will serve the great King  
 “ of the World in such Ways as are pleasing and  
 “ acceptable to him, you must study his Nature,  
 “ and inform your selves, which way his infinite  
 “ Perfections incline, that you may know how to  
 “ comport yourselves towards him, and to render  
 “ him such Services as are agreeable to his Nature ;  
 “ for there's no Rule in the World, but only that  
 “ of his Nature, by which you can certainly con-  
 “ clude what will please him. ——— So that in all  
 “ our Enquiries what is pleasing to God, our last  
 “ Appeal must be to his Nature, which is the great

Christ. Life,  
 P. 2. Vol. 1.  
 Ch. 6. p. 321,  
 322.

“ Standard

“ Standard of Good and Evil ; by which we are to  
 “ measure what is pleasing and displeasing to him. ”

IF then, with this judicious Author, you allow, that we are to measure what is pleasing and displeasing to God, (which takes in the whole of Religion) from what our Reason teaches concerning his Nature, you allow all I contend for.

IN short, if the Relations between Things, and the Fitness resulting from thence, be not the sole Rule of God's Actions, must not God be an arbitrary Being ? and then what a miserable Condition will Mankind be in ! Since an arbitrary Will might change every Moment, and those Things which entitled Men to God's Favour to-day, might make them incur his Displeasure to-morrow : Nay, he might at the same time have a secret Will opposite to his reveal'd Will ; or have different Wills for every different Person ; or might reveal his arbitrary Commands so obscurely, as to cause the utmost Confusion ; but if God only commands what the Nature of Things shew to be fit, 'tis scarce possible, that Men (tho' now endlessly divided upon the account of their different Traditions) should mistake their Duty ; since a Mind that's attentive can as easily distinguish *fit* from *unfit*, as the Eye can Beauty from Deformity, or the Ear Harmony from Discord : And if no Commands can alter the Nature of Things, or make that *fit* which is in itself *unfit*, external Revelation must attend the Nature and Relation of Things, and can only speak what those speak. As for instance, 'tis not in our power, tho' ever so often commanded, to love the Deity, while we conceive him an arbitrary Being acting out of Humour and Caprice ; nor could any Commands, supposing such possible, oblige us not to love him, while we believe him a kind and beneficent Being ; so that as long as we have right Notions of God, we can't but love, and adore him as we ought.

THUS, I think, I have fully prov'd from the Nature of God and Man, and the Relations we stand

stand in to him and one another, that the divine Precepts can't vary ; and that these Relations, which are the permanent Voice of God, by which he speaks to all Mankind, do at all times infallibly point out to us our Duty in all the various Circumstances of Life.

SHOULD Revelation require less than those Relations require, would it not be an imperfect Rule ? And if it enjoins more, would it not argue the Author of it to be of a tyrannical Nature, imposing on his Subjects, and under most severe Penalties, unnecessary Things ; and likewise shew a Design, not of being belov'd, but hated and dreaded ? And therefore, those who see the Consequences of Things, describe the Christian Religion as requiring such things only, as considering the Relations we stand in to God and one another, are apparently for our Good.

THE most accurate Dr. *Barrow* gives this Character of the Christian Religion, “ That its Precepts  
 “ are no other than such as Physicians prescribe for Vol. of Serm. p. 82.  
 “ the Health of our Bodies ; as Politicians wou'd  
 “ allow to be needful for the Peace of the State ; as  
 “ *Epicurean* Philosophers recommend for the Tran-  
 “ quility of our Minds, and Pleasures of our Lives ;  
 “ such as Reason dictates, and daily shews conducive  
 “ to our Welfare in all respects ; which consequent-  
 “ ly, were there no Law enacting them, we should  
 “ in Wisdom choose to observe, and voluntarily  
 “ impose them on ourselves ; confessing them to be  
 “ fit Matters of Law, as most advantageous and  
 “ requisite to the Good, general and particular, of  
 “ Mankind.

THAT great and good Man Dr. *Tillotson* says,  
 “ That all the Precepts of Christianity are reason- Serm. Vol. 1. p. 86.  
 “ ble and wise, requiring such Duties as are suitable  
 “ to the Light of Nature, and do approve them-  
 “ selves to the best Reason of Mankind ; such as  
 “ have their Foundation in the Nature of God, and  
 “ are an Imitation of the divine Excellencies ; such  
 “ as

“ as tend to the Perfection of Human Nature, and  
 “ to raise the Minds of Men to the highest Pitch of  
 “ Goodness and Virtue. ——— They command  
 “ nothing that’s unnecessary, they omit nothing  
 “ that may tend to the Glory of God, or the Wel-  
 “ fare of Men, nor do they restrain us in any thing,  
 “ but what is contrary to the regular Inclinations of  
 “ Nature, or to our Reason, and true Interest; they  
 “ forbid us nothing but what is base and unworthy  
 “ to serve our Humours and Passions, to make  
 “ ourselves Fools and Beasts. — In a word, no-  
 “ thing but what tends to our private Harm, or Pre-  
 “ judice, or to publick Disorder and Confusion. ”

Boyle’s Lect.  
p. 26.

THE late Dean of *Conterbury*, in a Sermon  
 preach’d in Defence of Christianity, says, “ What  
 “ can be a more powerful Incentive to Obedience,  
 “ than for a rational Creature clearly to discern the  
 “ Equity, the Necessity, the Benefit, the Decency  
 “ and Beauty of every Action he is call’d to do,  
 “ and thence to be duly sensible how gracious a  
 “ Master he serves; one that is so far from load-  
 “ ing him with fruitless, arbitrary, and tyrannical  
 “ Impositions, that each Command abstracted from  
 “ his Command who issues it, is able to recommend  
 “ itself; and nothing requir’d but what every wise  
 “ Man wou’d choose of his own accord; and can-  
 “ not without being his own Enemy, wish to be  
 “ exempted from. ” And this Character of Christi-  
 anity he makes to be essential to its being from  
 God, and therefore must make it the same with  
 natural Religion, which has this Character impress’d  
 on it.

Serm. before  
the Queen on  
*Christmas*  
Day, 1724.

“ THERE was none of the Doctrines of our Sa-  
 viour (*says the late Archbishop of York*) calcula-  
 “ ted for the Gratification of Mens idle Curiosities,  
 “ the busying and amusing them with airy and use-  
 “ less Speculations; much less were they intended  
 “ for an Exercise of our Credulity, or a Trial how far  
 “ we could bring our Reason to submit to our Faith:  
 “ But as on the one hand they were plain and simple,  
 “ and



“ and such as by their Agreeableness to the rational  
 “ Faculties of Mankind, did highly recommend  
 “ themselves to our Belief ; so on the other hand  
 “ they had an immediate Relation to Practice, and  
 “ were the genuine Principles and Foundation up-  
 “ on which all human and divine Virtues were na-  
 “ turally to be superstructed.” Does not every one  
 see, that if the Religion of Nature had been put in-  
 stead of Christianity, these Descriptions would have  
 exactly agreed with it ?

THE judicious Dr. *Scott* affirms, “ God never im-  
 “ poses Laws on us *pro Imperio*, as arbitrary Tests  
 “ and Trials of our Obedience. — The great  
 “ Design of them, *says he*, is to do us Good, and  
 “ direct our Actions to our own Interest. — This,  
 “ if we firmly believe, will infinitely encourage our  
 “ Obedience ; for when I am sure God commands  
 “ me nothing but what my own Health, Ease, and  
 “ Happiness requires ; and that every Law of his is  
 “ both a necessary and sovereign Prescription against  
 “ the Diseases of my Nature, and he could not pre-  
 “ scribe less than he has, without being defective  
 “ in his Care of my Recovery and Happiness ;  
 “ with what Prudence and Modesty can I grudge  
 “ to obey him ? ”

Christ. Life,  
 Part 2. Vol. 1.  
 Ch. 4. p. 173.  
 174.

NAY, the most considerable Men, even among  
 the *Papists*, do not scruple to maintain there's no-  
 thing in Religion but what is moral. The Divines  
 of *Port-Royal* for Instance say, “ All the Precepts,  
 “ and all the Mysteries that are express'd in so  
 “ many different Ways in the holy Volumes, do all  
 “ center in this one Commandment, of *loving God*  
 “ *with all our Heart, and in loving our Neighbours*  
 “ *as ourselves* : For the Scripture (it is *St. Austin* who  
 “ says it) forbids but one only thing, which is *Con-*  
 “ *cupiscence*, or the Love of the Creature ; as it  
 “ commands but one only thing, which is *Charity*,  
 “ and the Love of God : Upon this double Precept  
 “ is founded the whole System of the Christian Re-  
 “ ligion ; and it is unto this, *say they*, according

Prof. au Nouv.  
 Testament.

Ib.

“ to the Expression of Jesus Christ, that all the an-  
 “ tient Law and the Prophets have reference ; and  
 “ we may add also, all the Myſteries, and all the  
 “ Precepts of the new Law : *For Love*, ſays *St. Paul*,  
 “ *is the Fulfilling of the Law.*” And theſe Divines  
 likewiſe cite a remarkable Paſſage of *St. Auſtin* on  
 this Subject ; *viz.* “ He that knows how to love  
 “ God, and to regulate his Life by that Love,  
 “ knows all that the Scripture propounds to be  
 “ known.” They alſo might have quoted a known  
 Saying of this Father, *Omnia peccata ſunt in univer-*  
*ſum contra Rationem & Natura Legem.* And I  
 might add the Authority of a greater Man, and a  
*Papiſt* too, who ſays, “ Religion adds nothing to  
 “ natural Probity, but the Conſolation of doing  
 “ that for Love and Obedience to our heavenly  
 “ Father, which Reaſon itſelf requires us to do in fa-  
 “ vour of Virtue.” And the famous *Pere Queſnelle*  
 ſays on *A&ts* 2. 21. *Le vrai culte n’eſt plus attaché*  
*à un Peuple ; Le Chriſtianisme eſt une Religion uni-*  
*verſelle.*

*B.* Do Divines always give this Character of  
 Chriſtianity, do they never diſtinguiſh it from the  
 Religion of Nature, by ſuppoſing it contains cer-  
 tain arbitrary Precepts ?

*A.* WHEN they conſider how repugnant ’tis to  
 the Nature of God to give any arbitrary Com-  
 mands, then indeed the Force of Truth obliges  
 them to declare there’s nothing in Religion but  
 what tends to the Good of Mankind ; but if at any  
 time they talk otherwiſe, ’tis for the ſake of ſuch  
 things as either directly or indirectly ſerve their In-  
 tereſt. But to remove all Scruples, I ſhall more  
 fully prove,

Archbp. of  
*Cambray* Let-  
 tres ſur la Re-  
 ligion, p. 258.  
 à Paris.

## C H A P. IV.

*That not only the Matter of all God's Laws, but the Penalties annex'd to them, are for the Good of Mankind; even for those who suffer for the Breach of them.*

**B.** SHOUL'D I allow you, that the Natural Knowledge we have of God is the Foundation of all Religion, and that arguing from the Divine Attributes is a most certain Way of Reasoning, yet is not God's Glory one of his divine Attributes? And does not the wisest of Men say, that *God made all Things for himself, and the Wicked for the Day of Evil*; and consequently God's Glory, rather than the Good of Man, occasion'd the Almighty to create Man, and to give him Laws? Prov. 16. 4.

*A.* As to this Text, I shall answer you from Archbishop Tillotson; that "If by *God's making all Things for himself*, be meant, that he aim'd at and intended the Manifestation of his Wisdom, Power, and Goodness in the Creation of the World, 'tis most true, that in this Sense *he made all Things for himself*; but if we understand it so, as if the Goodness of his Nature did not move him thereto, but that he had some Design to serve Ends and Necessities of his own, upon his Creatures, this is far from him; but it's very probable, that neither of these are the Meaning of the Text, which may be render'd with much better Sense, and nearer to the *Hebrew* thus; *God hath ordain'd every thing to that which is fit for it, and the Wicked hath he ordain'd for the Day of Evil*; that is, the Wisdom of God hath fitted one Thing to another; Punishment to Sin, the Evil Day to the Evil Doers." This is the Sense that *Grotius*, and most of the best Commentators put on the  
Text,

Text. And here let me add, that if there are innumerable Places as capable of different Interpretations, even with Relation to God and his Attributes, this, sure, will be no Argument not to adhere to what the Light of Nature teaches us in this matter; since where Texts may be taken in different Senses, things are as much left to be determin'd by our Reason, as if there were no such Texts. And when we meet with Expressions of God's doing any thing for his own Glory, they can only mean, that such is the transcendent Excellency of his Nature, such the inexpressible Marks of his Wisdom and Power in all his Works, that he could not have given greater, had he design'd nothing but his own Glory. And when we impute the Glory of all we do to him, we thereby signify, that we have no Power, but what we derive from him; and that we desire to acknowledge him the Author of whatever is praise-worthy in us.

*B.* THO' it be allow'd, that God fram'd his Laws, and consequently, the Sanctions that make them Laws, for the Good of Man; yet a due regard to his own Honour, the Dignity of his Laws and Government, will oblige him to punish those, who violate his Laws, as for an Injury done to himself, distinct from the harm that by the Breach of them accrues to his Creatures.

*A.* As no Man breaks the divine Laws out of Contempt to his Maker, or imagines he can do God an Injury; so God does not make Laws for one end, and require the observing them for another; that being inconsistent with the Dignity of the divine Legislator, his Laws and Government: But as it was for the sake of Man that he gave him Laws, so he executes them purely for the same reason; since upon his own account, he can't be in the least affected, whether his Laws be, or be not observ'd; and consequently in punishing, no more than rewarding, does he act as a Party, much less an injur'd Party, who wants Satisfaction, or Reparation of Honour.

And

And indeed, to suppose it, is highly to dishonour him, since God, as he never can be injur'd, so he can never want Reparation; and he, who is infinitely satisfy'd in himself, can gain no addition of Satisfaction by his Creatures observing his Laws; nor can he, by their not observing them, be reduc'd to a condition of wanting Satisfaction, or Reparation of Honour, or any of those things, which, depending on the Opinion of others, are main Ingredients in human Happiness: and yet even among Men, none ought to be punish'd, (since what is past can't be help'd) but to prevent a future Breach of the Law; and all Laws being design'd for the Good of the Governed, "The greatest Monarch is not to punish the Breach of his Laws any otherwise, than the most petty State:" And tho' all own, it would be Tyranny in an earthly Governour to multiply Punishments, on pretence of vindicating the Honour of the Legislator; or as the Breach of Law is an Injury done to him, and such like; yet some are not ashamed to impute such Tyranny to God, and thereby take off from that Esteem and Love Men must have for him, did they believe he only punish'd when, and no further than their Good requir'd.

Do not we bring God down to ourselves, when we suppose he acts like us poor indigent Creatures, in seeking Worship and Honour for his own sake; nay, do we not cloath him, who has neither Parts nor Passions, with the worst of our Infirmities, if we represent him as an ambitious, suspicious, wrathful, and revengeful Being?

If we dare consult our Reason, it will tell us that Jealousy in Point of Honour and Power, Love of Fame and Glory can only belong to limited Creatures; but are as necessarily excluded from an unlimited, absolutely perfect Being, as Anger, Revenge, and such like Passions; which would make the Deity resemble the weak, womanish, and impotent part of our Nature, rather than the manly, noble, and generous.

COULD God, strictly speaking, be made angry, provok'd, or griev'd by the Conduct of us wretched Mortals, he wou'd not enjoy a moment's Quiet ; but must be much more miserable than the most unhappy of his Creatures. Or,

HAD God any Comfort or Satisfaction to gain from the Thoughts and Actions of his Creatures, he would never have been without an Infinity of 'em jointly contributing to this End.

IF Religion in general, and every Part of it was not useful to Mankind, there would be no reason why they should know it more than other Animals ; who tho' they have wonderful Talents (in many of which they exceed Men) given them by God for preserving themselves and their Species, yet are utter Strangers to Religion, as a thing wholly usefess to them.

THE Sum of what I have been saying is fully express'd by *Job* in these words ; *If thou sinnest, what dost thou against him ? Or if thy Transgression be multiply'd, what dost thou unto him ? If thou be righteous, what givest thou him ? Or what receiveth he at thy hands ? Thy Wickedness may hurt a Man as thou art, and thy Righteousness profit the Son of Man.* *Ch. 35. 6. &c*  
 Or, as *Esdra*s says, *What is Man that thou shouldst take displeasure at him ? Or what is a corruptible Generation, that thou shouldst be so bitter towards it ?* *2 Esdr. 8. 34.*

OUR greatest Felicity consists in having such an impartial and disinterested Judge as well as Legislator, that whether he punishes, or rewards, he acts alike for our good ; that being the End of all his Laws, and consequently of the Penalties as well as Rewards which make them Laws : whereas your common Systems of Divinity represent him full of Wrath and Fury, ready to glut himself with Revenge for the Injuries he has suffer'd by the breach of his Laws.

B. Is not God's Justice as well as his Mercy a divine Attribute, and will not That as much oblige him to punish the Breakers of his Laws, as if he had been, as he is sometimes represented, full of Anger, Wrath and Revenge ? *A.*

*A.* THO' Justice and Mercy can't at the same time be exercis'd in one and the same Instance on the same Subject ; yet your System-Writers, lest they shou'd limit these two Attributes in God, extend them alike to all Persons, which is making him neither just, nor merciful ; because these Attributes drawing contrary ways, must hinder each other's Effect.

*B.* I must confess, I do not see how the same Act can be an Act both of Justice and Mercy in relation to the same Person ; or how it can be said that God does Justice on a Sinner, when he shews Mercy to him ; and yet we must suppose the Justice as well as Mercy of God to be infinite.

*A.* THE Justice by which God is righteous in all his Actions, and the Mercy by which he is good or beneficent are infinite, and eternally inherent in the divine Nature ; but these oblige not God either to punish, or pardon any further than his infinite Wisdom sees fit ; and such punishing and pardoning are transient Acts, the Effects of his will, not Properties belonging to his Nature. Justice and Mercy among Men relate to different Subjects : When the Magistrate punishes a Criminal, 'tis an Act of Justice to the Publick ; and when he pardons him, 'tis an Act of Mercy to the Criminal, tho' an Act of Injustice to the Publick ; except in such Circumstances, where he has ground to believe that pardoning him may be no disadvantage to the Publick, whose Interest it is not to lose a useful Member.

THE greatest Difference in this Case between God and Man is, that the most powerful Monarch on Earth is of the same Nature with his Subjects, and his Good involv'd in the Good of the whole, and by the Breach of his Laws may be injur'd ; and, as a Party injur'd, may exact Reparation and Satisfaction : But this without Blasphemy can't be said of God, whose Nature is infinitely happy in himself before there was any Creature to adore him, or be obedient to his Will ; so he must still be such, tho' none of them did obey his Laws, or acknowledge

his Being; and therefore, in doing Acts of Justice he can't, like the Monarchs of this World, propose any Security to himself, but acts purely for the Good of his Creatures, and the Effects of his Justice (they never extending to Annihilation) must not only be for the Good of others, but even of the Persons punish'd; because God, whose Love infinitely exceeds that of mortal Parents, chastises his Children (and all Mankind are alike his Offspring) because he loves them, and designs their Amendment: And the Reason why God in Scripture is said to be *Love*, must be because all his Acts, by what name soever you call them, are Acts of pure, impartial, and disinterested Love.

ALL Punishment for Punishment's sake is meer Cruelty and Malice, which can never be in God; nor can he hate any thing he has made, or be subject to such Weakness or Impotence as to act arbitrarily, or out of Spite, Wrath, Revenge, or any Self-Interest; and consequently, whatever Punishment he inflicts, must be a Mark of his Love, in not suffering his Creatures to remain in that miserable State, which is inseparable from Sin and Wickedness.

As God's infinite Goodness appears in the Sanctions as well as Matter of his Laws, so his infinite Wisdom knows how to adjust the Punishment to the Offence; that it may be exactly fitted to produce the desir'd Amendment.

B. DOES not your supposing that God has no other Motive in executing his Laws, than he had in making them; *viz.* the Good of his Creatures; and that all Punishment must bear an exact proportion to the Offence it is design'd to amend, strike at the absolute Eternity of Hell-Torments? Since there's no proportion between Temporary Injuries done to all Men, and Eternal Misery of but one Man; nor can everlasting Torment work Amendment.

A. I shall at present refer you to Dr. *Burnet de Statu Mortuorum*, and only say with Archbishop *Tillotson*,



son, " The Right that God hath in his Creatures is  
 " founded in the Benefits he hath conferr'd on them  
 " and the Obligation they have to him on that ac-  
 " count. Now there's none, who because he has  
 " done a Benefit, can have, by virtue of that, a  
 " Right to do a greater Evil than the Good he has  
 " done amounts to ; and I think it next to Madness  
 " to doubt, whether extreme, and eternal Misery  
 " be not a greater Evil than simple Being is a  
 " Good." But at a proper Time I shall consider  
 what may be said from Scripture as well as Reason,  
 for the Doctrine of the absolute Eternity of Tor-  
 ments ; and what will be the Condition of those, who  
 die before they are capable of undergoing a Tryal ;  
 or knowing any thing of Religion. A Subject,  
 which, I think, has scarce been consider'd by any  
 one.

Serm. Vol. 6.  
 P. 211. & P.  
 261.

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## C H A P. V.

*That God requires nothing for his own sake ; no,  
 not the Worship we are to render him, nor the  
 Faith we are to have in him.*

B. **Y**OUR arguing from the Nature of God,  
 that every thing, consequently Faith in him,  
 and even the Worship and Service we render to him,  
 is wholly for our own sake, will hardly go down  
 with the Bulk of Mankind, who imagine, they by  
 those Acts do him some real Service.

A. IF they think so, 'tis a sign they have not  
 been well instructed ; the most eminent of our Di-  
 vines would teach them, that Prayer itself, God  
 knowing before-hand what we will ask, chiefly be-  
 comes a Duty, as it raises in us a due Contemplation  
 of the divine Attributes, and an Acknowledgement  
 of his great and constant Goodness, and serves to  
 keep up a constant Sense of our Dependance on him ;  
 and as it disposes us to imitate those Perfections we

adore in him, in being kind and beneficent to one another. There are few so gross as to imagine, we can direct infinite Wisdom in the Dispensation of Providence, or persuade him to alter those Laws he contriv'd before the Foundation of the World for putting things in a regular Course.

Vol. 7. p. 23.  
To. 2. 681.

“Tis, says Archbishop *Tillotson*, a great Con-  
“descension and Goodness in him, to accept our  
“imperfect Praises, and ignorant Admiration of  
“him; and were he not as wonderfully good, as  
“he is great and glorious, he would not suffer us  
“to sully his great and glorious Name by taking it  
“in our Mouths; and were it not for our Advan-  
“tage and Happiness to own and acknowledge his  
“Benefits, for any real Happiness and Glory that  
“comes to him by it, he cou'd well enough be  
“without it, and dispense with us for ever entertain-  
“ing one Thought of him; and were it not for  
“his Goodness, might despise the Praises of his  
“Creatures, with infinitely more Reason than wise  
“Men do the Applause of Fools.”

Scott's Christ.  
Life. Part 2.  
Vol. 1. Ch. 6.

“To imagine, as Dr. *Scott* observes, that God  
“needs our Services, and requires them to serve his  
“own Interest, is to blaspheme his All-sufficiency,  
“and suppose him a poor indigent Being, who for  
“want of perfect Satisfaction within himself, is for-  
“ced to roam abroad, and raise Taxes on his Crea-  
“tures, to enrich and supply himself: So that what-  
“soever some high-flown Enthusiasts may pretend,  
“that 'tis sordid and mercenary to serve God for  
“our Good, I am sure, to serve him for his Good,  
“is profane and blasphemous.”

The Cleric's  
Cause of In-  
red. Eng.  
Transl. p. 219.

As able a Divine as this, or perhaps any other  
Age has produc'd, observes, that “nothing can be  
“more false, or contrary to the Nature of the  
“Gospel, than to fancy God in part design'd to  
“shew he was Master, by enjoining some Com-  
“mands, which have no relation to the Good of  
“Mankind; Religion was reveal'd for us, and not  
“for God; who, absolutely speaking, neither wants  
“what

“ what we think of him, nor the Worship we pay him, but has manifested himself to us, only to make us happy.” And therefore, if from excess of Devotion, a Man neglects the Duties of civil Life, he is so far from doing a thing acceptable to God, that he mistakes the End of Religion, which is to render him as perfect as may be in all moral Duties whatever.

If any Command was ever given for the sake of God, it must certainly be that relating to the Institution of the *Sabbath*; and yet we find it said, *The Sabbath is made for Man, and not Man for the Sabbath*: So true is it in Divinity as well as Politicks, that *the Good of the People is the supreme Law*.

IN short, the Worship God requires, is either for his own sake, which supposes his Happiness some way or other depends on it; or else (except he requires things to no purpose) for the sake of Men, to raise and keep in their Minds the Contemplation of an infinitely good Being, and of his Laws, all founded on a disinterested Love to the whole Race of Mankind. To imagine the Worship of God is ordain'd on any other Account, not only destroys one of the greatest Motives of Mens doing good to one another; but supposes God not sufficient for, or infinitely happy in himself; but subject to the Passions of ambitious and vain-glorious Mortals.

THE Generality of Christians not only believe, that in worshipping God they do him real Service, but think he is extremely uneasy, if publick Worship is not perform'd in such a Manner, and with such Rites and Ceremonies; and being endlessly divided about these Trifles, think they make their Court to Heaven, and highly oblige an omnipotent Being, in destroying those formidable Enemies of God, who presume, without their Leave, to worship him after that Manner they judge agreeable to his Will. And,

THERE are no Measures, tho' ever so destructive, but what they, who do not consider the End of God's Laws, may be brought into; as all History sufficiently proves. The *Jews* not only thought that doing the greatest Good on their Sabbath, was profaning the Day; but were so superstitious as to think, that all Self-defence was then unlawful; and therefore durst not lift up their Hands against their Enemies, who butcher'd them as they pleas'd: And many of the primitive Fathers thought the Gospel forbid all Self-defence; and herein they are follow'd by a modern Sect, who are their strict Imitators in most things.

Maccab. 2.

'TIS no wonder, if some Ecclesiasticks have not been very forward to teach People, that what Worship God requires of them, is for their own Sakes; since then they could not, on pretence of that Worship, have claim'd such Powers and Privileges, as are inconsistent with the common Good; and People might then think it their Duty so to regulate Matters, as that their Priests, upon the whole, considering the Charge of maintaining them, and other Incidents, should do more Good than Hurt: Which can never happen, till Men are taught 'tis their Duty to do good to all, notwithstanding their widest Differences as to Worship, or any other matter of meer Religion; and 'tis to the Honour of our Clergy at present, that so many of them now endeavour to infuse such humane and benevolent Principles into a People, who, not long since, thought they shew'd a sufficient Zeal for Religion, in hating those their Priests hated, without knowing wherefore; and, fir'd by their Pulpit Investives, thought it their Duty to pull down Houses of religious Worship, and were ready at the Direction of their impious Leaders, to have perpetrated worse Crimes.

B. THERE'S one Difficulty, which to me seems insuperable, how to make the Faith requir'd by the Religion of Nature and of the Gospel, to have the same Views, and tend to the same End.

A. IF Faith in God himself, no more than in any other Act of Religion, is requir'd for God's sake, but our own; can Faith in one sent by God be requir'd for any other End? Especially considering, that no Person is ever the more known to Posterity, because his Name is transmitted to them. When we say, *Cæsar* conquer'd *Pompey*, we having no Idea of either, can only mean, Some-body conquer'd Some-body; and have we more distinct Ideas of *Jesus* and *Pilate*? And tho' we had a personal Idea of the former, he could receive no Advantage, or Disadvantage by what we thought of him. And if Faith in him was requir'd for a Cause antecedent to his being so sent, founded in his and our Nature, and the Relation we always stood in to him; wou'd not the eternal Reason of things have made it manifest? That which concern'd all, must be knowable by all, for which reason the Apostle says, *That which may be known of God* (and none can know that which may not be known) *was manifest in the Gentiles.* And,

THE End of Christ's coming seems not to teach Men new Duties, but (Repentance being the first thing preach'd by him and his Apostles both to *Jews* and *Gentiles*) to repent of the Breach of known Duties. And Jesus does not say, He was sent to all *Israel*, but to the *lost Sheep of the House of Israel*; and that the *Son of Man is come to save that which was lost*: And his Parable about the *lost Sheep*, suppos'd all were not lost. And when it was objected to him, that he kept Company with Sinners, he owns the Charge, and says, *The Whole need no Physician, but they that are sick*; which would have been an improper Answer, if he thought that all stood in need of him, and his spiritual Physick. And to confirm this, he adds, *I am not come to call the Righteous, but Sinners to Repentance*: and that *there's more Joy in Heaven for one Sinner that repents, than ninety nine just Persons that need no Repentance.* Which is dividing Mankind into two Parts, the *Whole* or *Righteous*, and the *Sick* or *Sinners*; and that his Business was  
intirely

Matt. 15. 24.

--- 18. 11.

Luke 15. 7.

Matt. 9. 12.

Ib. Ver. 13.

intirely with the latter. The not observing this Distinction, has been the Occasion of many uncharitable and gross Mistakes; and 'tis somewhat strange, that Jesus, who best knew how far his Commission extended, should not be credited in this Matter; especially considering that in Religion there are no *Nostrums*, or Secrets, but all may know what God requires of all; and there is but one universal Remedy for all sick Persons, *Repentance* and *Amendment*. And if God, who is no Respector of Persons, will judge the World in Righteousness; and they that in every Nation fear him, and work Righteousness, shall be accepted of him; they certainly are whole, and need no Physician, who do of themselves what will make them acceptable to him; living as those whom Christ came to reform were taught to live: It is not absurd to suppose, that till then none had sufficient Means given them to answer the End for which all were created?

THE Catholick Epistle of St. *Barnabas* will inform you of the Sentiments of the Ancients on this Head. This great Apostle (as translated by

*Wake's Transf.*  
§. 5. p. 272.

Dr. *Wake*) says, "That Jesus, when he chose his Apostles, which were afterwards to publish his Gospel, took Men who had been very great Sinners; that thereby he might plainly shew, that He came not to call the Righteous, but Sinners to Repentance." The Words are fuller in the Original,

*Matt.* 9. 13.

ὅτι οὐκ ἦν ἵνα προσκαλέσῃ ἀνομιώτερος.

B. THIS may be a forg'd Passage.

A. *Origen* owns it to be genuine, for when *Celsus* (I will give you his Words in the *Latin* Translation) says, *Jesum ascitis decem undecimve famosis hominibus, publicanis nautisque nequissimis, cum his ultro citroque fugitasse, corrogantem cibos sordidè acturpiter.* *Origen* says, Extat sane in *Barbæ Catholica* Epistola scriptum, *Jesum ad Apostolicam functionem elegisse hominis omni iniquitate iniquiores.* And it may be said in support of St. *Barnabas*, that the Apostles first became Jesus's Disciples upon temporal Motives; and the

*Origen cont.*  
*Celsus*. l. 1.  
p. 47.

*Ib.* p. 49.

Belief of Christ's temporal Kingdom was so firmly rooted in them, that Jesus neither during his Life, nor even after his Resurrection was able to remove it. At the last Supper there was a Strife amongst them, *Who should be accounted the greatest?* "The Luke 22. 24.  
 " meanest (as Bishop Parker expresses it) hoped at  
 " least to have been made Lord Mayor of *Caper-*  
 " *naum.*" And even at his Ascension the only Que-  
 sition his Disciples ask'd was, *Lord, wilt thou at this* Acts 1. 6.  
*Time restore again the Kingdom to Israel?*

BUT to take away all Subterfuges, what can be more requir'd than those Qualifications as will make *Jesus* in the last Day declare, *Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the Beginning of the World?* And what are those Quali-  
 fications, but living up to the Law of Reason, in exercising Acts of Benevolence, Goodness, &c? That this was the *Unum necessarium* is plain from his Answer, *Depart from me, ye that work Iniquity,* made to those who had omitted these things; tho' they pleaded, *They had prophesy'd in his Name, and in* Matt. 7. 22,  
*his Name cast out Devils, and done many wonderful* 23.  
*Works.* St. Paul in the first Chapter to the *Romans* is very large, in shewing that the *Gentiles* could not plead Ignorance of their Duty, either to God or Man, and as sinning against Knowledge, were inexcusable; and pursuing the same Subject in the second, he says, that *God who is no Respector of Persons* will deal with every one both *Jew* and *Gentile* according to their Deeds; and those by which they are to be judg'd are either moral or immoral: And had there been any thing else requir'd by the written Law, it could not be said that *the Gentiles*, who were not ignorant of their Duty either to God or Man, *did by Nature the Things contained in the Law.*

AND does not St. Paul, in another place, put our future State on the same Foot, in supposing we shall be dealt with at the last day *according to what* 2 Cor. 5. 10.  
*we have done in the Body, whether good or bad.* In short, if the Tree is to be known by its Fruit, and it brings

brings forth good Fruit, the Means by which this good Fruit is produc'd are not material ; but if it does not, no Means whatever can hinder it from being *hewn down, and cast into the Fire*. “ The grand deciding Question (*says Dr. South*) at the last Day will be, not what you have said, or what you have believ'd ; but what you have done more than others. God is pleas'd to vouchsafe the best he can give, only to the best we can do.” But to go on to the bottom of this matter ;

FAITH consider'd in itself can neither be a Virtue, or a Vice ; because Men can no otherwise believe than as things appear to them : Nay, can there be an higher Affront to God than to suppose, he requires Men to judge otherwise than the Faculties he has given them enable them to do ? Or what can be more absurd than to imagine, that God will shew his Favour to one for believing what he could not but believe ; and his Displeasure to another for not believing what he could not believe ? And therefore Faith is only to be esteem'd by the Works it produces ; for the strongest Faith may be worse than no Faith at all. *The Devils themselves*, (who are held the most wicked Beings in the Universe) *believe, and tremble*. Happy had it been for *Christendom*, if Zeal for, what the prevailing Parties call'd, *The Orthodox Faith*, had made none but themselves to tremble !

Dr. *Whitby* expresses himself very accurately on this Point ; “ Belief, or Disbelief, can neither be a Virtue, or a Crime in any one, who uses the best means in his power of being inform'd. If a Proposition is evident, we cannot avoid believing it ; and where is the Merit or Piety of a necessary Assent ? If it is not evident, we cannot help rejecting it, or doubting of it : And where is the Crime of not performing Impossibilities, or not believing what does not appear to us to be true ? ” What worse Opinion can we have of the divine Goodness, than to imagine a mean Denial of our Reason, or a wretched

Mat. 7. 19.  
Serm. Vol. 3.  
p. 174.

Ib. p. 172.

*Whitby's Last*  
Thoughts, p.  
40.



wretched Affectation of believing any Point too hard for our Understanding, can entitle us to the Favour of God.

IF Charity, which comprehends doing all possible Good to our Fellow-Creature, is to be destroy'd for the sake of Faith; or if Incapacities, Fines, Imprisonments, Rods, Gibbets, Racks, and Fire, are Marks of Charity, the Christian World has outdone all Mankind in Acts of Charity; but the Description St. Paul gives of Charity, is so far from requiring us to make others suffer, that itself *suffers long, seeks not her own, bears all things, endures all things*; and strictly enjoins us so to do. 1 Cor. 13.

HERE is the Practice of the Christian World on the side of Faith, sacrificing Charity, and all that's valuable to it; and on the other side, Christ and his Apostles preferring Charity before it. St. Paul, speaking of himself, says, *Tho' I have the Gift of Prophecy, and understand all Mysteries, and all Knowledge, and tho' I have all Faith, and cou'd remove Mountains, and have no Charity, I am nothing: Or tho' I give my Body to be burnt (which shews the highest Act of Faith) and have not Charity, it profiteth nothing.* And in another place he says, *Above all things put on Charity, which is the Bond of Perfectness.* And again, *The End of the Commandment is Charity; and Love is the fulfilling of the Law.* And, *If any provide not for his own, especially those of this own House (which is but one Species of Charity) he has denied the Faith, and is worse than an Infidel.* And St. Peter likewise speaks as highly of it, in saying, *Above all things, have fervent Charity among yourselves, for Charity shall cover a Multitude of Sins*; which can't be said of Faith, because that *without Charity profiteth nothing*; in not answering the End for which it was given. And St. James calls Love *the Royal Law.* And St. John says, *If any Man says I love God, and hateth his Brother, he is a Lyar.* And is not he likewise a Lyar, who shews all the Marks of Hatred to his Brother, and yet pretends to love him, and makes those very Marks an Argument of his 1 Cor. 13.  
Col. 3. 14.  
1 Tim. 1. 5.  
Rom. 13. 10.  
1 Tim. 5. 8.  
1 Pet. 4. 8.  
James 2. 8.  
1 John 4. 20.

Gal. 5. 6.

---Ver. 14.

Jon 13. 35.

Origen contra  
Celsum, l. 3.  
135.Origen of Mo-  
ral Evil. p. 90.

his Love. In Jesus Christ, says the Apostle Paul, neither Circumcision, nor Uncircumcision availeth any thing, but Faith which worketh by Love.— For all the Law is fulfilled in one Word, even in this, Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thy self. And Christ, in saying, By this shall all Men know ye are my Disciples, if ye love one another ; supposes Men's loving one another so essential to Christianity, as by that Token alone all Men may know who are his Disciples ; and if they who thus love one another are of course his Disciples, whose Disciples then are they, who, as all Men know, make People hate, and harras one another ; and pretend Christ's Commission for so doing ?

Origen, speaking of the Faith of Christians, could not (was there any thing peculiar in their Faith) have said, " 'Tis the Conformity of our Faith with the common innate Notions of all Mankind, that has given it Entrance into the Minds of candid and ingenuous Hearers." And,

OUR Divines (since the Liberty they enjoy has enabled them to think, and speak their Thoughts more freely than formerly) when they write in Defence of Christianity, endeavour to shew that the Faith the Scripture requires, is conformable to what Origen calls, *The common and innate Notions of Mankind*. I do not find, that the Dean of Sarum is censur'd for affirming in Defence of Christianity, that,

" The Scripture-Notion of Faith is very plain and obvious, viz. not a speculative and philosophical, but a religious and practical Faith ; and 'tis built on this Principle, that *God is*, and that *He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek him* ; that religious Faith is a full Conviction of Mind, that an eternal, immense Being, infinitely wise, just, and good, not only actually exists, but is the Governour of the World ; prescribes Laws to the Consciences, and to the Actions of Men ; takes notice of their Compliance with, or Transgression of them ; and will certainly reward or punish them, according as their Works have been. To live

" under

“ under this Sense and Expectation, is to live a  
 “ Life of Faith, and is co-incident with a Life of  
 “ Virtue. All the Species, or particular Instances  
 “ of Faith, may be reduc’d to this, as so many  
 “ Branches springing from it; and to explain them  
 “ in any other Sense, as if Faith and Reason were  
 “ oppos’d to each other, and Religion and Virtue  
 “ two different things, is to bind Mens Under-  
 “ standings, and to confound the plainest, and most  
 “ numerous Texts of Scripture.”

ANOTHER learned Divine, in defence of the Christian Religion, says, “ If it should happen, that  
 “ we cannot so satisfactorily evince the Certainty of  
 “ the Scripture-History against scrupulous, nice,  
 “ and sceptical Wits, yet we find ourselves oblig’d  
 “ to the Belief and Practice of what is really the  
 “ Christian Religion; because ’tis nothing else, as  
 “ to the Faith and Morals of it, but natural Reli-  
 “ gion.”

*Eye of Nat.  
 and Reveal.  
 Relig. p. 127.*

THE great *Grotius*, in a Discourse own’d to be the best that was ever writ in defence of Christianity, lays it down as a Maxim, that “ ’Tis absolutely  
 “ repugnant to the Goodness of God, that those,  
 “ who without respect to worldly Advantage, seek  
 “ after the way which leads to eternal Happiness;  
 “ imploring withal the divine Assistance, and sub-  
 “ mitting themselves intirely to his Providence,  
 “ should not be able to find it.” And if this is too evident to be deny’d, can there be any thing either in relation to Faith or Manners in the way that leads to eternal Happiness, but may be found at all Times and Places of every one, who diligently searches after it.

*Grotius de Verit. Chr. Rel. lib. 6. Sect. 2*

AND an eminent Divine, who is not look’d on to have altogether so extensive a Charity as *Grotius*, yet says, “ I think we may pronounce safely in this  
 “ Matter, that the Goodness and Mercy of God is  
 “ such, that he never deserts a sincere Person, nor  
 “ suffers any one that shall live (even according to  
 “ these Measures of Sincerity) up to what he knows,

*South’s Serm. Vol. 1. p. 293.*

“ to

“ to perish for want of any Knowledge necessary ;  
 “ and what is more, sufficient to save him.” Which  
 supposes no Faith, or Knowledge necessary to Sal-  
 vation, but what all are capable of requiring by  
 John 1. 9. virtue of that *Light, which lighteth every Man that*  
*cometh into the World.* And our Saviour himself says,  
 Mat. 7, 7. *Seek, and you shall find.* By this you may see what  
 Faith is requir'd, and for what End.

IF Man, as our Divines maintain against *Hobbs*,  
 is a social Creature, who naturally loves his own  
 Species, and is full of Pity, Tenderness, and Bene-  
 volence ; and if Reason, which is the proper Nature  
 of Man, can never lead Men to any thing but uni-  
 versal Love and Kindness, and there be no Part of  
 Natural Religion, or any Faith it requires, but high-  
 ly tends to improve this kind and benign Temper ;  
 how comes it to pass, that what is taught for Reli-  
 gion in so many places of *Christendom*, has trans-  
 form'd this mild and gentle Creature into fierce and  
 cruel ; and made him act with Rage and Fury against  
 those who never did, or intended him the least harm ?  
 Is not this chiefly owing to such a *Faith* as works not  
 by *Love* ; and such a *Zeal* as, not being according to  
 Knowledge, has destroy'd all good Works ; and is  
 utterly inconsistent with the End of all Religion ? But  
 no wonder, if Men, who most uncharitably damn  
 one another for such Matters of Faith as they dare  
 not trust Reason to judge of, should hate, and perse-  
 cute each other on the same account.

THE *Epicureans*, tho' they had exalted Notions  
 of their Gods, yet because they asserted it beneath  
 their Dignity to concern themselves with human Af-  
 fairs, were at all times censur'd as Atheists ; which  
 shews that 'twas accounted much the same to believe  
 no Gods, as to believe them useles to Mankind : But  
 certainly, believing the Deity to be indolent, can't be so  
 bad as believing him so cruel, as to oblige Christians  
 to persecute, ruin, and destroy even their Brethren,  
 for things too, no ways contributing to the Good of  
 Mankind ; since this is downright *Demonism* : And  
 yet

yet in what Age of the Church would not those conscientious People, that chanc'd to be undermost, have thought themselves happy, if the Men in Power had not had a worfe Notion of the Deity, than that of Indolence.

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## C H A P. VI.

*That the Religion of Nature is an absolutely perfect Religion; and that external Revelation can neither add to, nor take from its Perfection; and that true Religion, whether internally, or externally reveal'd, must be the same.*

**H**AVING prov'd, that God requires nothing for his own sake; I shall now, the way being thus prepar'd, shew you, *That the Religion of Nature is absolutely perfect; and that external Revelation can neither add to, nor take from its Perfection*: And in order to it let me ask you, why you believe the Gospel a Law of absolute Perfection, incapable of any Addition, Diminution, or Alteration?

*B.* BECAUSE 'tis the last Law of God's giving.

*A.* WAS it not such in itself, That could not make it so; since the Law given to the *Jews* was for many Ages the Only External Law: And yet, I suppose, you grant that this abrogated Law was far from deserving such a Character; but were there any thing in this Argument, it makes wholly for the Law of Nature, since That is not only the first, but the last Law of God's giving; if That can be said to be last, which is eternal: A Law, by which God governs his own Actions; and by which he expects all the rational World should govern theirs. And therefore, notwithstanding the Promulgation of the Gospel, he continues daily to implant it in the Minds of all Men, Christians as well as others; and conse-

quently, 'tis as necessary for them as for Others ; as necessary since, as before the Coming of Christ : And I may add too, not only necessary to be observ'd in this World, and ten Thousand more, were there ever so many ; but in Heaven itself, and that too for ever.

*B.* SHOUL'D I grant, that my Argument, from the Gospel's being the last Law of God's giving, does not fully prove its absolute Perfection ; yet it will undeniably follow from the great Agreement there is between That and the Law of Nature ; it neither forbidding what that requires, nor requiring what That forbids ; and in a Word, containing nothing in it unworthy, but every Thing worthy, of an absolutely-perfect Law-giver.

*A.* IN saying This, you own the Law of Nature to be the Standard of Perfection ; and that by It we must judge, antecedently to any traditional Religion, what is, or is not a Law absolutely perfect, and worthy of such a Being for its Legislator.

*B.* INDEED, it must be own'd, that Divines as well as Others, make the same Concessions in relation to Natural Religion, which Dr. *Prideaux* does in his celebrated Letter to the *Deists* at the End of *Mahomet's* Life : " Let what is written in all the " Books of the New Testament be try'd by That " which is the Tough-stone of all Religions ; I mean " that Religion of Nature and Reason, which God " has written in the Hearts of every one of us from " the first Creation ; and if it varies from it in any " one Particular, if it prescribes any one Thing, " which may in the minutest Circumstances thereof " be contrary to its Righteousness, I will then acknowledge this to be an Argument against us, " strong enough to overthrow the whole Cause, and " make all Things else that can be said for it totally ineffectual for its Support."

*A.* I desire no more than to be allow'd, That there's a Religion of Nature and Reason written in the Hearts of everyone of us from the first Creation ;

by

by which all Mankind must judge of the Truth of any instituted Religion whatever; and if it varies from the Religion of Nature and Reason in any one Particular, nay, in the minutest Circumstance, That alone is an Argument, which makes all Things else that can be said for its Support totally ineffectual. If so, must not Natural Religion and external Revelation, like two Tallies, exactly answer one another; without any other Difference between them, but as to the Manner of their being deliver'd? And how can it be otherwise? Can Laws be imperfect, where a Legislator is absolutely perfect? Can Time discover any Thing to him, which he did not foresee from Eternity? And as his Wisdom is always the same, so is his Goodness; and consequently, from the Consideration of both these, his Laws must always be the same.—Is it not from the infinite Wisdom and Goodness of God, that you suppose the Gospel a most perfect Law, incapable of being repeal'd, or alter'd, or of having Additions; and must not you own the Law of Nature as perfect a Law, except you will say, that God did not arrive to the Perfection of Wisdom and Goodness till about seventeen Hundred Years since?

To plead, That the Gospel is incapable of any Additions, because the Will of God is immutable; and his Laws too perfect to need them, is an Argument, that Christianity a new Religion, which destroys itself; since from the Time it commenc'd, you must own God is mutable; and that such Additions have been made to the all-perfect Laws of infinite Wisdom, as constitute a New Religion. The Reason why the Law of Nature is immutable, is, because it is founded on the unalterable Reason of Things; but if God is an arbitrary Being, and can command Things merely from Will and Pleasure; some Things to-day, and others to-morrow; there is nothing either in the Nature of God, or in the Things themselves, to hinder him from perpetually changing his Mind. If he once commanded Things without

Reason, there can be no Reason why he may not endlessly change such Commands.

I think, no Man has more fully done Justice to the Law of Nature, than a Divine of that Church which requires so many Things contrary to that Law; I mean the celebrated *Charron*, in his *Treatise of Wisdom*, whose Authority is certainly not the less for being translated by the late Dean of *Canterbury*; He says, “ The Law of Nature, by which I mean  
 “ Universal Reason and Equity, is the Candle of  
 “ our Maker, lighted up in every Breast, to guide,  
 “ and shine perpetually. This is the Dictate of God  
 “ himself, he is the King, and this the Fundamental  
 “ Law of the Universe; a Ray and Beam of the di-  
 “ vine Nature, which flows from, and has a neces-  
 “ sary Connection and Dependance upon that eter-  
 “ nal and immutable Law, which the Almighty  
 “ prescribes to his own Actions. A Man, who  
 “ proceeds on this Principle, is his own Rule; for  
 “ he acts in Agreement with the noblest, and most  
 “ valuable Part of his Nature: This Man’s Hone-  
 “ sty is essential to, and inseparable from him, not  
 “ precarious and uncertain, and owing meerly to  
 “ Chance and Occasion; for this Light and Law is  
 “ born with, and bred in us; a Piece of our Frame  
 “ and Constitution; and from thence obtains the  
 “ Name of Nature, and the Law of Nature: Such  
 “ a Man, by Consequence, will be a good Man  
 “ constantly, and at all Times, his Virtue will be  
 “ uniform, and every Place, every Emergency will  
 “ find him the same; for this Law of Nature is per-  
 “ petual, the Obligation of it is lasting and invio-  
 “ lable; the Equity and Reason of it are eternal,  
 “ written in large and indelible Characters, no Acci-  
 “ dent can deface them, no Length of Time waste,  
 “ or wear them out.—These first Principles, which  
 “ are the Ground of all moral Institutions, admit of  
 “ no Change, no Increase, no Abatement, no Fits,  
 “ no Starts, no Ebbings and Flowings. — Why  
 “ then, vain Man, dost thou trouble thyself to seek

“ abroad



“ abroad for some Law or Rule to Mankind?  
 “ What can Books or Masters tell thee, which thou  
 “ might’st not tell thyself? What can Study, or  
 “ Travel shew, which, without being at the ex-  
 “ pence of so much Pains, thou might’st not see at  
 “ home, by descending into thy own Conscience,  
 “ and hearkening attentively to its own Admo-  
 “ nitions ?

“ To what Purpose is all this Labour and Cost?  
 “ The toilsome tumbling over of Codes and Insti-  
 “ tutes? — the two Tables of *Moses*, the twelve  
 “ Tables of the *Greeks*, the Law written in the  
 “ Heart of them who had no Law; and in short all  
 “ the Rules of Equity and good Laws, that have  
 “ any where been enacted, and obtained in the  
 “ World, are nothing but Copies and Transcripts  
 “ produc’d in open Court, and publish’d from that  
 “ *Original*, which thou keepest close within thee;  
 “ and yet all the while pretendest to know nothing  
 “ of the Matter, stifling and suppressing as much as  
 “ in thee lieth the Brightness of that Light, which  
 “ shines within thee. As this invisible Fountain  
 “ within is more exuberant and plenteous, so it is  
 “ more lively, pure and strong, than any of the  
 “ streams deriv’d from it; of which we need but  
 “ this single Testimony, That when any Disputes  
 “ arise about the right Meaning of any positive  
 “ Law, the constant, and best Method of under-  
 “ standing the Equity and true Intent of it, is by  
 “ running back to its Head and observing what  
 “ is most agreeable to the Law of Nature: This is  
 “ the Test and Touch, This is the Level, and the  
 “ Truth, by which the rest are to be judged.”

AND in truth all Laws, whether the Law of Na-  
 tions, or Those of particular Countries, are only the  
 Law of Nature adjusted, and accommodated to Cir-  
 cumstances, nor can Religion, even in relation to  
 the Worship of God, as it is a reasonable Service,  
 be any thing, but what necessarily flows from the  
 Consideration of God, and the Creatures. ’Twas

Table-Talk.  
p. 162.

this made the great Mr. *Selden* say, in an Expression somewhat homely, “ That Men look after Religion, as the Butcher did after his Knife, when he had it in his Mouth.”

THE Religion of Nature is so entirely calculated for the Good of human Society, that tho’ a Man, hurry’d with the Violence of his Passions, breaks it himself, yet he wou’d have all others most strictly observe it ; and accordingly all Legislators punish the Breach of it : Whereas no Man rejects any positive Institution himself, but is willing that all others shou’d do so too ; which plainly shews, Men do not apprehend it to be for the general Good of Mankind. And the contending Parties in Religion, with equal Confidence cry, “ That if our Religion be not true, God must be wanting to Mankind, in what concerns their eternal Happiness ; he must be wanting to himself, and to his own Attributes of Goodness, Justice and Truth : It’s repugnant to the very Notion of a God, to let Men be ignorant in a Matter of such Importance without any Help or Remedy.” This Reasoning, if true, necessarily infers some universal Law knowable at all Times ; and can’t be apply’d to any partial Religion unknown to the World for many Ages ; and, as not being discoverable by Reason, still unknown to the greatest Part of it.

In a word, if the highest internal Excellence, the greatest Plainness and Simplicity, Unanimity, Universality, Antiquity, nay Eternity, can recommend a Law ; all These, ’tis own’d, do, in an eminent Degree, belong to the Law of Nature. A Law, which does not depend on the uncertain Meaning of Words and Phrases in dead Languages, much less on Types, Metaphors, Allegories, Parables, or on the Skill or Honesty of weak or designing Transcribers (not to mention Translators) for many Ages together but on the immutable Relation of Things always visible to the whole World : And therefore

Dr.

Dr. Scott justly says, “Moral Obligations are not founded like positive ones upon mutable Circumstances (which suppose they can only oblige in certain Circumstances) but upon firm and everlasting Reasons; upon Reasons that, to all Eternity, will carry with them the same Force and Necessity; as long as we are Creatures of an infinitely perfect Creator, it will be as much our Duty, as ’tis now, to submit our Will and Affections to our Reason; and as long as we are related to other reasonable Creatures, it will be as much our Duty, as now, to be kind, just and peaceable in all our Intercourses with them: So that These are such Duties as no Will can dispense with, no Reason abrogate, no Circumstances disannul; but as long as God is what he is, and we are what we are, they must, and will oblige us.”

*Scott's Christ. Life, Part 2. Vol. 1. Ch. 1 p. 66.*

I could, from many other Considerations, shew you the absolute Perfection of Natural Religion; for Instance, must we not, except we speak without any Meaning, or have no true Meaning of the Word *God*, intend by it a Being of all Perfections, free from all those Defects, which belong even to the most perfect Creatures? And must we not have an Idea of these Perfections, before we can know whether there is any Being who has enjoy'd them from Eternity; and must we not know there is such a Being from our Reason, before we can come to this Question, *Whether he has made any External Revelation?* Nay, Examining into this Question wou'd be to very little Purpose, except we could know whether this Being is bound by his external Word; and had not, either at the Time of giving it, a secret Will inconsistent with his reveal'd Will; or has not since chang'd his Will? This can't be known from any external Revelation, tho' it express'd itself ever so plainly; because the Question being, *Whether God is obliged to do, as he in it says he will do?* this must be resolv'd antecedently by the Light of Nature, which must

discover to us the Veracity of God, and the Immutability of his Will; and the same Reasons which will prove he could not change his Will since he made an external Revelation, will prove his Will was always unchangeable, and at all Times the same; whether internally, or externally reveal'd: Nor cou'd we take a Step towards proving the Veracity of God, or the Immutability of his Will; or indeed, any of his Perfections besides Power, without knowing that the Will of God is always determin'd by the Nature and Reason of Things: Otherwise Falshood and Mutability might be the Will of God, and there could be no such Thing in Nature as Good and Evil, but an arbitrary Will wou'd govern all Things.

WERE we not capable by our Reason of distinguishing Good from Evil, or knowing from the Consideration of the invariable Perfections of God, what the divine Goodness cou'd command, or forbid his Creatures antecedently to any external Revelation, we cou'd not distinguish the true instituted Religion from the many false ones: Or if by Accident we stumbl'd on it, avoid running into many Absurdities in the Interpretation of it, thro' the Difficulties that must attend a Book writ in a dead Language, and so many Ages since; and where, thro' the vast Variety of Readings, we might mistake the true Reading; and tho' we were certain of the Letter, even *the Letter killeth*.

IF Man had not natural Abilities to distinguish between Good and Evil, or to know what is pleasing, or displeasing to God; how cou'd we say he was a moral Agent, or even an accountable Creature?

DID we not allow that Men, by the Light of Nature, are capable of forming a sound Judgment in Matters of Religion, they may be so impos'd on by controverted, or mis-interpreted, not to say forg'd Texts, as to admit several Objects of divine Worship in their Practice, while in their Words they own

but One; or, in order to advance a supernatural Charity, destroy all natural Humanity; and believe our Love to God may be best shewn by our Hatred to our Fellow-Creatures; and introduce such abominable Notions, as may make Religion, instead of a Benefit, become a Mischief to Mankind.

WHEREAS, if we allow the Light of Nature sufficient to enable us to judge rightly in these Matters, and consequently to distinguish Truth from Falshood; we must own, since there can be no Disagreement in Truth, that there's an exact Conformity between internal and external Revelation; with no other Difference but as to the Manner of their being reveal'd: Or in other Words, that the Gospel, since 'tis impossible for Men at the same time to be under different Obligations, can't command those Things which the Law of Nature forbids; or forbid what That commands; nor can any thing be a Part of Religion by one Law, which by the other is Superstition; nor can External Revelation make That the Will of God, which the Light of Nature continually represents as unworthy of having God for its Author.

THE judicious Writer of the *Rational Catechism* lately reprinted says, “ That one of the most uni-  
 “ versal Causes of the great Differences among Prof. to Cate-  
 “ Men in Matters of Religion, is, that they have chism.  
 “ not examin'd Things to the Bottom; they have  
 “ fail'd in their Foundation-Work; they have  
 “ too much slighted that Philosophy which is the  
 “ Natural Religion of all Men; and which being  
 “ natural, must needs be Universal and Eternal:  
 “ — They have forsaken the Rule of right Rea-  
 “ son, which is only capable to produce true Sym-  
 “ metry in their intellectual Buildings; and they  
 “ have apply'd themselves without any Rule to the  
 “ Interpretation of Words and Phrases, which be-  
 “ ing easily susceptible of various Senses, have pro-  
 “ duc'd as many deform'd Irregularities.”

THO' all Parties alike pretend to aim at Truth, yet none of them, I think, inform us what Truth is, or wherein it consists: Now if Truth in general, implies an Agreement of our Ideas with the Things themselves, Religious Truth, or True Religion must consist in the Agreement of our Ideas with those Things, which are the Subjects of our religious Inquiry; *viz.* The Nature of God and Man; and false Religion must consist in having Ideas that are not agreeable to, or do not truly represent those Subjects; and this Agreement which we call Truth in respect to *Theory*, is what we term, in relation to *Action*, fit, just, good, or reasonable. Thus God is frequently styl'd in Scripture the *God of Truth*, because his Ideas of Things, and the Things themselves exactly correspond; and all his Actions are agreeable to the Relation Things have to one another: And when our Actions are such, we do all that's fit, just, and reasonable, all that God or Man can require; and from hence too it follows, that Iniquity is the same in Action, as Falsity is in Theory.

## C H A P. VII.

*That Natural and Reveal'd Religion having the same End, their Precepts must be the same.*

B. **A**LLOWING that the natural Knowledge we have of God, ourselves, and our Fellow-Creatures, is the Foundation of all Religion, may not external Revelation, building on this Foundation, erect a larger and nobler Edifice, by extending it to such things as the Light of Nature cou'd not reach, without contradicting any thing it teaches?

A. I thought I had obviated this Objection, by proving that the Religion of Nature was so perfect, that nothing cou'd be added to it; and that the Truth of all Revelation was to be judg'd of by its Agreement with it: However, since this Objection is the most plausible of any you have yet made; I reply, that if our Natural Notions of the divine Perfections demonstrate, that God will require nothing of his Creatures but what tends to their Good; whatsoever is of this Kind, is a Superstructure that belongs to the Law of Nature; or, in other Words, what the Reason, or the Nature of the things themselves plainly point out to us; and for all other Matters, which have no such Tendency, you must seek another Foundation, another Nature very different from the Divine, to build *your Hay and Stubble upon.* And,

If it be evident from the Light of Nature, what are those Relations we stand in to God and our Fellow-Creatures; and that neither God nor Man, without acting tyrannically, can require more than those require; can external Revelation any more than internal exceed these Bonds?

If original Revelation comprehends every thing obligatory on the account of its Excellency; that is, every thing which tends to the Honour of God, or the Good of Man; and these are the only Ends of *Traditional* Religion; no arbitrary, or merely positive Precepts, as not tending to the Honour of God, or the Good of Man, can belong either to natural, or reveal'd Religion.

By the Law of Nature as well as the Gospel, the Honour of God, and the Good of Man, being the two grand, or general Commandments; all particular Precepts must be comprehended under these two, and belong alike to the Law of Nature as well as the Gospel; and what does not, can belong to neither. Thus any particular Precept, if by change of Circumstances it ceases to contribute to the Honour of God, or the Good of Man, much more it

it become prejudicial to either, must lose its obliging Force.

THERE must be some Rule, or Rules, which bind without Exception; *because every Exception to a Rule is built on some Rule or other*; and as there can't be Rules, so there can't be Exceptions *ad infinitum*: And I suppose, you will not deny, but that these two grand Rules, or Commandments, *the Honour of God*, and *the Good of Man*, are obligatory without Exception. And yet these would be to little Purpose, cou'd not Reason tell Men how to apply them in all Conditions and Circumstances of Life.

B. SUPPOSING no particular Precepts can oblige, if they chance to clash with either of those Commandments, yet what is to be done if these two interfere with one another; must the Good of Man, or the Honour of God take place?

A. THESE two grand Laws are in effect the same, since what promotes the Honour of God, necessarily promotes the Good of Man: The more we love and honour God, the more we shall imitate him in our extensive Love to our Fellow-Creatures; who are equally the Children of God. The greater our Veneration is for our Maker, the more it will excite us to copy those Perfections of Goodness and Benevolence we adore in him; so that the Duty of a truly religious Person, and of a good Subject and Citizen are the same with relation to God and Man; for the more he honours God, the more zealous will he be to act the Patriot; and the more he does that, the more he honours God; because the happier Men are, the more Reason they have to honour that God, who made 'em so. The way to *glorify your Father which is in Heaven*, is to *let your Light so shine before Men, that they may see your good Works*. And *herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much Fruit*. And indeed, nothing can be plainer from Scripture, than that these two great Duties of the *Love of God*, and *our Neighbour*, include

Matt. 5. 16.

John 15. 8.



clude each other. *If, says the Apostle, a Man say* <sup>1 John 4. 20.</sup> *I love God, and hateth his Brother, he is a Lyar.*  
*And, if we love one another, God dwelleth in us ;* <sup>Ib. Ver. 12.</sup>  
*and the Love of God is perfected in us.* <sup>Ib. Ver. 7. 8.</sup> *Again, Let*  
*us love one another ; Every one that loveth, is born of*  
*God, and knoweth God. He that loves not, knoweth*  
*not God. But whofo hath this World's Goods, and* <sup>1 John 3. 17.</sup> *seeth his Brother have need, and shutteth up his Bowels*  
*of Compassion from him, how dwelleth the Love of*  
*God in him ? And it was this Consideration, that*  
*made that great Emperor and Philosopher Marcus*  
*Antoninus say, " Thou wilt never do any thing*  
*" purely human in a right Manner, unless thou*  
*" knowest the relation it bears to things Divine ;*  
*" nor any thing Divine, unless thou knowest all*  
*" the Ties it has to things Human."*

<sup>Lib. 3. C. 12.</sup>  
<sup>in Mr. & Madam</sup>  
<sup>Dacier's</sup>  
<sup>Version.</sup>

IN a Word, as Man is by Nature qualify'd to answer all the Purposes of a social Life, and to act a Part agreeable to Reason, so in doing this he gives Glory to his Maker, by fulfilling the End of his Creation ; but if he goes contrary to the Light of Nature, in acting an unfociable and hurtful Part, he reflects Dishonour on his Creator, by defeating, as far as in him lies, the Design of God in making him a social Creature. But,

BECAUSE Bigots represent these two grand Obligations as frequently clashing ; and oppose things which are for the Good of Man, on pretence that the Honour of God will either directly, or indirectly suffer by it ; and on this pretence have frequently done such Mischiefs to their Fellow-Creatures, as to give occasion for that proverbial Saying, *In Nomine Domini incipit omne malum* : Give me leave to say, That we can no otherwise honour God, since that consists in having the most exalted Ideas of him, than by supposing him benevolent in the most universal and impartial Manner ; and consequently, to imagine he can command any thing inconsistent with this universal Benevolence, is highly to dishonour him ; 'tis to destroy his impartial Goodness, and  
 make

make his Power and Wisdom degenerate into Cruelty and Craft.

THO' we have received our All from God, we can give him nothing, nor do him the least Kindness, much less return Kindness for Kindness; and therefore, the only way we have to shew our real Gratitude to our great Creator and Benefactor, is to be as useful as we can to his Creatures, whom we ought to love as ourselves; and if there can now be a Sin against the Holy Ghost, I should not scruple to say, It is making Religion the Means of destroying the End of all Religion, and rendring the Creature miserable, on pretence of doing Honour to the Creator; who, as he has impress'd on *Bodies*, in order to preserve the Natural World, a Tendency to each other; so he has implanted in *Minds*, the better to support the moral World, a Tendency to be kind, and beneficent to one another. And so deep is the Impression of Benevolence, that we can't but applaud a Person who does brave and generous Actions, even tho' we suffer by them; and as much condemn him who acts basely and treacherously, tho' we are ever so great Gainers.

Characterist.

Vol. 2, p. 414.

“ Is there then (*says a noble Author*) a natural  
 “ Beauty of Figures; and is there not as natural a  
 “ one of Actions? No sooner the Eye opens upon  
 “ *Figures*, the Ear to *Sounds*, than straight the  
 “ *Beautiful* results, and *Grace* and *Harmony* are known  
 “ and acknowledg'd. No sooner are Actions view'd,  
 “ no sooner the *human Affections* and *Passions* dis-  
 “ cern'd (and they are most of them as soon dis-  
 “ cern'd as felt) than straight *an inward Eye* dis-  
 “ tinguishes, and sees the *Fair* and *Shapely*, the  
 “ *Amiable* and *Admirable* apart from the *Deform'd*,  
 “ the *Foul*, the *Odious*, or the *Despicable*.” How is  
 it possible therefore not to own, “ That as the  
 “ *Distinctions* have their Foundation in *Nature*,  
 “ the Discernment itself is *natural*, and from *Nature*  
 “ *alone*.”

B. THIS, I own, is a beautiful Description of Human Nature, and a strong Evidence of the Goodness of its Author ; but do Men act as if they had such an innate Love of Nature, or such a benevolent Disposition ?

A. AN execrable Superstition has in many Christian Countries, in a manner, extinguish'd these kind Sentiments, and even all Humanity and Pity ; inso-much that the Tender Sex can rejoice to hear the Shrieks, and see the Agonies of Men expiring under the most cruel Torments ; and there's scarce any Place, so much does this cursed Bigotry prevail, where we do not almost daily see too much Reason to cry,

*Tantum Religio potuit suadere malorum.*

THE noble Author now quoted justly observes, Characterist. Vol. 2. p. 48

“ If there be a Religion that teaches the Adoration  
 “ and Love of a God, whose Character it is to be  
 “ captious, and of high Resentment, subject to  
 “ Wrath and Anger, furious, revengeful, and re-  
 “ venging himself, when offended, on others than  
 “ those who gave the Offence ; and if there be  
 “ added to the Character of this God, a fraudu-  
 “ lent Disposition, encouraging Deceit and Treachery among Men ; favourable to a few, tho’  
 “ for slight Causes, and cruel to the rest ; ’tis evident that such a Religion as this being strongly  
 “ enforc’d, must of necessity raise even an Approbation and Respect towards the Vices of this kind,  
 “ and breed a suitable Disposition, a capricious,  
 “ partial, revengeful, and deceitful Temper. For  
 “ even *Irregularities* and *Enormities* of a heinous  
 “ kind must in many Cases appear illustrious to  
 “ one, who considers them in a Being admir’d  
 “ and contemplated with the highest Honour and  
 “ Veneration. — Whensoever, therefore, a Religion teaches the Love and Admiration of a Deity,  
 “ that has any apparent Character of *Ill* ; it teaches,  
 “ at

ib. p. 47.

“ at the same time, a Love and Admiration of *that*  
 “ *Ill*, and causes that to be taken for good and a-  
 “ miable, which is in itself horrid and detestable.”

Serm. Vol. 1.  
 p. 181. &  
 To. 1. p. 60.

ARCHBISHOP *Tillotson*, than whom none better understood Human Nature, says, that “ Accord-  
 “ ing as Mens Notions of God are, such will their  
 “ Religion be. If they have gross and false Concep-  
 “ tions of God, their Religion will be absurd and  
 “ superstitious : If Men fancy God to be an ill-na-  
 “ tur’d Being, arm’d with infinite Power, who  
 “ takes delight in the Misery and Ruin of his Crea-  
 “ tures, and is ready to take all advantages against  
 “ them, they may fear him, but they will hate  
 “ him ; and they will be apt to be such towards  
 “ one another, as they fancy God to be towards  
 “ them ; for all Religion doth naturally incline  
 “ Men to imitate him whom they worship.

Christ. Life,  
 part 2. Vol. 1.  
 p. 326.

DR. *Scott*, to root out all such injurious Notions as derogate from the Goodness of God, very justly observes ; that “ God being infinitely good in his  
 “ own Nature, it is impossible we should conceive  
 “ him to be better than he is ; and therefore every  
 “ false Notion we entertain of his Goodness must  
 “ detract from it ; and so much as we detract from  
 “ his Goodness, so much we detract from the prin-  
 “ cipal Reason and Motive of our loving him.”

AND, indeed, Power and Knowledge, of them-  
 selves, can’t engage our Love ; if they cou’d, we  
 should love the Devil in proportion to his Power  
 and Knowledge : ’Tis Goodness alone which can be-  
 get Confidence, Love, and Veneration ; and there’s  
 none of those Questions, whether relating to God or  
 Man, but what may be easily determin’d, by consider-  
 ing which side of the Question carries with it the great-  
 est Goodness ; since the same Light of Nature, which  
 shews us there is such a good Being, shews us also  
 what such Goodness expects. And did Men consid-  
 er how repugnant ’tis to his Goodness, to require  
 any thing of them which they had no reason to o-  
 bey, but because they had no Power to disobey ; they  
 must

must abhor the Notion of all arbitrary Commands.

AND therefore I shall not scruple to affirm, That he who stedfastly adheres to what the Light of Nature teaches him concerning the Divine Goodness, as he will avoid the comfortless Prospect of the Atheist, the perpetual Anxiety of the Superstitious, the wild Perturbation of the Enthusiast, and the pernicious Fury of the Bigot ; so he can't fail of the true Religion, happily seated in the middle between these Extremes. And, as such a Person can't but love God as he ought ; so, in imitation of the Divine Goodness, which influences all his Actions, he will contribute his utmost to the Good of others ; and his Love and Kindness will be as extensive as Human Nature ; and going on rational and evident Principles, which must give him entire Satisfaction, he will act a steady uniform Part. And what can be wanting to a Man who has this heavenly, this god-like Disposition, which renders him happy in himself, and, as far as it is in his power, makes the whole World so too.

AND since 'tis not easy to part with a Subject which one can scarce think of without Rapture ; I must say, that Men can never have true Sentiments of the Goodness of the Divine Legislator, or esteem his Laws as they ought, till they are convinc'd he requires nothing of them but what is for their Good ; and that they can't but be miserable as long as they swerve from Rules so essential to their Happiness ; and that the longer they do so, the more difficult will it be to acquire a contrary Habit. These Notions, early inculcated, will cause Men with Joy to obey the Divine Laws, and make them in reality love God, as well as be lov'd by him ; who has the chief Regard to the Heart, and above all things requires the Purity of the Mind ; and that Men should act, not out of a Principle of slavish Fear, but from *perfect Love, void of all Fear !*

See *Plutarch de Superstitione*, Op. to 2. p. 171. Edit. Francofurt.

*Plutarch* speaking of Religion, as it stood in the Heathen Church, and in his own Time, represents it as full of Satisfaction, Hope, and Delight; and says, “It is plain and evident from most demonstrable Testimonies, that neither the Societies, nor publick Meetings in the Temples, nor any other diverting Parties, Sights, or Entertainments are more delightful, or rejoicing, than what we ourselves behold, and practise in the Church-Worship. — Our Disposition and Temper is not, on this Occasion, as if we were in the Presence of worldly Potentates, dread Sovereigns, and despotick Princes; nor are we here found meanly humbling ourselves, crouching in Fear and Awe and full of Anxiety and Confusion, as would be natural to us in such a Case; but where the Divinity is esteem’d the *nearest*, and most immediately present, there Horrors and Amazement are the further banish’d; there the Heart, we find, gives the freest way to Pleasure, to Entertainment, — and this even to Excess.” And,

CHRISTIANS in addressing to the divine Majesty, must be fill’d with inexpressible Joy and Delight, did they consider the true Notion of God; “Who, as *Archbishop Tillotson* says, would appear to be so lovely a Being, so full of Goodness, and all desirable Perfections, that even those who are of so irregular Understanding, as not to believe there is a God, yet could not refrain from wishing with all their hearts there was one. — Who takes particular care of every one of us, and loves us, and delights to do us good. — Who understands all our Wants, and is able and willing to relieve us in our greatest Streights. — Is it not every Man’s Interest, that there should be such a Governour of the World as really designs our Happiness, and has omitted nothing necessary to it? as governs us for our Advantage, and will require nothing of us but what is for our Good; and yet will infinitely reward us for doing of that which

*Treatise a-  
gainst Epicu-  
rean Atheism,  
to. 2. p. 1101.  
D. E.*

To. 1. p. 24.

“ which is best for ourselves ; that will punish any  
 “ Man that shall go about to injure us, or to deal  
 “ otherwise with us, than himself, in like Cases,  
 “ would be dealt withal ? ——— We have reason to  
 “ believe God to be such a Being, if he be at all.”

B. ARE not the last Words too bold, in supposing there could be no God, were he not such as he describes him ?

A. WITH submission, I think not ; since there can be nothing in God, but what is God-like ; he either must be perfectly good, or not be at all. It would be well, if all who in words give this Character of the Deity, were consistent with themselves, and did not impute such Actions to him, as make him resemble the worst of Beings, and so run into downright *Demonism*. And let me add, Men of good Sense, and who mean well, will naturally fall into the same Sentiments ; a *Shaftesbury* will say the same as a *Tillotson*.

“ If there be, *says that Noble Author, a general* Letter concerning En-  
 “ *Mind* ; it can have no *particular* Interest ; but thufiasm, p.  
 “ the general Good, and the Good of the Whole, 40, 41.  
 “ and its own private Good, must of necessity be  
 “ one and the same. It can intend nothing besides,  
 “ nor aim at any thing beyond, nor be provok’d  
 “ to any thing contrary. So that we have only to  
 “ consider, whether there be really such a thing as  
 “ *a Mind that has relation to the Whole*, or not. For,  
 “ if unhappily there be *no Mind* ; we may comfort  
 “ ourselves, however, that Nature has *no Malice* :  
 “ If there be really *a MIND*, we may rest satis-  
 “ fy’d, that it is *the best natur’d one in the World*.  
 “ The last Case, one would imagine, should be  
 “ most comfortable ; and the Notion of a *common*  
 “ *Parent* less frightful than that of *forlorn Nature*,  
 “ and a *fatherless World*. Tho’, as Religion stands  
 “ amongst us, there are many good People who  
 “ would have less Fear in being thus expos’d ; and  
 “ would be easier, perhaps, in their Minds, if they  
 “ were assur’d they had only mere *Chance* to trust

“ to. For no body trembles to think there should  
 “ be *no God*; but rather, that there *shou’d be one*.  
 “ This, however would be otherwise, if *Deity*  
 “ were thought as kindly of as *Humanity*; and we  
 “ could be persuaded to believe, that if there really  
 “ was a *GOD*, *the highest Goodness* must of necessi-  
 “ ty belong to him, without any of those Defects  
 “ of *Passion*, those *Meannesses* and *Imperfections*,  
 “ which we acknowledge such in ourselves; which  
 “ as good Men, we endeavour all we can to be su-  
 “ perior to, and which, we find, we every day con-  
 “ quer as we grow better.”

IN recapitulating what I have said of the Agree-  
 ment of natural and reveal’d Religion, I can’t do  
 it more fully than in the words of Dr. *Sherlock* (now  
 Bishop of *Bangor*) who in a Sermon for propagating  
 the Gospel (where we may expect every thing which  
 recommends it) says, that “ The Religion of the  
 “ Gospel is the *true Original Religion of Reason and*  
 “ *Nature*.—That the Doctrine of Repentance, with  
 “ which the Gospel set out in the World, had re-  
 “ ference to the *Law of Reason and Nature*, against  
 “ which Men had every where offended: And since  
 “ Repentance infers the Necessity of a future Re-  
 “ formation, and a *Return* to that Duty and Obe-  
 “ dience, *from which*, by Transgression, we are  
 “ fallen; the Consequence is manifestly this, that  
 “ the *Gospel* was a *Republication of the Law of Na-*  
 “ *ture*, and its *Precepts declarative* of that *Original*  
 “ *Religion*, which was as *old as the Creation*.

“ THIS; *continues he*, will appear, by consider-  
 “ ing the Nature of the thing itself. The *Notions*  
 “ of Good and Evil are eternally and unalterably  
 “ the *same*; which *Notions* are the Rules and Mea-  
 “ sures of all moral Actions, and are consequently  
 “ necessary, and constituent Parts of Religion. And  
 “ therefore, if the *Religion of Nature*, in her pri-  
 “ mitive State, was *pure and uncorrupt*, which will  
 “ not, I presume, be deny’d, tho’ there was suffi-  
 “ cient Reason for a *Republication* of it, because of

“ the



“ the great Ignorance and Superstition which had  
 “ grown upon the World ; yet there could be no  
 “ Reason for any *Alteration* of it : For tho’ the  
 “ World was the worse for abusing the *Religion of*  
 “ *Nature*, and might want to be reform’d by a di-  
 “ vine Instructor ; yet the *Religion of Nature* was  
 “ not the worse for being abus’d, but still retain’d  
 “ its first *Purity and Simplicity*. The Duties of Re-  
 “ ligion, consider’d as the Rules of Action, flow  
 “ from the Relation we bear to God, and to one  
 “ another ; and Religion must ever be the same, as  
 “ long as these Relations continue unalter’d. If  
 “ our first Parent was the Creature of God, so are  
 “ we ; and whatever Service and Duty he ow’d in  
 “ virtue of this Dependance, the *same* is due from  
 “ us ; nor can this *Relation* be ever made the ground  
 “ of *different* Duties in his Case and ours. If there-  
 “ fore *Nature* rightly instructed him at first how to  
 “ *serve* his Maker ; our Obligations being the same  
 “ with his, our Rule must be the *same* also. The  
 “ Case is the same with respect to the Duties owing  
 “ from Man to Man. And it would be as reasona-  
 “ ble to suppose, that the three Angles of a Tri-  
 “ angle should be equal to two right ones in one  
 “ Age, and unequal in another, as to suppose, that  
 “ the Duties of Religion should differ in one Age  
 “ from what they were in another ; the Habitudes  
 “ and Relations from which they flow continuing  
 “ always the same.

“ THAT the Case is in Fact what I have repre-  
 “ sented it to be, might be shewn from the *particu-*  
 “ *lar* Laws of the Gospel, and their Dependance  
 “ on the Maxims and Principles of *Natural Religion*.  
 “ —I will content myself with one general Proof,  
 “ which reaches to *every* Part of the *Christian* Doc-  
 “ trine.—If the Law and the Prophets hang on  
 “ these two great Commandments, *viz.* The *Love*  
 “ of God, and the *Love* of our Neighbour ; then  
 “ the Doctrine of our Saviour, which is the Perfec-  
 “ tion of the Law and the Prophets, must hang on

“ them likewise. Now, if you will allow, that the  
 “ Love of God, and the Love of our Neighbour,  
 “ are *Fundamentals* in the Law of Reason and Na-  
 “ ture (as *undoubtedly* they are) you must also al-  
 “ low, that whatever may be deduc’d from them  
 “ by rational Consequence, must be a *Precept* of  
 “ the Law of *Nature*: Whatever therefore hangs  
 “ on these two Commandments, must necessarily  
 “ be a Part of *Natural Religion*; and that *all* the  
 “ Law and the Prophets do so hang, and conse-  
 “ quently the Doctrine of the Gospel, which is the  
 “ Perfection of them, you have had our Saviour’s  
 “ *express* Testimony. Since then it appears (as I  
 “ think) that the *Religion* of the *Gospel* is the *True*  
 “ *Original Religion* of *Reason* and *Nature*; —  
 “ That it has, as such, a Claim to be receiv’d *in-*  
 “ *dependent* of those *Miracles* which were wrought  
 “ for its Confirmation; will be admitted by all who  
 “ allow the Force and Obligation of *Natural Re-*  
 “ *ligion*; and can be denied by none who know or  
 “ understand themselves. The Principles of Reli-  
 “ gion are interwoven with the very Frame and Make  
 “ of our Minds, and we may as well run from our-  
 “ selves, as from the Sense of the Obligations we  
 “ are under.”

B. BUT does not this Right Reverend Prelate in  
 this Sermon affirm, that there are Doctrines in Chri-  
 stianity, which, tho’ not different, yet are distinct  
 from the Principles of Reason and Nature?

A. THERE’S nothing more common with learned  
 Authors, than Distinctions without any Difference;  
 yet the Bishop very cautiously words what he says,  
 “ That the Doctrines of Christianity, tho’ not dif-  
 “ ferent, are distinct from the Principles of Reason,  
 “ and Nature:” but he does not say they are dis-  
 tinct from those Doctrines which flow from the Prin-  
 ciples of Reason and Nature. And what he imme-  
 diately adds, that “ Our Saviour came into the  
 “ World to supply the Defects, not of Religion,  
 “ which continu’d in its Purity and Perfection, but

“ of Nature ;” plainly shews, that he thinks nothing could be added by our Saviour to a Law that had no Defects ; and that the Defects of Nature cou’d only be supply’d, by obliging People to live up to this Natural Law of unchangeable Purity and Perfection.

THIS is doing justice to Reveal’d as well as Natural Religion, and shews the Author of both to be at all times equally wise, good, and beneficent ; and the Bishop ought to be valued for speaking thus plainly : *O sic omnia dixisset !*

AND to this Right Reverend Father, I may add the Authority of the late Most Reverend Archbishop *Sharp*, who says, “ That Religion (taking  
 “ that Word as it signifies that universal Duty we  
 “ owe to God, and by which we are to recom-  
 “ mend ourselves to his Favour) is not so variable,  
 “ uncertain, and arbitrary a Matter, as some Men  
 “ do perhaps suppose it ; but is a constant, fixed,  
 “ permanent, immutable Thing. The same now  
 “ that it was in the Days of the Old Law ; and  
 “ the same then that it was in the Days before the  
 “ Law was given ; and the same both then and  
 “ now that it shall be a thousand Years hence, if  
 “ the World should last so long. True Religion,  
 “ and that which is from God, was, and is, and  
 “ ever will be, the same in Substance in all Coun-  
 “ tries, and in all Nations, and among all sorts  
 “ and Conditions of Men whatsoever ; and the Sum  
 “ of it is, *To love the Lord our God with all our*  
 “ *Hearts, and with all our Minds, and with all our*  
 “ *Strength ; and, next to that, To love our Neigh-*  
 “ *bour as ourselves.* This was the Religion that the  
 “ Patriarchs, and all the pious Men of Old lived  
 “ in, and by which they obtain’d God’s Favour  
 “ and Acceptance ; when as yet there was no re-  
 “ veal’d instituted Religion in the World.—That  
 “ this is the Sum of the Christian Religion, no  
 “ Man can in the least doubt, that has ever read  
 “ the New Testament.-----In our Saviour’s Institu-

Serm. vol. 4.  
P. 208---211.

“ tion there is hardly any one thing recommended  
 “ to us, that doth not directly relate to this Mat-  
 “ ter; that is not either an Instance wherein we are  
 “ to express our Love to God, and our Neigh-  
 “ bour; or a Means whereby we may be further’d  
 “ in the practising of those Duties; or an Argu-  
 “ ment, and Motive, and Encouragement to ex-  
 “ cite us to the practising of them. It is the De-  
 “ sign of all his Doctrines, to give us right Notions  
 “ of God, and our Neighbour; to teach us how  
 “ excellent, how good God is in himself, and how  
 “ kind, how gracious to us; and therefore what  
 “ infinite Reason we have to love and serve all Man-  
 “ kind (who are our Neighbours) for his sake.—  
 “ WE have an easy, and a true Notion of that  
 “ Religion which is from God; and we can never  
 “ be at a loss to find out in what it doth consist.  
 “ It is not a thing to be alter’d at pleasure; both  
 “ the Law of Nature, and the Law of God; both  
 “ the natural Dispensation under which all Men are  
 “ born, and the reveal’d Dispensation as we have  
 “ either in the Old or New Testament; do suffi-  
 “ ciently instruct us in the main Heads of it. Nay  
 “ I dare be bold to say, so long as Mankind do re-  
 “ tain their Nature, and are not transform’d into  
 “ another sort of Creatures than what God made  
 “ them at first; it is impossible that there should  
 “ be any true Religion, but what may be summed  
 “ up in these two things; to love God, and our  
 “ Neighbour.”

## C H A P. VIII.

*That the not adhering to those Notions Reason dictates concerning the Nature of God, has been the Occasion of all Superstition, and all those innumerable Mischiefs, that Mankind, on the Account of Religion, have done either to themselves, or one another.*

HAVING in general shewn the Absurdity of not being govern'd by the Reason of Things in all Matters of Religion, I shall now in particular, shew the fatal Consequences of not adhering to those Notions Reason dictates concerning the Nature of God.

*Charron*, tho' a Priest of that Church which abounds with Superstition, the most pernicious as well as absurd, seems to have a right Notion of Superstition as well as justly to abhor it, in saying, that " Superstition, and most other Errors and Defects in Religion, are, generally speaking, owing chiefly to want of becoming and right Apprehensions of God: We debase and bring him down to us; we compare, and judge him by ourselves; we cloath him with our Infirmities, and then proportion, and fit our Fancy accordingly. — What horrid Prophanation and Blasphemy is this!"

*Charron of Wisdom. Eng. Transl. p. 131.*

'TIS to this Absurdity of debasing God, and cloathing him with our Infirmities, and judging of him by ourselves, that the Mediatory Gods amongst the Heathen owe their Rise. Had they believ'd a supreme Being was every where, and at all Times knew their Thoughts, they could never have taken such a round-about way of addressing him; who

who not only knew what they desired, but their real Wants, and what would relieve them, better than any Mediatory Beings whatever.

B. THEY address'd to Mediatory Beings, to shew their greater Respect to the Supreme Being; and their own Unworthiness to approach him.

A. THIS shews what unworthy Notions they had of the Supreme Being; since it would be an Affront even to a Temporal Prince, if he was present, and heard every thing you said, not to address to him, but to another, to let the Prince know what you wanted from him.

THE Heathen must think, if they thought at all, that those Mediatory Gods cou'd either suggest to the Supreme God some Reasons he before was ignorant of; or that by their Importunities they cou'd prevail on his Weakness, to do what otherwise he was not willing to do.

THIS Heathen Notion, as it suppos'd the Supreme God either ignorant or weak; so it made the Mediatory Gods to have a greater Kindness for, and Readiness to do Good to Mankind; and that their Sollicitations made him better-natur'd than otherwise he wou'd be: This of course took off their Love from the Supreme, and plac'd it on those Mediatory Gods, upon whose powerful Intercessions they so much depended. However, these Heathens, allowing one, and but one Most High God, did not so far derogate from the Honour of the one True God, as to pretend that the most distinguished among their several Mediators was equal to him; *Equality* and *Mediation* being as inconsistent as *Equality* and *Supremacy*; and they wou'd have made their Religion an errant Jumble, if they had worshipp'd these Gods sometimes as Mediators only; sometimes as sovereign Disposers of Things; and sometimes as both together.

HAD the Heathen believ'd God, to have been a purely-spiritual, invisible Being, they cou'd never have suppos'd him visible to Mortals; or have  
thought

thought that an unlimited Being cou'd appear under the limited Form of a Man, or other Animal; or that an Omnipresent Being cou'd any more be present in one Place, or Creature, than another; or that such a Being cou'd be confin'd to a small Spot of Earth, while another equally omnipresent was in Heaven, and a third descending from thence, &c. Or that one God cou'd be sent on the Errand of another God, after the manner that God *Mercury* was by God *Jupiter*; tho' there was nothing too absurd for the Heathen to believe, after they had destroy'd the Unity of God; except it was, that *Jupiter* and *Mercury*, the *Sender* and the *Sent*, were the same God.

The primitive Fathers bitterly inveigh'd against these heathenish Notions: *Justin Martyr*, for instance, says, "None, who have the least Sense, will dare to affirm, that the Maker and Father of the Universe did appear in a small Spot of Earth; the God of the Universe can neither ascend, nor descend, or come into any Place." *Tertullian* says, "He wou'd not believe the sovereign God descended into the Womb of a Woman, tho' even the Scripture itself should say it." "'Tis impossible, says *Eusebius*, that the Eyes of Mortals should ever see the Supreme God; viz. Him, who is above all things, and whose Essence is unbegotten and immutable." *Again*, "'Tis absurd, and contrary to all Reason, that the unbegotten and immutable Nature of the Almighty God should take the Form of a Man; or that the Scripture should forge such-like Falsities." *Minutius Felix* in his Apology says, that "The Deity can't die, nor can any thing which is born be a God: That only is divine, which has neither Beginning nor End; if the Gods get Children, they would get them immortal: We must conclude those Gods to be Men, of whose Birth and Burial we are fully satisfy'd." Thus the Fathers expos'd the Pagan *Polytheism*.

*Justin Oper.*  
P. 207. Ed.

1593.  
Al. p. 283. B.  
p. 356. E.

*Adv. Prax.*  
cap. 16.

*Demon. Evan.*  
l. 5. c. 20.  
p. 248.

*Ecccl. Hist. l. 1.*  
c. 2. p. 6. C.

*Reeve's Transf.*  
p. 121.  
Ed. Dav. c. 23.

A great deal more, as you may well imagine, might be said on this Head; but now I shall briefly consider what pernicious Effects the having wrong and unnatural Conceptions of the Deity, has occasion'd among Men with relation to themselves, and one another.

IF we take a general View of those Mischiefs Mankind have at all times practis'd on a religious account, either upon themselves or others; we shall find them owing to their entertaining such Notions of God, as are intirely inconsistent with his Nature; and contrary to what their Reason, if attended to, wou'd inform them of the Design and End of the Laws of God.

HAD not numbers in all Ages thought, that God delighted in the Pain and Misery of his Creatures; they cou'd never have imagin'd, that the best way to render them acceptable to him, was by tormenting themselves with immoderate Watchings, Fastings, Penances, and Mortifications of all Sorts; and the greater the more pleasing: And even at present there are among *Christians*, *Mahometans*, and *Pagans*, numbers of Men who devote themselves to Exercises full of Pain and corporal Sufferings, and either wound, or mangle their own Persons, or find other ways of tormenting themselves; and indeed, the Superstitious every where think, the less Mercy they shew to their Bodies, the more Mercy God will shew to their Souls.

MANY of the primitive Christians, instead of flying, as the Gospel directs, not only ran voluntarily to Execution, but provok'd their Judges to do them that favour. And under *Trajan*, all the Christians in a City in *Asia* came in a body to the Proconsul, and offer'd themselves to the Slaughter; which made him cry, *O! ye unbappy People, if ye have a mind to die, have ye not Haliers and Precipices enough to end your Lives; but ye must come here for Executioners?* And this was a general practice under the *Antonini*;  
and



and *Marcus Antoninus* severely reflects on the obstinacy of the Christians, in running thus headlong to death. And *St. Cyprian* labours to comfort those who might be so unhappy, by the ceasing of the then Persecution, to miss the Crown of Martyrdom; tho' one wou'd think there were but few who wanted this Consolation; since he says, *many of the Clergy, and the for greater part of the Laity apostatiz'd*. But when by the Empire's becoming Christian, the Crown of Martyrdom was no longer to be obtain'd by the prevailing Party of Christians, then exercising Cruelties on themselves was esteem'd the next best Thing; and many Devotees put monstrous Hardships on themselves, while others chose Poverty, Rags, and Nastiness; or else retir'd to Caves, Desarts, and other solitary places to sigh away their miserable Lives: And Ecclesiastick History is full of Miracles done by such Madmen as *Simeon Stylites*, who had no other Dwelling than a Pillar, on which he spent the best part of his Life; and 'twas owing to these superstitious Notions that such numbers of *Monasteries* and *Nunneries* were soon founded, to the great Oppression and Depopulation of the Christian World; not but that the impudent Forgeries of *Athanasius*, and other such like Saints about Miracles done by *Monks*, help'd to increase this Superstition; whilst the Prelates, tho' they encourag'd those Severities on others, were far from practising any on themselves.

HAD such Notions been adher'd to concerning the divine Goodness, as the Light of Nature dictates, the *Egyptians*, and some other Pagan Nations could never have thought that *cutting off the Foreskin* (not to be perform'd without great Pain and Hazard) cou'd have been esteem'd a religious Duty acceptable to a good and gracious God; who makes nothing in vain, much less what requires the cutting off, even with extreme Danger as well as Anguish. Had Nature requir'd such an Operation, Nature, being always the same, wou'd still have requir'd it.

See *Marc. Antonin.* de rebus suis, l. 11. c. 3. And *Lucian* de mort. *Peregr.* To. 2. p. 567. 568. And *Arrian* Epist. l. 4. c. 7. p. 500. Edit. Cantab. *Le Clerc's* Life of *Cypr.* Bib. Un. To. 12. p. 248, 249. Ep. 14. p. 31. Edit. Oxon.

See *Athanasius's* Life of *Anthony* the Monk, To. 2. p. 455. A & d. *Jerom* of the Miracles of *Paul & Hilariion*, two Monks. To. 1. p. 237. & d. p. 241. & d.

Can. Chron. p. 73. & d. Edit. Francof. THIS Institution, as is prov'd by *Marſham*, and others, ſeems to be owing to the *Egyptians*, who thought all to be prophane who uſed it not; and it was after *Abraham* had been in *Egypt*, that *Circumciſion* was inſtituted; in order, 'tis likely, to recommend his Poſterity to the *Egyptians*, on whom they were for ſome Ages to depend: And what makes this the more probable, is, that 'twas not till after the Lord had order'd *Mofes* into *Egypt*, that *the Lord* met him by the way in the Inn, and ſought to kill him for not circumciſing his Son: And upon *Joſhua's* circumciſing the *Iſraelites* (Circumciſion not being obſerv'd during their ſtay in the Wilderneſs, when they had no Communication with *Egypt*) the Lord himſelf ſays, *This day have I rolled away the Re-proach of Egypt from off you.*

Exod. 4. 24.

Joſh. 5. 2—9.

THE Heathen World muſt have very groſs Conceptions, not only of their inferior Gods, but of the Father of Gods and Men; when they imagin'd him of ſo cruel a Nature, as to be delighted with the butchering of innocent Animals; and that the Stench of burnt Fleſh ſhould be ſuch a *ſweet-smelling Saviour in his Noſtrils*, as to atone for the Wickedneſs of Men; and wicked, no doubt, they were, when they had ſuch an Atonement at hand. So that the *Harmleſs* were burnt to ſave the *Hurtful*; and Men the leſs *innocent* they grew, the more they deſtroy'd the innocent Beaſts.

*Non Bove maſtato Cœleſtia Numina gaudent;  
Sed, quæ præſtanda eſt, & ſine Teſte, Fide.*

Ovid. *Epift.* p. 89. *Ep.* 20. v. 181.

IF the *Pagans* believ'd Beaſts were not given them for Food, why did they eat them? Or, if they thought they were, why did they ungratefully throw back the Gifts of God on the Donor? Or, why did they not drown, or bury them, rather than make ſuch a Stench in burning them, as many times, by the number of Sacrifices, might infect the very Air?

'Tis

'Tis probable, that the Heathen Priests who shar'd with their Gods, and reserv'd their best Bits for themselves, had the chief Hand in this as well as in all other gainful Superstitions; while the deluded People, who many Times suffer'd by the Scarcity of Provisions, caus'd by the great Number of Sacrifices, were at vast Expence in maintaining these holy Butchers, whose very Trade inspir'd them with Cruelty.

AND 'tis probable, this absurd Notion prevail'd like all other Absurdities by Degrees, and at first Sacrifices were only religious Feasts, either in Commemoration of some National Benefit; where after God, their great Benefactor, was celebrated, they commemorated their particular Benefactors; or else Feasts were made on a private Account by the Master of a Family, upon shearing his Sheep, gathering in the Fruits of the Earth, &c. where those that assisted him were entertained, and joyfully joyn'd in giving Thanks to the Author of those Blessings, without destroying, or burning any Part of the Creature given for their Use; and the Master of the Family was no doubt, Master of the Ceremonies at his own Feast. But this simple Method not pleasing certain Persons, who were resolv'd to have the best share in all those religious Feasts, they perswaded the People that it was necessary some part of the Flesh of Animals was to be burnt to feed the hungry Nostrils of the Deity, delighted with the sweet Savour of burnt Flesh; and the better part to be reserv'd unburnt for themselves, to whom the slaying of the Animals, and the offering them up was appropriated. 'Tis then no wonder the Number of the Gods multiply'd, since the more Gods the more Sacrifices, and the Priests had better Fare; and that they might not want plentiful Feastings, the People were made to believe, that they cou'd learn their Fortunes from the Intrails of the Beasts they sacrificed; and this Method continues to this day in those Places, where they

they have not found out an easier and better Way of cheating the People.

*B.* You seem to be of the Sentiments of the Poet, who says,

*Natural Religion were easy first, and plain ;  
Tales made it Mystery, Offerings made it Gain :  
Sacrifices and Shews were at length prepar'd,  
The Priests eat Roast-Meat, and the People star'd.*

*A.* THE Pagan sacrificing of Beasts was not so bad in itself, as what it soon occasion'd, *human Sacrifices*; which Men, being of greater Value than Beasts, were believ'd to be more acceptable; and Parents, stifling all natural Affections, offered up their own Children, as the most precious Gifts they cou'd bestow on the Gods; except offering up their own Lives, and sacrificing themselves: And as this Sacrifice was thought most meritorious, so the more excellent the Persons, the more agreeable the Sacrifice; and there are even at this Day, a Number of superstitious People in *India*, who out of great Devotion throw themselves under the Wheels of those heavy Chariots, which carry the Images of their Gods, and are crush'd to death; and others, out of the same mistaken Zeal, cut off their Flesh, and mangle their Limbs till they fall down dead: Which makes the People rejoice at their Sufferings, and reverence them as most holy Martyrs; concluding that nothing but the Truth of their Religion cou'd enable them to shew such terrible Marks of Zeal on themselves, and become voluntary Martyrs.

*B.* I pity those deluded People, and wonder how Men can persuade themselves, that the Mercy of Heaven can be purchas'd by such Barbarities, as Human Nature left to itself would start at.

*A.* THAT the Priests were every where for human Sacrifices, is no wonder; since they had the appointing the Men, whom the Gods did the great Honour to accept for Burnt-Offerings: And indeed,  
after

## Ch. 8. *Christianity as Old as the Creation.*

after People once gave themselves up to believe in their Priests, there was nothing too absurd to be receiv'd as divine. When the *Ethiopians*, for instance, were once persuaded that their Priests were intimately acquainted with the Will of the Gods, it was too late to dispute any Orders they pretended to bring from them; and therefore, their Kings, as well as private Persons, well-knowing that the Commands of the immortal Gods were not to be disputed by Mortals, most religiously executed themselves as soon as the Pleasure of the Gods were signify'd to them by those sacred Messengers of their Will; and this blind Devotion might have continu'd till now, had not an Infidel Prince, bred up in the profane Philosophy of the *Greeks*, put a stop to it by surprizing, and destroying at once all those holy Impostors.

Diod. Sic. 1.2  
P 102. B. & d.

WE learn from *Bernier* and Others, that it has been an immemorial Custom in *Indostan*, for the Women (so great a Power has Superstition even over that fearful Sex) to burn themselves with their dead Husbands, adorn'd with all the incombustible Riches they cou'd procure on their own Account; or that the Folly of others wou'd send by them to their dead Friends: These their Priests secure to themselves, by telling the credulous People that the Ashes of the Dead, and all burnt with them, are too sacred to be touch'd by any but themselves.

B. Tho' human Sacrifices obtain'd among the Heathen, yet sure the *Levitical* Law did not approve, or countenance any such Practices.

A. AUTHORS are divided, and they who maintain the Affirmative say, That the *Levitical* Law distinguishes between ordinary Vows, and those Vows where any thing is *devoted* to the Lord; and this they pretend is plain from *Levit.* 27. where after many surprizing things about common Vows, by which the Things themselves, or Money in lieu of them, were to be given to the Priests; at *Ver.* 28. it comes to things devoted, and says, *Notwithstanding, no devoted thing that a Man shall devote unto the*

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Lord, of all that he hath, both of Men and Beasts, and of the Field of his Possession, shall be sold or redeem'd; every thing devoted is most holy unto the Lord, And what is meant by being most holy unto the Lord, is explain'd in the next Verse, None devoted, which shall be devoted of Man shall be redeem'd; but shall surely be put to death. And they say it was before declar'd, that whatever was the Lord's, as the First-born of Man and Beast, was to be slain; if God did not order its Redemption. *The First-born of Man was to be redeem'd*; and that of an *Afs*, if not redeem'd by a *Lamb*, was to have its Neck broke; and the *Captives taken in War*, which fell to the Lord's Share, there being no Order for redeeming, were, as is own'd by all, to be slain.

Exo. 1. 30. 12,  
13, & 34. 19,  
20.

Mic 6.6, to 8.

THE Prophet *Micah* reckons the putting every devoted Thing to death among the *Jewish* Institutions, in saying, *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with Burnt-Offerings, with Calves of a Year old? Will the Lord be pleased with Thousands of Rams, or with ten Thousands of Rivers of Oil? Shall I give my First-born for my Transgression; the Fruit of my Body for the Sin of my Soul? He hath shewed thee, O Man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee; but to do justly, and to love Mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*

HERE the sacrificing of a Man's own Children is mentioned equally with the sacrificing of Beasts, which is allowed to be a *Jewish* Institution; how absurdly must the Prophet be suppos'd to have argu'd, after he had preferr'd Justice and Mercy to a Thing commanded by God, if he should go on to prefer it before a thing abhor'd by God!

If there could be any doubt in this Matter, *Jephtha's Vow* would clear it up; for this *Jewish* Hero made the Vow when the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and after making it he wrought a great Deliverance for *Israel*: The Words of the Vow are, *Whosoever* (or rather *Whosoever*) *cometh forth of the*  
the

the Doors of my House to meet me, when I return in Peace from the Children of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's; and I will offer it up to him for a Burnt-Offering. A Vow made by such an extraordinary Person, and upon such an extraordinary Occasion, looks as tho' something extraordinary pleasing to God, was design'd by that Vow; which, tho' domestick Animals might have been sacrificed, must relate to Persons capable of acting with Design; viz. of coming out of his House to meet him after the Victory; which to his great Grief his only Child did. Had there been any Way of dispensing with this solemn Vow, he, since he had two Months Time to consider, would, no doubt, have found it out; but he says, *I have opened my Mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back*: and he did with her according to his Vow. And his Daughter, worthy of a better Fate, was willing her Father should execute his cruel Vow, only regretting that she died without being a Mother in *Israel*; for that Reason she was yearly mourn'd by the Daughters of *Israel*.

ST. *Jerome*, as well as the Author of the *Questions to the Orthodox*, thinks that *Jeptha's* Piety in sacrificing his Daughter, was the Reason of St. *Paul's* numbering him among the just Persons. And

Ep. to *Justin.*  
To. 1. p. 208.  
*Justin's* Oper.  
p. 454. A.  
455. C.

BISHOP *Smalridge*, in his Sermon about *Jeptha's* Vow, says, "That all the Fathers, as well as our own *Homilies*, own that he sacrificed his Daughter."

THE *Jews* could not think it absolutely unlawful for a Father to sacrifice an innocent Child; since *Abraham* was highly extol'd for being ready to sacrifice his only Son, and that too without the least Expostulation; tho' he was importunate with God to save an inhospitable, idolatrous, and incestuous City.

No Wonder that a single Person in the Power of another might be devoted to God, since free, and independent Nations were so devoted; and it was by Virtue of such a Vow, which *Israel* vowed unto

the Lord, that the *Canaanites*, who had never done *Israel* the least Injury, Men, Women, and Children, were to be utterly destroy'd.

HAD the Author of the Epistle to the *Hebrews*, who reckons *Jeptba* among the *Jewish* Heroes, thought the *Jews* abhor'd all human Sacrifices, he would not, at least, without some Apology for the Lawfulness of human Sacrifices, have declar'd one such Sacrifice, where the same Person was both Sacrificer and Sacrifice, to have been of infinite Value; in saying, that *Christ* offer'd up himself; and that *He put away Sin by the Sacrifice of himself*; and endeavours to shew the *Hebrews*, that the Blood of the Beasts that were sacrificed, was of no Value in comparison of the *Blood of Christ, who, thro' the eternal Spirit, offer'd up himself without Spot to God.*

B. ADMITTING the *Jewish* Law allowed human Sacrifices, yet the Christian Religion, sure, forbids (since *Christ*, according to the Apostles, *sacrificed himself*) all human Sacrifices.

A. IF putting innocent, and conscientious Men to death on account of Religion, may be call'd *sacrificing* them, there have been more human Sacrifices than ever were before in the World; and those too not offer'd up to God, but to the Devil, by burning their Bodies, and sentencing their Souls to Hell; and even at this Day the *Papists*, to persuade the Spectators, that those they condemn to the Flames immediately go to Hell, dress them up in a *San-Benito*, or a Coat painted all over with Flames and Devils; and then take their Leave of each Sufferer, with this charitable Expression, *Jam animam tuam tradimus Diabolo.*

B. I must own, this Bigotry, which has had such terrible Effects among Christians, was little felt, or known in the *Pagan* World.

A. Is not this cursed Bigotry owing to the most unworthy Notions Bigots have entertain'd of the divine Perfections, imagining they do Service to the Creator, by hurting, and destroying his Creatures?

The

Numb. 21.  
2, 3.  
Chap. 11. 32.

Heb. 7. 27.  
— 9. 26

Ver. 13.  
Ver. 14.



The fiery Zeal of such Wretches is capable of any Mischief: Most other Men, tho' ever so wicked, have some Remains of Pity and Humanity, some Checks of Conscience, and tho' ever so much provok'd, Time will assuage their Anger; but the Bigot feels not the least Remorse, nor can Time abate his Fury; and he is so far from having any Pity, that he glories in the cruellest Actions, and thinks the more hellish Facts he commits, the more he merits Heaven; and very often gets the Reputation of a Saint, for acting the Part of a Devil. So that his Notions of God and Religion, serve only to make him infinitely a worse Man, than if he had been without any Belief; for then he could have no Motives from the next World for doing Mischief; nor would his Disbelief strip him of his Humanity, or hinder him, if he judg'd rightly of his own Interest, from acting so by his Fellow-Creatures, as, taking in the whole of his Life, was best for him to do.

*B.* You represent Bigotry more odious than it is, in making it worse than Atheism itself.

*A.* As Bigotry is the worst Sort of Superstition, so you know the Philosophers in general suppose Superstition to be worse than Atheism itself. *Plutarch*, in particular, makes it his Business, in his Tract of *Deisidemy*, or *Superstition*, to prove that Atheism, tho' an Opinion false, and even stupid, yet is far less hurtful to Men than Superstition; and reflects less Dishonour on the Deity itself: For he interprets *Deisidemy* to be the continual Dread of a Deity, no less mischievous than powerful; which is the most odious Character that can belong to any intellectual Being, and has given birth to those shocking Notions, and dismal Rites in divine Worship, that have either run Men into Atheism, and expos'd Religion itself to Ridicule and Contempt; or made Mankind the Dupe of designing Knaves, and taught fierce Bigots to exercise, and then sanctify the most inhuman Barbarities. —

To. 2. 165.  
B. &c.

p. 171. A.

- p. 167. C, D. “ THE Atheist, *says he*, knows no God at all ;  
 “ the Superstitious none but what is monstrous and  
 “ terrible ; mistaking for dreadful, what is most kind  
 “ and beneficent ; for tyrannical, what is truly pa-  
 “ ternal ; for mischievously inclin’d, what is full of  
 “ providential Care ; nay, for a Being brutally sa-  
 “ vage and fierce, what is meer Goodness itself.
- p. 169. E, F. “ Shall then, *adds he*, the Atheist be counted impious,  
 “ and not this superstitious Person much more so? I,  
 “ for my part, had rather Men should say there is  
 “ no such Person as *Plutarch*, than that he is a Man  
 “ inconstant, fickle, prone to Anger, ready to re-  
 “ venge himself upon the slightest Occasion, and full  
 “ of Indignation for meer Trifles, &c. And yet this  
 “ is no more than what the Superstitious think of  
 “ the Deity ; whom of consequence they must as well  
 “ hate as fear : They worship, indeed, and adore  
 “ him, and so do Men even those very Tyrants they  
 “ would be glad of an Opportunity to destroy. The  
 “ Atheist contributes not in the least to Superstition ;  
 “ but Superstition having given out so hideous an  
 “ Idea of the Deity, some have been frighted into  
 “ the utter Disbelief of any such Being, because they  
 “ think it much better, nay, more reasonable, that  
 “ there should be no Deity, than one whom they  
 “ see more reason to hate, and abominate, than to  
 “ love, honour and reverence. Thus inconsiderate  
 “ Men, shock’d at the Deformity of Superstition,  
 “ run directly into its opposite Extreme, *Atheism*,  
 “ heedlessly skipping over true Piety, that is the Gol-  
 “ den Mean between both.” So much for this Philo-  
 “ sopher of the *Gentiles*, I shall now quote a noble Chris-  
 “ tian Philosopher, who says, “ Atheism leaves a Man  
 “ to Sense, to Philosophy, to natural Pity, to Laws,  
 “ to Reputation ; all which may be Guides to an  
 “ outward moral Virtue, tho’ Religion were not :  
 “ But Superstition dismounts all these, and erecteth  
 “ an absolute Monarchy in the Minds of Men.  
 “ Therefore Atheism did never perturb States, for it  
 “ makes Men wary of themselves, as looking no fur-  
 “ ther :

Bacon’s Es-  
 says, p. 96.

“ ther : And we see the Times inclining to Atheism  
 “ (as the Time of *Augustus Cæsar*) were civil Times.  
 “ But Superstition hath been the Confusion of many  
 “ States, and bringeth in a new *Primum Mobile*, that  
 “ ravisheth all the Spheres of Government.”

I grant that next to a real Bigot, an Athiest in Masquerade may do most mischief; but then it is by hiding the Atheist, and personating the Bigot; and under colour of promoting Religion, advancing Priestcraft. And there are no small number of these Atheists, if what the famous *Scaliger* says is true, *Quicumque Jesuitæ vel Ecclesiastici Romæ in honoribus vivunt, Athei sunt.* Scaligerana p. 126. And Men must have a great deal of Charity to think better of any Protestant, whose pretended Zeal carries him, contrary to the Principles of his Religion, into persecuting Measures.

HAD the Heathens distinguish'd themselves by *Creeds* made out of Spite to one another, and mutually persecuted each other about the Worship of their Gods, they would soon have made the Number of their Votaries as few as the Gods they worship'd; but we don't find (except in *Egypt*, that Mother-land of Superstition) they ever quarrell'd about their Gods, tho' their Gods sometimes quarrell'd, and fought about their Votaries: No, it was a Maxim with them, *Deorum injuriæ, Diis curæ.*

By the universal Liberty that was allow'd among the Ancients, “ Matters (*as a noble Author observes*)  
 “ were so ballanc'd, that Reason had fair Play;  
 “ Learning and Science flourish'd; wonderful was  
 “ the Harmony and Temper, which arose from these  
 “ Contrarities. Thus Superstition and Enthusiasm  
 “ were mildly treated; and being let alone, they  
 “ never rag'd to that degree as to occasion Blood-  
 “ shed, Wars, Persecutions, and Devastations; but  
 “ a new Sort of Policy, — has made us leap the  
 “ Bounds of natural Humanity, and out of a super-  
 “ natural Charity, has taught us the way of plaguing  
 “ one another most devoutly. It has rais'd an An-  
 “ tipathy, that no temporal Interest could ever do,  
 “ and

“ and entail’d on us a mutual Hatred to all Eternity.  
 “ And savage Zeal, with meek and pious Semblance,  
 “ works dreadful Massacre ; and for Heaven’s-sake  
 “ (horrid Pretence!) makes desolate the Earth.”

Ib. 388.

Characterist.

Vol. 3. p. 153.

: 54.

AND as this noble Author observes, “ The *Zeus*  
 “ *Ἰεὺς* (or the *Jupiter* of Strangers) was among  
 “ the Ancients, one of the solemn Characters of  
 “ Divinity, the peculiar Attribute of the supreme  
 “ Deity ; benign to Mankind, and recommending  
 “ universal Love, mutual Kindness and Benignity  
 “ between the remotest, and most unlike of human  
 “ Race. Such was the antient Heathen Charity,  
 “ and pious Duty towards the whole of Mankind ;  
 “ both those of different Nations and different  
 “ Worship.”

BUT, good God ! how different a Character do Bigots give us of the Deity, making him an unjust, cruel, and inconsistent Being ; requiring all Men to judge for themselves, and act according to their Consciences ; and yet authorizing some among them to judge for others, and to punish them for not acting according to the Consciences of those Judges, tho’ ever so much against their own.

THESE Bigots thought they were authoris’d to punish all those that differ with them in their religious Worship, as God’s Enemies ; but had they consider’d, that God alone could discern Mens Hearts, and alone discover whether any, by conscientiously offering him a wrong Worship, could become his Enemies ; and that infinite Wisdom best knew how to proportion the Punishment to the Fault, as well as infinite Power how to inflict it ; they would, surely, have left it to God to judge for himself, in a Cause which immediately related to himself ; and where they were not so much as Parties concern’d, and as likely to be mistaken as those they would punish. Can one, without Horror, think of Mens breaking through all the Rules of doing as they would be done unto, in order to set themselves up for Standards of Truth for God as well as Man ? Do not these im-

pious

pious Wretches suppose, that God is not able to judge for himself; at least, not able to execute his own Judgment? And that therefore, he has Recourse, forsooth, to their superior Knowledge or Power; and they are to revenge his Injuries, root out his Enemies, and restore his lost Honour, tho' with the Destruction of the better Part of Mankind? But,

To do the Propagators of these blasphemous Notions Justice, they do not throw this Load of Scandal on the *Law of Nature*; or so much as pretend from thence to authorise their execrable Principles; but endeavour to support them by traditional Religion, especially by misinterpreted Texts from the Old Testament; and thereby make, not only Natural and Reveal'd Religion, but the Old and New Testament (the latter of which requires doing Good both to *Jews* and *Gentiles*) contradict each other. But to return:

IF what the Light of Nature teaches us concerning the divine Perfections, when duly attended to, is not only sufficient to hinder us from falling into Superstition of any Kind whatever; but, as I have already shewn, demonstrates what God, from his infinite Wisdom and Goodness, can, or cannot command; how is it possible that the Law of Nature and Grace can differ? How can it be conceived, that God's Laws, whether internally or externally reveal'd, are not at all times the same, when the Author of them is, and has been, immutably the same for ever?

## C H A P. IX.

*Human Happiness being the ultimate Design and End of all Traditional, as well as Original Revelation, they must both prescribe the same Means, since those Means, which at one Time promote human Happiness, equally promote it at all Times.*

B. **S**HOULD I grant you, that *Natural and Reveal'd Religion, as they have the same Author, must have the same Ends; and that the ultimate End of all God's Laws, and consequently of all Religion, is human Happiness;* yet there are several things to be consider'd as subordinate Ends: And here, may not original and traditional Religion differ? since it is allowed by all, that how immutable soever these subordinate Ends are, yet the Means to promote these Ends are various and mutable.

A. YOUR allowing these Means to be various and mutable, supposes no such Means so prescrib'd in the Gospel; but that, agreeably to the Law of Nature, they are to be vary'd as best suits that End for which they were ordained. To imagine the contrary, is to make things, dependent on Circumstances, independent; things that are proper only under some Circumstances, necessary under all Circumstances; nay, to make Ends mutable, and Means immutable; and that these are to continue the same, though by Change of Circumstances they become prejudicial; nay, destructive to the End for which alone they were ordained. The more necessary any *End is*, there's the more Reason for People to be left at liberty to consider, in the vast Variety of Circumstances, and those too perpetually changing, what Means may be most proper for obtaining that End; since these having no Worth in themselves, can only be

be valued, according as they more or less conduce to the Purpose they were intended for; and where God does not interpose, it is incumbent on human Discretion, chiefly ordained for this End, to make such Alterations as the Reason of things requires.

DID not God always employ the most fit and most suitable Means, he would act contrary to the Rules prescribed him by his own unerring Reason; and so he would, did he not leave Men at liberty to use such Means, as their Reason, given for that Purpose, told them was fittest to be done, in all those Circumstances in which he had placed them; because that would be requiring of them a Conduct contrary to his own; and consequently, a Conduct highly irrational: And therefore to alter one's Conduct, as Circumstances alter, is not only an Act of the greatest Prudence and Judgment, but is consistent with the greatest Steadiness.

As far as divine Wisdom excels human, so far the divine Laws must excel human Laws in Clearness and Perspicuity; as well as other Perfections. Whatever is confus'd or perplex'd, can never come from the clear Fountain of all Knowledge, nor that which is obscure, from the Father of inexhaustible Light; and as far as you suppose God's Laws are not plain to any Part of Mankind, so far you derogate from the Perfections of those Laws, and the Wisdom, and the Goodness of the divine Legislator; who, since he has the framing of the Understanding of those to whom he dictates his Laws, can't but adapt one to the other. But how can we say, that infinite Wisdom speaks plainly to Mankind thro' all Generations, except we allow that his Commands extend not beyond moral Things; and that in all Matters of a mutable Nature, which can only be consider'd as Means, he obliges them to act according as they judge most proper for bringing about those Ends.

UPON any other *Hypothesis*, human Laws have vastly the Advantage of the divine; as being published in the Language the Subjects understand, in a plain simple Style, without any allegorical, metaphorical, hyperbolical, or other forc'd Way of Expression; and if Time discovers any Inconvenience, or any unforeseen Difficulties want to be clear'd up, the Legislature is ready at hand; or if in the mean time, any Doubts about interpreting the Laws arise, there are standing Judges (accountable to the Legislature) in whose Determinations People are to acquiesce. But Mankind are not to expect, that the divine Legislator will, from time to time, make any Change in his Laws, and communicate them to all Nations in the Languages they understand; nor can there be any Judges with a Power to oblige People by their Determinations; because such a Power being without any Appeal, is the same as a Power to make divine Laws; and consequently the only Tribunal God has erected here on Earth (distinct from that he has mediately appointed by Men for their mutual Defence) is every Man's own Conscience; which as it can't but tell him, that God is the Author of all things, so it must inform him, that whatever he finds himself obliged to do by the Circumstances he is in, he is obliged by God himself, who has dispos'd things in that Order, and plac'd him in those Circumstances. It is for want of observing this Rule, that the divine Writings are render'd so obscure; and the Infinity of Sermons, Notes, Comments and Paraphrases, which pretend to speak plainer than God himself, have increased this Obscurity. If whatever tends to the Honour of God, and Good of Man, is evident from the Light of Nature; whence comes all this Uncertainty, Perplexity, Doubts and Difficulties? Is it not chiefly owing to the denying People that Liberty, which God, out of his infinite Goodness, has allowed them by the Law of Nature; and hindring them from judging for themselves of the Means  
which



which best tend to promote this End ; and imposing on them, by the Terrors of temporal and eternal Punishment, such needless Speculations and useles Observances, as can't be consider'd either as Means or Ends ?

B. You know that Divines, tho' they can't deny what you say to be true in general ; yet they think there's an Exception as to Church-Matters, and that here Men are not permitted to use such Means as they themselves think best ; but such only as those, who set up to be their *Spiritual Governors*, shall appoint.

A. NOTHING can be more absurd, than to suppose God hath taken this Power from the People, who have an Interest to preserve Religion in its Purity (every Deviation from it being to their Prejudice) and placed it uncontrollably in the Hands of Men, who, having an Interest in corrupting it, do, generally speaking, so manage Matters, as if Religion was the Means, and their Power the End for which it was instituted. We do not find, that the *Mahometan* Clergy cause any Confusion or Disorder among the *Musselmens* ; and the *Pagan* Priests are scarce taken Notice of in Story, so little Mischief did they do ; while all *Church-History* is full of the vilest, and most pernicious Things perpetrated by *Christian* Priests. The Christian Morals, you must own, are too pure and plain to cause this Difference ; what then can it be imputed to, but that independent Power which those Priests usurp'd ; which, tho' they claimed it as derived from Heaven for promoting godly Discipline, has occasioned general Disorder and Confusion ? Endless have been the Quarrels ambitious Priests have had with Princes upon the Account of this Power, to the stopping of Justice, and Subversion of almost all Civil Polity : Nor have Ecclesiasticks been less embroil'd among themselves, each Set striving to engross a Power which can belong to no Mortal. And the Bishops, when they had no others to contest with,

have

have ever contended among themselves about *Superiority*, the *Rights of their Sees*, and the *Limits of their Jurisdictions*; and when their Choice depended on the People, they frequently, especially in their Contentions about the greater Sees, run things on to Blood and Slaughter: And I appeal to their own Historians, whether the Ecclesiasticks ever scrupled any Method to obtain this Power; and whenever they got it, whether an insupportable Tyranny over Body and Mind, with the utter Ruin of Religion, was not the Consequence? And whether it had not, where exercis'd to the Highth, more fatal Effects than all the Superstition of the *Gentiles*? Look the World round, you shall every where find Men more or less miserable, as they have been more or less debarr'd the Right of acting according to the best of their Understanding in Matters relating to Religion.

WHILE every Church, or Congregation of Christians, as in the Apostolical Days, chose and maintain'd their own Ministers, and order'd among themselves what requir'd a special Determination, no Inconveniencies happen'd; but as soon as this simple and natural Method was broke, and the Clergy were formed into a closely-united Body, with that Subordination and Dependence they had to one another, the Christian World was enslav'd, and Religion forc'd to give way to destructive Superstition.

WHICH could never have happen'd, if the Christians had observed these general Rules, obligatory by the Light of Nature, as well as the Gospel; and which are alike given to every Christian, and oblige one as well as another; such as, "Doing all things for the Honour of God, for Edification, for Order, for Decency; for fleeing false Teachers, Seducers, Deceivers; for avoiding Scandal, and offending weak Brethren, &c." And here since every one must judge for himself, and can't make over this Right to any other, must not all Church-Matters be manag'd by common Consent?

IN a Word, If we consider the infinite Variety of Circumstances ; the different Manners and Customs that prevail in different Places ; the Prejudices of the weak, ignorant, and superstitious ; and the Designs of ambitious Men ; there's nothing of a mutable Nature, if once esteem'd immutably fixed by God, but must sometimes become prejudicial to the End it was intended to promote ; especially in a Religion design'd to extend over the whole World, as well as to last to the End of it. There are but two Ways of avoiding this Inconvenience ; either to suppose that the Founder of this Religion will from time to time, himself ordain such Alterations in Things of a mutable Nature, as those Circumstances, which are different in different Places, do require ; or else, that he has left the Parties concern'd, to act in all Places according to Discretion in such mutable Matters.

*B.* You labour this Point ; but there are few of your Sentiment.

*A.* IF you mean Ecclesiasticks, perhaps, you are in the right ; tho' I am sure, I have the Church of *England* on my Side, if judicious *Hooker* may be allow'd to understand its Constitution, as well as the Nature of *Ecclesiastical Polity*. He, in the tenth Section of his Third Book, maintains this Proposition, that " Neither God being the Author of Laws, nor his committing them to Scripture, nor the Continuance of the End for which they were instituted, is Reason sufficient to prove they are unchangeable : " Where he admirably well distinguishes between Things in their own Nature immutable, and Matters of outward Order and Polity, which he supposes daily changeable ; and says, " The Nature of every Law must be judged by the End for which it was made ; and by the Aptness of the Thing therein prescribed to the same End. — When a Thing does cease to be available to the End which gave it Being, the Continuance of it must appear superfluous. — That which the Ne-  
" cessity

“ ceflity of fome fpecial Time doth caufe to be en-  
 “ joined, binds no longer than that Time ; but  
 “ does afterwards become free. Laws, tho’ both  
 “ ordained of God himfelf, and the Ends for which  
 “ they were ordained continuing, may notwith-  
 “ ftanding ceafe, if by Alteration of Time, or  
 “ Perfons, they are found infufficient to attain to  
 “ that End. In which Refpect why may we not  
 “ prefume, that God doth even call for fuch a  
 “ Change or Alteration, as the very Nature of the  
 “ Things themfelves doth make neceffary ? —  
 “ God never ordained any Thing which could be  
 “ better’d, yet many Things he hath, that have  
 “ been chang’d, and that for the better ; that which  
 “ fucceedeth as better now, when Change is requir’d  
 “ had been worfe, when that which is now chang’d  
 “ was intituted. — In this Cafe Men do not pre-  
 “ fume to change God’s Ordinance, but yield there-  
 “ unto, requiring itfelf to be chang’d.” And he ap-  
 “ plies this Reason honeftly, in faying, “ The beft  
 “ Way for *us* were to hold, even as they do, that  
 “ in the Scripture there muft needs be found fome  
 “ particular Form of Church-Polity, which God has  
 “ intituted, and which, for that very Caufe be-  
 “ longeth to all Churches, to all Times ; but with  
 “ any fuch partial Eye to refpect ourfelves, and by  
 “ Cunning to make thofe Things feem the trueft,  
 “ which are the fitteft to ferve our Purpose, is a  
 “ Thing we neither like, nor mean to follow.” And  
 let me add, that moft, if not all our Divines from  
 the *Reformation*, till the Time of the *Laudean* Fac-  
 tion, were in the fame Sentiments ; and from the Mu-  
 tability of fuch Things as are Means to an End,  
 prov’d there could be no particular Form of Church-  
 Polity eftablifh’d by divine Authority : And they  
 argu’d from the Example of good King *Hezekiah*,  
 who, without Regard to the falutiferous Virtue the  
*Brazen Serpent* once had, broke it to pieces when  
 perverted to a fuperftitious Ufe. And,

ALL, who believe *Means* in their own Nature, are mutable, must, if consistent with themselves, agree with Mr. *Hooker*: This is so very apparent, that nothing but Interest can make any one talk otherwise; therefore, I shall only quote the late Dean of *Canterbury*, who, in a Sermon preach'd before the University of *Cambridge*, and published at their Request, says, "That the very Temper, and Composition of the Scripture is such, as necessarily refers us to some other Rule; for this is a System of mix'd, and very different Duties, some of eternal and universal Obligation; others occasional and particular, limited to Times and Circumstances; and when these Occasions and Circumstances ceas'd, the Matter of the Command was lost; and the whole Reason and Force of it sunk of course: Now those Things being oftentimes deliver'd promiscuously, and in general Terms, Men must of necessity have recourse to some other Rule, to distinguish and guide them in making the just Difference between the one, and the other sort."

Serm. at the  
Commen. at  
*Cambr.* p. 14.

AND what other Rule is there, by which we can distinguish rightly in this important Matter, but what arises from the Things themselves; those which have an innate Worth and Goodness, are of an eternal and universal Obligation; others, which have no such Worth, can be consider'd only as Means occasionally accommodated to particular Times, Places, Persons, and Circumstances; which, of course, must cease to oblige, when they cease to conduce to the End for which they were appointed; or others become more conducive: And this will more fully appear, if we consider, as the above-mention'd Author observes, that "The Circumstances of human

Ib. p. 13.

"Life are infinite, and depend on a Multitude of Accidents not to be foreseen; and consequently not to be provided against. Hence Laws must run in general Terms, and sometimes the Intent of the Law is best fulfill'd by running contrary to the Letter; and therefore, Reason and Ho-

“ neſty muſt guide us to the Fitneſs of the Thing,  
 “ and a great Scope muſt be left to Equity and  
 “ Diſcretion.” And ſurely, we muſt not ſuppoſe  
 that Reaſon, Honesty, Equity, and Diſcretion will  
 teach us one thing, and the Traditional Law ano-  
 ther; eſpecially conſidering that in all God’s Laws,  
 ’tis the Reaſon of the Law that makes it Law.

B. BY the Reaſoning of ſuch Divines, I can’t  
 perceive the Uſe of any occaſional Commands, ſince  
 they ſuppoſe theſe can’t oblige People longer than  
 they judge it fit to obſerve them; otherwiſe there  
 could be no Difference between occaſional and eter-  
 nal Precepts; and what they judge fit and proper  
 to be done, they are obliged to do without any oc-  
 caſional Commands; ſo that according to them,  
 whether there are, or are not any occaſional Com-  
 mands, human Diſcretion is left at liberty to judge  
 what is fit, or not fit to be obſerv’d; which, I think,  
 is ſuppoſing all ſuch Commands needleſs: Yet the  
 Authors you quote ſuppoſe, contrary to your *Hypo-  
 theſis*, there have been ſuch Commands; particu-  
 larly in relation to the *Jewiſh* State.

A. THE *Jews* taking the Story to be literally  
 true, being upon their coming out of *Egypt* a free  
 People, had a Right by the Law of Nature to  
 chooſe what Government and Governor they pleas’d;  
 and God would not act ſo inconſiſtent a Part, as to  
 deprive them of any of theſe Rights he had given  
 them by the Law of Nature; and therefore did not  
 take upon him the civil Adminiſtration of their  
 Affairs, till he had obtained their expreſs Conſent;  
 ſo that here he acted not as Governor of the Uni-  
 verſe, but by a Power derived from the People by  
 virtue of the *Horeb* Covenant; and the Preſumption is,  
 that where there is no ſuch Contract, God will not  
 exerciſe ſuch a Power; eſpecially conſidering that  
 tho’ the *Jews* rejected God himſelf from reigning  
 over them, and were for chooſing a new King, yet  
 he bids *Samuel* thrice in the ſame Chapter, to *hearken  
 to the Voice of the People*; but of this, and all other Ar-  
 guments of this nature, more fully hereafter. B.

B. THE Reasons you have given do not fully satisfy me, but that some Things may be required by God as Governor of the Universe, which are meerly positive; nay, that *Rites* and *Ceremonies*, *Signs*, or *Symbols* might be arbitrarily enjoin'd, and so intermixed with Matters of Morality, as to bind the Consciences of all Men at all Times; and therefore, if you please, we will review this Point.

A. WITH all my Heart; for this alone is the Point that must decide the Question, *Whether Natural and Reveal'd Religion do really differ?* As for *Natural Religion*, that, as you well know, takes in all those Duties which flow from the Reason and Nature of Things, and the Relations we stand in to God and our Fellow-Creatures; and consequently was there an instituted Religion which differs from that of Nature, its Precepts must be arbitrary, as not founded on the Nature and Reason of Things, but depending on meer Will and Pleasure; otherwise it would be the same with Natural Religion: And tho' 'tis difficult to prove a Negative, yet I think, I can fully shew you, by adding other Reasons to those already mention'd, that God, the great Governor of the Universe, can't give Mankind any such Precepts; and consequently, that *Natural*, and *Reveal'd Religion* only differ in the Manner of their being deliver'd.

## C H A P. X.

*God does not act arbitrarily, or interpose unnecessarily; but leaves those Things, that can only be consider'd as Means (and as such are in their own Nature mutable) to human Discretion, to determine as it thinks most conducing to those Things, which are in their own Nature obligatory.*

**I**N order to settle this Point, 'tis necessary to see how far this Natural Law extends; it not only commands that *Evil Doers should be punish'd*, but that Men, according to the different Circumstances they are under, should take the most proper Methods for doing it, and vary as Exigences require; so it not only requires that Justice should be done Men as to their several Claims, but that the readiest, and most effectual Way of doing it should be taken; and the same may be said of all other Instances of this nature. If God interposes further, and prescribes a particular Way of doing these Things, from which Men at no Time, or upon no account ought to vary; he not only interposes unnecessarily, but to the Prejudice of the End for which he thus interposes. And as to Matters relating to the Worship of God, it is the Voice of Nature that God should be publickly worship'd; and that Men should do this in the most convenient Way, by appointing amongst themselves Time, Place, Persons, and all other Things which require special Determination: And, certainly, there's as much Reason that Things of this nature should be left to human Discretion, as any other whatever; considering the different Conditions and Circumstances which Christians may be under, and the Handle designing Men might otherwise take, to impose upon



upon weak Persons what they please, on pretence of Divine Right.

THIS being premis'd, the sole Question is, Whether God, who, for many Ages, did not command, or forbid any thing, but what was moral and immoral; nor yet does so to the greatest Part of Mankind, has, in some Places and in some Cases, broke into the Rule of his own Conduct, and issu'd out certain Commands which have no Foundation in Reason; by obliging Men to observe such things, as would not oblige were they not impos'd; or if the Imposition was taken off, would immediately return to their primitive Indifference?

To suppose, then, such Commands, is it not to suppose God acts arbitrarily, and commands for commanding-sake; and that too under the severest Penalties? Can such Commands be the Effects of infinite Wisdom and Goodness? Or, if there be no Reason, why a thing should be done at all; or if to be done, why it should be done rather this Way than that Way; or why Men should not vary Means, as they judge most conducive to the End, for whose sake alone they were design'd: Can there be any Cause, why a Being, which never acts unnecessarily, and whose Commands are all the Effects of infinite Wisdom, should interpose? 'Tis so far from being necessary for God to interpose in such Cases as these, that it only serves for a Handle to human Imposition; for there's nothing so indifferent, but may, if believ'd to have Divinity stamp'd upon it, be perverted by designing Men to the vilest Purposes; and in truth, there's nothing of this nature introduc'd into Religion, but what, I am afraid, has been some Time or other so perverted.

ONE would think it a thing wholly indifferent who sprinkl'd an Infant, or from whose Hands we receiv'd the Sacramental Bread and Wine, as long as the Rules of Decency and Order were observ'd; yet has there not been a Set of Men, who, on pretence of a Divine Right to do those things, have

made the Christian World believe, they have a discretionary Power to bestow, or with-hold the Means of Salvation ; and, by virtue of this Claim, have over-aw'd them into slavish Obedience, and a blind Submission.

THERE'S no Good or Hurt in drawing two Lines cross one another, and yet what have not Priests made the poor People believe they could do by virtue of it ; as *Curing Diseases, driving away Devils,* and doing an Infinity of other Miracles ? And in short, they have made it one of the chief Engines of their Craft, for the better carrying on of which, they persuaded the People to adore the *Cross*, miraculously found after it had been bury'd about three hundred Years ; and the Wood of it has since so wonderfully encreas'd, as to be able to make innumerable Crosses, whereof each Bit contain'd the Virtue of the whole.

CONFESSION of *Sins* to honest and judicious Persons might be of Service, by the prudent Advice they gave how to avoid the like Sins for the future ; but the *Papish Priests* claiming a Power by Divine Right to *absolve People upon Confession*, have been let into the Secrets of all Persons, and by virtue of it have govern'd all Things ; and have made the *Sins of the People*, not to be pardoned but on their Terms, the *Harvest of the Priests*.

AMONG the *Jews*, the *Anointing with Oil* was look'd on as very medicinal, and generally used in Sickness ; they pray'd, and anointed the Sick in hopes of a Recovery : But tho' the Anointing in colder Climates is thought of no Use in Sickness, yet the *Papists* have built a most superstitious Practice on it, which, for the greater Reverence, they call the Sacrament of *Extreme Unction* ; and which their Priests are not to administer as long as there's Hopes of Recovery.

WHAT can be more indifferent, or harmless, consider'd in themselves, than the Ceremonies of *Oiling the Heads of Kings, and laying Hands on the Heads of Elders or Presbyters* ; and yet what absurd Pretences

tences have not Priests, who have the Art of turning the most indifferent Things to a superstitious Use, drawn from thence to the Prejudice of both Church and State ?

IT was an antient Custom among the *Hebrews*, when they pray'd for a Blessing on any Person, to lay Hands on him : Thus *Jacob* laid his Hands on the Sons of *Joseph*, and *Moses* on *Joshua*. And among the primitive Christians, when any Congregation chose their Minister, they pray'd that he might duly execute that Office, to which they had ordain'd him ; and in praying, he that was the Mouth of the Congregation (the whole Assembly not being able conveniently to do it) laid his Hands on him.

THIS gave a Rise to the Clergy to pretend, that their *Laying on of Hands upon a Man*, was necessary to qualify him for the Ministry ; they by that Act having given him the Holy Ghost, and an indelible Character with certain spiritual Powers ; so that the People must either be without Ministers, or take one they had thus ordain'd, however unqualify'd they might think him.

IT's a Thing indifferent in itself, whether *Men meet to pray in this, or that Place* ; but the Christians out of a superstitious Reverence to the Reliques of the Martyrs, usually praying at their Tombs, came by degrees, as their Reverence for them increas'd, to offer their Prayers to them ; which was a great Change from their praying for them among the other Dead, as was in the first Ages a general Practice ; and which, some of our High-Church Priests are zealous for restoring, and pretend we have better Proof for its being a Catholick Doctrine, than for the Authority of several Books of Scripture.

THE primitive Christians frequently consulting their Clergy in relation to Marriages, gave them a Handle to set up for Judges by divine Right in all matrimonial Causes ; and many prohibited Degrees as well as spiritual Relations, such as *God-fathers* and *God-mothers*; &c. were introduc'd, to give the Clergy

frequent Opportunities to grant, at their own Price, Dispensations; by which Means the Succession and Inheritance not only of private Estates, but of Principalities and Kingdoms, in a great Measure depended on them: And as an Appendix to this spiritual Usurpation, they hook'd in the Cognizance of all *Carnal Causes*, *Incontinence* in single as well as married Persons. Thus you see, how easily Mankind may be abus'd, where 'tis believ'd, that Religion can require any thing inconsistent with the Rights and Liberties God has allow'd them by the Law of Nature; and how dangerous 'tis to trust any Thing with Men, who pretend a Divine Right to whatever they can lay hands on. To give an Instance how severely this Divine Right was exerted by the Pope, as Head of the Church: "*Robert*, King of *France*, having marry'd a Lady of the House of *Burgundy*, a Match very advantageous to the State, and tho' he had the Consent of his Bishops, yet he, and the whole Kingdom were excommunicated by the Pope, because this Lady was in the fourth Degree of Consanguinity, and the King had been God-father to the Child by a former Husband; which so distress'd the poor King, that all his Servants, except three or four, deserted him; and no one would touch the Victuals which came from his Table, which were, therefore, thrown to the Dogs."

I shall give one Instance more: Men are oblig'd to avoid as much as conveniently they can the infectious Conversation of immoral Persons; and it was, no doubt, at first a Duty in a special Manner, for Christians, compass'd round with *Pagans*, to observe this Rule in relation to their own Body, and agree to shun any such Person as one who had his *Father's Wife*; and tho' this is no more than what is daily done in private Societies, and was easily practis'd amongst Christians when they were but few; yet because the Minister might collect the Votes, and declare the Opinion of the Assembly, the Clergy by degrees

*Puffend. Intr.*  
to *History*,  
p. 170.

degrees not only excluded the Congregation from this their natural Right ; but claim'd, as given them by Heaven, a Power to excommunicate whom they please, even their own Sovereign ; and that too for things relating to their own Interest : And they forbid not only their own Congregations, but all Christians, on peril of their Salvation, to *avoid all Commerce with the Excommunicated*, and ordain'd, that *if he did not in forty Days give the Church Satisfaction, the Magistrate was bound to imprison him, and confiscate his Estate* : And the Princes, instead of resenting these Incroachments on their Power, had so little Sense, as to pass this into a Law ; not imagining this Treatment would reach them. But they soon felt, that the Church claim'd the same Power over them as over other Christians ; looking on all to be alike subject to their spiritual Power. And accordingly Kings were often excommunicated, their Subjects absolv'd of their Oaths of Allegiance, and their Dominions given to more orthodox Princes to be held of the Church ; which, no doubt, was in a flourishing Condition, when she, as often as her Interest requir'd it, absolv'd Princes of their Oaths to their Subjects, and Subjects of theirs to their Sovereigns ; and by virtue of her spiritual Power, dispos'd, as she thought fit, of Mens Estates, Honours, and even Lives. *What has been, may be !* And in all probability would be, were the Clergy as united among themselves as formerly.

In a word, there's nothing in itself so indifferent, either as to Matter or Manner, but if it be engrafted into Religion, and monopoliz'd by the Priests, may endanger the Substance of it : This has been plainly shewn by those Divines, who, at the *Reformation*, and since, have argu'd against all Impositions ; they have prov'd that most of the Corruptions of *Popery* began at some Rites, which seem'd at first very innocent ; but were afterwards abus'd to Superstition and Idolatry, and swell'd up to that Bulk as to oppress, and stifle true Religion  
with

with their Number and Weight. And, indeed, there's no Sect, but complains how superstitiously Rites and Ceremonies are us'd by all, except themselves; and since I am defending the Liberties given by God to Mankind, and which, without Ingratitude to the Donor, as well as Injury to ourselves, we can't give up; I do not doubt but you will hear me with Patience, because if I prove my Point, I shall, it may be hop'd, in some measure put an End to those otherwise endless Disputes, which divide, and distract the Christian World.

WHATSOEVER is in itself indifferent, whether as to Matter or Manner, must be so to an All-wise Being, who judges of Things as they are; and for the same Reason that he commands Things which are good, and forbids those which are evil, he leaves Men at Liberty in all things indifferent; and 'tis in these only, that our Liberty of acting as we please consists.

THINGS, which are of no Value in themselves, can be no Motives to an All-wise Being to punish us; or to clog our Happiness with any such needless Observances: And consequently, Men, as far as they assert our future Happiness, or any Part of it, to depend on such Things, do so far derogate from the Wisdom and Goodness of God; and from those Motives we have to love, and honour him. The arbitrary Commands of a Tyrant may be obey'd out of Fear, but just and rational Laws alone can move the Affection of rational Creatures.

Is it reasonable to believe, an All-wise and Gracious Being is so fond of indifferent Things, that he subjects his Children to suffer even this Life on their account? And yet you must own, if he has made these the Subject of his Commands, they ought to suffer every thing rather than not observe them; but if God will not have men punished in this World, and much less in the next, upon the account of Things indifferent; they can never be the Subject of his Commands.

THO' a judicious Author supposes a Form of divine Worship, in itself indifferent, may be requir'd by God for the sake of Peace and Unity; yet at the same time he contends, that "God does not expect  
 " we should comply with that Form, if it brings Mi- Chub's Sup-  
pl. to his  
Prev. Quest.  
27, 28.  
 " sery to ourselves, or Confusion to the Publick;  
 " because that would be preferring a thing in itself  
 " indifferent to the Happiness of our Lives, and the  
 " Peace of the Publick; and that to suppose the  
 " contrary, would be breaking in upon the spot-  
 " less Character of our heavenly Father, by repre-  
 " senting him not as a wise and good, but a peevish  
 " and ill-natur'd Being; who takes an unreason-  
 " able Resentment at the prudent Conduct of his  
 " Children." But will not this as strongly infer, that God could not command the observing such Things, which, if observed, would destroy his moral Character; and which, instead of preserving Peace and Unity; would bring Misery on private Persons, and Confusion on the Publick? Whereas these Blessings of Peace and Unity can never be obtained by a forc'd Conformity, or by any other Method than allowing People their natural Liberty in all such Matters. And,

If Religion consists in imitating the Perfections of God, what Perfection of God do the Superstitious imitate, when they contend, as *pro Aris & Focis*, for Forms, Rites, and Ceremonies?

IF in Heaven there's no room for arbitrary Precepts, to incumber that moral Goodness which is the sole Business of the Blessed above; what could hinder us, did we but make that too our only Concern here, from enjoying a Sort of Heaven on Earth, free from all tyrannical Impositions, and endless Quarrels about indifferent Things?

IN a Word, if there's nothing in a Religion which comes from God, but what is most excellent; what room can there be for indifferent Things? Can such Things as have no Worth or Excellency, contribute to the Worth, or Excellency of Religion?

gion? If they could, the more they abounded, the more excellent would Religion be; which yet is so far from being true, even in the Opinion of those who contend for such Things, that even they, when they are to shew the Excellency of the Christian Religion, recommend it for having but few of those Things; which is supposing it loses of its Excellency in proportion to what it has of this nature; and that they have a higher and more honourable Conception of it, who believe it has no such Mixture to spoil its Beauty, and destroy its Simplicity; but that, like its Author, 'tis wholly spiritual, and as such, worthy its divine Original.

ONE would think these Men must appear ridiculous to themselves, who, tho' they recommend the Christian Religion, as purely spiritual, in opposition to the carnal Religion of the *Jews*; yet at the same Time contend it has some Ordinances as little spiritual as any the *Jews* had; and put a greater Strefs upon them, than ever the *Jews* did on any of theirs.

IF God's Works shew infinite Wisdom, there's no reason to imagine but his Laws do the same; but then they must be moral Laws, for these alone can speak his Wisdom as plainly to all Mankind as his Works do: They both alike have the Character of infinite Wisdom impress'd on them, and both alike discover their divine Original.

IF all God's Laws are of a piece, must they not all be built on the eternal Reason of Things? Nay, if that be sufficient to determine him in one Case, it must be so in all. But on the contrary, if God acts arbitrarily in any one Instance, he must, or at least may, do so in all; since no foreign Cause, nothing but his Nature, could make him act so. But God forbid we should imagine, that any of his Laws have not impress'd on them the same Character of the highest Wisdom and Goodness, that is impress'd on the whole Frame of Nature, and on every Part of it.



'TIS impossible Men should have any just Idea of the Perfections of God, who think that the Dictates of infinite Wisdom do not carry their own Evidence with them; or are not by their own innate Worth discoverable to all Mankind. Were it not so, how could they be distinguish'd from the uncertain Opinions of weak and fallible Men; not to say the Whimsies and Reveries of crack'd-brain'd Enthusiasts? How shocking is it to hear Divines cry, that, " Certain Things, were they not to be ador'd as Mysteries, ought to be exploded as Absurdities! "

*South's Sermon.*  
Vol. 3. p. 316.

IF we suppose any arbitrary Commands in the Gospel, we place Christians in a worse Condition than those under no Law but that of Nature, which requires nothing but what is moral; and consequently the greatest Part of Mankind, who are to be judg'd by the Law they know, and not by the Law they do not know, are, on this Supposition, in a better Condition as to the next World than Christians, because they do not hazard the Favour of God by any Mistakes, or Omissions in such Matters.

To suppose some Men, who, tho' they exactly obey the Law of Nature, may yet be punish'd, even eternally, for not obeying another Law besides, would be to make God to deal infinitely less mercifully with them, than with those that have no other Law: And yet in this miserable Case are all Christians involv'd, if the Gospel requires such Things as the Law of Nature does not; and that too under the severest Penalties. And I may add, that even as to temporal Happiness, they who think Original and Traditional Revelation don't differ, are in the better State, since they must delight in their Duty, as having nothing requir'd of them, but what they must evidently see tends to their Good, and consequently are free (no small Happiness) from all panick Fears; while they, who believe there are Things merely positive in Religion,

ligion, of which Reason affords no Light how they are to be perform'd, or even what they are, must lie under endless Doubts and Fears; and according to the Measure of their Superstition, be wrought upon by designing Men to hate, damn, and persecute one another about such Observances, as we see is actually done every where by the different Sects, who are so absurd as to believe a God of infinite Wisdom and Goodness, can give his Creatures arbitrary Commands.

WHEN Men are at a loss to know, from the Nature and Reason of Things, what to believe, and what to practise, and see every where endless Divisions, they must be in continual Dread of such an arbitrary Being, as their unmanly and irrational Fears represent God to be. *Plutarch* makes this Difference between the Atheist and Superstitious; " One believes no Deity, the other wishes there was none; if he believes, 'tis against his Will; " mistrust he dares not, or call his Thoughts in " Question; but could he, with Security, at once " throw off that oppressive Fear, which, like the " Rock of *Tantalus*, impends, and presses over him, " he would with equal Joy spurn his enslaving " Thought, and embrace the Atheist's State and " Opinion, as the happiest Deliverance. Atheists " are free of Superstition, but the Superstitious are " in Will and Inclination Atheists, tho' impotent " in Thought, and unable to believe of the Divine " Being as they willingly would." And I am afraid, this now is the Case with most of these superstitious Persons, who represent God as a most cruel Being, damning Men to Eternity, even for mistaken Opinions, or about such Things too, as have no Foundation in Reason. And perhaps, the endeavouring to drown all Thoughts of such a tyrannical Deity, is no small Occasion of that gross Immorality which does every where prevail, and must ever do so where Superstition abounds.

Treatise of  
Superstition.  
Tom. 2. p.  
170. E. F.

'TIS Mens not being govern'd by the Reason of Things, which makes them divide about Trifles, and lay the utmost Strefs on such Things as wise Men would be asham'd of. 'Tis on the account of these, that the different Sects set the highest Value on themselves, and think they are the peculiar Favourites of Heaven, while they condemn all others for Opinions and Practices not more senseless than those themselves look on as Essentials. And were it not in so serious a Matter, it would be diverting to see how they damn one another, for placing Religion in whimsical Notions, and fantastical Rites and Ceremonies, without making the least Reflection on what they themselves are doing.

WHAT Reason has a *Papist*, for instance, to laugh at an *Indian*, who thinks it contributes to his future Happiness to die with a Cow's Tail in his Hands, while he lays as great a Strefs on rubbing a dying Man with Oil? Has not the *Indian* as much Right to moralize this Action of his, and shew its Significancy, as the *Papist* any of his mystick Rites, or *Hocus Pocus* Tricks? which have as little Foundation in the Nature or Reason of Things.

SUPPOSE one came from the furthestmost Parts of the Earth, vouching it as a divine Revelation, that the Nails of our Children are, at a certain time, to be par'd by certain Persons with certain Ceremonies, in order to make them capable of Salvation; and that such as died before their Nails were thus par'd, remain'd for ever in a very wretched State; would not every one here, without examining into this Man's Mission, or without regard to those spiritual Things signified under paring of Nails, reject this Belief as unworthy of having God for its Author? And yet, as absurd as this may appear to us, the superstitious *Mahometans* think they are oblig'd to have their Nails par'd during their Sickness, if they apprehend it to be mortal.

*Hide's Preface to Bobovius on the Turkish Liturgy, &c.*

THEY must be very little acquainted with the Nature of a spiritual Religion, who think it can any ways consist in not going to rest when Men are sleepy; not eating, when they are hungry; or abstaining from, or using certain Meats and Drinks at stated Times; and in Washings, Sprinklings, and Lustrations by Blood or Water: And yet, these things were in so high a Repute with most of the *Pagans*, that they thought they would atone for the greatest Immoralities.

Ovid Fast.  
l. 2, 45.

*Ab nimium faciles, qui tristia crimina cædis  
Flumineâ tolli posse putetis aquâ.*

THE *Taurobolia*, or the bedawbing a Man in a Pit, all over with the Blood of a Bull, which fell on him thorough Holes made in the Plank on which the Beast was slain, was believ'd to wash away all his Sins, and he, happy Man, regenerated to Eternity; provided that once in twenty Years he renewed this mystical Regeneration: And not only great Persons, but whole Cities might perform this religious Ceremony by Deputation, and receive the Benefit. A short Account of this, you meet with in *Fontenelle's* History of Oracles, taken from *Prudentius*.

Peri Stephanon de Romano, p. 135, 136. See Salmat. ad Helio-gab. c. 7.

THO' the Heathen Priests made the People believe they could be cleansed from their Sins by Sacrifices, and other external Things, yet it was as themselves had the Application of them; they were the Persons to whom the Gods had committed the *Religious Rubbing Brushes*; tho' the Men of Sense among the *Pagans* were not thus to be impos'd on; which made *Tully* say,

De Leg. l. 2.  
c. 10.

*Animi labes nec diuturnitate evanescere, nec amnis ullis elui potest.*

Institut. l. 3.  
c. 26 n. 9.

*Lactantius* seems to be of another Opinion, in saying, "Give us one that is unjust, foolish, and a  
" Sinner;

“ Sinner ; and in one Instance he shall be just, prudent, and innocent ; with one Laver all his Wickedness shall be wash’d away.”

IN a Word, while Priests of what Denomination soever pretend Authority to absolve Sinners, and the People are so void of Sense as to rely on their Absolution ; natural Religion, which puts the whole stress on internal Penitence and true Virtue in the Soul, will be despis’d ; as allowing no *Succedaneum*, no commuting, or compounding with Heaven. And, indeed, all such commuting, or compounding Powers, where they are suppos’d to be lodg’d, serve as a Bank of Credit for the Transgressors ; and are a mighty Incitement to all manner of Villany : And in former Days, the great Men, after having oppress’d and plunder’d People, thought to compound with Heaven, by letting the Clergy share in the Spoil ; and ’tis on this Notion so many Abbies and Monasteries have been founded ; and the Superstitious, as long as they are persuad’d there is any Virtue in Externals, will, as we see by constant Experience, chiefly depend on such things. And I may add,

THIS Doctrine, that one Man may not only merit for himself by doing more than God requires of him ; but that the Merit of such Actions may be transferr’d to another, who has done less than God requires of him, has been a great Incitement to Wickedness : And those who have acted a most immoral Part during their whole Lives, have believ’d they might comfortably rely on it ; nothing being thought too hard for Merit and Mediation.

THERE are none, I think, now so absurd, as in Words to maintain, that there is the least Variableness in God, much less that he is an arbitrary Being, commanding things for commanding-sake ; yet are not they, who assert there are merely positive things in the Christian Religion, guilty of this Absurdity ; in supposing that God, who had the Goodness for a long time, not to confine Mankind to

any indifferent Things ; yet at length chang'd his Mind, and repented of his great Goodness ; and arbitrarily depriv'd, they will not say, all Mankind, but no small Number of this Liberty ; and requir'd of them the Belief of certain useles Speculations, and the Practice of certain indifferent Things on the severest Penalties ? And when they lament that the Christian World, even from the earliest Days, has been in perpetual Broils about such Things, do they not suppose that God can give arbitrary Commands, and that those Commands are involv'd in great Obscurity ? Whereas, if merely positive Things were requir'd, those, not being like Matters of Morality, discoverable by their own Light, would be made as plain as infinite Wisdom could render them ; and to prevent their being perverted to serve ill Purposes, we should have been punctually told when, how, and by whom, those arbitrary Things should be apply'd, as well as that they were to be obligatory for ever.

*B.* IF God has reveal'd any thing in a way liable to be mistaken, he can't be displeas'd with sincere People for mistaking it.

*A.* THAT'S very true, but certainly, the End of God's giving any Precepts, was not to deliver them so obscurely that People might be faultless if they mistook ; but make 'em so plain that they could not well mistake : And this is agreeable to infinite Wisdom directed by infinite Goodness, which, certainly, will give us equal Degrees of Evidence for religious Truths, which so much concern us, as it has done for Truths of less importance.

FOR my Part, I cannot help being of the Sentiments of a learned Divine, who after having prov'd at large, that morality is capable of Demonstration, concludes with saying, “ I shall only here repeat, “ that Man being a reasonable Agent, Reason is the “ Law and Rule of his Actions ; there's no Truth “ in the *Mathematicks* more clear, and incontestable “ than This. Now, 'tis as easy for him, when he “ examines

“ examines his Actions by this Rule, to see whether they agree together, as to know when two Lines are compar’d, whether they are of the same, or a different Length. — Why should Demonstration then be confin’d only to Numbers and Figures? — Nay, if we argue from the Importance of Morality, it will be found much more agreeable to the Goodness of God, who gave us our intellectual Faculties, that the Truths which are of the greatest Concern to us, should, if we make a due Use of those Faculties, admit of the greatest Evidence.” I think, I need only add, that was there any thing but Morality necessary to constitute true Religion; we might be certain that the Goodness of God would give us a Demonstration for it, equal to that he has given us for Morality. But,

If there are new things which are not moral in Religion, does not that suppose a Change of Mind in God; and then, where will you stop? For if Changeableness was not a Perfection, it would not be in him; and if all his Perfections are infinite, must not this be so too? And is not it as reasonable to suppose, he may command some indifferent things To-day, and others To-morrow; or some in this Part of the World, and some in another; as at first to command moral, and then superadd indifferent things? If indifferent things can contribute to the Perfection of Revelation, there may be endless Revelations; and the last always more perfect, as having new indifferent things. It was not about things of a moral Nature, that there were such Divisions in the primitive Times, and that *Montanism* spread itself over a great Part of the Christian World; the Followers of *Montanus*, as *Eusebius* writes, boasting that he was the Paraclete, and that *Priscilla* and *Maximilla* his Companions, were his Prophetesses? And *Tertullian*, as is own’d by the Translator of his Apology, says, “ That the Law, and the Prophets were

Ecc. Hist. 1.5.

c. 14.

Reeve's Prelim. Dif. to Tert. Apol. p. 149

as it were, the Youth ; but that there was no com-  
 " pleat Perfection to be found, but in the Instruc-  
 " tion of the Holy Ghost, who spake by *Monta-*  
 " *nus.*" But to make some Apology for his laps'd  
 Father, he says, " The Arch-Heretick *Montanus*  
 " supported the Character of a most holy, mortifi-  
 " fied, and extraordinary Person for a considerable  
 " time ; the World rung with the Visions and Pro-  
 " phecies of him, and his two Damsels ; and the  
 " Face of Severity and Saintship consecrated their  
 " Reveries, and made real Possession pass for In-  
 " spiration. — The Churches of *Pbrygia*, and  
 " afterwards other Churches, divided upon the ac-  
 " count of these new Revelations ; and even the very  
 " Bishop of *Rome* himself for some time espous'd  
 " the Vanity, and made much of the Impostor."  
 And had he continu'd to do so, it might, perhaps,  
 have obtained ; since we find the Christians in the  
 primitive Times came intirely into a more gross Im-  
 posture, and had Faith for the most palpable For-  
 gery of the *Sybilline* Oracles being writ by real Pro-  
 phetesses under divine Inspirations. And the whole  
 Christian World for more than the two first Centu-  
 ries believ'd the *Millenarian* Heresy, as it is now  
 call'd ; for which, indeed, they pretended other  
 Proofs than the divine Authority of the *Sybilis*. And  
 there has scarce been an Age since, but where some  
 such Attempt has been made, and that of *Popery*,  
 which is the grossest Attempt on the Credulity of  
 Mankind succeeded ; tho' the *Monks* in the twelfth  
 Century were not satisfi'd even with that ; and  
 therefore, endeavour'd to introduce a new Gospel,  
 call'd *Evangelium aeternum*, or the *Gospel of the Holy*  
*Ghost* ; and affirm'd, that this Gospel of the Spirit  
 excell'd that of Christ's, as much as the Light of  
 the Sun does that of the Moon.

*Uffer de Chriſt.*  
*Eccleſ. Suc-*  
*ceſſione & Sta-*  
*tu. l. 9. Sect.*  
 2.

IN short, to this Belief, that there may be things  
 in Religion not founded on Nature and Reason, and  
 that these may be reserv'd for this, or that Period of  
 Time, are owing all the Visions and Reveries among  
 the



the *Papists*, and other Enthusiastick Christians; and upon this absurd Notion is founded the most spreading Religion of *Mahomet*, who pretended to be the Paraclete promis'd by Jesus to compleat and perfect all things: And,

IN a word, to this Belief are owing all the false Revelations that ever were in the World; and except we allow there are certain Tests flowing from the Nature of things, whereby the meanest Capacities may distinguish Truth from Falshood, we shall for ever be liable to be impos'd on by Madmen, as well as Impostors.

IF God can command some things arbitrarily, we can't be certain, but that he may command all things so; for tho' some Commands should relate to things in their own nature good, yet how can we know that an arbitrary Being commands them for this Reason; and, consequently, since an arbitrary Will may change each Moment, we can never be certain of the Will of such a Being. And,

To suppose that God by the Law of Nature leaves Men at liberty in all indifferent things, and yet, by a positive Law, restrains this Liberty in certain Parts and Ages of the World; is to suppose God determines one way by immediate, and another way by mediate Revelation; both Laws too subsisting at the same time.

*B.* WE say that the Law of Nature, however immutable as to Good and Evil, has enjoin'd nothing in relation to indifferent things; so that there's a large Field, in which all Legislators, human as well as divine, may exert their Power.

*A.* IT's true, the Law of Nature leaves Men at liberty to act as they please in all indifferent Matters; and if any traditional Law abridges this Liberty, so far 'tis contrary to that of Nature, and invades those Rights which Nature and its Author has given Mankind.

HUMAN Legislators are so far from having a Right to deprive their Subjects of this Liberty, that their main End in submitting to Government is, to be protected in acting as they think fit in all such Cases, where no one is injur'd; and herein the whole of human Liberty consists, the contrary being a State of meer Vassalage; and Men are more or less miserable, according as they are more or less depriv'd of this Liberty; especially in Matters of mere Religion, wherein they ought to be most free.

To suppose God has *in these last Days*, as they are call'd in Scripture, depriv'd any part of Mankind of that Liberty which before was granted to all, would be to make him act unreasonably; since all those Reasons which obliged him to command good, or forbid evil things, must wholly cease in relation to a Subject, which by being indifferent partakes of neither; and was there any reason to deprive Men of their Liberty in indifferent things, they would then cease to be indifferent. On the contrary, the same Reasons which oblige him to interpose in things, whose Nature is either good or evil, forbids it in indifferent things; since Mens Happiness depends on their Liberty in all such things. Whatever is unreasonable for God to do, is contrary to the eternal Law of his Nature; and consequently, to deprive Men in any of these Cases, is to make the Dictates of his Nature, and his revealed Will to clash.

In short, the Law of Nature either is, or is not, a perfect Law; if the first, 'tis not capable of Additions; if the last, does it not argue want of Wisdom in the Legislator, in first enacting such an imperfect Law, and then in letting it continue thus imperfect from Age to Age; and at last thinking to make it absolutely perfect by adding some meerly positive and arbitrary Precepts. To what End does God continually impress on Christians as well as others this Law of Nature; since that was needless; had they another more perfect, and more plainly reveal'd?

IF Men have been at all times oblig'd to avoid Superstition, and embrace True Religion, there must have been, at all times, sufficient Marks of Distinction, which could not arise from their having different Objects, since God is the Object of both, but from the having different Notions of him and his Conduct: Nay, allowing that the Light of Nature was sufficient to teach Men, that True Religion consists in entertaining such Notions of God as are worthy of him, and Superstition in such as are unworthy of him; yet that alone would not enable Men, when they came to Particulars, to distinguish one from the other: And, therefore, the same Light of Nature must teach them what Notions are worthy, and what unworthy of having God for their Author. But how can there be such Marks flowing from the Nature of Religion and Superstition, if what is Superstition by the Light of Nature, can, notwithstanding these Marks, be made a part of Religion by Revelation?

IF he, who resembles God most, is like to understand him best, is it not “because, as Bishop *Tillotson* observes, he finds these Perfections in some measure in himself, which he contemplates in the divine Nature; and nothing gives a Man so sure a Notion of things as Practise and Experience; every good Man is in some degree Partaker of the divine Nature, and feels that in himself, which he conceives to be in God; so that this Man does experience what others do but talk of; he sees the Image of God in himself, and is able to discourse of him from an inward sense and feeling of his Excellency.” But this would not be just Arguing, if God was an arbitrary Being, and could command his Creatures things which carried no Perfection or Goodness with them.

IN a word, if the Essence of Religion consists in believing and practising such things, as have a real Worth and Excellency in them, tending to the Honour of God, and the Good of Men; the Essence of Superstition, which is its Opposite, must consist in

imagining to propitiate an all-wise and gracious Being by such things as have no Worth or excellency in them; such as may as well not be done, as done; or as well done this, as that way. *Superstition* is defin'd by Dr. *H. More* (and all our Divines speak to the same Purpose) *to be that Impiety, by which a Man considers God to be so light or passionate, as with trivial things, either to be pleas'd, or else mov'd to Wrath.* Can any thing be more trivial, than useless Speculations, and unnecessary Observations?

How numerous soever Christians may be, tho' they are but few in comparison of the rest of Mankind, yet the Church of Christ, by the Confession of all Parties, is a very small Body of Men; each Sect, tho' they complain of one another's Uncharitableness, yet they excluding all other Sects, either as *Schismatics* or *Hereticks*, confine Salvation to their own Church. Dr. *Scott* says, "While Men behold the State of Religion thus miserably broken and divided, and the Professors of it crumb'd into so many Sects and Parties, and each Party spitting Fire and Damnation at its Adversary; so that, if all say true, or, indeed, any two of them in five hundred Sects, which there are in the World; (and for aught I know there may be five thousand) it is five hundred to one, but that every one is damn'd; because every one damns all but itself; and itself is damn'd by four hundred and ninety-nine:" How, I say, can these Differences be avoided, as long as Men take into their Notion of Religion; nay, make unnecessary things necessary Parts of it? And if many of our Divines have got rid of these absurd Notions, is it not because they are, what in Contempt they are call'd, *Rationalists*?

THE pious Bishop *Taylor* says, "He could not expect, but that God would some way or other punish Christians, by reason of their pertinacious disputing of things unnecessary, undeterminable, and unprofitable; and for their hating and persecuting

The Abridg.  
of his Morals,  
or Account of  
Virtue. l. 2.  
p. 122.

Christ. Life,  
p. 11. Vol. 1.  
c. 3. p. 112.

Epistle Ded.  
to Liberty of  
Propheying.

“secuting their Brethren (which should be as dear to them as their own Lives) for not consenting to one another’s Follies and senseless Vanities.

BUT, is there any certain way of judging what are necessary or unprofitable Things, but by the Rules here laid down, of judging of Things, from their Nature and Tendency? Without observing this Rule, there’s nothing so trifling, or senseless, but People may be persuaded to place Religion in, and be in continual Broils about it. If a Dispute between two Preachers, whether the first Words in the Lord’s Prayer should be translated *Father our*, or *Our Father*, could cause such Disturbances, as it lately did at *Hamburg*; what is there so indifferent, if once believ’d to belong to Religion, but may have pernicious Effects? And there are a Number of Instances in all Ages, where Things as trifling have occasion’d strange Disorders.

AND the primitive Times were not free from them; the memorable Mr. *Hales* gives this Account of the then Quarrel about the Time of keeping *Easter*: “It being, *says he*, upon Error taken for  
 “necessary, that an *Easter* must be kept; and upon Tract of Schism.  
 “worse than Error, if I may so speak, (for it was  
 “no less than a Point of *Judaism* forc’d upon the  
 “Church) thought further necessary, that the  
 “Ground for the Time of our keeping that Feast,  
 “must be the Rule left by *Moses* to the *Jews*;  
 “there arose a stout Question, Whether we were  
 “to celebrate it with the *Jews* on the fourteenth  
 “Moon, or the Sunday following? This Matter,  
 “tho’ most unnecessary, most vain, yet caus’d as  
 “great a Combustion as ever was in the Church;  
 “the *West* separating from the *East* for many Years  
 “together. In this fantastical Hurry, I can’t see  
 “but all the World were *Schismatics*, neither can  
 “any thing excuse them from that Imputation,  
 “excepting only this, that we charitably suppose  
 “that all Parties, out of Conscience did what they  
 “did. A thing which beset them, thro’ the Ignorance

“ rance of their Guides ; and because thro’ Sloth  
 “ and blind Obedience Men examin’d not the Things  
 “ they were taught ; but like Beasts of Burden pa-  
 “ tiently couch’d down, and indifferently under-  
 “ went whatever their Superiors laid upon them.”

*Burnet's Sermon.*  
 Ann. 1681.

“ AND can we, says Dr. *Burnet*, think without  
 “ Astonishment, that such Matters, as giving the  
 “ Sacrament in leavened or unleavened Bread ; or  
 “ an Explication of the Proceſſion of the Holy  
 “ Ghost, whether it was from the Father and the  
 “ Son, or from the Father by the Son ; could have  
 “ rent the *Greek* and *Latin* Churches ſo violently  
 “ one from another, that the *Latins*, rather than  
 “ aſſiſt the other, look’d on till they were deſtroyed  
 “ by the *Ottoman* Family ? ”

AND other Inſtances he gives of fatal Diſtur-  
 bances from Diſputes about Trifles ; as the removing  
 the Pictures of certain Biſhops out of a Church oc-  
 caſion’d Image-worſhip ; for thoſe who oppos’d their  
 Removal, went ſo far as to maintain, that Pictures  
 ought not only to be ſet up, but worſhipp’d ; which  
 cauſ’d not only great Diſorders in the *East*, but  
 made *Italy* to revolt at the Pope’s Inſtigation. This  
 Conteſt too begat another, whether the Sacrament  
 was only the Image, or the very Subſtance of  
 Chriſt ?

I might add, that the Diſpute between the *Lu-  
 therans* and *Calviniſts* about the Sacrament, tho’ it  
 has created ſuch fierce Animofities, is merely ver-  
 bal ; ſince both ſides are againſt any Change in the  
 Elements, and both ſides maintain a real Preſence  
 of the Body of Chriſt.

I need not have gone to diſtant Times and Places  
 for Inſtances, our own late Diviſions and Perſecu-  
 tions about ſuch trifling Things, as Rites and Cere-  
 monies, nay, Habits and Poſtures, would in all  
 likelihood have ended in the utter Ruin both of  
 Church and State, had not the bleſſed Revolution  
 interpos’d.

*B.* I would not have you treat what you call Postures so irreverently; ought not People to kneel at their Devotion.

*A.* THE whole Christian World for many Ages thought not; and the *Anti-Nicene* Fathers, as well as the Council of *Nice*, forbad kneeling on all *Sundays*, and all other Days between *Easter* and *Whitsunday*. *Daillé of the Fathers, l. 2. c. 6. p. 336, 337.*

IN a Word, if those Sentiments must be true, which tend most to make Men love and honour God, by giving the brightest and noblest Ideas of his Wisdom and Goodness; and which free him from the Imputation of Change and Inconstancy, and from imposing from time to time arbitrary Commands; and from Partiality and Respect of Persons; what I have laid down must be true; and the contrary, not only false, but impious. But however, since this is a Point of the utmost Consequence, I shall proceed to other Arguments, and shew how inconsistent it is with the Good of Mankind, to suppose any merely positive Things to be part of the Ingredients which constitute true Religion.

## C H A P. XI.

*The supposing Things merely positive to be made the Ingredients of Religion, is inconsistent with the Good of Mankind, as well as the Honour of God.*

THE Happiness of human Society, and of every particular Member, consisting in the due Observation and Practice of Morality; whatever diverts, or discourages that, must be highly injurious: Now 'tis certain, that the Mind may be over-loaded as well as the Body; and the more it is taken up with the Observation of Things, which are not of a moral Nature, the less it will be able to attend

attend to those that are ; which requiring the Application of the whole Man, can never be rightly perform'd, while the Mind, by laying stress on other Things, is diverted from attending on them ; especially if it be consider'd, that Superstition, if once suffer'd to mix with Religion, will always be gaining Ground. If Reason is to be heard, no unnecessary Things will be admitted ; but if it be not, where shall we stop ? If People are once brought to believe such Things are good for any thing, they will be apt to believe they are good for all Things ; at least, Pretences will never be wanting for a thousand Things of this nature ; and there's nothing of this kind that Men will not come into, if they are made to believe they carry any Merit with them : These they will be punctual in observing, in hopes to atone for indulging themselves in their darling Vices ; which they, not knowing how to leave, and yet willing to secure their future Happiness, hope by the help of such Expedients, to compound with Heaven ; and then vainly imagine, they cannot have too many Things of this nature ; or shew too great a Zeal for the Practice of them, when assur'd by their Priests (who, as they fondly imagine, know the whole Counsel of God) that they are acceptable to the Deity ; and tend to make him propitious to the religious Observers of them.

THE *Banditti*, and Bravoes most religiously observe the Orders of their Church, about *not eating Flesh*, &c. and Instances of this nature might be produc'd from the most immoral in all Churches ; who, not satisfy'd with practising such things themselves, think it highly meritorious to compel others to do the same. And, indeed, the Substance of Religion has been destroy'd in most Places to make room for Superstition, Immorality, and Persecution ; which last, when Men want Reason to support their Opinions, always supplies its Place. And are there not even now, Numbers in the best Reform'd Churches, of the same Sentiments with those

Dr.



Dr. *Scott* complains of? “ Who, *he says*, persuade themselves, that God is wonderfully concern’d about small things, about trifling Opinions and indifferent Actions, and the Rites and Modes, and Appendages of Religion; and under this Persuasion they hope to atone for all the Immoralities of their Lives, by the Forms and Outfides of Religion; by uncommanded Severities, and affected Singularities; by contending for Opinions, and sticking for Parties; and being *pragmatically* zealous about the Borders and Fringes of Religion.” And,

Christ. Life.  
vol. 1. p. 2  
c. 6. p. 376.

I’m afraid ’tis but too true, as is observ’d in the *Letters concerning Inspiration*; that “ Men have thought it an Honour to be stil’d that which they call zealous Orthodox, to be firmly link’d to a certain Party, to load others with Calumnies, and to damn by an absolute Authority the rest of Mankind; but have taken no care to demonstrate the Sincerity and Fervour of their Piety, by an exact Observation of the Gospel-morals: Which has come to pass by reason that Orthodoxy agrees very well with our Passions; whereas the severe Morals of the Gospel are incompatible with our way of living.” And one would be apt to think, that Zeal for speculative Opinions, and Zeal for Morality were scarce consistent, shou’d he form his Judgment from what he sees most practis’d. “ Moral Goodness, says Dr. *Scott*, is the great Stamp and Impress that renders Men current in the Esteem of God; whereas on the contrary, the common Brand by which Hypocrites and false Pretenders to Religion are stigmatiz’d, is their being zealous for the Positives, and cold and indifferent as to the Morals of Religion.”

Eng. Transf.  
p. 108.

Christ. Life.  
p. 2. vol. 1.  
c. 1. p. 53.

“ AND, in general, we find mere moral Principles of such weight, that in our Dealings with Men, we are seldom satisfy’d by the fullest Assurance given us of their Zeal in Religion, ’till

Inq. concern-  
ing Virtue and  
Merit. Treat.  
4. l. 1. p. 5.

“ we

“ we hear something further of their Character. If  
 “ we are told a Man is religious, we still ask, *What*  
 “ *are his Morals?* But if we hear at first that he  
 “ has honest moral Principles, and is a Man of na-  
 “ tural Justice and good Temper, we seldom think  
 “ of the other Question, *Whether he be religious*  
 “ *and devout?* ”

IT is a general Observation in History, that where any thing has had the appearance only of Piety, and might be observ'd without any Virtue in the Soul, it easily found Entertainment among superstitious Nations. Hence *Tacitus* says, “ Men extremely liable to Superstition, are at the same time as violently averse to Religion.” *Le Clerc* not only makes the same Remark, but says, “ Those who had a confused Notion of Christian Piety, believ'd it could not maintain itself without the help of outward Objects; and I know not what heathenish Pomp, which at last extinguish'd the Spirit of the Gospel, and substituted *Paganism* in its room.”

WHATEVER Appearance it might have of Piety, what Virtue did it require in the Practice, to make War with the *Saracens* for the *Holy Land*; (tho' considering the Impieties committed there, it might be call'd *Unholy*;) yet so highly meritorious was this Project for several Ages thought to be, that vast Shoals of *Bigots* for its sake have frequently gone from the *West* to fight Men in the *East*, who never did them any Harm; and these *Bigots*, presuming on the Merits of this sacred Expedition, were most enormously flagitious.

B. If this was Superstition, it was built on a Notion which had long before prevail'd, of believing it a piece of Piety to visit *Jerusalem*, and the holy Places there. The great *St. Jerome* says, *Certe adorasse ubi steterunt Pedes Domini, Pars Fidei est, &c.* “ That it was undoubtedly a part of Faith, to go, and worship in those Places where the Feet of our Saviour had once stood; and to  
 “ have

Hist. 5. 13.—

Life of *Prudentius*, p. 317.  
 Eng. Transl.  
 & Bibl. Univ.  
 To. 12. p.  
 173, 174.—

Ep. 144. ad  
*Desider.* To.  
 3. p. 198. D.

“ have a Sight of the Tracks, which at this Day  
 “ continue fresh, both of his Nativity, Cross, and  
 “ Passion. ”

A. I believe St. *Jerome*, when he says, *We ought to worship where the Feet of our Lord stood*, chiefly intended his last Footsteps when he mounted up to Heaven; *the Print of which*, says *Sulpicius Severus*, *remain to this Day*. *Quæcunque applicabantur, insolens humana suscipere terra respueret, excussis in ora apponentium sæpe marmoribus. — Et cum quotidie confluentium Fides certatim Domino calcata diripiat, damnum tamen arena non sentiat: & eadem adhuc sui speciem, velut impressis signata vestigiis, terra custodit.* And *Paulinus* says the same.

Sulp. Sever.  
 Sacred Hist.  
 lib. 2. p. 100,  
 101. Edit.  
 Elzev. 1643.

A strict Observance of such things as require no Virtue in the Practise, and may with great ease be punctually observ'd, makes the Superstitious liable to be every where cheated by your *Tartuffs*, or *Mackw—ths*; while Men who put their whole stress on Morality, are represented not only as Enemies to Religion, but even as Encouragers of Immorality, and mere Libertines, because they are for Liberty in Thinking; tho' this can't fail to make Men see the Folly of Licentiousness in Acting.

AND, indeed, we shall generally find those Ecclesiasticks, who inveigh most against *Free Thinking*, are the real Encouragers of Immorality; by screening, not only the most Immoral of their own Order on pretence of preserving the Honour of the Church, tho' to the Dishonour of Religion; but also by laying the most Moral, if they differ from them in speculative Points, under constant Sufferings, to enforce them to play the Hypocrites with God and Man: And who is it that the corrupt Part of the Clergy shew more Inveteracy against, than the very best Men of their own Order, for not approving these Methods?

It's worth while to remark, how differently Men are treated for Civil and Ecclesiastical Offences:

“ In Civil Cases, as a Right Reverend and Excel-

lent

Diffic. & Discouragements of studying the Scriptures, p. 23, 24.

“lent Author observes, the Offender, if his Crime  
 “be not Capital, suffers a *temporary* Punishment,  
 “proportion’d to the Fault he has committed;  
 “and when he has undergone that, nothing fur-  
 “ther is requir’d of him, except in some Cases to  
 “find Security for his good Behaviour for the fu-  
 “ture. But in Cases of *Heresy*, there is no regard  
 “to the *Degree* of the Offence, in the Punishment  
 “inflicted; nor is there any *End* of it: ’Tis not  
 “enough to have suffer’d the *severest* Punishment,  
 “tho’ for the *smallest* Offence; ’tis not enough to  
 “give Security of not offending for the future:  
 “The innocent Offender must declare (what ’tis  
 “oftentimes *impossible* he should declare) that he  
 “has chang’d his Sentiments, and is become *Or-*  
 “*thodox*; and this, tho’ perhaps no Methods of  
 “*Conviction* have been used, except that of *Punish-*  
 “*ment* be one. This is the miserable Condition of  
 “a *Convict-Heretick*: The Punishment which fell  
 “on him for *expressing* Thoughts *heretical*, he must  
 “*continue* to endure for *barely thinking*, which is a  
 “thing not in his own Power, but depends on the  
 “*Evidence* that appears to him: He must for ever,  
 “(cruel Justice!) for ever suffer for his *private*  
 “*Thoughts* (tho’ they go not beyond his own Heart)  
 “the Punishment which some Overt-Act has once  
 “drawn upon him. To punish *toties quoties*, as  
 “often as those Overt-Acts are repeated, will not  
 “satisfy the *Holy Office*. — If an Offender can’t  
 “be convicted of *Heresy*, he may however be con-  
 “victed of writing, or speaking *against* the esta-  
 “blish’d Doctrine of the Church; and that will  
 “draw on him all the same Consequences, that  
 “*Heresy* would do. — Well does this Author ad-  
 “vise, Whatever you do, be *Orthodox*: *Orthodoxy*  
 “will cover a *Multitude of Sins*, but a *Cloud of*  
 “*Virtues* cannot cover the want of the minutest  
 “Particle of *Orthodoxy*. — It may, I doubt not,  
 “be *demonstrated* with the greatest Evidence, that  
 “*all Christian Churches* have suffer’d more by their

Ib. p. 26.

Ib. p. 22.

Ib. p. 29.

“ *Zeal*

“ Zeal for *Orthodoxy*, and by the violent Methods  
 “ taken to promote it; than from the utmost Ef-  
 “ forts of their *greatest Enemies*. But for all that,  
 “ the World will still think the same Methods ne-  
 “ cessary.”

A Man, who has, or pretends to have a blind  
 Zeal for those things, which discriminate his Sect,  
 tho’ he be ever so immoral, too often finds Coun-  
 tenance and Credit from them; and tho’ thought a  
 Devil by others, passes for a Saint with his own  
 Party: So that the Superstitious lie under no Temp-  
 tations to be vicious, and the Vicious to act super-  
 stitiously. Nay,

“ THE way that Men are apt to take to pacify  
 “ God, is, as Archbishop *Tillotson* observes, by  
 “ some external Piece of Religion. — Such as  
 “ were Sacrifices among the *Jews* and *Heathens*. —

*Tillotson's*  
 Sermon, Vol. 4.  
 p. 5, 6. & To.  
 2. p. 334.

“ The *Jews* pitch’d upon those which were most  
 “ pompous and solemn; the richest, and the most  
 “ costly; so they might but keep their Sins, they  
 “ were well enough content to offer up any thing  
 “ else to God; they thought nothing too good for  
 “ him, provided he would not oblige them to be-  
 “ come better.

“ AND thus it is among ourselves, when we ap-  
 “ prehend God is displeas’d with us. — We  
 “ are content to do any thing, but to *learn Right-*  
 “ *eousness*.

“ As to the Church of *Rome*, ——— *He says*,  
 “ They (as they pretend) are the most skilful Peo-  
 “ ple in the World to pacify God. ——— I do not  
 “ wrong them by representing them enquiring after  
 “ this manner: Shall I go before a *Crucifex*, and  
 “ bow myself to it, as to the *High God*? ——— To  
 “ which of the Saints and Angels shall I go to me-  
 “ diate for me, and intercede on my Behalf?  
 “ Will the Lord be pleas’d with Thousands of  
 “ *Pater-nosters*, or with Ten Thousands of *Ave-*  
 “ *Maries*? Shall the Host travel in Procession, or  
 “ myself undertake a tedious *Pilgrimage*? Or shall

“ I list myself a Soldier for the *Holy War* ? Shall  
 “ I give my Estate to a *Convent* ? Or chasteise, and  
 “ punish my Body for the Sin of my Soul ?”

THE Heathen Priests, knowing what would render them most acceptable to the People, made the chief Part of their Religion to consist in gaudy Shews, pompous Ceremonies; and such other Tricks as serv'd to amuse, and divert them, who, provided they entertain'd such Notions as created a Reverence for their Priests, and believ'd they could discover to them the Will of their Gods; might be as leud, and wicked as their Gods themselves: “ Are the  
 “ Gods angry ? Must we repent of our Crimes, and  
 “ re-enter into the Paths of natural Justice to divert their Thunder ? Not at all; only take a  
 “ Calf of such a Colour, calv'd at such a time, and  
 “ let his Throat be cut by a religious Butcher, in  
 “ such a Dress, with a consecrated Knife; and the  
 “ Gods, as you will find by the Entrails, will be  
 “ frait appeas'd.”

THE *Mahometans* make the going a Pilgrimage to *Mecca*, the highest Act of Religion; and there, out of deep Devotion, play many Monkey-Tricks; and then, they return cleansed from all Impurity. As to the *Jewish* Priests, and the Doctors, who depended on them, we learn from our Saviour, how they made the moral Law void by their vain Traditions; and that the Temple then, as the Church in After-times, was made the grand Presence. And what vile things has not the abus'd Name of the Church patroniz'd ? Nay, even in the best constituted Church, have we not lately had Numbers of Men fond of the Name of *Highb-Church*, whose Religion chiefly consisted in drinking for the Church; cursing, swearing, and lying for the Church; raising Riots, Tumults, and Sedition, in favour of a *Popish Pretender*, and all for the Security of the *Protestant Church of England*; and in having a profound Veneration for black Gowns, no matter what the Wearers are; and a great Contempt for  
 Men

Men in black Cloaks, how-deserving soever; and in firmly believing, that those who go to Places with Steeples can never be in the wrong; and that those who go to Places without them, can never be in the right; without knowing what either hold, or so much as what is the true Meaning of even the word *Church*?

WHAT Advantage have not the Popish Priests gain'd by their Arts of reconciling the Practice of Vice with the Prospect of Heaven. The *Jesuits*, tho' the youngest Order, yet flourish most, being the most expert in this Artifice; as may be seen in *Mr. Pascal's Provincial Letters*. But all the Popish Priests agree, in defending their Superstition by Fire and Faggot; while their Churches are open Sanctuaries for the most flagitious; which shews how sensible they are, that Superstition and Immorality support each other. And perhaps, 'tis but reasonable, that the Places where they learn vile things, should protect them when they have committed the vilest. 'Tis by these means that Holy Church gets a terrible Party, who can't refuse to maim or murder, as their spiritual Protectors direct, for fear of being deliver'd up to civil Justice; and not only your mean Rogues, but even the greatest, have been frequently screen'd this way.

THE supposing indifferent things equally commanded with Matters of Morality, tends to make Men believe they are alike necessary: Nay, the former will, by degrees, get the better with the Superstitious; and acquire such a Veneration by Age, as to make Men have recourse to them upon all occasions, tho' ever so unseasonable. If People can be so far impos'd on, as to admit such things into their Religion, they will as easily be persuaded to put a greater Stress on things, tho' of some Use in Religion, than their Nature will bear; to the confounding things of the greatest moment with those of the smallest: And if this is reckon'd Superstition, much more ought the other to be thought so.

THE not distinguishing Means from Ends, has been the Occasion of endless Superstition ; and there have been numbers, in all Ages, especially of the female Sex, who have thought themselves very religious, if they, tho' to the neglect of their Family-Concerns, went from Church to Chappel, from Chappel to Church, and were punctual in observing all Church-Ceremonies, without regarding the End for which alone they could be instituted ; so that instead of being humble, affable, and good, they have prov'd big with the worst sort of Pride, spiritual Pride ; censuring and despising their Neighbours, tho' ever so good, if they were not as punctual as themselves in observing those things ; and the Conceit they had of their own Godliness, has made them as troublesome at home as abroad, as bad Wives as Neighbours.

UPON the whole, nothing can be of worse consequence, than thus to depreciate Morality, by mixing things of an indifferent nature with it ; because, as Experience shews, Men are more or less virtuous, according to the Value they put on Virtue ; and can a Man, who acts contrary to Reason, not be an Enemy to a Religion founded on Reason ? The Precepts of Natural Religion, and the Rules of right Reason, can't but make strong Impressions on rational Creatures ; what is fix'd on the Minds of Men, and wrought in as it were with their very Constitution, can't easily be broke thorough ; human Nature is apt to start, and recoil at any such Attempt : And yet some have found a most effectual way to break through it, by teaching Men, that the most moral Actions, without a right Notion, forsooth, in certain things of another nature, are to be look'd on, as *splendida Peccata*, and partaking of the Nature of Sin.

IT is the chief Business of Preachers, to shew the Reasonableness of the Doctrines they teach, as the most effectual way of operating on rational Creatures ; and all the Laws of natural Religion being



being built on their own Reasonableness, they, who attend to the Dictates of their Reason, can scarce fail to pay a ready and chearful Obedience to all its Laws; but when Men take things merely on Authority, and would have taken the contrary on the same Authority; Reason is discarded, and rational Motives cease to operate: Nor can Men any longer perform moral Duties with a free and chearful Mind; but slavishly obey, out of fear, the suppos'd arbitrary Commands of a Being too mighty to be contended with; and that only with a View to atone for Immoralities.

As long as Men believe the Good of the Society is the supreme Law, they will think it their Duty to be govern'd by that Law; and believing God requires nothing of them than what is for the Good of Mankind, will place the whole of their Religion in benevolent Actions, and to the utmost of their Abilities copy after the divine Original; but if they are made to believe there are things which have no relation to this Good, necessary to Salvation; they must suppose it their Duty, to use such means as will most effectually serve this Purpose; and that God, in requiring the End, requires all those Means as will best secure and propagate it. And;

'Tis to this Principle we owe the most cruel Persecutions, Inquisitions, Crusades, and Massacres; and that *Princes* have endeavour'd, not only to destroy their Subjects, but to disinherit their own Issue, to make room for suppositious Children. And,

'Tis to this Principle we also owe innumerable Tumults, Seditions, and Rebellions, even against the best of Princes; as well as endless Feuds and Animosities in private Families, and among the nearest Relations: They who are govern'd by this Principle can't be good Men, good Subjects, good Citizens, or good Neighbours; no Ties of Friendship or Gratitude, no Vows or Oaths can bind them, when the Interest of such things, as they think, they

are obliged to promote, on pain of God's Displeasure, requires the contrary Conduct.

THE *Jews*, as they were most superstitious, so were they most cruel; and as the *Papists* have, beyond all other Christians, introduced into Religion things which are far from contributing to the Good of Mankind; so they have exercis'd a matchless Cruelty for the Support of them: And no wonder, since their Priests gain by the Superstition of the People, and, consequently, inspire them with a proportionate Hatred against all who will not comply with it. And,

AMONG *Protestants*, of what Denomination soever, they who lay the greatest stress on useless Speculations, Rites, Modes and Ceremonies, are for the most part sour, ill-natur'd Persons, ready to come into any persecuting Measures for their sake. But nothing has done so much Mischief as that most monstrous Opinion of *Imperium in Imperio*. Those, who pretended to a spiritual Empire, claim'd, as well they might, a divine Right to judge of the Extent of that Empire, and to do all they judg'd necessary for its Support; and consequently that they had a Right, since temporal things must give Place to spiritual, to depose the Governors of the State, whenever they judg'd it necessary for the Safety of the Church. 'Tis from hence there have been so many Tumults, Seditions, Insurrections, Rebellions, Civil Wars, Murders and Massacres upon the Pretence of Religion; and which at last ended in the enslaving of the Christian World to the *Pope*, as Head of the Church; whose Power of deposing heretical Princes was for many Ages universally allow'd; *no Nation, no University declaring against it; nor so much as one Divine, Civilian, or Casuist*. Nor were things mended, when, by reason of the great Schisms about the *Popedom*, Councils pretended to govern the Church: They then, carry'd their Power to such a highth, as dispos'd Princes to enter into Agreements with the *Popes*, to whom they yielded a great deal, to be protected

*Burnet's Exp.*  
of the Art. 19.

p. 187.

*Ib.* Art. 21.

p. 200.

*Ib.* Art. 37.

p. 385.

ted in what they had reserv'd to themselves. They, therefore, who maintain, that People may forfeit their Properties by *Schism, Heresy, Infidelity, &c.* play the Hypocrites, when they pretend the Power of Princes is more sacred than the Properties of the People, for whose sake they have all their Power. And therefore we may justly conclude, that they who are for soliciting Kings and Magistrates to assist the Church in punishing Misbelievers, are equally Enemies to the Power of Kings, as well as to the Rights of the People; and they have never fail'd to shew it, whenever they have found it their Interest.

AND tho' at first those Princes were idoliz'd, who were the Instruments of their Cruelty; yet when by their means, the People were entirely at the Devotion of the Clergy, they too were soon forc'd to submit; and had just cause to curse their own and Predecessors Bigotry, which enabled the Ecclesiastics to insult them as they pleas'd. And what Disturbances have not your *Becket's, Lauds, &c.* created here, when they got into Power, and became then as insolent as before they were submissive? Father *Paul*, no Stranger to our Constitution, in one of his Letters, writ in the Reign of King *James I.* says thus; “As

“for the *English*, I am in fear; the great Power the  
 “Bishops have, tho' under a King, makes me very  
 “jealous; for shou'd they have an easy Prince, or an  
 “Archbishop of a high Spirit, the kingly Power  
 “must sink by the Bishop's aspiring to an absolute  
 “Dominion.”

I believe you will allow, that in the late Times Men were as much in earnest about Religion as ever; and yet by their mixing several things, not of a moral Nature, with it, and thinking all Means proper to promote them lawful; Imposition and Zeal, Bigotry and Hypocrisy were strangely blended together. And as we are assur'd by an eminent Historian, it was the Opinion of *Cromwell*, that “the moral

“Laws were only binding in ordinary Cases; but that upon extraordinary ones these might be  
 “super-

Eng. Transl.  
 Pref. p. 51.

Bp. Burnet's  
 Sum of Af-  
 fairs before  
 the Restorat.  
 p. 46. --- 79

“ superseded ; he, and that Set of Men, justifying  
 “ their ill Actions from the Practice of *Ehud* and  
 “ *Jael*, *Sampson* and *David*.

HERE, indeed, they were no Hypocrites ; but  
 frankly confess'd what at the Bottom influences all  
 those, who, tho' they have not the Grace to own it,  
 make things, not of a moral Nature, necessary In-  
 gredients of Religion ; and thereby give too just oc-  
 casion for this Remark of Archbishop *Tillotson's*,  
 “ That it will be hard to determine, how many  
 “ Degrees of Innocence and Good-Nature, or of  
 “ Coldness and Indifference in Religion, are neces-  
 “ sary to over-balance the Fury of a blind Zeal ;  
 “ since several Zealots had been excellent Men, if  
 “ their Religion had not hinder'd them ; if the Doc-  
 “ trines and Principles of their Church had not  
 “ spoil'd their natural Disposition.” What can be  
 a greater Satyr on any Religion, than that it is  
 able to spoil the best Disposition ; and that, if it  
 does not make Men arrant Devils, 'tis only because  
 Nature is too hard for Principles ?

B. THESE sure are uncommon Principles.

A. NOT so uncommon as you may imagine,  
 since all Religion inclines Men to imitate what they  
 worship ; and they who believe that God will damn  
 Men for things *not Moral*, must believe, that in or-  
 der to prevent damnable Opinions from spreading,  
 and to shew themselves holy, as their heavenly Fa-  
 ther is holy, they cant't shew too much Enmity to  
 those, against whom God declares an eternal Enmi-  
 ty ; or plague them enough in this Life, upon whom  
 in the Life to come God will pour down the Plagues  
 of eternal Vengeance. Hence it is, that Animosity,  
 Enmity, and Hatred, have over-run the Christian  
 World ; and Men, for the sake of these Notions,  
 have exercis'd the utmost Cruelties on one another ;  
 the most *curfing* and *damning* Churches having al-  
 ways prov'd the most *persecuting*. The *Papists*, tho'  
 they declare it to be their Duty to love their own Ene-  
 mies, yet looking on all *Protestants* as God's Enemies,  
 think

think it meritorious to murder them; and *Protestants* had no sooner renounced those persecuting Principles of *Papery*, but they too shamefully practis'd the same themselves, for the support of such trifling Notions as the Publick had not the least Interest in. And before the happy Revolution, the Spirit of Persecution was so outrageous, that *Protestants* ruin'd *Protestants* upon the account of Rites, Ceremonies, Habits, &c. to the great Joy of the common Enemy. And,

THO' there may be, even now, some who will not forgive their being debarr'd the Exercise of their former Tyranny, and would be glad, at any rate, to destroy that hated Liberty we are now bless'd with; yet I may venture to say, that all who have so just an Opinion of Religion, as to think it requires nothing but what is for the Good of Mankind, are to a Man zealous for the present Government, establish'd on the Principles of civil and religious Liberty.

To preserve which, the Legislature has not only excluded all *Papists*, as Men of persecuting Principles, from the Crown; but, by affording Protection to *Dissenters*, has set the differing Churches in *South* and *North Britain* on a level, well knowing, that neither civil or ecclesiastical Liberty can be preserv'd on any other foot. Had they gone a step farther, and excluded, on the strictest Tests, Men of persecuting Principles from inferior Posts, as well as the persecuting *Papists* from the highest, they had acted up to those Principles of *Protestantism* upon which the Revolution is founded. And all, who are in earnest about Religion, wou'd have been highly pleas'd to have seen it an establish'd Maxim, that *no Man ought to suffer in his Person, his Property, or Reputation, for his Opinion in Matters of mere Religion.*

THEY, who think Force lawful, for the support of such Opinions as can't be supported by Reason, (as what Church, when it has Power, does not?)

can't

can't but think Fraud so too; especially when 'tis used not only for Mens eternal but temporal Good, and to prevent such Severities, as otherwise would be thought *wholesome* and necessary. How can Men of these Principles think any Untruth not lawful, when 'tis necessary to guard fundamental Truths? Nay, must they not think it much more their Duty to deceive Men, for the sake of their eternal Good, than to deceive Children or sick People for an infinitely less Good; especially when the temporal Interest of the Deceivers is join'd with the spiritual Interest of the Deceiv'd; who, happy Men, have the good luck to be cheated into Paradise; and by the Stratagem of a pious Fraud to obtain an heavenly Crown? If it be lawful to deceive melancholy Persons, who design to poison themselves, and put a Remedy in the place of the Poison, can any think such an Artifice unlawful, when he believes 'tis to hinder Millions from imbibing such Notions, as are rank Poison to their immortal Souls?

'TIS with an ill Grace that those *Protestants*, who are for restraining the Liberty of the Press, or suffering nothing to be printed, but what has undergone their Spunges, rail at the *Papists* for their *Index Expurgatorius*: These Men may, indeed, plead Authority; since, as *Daillé* observes, “ This Opinion has  
 “ always been in the World; that to settle a certain  
 “ and assur'd Estimation upon that which is good  
 “ and true, (that is to say, upon what we account  
 “ to be such;) it is necessary to remove out of the  
 “ way whatsoever may be an Hindrance to it: Nei-  
 “ ther ought we to wonder, that even those of the  
 “ honest, innocent, primitive Times made use of  
 “ these Deceits, seeing for a good End they made  
 “ no Scruple to forge whole Books.

THEY, indeed (and such there are, to the Honour of the present Time, not a few) who think Sincerity will carry Men to Heaven, lie under no Temptation to use pious Frauds; but for Men of  
 other

other Principles, tho' they go under the Name of Fathers and Saints, there's no depending on them ; since a Desire to deceive People into their Opinions, will hold in proportion to the Zeal they have for propagating those Opinions.

If those Men, in whose Hands the sacred Books, from time to time have been chiefly deposited, did allow that every Man was to judge for himself of their Meaning, in order to make him acceptable to God ; there could be no danger of their being designedly corrupted : But if they believ'd, that a certain Set of Opinions was necessary to Salvation, then they must have thought themselves, in Charity, oblig'd to take the most proper Methods to bring Men to embrace them ; and consequently must have believ'd it their Duty to substitute some Words of their own, which would best express those Opinions, on which Mens Salvation depended, in the room of others, which were apt to lead them into fatal Errors ; since by thus changing of Sounds, they might save Millions of Souls, who they were confident would otherwise everlastingly perish. Must not the same Principle that oblig'd them to impose their own Words, instead of the Words of God, in their *Creeds* and *Articles*, on pain of Damnation, equally oblige them to act the same part, in relation to the Scripture ? And if Men have stuck so close to this Principle, that they have (whenever they had a convenient Opportunity) left out, added to, or alter'd all other Books of Religion whatever, which have fallen into their Hands ; there can be no reason to think, they would not do the same with the Bible, where the Motives were so much stronger ? “ 'Tis *Euseb. Eccles. Hist. l. 4. c. 23. in fine.*

“ no wonder, says that primitive Father *Dionysius*, Bishop of *Corinth*, that some attempt to adulterate the holy Writings of our Lord ; since they have basely falsify'd such as are of an inferior Authority.” And it must be either to put a stop to, or prevent this Practice, that the *Revelation* concludes with a Curse on all who should make any Alteration

teration in that Book. And 'tis morally impossible, but they who thought it their Duty to commit the most barbarous Acts of Cruelty for propagating of Opinions, should not think it lawful to use Deceit for the same End; which they can never imagine to be an Evil, while they suppose it so useful for the saving of Mens Souls, without giving up all the other indirect Methods they took to hinder Men from seeing what may be said for or against any Opinions.

NOR is there any one thing in which all Parties agree, but in taking it for granted, that their Adversaries will scruple no Means to gain Credit to their own Opinions, or to discredit those of their Adversaries; and in order to it, misrepresent their Persons as well as Opinions, and make Men Saints or Devils, as it serves their Cause; which, as you will find in Church-History, has afforded a Number of Miracles for the *Orthodox*, and as many Judgments on the *Heterodox*: And if there be Miracles on both sides, ours to be sure are divine, and yours diabolical.

IF ever the Words of *David*, that *All Men are Liars*, were literally true, it has been in this Case; and all History shews the Justness of my Lord *Bacon's* Remark: *Maxime habenda sunt pro suspectis, quæ pendent quomodocunque à Religione; ut prodigia Livii.*

THE *Arabian* Writers are full of Miracles done by *Mahomet*, which they impose on People, by telling them, that "*Mahomet's* Enemies would not invent them; and his Friends are forbid telling Lies of him on pain of Damnation.

B. You may make as bold as you will with *Mahometans*; but can you charge Protestant Writers, much less the Holy Fathers, with any such Practices?

A. I hope, 'tis no Crime to take notice, that one of the ten *Reasons* the celebrated *Chillingworth* gives for his turning *Papist*, is, "Because the Protestant Cause is now, and hath been from the

Nov Org. 1.2.  
Aph. 29—

*Mahom. Life*  
in *Eng.* before  
*Roland's Ma-*  
*hom* p. 32.

Pref.

"Begin-



“ Beginning, maintain’d with gross Falsifications  
 “ and Calumnies, whereof the prime Controversy-  
 “ Writers are notoriously, and in a high Degree,  
 “ guilty.” And upon his Return to the Church,  
 he says, *Iliacos intra muros peccatur & extra*; which  
 is in plain English, *Priests of all Denominations will  
 lie alike.* And I may add, that it is so fully prov’d  
 in the *Historical Essay of the Thirty-nine Articles*, that  
 that Clause in the twentieth Article, that *the Church  
 has Power to decree Rites and Ceremonies, and Autho-  
 rity in Controversies of Faith*, had neither the Sanction  
 of Parliament or Convocation; that no one has of-  
 fer’d the least Reply, tho’ for the Honour of those  
 good Church-men who first forg’d it, and those who  
 since defended it, we might expect all that could be  
 said, tho’ the Clause had not given them a Power  
 which can only belong to Parliaments, of *decreeing  
 Rites and Ceremonies*; and another Power, which  
 can belong to no Mortal; *Authority in Controversies  
 of Faith.* What Credit ought to be given to the Re-  
 presentations of modern Divines, we may in some  
 measure learn from a Pamphlet entitled, *The Re-  
 presentation of the present State of Religion, with re-  
 gard to the late excessive Growth of Infidelity, Heresy  
 and Profaneness, as it pass’d the lower House of Con-  
 vocation*; where are almost as many notorious False-  
 hoods, as there are Paragraphs; not to say any thing  
 of a *certain Pastoral Letter.* And if we look into  
 Church-Story, we shall find it to have been the con-  
 stant Practice of a certain Set of Men, not only to  
 impute to their Adversaries Opinions which they  
 disown’d; but to represent those Opinions as ready  
 to prevail, was it not for their Interposition: By  
 which means they hoped not only to be highly re-  
 verenc’d for their great Zeal, but to have new Pow-  
 ers granted them to oppress Mankind. Thus the  
 Consequence of belying the Followers of *Wickliff*,  
 was the Statute *de Hæretico comburendo*, granted at  
 the Petition of the Clergy; and the belying the  
*Albigenses, Waldenses, &c.* rais’d a Crusado against  
 those poor People,

See a Pam-  
 phlet in two  
 Parts, entitled  
*The Nation  
 vindicated  
 from the As-  
 persions cast on  
 it in that Re-  
 presentation.*

L. 1. c. 6. See  
P. 159, &c.

As for the holy Fathers, They, as *Daillé* has a whole Chapter to prove, did not think themselves in their Controversial Writings (and most of theirs were such) oblig'd to speak the Truth; but that every thing was lawful which serv'd to gain the Victory. They thought they might, by way of Oeconomy or Dispensation, say one thing and mean the contrary: "*Origen, Methodius, Eusebius, Apollinaris,* (says St. "*Jerome*) have writ largely against *Celsus* and *Porphyry*: Do but observe, says he, the Manner of their Arguing, and what slippery Problems they us'd. They alledg'd against the *Gentiles*, not what they believ'd, but what they thought necessary; "*Non quod sentiunt, sed quod necesse est, dicunt.* And adds, I forbear mentioning the Latin Writers, as "*Tertullian, Cyprian, Minutius, Victorius, Lactantius,* and *Hilary,* lest I should seem rather to accuse others, than defend my self:" And yet he goes on charging not only St. *Paul,* but even *Jesus Christ* himself with the same Practice. And there was nothing so sacred that could escape being chang'd, either in whole, or in part; even the Canons of the famous Council of *Nice,* as well as the Canons of other Councils, have been falsify'd; and those forg'd Canons of *Nice,* the *Popes,* for many Ages, impos'd on the *Christian World* as genuine; and the ancient *Liturgies,* tho' Things of daily use, underwent divers Alterations: Nay, even the *Creeeds* themselves, tho' thought to be the sacred *Depositum* of the Faith, have had the same Fate. "'Tis well known (says an eminent Divine) that the *Apostles Creed* has receiv'd various Additions to the original Form; that the *Nicene Creed* was enlarg'd by the *Constantinopolitan* Fathers, and has also, with respect to the *Filioque,* been interpolated by the *Latin Church*; that 'tis probable, the *Latin Church* has interpolated the *Athanasian Creed* too, with respect to the *Filioque*:" Nay, the *Athanasian Creed* itself, as Bishop *Burnet* has shewn, was a Forgery of the eighth Century. Nor did they confine their Forgeries

To. 2. p. 105,  
106.

*Bennet's* Directions for  
studying the  
30 Articles,  
p. 66.

Art. 8. p. 106.

ries to Church Matters, but practis'd on the imperial Laws, and inserted in the *Theodosian Code*, a Rescript of *Constantine*, relating to the Power of Bishops, long before repeal'd.

*Selden's Dissert.*  
on *Fleta*, c. 5.  
N. 6.

THE farther back we go, the greater was their Recourse to pious Frauds. *Scaliger*, speaking of the primitive Christians, says, *Omnia, quæ putabant Christianismo condici re, bibliis interseruerunt.* And as he supposes, nothing certain of the Church till the Times of *Pliny*, so he says, speaking of the second Century, *Adio verbum Dei inefficax esse censuerunt, ut regnum Christi sine mendacio—promoveri posse diffiderunt, ut qui utinam illi primi mentiri cœpissent.* And *Cesaubon* says, *Illud me vehementer movit, quod videam primis Ecclesie temporibus quam plurimos exiisse, qui facinus Palmarium judicabant, celestem veritatem figmentis suis ire adjutum; quo facilius nova illa doctrina Gentium sapientibus admitteretur.* And the learned *Blondel* says, “ That the second Century of Christianity, whether you consider the immoderate Impudence of Impostors, or the deplorable Credulity of Believers, was the most miserable Time, and exceeded all others in holy Cheats; and that, to the Disgrace of Christianity, there was a greater Aversion to Lying, more Fidelity, and a greater Simplicity not to depart from the Truth, to be found in prophane Authors, than the Christian Writers.”

*Scaligerana,*  
Art. Siloc.

Epist. ad *Cesaubon*, p. 303.

Exercit. 1.  
ad Appendix  
p. 54, 2--

Epist. ad *C. Arnoldum*, apud *Ouvrage de Scau.* Anno 1701.

OUR most learned Bishop *Stillingsfleet* says, “ That Antiquity is most defective where it is most useful; namely, in the Times immediately after the Apostles: And that the Fathers were often deceiv'd with pious Frauds, but then it was when they made for the Christians.” And the pious Bishop *Fell* does not speak quite so tenderly in saying, *Tanta fuit primis seculis fingendi licentia, tam prona in credendo facilitas, ut rerum gestarum fides exinde graviter laboraverit; nec orbis tantum terrarum, sed & Dei Ecclesia de temporibus suis mysticis merito queratur.*

*Iren.* p. 296.  
Orig. Sacr.  
p. 29.

In præmissâ  
monit. Confess.  
Suppos.  
*Cypriani*, p. 33

How unhappy were we of the Laity, had we not the Reason and Nature of things (which no Priests can alter) to depend on; but were intirely oblig'd to take our religious Sentiments from Men, who as far as we have any Account of things, have, even from the earliest Times, not scrupl'd to forge, not only whole Passages, but whole Books; and left nothing entire on which they could lay their foul Hands: Which, as that great and honest Critick *Daille* observes, “has render'd the Writings and venerable Monuments of Antiquity so imbroil'd, and perplex'd, that it will be the hardest matter in the World for any Man to make out any clear or perfect Discovery of those things, which so many several Artists have endeavour'd to conceal from us.” As to this imposing Temper of the Ecclesiasticks, I shall only say, that it is plain from History, that the ambitious, domineering part of the Clergy, the Imposers of *Creeds*, *Canons* and *Constitutions* have prov'd the common Plagues of Mankind; and the true Authors and Fomenters of the most general and most fatal Calamities, which have befallen the Christian World. What the Consequence was of imposing *Creeds*, may be learnt from an eminent Father, who flourish'd when this Trade of *Creed-making* was at its highth. “It is, *says St. Hilary*, a thing equally deplorable and dangerous, that there are at present as many *Creeds*, as there are Opinions among Men. — We make *Creeds* arbitrarily, and explain them as arbitrarily. — We can't be ignorant, that since the Council of *Nice*,” (there, it seems the fatal Mischief began) “we have done nothing but made *Creeds*. — We make *Creeds* every Year, nay, every Moon; we repent of what we have done; we defend those that repent; we anathematize those we have defended; we condemn the Doctrine of others in ourselves, or our own in that of others; and reciprocally tearing one another in pieces, we have been the Cause of one another's Ruin.”

De usu Patrum, c. 4. in fine c. 120

Hil. ad Constant. p. 217. Basil Edit. al. p. 211, 212.

THUS you see how Fraud and Force are unavoidable, when 'tis believ'd Things, having no Foundation in Nature or Reason, are necessary Parts of Religion; and Ecclesiastical History contains a continued Scene of Villany, for the Support of such Notions; and that the more good Sense, Piety, and Virtue any Man was endow'd with, the more, if he did not come into those Notions, was he hated, and persecuted as a most dangerous Enemy. But,

BEFORE I leave this melancholy Subject, I must observe, these Men have done their best to justify a Remark of *Uriel Acosta*, who, in his *Exemplar Vitæ Humanæ*, says, “ That when Men depart ever so  
 “ little from Natural Religion, it is the Occasion  
 “ of great Strifes and Divisions, but if they recede  
 “ much from it, who can declare the Calamities  
 “ which ensue? ” And can Men more depart from it, than by imposing upon their Brethren, either by Fraud or Force, Things no ways tending to the Good of Mankind?

THO' we cry up the great Advantage we have above all other Animals, in being capable of Religion, yet those Animals, we despise for want of it, herd most socially together, except such carnivorous Creatures which Necessity separates. The *Ants*, notwithstanding they have Stings, are croud- ed in vast Numbers in the same Hillock; and, having all Things in common, seem to have no other Contention among them, but who shall be most active in carrying on the common Interest of their small Republick. And much the same may be said of *Bees*, and other Animals; yet Men, tho' they can't subsist but in Society, and have Hands, Speech, and Reason to qualify them for the Blessing of it above all other Animals; nay, what is more, have Religion, design'd to unite them in the firm Bonds of Love and Friendship, and to engage them to vie with one another in all good Offices; and the good-natur'd Laity too have, at a vast Expence, hir'd Persons to inculcate these generous Notions; yet alas!

in spite of all these Helps and Motives, Religion has been made by these very Persons, a Pretence to render Men unfociable, fierce and cruel; and to act every thing destructive to their common Welfare: And the greater the Number of these Religions, and the more Expence People have been at in maintaining them, the more of these Mischiefs have they most ungratefully occasion'd to their generous Benefactors.

*B.* GRANTING that a Deluge of every thing that's ill has overflow'd *Christendom*, and does so still in most Places; and that Religion has been made a handle for such Barbarities, as Human Nature, left to it self, wou'd startle at, yet how is this to be remedied?

*A.* EDUCATION is justly esteem'd a second Nature, and its Force so strong, that few can wholly shake off its Prejudices, even in Things unreasonable and unnatural, and must it not have the greatest Efficacy in Things agreeable to Reason, and suitable to human Nature? Let those therefore who have the Education of Youth, recommend Morality as the End of all Religion, and let every thing, not tending to promote the Honour of God, and the Good of Man, be accounted Superstition; let the Youth be taught to join the Ideas of Virtue with the Ideas of Beauty, Pleasure, and Happiness; and the Ideas of Vice with those of Deformity, Grief, and Misery; there wou'd then be little room for so odious a Thing as Vice to take Possession of Peoples Minds, and justle out Virtue so firmly rooted. For these Ideas, thus early associated, wou'd, by degrees, become inseparable; especially if Men, as they grew up, were frequently shewn the necessary Connexion between these Ideas, and how essential Virtue is to the Felicity of Nations, Families, and private Persons; and on the contrary, how miserable Vice must render Men in every Station of Life.

'Twas after this Manner that the Heroes of Old, those Benefactors to Mankind, were educated; and

and the Discourses of the Philosophers, who had the instructing them, were full of the intrinsick Loveliness of Virtue, and the Deformity of Vice; and taught them to direct all their Actions to the common Good, as to a common Centre; and that their future as well as present Happiness depended on it. But afterwards the Education of Youth being committed to Men of another Stamp, devoted to the Interest of their own Order, they, instead of infusing these noble Sentiments into them, persuaded them that their separate Interest, with the things on which it depended, which they call'd *the Good of the Church*, was to be their chief Aim: and so little Regard have some Men had to the common Good, that they have industriously dress'd up Vice in such lovely, and Virtue in such odious Colours, as to maintain, that bating the Consequences of a future State, they wou'd act like Fools, who did not indulge themselves in a vicious Course: And, I believe, Men of such Principles can't boast of much more Virtue, than a late Prelate of uncommon Parts and Learning, who from the Pulpit endeavour'd to prove, that *in this*

*Atterbury's*  
Funeral Ser-  
mon on Mr.  
*Bennet.*

*Life the virtuous Man is most miserable*; and who, by all his Actions, especially by his late monstrous Practices, shew'd how firmly he believ'd his own Doctrine, and how resolv'd he was, that Virtue should not make his present Life miserable.

B. I grant you, 'tis of the utmost Consequence to the Commonwealth, that Youth should be rightly instructed in all such Principles as promote the common Good; but can you imagine Pagan Philosophers could infuse more generous Sentiments into them, than Christian Clergymen?

A. I do not think so, when they are such Clergymen as those who at present have the instructing our Youth; otherwise I can't help giving into the Sentiments of a noble Author, who, speaking of the Education of Youth, when instructed by Philosophers, says, "It tended to make them as useful  
" to the Society they liv'd in as possible. There  
" they

Preface to the  
Account of  
*Denmark.*

“ they were train’d up to Exercise and Labour, to  
 “ accustom themselves to an active Life; no Vice  
 “ was more infamous than Sloth, nor any Man  
 “ more contemptible, than he who was too lazy  
 “ to do all the Good he could. The Lectures of  
 “ their Philosophers serv’d to quicken them up to  
 “ this; they recommended, above all Things, the  
 “ Duty to their Country, the Preservation of the  
 “ Laws and publick Liberty; subservient to which  
 “ they preach’d up moral Virtues, such as Forti-  
 “ tude, Temperance, Justice, a Contempt of Death,  
 “ &c. They taught their Youth how, and when to  
 “ speak pertinently; how to act like Men, to sub-  
 “ due their Passions; to be Publick-spirited; to  
 “ despise Death, Torments, and Reproach, Riches,  
 “ and the Smiles of Princes as well as their Frowns,  
 “ if they stood between them and their Duty. This  
 “ Manner of Education produc’d Men of another  
 “ Stamp than appears now upon the Theatre of  
 “ the World, such as we are scarce worthy to men-  
 “ tion, and must never think to imitate, till the  
 “ like Manner of Institution grows again into Re-  
 “ putation, which in enslav’d Countries ’tis never  
 “ like to do, as long as the Ecclesiasticks, who  
 “ have an opposite Interest, keep not only the E-  
 “ ducation of Youth, but the Consciences of old  
 “ Men in their Hands.”

B. THIS, I confess, is the right way to prevent  
 Immorality; but if every thing, as you contend,  
 ought to be look’d on as superstitious, which is not  
 of a moral nature, Superstition has spread itself over  
 the Face of the Earth, and prevail’d more or less  
 in all Times and Places.

A. THIS is no more than what has been own’d  
 long ago by a very good Judge, who says, *Super-*  
*stitio fusa per gentes, oppressit omnium ferè Animos,*  
*atque hominum occupavit Imbecillitatem.* And the  
 Universality of Superstition is in effect own’d by  
 every Sect, in affirming that Superstition is crept  
 into all other Sects, and that ’tis the chief Business

*Cicero l. 2. de*  
*Divinat. c. 72.*



of their respective Teachers to promote it : And is it possible to be otherwise, as long as Men are taught to build their Religion on a narrower Foundation, than that on which the universal Being has universally laid it ?

'TIS the Observation of *Naturalists*, that there is no Species of Creatures, but what have some innate Weakness, which makes them an easy Prey to other Animals, that know how to make the Advantage of it : Now the peculiar Foible of Mankind is Superstition, which at all times has made them liable to be practis'd on, not by Creatures of different Species, but by those of their own ; who, by a confident Pretence of knowing more than their Neighbours, have first circumvented the Many, the Credulous and Unwary ; and afterwards forc'd the Free-thinking few into an outward Compliance : And as far as we have an Account of Things, we shall find that most of the prevailing Superstitions have been erected on this Foundation, and to it owe their whole Support. And whoever knows any thing of *France* and *Italy*, not to mention other Countries, can't but know that the better Sort are sensible of the prevailing Absurdities, but, overaw'd by the Priests and Mob, are forc'd to submit. And,

THE more Superstition the People have, the easier they may be impos'd on by designing Ecclesiasticks ; and the less Religion the Clergy have, the more unanimous they will be in carrying on their common Interest ; and when the Clergy are without Religion, and the People abound in Superstition, the Church, you may be sure, is in a flourishing Condition ; but in great Danger, when Men place their Religion in Morality ; for then all indifferent Things are look'd on as they are in their own Nature, indifferent ; then the People have no superstitious Veneration for the Persons of Men, and the Clergy are esteem'd only in Proportion to the Good they do ; and every Evil they commit is

reckon'd a Branch of Trust, they being maintain'd by the People chiefly to set them good Examples : But this Method of gaining all that Reverence and Authority they pretend to, has, it seems, been thought too laborious and servile. They have (I mean, where *Popery* prevails) as Masters of the Religious Ceremonies, most effectually gain'd their End, by introducing such Things into Religion, as have promoted a superstitious Veneration to themselves, and made People believe, that the chief Means to obtain their *eternal* Happiness, were of a different nature from those, which caus'd their *temporal* Happiness ; and only to be dispens'd by them, in order to get the sole Management of *Spirituals* to themselves ; and consequently, (since there can't be at the same time two supreme Powers) of *Temporals also* : And so well have they succeeded, that, in most Places, the temporal Interest of the Clergy pass'd for the spiritual of the Laity.

THERE are two Ways which never fail to make Superstition prevail ; Mysteries to amuse the Enthusiasts, especially the Pretenders to deep Learning, and all that admire what they do not understand ; and gaudy Shew, and pompous Ceremonies, to bewitch the Vulgar : And the *Popish* Church, whose Conduct shews how well they understand their Interest, may vie with the old *Egyptian* Church for Mysteries ; and *Pagan Rome* must yield to *Christian Rome* in such Shews, Rites, and Ceremonies, as dazzle the Eyes of the People, and insensibly gain their Hearts ; and the more there are of these in any Church, the more the Clergy, the holy Dispensers of them, are reverenc'd, not to say ador'd, by the unthinking Multitude, as they are in the Church of *Rome*. “ That Church has, as Arch-  
 “ *bishop* Tillotson *observes*, weaken'd the Force of  
 “ Christianity upon the Hearts and Lives of Men,  
 “ by amusing them with *external Rites*, which  
 “ they have multiply'd to that excessive degree, as  
 “ to make the *Yoke* of Christ really *heavier* than  
 “ that

“ that of *Moses*, and the Christian Religion a more  
 “ *external* and *carnal Commandment* than that of the  
 “ Law, and have diverted the Minds of Men from  
 “ the main Design of Christianity. — They have  
 “ had no Leisure to think of being good Men,  
 “ and to mind the *great* and *substantial* Duties of  
 “ the Christian Life. — The *Simplicity* of the *Chri-*  
 “ *stian Worship* they have incumber’d with so many  
 “ frivolous *Rites* and *Observances*, as not only ren-  
 “ der it more burthensome, but less apt to make  
 “ Men *inwardly* and *substantially* good, than *Ju-*  
 “ *daism* itself.”

THIS great Man observes, that “ Those Things Serm. Vol. 4.  
P. 37. & To. 2.  
P. 341.  
 “ which are agreeable to our Nature, our Reason,  
 “ and our Interest, are the great Things which our  
 “ Religion requires of us. — And that Mankind  
 “ might have no Pretence left to excuse them from  
 “ these, the Christian Religion has set us free from  
 “ those many outward positive Observances, that  
 “ the *Jewish* Religion was incumber’d withal; that  
 “ we might be wholly intent on these great Duties,  
 “ and mind nothing in Comparison of the real and  
 “ substantial Virtues of a good Life.” If so, can  
 we suppose the Christian Religion has super-added  
 any outward positive Things of its own, to  
 hinder us from being wholly intent on these Du-  
 ties?

THE Popish Priests are so far from giving the  
 People any just Idea of God, that they represent  
 him as an arbitrary and tyrannical Being, impos-  
 ing, on the highest Pain, the Practice of ridiculous  
 Ceremonies, and the Belief of absurd Doctrines;  
 as a fantastical Being, angry without a Cause, and  
 pleas’d without Reason; as a vain-glorious Being,  
 fond of having his Ministers and Favourites, that  
 is, themselves, live in Pomp, Splendor, and Luxury,  
 to the miserable Oppression of the People. But ’tis  
 no wonder, that they are made to believe, that God  
 requires the observing indifferent Things on the se-  
 verest Penalties; since their Priests claim the same

Power, in making such Things necessary to the communicating in their holy Church, out of which, they affirm, Salvation is not to be had. I wish I could say, the Popish Priests only were guilty of this horrid Impiety; and that some others had not been as zealous for imposing such Things, by making them necessary Terms of Communion, and damning those that durst not comply with them, and who seem to be of the Spirit with the famous Bishop Gunning, who, when the *Presbyterians* urg'd that *Lights, Holy We'er*, and such like, might as well be impos'd as the *Cross* and *Surplice*, reply'd, *The more the better*. But if *External Rites*, as Archbishop Tillotson observes, *have eat out the Heart of Religion in the Church of Rome*, by Parity of Reason, Religion should seem to have made the deepest Impression on the *Quakers*, who are the most averse to Things of this nature; and are therefore hated by the *Formalists* of all Churches.

B. SENSIBLE Things make a deeper Impression on the Minds of the common People than Words; and therefore, the using symbolical Representations being for the Advantage of Religion, why may they not be ordain'd of God?

A. IF you must have Recourse to Words, to explain the Signification of such Symbols, are they not arbitrary Marks, whose Meaning cannot be known, but from Words; and, not being capable of expressing Things more fully than Words, wholly needless as to that Purpose? Nay, Words themselves being but arbitrary Signs, to multiply such Signs needlessly would be very absurd.

As to sensible Things making a deeper Impression on the common People, that, I presume, is a just Reason against their Use in Religion, because the Vulgar, who generally look no farther than Externals, do not use them barely, as they do Words, to express their Meaning; but conceive in them I know not what internal Holiness, and think such symbolical Representations as necessary as the Things repre-

represented by them, nay, by degrees, forgetting the Reason of their Institution, come to idolize them, as the *Israelites* did the brazen Serpent: And this the People have always done in all Religions whatever, where these symbolical Representations have been used.

THE chief Cause of the *Egyptians* falling into grosser Idolatries than other less knowing Nations, was, no doubt, owing to the Use of *Hieroglyphicks* in their religious Worship: An Ox, that laborious and useful Animal, was at first only a symbolical Representation; the Meaning of which, the People in time forgetting, fell to down-right adoring the Beast; and, perhaps, it was for the same Reason that *Leeks* and *Onions*, and other Garden-stuff came likewise to be worshipped. But without looking into the *Pagan* World, and shewing by what Degrees they came to worship those sensible Representations, Statues and Images; whoever reflects on the Use the *Papists* have made of such things, must see how fatal it is to bring them into Religion: The Images and Pictures of Saints, and Crosses were first introduced, on pretence, that being sensible Representations, they might serve to excite People's Devotion; but that End was soon forgotten, and the superstitious Vulgar worship'd the very Images, Pictures, and Crosses. I need not tell you what *Transubstantiation*, *Consubstantiation*, *Real Presence*, and other Absurdities of that nature are owing to; and what Mischiefs they have occasion'd: But supposing such symbolical Representations might be occasionally used; is it not, for the Reasons already given, incumbent on the Parties concern'd, to appoint, alter, and vary them as Occasion requires?

B. If God has delegated to the Clergy a Power to consecrate Persons and Things; can any, whether Prince or People, dispense with this Power, and substitute Things unconsecrated?

A. As God alone is absolutely holy, so Men may be said to be more or less holy, according as they imitate him; and as this Holiness consists in a good and pious Disposition of Mind; so Mens Actions are no otherwise holy, but as they flow from, and are Signs of this holy Disposition. Inanimate things can only be said to have a relative Holiness, as made use of in Actions, by which Men express that holy Disposition of Mind, and can last no longer than they are thus employ'd. What Holiness, either real or relative, would the Ark now have? tho' it once had such a legal Holiness, that more than fifty thousand Reapers were destroy'd for peeping into it. Nay, Persons who want all real Holiness, may yet have a relative Holiness, as Ministers employ'd by the Congregation about holy things; but this can be no more than a derivative Holiness, and can last no longer than the holy Action they are about; and belongs equally to those from whom 'tis deriv'd. Thus all the relative Holiness which concerns publick Worship, whether as to Persons, Places, or Things, must be deriv'd from the Congregation; and nothing sure can be more absurd, than to imagine the Clergy, by any Form of Words, can bestow any permanent Holiness, whether real or relative, on Timber, Stone, &c. And therefore the Method us'd by Archbishop *Laud*, in consecrating a Church, was generally cry'd out on as profane, and tending to justify those Consecrations used in the *Greek* and *Latin* Churches, whereby they cheat the People of immense Sums. But 'tis no wonder, if they who claim this Power in relation to inanimate things, should pretend to convey to Men, tho' ever so wicked, a real inherent, nay, *indelible* holy Character; tho' wherein that consists, they themselves can't tell. But,

WHAT the Priests aim at, by this Cant, is to make People believe their Prayers are of greater Efficacy than those of the un sanctify'd Laity; very well knowing, that if the People were so weak as

to believe it, they would be thought necessary on all occasions; especially to Persons on their Death-beds. What Advantages they have made by being then thought thus necessary, no one can be ignorant of. I do not wonder, that so loose an Haranguer as *St. Chrysostom* should say, *The Prayers of the People, which are weak in themselves, laying hold on the more prevailing Prayers of the Priests, may, by them, be convey'd to Heaven.* But I admire, that the judicious *Bishop Potter*, the King's Professor of Divinity at *Oxford*, should maintain the same Position, and think to support it by this Father's Authority: But this is modest in comparison of what *Hickes*, *Brett*, and others of that stamp, assign to Priests; in supposing they have such transcendent Privileges by virtue of their *indelible* Character, that they can bless or curse *authoritatively*; nay, that their very Prayers to God himself are *authoritative Prayers*.

Of Church-  
Government,  
P. 250.

*B.* THO' some have had too little Regard for Natural Religion, as being too stubborn to yield to any selfish Views; yet that will not justify you for levelling your Arguments against the Divine Omnipotency. Are we not God's Creatures; and may not our Creator give us what arbitrary Commands he pleases?

*A.* NOT to repeat what I have said already, I shall only ask you, Why may not God deceive us? Tell us one thing, and act the contrary? Is not his Power absolute? and *his Will who can resist*? Would you not reply, that God, as he is infinitely good and happy, can have no Motive to deceive us? And that he could do whatever he thought fit for the Good of his Creatures, without having recourse to such mean Shifts? And will not this reason equally hinder him from burdening us with arbitrary Commands? Is not one as much as the other, inconsistent with his Wisdom and Goodness, by which his Power is always directed? And of the two it should seem less absurd, that God might deceive for their Good, than impose arbitrary things on them for their Hurt;

Hurt; by annexing severe Penalties on Non-observance.

**B. MAY** not God give us arbitrary Commands to try our Obedience?

**A.** A Man, who knows not the Hearts of others, nor foresees how they will act, may think it prudent to try People in things of little or no moment, before he trusts them in greater; but God, who foreknows what Men will do on all occasions, can need no such Trial. If earthly Kings, who may be deceiv'd, and for the most part are so, would be justly esteem'd Tyrants, if they require things of their Subjects merely to try their Obedience; how can we think this of the Omniscient, infinitely Glorious King of Kings? Tho' was a Trial necessary, moral and immoral things would be the most proper Subjects for it; because we can't practise one, or refrain from the other, without subduing our Lusts and Passions: but what speculative Articles will not an ill Man profess? Or what indifferent things will he not practise, to be indulg'd in any one darling Vice.

AND now don't you think we may justly conclude, that whatsoever God requires us to believe, or practise, is purely for our Good; and consequently, that no Belief, or Practise which does not contribute to that Good, can come from God; and therefore, as long as we adhere to what Reason reveals to us concerning the Goodness of God, by admitting every thing into Religion which makes for the Good of Man, and nothing that does not, we can't mistake our Duty either to God or Man.

AND therefore I shall conclude this Head with a Quotation from a noble Author: "To believe, " that every thing is govern'd, order'd, or regulated *for the best*, by a designing Principle, or " Mind, necessarily good and parmament, is to be " a perfect THEIST.

" To believe no *one* supreme designing Principle, " or Mind, but rather *two, three, or more*, (tho' " in



“ in their Nature *good*) is to be a **POLYTHEIST**.  
 “ To believe the governing Mind, or Minds, not  
 “ absolutely and necessarily good, nor confin'd to  
 “ what is best, but capable of acting according to  
 “ mere Will or Fancy, is to be a **DÆMONIST**.”

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## C H A P. XII.

*That they, who, to magnify Revelation, weaken the Force of the Religion of Reason and Nature, strike at all Religion; and that there can't be two independent Rules for the Government of human Actions.*

**B.** **I**N my Opinion you lay too great a Stress on fallible Reason, and too little on infallible Revelation; and therefore I must needs say, your arguing wholly from Reason would make some of less Candour than myself, take you for an errant *Free-thinker*.

**A.** **W**HATEVER is true by Reason, can never be false by Revelation; and if God can't be deceiv'd himself, or be willing to deceive Men, the Light he hath given to distinguish between religious Truth and Falshood, cannot, if duly attended to, deceive them in things of so great Moment.

**T**HEY who do not allow Reason to judge in Matters of Opinion or Speculation, are guilty of as great Absurdity as the *Papists*, who will not allow the Senses to be Judges in the Case of *Transubstantiation*, tho' a Matter directly under their Cognizance; nay, the Absurdity, I think, is greater in the first Case, because Reason is to judge whether our Senses are deceiv'd: And if no Texts ought to be admitted as a Proof in a matter contrary to Sense, they ought certainly as little to be admitted in any Point contrary to Reason.

**I**N a word, to suppose any thing in Revelation inconsistent with Reason, and, at the same time, pretend

pretend it to be the Will of God, is not only to destroy that Proof, on which we conclude it to be the Will of God, but even the Proof of the Being of a God; since if our reasoning Faculties duly attended to deceive us, we can't be sure of the Truth of any one Proposition; but every thing wou'd be alike uncertain, and we should for ever fluctuate in a State of universal Scepticism: Which shews how absurdly they act, who, on pretence of magnifying Tradition, endeavour to weaken the Force of Reason, (tho' to be sure they always except their own;) and thereby foolishly sap the Foundation, to support the Superstructure; but as long as Reason is against Men, they will be against Reason. We must not, therefore, be surpriz'd, to see some endeavour to reason Men out of their Reason; tho' the very Attempt to destroy Reason by Reason, is a Demonstration Men have nothing but Reason to trust to.

AND to suppose any thing can be true by Revelation, which is false by Reason, is not to support that thing, but to undermine Revelation; because nothing unreasonable, nay, what is not highly reasonable, can come from a God of unlimited, universal, and eternal Reason. As evident as this Truth is, yet that shall not hinder me from examining in a proper Place, whatever you can urge from Revelation. And give me leave to add, that I shall not be surpris'd, if for so laudable an Attempt, as reconciling Reason and Revelation, which have been so long set at variance, I should be censur'd as a *Free-thinker*; a Title, that, however invidious it may seem, I am far from being asham'd of; since one may as well suppose a Man can reason without thinking at all, as reason well without thinking freely. But,

THE irreconcilable Enemies of Reason seeing it too gross, in this reasoning Age, to attack Reason openly, do it covertly under the Name of *Free-thinking*; not despairing, but that the time may come

come again, when the Laity shall stifle every Thought rising in their Minds, tho' with ever so much Appearance of Truth, as a Suggestion of Satan, if it clashes with the real, or pretended Opinions of their Priests.

B. THO' you talk so much about Reason, you have not defin'd what you mean by that Word.

A. WHEN we attribute any Operation to it, as distinguishing between Truth and Falshood, &c. we mean by it the rational Faculties; but when we ascribe no such Operation to it, as when we give a Reason for a thing, &c. we then understand by it, any Medium, by which our rational Faculties judge of the Agreement, or Disagreement of the Terms of any Proposition; and if an Author writes intelligibly, we may easily discern in which of these two Senses he takes the Word. But to go to the Bottom of this Matter;

IT will be requisite to give a more distinct Account of Reason in both these Senses. By the rational Faculties then, we mean the natural Ability a Man has to apprehend, judge, and infer: The immediate Objects of which Faculties are, not the things themselves, but the Ideas the Mind conceives of them. While our Ideas remain single, they fall under the Apprehension, and are express'd by simple Terms; when join'd, under the Judgment, and express'd by Propositions; when so join'd as to need the Intervention of some other Idea to compare 'em with, in order to form a Judgment, they become by that Intervention, the Subject of Inference, or Argumentation; and this is term'd, Syllogism or Argument. It must be observ'd too, that all the Ideas we have, or can have, are either by Sensation or Reflection; by the first, we have our Ideas of what passes, or exists without; by the second, of what passes, or exists within the Mind: And in the View, or Contemplation of these consists all our Knowledge; that being nothing but the Perception of the Agreement, or Disagreement of our Ideas. And any two of these,

these, when join'd together, so as to be affirm'd or deny'd of each other, make what we call a *Proposition*; when consider'd apart, what we call the *Terms* of that *Proposition*; the *Agreement*, or *Disagreement* of which *Terms* being express'd by the rightly affirming, or denying 'em of each other, is what we call *Truth*; the Perception of their *Agreement* or *Disagreement*, is what we term *Knowledge*: This *Knowledge* accrues either immediately on the bare Intuition of these two *Ideas*, or *Terms* so join'd, and is therefore styl'd *Intuitive Knowledge*; or self-evident *Truth*: Or by the Intervention of some other *Idea*, or *Ideas*, as a common Measure for the other two; and is therefore call'd the *Medium*, by which Reason judges of their *Agreement* or *Disagreement*; and this is call'd *Demonstrative Knowledge*, which is never to be had without the help of the other. For,

IF there were not some Propositions which need not to be prov'd, it would be in vain for Men to argue with one another; because they then could bring no Proofs but what needed to be prov'd. — Those Propositions which need no Proof, we call self-evident; because by comparing the *Ideas*, signify'd by the *Terms* of such Propositions, we immediately discern their *Agreement*, or *Disagreement*: This is, as I said before, what we call *intuitive Knowledge*, and is the *Knowledge* of God himself, who sees all things by Intuition; and may, I think, be call'd *divine Inspiration*; as being immediately from God, and not acquir'd by any human Deduction, or drawing of Consequences: This, certainly, is that divine, that uniform Light, which shines in the Minds of all Men, and enables them to discern whatever they do discern; since without it there could be no Demonstration, no Knowledge, but invincible Obscurity, and universal Uncertainty.

WHERE a Proposition can't be made evident, by comparing the two *Ideas* or *Terms* of it with each

each other, it is render'd so by intermediate Ideas or Terms; whereby the Agreement, or Disagreement of the Ideas under Examination, or the Truth of that Proposition is perceiv'd; and when there is an intuitive Perception of the Agreement, or Disagreement of the intermediate Ideas in each Step of the Progression, then, and not till then, it becomes demonstrative Knowledge; otherwise it can rise no higher than Probability, which consists not in a certain, but a likely Connexion between the Terms of a Proposition, and the intermediate Proofs of it: So that every Proposition that's only probable, must have a proportionable Degree of Uncertainty, otherwise it would amount to Demonstration; and consequently, Probability, as well as Certainty, is founded on the Relation it has to self-evident Truths; because where no Relation to them of *any Sort* can be discover'd, there is no room for Certainty, or Probability.

HENCE we see that all wrong Reasoning is the Effect of Rashness, and consists either in taking Propositions to have a certain Connexion with self-evident Truths, when they have but a probable one; or imagining there's a probable Connexion, when there's no Connexion at all; or else mistaking the Degrees of Probability.

*B.* THE *Quakers* are very positive, that there is in all Mankind, a Principle of Action distinct from Reason, (and which is not Inspiration) by which all are to be govern'd in Matters of Religion, as they are by Reason in other Matters; and which they commonly call *the Light within*.

*A.* WAS there any such Principle, Men destitute of all Reason were as capable of knowing all Matters of Religion, as if they had been ever so rational. 'Tis strange, that all Mankind should have a Principle of acting, of which they never were sensible; nor can these modern Discoveries tell them what it is, or how it operates; nor do they themselves ever use it in any of their Debates about Religion; but argue like other Men from Principles

ples that are in common to all Mankind, and prove Propositions that are not self-evident by those that are so; and confute false and bad Reasons (of which they can only judge by Reason) by true and good Reasons; which supposes that Reason, however fallible it may be, is all rational Creatures have to trust to; and that 'tis the highest Commendation of Religion; that it is a *reasonable Service*. And since this is an Age, where Words without Meaning, or Distinctions without Difference, will not pass current; why should they, who otherwise appear to have good Sense, thus impose on themselves, and be expos'd to others, for such senseless Notions, as can only serve to prejudice People against their other rational Principles? But 'tis the Fate of most Sects to be fondest of their ugliest Brats. But not to deviate,

WERE it not for those self-evident Notions, which are the Foundation of all our Reasonings, there could be no intellectual Communication between God and Man; nor, as we are fram'd, can God ascertain us of any Truth, but by shewing its Agreement with those self-evident Notions, which are the Tests by which we are to judge of every thing, even the Being of a God, and Natural Religion; which, tho' not knowable by Intuition, are to be demonstrated by such Proofs, which have, mediately or immediately, a necessary Connexion with our self-evident Notions. And therefore to weaken the Force of Demonstration, is to strike at all Religion, and even the Being of God; and not to give Probability its due Weight, is to strike at the Authority of that Revelation you contend for; because, that God reveal'd his Will by *Visions, Dreams, Trances*, or any other Way besides the Light of Nature, can only come under the Head of Probability. And,

IF it be but probable, that God made any external Revelation at all, it can be but probable, tho' perhaps, not in the same Degree of Probability, that he made this, or that Revelation: And this  
Evidence

Evidence all pretend to, since, perhaps, there never was a Time or Place, where some external Revelation was not believ'd, and its Votaries equally confident, that Theirs was a true Revelation: And, indeed, the prodigious Numbers of Revelations, which from time to time have been in the World, shew how easily Mankind may in this Point be impos'd on. And as there can be no Demonstration of the Revelation itself, so neither can there be any of its Conveyance to Posterity; much less that this, or that, has been convey'd intire to distant times and Places; especially, if the Revelation be of any Bulk; and which may have gone thorough the Hands of Men, who, not only in the dark Ages of the Church, but even in the Beginning, if we judge by the Number of corrupted Passages, and even forg'd Books, were capable of any pious Fraud. Nay, the very Nature of Probability is such, that were it only left to Time itself, even that wou'd wear it quite out; at least if it be true what *Mathematicians* pretend to demonstrate, *viz.* That the Probability of Facts depending on human Testimony, must gradually lessen in proportion to the Distance of the Time when they were done. And we have a Reverend Divine, who

*Craig's Principia Mathematica Theologiae Christianae, p. 23--- & d. Edit. Londini 1699.*

ARCHBISHOP *Laud* says, that “ the Assent  
“ we yield to this main Point of Divinity, that the  
“ Scripture is the Word of God, is grounded on  
“ no compelling or demonstrative Ratiocination,  
“ but relies on the Strength of Faith more than  
“ any one Principle whatever.” And by the Confession of the best *Protestant* Writers, the internal Excellency of the Christian Doctrines is the main Proof of their coming from God; and therefore, Mr. *Chillingworth* says, “ For my Part, I profess,

*Laud against Fisher, p. 110.*

*Relig. Prot. st. Part. 1. c. 2.*

“ and as fit to come from God, the Fountain of  
 “ Goodness, as the Miracles, by which it was con-  
 “ firm’d, were great; I should want one main Pil-  
 “ lar of my Faith: And for want of it, I fear,  
 “ should be much stagger’d in it.

THIS, I think, may be sufficient to shew, what a Folly they are guilty of, who, in order to advance the Credit of Revelation, endeavour to weaken the Force of Reason.

B. I don’t think we ought to have the same Regard for Reason as Men had formerly; when That was the sole Rule God had given them for the Government of their Actions; since now we Christians have two supreme, independent Rules, *Reason* and *Revelation*; and both require an absolute Obedience.

A. I can’t see how that is possible; for if you are to be govern’d by the latter, That supposes you must take every thing on Trust; or merely because it’s said by those, for whose Dictates You are to have an implicit Faith: For to examine into the Truth of what they say, is renouncing their Authority; as on the contrary, if Men are to be govern’d by their Reason, they are not to admit any thing farther than as they see it reasonable. To suppose both consistent, is to suppose it consistent to take, and not to take, things on trust.

To receive Religion on the account of Authority supposes, that if the Authority promulgated a different Religion, we should be oblig’d to receive it; and indeed, it’s an odd Jumble, to prove the Truth of a Book by the Truth of the Doctrines it contains, and at the same time conclude those Doctrines to be true, because contain’d in that Book; and yet this is a Jumble every one makes, who contends for Mens being absolutely govern’d both by Reason and Authority.

WHAT can be a fuller Evidence of the Sovereignty of Reason, than that all Men, when there is any thing in their traditional Religion, which in its literal Sense can’t be defended by Reason, have



recourse to any Method of Interpretation, tho' ever so forc'd, in order to make it appear reasonable. And do not all Parties, when press'd, as they are all in their turns, say with *Tertullian*, " We ought to interpret Scripture, not by the Sound of Words, but by the Nature of Things?" *Malo Adv. Prax. te ad sensum rei, quam ad sonum vocabuli exerceas.* c. 3. But sometimes the Letter of the Scripture is such an Authority, as can't be parted with without Sacrilege; and sometimes 'tis a *Letter which killeth.*

IN a Word, when Men, in defending their own, or attacking other traditionary Religions, have recourse to the Nature or Reason of Things; does not That shew, they believe the Truth of all traditionary Religions is to be try'd by it; as being That, which must tell them what is true or false in Religion? And were there not some Truths relating to Religion of themselves so evident, as that all must agree in them, nothing relating to Religion could be prov'd, every thing would want a farther Proof; and if there are such evident Truths, must not all others be try'd by their Agreement with them? And are not these the Tests, by which we are to distinguish the only true Religion from the many false ones? And do not all Parties alike own, there are such Tests drawn from the nature of Things, each crying their Religion contains every thing worthy, and nothing unworthy of having God for its Author; thereby confessing that Reason enables them to tell what is worthy of having God for its Author. And if Reason tells them this, does it not tell them every thing that God can be suppos'd to require?

IN short, nothing can be more certain, than that there are some things in their own Nature good, some evil; and others neither good nor evil; and for the same reason God commands the Good, and forbids the Evil, he leaves Men at liberty in Things indifferent; it being inconsistent with his Wisdom to reward the Observance of such things, and with his

Goodness to punish for not observing them. And as he could have no End in creating Mankind, but their common Good; so they answer the End of their Creation, who do all the Good they can: And to enable Men to do this, God has given them Reason to distinguish Good from Evil, useful from useless Things: Or, in other Words, has made them moral Agents, capable of discerning the Relations they stand in to God and one another; and the Duties resulting from these Relations, so necessary to their common Good: And consequently, Religion, thus founded on these immutable Relations, must at all Times, and in all Places, be alike immutable; since external Revelation, not being able to make any Change in these Relations, and the Duties that necessarily result from them, can only recommend, and inculcate these Duties; except we suppose, that God at last acted the Tyrant, and impos'd such Commands, as the Relations we stand in to him, and one another, no ways require.

To imagine any external Revelation not to depend on the Reason of Things, is to make Things give Place to Words; and implies, that from the Time this Rule commenc'd, we are forbid to act as moral Agents, in judging what is Good or Evil; Fit or Unfit; and that we are to make no other Use of our Reason, than to see what is the literal Meaning of Texts; and to admit That only to be the Will of God, tho' ever so inconsistent with the Light of Nature, and the eternal Reason of Things. Is not this to infer, there's nothing Good or Evil in itself, but that all depends on the Will of an arbitrary Being; which, tho' it may change every Moment, is to be unalterably found in such a Book? And,

ALL Divines, I think, now agree in owning, that there's a Law of Reason, antecedent to any external Revelation, that God can't dispence, either with his Creatures or himself, for not observing; and that no external Revelation can be true, that in the least Circumstance, or minutest Point, is inconsistent

sistent with it. If so, how can we affirm any one thing in Revelation to be true, 'till we perceive, by that Understanding, which God hath given us to discern the Truth of things; whether it agrees with this immutable Law, or not.

IF we can't believe otherwise than as things appear to our Understandings, to suppose God requires us to give up our Understandings (a Matter we can't know but by using our Understanding) to any Authority whatever, is to suppose he requires Impossibilities. And our self-evident Notions being the Foundation of all Certainty, we can only judge of things, as they are found to be more or less agreeable to them; to deny This on any Pretence whatever, can serve only to introduce an universal Scepticism. And therefore Bishop *Taylor* very justly observes, " 'Tis Reason that is the Judge; and Fathers, Councils, Tradition and Scripture the Evidence." Polem. Disc. P. 507. And if Reason be the Judge, can it form a right Judgment, without examining into every thing which offers itself for Evidence? And would it not examine in vain, if it had not certain tests, by which it could try all Evidences relating to religious Matters.

*B.* THO' Reason may be the Judge; yet the Scripture, we say, is the Rule, by which Reason must judge of the Truth of things.

*A.* IF it be such a Rule, must it not have all the Qualifications necessary to make it so? But if Reason must tell us what those Qualifications are, and whether they are to be found in Scripture; and if one of those Qualifications is, that the Scripture must be agreeable to the Nature of things; does not that suppose the Nature of things to be the standing Rule, by which we must judge of the Truth of all those Doctrines contain'd in the Scriptures? So that the Scripture can only be a secondary Rule, as far as it is found agreeable to the Nature of things; or to those self-evident Notions, which are the Foundation of all Knowledge and Certainty.

IN short, no Man can any more discern the Objects of his own Understanding, and their Relations, by the Faculties of another, than he can see with another Man's Eyes; or that one Ship can be guided by the Helm of another: And therefore, he, who demands a Man's Assent to any thing, without conveying into his Mind such Reasons as may produce a Sense of the Truth of it; erects a Tyranny over his Understanding, and demands an impossible Tribute. No Opinion, tho' ever so certain to one Man, can be infus'd into another as certain, by any Method, but by opening his Understanding, so that he may find the Reasonableness of it in his own Mind; and consequently, the only *Criterion*, by which he tries his own Reasonings, must be the internal Evidence he has already of certain Truths, and the Agreeableness of his Inferences to them. And,

To suppose a Creature to have Reason to direct him, and that he is not to be directed by it, is a Contradiction; and if we are religious as we are rational, can Religion oblige us not to be govern'd by Reason, tho' but for a Moment? Nay, what is the Religion of all rational Beings, but what the Scripture terms it, *a reasonable Service*? Or, their Reason employ'd on such Subjects, as conduce to the Dignity of the rational Nature? So that Religion and Reason were not only given for the same End, the Good of Mankind; but they are, as far as such Subjects extend, the same, and commence together. And if God can no otherwise apply to Men, but by applying to their Reason, (which he is continually doing by the Light of Nature) does he not by that bid them use their Reason? And can God at the same time forbid it, by requiring an implicit Faith in any Person whatever.

IF you allow, that Men by their reasoning Faculties are made like unto God, and fram'd after his Image; and that Reason is the most excellent Gift

Gift God can bestow; do they not destroy this Likeness, deface this Image, and give up the Dignity of human Nature, when they give up their Reason to any Person whatever?

CAN we lay too great a Stress on Reason, when we consider, 'tis only by virtue of it God can hold Communication with Man? Nor can otherwise, if I may so speak, witness for himself, or assert the Wisdom and Goodness of his Conduct; than by submitting his Ways to Mens cool Deliberation, and strict Examination? since 'tis from the Marks we discern in the Laws of the Universe, and its Government, that we can demonstrate it to be govern'd by a God of infinite Wisdom and Goodness: He, whose Reason does not enable him to do This, can neither discern the Wisdom, Goodness, or even the Being of a God.

THEY only answer the End for which their Reason was given them, who judge of the Will of God, by the Reasonableness and Goodness of Doctrines; and think his Laws, like his Works, carry in them the Marks of Divinity; and they likewise do the greatest Honour to the Scripture, who suppose it deals with Men as with rational Creatures; and therefore admit not of any of its Doctrines without a strict Examination; And those who take a contrary Method, would, if they liv'd in *Turky*, embrace *Mahometanism*, and believe in the *Alcoran*.

AND indeed, a blind Submission is so far from doing credit to true Religion, that it puts all Religion on the same foot; for without judging of a Religion by its internal Marks, there's nothing but Miracles to plead; and Miracles true or false, if they are believ'd (and where are they not?) will have the same Effect: Nay, if Miracles can be perform'd by evil, as well as by good Beings, the worst Religion may have the most Miracles, as needing them most. And it was a proverbial Saying among the Philosophers of Greece, *Θαύματα μωροῖς*  
*Miracles*

*Miracles for Fools, and Reasons for Wise Men.* The *Bæotians* were remarkable for their Stupidity, and the Number of their Oracles; and if they look no further than the Christian World, you will find, that Ignorance, and the Belief of daily Miracles go hand in hand, and that there is nothing too absurd for the People's Belief. And if the most learned *Huetius* gives us a true Account of Things, there are no Miracles recorded in the Bible, but many of the like nature are to be found in Pagan Histories.

See his *Alphabetæ Quæstiones de Concordantia fidei & rationis.*

Wou'd not Christians themselves think it a sufficient Proof of a Religion's not coming from God, if it wanted any of those internal Marks, by which the Truth of Religion is to be try'd, without inquiring into its Miracles, or any other its external Proofs? and consequently, wherever these internal Marks are found, are not external Marks needless? But,

How can we maintain, that the Scripture carries with it all those internal Marks of Truth, which are inseparable from God's Laws; and at the same time affirm, it requires an implicit Faith, and blind Obedience to all its Dictates? If it does so, how could we have examin'd whether it had those internal Marks? Or can we say, we can't know without the Scripture, what are the internal Marks of Truth; and at the same time suppose, we must by our Reason know what are those Marks, before we can tell whether they are to be found in the Scripture?

If our Nature is a rational Nature, and our Religion a *reasonable Service*, there must be such a necessary and close Connexion between them, as to leave no room for any thing that is arbitrary to intervene: And consequently, the Religion of all rational Beings must consist in using such a Conduct to God, and their Fellow-Creatures, as Reason, whatever Circumstance they are in, does direct.

Gal. i. 8.

WE find *St. Paul* himself saying, that *Tho' We, (the Apostles) or an Angel from Heaven, preach any other*

*other Gospel, let him be accursed:* And is not this laying the whole stress on its internal Marks? Since there's nothing in the nature of such Things as have not those Marks, to hinder them from being chang'd every Moment.

AND as to those who depress Reason, in order to exalt Revelation, I would ask them, what greater Proof the Scripture can give us of the Rectitude of human Understanding in religious Matters, than calling it *the Inspiration of the Almighty*; or than God's frequently appealing to it, for the Justification of his own Conduct? Job. 32. 3.

IN the Prophet *Isaiab*, God representing his own Conduct towards his People, under the Parable of a Vineyard, expressly says, *O ye Inhabitants of Jerusalem, and Men of Judah, judge, I pray you, between me and my Vineyard.* And in *Ezekiel*, God, after a long Vindication of his Carriage towards his People, appeals to them, saying, *Hear now, O House of Israel, is not my Ways equal? Are not your Ways unequal?* And in the Prophet *Micah*, he says, *He will plead with them; asks what he has done, and bids them testify against him.* And in the Prophet *Isaiab*, after the Lord had said, *Wash ye, make ye clean, put away the Evil of your Doings from before mine Eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well; seek Judgment, relieve the Oppressed; judge the Fatherless, plead for the Widow;* he adds, *Come now, let us reason together; tho' your Sins be as Scarlet, they shall be as white as Snow.* Does not God here appeal to their Reason for the Sufficiency of moral Things, to wash away their Sins, tho' of the deepest Dye? And could God and Man reason together, except there were some Notions in common to both; some Foundation for such Reasoning? Otherwise could *Job* say, *I desire to reason with God?* And certainly, the next thing to reasoning with God, is reasoning with one another about God and Religion; that being the chief End, for which our Reason was given us. *Thus Paul reason'd in the Synagogue every Sabbath.* And again, Job. 13. 3.  
Isa. 5. 3.  
Ezek. 18. 2.  
Mic. 6. 2, 3.  
Isa. 1. 16, 17.  
Acts 18. 4.  
He

c. 17. 2.  
e. 24. 25.

*He reason'd with them out of the Scriptures. And as he reason'd of Righteousness, Temperance, and Judgment to come, Felix trembled: Which, certainly, he had never done, had Paul talk'd about Types, Allegories, Rites and Ceremonies, &c.*

*B.* You argue as if we had no certain way of knowing the Will of God, except from the Light of Nature, and that eternal Rule of Reason, by which you suppose, God governs all his own Actions, and expects Men should govern all theirs; but may not God take what Methods he pleases to communicate his Mind?

*A.* THIS all traditional Religions with equal Confidence assert; and they would have equal Right to plead it, if Reason did not afford Men certain *Criteria* to know God's Will by, which way soever reveal'd.

IF God created Mankind to make them happy here, or hereafter, the Rules he gave them, must be sufficient to answer that benevolent Purpose of infinite Wisdom; and consequently, had Mankind observ'd them, there could have been no Occasion for an external Revelation; and its great Use now is, to make Men observe those neglected Rules, which God, of his infinite Wisdom and Goodness, design'd for their present, and future Happiness.

*B.* Do not our Divines say, Mankind were for many Ages in a deplorable State, for want of an external Revelation?

*A.* IF God does every thing that's fit for him to do, could Men be in such a State, because God did not do a thing, which was not fit for him to do, *viz.* make a Revelation, before it was fit for him to make it? Or can the greatest Part of Mankind be now in that deplorable Condition, for want of a Revelation, which God, out of his infinite Wisdom, has not as yet thought fit to communicate to them; at least with that Evidence, as is necessary to make them believe it?



MUST not these Gentlemen suppose, that either God, in creating Mankind, did not design their future Happiness, tho' he gave them immortal Souls capable of it; or else, that tho' he design'd it, he prescrib'd them such Means, or gave them such Rules, as either were not sufficient at first; or in Process of Time became insufficient for that End? But that after Men had been, for many Ages, in this miserable Condition, God thought fit to mend the eternal, universal Law of Nature, by adding certain Observances to it, not founded on the Reason of Things; and that those, out of his partial Goodness, he communicated only to some; leaving the greatest Part in their former dark and deplorable State? But,

Is it not incumbent on those, who make any external Revelation so necessary to the Happiness of all Mankind, to shew, how it is consistent with the Notion of God's being universally benevolent, not to have reveal'd it to all his Children, when all had equal need of it? Was it not as easy for him to have communicated it to all Nations, as in any one Nation, or Person? Or in all Languages, as to any one? Nay, was it not as easy for him to have made all Men, for the sake of this noble End, speak in one and the same Language; as it was at first, to multiply Languages, to prevent their building a Tower up to Heaven? Nay, I see not how God can have any need at all of Language, to let Mankind know his Will; since he has at all times communicated his Mind to them without it?

*B.* THESE, I confess, are considerable Difficulties; but as to the last Difficulty, did not God give Laws to the *Jews*, of which other Nations knew nothing?

*A.* NOR were they concern'd to know, or when known, oblig'd to observe them; nor did they bind the *Jews* themselves, but for a time; and even then, they were, for the most part, impracticable out of the Land of *Canaan*; where God, as I shall

shall fully shew hereafter, acted not as Governour of the *Universe*, but as King of the *Jews*, by virtue of the *Horeb Covenant*; which he obtain'd at his own Request. But when God acts as Governour of the *Universe*, his Laws are all alike design'd for all under his Government; that is, all Mankind: And consequently, what equally concerns all, must be equally knowable by all. And if the Universality of a Law, be the only certain Mark of its coming from the Governour of Mankind; how can we be certain, That, which wants this Mark, comes from him? And if Religion belongs to us, as we are Men; must we not, as Men, be capable of knowing it? And if all Mankind are Creatures of the same Creator, and Fellow-Creatures with one another, must not all their religious Duties, as they are Creatures of the same God, and Fellow-Creatures with one another, be the same? And let me add, that

IF Men are religious, as they are rational, must they not be capable, when they come to the Use of their Reason, of knowing a Religion founded on Reason? Or must they be oblig'd to leave their Country, and endlessly rove up and down, in search of such Opinions as have no Foundation in Reason? Or, if they are forc'd to stay at home, be ever examining into all the arbitrary Precepts, which are to be met with in any of the traditional Religions they can come at? And shou'd they do so, must they not, since Reason could not direct them in Things not depending on Reason, perpetually remain in a State of Uncertainty?

I might go farther, and ask you, whether it is consistent with that Impartiality, which is essential to the Deity, not to make those he designs should know his Will by Revelation, capable of knowing that Revelation; and consequently his Will, contain'd in it, at one time as well as another? Which could not be, if that which was plain at first, became obscure by reason of the Change of Languages,

guages, Customs, the Distance of Time and Place, the Errors of Transcribers and Translators, and an hundred other Things too long to mention. Can these Difficulties be avoided, without supposing, that Religion, which way soever reveal'd, carries such internal Marks of Truth, as at all Times and Places, plainly shews itself, even to the meanest Capacity, to be the Will of a Being of universal and impartial Benevolence.

*B.* THE greater Strefs you lay on Reason, the more you extol Revelation; which being design'd to exalt and perfect our rational Nature, must be itself highly reasonable.

*A.* I grant you this is the Design of Religion; but have not the Ecclesiasticks in most Places entirely defeated this Design, and so far debas'd Human Nature, as to render it unsociable, fierce, and cruel? Have they not made external Revelation the Pretence of filling the Christian World with Animosity, Hatred, Persecution, Ruin, and Destruction, in order to get an absolute Dominion over the Consciences, Properties and Persons of the Laity? But, passing this over, if the Perfection of any Nature, whether Human, Angelical, or Divine, consists in being govern'd by the Law of its Nature; and ours, in acting that Part for which we were created; by observing all those Duties, which are founded on the Relation we stand in to God and one another; can Revelation any otherwise help to perfect human Nature, but as it induces Men to live up to this Law of their Nature? And if this Law is the Test of the Perfection of any written Law; must not that be the most perfect Law, by which the Perfection of all others is to be try'd? And,

IF nothing but Reasoning can improve Reason, and no Book can improve my Reason in any Point, but as it gives me convincing Proofs of its Reasonableness; a Revelation that will not suffer us to judge of its Dictates by our Reason, is so far from improving

improving Reason, that it forbids the Use of it; and reasoning Faculties unexercis'd, will have as little Force, as unexercis'd Limbs; he that is always carry'd, will at length become unable to go: And if the *Holy Ghost*, as Bishop Taylor says, works by heightning and improving our natural Faculties; it can only be by using such Means as will improve them, in proposing Reasons and Arguments to convince our Understanding; which can only be improv'd, by studying the Nature and Reason of Things: *I apply'd my Heart* (says the wisest of Men) *to know, and to search, and to seek out Wisdom, and the Reason of Things.*

So that the *Holy Ghost* can't deal with Men as rational Creatures, but by proposing Arguments to convince their Understandings, and influence their Wills, in the same manner as if propos'd by other Agents; for to go beyond this, would be making Impressions on Men, as a Seal does on Wax; to the confounding of their Reason, and their Liberty in choosing; and the Man would then be merely passive, and the Action would be the Action of another Being acting upon him; for which he could be no way accountable: But if the *Holy Ghost* does not act thus, and Revelation itself be not arbitrary; must it not be founded on the Reason of Things? And consequently, be a *Republication, or Restoration of the Religion of Nature*? And since that takes in every thing thus founded, all the Help any Authority whatever can afford a reasonable Being, is the offering him Arguments, of which his own Reason must judge: And when he perceives their Agreement with his self-evident Notions, 'tis then, and only then, he can be sure of their Truth. And tho' Men could not mistake, as we see they daily do, a natural for a supernatural Suggestion; yet whether that Suggestion comes from a good or evil Being, (continually tempting People) can only be judg'd by the nature of the Things suggested. For 'tis in vain to have recourse to Miracles, if evil as well

Liberty of  
Prophecy,  
c. 18. p. 19.

Eccles. 7. 25.

well as good Beings had the Power of doing them. And some are so heterodox as to imagine, one Reason why evil Beings are permitted to do Miracles, is, lest from the Report of Miracles (which is alike spread every where, and for every Religion) Men might be tempted not to rely on the Reason and Nature of Things; and so run into endless Superstitions. And,

God, in the Old Testament, is said to suffer Deut. 13. 1. 3. Miracles to be done by false Prophets, in order to prove his People; and in the New, such Miracles, as would, *if it were possible, deceive the very* Mat. 24. 24. *Elect.*

In short, Revelation either bids, or forbids Men to use their Reason, in judging of all religious Matters; if the former, then it only declares that to be our Duty, which was so independent of, and antecedent to Revelation; if the latter, then it does not deal with Men as with rational Creatures; but deprives them of that inestimable Blessing.

B. Who, I pray, maintains, that Revelation forbids us the Use of our Reason, in judging the Truth of any religious Matters?

A. Is not every one of this Opinion, that says, we are not to read the Scripture with Freedom of assenting, or dissenting, just as we judge it agrees, or disagrees with the Light of Nature, and the Reason of Things? And this, one wou'd think, none cou'd deny was absolutely necessary, in reading a Book, where 'tis own'd that the *Letter killeth*. Nay, do not all in effect own as much, who will not allow the Scripture any Meaning, how plain soever, but what is agreeable to their Reason? Which shews, that in their Opinion, Reason was rather given to supply the Defects of Revelation, than Revelation the Defects of Reason. Is there a Divine, who, tho' he pretends ever so high a Veneration for the Scripture, but will own there are many Places, where 'tis necessary to recede from

the Letter, and find out a Sense agreeable to his Reason; which supposes it is that, and not the Authority of the Book, for that's the same in both cases, which makes him approve the literal Sense in one Case, and condemn it in another. And were Men not govern'd by their Reason, but by some external Revelation, they had nothing more to do, but to take the Words of that Revelation, in its literal, obvious, and plain Meaning, how absurd soever it might appear to their carnal Reason.

*B.* WE may take the Words of fallible Men in the plain, literal Sense; but if any thing is said by infallible Men, which in the obvious meaning of the Words is inconsistent with Reason, we must have recourse to an allegorical Sense; or if that will not do, we must put no meaning at all on the Words: Thus we support the Dignity of both Revelation and Reason.

*A.* Is not this owning you take not your Religion from those infallible Men, but you endeavour to impose that Religion your Reason tells you is true, upon their Words; by allowing them no other Meaning, how plain soever, but what you antecedently know by the Light of Nature to be the Will of God? And,

THERE'S no Book, but you may own its Infallibility, and yet be entirely govern'd by your Reason, if you, as often as you find any thing not agreeable to your Reason, torture it, to make it speak what is so. Would you think a *Mahometan* was govern'd by his *Alchoran*, who, upon all Occasions, should thus depart from the literal Sense; nay, would you not tell him, that his inspir'd Book fell infinitely short of *Cicero's* uninspir'd Writings; where there is no such Occasion to recede from the Letter?

THE *Moammerites*, a famous Sect among the *Mahometans*, and the *Myticks*, very numerous in *Turky*, sensible of the Difficulties and Uncertainties  
that

that attend all traditional Facts, maintain, "That  
 " God can never discover himself with Certainty  
 " any other way, than by speaking to the Rea-  
 " son and Understanding of Men: For if we de-  
 " pend, *say they*, on Oral Tradition, we lay our-  
 " selves open to the greatest Falsities and Imposi-  
 " tions; there being nothing so liable to infinite  
 " Changes and Alterations; numberless Mistakes,  
 " Additions and Subtractions, according as Mens  
 " Opinions vary by the Change of Times and Cir-  
 " cumstances: Nor are Books more exempt from  
 " such Doubtfulness and Uncertainty; since we  
 " find so much Disagreement among Books wrote  
 " by different Men, in different Parts and diffe-  
 " rent Ages; and even among the different Books  
 " of the same Men. But suppose, *continue they*,  
 " we should resolve our whole Faith into the sole  
 " Text of the *Alchoran*, the Difficulty and Uncer-  
 " tainty will still remain; if we consider, how  
 " many *Metaphors, Allegories*, and other Figures  
 " of Speech; how many obscure, ambiguous, in-  
 " tricate and mysterious *Passages* are to be met with  
 " in this infallible Book; and how different are the  
 " Opinions, Expositions and Interpretations of the  
 " most subtle Doctors, and learned Commentators  
 " on every one of them. The only sure way,  
 " then, *add they*, to come to the certain Know-  
 " ledge of the Truth, is to consult God himself,  
 " wait his Inspirations, live just and honest Lives,  
 " be kind and beneficent to all our Fellow-Crea-  
 " tures, and pity such as differ from us in their  
 " Opinions about the Authority, Integrity, and  
 " Meaning of the *Alchoran*."

THE *Mahometans*, though they own the Law  
 of Christ, yet they make it of no Use, because  
 they suppose the Law of *Mahomet* is more per-  
 fect; and 'tis that they must stick to: And do  
 not some Men, by arguing much after the same  
 manner in relation to the Gospel, render the Law

*Mahom. Life*  
 in *Eng.* before  
*Reland's Ma-*  
*hom.* p. 39, 40.

of Nature uselefs? But if we are still moral Agents, and as fuch are capable of judging between Religion and Superftition; can we think otherwife of the Gofpel than that it is design'd, not to free us from the eternal Law of Nature, but from thofe Abfurdities, which the Folly or Knavery of Men have introduced in oppofition to it? Hence it is, that the Scripture fpeaks in general Terms, without defining thofe things which it commands, or forbids; becaufe it fupposes Men moral Agents, capable by their Reason to difcern Good from Evil, Virtue from Vice, Religion from Superftition.

Posthumous  
Works,  
p. 226.

IF Mr. *Locke* reasons juftly, “ No Miffion can  
“ be look'd on to be divine, that delivers any  
“ thing derogating from the Honour of the one,  
“ only, true, invifible God; or inconfiftent with  
“ Natural Religion and the Rules of Morality:  
“ Becaufe God having discover'd to Men the Unity  
“ and Majefty of his eternal Godhead, and the  
“ Truths of Natural Religion and Morality by  
“ the Light of Reason, he cannot be fuppos'd  
“ to back the contrary by Revelation; for that  
“ wou'd be to deftroy the Evidence and Ufe of  
“ Reason, without which, Men cannot be able  
“ to diftinguifh divine Revelation from diabolical  
“ Impofture.”

DOES not this fuppose, *First*, that no Miffion can be divine, or its Revelation true, that admits of more than one, only, true, invifible God? *Secondly*, That Men, by their Reason, muft know, wherein the Honour of this one, only, true, invifible God confifts; otherwife they might (for aught they know) be oblig'd by Revelation to admit what is derogatory to his Honour? *Thirdly*, They muft know by the Light of Reason, what are the Truths of Natural Religion and Rules of Morality; becaufe otherwife they might be oblig'd to admit things inconfiftent with them: And that



to suppose the contrary, wou'd be to destroy the Use and Evidence of Reason, without which, Men would not be able to distinguish divine Revelation from diabolical Imposture; which implies, that in things tending to the Honour of God; and the Good of Mankind, the *dernier* Resort is to Reason; whose Dictates, as they need no Miracles for their Support, so all Doctrines inconsistent with them, tho' they plead endless Miracles, must be look'd upon as diabolical Impostures. And,

WHEN the Apostle says, *Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good Report; if there be any Virtue, if there be any Praise, think on these Things*: Is not this referring us to the Light of Nature, to know what these things are, which shew themselves to be the Will of God by their internal Excellency?

B. OUR Divines, tho' they own Reason may do tolerably well in things between Man and Man; yet in Matters relating to God, Reason, *they say*, must submit to Faith; and that the chief End of Revelation is to give Men, especially the common People, just Conceptions, and right Notions of the Nature and Perfections of God; which they could never have from the dim Light of Nature, without the Help of Revelation.

A. THO' they argue thus, yet at the same time they find themselves oblig'd to own, that the Scripture, when taken literally, gives the Vulgar false and unworthy Notions of the Divine Nature; by imputing, almost every where, to God, not only human Parts, but human Weakness and Imperfections; and even the worst of human Passions. To this, indeed, they have two An-

swers, which seem inconsistent: First, That 'tis necessary to accommodate things in some measure to the gross Conceptions of the Vulgar. The other is, That Reason has given all Men such just Conceptions of the divine Nature, that there is no danger that even the common People should take these Expressions literally.

B. THO' Reason, on which you lay such stress, may demonstrate, that there are not more Gods than one; yet Reason can never tell us, that there's more than one that is God: though Reason tells us, that there are not Three Gods, yet Reason could never tell us, that, tho' in the Idea of a divine Person, the Idea of God be included, each Person being by himself God; yet that the multiplying of divine Persons, was not the multiplying of Gods? And though Reason declare, there's a Difference between Three and One; yet Reason will never discover, that there's no more in Three Persons, than in One; all Three together being the same Numerical God, as each is by himself. Reason will never be able to find out a Middle between a Numerical, and a Specifick Unity; between one in Number, and one in Kind; and yet without it, how can we suppose the same God to be self-existent, and not self-existent, &c. Reason can as little discover a *Medium* between a Nominal, and a real Difference; and yet without it how can we avoid *Sabellianism* on the one hand, or *Polytheism* on the other? There's nothing Reason can tell us more plainly, than that God and a Man are two distinct, intelligent Persons; but can Reason tell us they may become one intelligent Person, even while their personal Natures and Properties remain infinitely distinct and different? Thus you see, how Reason must submit to Faith.

A. I, for my part, not understanding these Orthodox Paradoxes, can only at present say, I do not disbelieve them; but must add, that as I am a rational Creature, and God requires of me a *reasonable Service*, I ought not, nay, I cannot, have any Faith, which will not bear the Test of Reason; and therefore, notwithstanding your Maxim of Reason's submitting to Faith, I will venture to affirm, if a Book assert (supposing the Words of it are taken in their plain, literal Sense) immoral, or impious Doctrines; and there are not in that Book certain Marks to tell us, where they are to be taken literally, and where figuratively; or, what is the figurative Sense; that Men in these Points are as much to be determin'd by their Reason, as if there was no such Book.

B. THIS, sure, can't be the Case, with relation to the Scriptures.

A. I shall only tell you what the most celebrated Fathers say on this Head. *Athanasius* says, (a) "Should we understand a great Part of the sacred Writ literally, we should fall in- to the most enormous Blasphemies." *St. Cyril* says (b) much the same. *St. Gregory* the First says (c) "The Scripture is not only dead, but deadly; for it is written, *The Letter kills, but the Spirit quickeneth*; and this is what the whole divine Letter does." And in another Place (d) he compares them to Beasts who regard the Letter. And *St. Jerome* says, (e) "If we ad- here to the Flesh of the Letter, it will be

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"the

(a) *Quæstiones ad Antiochum*, Tom. 2. p. 357. D.

(b) L. 9. contr. Julian, p. 303, 304. Tom. 6. Oper.

(c) Comm. on 2 Kings, c. 7.

(d) Prolog. in Cant. Cantic. fol. 256. col. 1. B.

(e) In Gal. c. 5. p. 84. B.

“ the Occasion of many Evils.” And *Gregory Nyssen* (*f*) makes the like Reflection.

Defence of  
Christianity.  
p. 363.

*B.* I durst not have made so bold with the Scriptures as these Fathers ; but content my self in saying with the excellent Bishop of *Litchfield*, that “ God, was he to speak with Men, “ must not only speak their very Language, “ but according to the Conceptions of those he “ speaks to : To rectify their Sentiments in *Natural, Historical, or Chronological Matters* ; to “ mend their *Logick, or Rhetorick* when ’tis defective, but has no ill Influence on Piety, is “ not the Business of Revelation. ——— Need- “ lessly to contradict innocent vulgar Notions, is “ the sure way to lose the Peoples Affections, “ and to forego a prudential Way of gaining “ them.”

*A. W I T H* Submission to this learned Author, is there no Difference between God’s not rectifying Mens Sentiments in those Matters, and using himself such Sentiments as needs be rectify’d ; or between God’s not mending Mens *Logick, or Rhetorick*, where ’tis defective, and using such himself ; or between God’s not contradicting vulgar Notions, and confirming them ; by speaking according to them ? Or, can the God of Truth stand in need of Error to support his Truth ; his eternal Truth ? Or, can infinite Wisdom despair of gaining, or keeping Peoples Affections, without having recourse to such mean Arts ? No wonder, if Men use pious Frauds, when they think God himself has recourse to them. In this Case, must not Men by their Reason judge, when God makes use of defective *Logick, or Rhetorick* ; and speaks in *Natural, Historical,*  
and

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(*f*) De vita Moysis. To. 1. p. 235. D. & d.

and *Chronological* Matters, not according to the Truth of things, but according to the Conceptions of those of the Vulgar, to whom he directs his Speech? Nor can I think of any Falseness, suppos'd to be authoriz'd by the God of Truth, but may be made use of to some ill Purpose; in *Divinity* as well as *Mathematicks* it's a certain Maxim, *Uno absurdo dato mille sequentur.*

St. *Austin* argues after another Manner, in saying, “Should Unbelievers know us to be mistaken  
“ in such things as concern the natural World, and  
“ alledge our Books for such vain Opinions; how  
“ shall they believe the same Books, when they speak  
“ of the Resurrection of the Dead, and the World  
“ to come?”

Gen. ad. Lit.  
l. 1. c. 19.

Dr. *Prideaux*, speaking of the Marks of Imposition, says, “If there be but one known  
“ Truth in the whole Scheme of Nature, with  
“ which it interferes, this must make the Discovery  
“ very; and there's no Man that forgets an  
“ *Imposition*, but makes himself liable to be this  
“ way convicted of it.” The Doctor, sure, would not have asserted this so roundly, had he not compar'd the Philosophical, and Scriptural Scheme of Nature, and perceiv'd their exact Agreement.

Letter to the  
Deists, p. 139  
Edit. 7. Svo.

But,  
Not only Dr. *Burnet*, in defence of his *Archæologia*, but all, who maintain, that the Sun is immoveable, and that 'tis the Earth which moves; sufficiently shew, that the Scriptural and Philosophical Account of natural things seldom agree: However, to give one Instance, there's scarce a Country-man so ignorant, as not to know, that if the Seed thrown into the Earth is kill'd by Drought, or dies by any other Accident, it never rises; but St. *Paul* (without regard to that Judgment, which our Saviour denounces against a Man who calls his Brother *Fool*;) says, *Thou Fool*, 1 Cor. 15. 36.  
*that*

*that which thou sowest is not quickned, except it die :*

John 12. 24.

And our Saviour himself says, *Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a Corn of Wheat fall into the Ground, and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much Fruit.* And the Greek Church, to this

The Works  
of Gregory of  
Christ Church.  
p. 141.

Day, make use of boil'd Corn at their Commemoration of their Dead, to signify the *Resurrection of the Body.*

To convince you how entirely we are to depend on Reason in Matters of Religion, I will only ask you, why you suppose it so absurd in the *Papists* to say, that Men bred up in their Church, are oblig'd entirely to depend on its Infallibility; and that they, who have not had the Happiness to be thus educated, ought, indeed, to use their Reason to bring them into their Church; but that then they are no longer to be govern'd by it, but with the rest of the Members, equally to rely on the Churches infallible Decisions.

B. BECAUSE this supposed Infallibility puts it in the Power of the Church, to make their Votaries believe Virtue to be Vice; and Vice, Virtue; or any other Absurdity whatever; since they have no way to know, whether it does not require such things, but by examining, by their Reason, all her Doctrines: And if Reason be sufficient to discover the Being and Will of God, and that their Church holds no Doctrines disagreeable to his Will, (for this they must own Reason capable of discovering, before it could bring Men into their Church) they, in spite of their Pretences to Infallibility, put the whole stress on Reason. And if afterwards, they teach Men to renounce *that Reason*, by which before they would have them wholly govern'd; it can be for no other Cause, but to prevent their discovering in that Church such Errors, as they could not well know before;

before; and which, if known, wou'd have hinder'd them from coming into it.

A. THE *Papists*, you know, reply, that if this Reasoning is good, it strikes at all implicit Faith in *St. Peter*, as well as his Successors; and equally concludes against Mens giving up their Reason to any Persons in former ages, as well as the present; since it is by that alone they are able to judge, whether their Doctrines are consistent with the Light of Nature, and free from Superstition; and contain nothing in them unworthy of a divine Original: Before examining what Men teach, there's no reason to have an implicit Faith in one Set of Men more than another; and Examination destroys all implicit Faith, and all Authority whatever; since if they then embrace the Opinions of others, whether Apostles or not, 'tis because they appear agreeable to their Reason. If you say the Apostles would by Reason bring Men into their Religion, and after that, have them wholly govern'd by their Authority; may not the *Papists* retort on you your own Answer? and cry, "That if Reason is sufficient to discover the Being and Will of God, and that the Apostles taught no Doctrines, but what are agreeable to his Will; (for this, *say they*, you must allow Reason capable of discovering, otherwise it could never lead Men to believe what the Apostles taught;) you alike put the whole Strefs on Reason. And you must own, either that Men are intirely to be govern'd by Reason, and then you destroy all Authority whatever; or else not to be govern'd by it, and then you can't, by Reason, shew the Absurdity of that implicit Faith the Catholick Church requires."

B. You know, that in answer to all Objections of this nature, we say, as *Bishop Burnet* does,

Expof. of the  
19th Article.  
p. 183.

does, in the Exposition of the *Articles* of our Church; “ That if we obferve the Style and Method of the Scriptures, we fhall find in them “ all over a constant Appeal to Mens Reason, and “ to their intellectual Faculties. If the mere Dictates of the Church, or of *infallible Men*, had “ been the Refolution and Foundation of Faith, “ there had been no need of fuch a long Thread “ of Reasoning and Difcourfe, as both our Saviour us’d when on Earth, and the Apoftles “ us’d in their Writings. We fee the way of Authority is not taken, but Explanations are offer’d, “ Proofs, and Illustrations are brought, to convince the Mind; which fhews that God, in “ the cleareft Manifeftation of his Will, would “ deal with us as with rational Creatures, who “ are not to believe, but on Perfuaſion; and to “ uſe our Reason in order to the attaining that “ Perfuaſion.

A. THIS is all I contend for, and had not what the Biſhop ſays, (tho’ it amounts to giving up all implicit Faith) been agreeable to the whole Tenor of the Scriptures, and the Doctrines of our Church; ſome of thoſe, who have ſo nicely examin’d into all Parts of his *Expoſition* of the Articles, wou’d never have let this Paſſage eſcape without Remarks. And therefore, ſince ’tis in Defence of the *Proteſtant Religion*, and the whole Current of Scripture, I ſhall add, to what this excellent Father of the Church has ſaid; That when any Perſon has recourſe to Arguments and Reasonings, he does, in thoſe Inſtances diſclaim all Authority, and appeals to the Reason of thoſe he means to perſuade; and, in order to it, would have them judge of the Force of his Arguments, by thoſe common, and ſelf-evident Notions, upon which the Validity of all Proofs depend; and Men, in examining what he ſays by that Reason



to which he appeals, wholly answer the End for which he argues with them ; tho' upon Examination, they are not convinc'd by his Reasons. To require more, would be to require Impossibilities ; since it is not in Mens power, after they have consider'd things as well as they are able, to believe otherwise than they do. And had the Apostles said to those they design'd to convert, " It will be an Affront to our Infallibility, " not to have an implicit Faith in us ; not to " take on content whatever we say ; you are, " therefore, no longer to act as moral Agents, " or to have recourse to the essential Difference " of Good and Evil ; to the Light and Law of " Nature, or to the eternal Reason of things, " to judge of the Truth of what we declare. " No, this is the Faith, and thus you must " believe, or perish everlastingly : " Had the Apostles, I say, talk'd after this manner, do you think they could have gain'd one reasonable Convert ? No, they knew full well, that this was not the way to deal with rational Creatures ; they, on the contrary, as I shall fully shew hereafter, every where speak to this effect : " We <sup>1</sup> Thes. 5. 21. " desire you would, with the utmost Freedom, " examine our Doctrines ; since if they are, as " we affirm, true ; they will not only bear the " Test of Reason, but the more they are try'd, " the brighter they will appear : This will be *eno-* Acts 17. 11. " *bling* your selves, and doing justice to your own " Understandings, as well as to our Doctrines." If Men have any Authority, 'tis then only, when they renounce all peremptory Authority ; and instead of claiming *Dominion over Mens Faith*, desire they wou'd prove every thing by those Tests God had given them, in order to discern Good from Evil ; Truth from Falseness ; Religion from Superstition. Thus the Apostle seeks to maintain

maintain his Credit and Authority with the *Thes-  
salonians*; *Prove all Things*, says he, *hold fast that  
which is Good.*

*B.* Do not you, by laying such a Stress on Reason, in effect set aside Revelation?

*A.* No, if Revelation be a reasonable Revelation, the greater Stress we lay upon Reason, the more we establish Revelation.

*B.* BUT not on the Foot of its own Authority, but only as you judge it agreeable to Reason; and therefore I question, whether any of our eminent Divines talk thus in Commendation of Reason, to the Disparagement of Authority.

*A.* IF Reason is all we rational Creatures have to trust to, being That alone which distinguishes us from Brutes, incapable of Religion; Divines, even those of the most narrow Principles, however they may shuffle a while, must make Reason their *dernier* Resort: But however, since Reason alone will not satisfy you, but you must have Authority even against Authority, I shall mention what some of our most eminent Divines say, when they are defending Revelation against the Attacks of *Infidels*; or writing against the *Papists*, or Men *popishly* affected.

*DR. J. Clarke*, Dean of *Sarum*, in defending Christianity against the Attacks of *Infidels*, who charge it with requiring an implicit Faith, thinks this such a Scandal to Christianity, that a good Part of his *Boylean* Lectures are to clear it from that Charge; "We find, says he, no Command

Orig. of Moral  
Evil. p. 88.

"in Scripture to lay aside our Reason or Under-

"standing, but directly the contrary is there as-

Rom. 12. 1.

"firmed of the Christian Religion; viz. that it

"is our *reasonable* Service: And therefore the

"Method in which Christ and his Apostles taught

"*this Service*, was agreeable to Reason, viz. by

Mat. 11. 15.

"exhorting Men to *attend seriously*, to weigh di-

"*ligently*

“ *ligently*, their Doctrines and Precepts, &c. and *then asks*, “ Are these, and such-like Expressions  
 “ calculated to enslave Mens Understandings, and  
 “ to induce a blind and implicit Obedience?  
 “ Such Methods may serve the Purpose of Super-  
 “ stition, but true Religion can gain nothing by  
 “ them.

DR. *Whitchcot* does this Justice to external Vol. of Sermon.  
 Revelation, as to say, “ The Scripture’s Way of P. 117.  
 “ dealing with Men in Matters of Religion, is  
 “ always by Evidence of Reason and Argument;  
 “ and *very judiciously adds*, “ I reckon, That which  
 “ has not Reason in it, or for it, is Man’s Su-  
 “ perstition, and not Religion of God’s making.”  
 What an Infinity of Disputes would this Rule  
 have cut off? What, I pray was the grand Occa-  
 sion of so many monstrous *Heresies*, even in the pri-  
 mitive Times, but their believing the Scripture’s  
 Way of dealing with Men, was not by Evidence  
 of Reason? and if any now think otherwise, are  
 they not in danger of making no better Distinction  
 between Religion and Superstition, than a modern Hobbes.  
 Philosopher, who thus concisely distinguishes them;  
*Tales publickly allow’d, Religion; disallow’d, Super-*  
*stition.*

BP. *Hoadley*, the strenuous Asserter of our reli- Answ. to the  
 gious, as well as civil Rights, *says*, “ Authority *Represen. of*  
 “ is the greatest, and most irreconcilable Enemy *the Committ.*  
 “ to *Truth* and *Argument*, that *this World* ever *of the lower*  
 “ furnish’d out; all the *Sophistry*; all the *Colour* *House of Con-*  
 “ of *Plausibility*; all the *Artifice* and *Cunning* of *voc. p. 312.*  
 “ the subtlest *Disputer* in the World, may be *313, 314, 315.*  
 “ laid open, and turn’d to the Advantage of that  
 “ very *Truth*, which they design’d to hide, or to  
 “ depress: But against *Authority* there is no de-  
 “ fence.” And after having shewn, that it was  
*Authority* that crush’d the noble Sentiments of *Soc-*  
*rates*, and others; and that it was by *Authority*,  
 that

that the *Jews* and *Heathens* combated the Truth of the Gospel; he says, “ When *Christians* were  
 “ increas’d to a *Majority*, and came to think the  
 “ same Method to be the only proper one, for the  
 “ Advantage of *their* Cause, which had been the  
 “ Enemy and Destroyer of it; *then*, it was, the  
 “ Authority of *Christians*, which, by degrees, not  
 “ only laid waste the Honour of *Christianity*, but  
 “ well nigh extinguisht it among Men. —

“ It was *Authority* which would have prevented  
 “ all *Reformation*, where it is; and which has put  
 “ a *Barrier* against it, wherever it is not. — How  
 “ indeed, can it be expected, that the *same Thing*,  
 “ which has in all Ages, and in all Countries,  
 “ been hurtful to *Truth*, and *True Religion*, a-  
 “ mongst Men, should in *any Age*, or *any Coun-*  
 “ *try*, become a Friend and Guardian of them?”

And to obviate an Objection easily foreseen, he says, “ It was *Authority*, which hinder’d the Voice  
 “ of the *Son of God* himself from being heard;  
 “ and which alone stood in opposition to *his*  
 “ powerful *Arguments*, and his divine *Doctrine*.”

Which supposes there’s no Christian Doctrine, but what has powerful Arguments to support it; or in other Words, has Divinity stamp’d on it, shewing itself by its innate Excellency to be the Will of God; since to put its Credit on mere Authority, is to put its Credit on that, which has been, and always will be, an Enemy to Truth: Nay, he supposes, that were it possible, that Authority and Truth could consist together, and the latter be receiv’d for the sake of the former, it could not avail.

His Words are, “ Where *Truth* happens to be re-  
 “ ceiv’d for the sake of Authority; there is just so  
 “ much diminish’d from the Love of Truth, and  
 “ the Glory of Reason, and the Acceptableness of  
 “ Men to God; as there is attributed to *Authority*.”

And

ARCHBISHOP *Tillotson* says, “ All our Reasonings about divine Revelation are necessarily gather’d by our natural Notions about Religion; and therefore, he, who sincerely desires to do the Will of God, is not apt to be impos’d on by vain, and confident Pretences of divine Revelation; but if any Doctrine be propos’d to him, which is pretended to come from God, he measures it by those sure, and steady Notions, which he has of the divine Nature and Perfections; and by these he will easily discern, whether it be worthy of God or not, and likely to proceed from him: He will consider the Nature and Tendency of it, or whether it be a Doctrine according to Godliness, such as is agreeable to the divine Nature and Perfections, and tends to make us like unto God; if it be not, tho’ an Angel should bring it, he would not receive it.” And if no Miracles, no, not the Preaching of an Angel, ought to make us receive any Doctrine that does not carry those internal Marks; no Miracles, certainly, ought to make us reject any Doctrine that has these internal Marks. And much to the same Purpose, our judicious Doctor *Claget* says, “ When Men pretend to work Miracles, and talk of immediate Revelations, of knowing the Truth by Inspiration, and of more than ordinary Illumination, we ought not to be frighted with those big Words, from looking what is under them; nor to be afraid of calling these Things into question, which are set off with *high-flown* Pretences. From hence it has come to pass, that Superstition and Idolatry, Enthusiasms and Impostures have so much prevail’d in the World. It is somewhat strange, that we should believe Men the more, for that very Reason upon which we should believe them the less.

Serm. Vol. 3  
P. 40.

*Claget's Persuasive to an ingenuous Trial of Opin.*  
p. 19.

Enthusiasm of  
the Church of  
*Rome*, p. 234.  
suppos'd to be  
*Stillingfleet's*.

I shall give you the Sentiments of one judicious Divine more, since they contain a Summary of what I have been saying; his Words are: “ It could not be avoidable, but that this natural  
“ Reverence for divine Revelations, and Prone-  
“ nefs of believing them, would produce some ill  
“ Effects, prejudicial to the Reason and Interest  
“ of Mankind; a fatal Credulity would creep into  
“ the World, and possess the Minds of the more  
“ ignorant Persons, and induce them blindly to  
“ believe every bold Pretender to Revelation. Af-  
“ ter a laborious and fruitless Search of future Hap-  
“ piness, Men were apt to embrace any System of  
“ Religion presented to them; if it flatter'd their  
“ Hopes of future Felicity, they were loth to disco-  
“ ver the Error and Illusion of any pleasing Revela-  
“ tion; they wish'd it might be true, and at first,  
“ what they wish'd, they at last believ'd to be  
“ true.—Many fear'd they should be injurious to  
“ the divine Majesty, and incur the Guilt of *A-*  
“ *theism*, if they should scrupulously examine what  
“ pretended to carry the Stamp of his Authority,  
“ and to have been reveal'd by him. To entertain  
“ Scruples in this Case, was thought no less than  
“ Sacrilege, and every Doubt was esteem'd an Af-  
“ front to God; to which may be added, That  
“ they should contract no small Merit, and ever lay  
“ an Obligation on God, if they immediately re-  
“ sign'd up their Judgment to his suppos'd Revela-  
“ tion, and blindly receiv'd it without any Doubt  
“ or Hesitation.

“ THIS, in all Ages, open'd a wide Gap, and  
“ prepar'd a Way for Error and Superstition;  
“ while the Whimfies of every foolish *Entusiast*,  
“ and the Follies of every bold *Impostor* were pro-  
“ pos'd under the venerable Name of *divine Ora-*  
“ *cles*. ——— Hence all the Absurdities of the  
“ *Pagan* Religion found Belief, and Entertain-

“ ment

“ ment in the World; and the most extravagant  
“ *Impostors* never wanted *Profelytes*. Hence the  
“ most pernicious Errors of *Hereticks*, found Ad-  
“ mission into the Church; and the Pretence of new  
“ Revelations seduc'd some Part of the *Christian*  
“ World.

“ To this fatal Credulity, and Danger of Illu-  
“ sion arising from it, God and Nature have pre-  
“ scrib'd an excellent Remedy; the Use of Rea-  
“ son, which may examine the Grounds and Testi-  
“ monies of all pretended Revelations; enquire  
“ into their Truth, and after a scrupulous Trial,  
“ pass Sentence on them. This, the Interest of  
“ Truth, and the Honour of our Nation requires  
“ us to perform, that we may neither prostitute  
“ the former, nor depreciate the latter. — With-  
“ out this precedent Enquiry, our Belief would  
“ become unlawful; for to obviate the Rules of  
“ Conduct, prescrib'd to our Understanding, were  
“ to overthrow all the Laws of Nature, to de-  
“ base the Dignity of Mankind, and to efface the  
“ Image of God implanted in us. These Rules  
“ assure us, that God can't command any thing  
“ foolish or ridiculous. — No greater Injury  
“ can be offer'd to the Deity, than to believe  
“ him the Author of any Religion, which pre-  
“ scribes, or encourages foolish or superstitious  
“ Practices. — Justly does *Plutarch* wonder,  
“ why *Atheism* should rather be accus'd of Im-  
“ piety, than Superstition; since few are mov'd  
“ by any Defect in the Order of Government,  
“ to call in question the Existence of God; but  
“ the Trick and Cheats of superstitious Persons,  
“ their *Entbusiastick* Motions, ridiculous Actions,  
“ Exorcisms, and Lustrations, and such like; give  
“ them Occasion to believe it better there should be  
“ no God, than such a God, as the Author of such  
“ a superstitious Religion must necessarily be.”

IF this Author reasons justly, as all *Protestants* will allow, at least, when they write against the *Enthusiasm* of the Church of *Rome*; does it not follow, that 'tis our Duty, before we embrace any instituted Religion, to examine by that Light which God has given us, into every Part of it; and after a scrupulous Trial, pass Sentence on it? If the Interest of Truth, and the Honour of Man's Nature require them to perform this grand Duty, must not their Reason, antecedently to all external Revelation, afford certain Tests to distinguish between Truth and Falsehood in all religious Matters? 'Twould be ridiculous to tell Men, that 'tis a Crime worse than *Atbeism*, to admit a Religion, which prescribes, or encourages foolish or superstitious Practices; unless upon a Supposition, that their Reason can tell them what are such Practices; and thereby hinder them from embracing a Religion, which requires Things of this nature. And if Men are apt to embrace any Religion (the *Mahometan* for Instance) which flatters their Hopes of future Felicity, and makes them loth to discover the pleasing Illusion; does it not follow, that the more any Religion does so, the more Cause Men have critically to examine into its Reasonableness? Because without such a precedent Enquiry, their Belief would be irrational and unlawful, debasing the Dignity of Mankind, and effacing the Image of God implanted in them. And,

IF the Absurdities, not only of the *Pagan* Religion, but even the most pernicious Errors amongst *Christians*, have been occasion'd thro' want of previous Examination; nothing can be requisite to discover True Christianity, and to preserve it in its native Purity, free from all Superstition, but, after a strict Scrutiny, to admit nothing to belong to it, except what our Reason tells us is  
worthy



worthy, of having God for its Author. And if it be evident, that we can't discern whether any instituted Religion contains every thing worthy, and nothing unworthy of a divine Original; except we can antecedently by our Reason discern what is, or is not worthy of having God for its Author; it necessarily follows, that natural and reveal'd Religion can't differ: Because whatever Reason shews to be worthy of having God for its Author, must belong to natural Religion; and whatever Reason tells us is unworthy of having God for its Author, can never belong to the True Reveal'd Religion. 'Tis upon this very Plan, that I have endeavour'd to shew you wherein True and Genuine Christianity consists.

*B.* By the reasoning of these Divines, Religion is the plainest thing in the World: We, it seems, have nothing to do but to examine what Notions are worthy of God, in order to know his Will; but do they tell us how we may certainly know what those Notions are?

*A.* ALL Divines, of what Denomination soever, agree, at least in Words, that God can't act arbitrarily in the Government of the World, or command things for Commanding-sake; but that all his Laws, being calculated for the Good of Mankind, carry with them the Marks of consummate Wisdom and Goodness. However, I shall mention two.

THE incomparable Archbishop *Tillotson* says, Vol. 6. p. 216.  
 “ It would be little less than an horrid and dreadful Blasphemy, to say, that God, out of his sovereign Will and Pleasure, can do any thing which contradicts the Nature of God, or the essential Perfections of the Deity; or to imagine that the Pleasure and Will of the holy, just, and good God is not always regulated, and determined by the essential and indispensable Laws of Goodness, Holiness, and Righteousness.

Christ. Life,  
Part I. Vol. I.  
P. 362.

THE judicious Mr. *Scott*, affirms, “ That to suppose the Will and Power of God is not perfectly subject to his moral Perfections, is to suppose him a very defective and imperfect Being; a lawless Will and Power being the greatest Defect in Nature: Wherefore, to secure our Minds against all Injurious Apprehensions of God, this is a most necessary Rule; that we conceive him to be such a Being as can never will, nor act any thing, but what his own essential Wisdom, Goodness and Justice do approve. ——— To affirm, he is not oblig’d to regulate himself by Wisdom, Justice and Goodness; or that he can do otherwise; is to attribute him a Power to will, or act foolishly, &c.”

*B.* I should readily approve what the Authors you quote have said, to shew the Reasonableness of the divine Law in every Instance; were there not in Religion, propositions to be believ’d, which are above Reason.

*A.* IF I do not understand the Terms of a Proposition; or if they are inconsistent with one another; or so uncertain, that I know not what Meaning to fix on them; here is nothing told me, and consequently, no room for Belief: But in such Cases, where I am capable of understanding a Proposition, ’tis Reason must inform me, whether ’tis certain, probable, or uncertain; and even in Propositions relating to such Facts as we learn from Report, ’tis by our Reason alone, in comparing Circumstances, &c. that we must judge of their Probability. But,

ALTHO’ designing Men very well know, that it’s impossible to believe, when we know not *What it is* we are to believe; or to believe an absurd, or contradictory Proposition; yet they, because without Examination, People may be brought to fancy they believe such things, and

it being their Interest to confound Mens Understandings, and prevent all Inquiry, craftily invented the Notion of believing things above Reason: Here the Ravings of an *Enthusiast* are on a Level with the Dictates of infinite Wisdom, and Nonsense render'd most sacred; here a Contradiction is of great Use to maintain a Doctrine, that, when fairly stated, is not defensible; because by talking backward and forward, by using obscure Terms, and taking Words in different Senses, they may easily amuse, and puzzle the People. On this Foundation *Transubstantiation* is built, and most of those mysterious Propositions, about which, in former Days, Christians so frequently murder'd each other. But,

If the Scripture was design'd to be understood, it must be within the reach of human Understanding; and consequently, it can't contain Propositions that are either above, or below human Understanding: And if there are no Propositions in the Bible, but what have certain Ideas, by common Usage, annexed to the Words; how can we suppose some are design'd to be understood, and some not? or know which are, and which are not? And indeed, if the End of God's giving a Revelation was to direct Mens Thoughts and Actions, it must (as necessary to that End) be deliver'd in such a way, as is plain and easy to be understood, even by mean Capacities; and consequently to suppose it dark and mysterious in any Part, is to represent it as unworthy of having God for its Author. And,

ONE would think, that Men, when they knew they had Truth on their Side, would speak after the plainest manner, and not study to disguise it by unnatural ways of expressing themselves; especially, when they reflect on others for so doing.

THE *Christians* said, the *Heathens* were conscious their Religion was absurd by their having recourse to allegorical, ænigmatical, and mysterious Explications; and consequently, that it could not be design'd for the common People, incapable of such Explications; and that their Priests, instead of defending it, render'd it uncertain; since where the literal Sense is quitted, there may be many allegorical, or spiritual Senses, opposite to one another; and indeed, the wise Men among them, as *Tully*, &c. own'd as much.

NOR did the *Heathens* fail to retort the like Objection upon the *Christians*; and, in Truth, they equall'd, if not out-did them in allegorising away, not only the plainest Texts, but even Matter of Fact; which prov'd the Occasion of innumerable Heresies.

Short Hist.  
of the Church  
Vol. 2. c. 4.

*Dupin*, speaking of the extravagant Opinions, which obtain'd among silly People in the primitive Times, says, "They sprang from the Principles of the *Pagan* Philosophers; and from the Mysteries, which crack'd-brain'd Men put on the History of the Old and New Testament, according to their Imaginations; the more extraordinary these Opinions were, the more did they relish, and the better did they like them; and those who invented them, publish'd them gravely as great Mysteries to the Simple, who were all dispos'd to receive them." But could any crack'd-brain'd Writers have found out more Mysteries in the Old and New Testament, than the primitive Fathers, (who interpreted them according to their Imaginations, and jumbled them together with that *Pagan* Philosophy they were educated in?) Or have publish'd their mysterious Reveries with greater Gravity to simple People, always dispos'd to receive what they do not understand?

THE same Author, speaking of St. *Barnabas's* Catholick Epistle in Answer to this Objection, "That it was incredible so great an Apostle, full of the Holy Ghost, and Collegue of St. *Paul*, should be the Author of such forc'd Allegories, and extravagant Explications of Scripture; of those various Fables concerning Animals, with divers other Conceits of the like Nature; says, "They have but little Knowledge of the *Jewish* Nation, and of the primitive Christians, educated in the Synagogues, who obstinately believe, that such sort of Motions could not proceed from them; that on the contrary, it was their very Character to turn the whole Scripture into Allegory." And,

I think, none of our celebrated Writers reject this Epistle as spurious, because of the Allegories it abounds with: Our excellent Archbishop says, "Even St. *Paul* himself in his *Epistles*, receiv'd by us as *Canonical*, affords us not a few Instances of this, which is so much found fault with in St. *Barnabas*: As I might easily make appear from a Multitude of Passages out of them, were it needful for me to enlarge myself on a Point, which every one, who has read the *Scriptures* with any Care, cannot chuse but have observ'd." And those Christians St. *Paul* mentions, for believing the Resurrection was past, were, no doubt, great Allegorists.

THE primitive Fathers exactly follow'd the Precedent set them by the Apostle *Barnabas*, and other Apostolical Men: *Clemens* of *Alexandria* says, "The Oeconomy of the Law, is typical and prophetical; and that *Moses* and the Prophets, wrote all in *Parables*." So *Tertullian*, "The Law is spiritual and prophetical, " and

*Dupin's Life of Barnabas,*  
P. 6. col. 2. &  
7. col. 1.

*Wake's Life of Barnabas,*  
P. 73.  
See 1 Cor. 10.  
1, 4. Gal. 4.  
21. Eph. 5.  
31. Heb. 9. 8,  
23, 24. & 10.  
1. &c.

*Stroma* 1. 2.  
c. 19. P. 403.  
B. 1. 6. c. 15.  
p. 678. B.  
Adv. Mar. 1.  
2. c. 19.

*Le Clerc's Life of Cle. Alexan.*  
Eng. Transl.  
p. 54. & Biblioth. Univer.  
To. 10. p. 236.

Hom. 7. in  
I. e. vit. To. 1.  
fol. 73. C.

Homil. 26. in  
Mat. fol. 50.  
E. Epist. ad  
Rom. c. 2. fol.  
147. G.

“ and almost in all Points figurative.” And *Le Clerc* observes, “ The Fathers did not content themselves with interpreting the Old Testament allegorically, but they did the same as to the New.”——But because

*Origen* was famous for this allegorical Method, and by virtue of it esteem'd the greatest Champion of Christianity, next to the Apostles; and since what he says, was not only his own, but the Sense of the then Church, it will not be improper to cite him. “ If we adhere, *says he*, to the Letter; or understand what is written in the Law of God, as the *Jews* do, in the common Acceptation of the Words; I blush to own, that God ever gave such Laws: For mere human Constitutions, as those of the *Romans, Athenians, or Lacedæmonians*, will seem more reasonable and proper; but if the Law of God is to be understood in the Sense the Church teaches, then truly it exceeds all human Ordinances.” For which Reason he makes the allegorical Way of interpreting Scripture to be the Key of Knowledge; and following the Letter of the Law, the direct Way to *Infidelity* and vain Superstition. *Litteram sequentes in Infidelitatem, & varias Superstitiones incurrant.* And he objects to *Marcion* the *Heretick*, that he was against the allegorical Way of interpreting Scripture.

B. Do not these Fathers suppose God either a weak Being, who could not frame as wise Laws as Men; or else an ill-natur'd Being, who, in order to puzzle Mankind, speaks in *Riddles* and *Mysteries*? What should we think of a *Lawyer*, who said, he should be ashamed of the Laws of his own Country, if taken in a literal Sense; but that there was an allegorical Sense, which could One but hit, would discover profound Wisdom?

A. THUS the Fathers sufficiently acknowledg'd the Sovereignty of Reason, in allegorising away Matters of Fact, that were in truth, incapable of being allegoris'd; tho' that is but running into one unreasonable thing, to get rid of another: And how can we depend on any thing said in the Scripture, if we can't on its Facts? One would think nothing was a plainer Fact, than that of *Lot's* lying with his two Daughters, yet St. *Irenæus* allegorises That away; and is so fond of allegorising, that for the sake of it, he contradicts the Scripture, and says, "The Harlot *Raab* entertain'd *three* Spies;" and had he not made them three, he would have been at a loss, how to say, as he does, that *this Harlot* hid in her House, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. "How can we be edify'd, says *Origen*, in reading that so great a Patriarch as *Abraham*, not only ly'd to King *Abimelech*, but also betray'd to him the Chastity of his Wife? What Instructions can we reap from the Wife of so great a Patriarch, if we think she was expos'd to be debauch'd by her Husband's Contrivance? Let the *Jews* believe such things, and those with them, who are greater Friends to the Letter than to the Spirit."

Lib. 4. c. 51.  
per totum.

Lib. 4. c. 37.  
p. 33. col. 1.  
l. 36, &c.  
Joshua 2. 1.

Hom. 6. in  
Gen. to. 1.  
fol. 12. H. 13.  
A.

HE asserts, "That there are, even in the Gospel, things said, which, according to the Letter, or taken in their literal Sense, are mere Falsities, or Lyes; as where our Saviour says, *He that believeth in me, the Works that I do, shall be do also; and greater Works than these shall be do.* John xiv. 12, &c. which, he shews, was not verify'd literally, but spiritually." And,

Hom. 6. in  
Hsa. fol. 106  
D.

"THAT it was want of Knowledge in the Scriptures, to think, that God spent six real Days in the Work of the Creation."

Orig. contra  
Cels. l. 6. p.  
310, 311. See  
Philocal. c. 1.

HE p. 12.

Tom. 10. in  
Joh. p. 150.  
D. E.

HE desires any One to shew, “ how the Truth  
“ of the Gospels can be maintain’d, or their seem-  
“ ing Contrarieties clear’d by any other than the  
“ anagogical Method; which he affirms necessary  
“ for that Purpose.

Hom. 14. in  
Luc. p. 101.  
B. To. 3.

HE says, “ The Pair of *Turtle Doves*, or  
“ two young *Pigeons*, offer’d for Jesus, were not  
“ such as we see with our carnal Eyes; not  
“ *Birds*, such as fly in the Air, but something  
“ divine and august, beyond human Contempla-  
“ tion, &c.

Cap. 1. p. 12.  
& seqq. Edit.  
Cantab. 1658.

IF you desire to be more plentifully furnish’d  
with Instances of the like nature with those above-  
mention’d, consult the *Philocalia* of *Origen*.

Contra Men-  
dacium, c. 10.  
P. 44, 45.  
To. 4.

ST. *Austin*, a Man of the greatest Authority of  
all the Fathers, says, “ We must not take the  
“ Story of *Jacob’s* cheating his Father, by per-  
“ sonating his Brother *Esau*, literally, lest the  
“ Scripture should seem to encourage *Lying*.

Serm. 74. 1.  
2. de Gen.  
Contra Mani-  
che. c. 17.  
& d.  
Tom. 3. lib.  
impert. de  
Gen. 2d. Lit.  
c. 7. &c.

AND speaking of Jesus cursing the *Fig-Tree*,  
says, *Hoc factum, nisi figuratum, stultum invenitur*.  
And he, with the rest of the Fathers, not only  
most unnaturally allegorises away the History of  
the Fall, but even of the whole Creation; and  
says, “ The whole World was created in an In-  
“ stant.” And tho’ there’s not one Word about  
Angels in the Text, yet this angelical Doctor makes  
Part of the six Days Labour relate to the Creation  
of Angels.

B. BUT how could he account for God’s in-  
stituting the Sabbath, upon his resting from his  
six Days Labour, if all Things were created in an  
Instant?

Lib. 2. de  
Gen. contra  
Manich. c. 17,  
18. p. 841.  
B. To. 1.

A. How happy he was in allegorising, you  
may judge from his explaining that Passage of  
*Genesis*, iii. 14. where the *Latin* Version which  
he follow’d, runs thus; *Upon thy Breast, and upon  
thy Belly shalt thou go, and Dust shalt thou eat all  
the*



*the Days of thy Life.* By the *Breast*, says he, is to be understood *Pride*; by the *Belly*, *the Lusts of the Flesh*; and by that which is added, *Dust shalt thou eat*, is meant *Curiosity*, which extends to things temporal and earthly; and by *Curiosity*, he means *Avarice*. And,

ST. *Ambrose* will not allow the *Rainbow* to be the *Bow*, which God plac'd in the *Clouds*; and saith, "Far be it from us to call this *God's Bow*; " for this *Bow*, which is call'd *Iris*, is seen indeed in the *Day*, but never appears in the " *Night*: For which weighty Reason he substitutes in its room, a strange, allegorical *Bow*, out of his own *Imagination*.

IF the Fathers could allegorise away the most stubborn Matters of Fact, they could have no difficulty in allegorising away any other Matter, where Words are capable of various Senses: One would think, it was difficult to find out an allegorical Meaning to this Text, *O Daughter of Babylon, happy is he, who taketh, and dashes thy little ones against the Stones*, yet nothing is too hard for *Origen*, who assures us that the Text intends, *The Man who dashes his vicious Thoughts against the solid Rock of Reason*.

AND, indeed, the Fathers have so turn'd and twisted the Scripture, with a pious Intention to make it speak nothing but what they thought agreeable to Reason; that they have render'd it like *Aristotle's Materia prima; nec quid, nec quale, nec quantum, nec aliquid eorum de quibus ens denominatur*: For by making the Scripture, in so many Places say one thing, and mean another, they have destroy'd its Certainty; since, as *Le Clerc* observes, "If, according to this Method, " the sacred Writers had said quite another thing " than what they said, or, if you will, the quite " contrary, yet one may find as good Sense in " them;

Lib. de Nee  
& Arca. 27.

*Origen contra  
Celsum, l. 7.  
p. 347.*

*Life of Clem.  
Alexand. p.  
54, 55, Engl.  
Translat. &  
Bibl. Univer.  
To. 10. p.  
236, 237.*

“ them ; as those that will try it, will presently  
 “ observe.—Therefore the *Christians*, and the  
 “ *Jews* would have done much better to keep  
 “ close to the Letter, than to use so uncertain a  
 “ Method, to defend the holy Scripture against  
 “ the *Pagans*.”

B. ALL the Fathers do not allegorise like  
*Origen* ; *Justin Martyr*, for Instance, asserts, that  
 the threatening, that *In the Day thou eatest thereof*  
*thou shalt surely die*, was literally fulfill'd, in that  
*Adam* did not live out a thousand Years ; which,  
 with God, is but one Day. But to go no farther  
 than the Story of *Abraham's* prostituting his Wife ;  
 St. *Ambrose*, to justify *Abraham's* Conduct, round-  
 ly asserts, Adultery to be no Crime before the  
 giving of the Law by *Moses*. And St. *Austin*  
 makes Adultery still lawful, if Husband and  
 Wife consent. St. *Jerom*, indeed, runs into the  
 other extreme, and approves the Conduct of those,  
 who kill'd themselves to preserve their Chastity.  
 But the most eloquent St. *Chrystom* enlarges very  
 much in Commendation of *Abraham* and *Sarah*,  
 and says, “ Tho' nothing gives a Husband more  
 “ Uneasiness, than to imagine his Wife has to  
 “ do with another ; yet this just Man did what  
 “ he cou'd, even to accomplish the Act of Adul-  
 “ tery. ——— And adds, that *Sarah* too (whom  
 “ he sets as a Pattern for all marry'd Women)  
 “ accepted the Proposal very couragiously ; and  
 “ then cries out, Who can enough admire this  
 “ Readiness to obey her Husband ? Who can  
 “ sufficiently celebrate the Praises of *Sarah*, who,  
 “ after so long Contenance, and at her great  
 “ Age, readily consented to this Act of Adul-  
 “ tery, and to let the *Barbarian* have the Use of  
 “ her Body, to save her Husband ?

A. MIGHT not those Fathers as well have  
 allegoris'd, as talk thus absurdly ? 'Tis chiefly  
 owing

Dialo. cum  
 Tryph. p. 89.

Lib. 1. de  
 Abr. Patriar.  
 c.4. See *Daille*  
 De usu Patr.  
 p. 271, 272.  
 De civit. Dei,  
 l. 16. c. 25.  
 Com. on Jon.  
 To. 6. p. 150.  
 D.  
 Hom. 32. in  
 Gen.

owing to the *Papists* taking some Words in a literal Sense, relating to the *eating the Flesh, and drinking the Blood of the Son of Man*; that makes them to be of a different Religion from the *Protestants*: and tho' two Parties may agree, in taking the same Words in an allegorical Sense; yet by allegorising them indifferently, they may be of different Religions. By allegorising some Texts, the *Jews* have made the *Messiah* a Temporal Prince; the *Christians* a Spiritual One. Mr. *Whiston* must think there are no Words so plain, but are capable of being allegoris'd; since, he supposes the Catholick Church has all along allegoris'd plain Love-Songs, between *Solemon* and one of his Mistresses, into spiritual Hymns between Christ and his Spouse, the Church. And what Dr. *South* must have thought of the *Revelations*, I leave you to judge; when he does not scruple to call it, *a mysterious, extraordinary Book; which, perhaps, the more 'tis study'd, the less 'tis understood; as generally finding a Man crack'd, or making himself so.* And had not the *Mahometan* Divines had the Knack of allegorising Nonsense, Fools and frantick Persons would not have been had in such Honour and Reverence among the *Musselmen*, only because their *Revelations and Enthusiasms* transported them out of the ordinary Temper of Humanity. Therefore, upon the whole, I must needs say, Happy is the Man, who is so far, at least, directed by the *Law of Reason*, and the *Religion of Nature*, as to suffer no Mysteries, or unintelligible Propositions, no Allegories, no Hyperboles, no Metaphors, Types, Parables, or Phrases of an uncertain Signification, to confound his Understanding. And certainly, the common Parent of Mankind is too good and gracious, to put the Happiness of *All* his Children on any other Doctrines, than such as plainly shew themselves

See Supplem.  
to his Essay.  
ab initio.

*South's* Serm.  
Vol. 2. p. 407.

*Ricaud's* Pref  
State of the  
*Ottom. Emp.*  
B. 2. c. 4.

felves to be the Will of God, even to the ignorant and illiterate ; if they have but Courage and Honefty to make ufe of their Reason : Otherwise the Scripture wou'd not be plain in all necessary things ; even to *Babes and Sucklings*.

*B.* You fuppofe then, that the Bulk of Mankind are taught by God himfelf, to know what Religion comes from him ; even tho' they want Letters to make them capable of understanding thofe external Proofs, on which all traditional Religions do, and muft depend.

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## C H A P. XIII.

*The Bulk of Mankind, by their Reason, must be able to distinguish between Religion and Superstition; otherwise they can never extricate themselves from that Superstition they chance to be educated in.*

A. RELIGION either does not concern the Majority, as being incapable of forming Judgment about it; or, it must carry such internal Marks of its Truth, as Men of mean capacity are able to discover; or else notwithstanding the infinite variety of Religions, All who do not understand the original Languages their traditional Religions are written in, which is all Mankind, a very few excepted, are alike bound in all Places to pin their Faith on their Priests; and believe in Men, who have an interest to deceive them; and who have seldom fail'd to do so, when occasion serv'd.

CAN People, if incapable by their Reason to distinguish Truth from Falshood, have any thing more to plead for the Truth of their Religion, than that they believe it to be the true Religion; because their Priests, who are hired to maintain it, tell them it was a long while ago reveal'd to certain Persons, who, as they, on their *Priestly* Words, assure them, were too wise to be impos'd on themselves; and too honest to impose on others? And that no change could have been made in their Religion in after-times; the care Men have of their own Souls, as well as their natural affections to posterity, obliging them from generation to generation to hand down their Religion just as they receiv'd it: And that it was morally impossible, Innovations should creep in, since it would be the

P highest

highest folly in any to attempt to introduce new Doctrines, as a Tradition receiv'd from their Ancestors, when all must know they had receiv'd no such Tradition. As this is all, the bulk of Mankind, if they are not capable of judging from the Doctrines themselves of their Truth, can say for their Religion; so they, in all places, make use of this argument; and with equal confidence aver, that tho' all other extraordinary Religions are full of gross Falshoods, and the most absurd Notions, which their Priests impudently impose on them as divine Truths; yet our own Priests are such faithful Representers of things, that one may as well question the Truth of all History, as the Truth of things believ'd on their Authority. Priests of other Religions, we know, will lye for Interest; and conscious that their Traditional Religion will not bear Examination, guard it with penal Laws; but we can never suspect, that our own Priests, tho' they take the same Methods, act on the same motives.

THIS boasted Argument, in which Men of all Religions thus triumph, if it proves any thing, would prove there never was, nor could be any false Religion, either in whole, or part; because Truth being before Falshood, and Mens Ancestors having once possess'd it, no change could afterward ever happen: Whereas on the contrary, tho' there have been at Times great numbers of traditional Religions, yet as far as it appears, no one of them has long remain'd the same; at least, in such points as were merely founded on Tradition.

I see no middle, but that we must either own, that there are such internal Marks fix'd on every part of the true Religion, as will enable the bulk of Mankind to distinguish it from all false Religions; or else that all traditionary Religions are upon a Level: Since those, who, in every Country, are hired to maintain them, will not fail to assert, they have all external Marks; such as, *uninterrupted Traditions, incontestable Miracles, Confession of Adversaries,*

*saries, Number of Profelytes, Agreement among themselves*; and all those other external Arguments, that the *Papists* and *Mabometans* set so high a value on. In this case, what can the common People do, who understand not a word of the Language, their Religion and its external Proofs are writ in, but be of the Religion in which they are educated? Especially, if nothing is suffer'd to be publish'd, which may in the least tend to make them question its Truth; and all other Religions are represented as full of the grossest Absurdities.

HAD the People of *Rome*, in the primitive Times of Christianity, been govern'd by external Marks, none of them had quitted their old Religion, which had every external Mark proper to recommend it; and under which they were so bless'd, as to become Masters of the best part of the known World. But,

BECAUSE this is a Point, wherein the greatest part of Mankind are at all times nearly concern'd, I shall beg leave to mention, tho' it be somewhat long, what Mr. *Locke* says on this Head.

“ HAVE the bulk of Mankind no other Guide, Of Human  
 “ but Accident, and blind Chance, to conduct Underst. l. 4.  
 “ them to their Happiness or Misery? Are the c. 19. Sect. 3.  
 “ current Opinions, and licens'd Guides of p. 399, Edit. 2.  
 “ every Country sufficient Evidence and Security  
 “ to every Man to venture his great Concern-  
 “ ments on; nay, his everlasting Happiness or  
 “ Misery? Or, can those be the certain and in-  
 “ fallible Oracles and Standards of Truth, which  
 “ teach one thing in *Christendom*, and another in  
 “ *Turkey*? Or, shall a poor Country-man be eter-  
 “ nally happy, for having the Chance to be born  
 “ in *Italy*; or a Day-labourer be unavoidably lost,  
 “ because he had the ill luck to be born in *Eng-*  
 “ *land*? How ready some Men may be to say  
 “ some of these things, I will not here examine;  
 “ but this I am sure, that Men must allow one  
 “ or other of these to be true; (let them chuse

“ which they please,) or else grant, that God  
 “ has furnished Men with Faculties sufficient to  
 “ direct them in the way they should take, if they  
 “ will but seriously employ them that way, when  
 “ their ordinary Vocations allow them the leisure.—  
 “ There can’t be a more dangerous thing to rely  
 “ on, than the Opinion of others, nor more likely  
 “ to mislead one; since there is much more Falshood  
 “ and Error among Men than Truth and Know-  
 “ ledge: And if the Opinions and Persuasions of  
 “ others, who we know, and think well of, be  
 “ a ground of Assent, Men have reason to be  
 “ *Heathens in Japan, Mabometans in Turkey, Pa-*  
 “ *pists in Spain, Protestants in England, and Lu-*  
 “ *therans in Sweden.*”

Ib. l. 4. c. 15.  
 Sect. 6. Edit.  
 2.

W A S there a Set of Priests, on whose Authority  
 the common People were every where to depend  
 for their religious Sentiments, they must be known  
 by some plain, external Marks: To say the People  
 must follow those Priests that are in the right,  
 is to suppose People must judge what is right;  
 and then judge (if that concern’d them) whether  
 any Set of Priests are in the right; and if Men  
 can’t believe, when they see no Reason for believ-  
 ing, what reason can the Bulk of Mankind have  
 to prefer one Religion before a number of others, on  
 the account of such things, as, upon Priestly Autho-  
 rity, are believ’d to belong to every one of them;  
 such as *Visions, Dreams, Trances, Extasies, Inspira-*  
*tions, Conferences with Spirits, traditionary Report*  
*about Miracles, &c?* And shou’d the Chance of Edu-  
 cation throw Men into the *true* traditionary Religi-  
 on, yet considering its Style is not very exact, there  
 being generally more express’d than is meant; and  
 things of the greatest Consequence are often so  
 treated, as that Men can’t from thence perceive  
 the Nature and Extent of their Duty; and even  
 Precepts of the greatest moment are sometimes so  
 far from being deliver’d plainly and simply, that  
 they are express’d after a general, undetermined,  
 nay,



may, hyperbolical manner; so that even in this case, there's a necessity for the common People to have recourse to the Reason of Things.

ARE not the Unlearned wholly unacquainted with those *Keys of Solution* (as they are call'd) which the Learned have such frequent recourse to, such as those of a *Transposition of Words or Clauses, Errors of Copies, various Readings, various Meanings of the same Word, Punctuation, taking away or adding of the Negative Particle; Allusion to Customs, Consideration of the matter in hand, Exaggeration, Interrogation, Parenthesis, literal Sense, figurative Sense; Want of exactness in the sacred Writers, Prudence in concealing some things, or in complying with some Opinions prevailing in their Times; Condescension to Pagans or Jews; using such Ideas as prevail'd in such a Religion; Prejudication in the Hearers, Answers suitable to their Needs, rather than to their Queries; compendious Expressions, Phraseology of that Time, the Author's Nation, or native Country; Parallel Passages, Precepts peculiar to the Apostles, Advices to Perfection, Censures against certain Hereticks, the Circumstances of the Subject, the Scope of the Author, what goes before, and what follows; the Barrenness of the Hebrew Tongue; and consequently, its Ambiguity, its particular Idioms, the various Senses of the same Verb, in different Conjugations; the Want of certain ways of Expression us'd in other Tongues; the sublime and metaphorical Expressions most frequent in the Oriental Languages; the Imitation of the Hebrew Idiom in the LXX Version; and in the original Text of the New Testament Greek of the Synagogue, &c.*

THE bulk of Mankind being incapable of *Metaphysical Speculations*, and their Understandings given them to discern those Rules of Action which God prescribes them, he has, no doubt, adjusted one to the other; and consequently, the Simplicity, the Reasonableness, the Conveniency and Usefulness of these Rules, point them out to be the Will of God, to Men in all Places, and Conditions of Life;

but to carry things further, can only serve the Designs of ill Men, who have taken occasion from thence to abuse their Credulity to the vilest purposes.

CAN, for instance, the common People, who understand not a Word of the Language the *Jewish* Books are writ in, be better Judges than the *Jews* themselves of the Meaning of their own Books; and of their own Prophets speaking in their own Language? Or, are the common People capable of judging of the innumerable Disputes among *Christians*; if those likewise depend, not on the Reason of Things, but on the critical Understanding of Books, written in dead Languages? Nay, what do they know of the distinguishing Doctrines of their own Churches? They, indeed, on all sides, know whom their Leaders wou'd have them hate; but little, or nothing of those Opinions, which divide their Leaders.

B. Is there any Divine of Note, who makes Revelation thus difficult to be understood by the ignorant, and unlearned?

A. I shall mention one, against whom you have no Exception; who represents it thus obscure, even to the Learned. Is not Bishop *Taylor* (highly esteem'd for his devotional, as well as polemical Works) a competent Judge in this Matter? And he (summing up, and that very briefly, what he had spent several Chapters to prove at large) says, “ Since there are  
 Polem. Works, p. 452. “ so many Copies with infinite Varieties of Reading;  
 “ since a various Interpunction, a Parenthesis, a  
 “ Letter, an Accent, may much alter the Sense; since  
 “ some places have divers literal Senses, many have  
 “ spiritual, mystical and allegorical Meanings; since  
 “ there are so many Tropes, Metonymies, Ironies,  
 “ Hyperboles, Proprieties and Improperities of  
 “ Language, whose Understanding depends upon  
 “ such Circumstances, that it's almost impossible to  
 “ know the proper Interpretation; now that the  
 “ Knowledge of such Circumstances, and particular  
 “ Stories, is irrecoverably lost: Since there are some  
 “ Myste-

“ Myſteries, which at the beſt Advantage of Ex-  
 “ preſſion, are not eaſy to be apprehended; and  
 “ whoſe Explication, by reaſon of our Imperfecti-  
 “ ons, muſt needs be dark, ſometimes unintelligi-  
 “ ble: And laſtly, ſince thoſe ordinary Means of  
 “ expounding Scripture, as ſearching the Originals,  
 “ Conference of Places, Parity of Reaſon, Ana-  
 “ logy of Faith, are all dubious, uncertain, and  
 “ very fallible; he that is wiſeſt, and by conſe-  
 “ quence, the likeliſt to expound trueſt, in all  
 “ probability of Reaſon, will be very far from  
 “ Confidence; becauſe every one of them, and  
 “ many more, are like ſo many degrees of Improb-  
 “ ability and Incertainty, all depreſſing our Cer-  
 “ tainty of finding out Truth in ſuch Myſteries,  
 “ and amidſt ſo many Difficulties.”

AND in another Place, “ The Obscurity of Polem. Works,  
 “ ſome Queſtions, the Niceties of ſome Articles,<sup>p. 521.</sup>  
 “ the Intricacy of ſome Revelations, the Variety of  
 “ human Underſtandings, the Winding of Logick,  
 “ the Tricks of Adverſaries, the Subtilty of So-  
 “ phiſters, the Engagement of Educations, personal  
 “ Affections, the portentous Number of Writers,  
 “ the Infinity of Authorities, the Vaſtneſs of ſome  
 “ Arguments, conſiſting in an Enumeration of many  
 “ particulars, the Incertainty of others, the ſeveral  
 “ degrees of Probability, the Difficulties of Scrip-  
 “ ture, the Invalidity of Probation, of Tradition,  
 “ the Oppoſition of all exterior Arguments to one  
 “ another, and their open Conteſtation, the publick  
 “ Violence done to Authors and Records, the pri-  
 “ vate Arts and Supplantings, the Falsifyings, the  
 “ indefatigable Induſtry of ſome Men, to abuſe all  
 “ Underſtandings, and all Perſuaſions, into their  
 “ own Opinions: Theſe, and a thouſand more,  
 “ have made it impoſſible for a Man in ſo great  
 “ a Variety of Matter not to be deceiv’d.” And  
 I might add, in Confirmation of the Biſhop’s Senti-  
 ments, and demonſtrate too, were it not endleſs to  
 go through particulars, that there’s ſcarce a Text,  
 P 4 except

except in things of their own Nature evident, where Commentators do not differ. Whether these Considerations alone, be not a sufficient Reason for the unlearned to adhere to those plain, simple Truths, the Light of Nature dictates, I leave you to judge?

AND do not other Divines, in effect, say the same, when they make Religion not to be implanted in human Nature; but an Art so far above the Capacity of common People, that it requires great Learning and Labour to be competently skill'd in it? And tell us, that they, who have spent their time in studying it, can't have too much Honour, or too great Rewards given them, for deciding for the People, Points of Religion, as the Common-Law Judges do Points of Property; and that People justly incur the dreadful *Anathema* pronounc'd in Synods and Councils, against those who refuse to submit to their Decisions; and that 'tis the Duty of the Magistrate to see their Decrees put in execution.

A Right in Priests, whether in, or out of *Convocations*, to judge, and determine for the People, what they shall believe and profess, supposes it a Duty in them so to believe, and so to profess; and consequently, that the Religion of the *Laitie* consists in believing their Priests; and that whatever they decree, is to be the Rule of their Actions.

B. THIS is too severe; they only claim a power of interpreting the Laws of Christ, not of making new Laws themselves.

A. THERE'S only a verbal Difference between a Law-maker, and a sovereign Interpreter of Laws, to whose Interpretation all are oblig'd to submit; so that ever since the Council of — People have been taught to renounce both Natural and Reveald Religion; and become Priests Worshippers, and to have a divine Faith in their Dictates; and indeed, so they ought, if these Priests had, as they claim, a judicial Power to determine of Mens Condition hereafter; and thereby make God a mere Executioner

tioner of their Sentences, by which they bind, or loose Mens Sins to Eternity.

As this Notion carries with it the highest Blafphemy and Idolatry, fo I think it is treated too gently by Mr. *Chillingworth*, in faying, “ This Chillingworth's Relig. of Proteft. Part. 1. c. 4. Sect. 16. p. 152. Edit. 5. presumptuous imposing of the Senses of Men upon the Words of God, the special Senses of Men upon the general Words of God, and laying them upon Mens Consciences together under the equal Penalty of Death and Damnation : This vain Conceit, that we can speak of the Things of God better than the Words of God ; This Deifying our own Interpretations, and tyrannous Inforcing them upon others ; this restraining of the Word of God from that Latitude and Generality ; and the Understandidg of Men from that Liberty, wherein Christ and the Apostles left them ; is and hath been the only Fountain of all the *Schisms* of the Church, and that which makes them immortal ; the common Incendiary of *Christendom*, and that which tears in pieces, not the Coat, but the Bowels and Members of Christ : *Ridente Turca, nec dolente Judæo.*

IN short, true Religion can't but be plain, simple, and natural, as design'd for all Mankind, adapted to every Capacity, and suited to every Condition and Circumstance of Life ; and if it be render'd otherwise, is it not owing to those, who have made it their Business to puzzle Mankind, and render plain things obscure ; in order to get the Consciences, and consequently, the Properties of the People at their disposal, and to be in a manner ador'd, notwithstanding the grossest Immoralities, as the sole Dispensers of such Things, as no ways relate to the Good of the Community ; and to destroy all that will not comply with their pernicious Designs, as Enemies of God, and his Holy Church ? And,

Tho' the Clergy have taken all possible Methods for a blind Submission, and a forc'd Uniformity, yet they have not been able to hinder *Christians* from being

ing endlessly divided, even in what they call *Fundamentals*. And tho' no one Sect, as far as I can find, have ventur'd to give us a compleat Set of their *Fundamentals*; yet all Sects unanimously own, that those Things, which are necessary to the Salvation of *Christians*, must be so plain, as that all *Christians*, even those of the meanest Capacities, may apprehend them. Would not one think, that a little honest Reflexion should carry them further, and make them see, that it is inconsistent with the universal and unlimited Goodness of the common Parent of Mankind, not to make That which is necessary for the Salvation of all Men so plain, as that all Men may know it? Tho' one would be apt to think, that by the Number and Oddness of those things, which in most Churches Divines have made necessary to Salvation, they were more zealous to damn others than to save themselves; or, at least, that they thought there was no room in Heaven for any, but Men of their own narrow Principles. But,

LET me ask these charitable Gentlemen, Whether the Happiness of others wou'd make *Christians* unhappy? Or, what Prejudice it will be to them, to suppose *God is no Respector of Persons*; but that all may come to him, who believe that *he will reward those* in all Nations, and at all Times, *who have diligently sought him*?

NATURAL Religion, which is of the greatest importance to Mankind, and is a perpetual standing Rule for Men of the meanest, as well as highest Capacity, carries its own Evidence with it, those internal, inseparable Marks of Truth; but can that be said of any Religion, which depends on Tradition? Does not that want foreign Aid and Assistance? Ought we not to be certain, that the first Propagators of it cou'd not be impos'd on themselves, or wou'd not impose on others? Or, in other Words, were infallible, and impeccable? But since Numbers have taken their Reveries for divine Inspirations,

tions, ought we not to have certain Marks to distinguish the one from the other? Nor is this alone sufficient; for if evil Beings can impress Notions in Mens Minds as strongly as good Beings, and cause Miracles to be done in confirmation of them; is there any way to know, to which of the two, Notions, thus impress'd, are owing, but from their Nature and Tendency; or those internal Marks of Wisdom and Goodness, by which they plainly shew themselves to be part of Natural Religion? If so, can external Proofs carry us farther than the internal Proofs do? But,

'T IS not enough to be certain, these Men were not impos'd on; we must be as certain, they wou'd on no occasion whatever impose on others: Or, in other words, were not Men of like Passions and Infirmities with other Mortals. Does not the Scripture give very many Instances of inspir'd Persons as much govern'd by their Passions, as uninspir'd? Was not *Abraham*, tho' a Prophet, and so dear to God, that he wou'd not destroy a neighbouring Town without acquainting him with it, guilty of an incestuous Marriage, his Wife being his Sister by the Father's side? And did he not endeavour to betray her Chastity to two Kings, in disowning her to be his Wife, by which Conduct he got from one of them, who *entreated him well for her sake*, Men and Maid-Servants, Sheep, Oxen, Asses, and Camels; and from the other, *a thousand pieces of Silver*, besides Sheep, Oxen, Men and Women-Servants? And immediately after *his Faith was counted to him for Righteousness*, did he not doubt of God's Promise, till God spoke to him *in a deep Sleep*?

WAS not *David*, tho' a Prophet, and a Man after God's own heart, guilty of many enormous Crimes, from the time he design'd to have murder'd all the Males in *Nabal's* Family, because he wou'd not pay Contributions to him, and those Men, who out of Debt, Discontent and Distress join'd him? tho' *Nabal*, by so doing, might have incurr'd the Fate

Gen. 18. 15.

— 20. 12.

— 12. 19.

— 20. 2.

— 12. 16.

— 20. 16.

— 15. 6, 8.

— 12. 13.

1 Sam. 25. 22.

— 22. 2.

Fate of those Priests, from whom, *David*, by several Falshoods, got both *Shew-Bread*, and *Goliab's* Sword. What cou'd be more treacherous, than his invading People, that were, at least, in Peace, if not — 27.8 — 12. Allies of the King of *Gath*, to whom he fled for Safety; and having neither fav'd Man or Woman alive to bring Tydings, told his generous Protector, he had been making an Inroad into *Judea*?

IN a word, (not to mention his Treatment of *Uriah*, which no brave Man can think of without horror) did he not leave the World in a very unforgiving Temper, when the last thing he commanded his Son *Solomon*, was, to put *Shimei* to death, tho' he had *sworn before the Lord*, that he *wou'd not put him to death*, and that *he shou'd not die*?

SOLOMON, tho' inspir'd with Wisdom from above, and had Conferences with God himself, yet his Passion for Women made him guilty of gross Idolatry. And not to multiply Instances; we find one Man of God lying to another Man of God in the Name of God; purely for the pleasure of making him *eat Bread, and drink Water with him*. And if we go to the New Testament, 'tis plain, by what our Saviour says to those, who *had prophesy'd, and cast out Devils, and done many wonderful Works in his Name, Depart from me, ye that work Iniquity*; that neither Prophecies, nor Miracles, are absolute Securities for Men to depend on. Nay, do we not find one of the Apostles, tho' he, with the rest, had the power of doing Miracles, even to the *Raising of the Dead*, betraying his Master for the paultry Sum of thirty pieces of Silver? And the other Apostles not only fled, and deserted him; but the chief of them *forswore him*, as often as he was ask'd about his being one of his Followers; and he, as well as *Barnabas*, was afterwards guilty of a mean piece of Dissimulation. And *Paul* and *Barnabas* had such a *sharp Contention*, tho' about a very indifferent Matter, as to cause a Separation: And even *St. Paul* says, *The Good that I would do, I do not; but*



*but the Evil which I would not, that I do.—But I see another Law in my Members, warring against the Law of my Mind, and bringing me into Captivity\* to the Law of Sin, which is in my Members.* And a great deal more to the same purpose.

Do not these Instances, tho' many more might be added, plainly shew, that inspir'd Persons, whether Prophets or Apostles, are subject to the same Passions, even to dissembling and lying, as other Men? And that we sin against that Reason, which was given us to distinguish between Good and Evil; Religion and Superstition; if we do not by it examine all Doctrines whatsoever, and by whomsoever deliver'd? But supposing Prophets and Apostles impeccable as well as infallible; yet what Certainty can People have, that those things which were taught by them have been faithfully convey'd down for many Generations together by Men, who were far from being infallible, or impeccable? So that here, certainly, they ought to make use of their Reason, in judging of all Doctrines thus convey'd. Admitting Tradition has been a faithful Conveyancer, yet how can the common People be certain the Scripture has been truly translated? But, granting even that; yet since most Texts have vastly varied, and sometimes contrary Interpretations, and the literal Sense very often *kills*; how can they be confident they do not mistake their meaning, except the Reason of things makes it evident? But supposing no such uncertainty in the meaning of Texts, yet since the Scripture contains some Precepts, which are occasional, obliging only certain Persons, upon certain Occasions, and in certain Circumstances; and others that are of an eternal Obligation, and makes no distinction in delivering them; can Men, even the most learned, have any other way of knowing one from the other, but from the nature of the Precepts; and that those only are of eternal Obligation, which are founded on the eternal Reason

of things; and which wou'd eternally oblige, whether deliver'd in Scripture, or not? And,

LET me further add, That to make external Revelation of any use, must we not, as I have already observ'd, be able to determine, whether God is oblig'd to act, as he declares in it he will do? And in order to settle this important Point, which Revelation itself can never do; must not our Reason tell us, that infinite Wisdom can have no Commands, but what are founded on the unalterable Reason of things? And if God cou'd command at one time for commanding-sake in any one Point, he might do so in all points and times; and consequently that an arbitrary Will, which might change every moment, would govern all things? And can they, who plead that their external Revelation is the unchangeable Will of God, any otherwise do it, but by having recourse to the Nature of God, by which they can't but perceive, that the Will of God before, as well as since any external Revelation, must be as immutable as God himself; as being founded on the eternal Reason of Things? So that they who make the Will of God, whether reveal'd by himself, or by any Messenger, not to be unchangeably the same, destroy all possible Proof, that any external Revelation cou'd be, or at least, continue to be the Will of God. Thus you see, that, take what *Hypothesis* you please, yet you can prove nothing to be his Will, but what the Nature of God, and the Nature of Things point out to all Men, who dare use their Reason, to be his Will, his immutable Will.

AMONG the numerous Answerers of the *Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*, Mr. Chandler is deservedly reckon'd to stand in the foremost Rank;

Chandler's De- and this judicious Divine says, that " Natural Re-  
dic. to Serm. " ligious is the only Foundation, upon which Re-  
preach'd in " velation can be supported; and which must be  
the *Old Jewry*, " understood, before any Man is capable of judging  
p. 8. " either of the Nature and Evidence of Christia-  
" nity:

“ nity : And I am persuaded, *says he*, that 'tis to  
 “ the want of a due Knowledge of the first Prin-  
 “ ciples of all Religion, those Mistakes about the  
 “ Christian are owing, that have obscur'd the Sim-  
 “ plicity of it, and prejudiced many against enter-  
 “ taining, and believing it.—If natural Religion  
 “ is not part of the Religion of Christ, 'tis scarce  
 “ worth while to enquire at all what his Religion  
 “ is. If it be, then the preaching Natural Reli-  
 “ gion is preaching Christ.—The Religion of Ib. p. 9, 10,  
 “ Christ must be understood, before it can, or 11.  
 “ ought to be believ'd ; and that it must be prov'd  
 “ to be a consistent, and rational Religion, before  
 “ they can be under any Obligation to receive it.

“ AND, indeed, why should not every Man  
 “ insist upon those things ? The only Consequence  
 “ that I can imagine can flow from it, is, not that  
 “ the Cause of Christianity will suffer ; which will  
 “ stand the test of the most impartial Inquiry ; but  
 “ that the rigid Directors of the Faith and Consci-  
 “ ences of Men will lose their Authority, and hu-  
 “ man Schemes and Creeds, that have been set up  
 “ in the room of Christianity, will fall into the  
 “ contempt they so justly deserve.

“ —'TIS my hearty Prayer to *the Father of*  
 “ *Lights*, and *the God of Truth*, that all human  
 “ Authority in matters of Faith, may come to a  
 “ full end ; and that every one, who hath Reason  
 “ to direct him, and a Soul to save, may be his  
 “ own Judge in every Thing that concerns his eter-  
 “ nal Welfare, without any prevailing regard to  
 “ the Dictates of fallible Men, or fear of their  
 “ peevish, and impotent Censures.” And in this  
 Prayer, I believe, every honest Man will join.

THE Reverend and Judicious Mr. *Bullock*, in Serm. p. 3, 4-  
 summing up what I have been endeavouring to  
 prove at large ; says, “ A Revelation coming from  
 “ God, unless it could be known to be such, is in  
 “ effect the same, as having none at all.—Shall a  
 “ Man, *says he*, embrace the first Religion that of-

“fers itself to him, and without seeking any further, stick close to the Principles of his Education? If this were safe, then all the contradictory Notions that are in the World, would be equally safe and true; and there would be no such thing as a false Religion, or the Spirit of Error any where: But this will not be admitted. Is Truth, then, confin’d to any certain Country, or to any particular Set of Men? No: But if it were, still there would remain this difficulty, to be assured to what Country, or to what sort of Men it belonged. If this were all the Rule we had to go by, every Man (no doubt) would be partial to his own Country, and to those Men he is best acquainted with. And so the Principles of Education must prevail every where, instead of true Religion.”

Serm. p. 18,  
 19.

IN answer to these, and such like Objections, he says, “We are well assur’d, that God is the Author of our Beings, and all our Faculties; and we cannot but acknowledge, that our Understanding is the most excellent Faculty he has given us. It is in that we excel the Beasts that perish; and it was plainly given us with this intent, that by a due Use and Application thereof we might discern Truth from Error; that which is just and fit to be done, or observed by us, from that which is not.—Should we, therefore, admit any thing, as a Revelation coming from him, which contradicts the evident Dictates of our Reason; we sacrifice one Revelation, that which God gave us with our very Beings, to make way for another, which is inconsistent with it. It is in effect admitting, that the Judgment of our own Minds is in no case to be depended upon; that the Faculties thereof, the very best Gift which God has given us, are of no use and service to us, no, not even in discerning which Doctrines come from God, and which do not. For, if I cannot depend upon the plainest Dictates

“ of

“ of Reason, how can I be assur'd that any Doc-  
 “ trine is a Revelation from God? If I receive it  
 “ without consulting my Reason, then for ought I  
 “ know, it may be an Imposture; and I am every  
 “ way as liable to embrace an Error as the Truth.  
 “ But if I embrace it upon the Tryal and Convic-  
 “ tion of my Reason, then 'tis plain, I admit the  
 “ principles of Reason are to be depended upon;  
 “ which if I do, I cannot consistently admit any  
 “ thing as true, which contradicts it.”

To apply this Author's Reasonings, God is fre-  
 quently said *to swear*; nay, in both Old and New-  
 Testament, to *swear in Wrath*. Now, if we are to  
 admit nothing, that is repugnant to the Natural  
 Notion we have of God, ought we not to examine  
 by our Reason, whether God, who has no Superior  
 to invoke, can swear at all; much less be in a  
 Passion, and swear in Wrath?

AGAIN, If there are ever so many Texts, which  
 seemingly confine Salvation to a Belief, to which  
 the greatest part of Mankind are utter Strangers;  
 or else have not had sufficient Reason to see they  
 were oblig'd to examine into it; or if they did,  
 could not find out its Truth; must it not, by this  
 Author's Reasoning, be my Duty to consider, whe-  
 ther this is consistent with the Character we have  
 from the Light of Nature, of the impartial and uni-  
 versal Goodness of God, to damn Men for Impos-  
 sibilities? Or, whether One can be said to be sent  
 as a Saviour of Mankind, if he comes to shut Hea-  
 ven's Gates against those, to whom before they  
 were open; provided they follow'd the Dictates of  
 their Reason?

IF, besides these, there are innumerable Texts,  
 which, in the plainest manner Words can express,  
 impute human Parts, human Infirmities, and human  
 Passions, even of the worst kind, to God; does not  
 this suppose, that even all have a right to examine;  
 and consequently, sufficient Understanding to judge,  
 when Texts, taken in their plain, obvious meaning,

are, or are not consistent with what the Light of Nature teaches them the Character of the supreme Being? What Notions must the Vulgar have of God, if the Light of Nature can't direct them right, when they find he is said to be *jealous and furious*? And God himself says, *My Fury shall come up in my Face, for in my Jealousy, and in the Fire of my Wrath have I spoken*: With a Number of other Expressions of the like nature? Nay, does not the Scripture, if taken literally, suppose, that God does things of the greatest Moment in Anger and Fury? Was it not thus he gave his favourite People *Statutes, which were not good; and Judgments, by which they could not live*? And does not St. Peter (to mention no other Apostle) tho' a *Jew*, call the *Jewish Law, given by God, a Yoke that neither we, or our Fore-fathers could bear*? In what a Number of Places is God said to do things *to try* People; and yet notwithstanding this Caution, how often is he said *to repent*? Does he not even repent of the first Action he did in relation to Man? *He repented that he made Man, and it griev'd him at his Heart*. Nay, does not the Scripture suppose he has so often repented, that he is *weary of repenting*? What strange Notions must the Bulk of Mankind, cou'd not their Reason direct them right, have of the supreme Being, when he is said to have *rested*, and to *be refresh'd*; and that *Wine cheareth both God and Man*? And what is yet stranger, such Actions are attributed to him, as can only belong to the lowest rank of Creatures, such as *kissing*; God being in three places of the Prophets said *to kiss*; and in one place *to kiss for a Fly, that is in the uttermost part of the River of Egypt; and for a Bee, that is in the Land of Assyria*.

B. DIVINES tell us, We must recede from the Letter, when the nature of the thing requires it; that is, when it contains any notion, or fact, which our Reason tells us is unworthy of God; as being inconsistent with his Wisdom, Goodness, Justice, Immu-

Immutability, impartial and universal Benevolence, or any other of his Perfections; or any ways clashes with those Duties, that Men as Men, or Creatures of the same Creator owe their Fellow-Creatures.

A. I should think that Man was unreasonable, who requir'd a greater scope in reading any Book, than what these Divines allow him in reading the Scripture; especially considering the frequent occasion he will have to exercise his reasoning Faculty, in allegorising away facts deliver'd after the plainest manner: As for Instance, If Reason tells us, that God, the only true God is *invisible*, we must not interpret those numerous Texts literally, which suppose him to have been so often seen by mortal Eyes: No, not even those which represent him for many Days together visible on Mount *Sinai*, where what was under his Feet is mention'd; and that the *Nobles, on whom God laid not his Hand, saw God, and did eat, and drink.* Exod. 24. 10; And Bishop *Patrick* says, 11. Comment on the Place. "that after they saw God, they were so far from receiving any harm, that they feasted with him upon the Relicks of the Peace-Offerings, with great Joy and Gladness." And tho' 'tis said, *God spake to Moses face to face, as a Man does to his Friend*; yet for the same reason, that Text must not be interpreted literally.

B. THAT'S certain, since God, in the same Chapter, says to *Moses, Thou canst not see my Face*; Exod. 33. 20; *for there shall no Man see me, and live.*

A. DOES not God immediately add, *Behold there* — Ver. 21, *is a Place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a Rock. And* 22, 23. *it shall come to pass, while my Glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a Cleft of the Rock; and I will cover thee with my Hand, while I pass by. And I will take away mine Hand, and thou shalt see my Back-parts; but my Face shall not be seen.* And since Reason tells us, God has neither Fore-parts, or Back-parts, must not the *Rock, the Cleft of the Rock, and the Hand that cover'd Moses in this Cleft, and the Back-parts seen*

upon taking away the Hand, be understood by Men of the meanest Capacity, in a spiritual Sense?

ACCORDING to the acknowledg'd Maxims, you have laid down from Divines, we must not take literally the two Conferences mention'd in the first and second of *Job* between God and Satan; when *Satan*, in very good Company, *with the Sons of God*, presented himself before the Lord; who, when Satan wou'd not otherwise be satisfy'd of *Job's* Integrity, permitted him to *slay Job's Children and Servants*, and reduce him to extremity to make the experiment. The same may be said of the Lord's saying

Zech. 3. 1, 2. at another time to Satan, *standing at the right Hand of the Angel of the Lord, to resist the High-Priest Joshua, standing likewise before him, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan*: And must we not think it as unworthy of God to *talk to a Serpent* as to *Satan*? Or, how can we conceive a Serpent cou'd talk to *Eve*, and delude the Mother of Mankind, tho' in the high State of Perfection; even tho' the Apostle says,

2 Cor. 11. 3. *The Serpent deceiv'd Eve by his Subtilty?*

SOME wou'd be almost apt to imagine, that the Author of the Book of *Genesis* thought, that Words had Ideas naturally fix'd to them, and not by Consent: Otherwise, say they, how can we account for his supposing, that God brought all Animals before *Adam*, as soon as he was created, to give them Names; and that *whatsoever Adam call'd every living Creature, that was the Name thereof*; and that the *Serpent* and *Eve*, almost as soon as created, entertain'd one another in the same Language? And some think, that this Author did not know the reason of the necessary variety of Language upon the Increase of Mankind, by making God to come down

Gen. 2. 19. to see *the City and Tower, whose Top was design'd to reach to Heaven*; and then saying, *this they begin to do; and now nothing will be restrain'd from them, which they have imagin'd to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their Language*. And, perhaps, the not knowing the natural Cause of the

Gen. 11. 4, 6, 7. *Rain-bow,*



Rain-bow, occasion'd that Account we have in *Genesis* of its Institution.

As to the Story of an Angel of God's wrestling all Night with *Jacob*, and then *laming*, and  *blessing* Gen. 32. 24, *him*, and *changing his Name*; "Interpreters of 25, 28, 29. *note*, whether *Jews* or *Christians* (as Mr. *Nye* <sup>Nye of Nat. and Rev. Re-</sup> observes) "understood it done, not in Fact, but <sup>lig. p. 203.</sup> "in Vision only:" Tho' one would imagine the *Jews* thought it literally true, because the Text says, *They eat not of the Sinew*; that Sinew, which — Ver. 32. *sbrank, unto this very Day.*

WHAT a number of Ideas must *Balaam's Ass* have, to be able to reason with his Master; when he saw, and knew an Angel? And tho' 'tis said by *Peter*, that *the dumb Ass speaking with Man's Voice*, 2 Pet. 2. 16. *forbad the Madness of the Prophet*; yet in the Story itself; there does not appear any thing like Madness: For that Prophet did nothing but what the Lord enjoin'd him; and declares tho' *Balak wou'd give me his House full of Silver and Gold, I cannot go beyond the Word of the Lord, my God.* And when he went to *Balaam's second Messenger*, it was by the express Command of God; and yet the Text says, *God's Anger was kindled because he went*: And Num. 22. 22. then follows the Dialogue between the Ass and his Master.

How many Commands did God give his Prophets, which, if taken according to the Letter, seem unworthy of God, as making them act like Mad-men or Idiots? As for Instance, The Prophet *Isaiab walk'd* Isa. 20. 3. *for three Years together naked for a Sign.* *Jeremiab* is commanded *to carry his Girdle as far as Euphrates*, Jer. 13. 4, 6. *and there to bury it in the Hole of a Rock*; and after many Days he is sent to dig it up again. So he is commanded *to make Bands and Yokes, and put them about* — 27. 2, 3. *his Neck, and send them to several Kings.* *Ezekiel* is commanded by the Lord *to draw Jerusalem on a Tile*, Ezek. 4. 1, 2, *and lay siege to it, build a Fort against it, set a Camp* 3, 4. *against it, and set Battering-Rams against it round about.* Moreover *to take an Iron Pan, and set it for a*

*Wall of Iron between him and the City*: And immediately after he is commanded, *to lie three hundred and ninety Days on one Side, and forty Days on the other; and then to mix Man's Dung with his Bread.*

Ezek. 4. 12, 15. And afterwards the Lord said, *I have given thee Cow's Dung for Man's Dung.* Another time he is

— 12. 5, 6. commanded *to dig a Hole through the Wall of his House, and carry forth his Goods in the Twilight, and cover his Face, as not to see the Ground.* And as St.

Rev. 10. 9. *John* was commanded *to eat a Book*, so the Prophet

Ezek. 3. 1, 3. was commanded *to eat a Roll*; and likewise *to clip*

Ezek. 5. 1, 2, 3, 4. *his Hair*, and *to dispose of the Clippings* after a very odd Manner; and several other things as strange,

Hof. 1, 2, &c. too many here to mention. And the Prophet *Hosea*, who was likewise a Priest, was bid to take a *Wife*

Lev. 21. 14. *of Whoredoms*, (tho' that by *Moses* Law was forbid a Priest,) and *Children of Whoredoms*; and had three Children by this Wife, to whom *the Lord himself* gave Names.

No *Mathematician* cou'd give a more exact Description of a City, than *John* does of *that great City, the Holy Jerusalem*; which *from an high Mountain* he saw descending out of Heaven from God; and he was so near it, as to describe the *Gates, Walls* and *Streets*; and to measure its *Length, Breadth, and*

Rev. 21. 10, &c. Height with a *Reed*. And *Tertullian* assures us, “that in his time there was seen for forty Days

Contra Mar- tion. l. 3. c. 24. “together, a City hanging in the Air over *Judea*.” And yet Interpreters have since allegoris'd this great City into a meer Castle in the Air. But,

To come to things of greater moment, did not the Scripture suppose Reason was able to teach Men of the meanest Capacity, that God cou'd not be deceiv'd himself, or deceive us; the Prophet *Jeremiah* wou'd not have said, *O Lord, Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived; thou art stronger than I, and hast prevail'd.—Wilt thou be altogether unto me as a Liar; and as Waters that fail?* And in another

Jer. 20. 7. Prophet the Lord says, *The Days are prolonged, and every Vision fails.* And tho' the Lord adds, *Thus*

— 15. 18. *shall*

Ezek. 12. 22, 28. *shall*

shall none of my Words be prolong'd any more, but the Word which I have spoken shall be done; yet he afterwards says, *If the Prophet be deceiv'd when he hath spoken a Thing, I, the Lord have deceiv'd that Prophet.* And if the Prophet is deceiv'd, must not the People, who rely on that Prophet, be deceiv'd? And does not the Prophet *Jeremiah* say, *Ab! Lord God, surely thou hast greatly deceiv'd this People?* And to the same purpose the Prophet *Isaiab*, *O Lord, thou hast made us to err.*

THERE are other Texts which go farther, and, if taken literally, represent God not only falsifying his Word, but his Oaths. To mention two, the first relates to the Children of *Israel*, to whom the Lord said, *Ye shall not come into the Land concerning which I swear to make you dwell; and ye shall know my Breach of Promise.* The second is in *Psalms* 89. in the first Part of which is largely set forth the Promises of God to *David* by Covenant and Oath; and in the other Part *David* complains of God's Breach, both of his Covenant and his Oath; and in summing up those Breaches he says, *Thou hast made void the Covenant of thy Servant: Lord, where are thy former loving-Kindnesses which thou swearest to David in thy Truth?* And there are several Facts mention'd in Scripture, which, if taken literally, look as tho' the Prophets were either deceiv'd themselves, or were willing to deceive others. [\* *Jeremiah* prophesies, King *Zedekiah* should die in Peace; and yet the poor King had his Sons slain before his Eyes, and his Eyes then put out, bound in Chains, and died in Prison. And tho' he prophesied that *Jehoiachim* should be buried with the Burial of an Ass, drawn, and cast forth beyond the Gates of *Jerusalem*; yet this does not at all agree with what is related of him in the last Chapter of the second Book of *Kings*, or even in the last Chapter of *Jeremiah*.] The Prophetess *Hilda* assures good King *Josiah* from the Lord, that he shou'd be gather'd to his Grave in peace; and yet soon after he receiv'd a mortal Wound, of which he died.

2 Kings 3.  
7—10.

Prophet *Elisba* sends word to *Benhadad*, the King of *Syria*, who consults him about his Recovery, that he may, (or rather shall or will, for so it ought to be render'd) certainly recover; yet he tells *Hazael*, who had a Design on his Crown and Life (and who before had been anointed King of *Syria*, by the Prophet *Elijah*) that *he should surely die*. And this look'd the more ungrateful in the Prophet, because he had receiv'd *forty Camel Loads of the good things of Damascus*, to tell the King the Truth. But I need not mention single Prophets deceiving, or being deceiv'd, when the Scripture tells us of four hundred being deceiv'd at once, to the destruction of a number of innocent Persons. *I saw*, says the Prophet *Micaiah*, *the Lord sitting upon his Throne, and all the Host of Heaven standing on his right Hand, and on his left. And the Lord said, who shall entice Ahab, King of Israel, that he may go up, and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one spake, saying after this manner, and another saying after that manner. Then there came out a Spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will entice him. And the Lord said unto him, wherewith? And he said, I will go out, and be a lying Spirit in the mouth of all his Prophets. And the Lord said, Thou shalt entice him, and thou shalt also prevail. Go out, and do even so.*

1 Kings 19.

15.

2 Kings 8. 8,

9.

2 Chron. 18.

5, 12.

2 Chron. 18.

5, 18, 21, 22.

Jude 9, 12.

As to the New Testament, I shall now only observe, that tho' *St. Jude* quotes (besides the Assumption of *Moses*) a Prophecy of *Enoch*, the seventh from *Adam*, and the Book containing this Prophecy was then in being; yet, because there were things in it, which seem'd unworthy of God, and cou'd not be well allegoris'd; the Authority of an inspir'd Person quoting it as an inspir'd Book, cou'd not support its Credit, but it fell into Contempt, and was lost.

*B.* THO you allow Reason to be the proper Judge in things of Morality, as falling under its Cognizance; yet as to Prophecies, you must own, we are entirely to rely on Authority.

A. I have hitherto said nothing in relation to Prophecies, designing to speak of them at another season; but since you mention them, I must, as to the Prophecies in the Old Testament, confess my Ignorance, that I do not understand them; and Divines themselves, as far as I can find, are infinitely divided about interpreting them: And as to those Prophecies, if they may be so call'd, in the New Testament, relating to the *second Coming of Christ*, and the *End of the World*, the best Interpreters and Commentators own, the Apostles themselves were grossly mistaken; there scarce being an Epistle, but where they foretel that those Times they wrote in, were *Tempora novissima*; and the then Age the last Age, and those Days the last Days; and that the *End of the World was nigh*, and the *Coming of Christ at hand*; as is plain, among other Texts, from 1 Cor. x. 11. Rom. xiii. 11, 12. Heb. ix. 26. Jam. v. 7, 8. 1 John ii. 18. 2 Pet. iii. 12, 13. And they do not assert this as a mere matter of Speculation, but build Motives and Arguments upon it, to excite People to the Practice of Piety, and all good Works; as Phil. iv. 5. *Let your Moderation be known to all Men, the Lord is at hand.* And to the same purpose are Heb. x. 24, 25. 1 Pet. iv. 7, 8. 1 Cor. vii. 29. 2 Pet. iii. 11, 12. And tho' they do not pretend to tell the very Day and Hour, when these things must happen; yet they thought it wou'd be during their time, and continually expected it. Timothy is charged to keep this Commandment — till the appearing of the Lord. So Paul says, <sup>1 Tim. 6. 13,</sup> to the Corinthians, *As oft as ye eat this Bread, and* <sup>14.</sup> *drink this Cup, ye do shew the Lord's Death till he comes.* And I think, 'tis plain, Paul himself expected to be alive at the coming of the Lord, and that he had the Word of God for it. <sup>1 Thes. 4. 15,</sup> *For this we* <sup>16, 17, 18.</sup> *say unto you by the Word of the Lord, that we which* <sup>See Grotius in</sup> *are alive, and remain unto the Coming of the Lord,* <sup>loc.</sup> *shall not prevent them which are asleep.—The dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive, and remain*

remain, shall be caught up together with them in the Clouds, to meet the Lord in the Air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore, comfort one another with these Words. And there are other Texts to the same Purpose, as 1 Cor. xv. 51, 52. 2 Cor. v. 4.

2 Thes. 2. 3. B. DOES not St. Paul suppose, that before the Coming of Christ, *Antichrist* must appear?

A. THAT does not in the least hinder, but he might believe both wou'd happen in his Time; —Ver. 7. For, says he, *the Mystery of Iniquity does already work.* And St. *John* puts this matter out of Dispute, in saying, *Little Children, it is the last Time; and as ye have heard the Antichrist shall come, even now are there many Antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last Time.*

2 Pet. 3. 3, 4. B. DOES not St. Peter say, *There shall come in the last days, Scoffers*—saying, *where is the Promise of his Coming?*

A. SAINT Peter owns those to be the last Days, and the Promise of his then coming he confirms, by 1b. Ver. 9.—saying, *God is not slack concerning his Promise, the Day of the Lord will come as a Thief in the Night:—What manner of Persons ought ye to be in all holy Conversation and Godliness, looking for, and hastening unto the coming of the Day of God, wherein the Heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the Elements shall melt with fervent Heat: Nevertheless we, according to his Promise, look for new Heavens, and a new Earth.*

—Ver. 8. B. DOES not St. Peter say, *Beloved, be not ignorant of this one Thing, that one Day is with the Lord as a thousand Years, and a thousand Years as one Day?*

A. THIS, as in the Margin, seems to be quoted from *Psalms* xc. 4. where 'tis said, *A thousand Years in thy sight, are but as Yesterday when it is past.* And surely St. Peter cou'd not imagine, that God affected to speak unintelligibly; and by one Day meant a thousand Years; and by a thousand Years one Day; and refer to this Place as a Proof.

B. DIVINES are at a loss how to account for the Apostles so frequently declaring, the *End of all Things*

*Things to be at hand, and Christ to be then a coming; when our Saviour says, Of that day and Hour know-* Mat. 24. 36, *eth no Man; no, not the Angels of Heaven, but my Father only.*

A. THOSE Divines wou'd not make these Reflections, did they but consider what our Saviour declares to his Disciples, when they came to him privately; saying, *Tell us when these things shall be;—* Ver. 3. *and what shall be the Sign of thy Coming, and of the End of the World.* Does he not in answer to their Question tell them what those Signs would be? Withal adding, *So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these*—Ver. 33, 34. *Things, know that it is near, even at the Doors. Verily, I say unto you, this Generation shall not pass, till all these Things be fulfilled.* And to assure them of the Truth of what he declares, *Heaven and Earth,* says Ver. 35. *he, shall pass away, but my Words shall not pass away.* And his adding, *But of that Day and Hour knoweth* Mat. 24. 36. *no Man, no, not the Angels of Heaven, but my Father only; was not meant to contradict what he just before declar'd, that this Generation shall not pass till these Things be fulfill'd; but to warn his Disciples not to be surpris'd, as the old World was, when the Flood came and swept them all away; Watch, therefore, for ye know not what Hour the Lord will come: But know this, that if the good Man of the House had known in what Watch the Thief would have come, he wou'd have watch'd.—*And the Apostles, agreeable to this Admonition of the Lord, say, *Yourselfes know per-* 1 Theff. 5. 2. *fectly, that the Day of the Lord cometh as a Thief in the* 2 Pet. 3. 10. *Night.* And after the Resurrection, our Saviour says to Peter, who asks him concerning the beloved Disciple; *If I will that he tarry till I come, what is* John 21. 22, *that to thee?* And the last thing his Disciples ask'd him on his Ascension, is, *Wilt thou at this Time re-* Acts 1. 6. *store again the Kingdom to Israel?* And the Answer he gave them is very consistent with the Kingdom, even the temporal Kingdom of Israel's being restor'd again during their Lives. And by our Saviour's saying when the last Supper was ended, *I will not* Mat. 26. 29. *drink*

*drink henceforth of the Fruit of the Vine, until that Day I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom.* They, no doubt, believ'd this happy Time was not far off. But,

IF most of the Apostles, upon what Motives soever, were mistaken in a Matter of this Consequence; how can we be absolutely certain, that any one of them may not be mistaken in any other Matter? If they were not inspir'd in what they said in their Writings concerning the then coming of Christ; how could they be inspir'd in those Arguments they build on a Foundation far from being so? And if they thought their Times were the last, no Direction they gave, cou'd be intended to reach further than their own Times. And if *John* the Evangelist, and *John* the Divine, are the same Person, he must believe what is mention'd in the *Revelation*, wou'd have happen'd within the Compass of that Age in which he writ. But leaving these matters to another time, let us return to the Consideration of those Duties, which Reason shews us from the Nature of God and Man, and the relation Men stand in to him, and one another.

As I have already shewn you by a number of Instances, where Divines themselves own, that tho' the literal Sense of the Scripture be ever so plain, yet it must not stand in Competition with what our Reason tells us of the Nature and Perfections of God; so I shall now shew you the same in relation to those Duties Men owe to one another; and that if Men are not well grounded in the Reason and Nature of Things, and from thence judge of their Duty, in relation to one another; there are things either commanded, or approv'd of in the Scripture, which might be apt to lead Men astray. A Man who looks no further than That, might think it no Crime to cheat his elder Brother, impose on his aged Parent, and by a Lye obtain his Blessing; nay, hope that God wou'd confirm it, when he sees how *Jacob* obtain'd the greatest Blessing from God.

Gen. 27.



IF Men flatter themselves, that they are true *Israelites*, and those of a different Religion mere *Egyptians*; will they not be apt to imagine, when they see how the *Israelites* spoil'd the *Egyptians* by the Command of God himself, who made them borrow what they were not to repay; that this might be a good Precedent for them?

B. I must own, that a Command to *lend, hoping* Luke 6. 35. *for nothing again*; and a Command to *borrow, without returning* any thing again, seem to be very different Commands. — 22, 35, 36.

A. WHEN Men find the Harlot *Rahab* celebrated, even in the *New Testament*, for lying to the Government, and betraying her Country to its most cruel Enemies; \* [and, as some think, miraculously sav'd with all her Kindred, by her House standing in which they were, when the Wall, on which it was, and in which she dwelt, fell flat.] — 6. 20, 23. Are they not in danger, if they find their Advantage in it, and 'tis for the Service of those they judge to be true *Israelites*, to do the same? Since 'tis not pretended the Harlot had any more special Command for so doing, than *Jaël* had for an Act of the highest Treachery; for which, because it serv'd the Interest of *Israel*, she is declar'd by the Prophetess *Deborah* to be *bliss'd above all Women*. — Judg. 5. 24.

WHAT Prince can ever want a Pretence of going to War; and totally extirpating those he invades; when he sees *Saul* was commanded by God to destroy the *Amalekites*, Men, Women, Infants and Sucklings, Ox and Sheep, Camel and Ass, for an Injury done four hundred Years before? And how, for sparing *Agag*, (whom *Samuel* hew'd in pieces before the Lord;) and preserving some of the Cattle for Sacrifice, the Lord rejected him from being King; nay, order'd *Samuel*, lest *Saul* should suspect the Design, to pretend a Sacrifice, when he sent him to anoint *David*?

Wou'd

WOULD not People, if, like the Children of *Israel*, they were destitute of an Habitation, be apt to think what the *Israelites* did to the *Canaanites*, a good Precedent; and that they might invade a neighbouring, idolatrous Nation, that never did them the least Harm; and extirpate not only Men and Women, but even their innocent Infants, in order to get possession of their Country? And I question, whether the *Spaniards* would have murder'd so many Millions in the *Indies*, had they not thought they might have us'd them like *Canaanites*.

Jud. 3. 15,  
20, 21.

How many Precedents, besides that of *Ebud*, (who, on a Message from the Lord, stabb'd the King to whom his People sent him with a Present) did the *Papish* Priests plead from the *Old Testament*, for the Assassination of the two *Henries* of *France*? And had the *Gun-Powder-Plot* succeeded here, they would, no doubt, have made use of the same Plea to justify it.

THO' the Lord bids the *Jews* to pray for the Peace of *Babylon*, *whither he had caused them to be carry'd away Captives*; and that *in the Peace thereof they should have Peace*; yet is it not said in the *Psalms*, O Daughter of *Babylon*, happy shall he be, who taketh, and dasheth thy Little Ones against the Stones? And this for no other Reason, but because she desir'd of her Captives one of the Songs of *Zion*.

Jer. 29. 7.

Pf. 137. 8, 9.

—Ver. 3.

THE holier Men in the *Old Testament* are represented, the more cruel they seem to be, as well as more addicted to cursing: How plentifully does *David* in the 109th *Psalms* bestow the bitterest Curses on his Enemies? And how cruelly did he treat the *Ammonites*, when he took their Cities, cutting the People with Saws, and with Harrows of Iron, and with Axes?

1 Chr. 20. 3.

WHO is not surpris'd to find the holy Prophet *Elisha* cursing in the Name of the Lord, little Children; for calling him *Bald Pate*? And what is still more surprising, *Two She-Bears*, upon his cursing, strait devour'd forty two little Children.

2 Kings 2. 23,  
24.

AND he likewise entail'd the Curse of Leprosy on his Man *Gebazi*, and his Seed for ever; for accepting, without his Master's Knowledge, a small Present from *Naaman*, the *Affyrian*; tho' the Prophet himself afterwards took *forty Camel Loads of the good things of Damascus*, to tell their King the Truth, in relation to his Recovery; and yet deceiv'd him.

*Elijah's* causing Fire to come down from Heaven, to destroy two Captains with their Companies, for no other Fault, but bluntly delivering a Message from the King; and perhaps, in the very Words they were commanded; was not so cruel, as his hindring it from raining upon the Earth for the space of three Years and six Months; since a Drought of that Continuance, without Dew or Rain, in such a barren Country as *Judæa*, must have, without Miracles, destroy'd every thing; and yet St. *James* from hence takes occasion to recommend the Efficacy of Prayer.

IF God will not, in this Life, miraculously alter the Course of things, for the sake of the Innocent, he, certainly, will not do it for the Guilty; nor break in upon the ordinary Methods and Laws of his Providence, to punish one Man for the Crime of another; the Innocent for the Guilty. If God could act thus, it would be no crime in Man to imitate him; nay, how could we be sure, if God deals thus with his Creatures in this Life, he will not act so in the Life to come; since if the eternal Rules of Justice are once broke, how can we imagine any Stop? And yet,

ARE there not Examples in Scripture, which, taken in their literal Sense, seem to make God break in upon the common Course of Nature, and the ordinary Rules of his Providence, to punish Men for Crimes they are not guilty of? As God's causing, in the latter end of *David's* Reign, a Famine for three Years together, for the Crime of *Saul* and his bloody House, in slaying the Gibeonites: And that

that *God smote Israel, and destroy'd seventy thousand of them for David's Fault; in causing the innocent Sheep, as he justly calls them, to be number'd.*

B. I believe there must be some Mistake in this last Story; for is it not fit, for several important Reasons, that Kings should know the Numbers of their People? Are they not the Strength and Riches of their Kingdom? And was not the People of *Israel*, by being frequently number'd, and sometimes by God's own Appointment, a good Precedent for *David*? But passing that by, how can we reconcile this Story with itself? In one Place 'tis  
 2 Sam. 24. 1. said *God mov'd David to number Israel*; in another,  
 1 Chr. 21. 1. *Satan provok'd David*. Did God conspire with Satan in this Act, in order to destroy a Number of innocent Persons? But do these two Places any more agree in the Account *Joab* gives in of the Number of the People? Nay, if in the Beginning  
 1 Sam. 11. 8. of *Saul's* Reign, the Numbers were rightly calculated; 'tis morally impossible, to say nothing of the Destruction made by continual War, that either Account should be true. Besides,

CAN God change his Mind, and that suddenly too? Yet it is said, *God sent an Angel to Jerusalem to destroy it*; and as he was destroying it, *the Lord beheld, and repented him of the Evil*. And can any One think this to be a mere Pestilence, when a real Angel is said to be miraculously sent to execute  
 1 Chr. 21. 15, 16, 18. *God's Anger? And David with the Elders of Israel, fell on their Faces, and saw the Angel of the Lord stand between the Earth and the Heavens, having a drawn Sword in his Hand, by the Threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite; and is there commanded to build an Altar.*

A. What you say may be true, since there are several mistakes crept into the Old Testament; See *Prideaux's* where there's scarce a Chapter, which gives any Conn'd. Par-historical Account of Matters; but there are some  
 1. B. 5. p. 343. things in it, which could not be there originally:  
 & B. 8. p. 574. And even in this Book of *Chronicles*, there are things mention'd

mention'd, too late to be inserted by *Ezra*, or *Nehemiah*. And I might add, that the *Jewish* History being for the most part taken from larger Accounts, 'tis no wonder its Abstracts are not always very exact.

I cou'd give you many more Instances of this Nature, but I am afraid some will think these too many; tho' I have said nothing, but what Archbishop *Tillotson* does in Effect, in affirming, "The Serm. Vol. 2.  
 " Difference between the Style of the Old and p. 185.  
 " New Testament is so very remarkable, that one  
 " of the greatest Sects in the primitive Times did,  
 " upon this very ground, found their Heresy of  
 " *Two Gods*. The One evil, fierce, and cruel,  
 " whom they call'd *The God of the Old Testament*;  
 " the Other good, kind, and merciful, whom they  
 " call'd *The God of the New Testament*: So great a  
 " Difference is there between the Representations,  
 " which are made of God in the Books of the  
 " *Jewish* and *Christian* Religion, as to give, at least,  
 " some colour, and pretence for an Imagination  
 " of Two Gods." But,

IT must be own'd, that the same Spirit, (I dare not call it a Spirit of Cruelty) does not alike prevail throughout the Old Testament; the nearer we come to the Times of the Gospel, the milder it appear'd: For tho' God declares in the Decalogue, that he is a *jealous God, visiting the Iniquity of the* *Josh. 7. 24.*  
*Parents upon their Children, to the third and fourth*  
*Generation*; and accordingly *Achan* with all his Family, was destroy'd for his single Crime; yet the Lord afterwards says, *The Soul that sinneth, it shall die*; *Ezek. 18. 20.*  
*the Son shall not bear the Iniquity of the Father, &c.*  
 \* [Tho' before it was plain the Son did, by God's declaring to *Abraham*, that the *uncircumcised Man-* *Gen. 17. 14.*  
*Child was to be cut off from his People*: Yet it does not appear any Punishment was to be inflicted on his Parents for not circumcising him.]

OUR Saviour, by saying, *He came not to destroy Mens Lives, but to save them*; condemns their taking  
 R away

away the Lives of any, except in defence of their own, and of what is necessary for their Support; and this he declares, upon a most remarkable Occasion: Some of his Disciples, upon his not being receiv'd into a Samaritan Village, *because his Face was towards Jerusalem*, frantically cry'd, *Wilt thou we command Fire from Heaven, and consume them, as Elias did? He rebuk'd them, and said, Ye know not what manner of Spirit ye are of; for the Son of Man is not come to destroy Mens Lives, but to save them.* If any Precedent might have been pleaded from the Old Testament, it wou'd, no doubt, have been *Elias*, the Fore-runner of our Saviour; who came from Heaven (to which he went up by a Whirlwind in a Chariot of Fire, with Horses of Fire) to meet our Saviour on a high Mountain.

Luke 9. 54.  
— Ver. 55,  
56.  
2 Kings 2. 11.  
Mark 9. 2, 4.

AND if it be contrary to the Spirit of the Gospel, even to wish to imitate that great Prophet so favour'd of God; the same will hold as strongly, in relation to all the Actions that are of a like nature of other Holy Men, tho' quoted with Approbation in the New Testament; as *Moses* is, for acting the part of a Magistrate, when a private Man, in destroying his Fellow Subject. And if there's a Contrast between the Spirit of the Old, and the Spirit of the New Testament, ought not we *Christians* to stick to the latter; and not suppose the Texts, which require doing good even to the *Gentiles*, and dealing with them as ourselves expect to be dealt with, to relate to *Christians* only before they had Power to act otherwise; and that after, they were to be govern'd by Precedents from the Old Testament?

Acts 7. 24.

*B.* ARE there any so absurd, as to endeavour thus to reconcile the Old and New Testament?

*A.* WE find the Orthodox, as soon as they had a Prince, who refus'd Submission to their Decisions in the Council of *Nice*, in express Terms own'd as much.

*Lucifer Claritanus*, then a most orthodox Bishop, in several Discourses address'd to the Son of *Constantine* the Great, does not scruple to tell the Emperor himself, that it was the Duty of the Orthodox to kill him, on the Account of his *Arianism*, which he calls *Idolairy*: And for this he quotes *Deut. xiii. 6.* and *1 Maccab. i. 43.* to Ver. 29th of Chap. ii. and then insultingly says, “ If you had been in the hands of *Matthias* or *Phineas*. they wou'd have kill'd you. You say you suffer despiteful Usage from us, contrary to the Admonitions of holy Scripture. — If ever any One of the Worshipers of God spared states, let what you say of us be true. — Pray shew me but one of them, that ever spar'd the Adversaries of his Religion.” And the Texts for Obedience to Magistrates from *Titus iii. 1.* he evades, by saying, “ That the Apostle spoke of those Princes and Magistrates, who as yet had not believed in the only Son of God; that they by our Humility, and Meekness, and suffering long under Adversity, and all possible Obedience in things fitting, might be won over to Christianity.”

*Athanasius*, and the Confessors that were with him, highly applauded *Lucifer's* Discourses, and says, “ We plainly see the Picture of an Apostle, the Boldness of a Prophet, the Magistry of Truth, the Doctrine of true Faith. — You seem to be the true Temple of our Saviour, who dwelling in you, speaks these things by you. — ”

“ BELIEVE me, *Lucifer*, you alone did not say these things, but the Holy Ghost with you; how came you to remember Scripture at that rate? How came you to understand the Sense and Meaning of it so perfectly; if the Holy Ghost had not assisted you in it?”

THEY, who design a new Religion, in opposition to establish'd ones, wou'd, no doubt, as these Fathers suppose, begin with Precepts of the

greatest Humanity and Tendernefs, and doing the utmost good to Mankind, tho' of ever fo different Perfuaſions: But to think, as theſe Fathers then did, (and the Orthodox, if we judge from their Actions, have ever ſince thought;) that all the Precepts of the Goſpel of this nature were deſign'd only to draw *Jews* and *Gentiles* into the Church, as Gallants gain their Miſtreſſes by Obſequiouſnefs; and that after they are once in, the Church (as all Sects and Parties term themſelves) had a Right to murder, not only private Perſons, but even their Sovereigns, for not holding the orthodox Faith; and that this is the only Way to reconcile the Old and New Teſtament, is a Notion highly injurious to the Chriſtian Religion.

'TIS, no doubt, the Intereſt of the wicked Prieſts, to have God repreſented under oppoſite Characters; and to give in one Teſtament Rules contrary to thoſe in the other; that they, as it ſerves their turn, may make uſe of either: But is it not aſtoniſhing for Saints and Confefſors, upon the firſt Occaſion, to renounce their former Principles; and in Deſiance of their Oaths of Allegiance, repreſent a Man *inspir'd by the Holy Ghoſt*, and ſay, that *Chriſt ſpoke in him*; when he declares it the Duty of Chriſtians to murder an heretical Emperor?

B. THOSE holy Fathers, I ſuppoſe, thought they ſaw Things of the greateſt Conſequence, tho' commanded in the Old, forbidden in the New Teſtament; and that to make the Old and New Teſtament to contradict each other in theſe things, was to deſtroy the Authority of both; and therefore concluded, this Expedient was the only way to ſupport both.

A. BY reaſoning thus, inſtead of reconciling both, they deſtroy'd both, and natural Religion too; in ſuppoſing things are not good and evil in themſelves; but that all depends on the Will of an arbitrary Being, which might endlessly change. But,



IF there's a Law of Nature, with the observing of which God can't dispense either in himself, or in his Creatures; and no Religion can be true, that in the minutest Circumstances is contrary to its Righteousness; and the Gospel inculcates all such Precepts of natural Religion, as require doing good to *Jew* and *Gentile*, even the same we expect from them; and that we are indispensably bound to allow all others the same Right of judging for themselves, as we claim for ourselves; must we not, if we will support the Credit of the Old Testament, suppose it to contain nothing inconsistent with this natural Right confirm'd by the Gospel? If this be not so, pray shew me my Mistake; but if it be just reasoning, tell me how you can account for the Conduct of the *Jews*, in invading, and that too, without any Declaration of War, the *Canaanites*, a free and independent Nation; and against whom they had not the least Cause of complaint; and on pretence of their being Idolaters, destroying not only the Men and Women, but Infants incapable of Idolatry, or any other Crime? This, you know, has given great Advantage to the Enemies of our Religion, who represent the whole Proceeding, as an unparallell'd piece of Injustice and Cruelty; and therefore, I should be glad to know what our Divines, if they do not interpret this Fact allegorically, or as only done in Vision, say, to shew 'tis not contrary to the Law of Nature, and those Precepts of the Gospel which are founded on it.

See *Prideaux's*  
Lett. to the  
*Deists*, p. 127.  
Edit. 7. 8vo.

*B.* I wonder you can be ignorant, with what ease our Divines solve this seeming difficulty, by having recourse to a positive Command for treating the *Canaanites* as they did.

*A.* Is not such a Command pleaded in vain, except it can be shewn, that the thing suppos'd to be commanded, is not inconsistent with the Law of Nature? Which if God can dispense with in any one case, he may in all; nor could his Wisdom then prescribe any certain Rule of Conduct, either

for himself or his Creatures ; but all wou'd depend on an uncertain, fluctuating, arbitrary Will.

*B.* MAY not a thing, which is unlawful for Men to do of themselves, become lawful, by the command of the Supreme Being?

*A.* SUPPOSE any should now plead that they had a divine Commission to destroy their next Neighbours, whom they judge to be Idolaters, Man, Woman and Child, in order to possess their Country ; would not our Divines say, no Man cou'd be as certain he had any such positive Command from God, as he was that God had forbid it him by the Light of Nature ? Nor cou'd Miracles be a proof of any such Commission ; since we can only know from the Nature of the things themselves, whether Miracles are done by a good, or evil Being ; and we are to compare what we are told of God, with what we know of him ; otherwise we believe in Men, and not in God. And if the Light of Nature, (the Voice of God himself) teaches us, even to demonstration, that God is infinitely wise and good ; does it not likewise demonstrate, that no Command, not stamp'd with these Characters, can come from him ; much less a Command inconsistent with all those Duties that Men as Men owe to one another ?

*B.* MAY not God punish some wicked Nations with Death, to fright others from committing the same Crimes ?

*A.* HAS not God a thousand ways of doing this, without commanding Men to do any thing, which, by the Law of Nature, he had forbid them ? And if God design'd what he did to be a terror to others, wou'd he not act after such a signal, and supernatural Manner, as all shou'd see it was his own doing ; and the reason of his so doing : And in order to it, distinguish between the guilty, and the innocent ?

IF God wou'd punish the *Canaanites*, for acting contrary to the Law of Nature ; wou'd he, in order to

to do this, require the *Israelites* to act contrary to the same Law; in murdering Men, Women, and Children, that never did them the least Injury?

BESIDES, were not the *Jews*, considering their Circumstances upon their coming out of *Egypt*, the most improper People to convince the World, that they did not act out of a private Interest; but purely to execute God's Vengeance on an idolatrous Nation? Wou'd God, in such a case, choose People as prone to Idolatry as the *Canaanites* themselves? Some question, whether, in this Case, the Plea of a divine Command, if taken literally, will not destroy all the internal Proofs of the Falshood of any Religion; for can that, *say they*, which is consistent with the Truth of any one true Religion, prove another Religion to be false? And do not all our Divines, when they are speaking against other Religions, maintain, that their commanding, or approving any thing contrary to the Law of Nature, is a Demonstration of their Falshood? since it destroys all the internal Proofs of the Truth of any Religion, and confounds all the essential Marks, by which we discern Good from Evil; and supposes God may command a Son to sacrifice his Father; or do any thing, tho' ever so repugnant to the Light of Nature.

B. THESE Men carry their Reasoning too far; for has not Providence frequently made use of ill Men, not only to punish ill Men, but for other good purposes?

A. IN the course of things it can't but happen, that some ill Men may be a scourge to others; yet that can't excuse them, if in so doing they act against the eternal Rules of Justice and Equity. Tho' a thing may be said to be done by the determinate Counsel of God, yet that will not justify, or excuse those that did it, if not consistent with the Law of Nature. St. Peter, speaking of the holy Child *Jesus*, says, — *The People of* Acts 4. 27. *Israel were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy*

*Hand, and thy Counsel determined before to be done:* And yet were not they, and their Posterity punish'd for that Fact, which God's Hand and Counsel had determin'd should be done? Besides,

IF the *Israelites* had a divine Commission to extirpate the *Canaanites*, ought not the *Canaanites* to have known it, to prevent their resisting Men acting by a divine Commission? Otherwise would there not be two opposite Rights at the same time; a Right in the *Jews* by Revelation, to take away the Lives of the *Canaanites*; and a Right in the *Canaanites* by the Law of Nature, to defend their Lives?

Josh. 10. 12,  
13.

B. WAS not the *Sun's standing still for a whole Day together*, at the Command of *Joshua*, that he might have Light enough to destroy his Enemies, a sufficient Proof they ought to have offer'd up their Throats?

A. THAT did not happen till they were defeated before *Gibeon*; and consequently till then, it cou'd be no Direction to them; and even after that,  
— c. 11. 20. *the Lord harden'd their Hearts, that they should come against Israel in Battle*; and tho' 'tis said, that *the living God is among you*, and that *he will not fail to*  
— c. 3. 10. *drive out before you the Canaanites, &c.* yet *Israel*  
— c. 16. 10. *could not drive them out of several Places*: And in  
— c. 17. 12. *one Instance, 'tis said, The Lord was with Judah, and he drove out the Inhabitants of the Mountain, but could not drive out the Inhabitants of the Valley, because they had Chariots of Iron.*

Nye of Nat.  
and Rev. Re-  
lig. p. 202.

A Reverend Author, to solve the Difficulties attending this Matter, says, “The Criticks and Rabbins take notice, that it is not said by the Historian, that *Joshua* commanded the *Sun* and *Moon* to stand still; but he recites the Words of a certain Book (supposed to be a *Poem*, written by one *Jasher*) in which the Poet, because of the great and long Slaughter, that *Joshua* made of the *Ammonites*, introduces *Joshua*, as requiring the *Sun* and *Moon* to stand still, while he, and his Army destroy'd the Enemies of the Lord. Which, in-  
“ deed,

“ deed, was an elegant Fiction, and very proper  
 “ in a Poem that was written on such an Occa-  
 “ sion.”

AND now let me ask you, Whether the very endeavouring to reconcile this, or any other Facts mention'd in the Old Testament, with the Light of Nature and the Evangelical Precepts, is not a plain Confession what Men ought to think of them, if they could not be reconcil'd, as no doubt they can; and that we are to use our Reason, in judging of the Actions of the most celebrated Persons of Old? Else, to give no other Instances, than the Transactions between *Judah* and *Tamar*, we might approve her Stratagem, in getting to lie with her Father-in-law: For tho' before he knew himself to be the Man, he was resolv'd to burn her; yet after he cry'd, *She has been more righteous than I: And* Gen. 38. 27. for this Righteousness she was bless'd with Twins, from whom the noble House of *Judah*, with all its Kings, and the *Messiah* himself was descended.

I think, I cou'd not say less than I have, in vindication of the Precepts of the Gospel; by shewing that they were not design'd merely to draw People into the Profession of the Christian Religion, and then to be laid aside; except where they serv'd the Interest of the local Orthodoxy: But that they are Rules in their own Nature obligatory, which, from their internal Excellency, always bound Mankind; and consequently all Men, even those of the meanest Abilities, must have been capable of knowing them; and out of danger, were it not their own fault, of being misled by any Precedents whatever.

IF what has been already said, may not be sufficient to shew, that it can't be imputed to want of Wisdom, or Goodness in God; or to any Defect in Reason, which he has at all times given Mankind for the Discovery of his Will: that the Nature of Religion is so little understood, and so many things, which do not shew themselves to be the  
 Will

Will of God, are mix'd with it; let me ask you, whether God has a greater kindness for the Brute, than the Rational Creation?

*B.* THAT, certainly, must be a needless Question.

*A.* IF God, then, in the very Frame and Make of those Animals we term irrational, has implanted the Sense of every thing necessary to answer the End of their Creation; can we imagine, he has not as great a Care of his Creatures endow'd with Reason, and made after his own Image; and for Ends infinitely more noble than the brute Creation? When we see with what Skill and Contrivance, Birds, without being taught by any, but the God of Nature, build their Nests; and how artfully the Spiders frame their Webs; the Bees their little Cells; and the Beasts avoid all noxious Herbs; and not to multiply Instances, how all Animals are endow'd with sufficient Sagacity, for preserving themselves and Species; must we not own, that what we call *Instinct*, is a certain and infallible Guide for inferior Animals? And can we doubt, whether Man, the Lord of the Creation, has not from his superior Reason, sufficient Notices of whatever makes for his greatest, his eternal Happiness?

IF we can't charge God with acting thus partially, must we not be oblig'd to own, that Reason is as certain a Guide for *rational* Creatures, as Instinct is for irrational? And consequently, that those Men are below Brutes, who, wanting Instinct, will not govern themselves, nor suffer others to be govern'd by Reason? And

THO' they place the highest Value on themselves for being rational, and by virtue of it Religious; yet are ever contriving how to hinder the free Exercise of Reason in religious Matters, as if Reason and Religion were irreconcilable; and that the Method God proposes for this Discovery of all other Truth, was a most certain Way to

confound religious Truth; and endlessly to multiply Error. But,

THESE Divines in all Ages have, for the most part, shewn themselves mortal Enemies to the true Exercise of Reason; yet now, God be thank'd, there are those among them, who dare do it justice.

THAT eminent Divine, Mr. *S. Nye*, tho' writing in defence of Revelation, says, " 'Tis obvious to every one, that natural Religion intimates to us, and comprises *the whole* Duty, that we owe to God or Men: Whatever is to be believed, or done by us, is declar'd and comprehended in natural Religion; God has instructed all Men every where, in the whole of their Duty, by a connate Light, even by the Talent of Reason common to all." And,

THE judicious Mr. *Butler* says, " That nothing can be more evident, than that exclusive of Revelation, Mankind can't be consider'd as a creature left by his Maker to act at random — but from his Make, Constitution, or Nature, he is in the strictest and proper Sense a Law to himself. There are as real, and the same kind of Indications in Human Nature, that we were made for Society, and to do good to our Fellow-Creatures, as that we were intended to take care of our Life, Health, and private Good."

*B.* IF what you, and these reverend Authors say, be true; the Principles, on which all Religion is founded, must be so obvious, that all Men, even of the meanest Capacity, may from thence discern their Duty both to God and Man.

*A.* YOU shall confess there are such Principles, by my asking you a Question, or two: Is not the Foundation of all Religion, the believing there's only one self-existent Being, to whom all others owe their Being, and their Continuance in Being? And is it not as certain, as there is such a Being, that he did not create Mankind to supply any Wants of his own; or give them Rules for their Conduct, but to oblige

oblige them to act for their common Good? If then an Action is for their Good, is not that alone an infallible Test of its being approv'd by God? And if it tends to their Hurt, is not that as certain a Mark of its being disapproved by him? But if it tends to neither, does not that sufficiently shew it to be neither approv'd, or disapproved? Since it is as inconsistent with the Goodness of God, to punish Men for not doing an indifferent thing, as it is with his Wisdom, to reward them for doing it.

*B.* THO' all rational Creatures, who, to their utmost, imitate their great Creator and Benefactor, in communicating Happiness to each other, do all that God requires of them; yet 'tis on supposition, that they do not judge wrong in relation to their common Good.

*A.* IF Men, according to the best of their Understanding, act for their common good, they then govern themselves by the same Rule God governs them; their Will is the same with his, and they concur in the same Design with him: And should they, in some nice and difficult Cases, mistake in applying the Rule; yet in being intirely govern'd by it, they have done all that God requires; who, having made Men fallible, will not impute to them want of Infallibility. And the best way not to mistake, in applying this Rule is to consider duly all Circumstances, and follow what upon the whole seems best. As this is the Rule both of God and Man, so it is in common to the Unlearned as well as Learned; for have not all alike Faculties given them by God, to distinguish between Good and Evil; Right and Wrong; and to know, that, as they would not suffer wrong themselves, so they ought not to do wrong?

*B.* THE common People may have sufficient Abilities to know their Duty to Man; but can they as well know what they owe to God?

*A.* IN what Point is it, that Men of the meanest Abilities may not know their Duty; whether it relates to God or Man? As to the first, can't they  
tell



tell what Sentiments inspire them with Love and Reverence for the Deity? And need they much Reflection to know, that the more any Sentiments do this, the more they ought to be cherished? And that every Notion, which tends not to raise in them the highest Conceptions of the divine Being, is derogatory to his Perfection; and that the highest Honour and Worship they can render him, is solemnly to own him to be what he is? And that as they ought themselves to have the highest Ideas of Love and Veneration for their Creator and Benefactor; so they should on all proper Occasions endeavour to excite the same in others? And that as they cannot but see, it would be in them affronting God, to offer him a Worship, which they believe he abhors; so they must think it the same in others?

As to their Duty to one another, can't they perceive, that 'tis fit in the nature of things, and agreeable to the Mind of their Creator, (who has endow'd them with Reason for this end) to introduce into his Creation as much Happiness as they can; by being ready to assist, and prevent one another in all good Offices? And indeed, the reciprocal Duties are so very evident, that even Children are sensible of doing as they would be done unto; and the Mind, with the same ease, sees the Agreeableness or Disagreeableness of moral and immoral Actions; as the Eye discovers Agreeableness and Disagreeableness in outward Objects. And,

THE meaner People are, and the lower their Station, the fewer are the things their Duty consists in; and those so very plain that they cannot well mistake, with relation either to God, or Man, were they not impos'd on by artful Men; who, in all Ages and Places, have mixed with pure Religion, things tending, indeed, to their own Honour, and their own Good; but far from being consistent with the Honour of God, and the Good of Man; and then pretended they were necessary to influence the common People, who wou'd not be satisfy'd with  
plain,

plain, simple Truths: And from this Source have issu'd out most of those Absurdities, which, to the Scandal of human Nature, have over-run Mankind; and which, for the most part, were too subtil and metaphysical for the common People, if left to themselves, ever to have thought of; much less to have rais'd Commotions about them: They, it must be own'd, Peace and Quiet being their Interest, are naturally good Subjects and good Neighbours; and upon all Accounts most useful Members of the Community; except when their Priests, on pretence of the good of the Church, work them up to Tumults, Mutiny, Sedition, and Rebellion; because their Governors presume, without their Leave, to give equal protection to all their Subjects, notwithstanding their different Opinions. And if we consult Ecclesiastical History, we shall find the worst of Princes have been most sure of their Assistance, even in carrying on the vilest Designs; provided the Church found their Interest in so doing: And the best, of their Opposition, when they design'd the Interest of pure Religion, free from Priestcraft and Superstition. And the Laity, certainly, can't be too much upon their guard, when they find extraordinary Favours, (such as those in a former Reign,) are design'd for the Clergy.

I do not wholly confine this Remark to the Priests of any one Religion; since by the Influence they have on the multitude, they have at all times done sufficient Mischiefs. Hence *Grotius* says, "That as *Curcius* observ'd of old, the Multitude, enflam'd by Superstition, are more apt to be govern'd by their Priests than Princes; and that the Kings and Emperors have learnt this at their cost; insomuch that to produce Examples of this kind, wou'd in a manner be transcribing the History of all Nations."

THEY, I think, wou'd do no small service to Mankind, who wou'd improve this Hint of *Grotius*, and shew how the Priests in all Religions, and in

*Grotius de Imper. sum. Potest. circa Sacra, c. 1. Sect. 13.*

all Times, have impos'd on the Credulity of the People; nor cou'd it but be very acceptable to a Clergy, who abhor all such vile Methods.

*B.* You all along argue, that the Rule of Action, in order to human Happiness, being every where the same; as founded on the Nature of God and Man, and the Relation we stand in to him, and one another: True Religion, in all Places and Times, must be ever the same; Eternal, Universal; and Unalterable: And such as every intelligent Creature, must have sufficient Understanding to discover, and Abilities to comply with, except we suppose a Being perfectly wise, and infinitely good, requires of his Creatures, things which he has not enabled them to know, or perform. And hence you conclude, that external Revelation can only be a Republication of this unchangeable Rule of Life; but Divines, you are sensible, for the most part, are of a different Sentiment; nay, highly complain of the Imperfection and Insufficiency of this Rule.

*A.* IN order to shew the Absurdity of such Complaints, let me ask you, Had Mankind, before any traditional Religion commenc'd, any Religion, or not?

IT must be own'd, that they had a Religion, which, as coming from the Author of all Perfection, must, as worthy of its divine Original, be wholly perfect; nor cou'd there be a greater Mark of its Perfection, than that of its being universal, unchangeable, and indelibly implanted in Human Nature.

*A.* I will not ask you, whether any Religion, that wants those marks of Perfection, can come from a Being of infinite Perfection; but desire to know wherein the Perfection of this universal, and unchangeable Religion consists?

*B.* IT can't be deny'd, that the End for which God implanted this Religion in human Nature, was to make Men happy here as well as hereafter; (God's Will in relation to Man and human Happiness,

ness, being equivalent Terms) and therefore, he cou'd not, at any time, leave them destitute of the most proper Means to answer this End.

A. DOES not the undeniable Perfection of this universal Religion, sufficiently expose all your pretences to a new Religion, given by God to any small part of Mankind in these last Ages?

B. WE say, there was need of a new Religion, tho' the old was ever so perfect; because Men did not observe it.

A. IF that was a Reason for a new Religion, we might expect new Religions daily: "But, as the  
 " *present Bishop of Bangor observes*, tho' the World  
 " was the worse for abusing the Religion of Na-  
 " ture, and might want to be reform'd by a di-  
 " vine Instructor; yet the Religion of Nature was  
 " not the worse for being abus'd, but still retain'd  
 " its first Purity and Simplicity;" and consequent-  
 " ly, its native Efficacy to make us happy. But Men  
 " not paying a due regard to this most perfect Reli-  
 " gion, but mixing with it human Inventions, it  
 " might, then, be agreeable to the divine Goodness,  
 " to send Persons to recal them to a more strict Ob-  
 " servation of it; which, had it been observ'd, must  
 " have destroy'd all Contentions, but of outvying one  
 " another in all good Offices; as the corrupting it has  
 " done the contrary.

*Sherlock's Ser-  
 mon for Pro-  
 pagating the  
 Gospel in Fo-  
 reign Parts,  
 p. 14.*

WHICH *Hypothesis*, think you, is most for the Honour of God, and the Good of Man; (those certain Tests by which we are to judge of the Truth of all Matters relating to Religion;) that all God's Laws shou'd carry with them such evident marks of Goodness and Kindness for the whole Race of Mankind, as that Men of the meanest Capacities, even tho' they can't read in their own native Language, may know their Duty? Or that their Religion, and the Proofs on which it depends, should be originally writ in Languages they understand not; which, by putting all traditional Religions on a level, obliges them in every Country, to pin  
 their

their Faith on Men, who are but too apt to abuse the Peoples Credulity to their own Profit?

B. THERE can be no doubt, but 'tis for the Honour of God, and the Good of Man, that all his Laws should have such a Signature impress'd on them, as may shew his infinite Wisdom and Goodness; but can you say, all his Laws bear this Character?

A. YES, if they are all of a piece: And since God has no other End in creating Mankind, but their Good; or in giving them Laws, but as they conduce to that Good; and has given, and requires 'em to use their Understanding to distinguish between Good and Evil; Men, in doing all the good they can, whether they know any thing of the Institutions, which prevail in this, or that Age or Country, or not, fully answer the End of their Creation; and do in the best manner recommend themselves to the Favour both of God and Man.

WITHOUT the common People are govern'd by those plain, obvious Principles I contend for, they would always be in a State of Uncertainty; since, as Bishop *Taylor* justly observes, and all History confirms, "There's no Church that is in Prosperity, but alters her Doctrine every Age; either by bringing in new Doctrines, or by contradicting her old; which shews they are not satisfy'd with themselves, nor with their own Confessions." Dedication to Liberty of Prophecy, p. 32.

"Let none of the Heathen, says an ancient Church-Historian, deride us, because the latter Bishops depose the former, and always find out something which they add to the Faith." Evag. Eccles. Hist. l. i. c. 11. p. 267. B.

B. Is there nothing in *Theology*, but what Divines have alter'd?

A. MR. *Le Clerc* observes, that "Theology is subject to Revolutions as well as Empires; but tho' it has undergone considerable Changes, yet the Humour of Divines is much the same." Life of Nazianzen, p. 28. Eng. Transl.

WHATEVER Noise *Ecclesiasticks* make about Creeds, or other Fundamentals, there's very often

Expof. of 39  
Art. p. 70.  
Art. 5.

something else at the Bottom; as whoever is conver-  
fant in Church-History must know: However to  
give one Instance, “ When the *Eastern* and *Western*  
“ Churches in the ninth Century, fell into an Hu-  
“ mour of quarrelling upon the account of Jurif-  
“ diction, after some time of Anger, in which  
“ they seem’d to be searching for matter to reproach  
“ one another with; they found out this difference.  
“ The *Greeks* reproach’d the *Latins*, for adding to  
“ the Faith about the Proceffion of the Holy Ghost;  
“ and corrupting the ancient Symbol; and that too  
“ contrary to the Decree of a general Council. The  
“ *Latins*, on the other hand charg’d them for de-  
“ tracting from the Dignity of the *Son*. And this  
“ became the chief point in Controversy between  
“ them.” I can’t but mention Bishop *Burnet’s* Re-  
mark on this Difpute, “ We of this Church, *says*  
“ *he*, tho’ we abhor the Cruelty of condemning the  
“ *Eastern* Churches for fuch a difference, yet do re-  
“ ceive the Creed according to the ufage of the  
“ *Western* Churches.” Which is in effect, damning  
that Creed which damns the *Eastern* Churches.

Ibid.

AND it’s plain from Church-History, that *Creeeds*  
were the fpiritual Arms, with which contending  
Parties combated each other; and that thofe  
who were the majority invented fuch unferiptural  
Terms, as they thought their Adverfaries would  
moft fcruple, in order to the ftripping them of  
their Preferments; and it wou’d have been well if  
they had ftuck there, and not made ufe of more  
cruel Methods.

NONE, who confider how differently the Cir-  
cumftances of human Affairs, which are continually  
changing, affect Men; but muft fee ’tis fcarce poffi-  
ble, that the Doctrines which were originally taught,  
or the Practice originally us’d in any Inftitution,  
fhould long continue the fame; nothing being more  
eafy than to vary the Signification of Words: The  
infinite Divifions which prevail’d, even in the primi-  
tive and apoftolical Times, fufficiently prove this  
without

without having recourse to those Alterations and Additions, which the Clergy have since been continually making in Christianity; especially in the *Greek* and *Latin* Churches. But we need go no further back than the *Reformation*: Did not the whole Body of the People, Laity as well as Clergy, in the compass of twelve Years, change their Religion three times? And it wou'd make no small Book, to shew how since that time, our Clergy, tho' their *Calvinistical* Articles continue the same, have vary'd, both as to *Doctrines* and *Discipline*. What a quick change have we seen of those passive Principles, once the Characteristick of the Church? And if we judge by the present Disputes now on foot, the Clergy are not like to be more fix'd for the future. But of all Clergy-men, they, certainly, are not upon any account to be rely'd on; who, tho' by their whole Conduct they shew their great Zeal for Persecution, yet talk against an implicit Faith, and recommend *Christianity as requiring no further Favour, than a fair and impartial Enquiry into its Grounds and Doctrines*. This not only shews their great Hypocrisy, but that they are more cruel than those, that expressly forbid all Examination; since they first tempt Men to examine, and then punish them for so doing, if they presume to differ from their Leaders; and those that forbid all Examination can do more. And herein they act the part of Satan, first tempt People, and then punish them for being tempted; so that, strictly speaking, 'tis not always true, that Priests of all Religions are the same; such hypocritical, persecuting Priests are worse than all others; who, while they charge the *Papist*, or *Mahometan*, with a Conscioufness of his Religion's being a Cheat, because he will not permit it to be examin'd; not only practise the same themselves, but contend 'tis necessary for the Support of true Religion.

How easily the Sense of Words may be mistaken, the Apostles themselves are a sufficient Instance; for had they the same Ideas of the Words which Jesus

spake, as Jesus himself had, 'tis impossible that after three Years converse they shou'd be ignorant of the End of his Mission: And if his familiar Friends, who daily convers'd with him in the same Language, and had every minute an Opportunity of being satisfied of their Doubts, cou'd yet so grossly mistake; well may we at this distance of Time, if we are to be govern'd by Words, and not by the unalterable Reason of things: And how long was it, till they understood the meaning of *Teach all Nations, Preach the Gospel to every Creature?* And St. Peter himself needed a Miracle to open his Understanding, to comprehend a most evident Truth.

Acts 10. 34,  
35.

*Then Peter opened his Mouth, and said, Of a truth, I perceive that God is no Respector of Persons: But in every Nation, he that feareth him, and worketh Righteousness, is accepted with him. Till this happen'd, he, tho' fill'd with the Holy Ghost, confin'd Salvation to the Name of a Person; viz. the Name of Christ. There is none other Name under Heaven given amongst Men, whereby we must be saved.*

Acts 4. 12.

HAD there been but one Language, and a Book writ in that Language, in indelible Characters, (so that there cou'd be none of these thirty thousand various Readings, which are own'd to be crept into the New Testament) and all cou'd have access to it; yet even then, considering how uncertain the meaning of Words is, and the interest of designing Men to put a wrong sense on them; it must be morally impossible this Religion could long continue the same. And,

On Galat. 1.

“ IF, as St. Jerom says, a false Interpretation of the Gospel of Christ, may make it become the Gospel of Men; nay, which is worse, of Devils;” how can they, who, not understanding the Original, must trust to the Interpretation of others, be certain; had they not a sufficient inward Light to direct them, what Doctrines are from God, what from Men, and what from Devils?

Is it not notorious, that Popish Priests, not to

mention



mention other persecuting Priests, have propagated such destructive Notions, that if the Devil himself had been to contrive a Religion, he cou'd not have invented more pernicious?

WORDS are the arbitrary Marks of Mens Ideas, and the Meaning of Words, as well as the Words themselves, are perpetually changing; and 'tis as impossible to fix one as the other. We see by the innumerable verbal Disputes, which happen even among learned Men, how different their Ideas are; and perhaps, there are not three Persons, who, when they talk abstractedly have precisely the same Ideas, tho' they use the same Words. No one can doubt of this, who considers how much the Divines of the same Church differ in explaining what they mean by *Divine Person, Essence, Trinity, Messiah, Incarnation, Hypostatical Union, Original Sin, Satisfaction, Justification, Predestination, Grace, Free-will*, and all other Technical Terms, if I may so call them. Bishop Taylor quotes *Osiander* for saying, "There are twenty several Opinions concern-  
 ing *Justification*, all drawn from the Scriptures by  
 the Men only of the *Augustine* Confession; and  
 there are sixteen several Opinions concerning  
*Original Sin*; and as many Distinctions of the  
*Sacraments* as there are Sects of Men that disagree  
 about them."

THAT excellent Critick *Daille* says, "We have,  
 indeed, these Words *Pope, Patriarch, Mass, Ob-*  
*lation, Station, Procession, Mortal Sins, Penance,*  
*Confession, Satisfaction, Merit, Indulgence*, as the  
 Ancients had, and make use of an infinite number  
 of the like Terms; but understand them in a  
 sense almost as far different from theirs, as our  
 Age is remov'd from theirs."

To give one remarkable Instance of this nature, the primitive Fathers did not believe a Spirit to be immaterial; but only a thinner sort of Body: And this they did not only apply to the Souls of Men and Angels, (who, they suppos'd, lay with Women, and

*Daille de Usu  
 Patrum. l. 1.  
 c. 5. p. 149.*

got Children in abundance;) but they thought that God himself was corporeal. *Melito*, who was believ'd to be a Prophet, and flourish'd about 170, wrote a Book about the *Imbodied God*. And *Tertulian* says, *Quis negabit Deum corpus esse, etsi Deus Spiritus est?* And again, *Nihil incorporale nisi quod non est*. And *St. Hilary*, even in the fourth Century, affirms, *There's nothing but what is corporeal*. And 'tis very probable, that from some Words of our Saviour, they thought that a *Spirit was a thinner sort of Body, that could be seen, but not felt*. And from *St. Paul's* saying, *In him dwelleth the fulness of the God-head bodily*; and talking in several other Places of a *spiritual Body*, they concluded that that was the same with a *bodily Spirit*; tho' our Divines now very well know how to distinguish between a *bodily Spirit*, and a *spiritual body*.

IN short, there are scarce any Words in any one Language, except of such things as immediately strike the Senses, that are adequately answer'd in another, so as exactly to comprehend the same Ideas; and if the Ideas are only fewer, or more, what confusion may not that occasion? How great, and frequent must the mistakes then be, in translating the antiquated Languages of People, who liv'd at a vast distance of time, as well as in Countries far remote; and affected hyperbolic, parabolic, mystical, allegorical, and typical ways of expressing themselves, as opposite to the usage in other parts, as *East* is to *West*? And not only this, but it will be likewise necessary to have an accurate knowledge of their Manners, Customs, Traditions, Philosophy, Religious Notions, Sects, Civil and Ecclesiastical Polity; of all which the common People know as little, as they do of the original Languages; who having very obscure, and incompetent Conceptions of the principal Words, and Phrases us'd in the Versions, their Religion must needs be a very odd Jumble of confus'd and inconsistent Notions, were it to depend on Words, and their precise Meaning;

and not on the things themselves, and their relations, which are plain and obvious to common Capacities; they wou'd be in a manner intirely govern'd by Sounds; some of which, such, as they us'd to hear spoken of with Respect, they wou'd highly reverence; while others, tho' of the same signification, they wou'd as much abhor, till Custom had made them familiar.

\* [“ SURE I am, *says Mr. Locke*, that the Signi-  
 fication of Words in all Languages, depending  
 very much on the Thoughts, Notions and Ideas  
 of him that uses them, must unavoidably be of  
 great uncertainty to Men of the same Language,  
 and Country. This is so evident in the *Greek*  
 Authors, that he who peruses their Writings,  
 will find in almost every one of them, a distinct  
 Language, tho' the same Words. But when to  
 this natural difficulty in every Country, there  
 shall be added different Countries, and different  
 Ages, where the Speakers had very different No-  
 tions, Tempers, Customs, Ornaments, and Fi-  
 gures of Speech, &c. every one of which influ-  
 enced the Signification of their Words then, tho'  
 to us now, they are lost and unknown; it wou'd  
 become us to be charitable one to another in our  
 Interpretations or Misunderstandings of those an-  
 cient Writings. — We ought to magnify God's  
 Goodness, that he has spread before all the World,  
 such legible Characters of his Works and Provi-  
 dence; and given all Mankind so sufficient a  
 Light of Reason, that they to whom this written  
 Word never came, cou'd not (whenever they set  
 themselves to search) either doubt of the Being  
 of a God, or of the Obedience due to him.”]

WERE Men not to be govern'd by Things, but Words, the Consequence now wou'd be much worse than what happen'd on the Confusion of Languages at *Babel*; because no written Religion, for want of an universal Language, could become universal; and People must, without a competent Skill in dead

Languages, be oblig'd to take their Religion on Trust, from Men too, as subject to be deceiv'd, as they are often ready to deceive: Nay, the Universality of Language, cou'd it have preserv'd Religion uncorrupt, wou'd have done so in the *Antediluvian* World, and before the Confusion of Language, which happen'd at *Babel*.

Relig. of Protestants, c. 6. Sect. 56. p. 290.

If Skill in Languages cou'd even make the Learned certain, how comes it to pass, that what goes for Orthodox in one Age, shall be Heterodox in another? What is fundamental in one Church, be damnable Error in another? Nay, must not every one, if at all vers'd in Church History, say with Mr. *Chillingworth*? “ I see plain, and with my own Eyes, that there are Popes against Popes, Councils against Councils; some Fathers against others; the same Fathers against themselves; a Consent of Fathers of one Age, against a Consent of Fathers of another Age; the Church of one Age, against the Church of another Age?” And do not the Clergy themselves think there's such Uncertainty in the Scripture-Language, even in Things of the greatest moment; when they generally use unscriptural Terms to express those things? And that they can't even here agree among themselves, there needs no better Proof than the Disputes of our Divines about Fundamentals; tho' they are, to prevent all Controversies of this nature, enacted, and guarded with penal Laws; and all the Clergy, at every turn, oblig'd to subscribe 'em in the same Words. And,

I cou'd name two eminent Bishops, who, if they were to give a true account of their religious Tenents, 'tis thought, wou'd appear to differ very widely, even in what themselves term Fundamentals. But are not such Differences utterly unavoidable, as long as Men found their Religion on Words and Phrases thus dubious; and not on the eternal Reason, and unalterable Relations of Things, obvious to the meanest Capacity?

NOTWITHSTANDING the wide Difference there is between all Christian Sects, from the *Papist* down to the *Quaker*; I can't help thinking, that an infinitely wise and good God has adapted the Rules and Evidences, of what he really requires from Mankind, to their general Capacity; and that the Certainty of every Command, must be equal to the Importance of the Duty. How can we suppose some of the most necessary Duties of Religion, are only to be found in voluminous Books, which the greatest Part of Mankind have, perhaps, never heard of; and of those that have, not one in a thousand understands a Tittle of the Languages they are writ in; or is capable of examining into those Records, from which the Authority of these Books are to be deriv'd?

Is not that an admirable *Hypothesis*, which, tho' it supposes God has endow'd Mankind with Reason to enable them to distinguish between Religion and Superstition; yet admits that almost all Mankind are incapable of doing it, but must alike, in all Countries, depend on the Authority of Men, hir'd to maintain the traditional Religion of the Places where they live; who, perhaps, will tell them, that there was a Time (happy those who liv'd in it) when Religion was suited to the Capacities of the Vulgar; being preach'd by inspir'd Men in the Languages they understood, and Miracles for their Conviction wrought in their Sight; but that now the Scene was entirely chang'd, they had no Miracles, no infallible Men to have recourse to, to set them right; and that their Religion by distance of Time was not only become obscure, but that the whole of it, and the Proofs on which its Validity depends, are writ in Languages, of which the People understand not a Word; and that

“ the Evidence arising from particular Types and  
 “ Prophecies, is now, by length of Time, and di-  
 “ stance of Place, and change of Customs, become  
 “ obscure and difficult to the Generality of People,  
 “ and

Bp. of London's  
 Past. Lett.  
 p. 20, 21.

“ and cannot be thoroughly discuss’d without a  
 “ great Variety of Knowledge concerning the an-  
 “ cient *Jewish* Customs, and the Authority of their  
 “ Writings, and the exact Calculation of Time.”  
 Which is in effect to suppose, that the Religion of  
 the Vulgar must consist, in taking the Words of  
 their Teachers, however divided among themselves,  
 for the Word of God ; and their Translations, for  
 Law and Gospel ; and that believing in them, is  
 having a divine Faith : Tho’ one wou’d think,  
 whatever depended on human Traditions and Trans-  
 lations, cou’d be but a human Faith.

B. THO’ something of this nature is unavoid-  
 able, where Religion is writ in antiquated Lan-  
 guages ; yet in the main, are we not now more  
 certain of the Truth of our Traditional Religion,  
 than those who liv’d in former Ages ; we having  
 the Authority of every past Age in Confirmation of  
 its Truth ?

A. MR. *Locke*, speaking concerning *Assent* in  
 Matters, wherein Testimony is made use of, *says*,  
 “ I think it may not be amiss to take notice of a  
 “ Rule observ’d in the Law of *England* ; which is,  
 “ That tho’ the attested Copy of a Record be  
 “ good Proof, yet the Copy of a Copy never so  
 “ well attested, and by never so credible Witnesses,  
 “ will not be admitted as a Proof in Judicature.  
 “ This is so generally approv’d as reasonable, and  
 “ suited to the Wisdom and Caution to be us’d in  
 “ our Enquiry after material Truths, that I  
 “ never yet heard of any one that blamed it. This  
 “ Practice, if it be allowable in the Decisions of  
 “ Right and Wrong, carries this Observation along  
 “ with it ; *viz.* That any Testimony, the fur-  
 “ ther off it is from the original Truth, the less  
 “ Force and Proof it has. The Being and Existence  
 “ of the Thing itself, is what I call the original  
 “ Truth. A credible Man vouching his Know-  
 “ ledge of it, is a good Proof : But if another,  
 “ equally credible, do witness it from his Report,  
 “ the

l. 4. c. 16.

Sect. 10. p.

382. al. p. 562.

“ the Testimony is weaker ; and a third that attests  
 “ the Hear-say of an Hear-say, is yet less confi-  
 “ derable. So that *in Traditional Truths, each Re-*  
 “ *move weakens the Force of the Proof.* And the  
 “ more Hands the Tradition has successively passed  
 “ through, the less Strength and Evidence does it  
 “ receive from them. — This is certain, that Ib. p. 383.  
 “ what in one Age was affirmed upon slight al. p. 563.  
 “ Grounds, can never after come to be more va- Sect. 11.  
 “ lid in future Ages, by being often repeated.”

I hope you will pardon me, if I presume to think, that God, at all Times, is so good and impartial, that his Will, on which the Happiness of Mankind at all Times depends, is at all Times equally knowable ; and consequently, must be founded on what is always alike discernible ; the Nature and Reason of Things. Can a Religion, design'd for every One, not be within the Reach of every One? Or can That, which above all Things it concerns ALL Men to know, not be knowable by ALL?

———— *id, quod*

Hor. l. 1.  
Ep. 1. 24.

*Æque pauperibus prodest, locupletibus æque ;*

*Æque neglectum pueris senibusque nocebit.*

*Hoc opus, hoc studium parvi properemus & ampli ;* Ib. Ep. 3. 28.

*Si patriæ volumus, si nobis vivere cari.*

AND certainly, nothing can be a greater Libel on the true Religion, than to suppose it does not contain such internal Marks, as will, even to the meanest Capacity, distinguish it from all false Religions ; so as that a Man, tho' unable to read in his Mother-Tongue, may, without pinning his Faith on any Sett of Priests, know what God requires of him.

I have said nothing of the Plainness, Simplicity, and even Universality of Religion, but what is agreeable to the Description, which *St. Paul*, from the Prophet *Jeremiah*, gives of the Gospel-Dispensation ; the express Terms of which run thus: *I will*

Heb. 8. 10, *will put my Laws into their Mind, and write them in their Hearts; and I will be unto them a God, and they shall be to me a People: And they shall not teach every Man his Neighbour, and every Man his Brother, saying, Know the Lord; for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.* As these Words are too plain to need a Comment, so I shall defer drawing any Consequences from them, till I have first endeavour'd to free the Scripture from that Obscurity, in which artful Men have involv'd it. And,

I shall, now, by way of Recapitulation, mention what Mr. *Barbeyrac*, a Person of no small Note in the learned World, says concerning the *Practical Science of Morality*: “None can reasonably doubt,

Historical and  
Critical Ac-  
count of the  
Science of  
Morality, in  
his prefatory  
Discourse to  
Mr. *Puffen-  
dorf*, of the  
*Law of Nature  
and Nations*,  
Engl. Transl.  
Sect. 1. p. 1.  
col. 1, 2.

“but that every Man, who will be happy, must  
“needs, in order to make himself so, regulate his  
“Conduct after some certain Manner; and that  
“God, as the Author and Parent of all human  
“Race, does prescribe to all Men without Excep-  
“tion, the Duties which tend to procure them that  
“Happiness, which they so passionately seek after.  
“Now, from hence it necessarily follows, that the  
“natural Principles of this Science are such as may  
“be easily discover'd; and such too, as are pro-  
“portionate to the Capacities of all Sorts of Per-  
“sons: So that to be instructed in this Science,  
“there will be no occasion to mount up to Heaven;  
“or to have from thence any extraordinary Reve-  
“lation for that purpose.——It must be own'd,  
“to the eternal Glory of the supreme Legislator  
“of Mankind, as well as to the utter Confusion of  
“themselves; that none can complain without In-  
“justice, that God has given him Laws, either  
“impracticable, or environ'd with such Obscurity,  
“as cannot be penetrated by one who really has  
“his Duty at heart, notwithstanding all his Pains  
“and Application. This the wisest Heathens have  
“acknowledg'd;——(and) the *Stoicks*, who make  
“Morality their principal Study, maintain'd, that  
“their Philosophy was not above the Reach of Wo-  
“men



“ men and Slaves: and that as the Way to Vertue  
 “ lies open to all Men without Distinction; so there  
 “ is no Estate, or Condition, with peculiar Privi-  
 “ leges exclusive of others, as to the Faculty of  
 “ knowing the Principles and Rules, as well of  
 “ those Duties which are common to all; as of  
 “ those which belong to each particular. — The  
 “ Idea of a Creator, boundless in Power, Wisdom Sect. 3. p. 10.  
 “ and Goodness; and the Idea of ourselves, as in- col. 2.  
 “ telligent, reasonable, and sociable Creatures:  
 “ These two Ideas, I say, if well look'd into, and  
 “ compar'd together in their whole Extent, will  
 “ always furnish us with steady Grounds of Duty,  
 “ and sure Rules of Conduct; notwithstanding it  
 “ may sometimes so fall out, that, for want of  
 “ Care and Attention, we may, in some uncom-  
 “ mon Cases, not know how to apply them; or  
 “ cannot methodically demonstrate the necessary  
 “ Connexion of some remote Consequences, with  
 “ the first Principles of Morality ——— 'Tis cer- Sect. 32. P.  
 “ tain, that the entire Conformity of the Christian 87, 88.  
 “ Morality, with the clearest Dictates of right  
 “ Reason, is one of the most convincing Proofs of  
 “ the Divinity of the Christian Religion; as has  
 “ been acknowledg'd by all, who have wrote with  
 “ any Solidity on that Subject. ——— And if we  
 “ duly weigh, and consider it, we shall find, that  
 “ this is the Proof, which of all others is the most  
 “ affecting; and the best proportion'd to the com-  
 “ mon Capacities of the Bulk of Mankind. ———  
 “ [Who] When they come at length to consider  
 “ the Evangelical Morality, and find it intirely  
 “ conformable both to their true Interests, and to  
 “ all those Principles, of which every Man has by  
 “ Nature the Seeds in his own Heart; they can-  
 “ not then help concluding, that the Author of it  
 “ must necessarily be that very Being, who has  
 “ given Life, and brought 'em into this World  
 “ only to make 'em happy; provided they will  
 “ not be wanting to themselves, but contribute on  
 “ their

“ their part, all that lies in their own Power, towards the Attainment of their own Felicity.”

I might here commend to your Perusal, what he, in several Sections, affirms of the “ Extreme Negligence of the *Publick Ministers of Religion*, in cultivating the Science of Morality; which, *as he* Sect. 12. p. 36. col. 1, 2. “ *says*, being by them almost banish’d out of the World, took sanctuary among the Laicks, or undignify’d Men of Letters: who gave it a much better Reception.——No sooner did that admirable Treatise of *Grotius*, of *The Right of War and Peace*, appear in the World, but the Ecclesiasticks, instead of returning Thanks to the Author for it, every where declared against him; and his Book was not only put into the expurgatory Index of the *Roman Catholick* Inquisitors, but many, even *Protestant* Divines, labour’d to cry it down. And thus it far’d too with Mr. *Puffendorff’s* Book of *The Law of Nature and Nations*; the *Jesuits* at *Vienna* caus’d it to be prohibited; and many *Protestant* Divines, both of *Sweden* and *Germany*, did their best, to make this excellent Work share every where else the same Fate.”

B. IF these great Men were thus dealt with, for setting the *Science of Morality* in its due Light; can you, who place Religion in the Practice of Morality in obedience to the Will of God, and suppose there can be no other Distinction between Morality and Religion, than that the former is acting according to the Reason of Things consider’d in themselves; the other acting according to the same Reason of Things consider’d as the Will of God: Can you, I say, hope to escape being pelted by some of the same Profession for such a Crime as This?

A. THAT, I must own, wou’d be a Favour I neither hope, nor wish for; since I am sensible, the shewing Religion to be no arbitrary Institution, but founded on the Nature of Things, and their Relations, obvious to the Capacity of all that dare use their Reason; must provoke all Ecclesiasticks of what

what Denomination soever, who expect a blind Submission from the Laity: Tho' was it not for the Authority, that the High-Church Clergy among the Reform'd lay claim to, when from *Protestant* Principles they draw *Popish* Conclusions; the Pretences of the *Popish* Priests for the Necessity of an *infallible Guide*, wou'd appear ridiculous.

THE Substance of what the *Papists* say, is, in short, " That if the Principles of *Protestants*, relating to private Judgment, are true, the Bulk of " Mankind can't go beyond such plain Rules of " Religion, as carry their own Evidence with them; " since otherwise they wou'd be oblig'd to admit " things, about which they are incapable of judging.

" IF the Religion of Peasants and Mechanicks, " Men and Maid-Servants, the Ignorant and Illiterate, must depend on Books written in antiquated Languages, of which, they understand " not one Word; and are incapable of judging of " the historical Evidences of remote Facts, on " which the Authority of those Books is founded, " nor can know whether a Religion thus founded, " has been faithfully convey'd down to them: " Must they not either be of that traditional Religion, which obtains in the Country where they " live, (as none is without one?) Or else must there " not be some Persons appointed to judge for them " in Matters of Religion, in whose Determination " they may safely acquiesce? If this be *Popery*, " there can be no Mean between *Popery* and Natural Religion.

" IF, in the earliest Times, Christians were split " into many Sects, and each Sect had their particular Scriptures; are the common Christians now " (when all the historical Evidence is lost but of " one Side only, and that too they understand not) " competent Judges in this Matter? Or to condescend " to Particulars, are they capable of judging in the " Controversies between *Catholicks* and *Protestants*, " about the Number of Canonical Books, Or al " Traditions,

“ Tradition, the Authority of the Church, the  
 “ uninterrupted Succession, and a thousand other  
 “ Things; especially such as relate to Mysteries;  
 “ about which they are so far from being compe-  
 “ tent Judges, that they are not capable of under-  
 “ standing even the Terms, in which the Learned  
 “ choose to express themselves, when they endea-  
 “ vour to explain their inexplicable Mysteries?

“ OUGHT not the Illiterate, if they had a just  
 “ Sense of their own Ignorance, to have been  
 “ frightened upon their pretended Reformation, at  
 “ the very thoughts of leaving a Church, to which  
 “ their Ancestors had been so long united; (and  
 “ which most of their Adversaries own'd to be a  
 “ true Church, and deriv'd their Authority from  
 “ her;) upon the Account of Opinions, they  
 “ were no more capable of judging; than they  
 “ were of judging, after they had left the Church,  
 “ to which of the numerous Sects they shou'd join  
 “ themselves?

“ ALL *Protestant* Churches have taken the same  
 “ Methods to make People pay an absolute Sub-  
 “ mission to their Decision; as the Church of *Rome*,  
 “ by excommunicating and condemning, when  
 “ they had Power, to perpetual Imprisonment; or  
 “ otherwise punishing those who wou'd not re-  
 “ nounce their private Opinions, when contrary  
 “ to their Decisions; which is either condemning  
 “ their own Principles, or their own Practices so  
 “ directly opposite to their Principles: But if this  
 “ Power of judging for the People is, as the *Pro-*  
 “ *testant* Clergy pretend, so necessary to preserve  
 “ Unity, that it must belong to every particular,  
 “ and *Protestant* Church, tho' founded on the  
 “ Breach of *Catholick* Unity; how came the  
 “ Church itself, before the pretended *Reformation*,  
 “ to want this Power so necessary to preserve itself?

*B.* *Protestant* Divines, when press'd on this Head,  
 usually distinguish between a just Authority, and  
 an absolute Authority.

A. CAN the Church of *Rome*, say its *Votaries*, claim a greater Authority, than the Church of *England* does in her *Canons* of 1600; where she declares, “ All are *ipso facto* excommunicate, who shall  
 “ affirm She is not an Orthodox and Apostolical  
 “ Church; not to be absolv’d, but by the Arch-  
 “ bishop, after having publickly renounc’d this  
 “ their impious Error:” And after the same man-  
 ner excommunicates “ All, who shall affirm the  
 “ *Articles* of 1562, made to avoid Diversity of Opi-  
 “ nions, *ulla ex parte superstitiosos aut erroneos existere*;  
 “ All that speak against her Rites and Ceremonies,  
 “ or condemn her Ordination, and her Discipline,”  
 (though she herself complains of Want of godly  
 Discipline) “ by *Bishops, Deans, Archdeacons, &c.*  
 “ All *Schismatics*, and all Congregations not esta-  
 “ blish’d by Law, if they assume to themselves the  
 “ Name of a *True, and Lawful Church.*” Does not  
 this, say the *Papists*, shew, That tho’ the Prin-  
 ciples of the Church of *England* were *anti-popish*;  
 yet that her Practices, her Laws Civil as well as  
 Ecclesiastical, before the *Revolution*, were *Popish*;  
 since the Laws against all *Separatists* then extended  
 to the Loss, not only, of Estate and Liberty; but  
 even of Life itself?

Can. 3.

Can. 4.

Can. 6, &amp;c.

Commination.

See Mr. Locke's  
3d Letter for  
Toleration,  
c. 4. p. 126.

FROM these, and such like Reasons, the *Papists* concluded, that if the People are oblig’d to go a Step beyond the plain and obvious Rules of Natural Religion, there is, in the Judgment of all Churches whatever, a Necessity for them to have recourse to others to judge for them; unless there are to be as many Religions as Judges.

B. How did our Reformers answer these Objections?

A. THEY being chiefly concern’d for the Authority of the Scripture. and withal willing in their Disputes with the *Papists* to support private Judgment, said, “ That the Scriptures themselves, from  
 “ their innate Evidence, and by the Illumination  
 “ of the same Holy Spirit which indited them,

T

“ suffi-

“ sufficiently shew’d themselves to be the Will of  
“ God.”

The *Dutch* Confession publish’d in 1566, in the Name of the *Belgian* Churches, after having recited a Catalogue of the Books of Scripture, *says*;

Harm. of Conf. p. 12, 13. “ These we receive as the only sacred and canonical Books; not because the Church receives them as such; but because the Holy Spirit witnesses to our Consciences, that they proceed from God; and themselves testify their Authority.

THE *Gallican* Churches, in their Confession, go somewhat further, not only, “ declaring their Faith in the Scriptures, to depend on the Testimony of the internal Persuasion of the Spirit; but that thereby they know the Canonical from the Ecclesiastical, *i. e.* Apocryphal Books.” And,

Art of Harm. of Conf. p. 10. “

THE Assembly of Divines at *Westminster* maintain’d, that “ Our full Persuasion and Assurance of the infallible Truth thereof (the Scriptures) is from the inward Work of the Holy Spirit, bearing Witness by, and with the Words in our Hearts.”

Chap. 1. Sect. 5.

As to foreign Divines, I shall only mention that great Reformer *Calvin*, who *says*, “ All must allow, that there are in the Scriptures manifest Evidences of God’s speaking in them.—The Majesty of God in them will presently appear to every impartial Examiner, which will extort our Assent: So that they act preposterously, who endeavour by any Argument to beget a solid Credit to the Scriptures.—The Word will never meet with Credit in Mens Minds, ’till it be seal’d by the internal Testimony of the Spirit who wrote it.”

Institu. t. Christ. Relig. l. 1. c. 7. Sect. 4, 5.

OUR learned *Whitaker*, in his Controversy about the Scripture against *Bellarmino*, gives this Account of the Doctrines of the Church: “ The Sum, *says* *be*, of our Opinion is, that the Scriptures have all their Authority and Credit from themselves; “ that

Controv. de Script. Quest. 3. c. 1. p. 286.

“ that they are to be acknowledg’d and receiv’d,  
 “ not because the Church has appointed or com-  
 “ manded so, but because they came from God ;  
 “ but that they came from God, cannot be cer-  
 “ tainly known by the Church, but from the Holy  
 “ Ghost?” And,

INDEED, our Church supposes no Man can be a good Christian, without being inspir’d ; by saying, *Works done before the Grace of Christ, and the Inspiration of his Spirit, are not pleasing to God:—yea,—we doubt not, but that they have the Nature of Sin.* And,

As to the *Dissenters*, I shall only quote Dr. Owen, a Man not long since very eminent among them, who is as zealous in maintaining this Opinion as any of the first Reformers ; his Words are,  
 “ The Scriptures of the Old and New Testament  
 “ do abundantly, and uncontrollably manifest  
 “ themselves to be the Word of the living God ; so  
 “ that merely on the Account of their own Propo-  
 “ sal to us, in the Name and Majesty of God as  
 “ such, without the Contribution of Help, or Af-  
 “ sistance from Tradition, Church, or any thing  
 “ else without themselves, we are oblig’d upon  
 “ the Penalty of eternal Damnation, to receive  
 “ them with that Subjection of Soul, which is due to  
 “ the Word of God. The Authority of God shining  
 “ in them, they afford unto us all the divine Evi-  
 “ dence of themselves, which God is willing to grant  
 “ us, or can be granted to us, or is any way need-  
 “ ful for us.” And lest the *Quakers* should take it  
 amiss, if while I quote other Sects, I shou’d overlook them ; *R. Barcklay* says, “ How necessary ’tis  
 “ to seek the Certainty of the Scripture from the Spi-  
 “ rit, the infinite Janglings, and endless Contests  
 “ of those who seek their Authority elsewhere, do  
 “ witness to the Truth thereof:” And then proceeds to prove those infinite Janglings, and endless Contests.

Dr. Owen's  
Disc. of the  
div. Orig. of  
the Script.  
c. 2. Sect. 5.  
& c. 4, 5.

Prop. 3. p. 70.

THE Reform'd wou'd have argu'd unanswerably, had they contented themselves with saying, that there are no Doctrines of a divine Original contain'd in the Gospel-Dispensation, but what by their innate Excellency are knowable to be such; as being *writ in our Minds*, and *put into our Hearts* by God himself; as is expressly declared by the Prophet *Jeremiah*, and repeated and re-asserted by the Apostle, and by Christ himself. But,

Jer. 31. 33.  
Heb. 10. 16.  
John 6. 45.

OUR Divines, it seems, at last found out, that the Reformers, and their Successors, had embrac'd Christianity on such Grounds, as they believ'd wou'd equally serve any other Religion, where there was a strong Persuasion; and being zealous for certain things, which do not carry any internal Marks of their Truth; or in other Words, of being *taught of God*, they fell into strange Inconsistencies; sometimes talking like *Hobbiſts*, of the Power of the Magistrate; sometimes like *Papiſts*, of the Authority of the Church in religious Matters; and sometimes maintaining both, and private Judgment too, in the same Discourse, if not in the same Section; which made their Adversaries treat them as a Pack of tricking, chicaning Wretches, who had no regard to Truth, or Consistency, or any thing but their private Interest.

THE Opinion, now, which seems to be espous'd by some, who wou'd be thought the only True Church-men, is, what the learned Dr. *Rogers* maintains; who, tho' he agrees with the *Papiſts*, that the People are incapable of judging for themselves in most Points of Religion; yet, to do him Justice, he puts the Church of *Rome* but upon a Level with all other Churches of what Religion soever, that chance to be uppermost; for he lays it down as a Principle, “ That tho' no Man ought upon any Authority to believe Contradictions, or profess an Assent to evident Falshoods, yet in Questions, where he must in the Event be determin'd by some Authority or other, he may reasonably

Pref. to Dr. Rogers's 8 Sermons, p. 53.  
54.



“sonably prefer the Authority appointed by publick Wisdom, and may justly be requir’d so to do.—“ The Bulk of Mankind are manifestly Ib. p. 55. unable to form a Judgment either of the Arguments by which he (his Antagonist) endeavours to subvert our Religion, or establish his own; whether they adhere to us, or go to him, they must unavoidably rely on his or our Authority, for the Truth of the Suggestions on which their Conclusion depends; and we presume our Word will go as far as his.” This is asserting that People are oblig’d to take their Religion on Trust, and then to change it as often as there’s any Change in the State-Religion; or as often as they change their Residence; and in all these Changes to be govern’d by Men, who are hir’d not to find out Truth, but to make that Religion, to which their Preferments are annex’d, to pass for true. And if People will not be govern’d, the Legislature, or in the Doctor’s Phrase, *Publick Wisdom may justly require them so to do.* Nor is the Matter mended, by excepting Contradictions and evident Falshoods; since here too, if private Persons and Authority differ, publick Wisdom will certainly be on the Side of the Authority it sets up; and ’tis in such Things that the publick Wisdom in most Christian Countries has exerted itself with the utmost Cruelty. So that the whole Question between the *Papists* and the Doctor (both Sides agreeing that Men can’t believe Contradictions and evident Falshoods; and that there are Things, which the People are incapable of knowing; or if known, can’t judge whether they are true or not;) is, on whom the People in these Points must pin their Faith? Whether there are certain standing Judges appointed by Christ, who shall infallibly lead them into the Truth? Or whether in every Christian Country, the People are bound to be of the Religion of those fallible, not to say, self-interested Guides, Publick Wisdom has authoris’d. Here it must be confess’d,

Vindic. of Ci-  
vil Establish.  
p. 205.

the Doctor is against the Pope of *Rome*, but 'tis to set himself up in his stead; and he accordingly maintains, that those who are committed to his Care, are in Things of which they can't judge, to follow his Judgment; and says, "tho' he may mistake, and in consequence of it mislead them; yet they will have this Defence before Christ, That they have fought his Will in the Methods which he has directed; and where they wanted a Guide, preferr'd one appointed to that Office according to his Institution." But why may not a Parish-Priest appointed by Publick Wisdom in *North-Britain*, *France*, or any other Country, say the same to People incapable of judging in these Points? Is not this supposing, that the Christian Religion, in many Points, is so fram'd, that in every Parish the People must follow the Judgment of their Parish-Priest; because they are to seek (and what more can be required of them) Christ's Will in the Manner the Parish-Priest tells them Christ directs? And is not this *Papery*, even worse than *Roman Popery*, as it is setting up a *Pope* in every Parish; and obliging the People, as often as any of them change their Parish, or he his Parish, or his Mind, to change their Religion too, in every Thing that is not self-evident, or a manifest Contradiction, in compliance with their present *Parish-Pope*?

Father Paul's  
Hist. of the  
Council of  
*Trent*, p. 75.

Pref. to his  
Serm. p. 63.

I can't but remark, how good Wits, tho' they liv'd in very distant Times, and seem of very different Religions, have luckily hit on the same Thought; I mean *Vergerius*, who, in *Luther's* Days, was *Nuncio* to the *Pope*; and *Dr. Rogers*, late Chaplain to a *Protestant* King, at the Head of the *Protestant* Interest. The former said to *Luther*, *If you wou'd have had any thing innovated in the Faith, in which you were bred up for 35 Years, for your Conscience and Salvation sake, it was sufficient to have kept it to yourself.* The latter asserts, "That in the Christian Religion, the *Apostle's* Rule is, *Hast thou Faith, have it to thyself;*" And yet 'tis plain, the *Apostle*

was

was persecuted by the *Rogerians* of those Days, for not keeping his Faith to himself.

B. *WHATEVER* *Vergerius* might deserve from *Popish* Publick Wisdom, for misapplying this Text, to put a Stop to the Reformation; a *Protestant* Divine cou'd deserve nothing but Contempt from *Protestant* publick or private Wisdom, for so notoriously perverting its Meaning, and openly bantering our first Reformers; and not only condemning them, for not keeping their Religion to themselves, p. 153. but asserting, that all, who (without a special Commission) from the Beginning of the World to this day, have “labour'd by publick Preaching, or p. 125. “ Writing, to withdraw Mens Submission to the “ establish'd Religion, whether *Pagan*, *Mahometan*, “ or *Popish*, and gather Congregations in Opposition to it, contrary to the Command of the Magistrate;” have been guilty of the damnable Sin of Disobedience and Sedition. So that if *Popery* had been establish'd by Law in King *James's* Reign, all *Protestants* must have kept their Religion in their own Breasts; since publickly professing a Religion can't but be unlawful, where there is no coming at it, but by unlawful Means. The *Papists*, sure, need p. 29. no other Arguments, to shew the Unlawfulness of the Reformation in most Places, than what this Reverend Divine has furnish'd them with. And tho' he declares himself an Enemy to all Persecution, and owns, “ that if there be no publick Worship, “ there must be all the Appearance that can be of “ absolute Irreligion; yet the chief Design of his “ *Vindication of the Civil Establishment* is to prove, “ that all Magistrates, of what Religion soever, “ have a Right to oblige all, but those of their “ own Communion, to keep their Religion to themselves.” Which is declaring for Persecution as well as Irreligion; since all Men believe 'tis their Duty publickly to worship God, tho' contrary to all human Commands; and he himself dares not say he wou'd obey such Commands.

AND his Distinction between Mens acting with, or without a special Commission, is impertinent in relation to a Magistrate, who owns no such Commission; and the whole is inconsistent with that Authority, which in another place, he gives to the Church or Clergy, of prescribing what Doctrines shall be taught, and what not: But if the Magistrate, for the sake of the State, can forbid the publick Profession of all Religions but one; why not that one? since I believe, there's scarce any Instance where the Profession of but one has been permitted; but that Religion soon degenerated into Priestcraft, to the entire Destruction of Mens Civil Liberties; and the Magistrate, as well as his Subjects, has been forc'd to submit to the arbitrary, and vile Impositions of his own Priests.

IN short, this noble Scheme, if there's any Consistency in it, is, that in all Matters of Religion, where People are capable of judging, they must not, if the Magistrate thinks fit, openly profess their Religion; and in all other things, which depend on Book-Learning, they are to be govern'd by their respective Parish-Popes. And if such a Scheme as this, cou'd recommend the Person that publish'd it, to a much larger Parish-Popedom than he had before; 'tis high time for the Laity to consider, whether all the Blood and Treasure which have been spent to keep out but one Pope, has not been spent in vain; if, instead of that one, we are now to have thousands?

I do not find, that the Apostles taught there was any thing in Religion, of which People were incapable of judging; for tho' Men cou'd not well be lower in point of Understanding, than those to whom the Gospel was first preach'd; yet even these are commanded to *judge for themselves; to prove all things; to take heed to what they hear; to try the Spirits; to avoid false Prophets, Seducers, and blind Guides.* And if this was their Duty in the Apostolick Times, it was, certainly, so in all After-Ages; and if there are now any such things, by what Authority soever

introduc'd, as make the Apostolical Rule impracticable; I shall, with Submission to Dr. *Rogers*, venture to affirm, they are no Part of the Christian Religion; and that those who teach them are *false Prophets, Seducers and Deceivers*; and, as such, are to be shun'd by all Christians.

St. *Chrysoftom* thinks Religion so very plain, that he says, "Were it not for our Sloth, we had no need of Teachers." And we do not find that even the Fathers thought the People, as not being able to judge for themselves, were to believe in their Parish-Priests. *Laſtantius*, for instance, says, "That in those things, especially, which concern our Life eternal, it becomes every Man to search, and examine the Truth of them by his own Sense and Judgment. rather than to expose himself by a foolish Credulity to the hazard of being seduc'd into other Mens Errors." And St. *Basil* tells us, "It is the Duty of Auditors not to believe implicitly, but to examine the Words of those that instruct them." And all our Divines, I mean such as are, what they pretend, *Protestants*; shew they have not so mean an Opinion of the Understanding of the People, by frequently exhorting them to judge for themselves; and telling them, "They have no reason to expect Heaven, if they will not be at the pains of examining what wou'd bring them thither; and that the luckiness of the Accident, shou'd they stumble on Truth, wou'd not atone for the neglect of this grand Duty."

A judicious Divine of our Church very justly observes, "That they, who have a good Cause, need no disingenuous Arts; they will not fright Men from considering what their Adversaries say, by denouncing Damnation against them; nor forbid them to read their Books, but rather encourage them so to do; that they may see the Difference between Truth and Falshood, between Reason and Sophistry, with their own Eyes. — And whensoever Guides of a Party do otherwise, they give

Hom. 3, on

2 Theſ. To. 4.

P. 234. Ed. Sav.

Inst. 1. c. 7.

Basil Mor.

Reg. 72.

To. 2. 372.

Clagget's Per-

suative to an

ingenuous

Trial of Opi-

nions in Re-

lig. p. 25.

“ give just cause to those that follow them to examine their Doctrines so much the more carefully, by how much they are unwilling to have them examin’d. ’Tis a bad sign, when Men are loth to have their Opinions seen in the Day, but *love Darkneſs rather than Light.*”

Tract of Schism.

THE Fault of the People, even from the Beginning, has been, as the memorable Mr. *Hales* observes, that “ They, thro’ Sloth and blind Obedience, examin’d not the things they were taught; but like Beasts of Burden, patiently couch’d down, and indifferently underwent whatever their Superiors laid upon them.”

HAPPY would the Laity have been, if they had given no just occasion for this infamous Character; tho’ if they had followed the Example of their Clergy in this one thing, of being as true to their common Interest, as these have always been to the separate Interest of their own Order; that alone would have preserv’d Religion in its native Simplicity, as being a thing wholly design’d for their general good; and then it would seem to be out of the Power of the Priests to corrupt it.

*B.* Is not this supposing, most, if not all, the Corruptions of Religion, which have prevail’d in any Church, are owing to their Impositions, and the blind Deference of the Laity?

*A.* IF you think I speak this without just grounds, examine into the present, and past State of *Christianity*; and see whether all those gross Depravations, and Perversions of Religion, which have prevail’d in most Places, were not contriv’d to advance the separate Interests of the Ecclesiasticks; and Religion been corrupted, in an exact Proportion to the Number, Riches, Influence, and Power of these reverend Gentlemen? Now these Corruptions being calculated for their Interest, could a Majority without a *Miracle* (as Bishop *Burnet* says, in relation to our *Reformation*) agree in correcting those Abuses? And I

Introduc’t to  
his Exposit. of  
the Art. p. 5.

may add, that in all Countries, where People have

not

not had the Liberty to judge for themselves in religious Matters, no other Liberty has been preserv'd ; but Men have been Slaves both in Body and Mind : Such Power has the united Force of Ecclesiasticks !

A judicious Author says, “ It was not unreason-  
 “ able in the Beginning of the Reign of *Edward VI.* Of the true  
 “ and Queen *Elizabeth* to think the Lords and Com- Grounds of  
 “ mons better Judges of Religion than the Bishops Eccle. Regi-  
 “ and Convocation. The whole Body can have no men, p. 84.  
 “ sinister Interest to blind them ; but the whole  
 “ Clergy, which is but a Part of the whole Body,  
 “ may ; and therefore the whole Body is to judge  
 “ of this. The meanest Man is as much interested,  
 “ and concern'd in the Truth of Religion, as the  
 “ greatest Priest ; for tho' his Knowledge thereof be  
 “ not in all respects equally easy, yet in some re-  
 “ spects it may be easier. For want of Learning  
 “ does not so much hinder the Light of the Layman,  
 “ as worldly Advantage and Faction sometimes does  
 “ the Priest ; and the Examples of these are infinite.  
 “ Corruption in the Church before our Saviour, and  
 “ in our Saviour's Days, and ever since ; has oftner  
 “ begun among the greatest Priests, Rabbies, and  
 “ Bishops, than among the meanest Laity.”

WHAT St. Paul says to the Christians of *Corinth*, in relation to false Apostles, has been verify'd in all Ages: *Ye suffer Fools gladly, seeing ye yourselves are wise.—Ye suffer if a Man bring you into Bondage ; if a Man devour you, if a Man take of you, if a Man exalt himself, if a Man smite you on the Face.* And, indeed, the *Laicks* have so seldom thought of asserting their natural Rights in religious Matters, that they have generally sacrific'd to the Malice of the Priests, all, who have endeavour'd to maintain these Rights ; and if the People throw off one Set of Ecclesiastical Tyrants, 'twas only to be Slaves to another ; and were ever ready to join against any one, that endeavour'd to set them free from all Ecclesiastical Tyranny ; under which the whole Christian World would still have groan'd, had not so many Accidents concurr'd at the *Reformation*. W F.

WE pray against being *led into Temptation*; but do we not lead the Clergy into almost irresistible Temptation, to impose what they please on the People? What may not Men, who, in a manner, engross the teaching of the Young, and instructing the Old; and have great Powers, and vast Revenues, and those too daily encreasing, bring about by their joint Endeavours; and that much more easily, than when they had nothing to depend on but the Alms of the People? What is it, that such a Confederacy, so modell'd, may not effect; especially where they are carefs'd by all Parties? nay, even by that, which is by too many of them despis'd and hated for their unpardonable Crime of being against Persecution? Are the Clergy less selfish, and designing, than they were in those Times some call the *purest*? Or, are the Laity grown wiser, and by the Experience of so many Ages, more upon their Guard?

PEOPLE abroad were surpriz'd to find a Nation, in former Times so miserably oppress'd by the Ecclesiasticks, capable, even under a *Whigg* Administration, of repealing that Statute of *Mortmain*, which their Predecessors thought absolutely necessary to prevent an all-devouring Corporation from swallowing every thing; and at the same time to see the *First-Fruits* and *Tenths*, granted at the *Reformation* to the Crown, as a just Acknowledgment of the Regal Supremacy, to be given for ever to this insatiable Corporation; and at a time too, when their Revenues were daily encreasing: These surprising Favours made Foreigners very inquisitive to know, how the Conduct of the Clergy had merited more since the *Revolution*, than it did at the *Restoration*; or any other time since the *Reformation*? But begging Pardon for this necessary Digression, I shall now shew, from the Confession of that great Divine and Philosopher, Dr. *H. More*, how little Reason the Laity, tho' of the meanest Capacity, have to depend upon the Authority of Church-men: His Words are,



“ THERE’S scarce any Church in *Christendom* at this day, which does not obtrude not only plain Falshoods, but such Falshoods as will appear to any free Spirit, pure Contradictions and Impossibilities; and that with the same Gravity, Authority, and Importunity, as they do the holy Oracles of God.” If this be true, what a miserable Condition must the People be in, if they are to depend on this *Gravity, Authority, and Importunity* of their respective Priests; who, ’tis possible, may not believe the *Creeds* and *Articles* they subscribe, and yet be against making the least change; for fear of putting the People upon examining into other things, wherein the Interest of the Clergy is more nearly concern’d; which may occasion them to assume to themselves the unpardonable Crime of seeing with their own Eyes, and judging with their own Understandings. That *Convocation* very well knew what they did, which in 1689 with so much Indignation rejected those Proposals, that some of our most eminent Divines were by the Crown authoris’d to offer them, for making Alterations in the *Liturgy*; particularly in leaving the Clergy at liberty with relation to the *Atbanasian Creed*.

IN short, whoever in the least reflects, must needs see, that in most Churches, many of their fundamental Articles are design’d to impose on the credulous Laity; and that the Priests themselves can’t believe them. Can the Pope of *Rome* any more believe himself infallible, than the *Tartarian Pope*, or *Lama*, believes himself immortal? Or than *Protestant* Priests (whose Churches are founded on private Judgment) can believe they have a Right to make *Creeds* and *Articles* for the People? Can even the *Romish* Priests any more believe they can pardon Sins, than the *Bonzees* believe the Money they borrow in this World, shall be repaid to their Creditors in the next? Or can the *Popish* Priests, tho’ they made the Laity for many Ages renounce their Senses, have different Ideas of the *Bread* and *Wine*, after they

Mystery of  
 Godliness, p.  
 495.  
 See Dr.  
 Clarke’s  
 Script. Doc-  
 trine, &c.  
 p. 450.

have numbled over certain Words, than they had before? Or can the *Lutheran* Priests believe they have the Power of *Consubstantiation*? Or the *Calvinistical* Priests think, they can make the Body and Blood of Christ to be not figuratively, or, not indeed; but *verily*, and *indeed*, taken by the Faithful? Or can any of those Priests believe they give the Holy Ghost? Or that they have an *Indelible Character*? Or that there can be *Imperium in Imperio*? Or can the *Papish* Priests any more believe their *Legendary Traditions*, than the *Pagan* Priests did their Oracles? Or some other Priests the Doctrine of *Passive Obedience*? Or the *Calvinistical* Articles they so solemnly subscribe? Or that *Awes* on one hand, and *Bribes* on the other, is the way to promote the *Protestant* Principle, of every Man's being oblig'd to judge for himself in all religious matters, without Prejudice and Partiality? Or an hundred other things, which, with this same *Gravity*, *Authority*, and *Importunity*, they impose on the People?

IF Men, notwithstanding they pretend to be *inwardly mov'd by the Holy Ghost*, go into Orders as they take to a Trade, to make the best of its Mysteries (and all Trades have their Mysteries;) and are bound for the sake of their Maintenance, to maintain those Doctrines which *maintain* them; and lest they should not do so, are shackled with *Subscriptions* upon *Subscriptions*: Can these Men, I say, under all the Prejudices this World affords, be proper Persons for the Laity to depend on in the Choice of their Religion? Or, are they, who are not permitted to choose their own Religion, fit to choose a Religion for others? In this Case, would not *the Blind lead the Blind into the Ditch of Popery*, &c. And I think, I may venture to say, that Men may as safely trust the Choice of their Religion to the Chance of a Dye, as to the Chance of Education; considering who, for so many Ages, have had the cooking up of Religion. And every one must see, that those things, which are brought into Religion, contrary to the End of

it, as they are inconsistent with the Interest of the People, so they favour more of Art and Learning, than to belong to simple Men; especially in those Times they were introduc'd. And as *Adam* said to God, *The Woman, whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the Tree, and I did eat*; so might the People say of their Priests, did they believe them *jure divino*; "The Priests thou gavest us, deceiv'd us, and we have been deceiv'd.

B. THIS is too severe.

A. YOU know, that those few good Men among the Ecclesiasticks, have said as much of their own Body; and therefore, I shall only mention what *Picus Mirandula* had the Courage to say to *Leo* the Tenth, and the *Lateran Council*: He, after having complain'd, that all Orders of Men were debauch'd by the Clergy, says, *Nec sane mirum, quando malum omne prodire de Templo Johannes Chrysostronus censet; & Hieronimus scribit, se invenisse neminem qui seduxerit Populos, præterquam Sacerdotes.* Tho' twas not always the could corrupt them; for they celebrated *St. Ambrose* says, *Plerumq; Clerus erravit, Sacerdotis nutavit Sententia, Divites cum seculi istius terreno regesenserunt, Populus fidem propriam reservavit.*

See Fascic. Rerum Expet. & Fugient. To. 1. p. 418, 149.  
Ambro. Serm. 17. To. 4. p. 725.

THIS can be no Reflection on the Ecclesiasticks among us, who abhor all these Principles, by which their Predecessors enslav'd Men both Body and Soul; and who maintain no Opinions, however advantageous to the Order, that are against the publick Good; and are so far from promoting Persecution, that by their Example as well as Writings, they have highly contributed to that Humanity, Charity, and Benevolence, which, to the great Grief of others, is daily increasing among Men of the most different Persuasions. Thus, where the Clergy are good, the People of course will be so; and therefore, such Clergymen (of which, perhaps, we now have more, than have ever been in the Church since *Constantine's* Time;) can't be too much esteem'd for conquering the strong Prejudice of Education, and the stronger

of Interest. And they, certainly, ought to be as much valu'd by the Laity for so unusual a Generosity, in defending the common Rights of Mankind; as they are hated by their Brethren, for giving up those Claims, by which they have at all Times commanded the Purfes, as well as the Consciences of the People; when too, they could not but be sensible, what they were to expect from their restless Enemies; whenever they should be permitted to exert themselves.

AND here I can't omit saying, that, if he, who best defends the Church, best deserves to rule it; Justice has eminently appear'd in the Promotion of that Person, now happily presiding over it; who so early put a stop to the boasted Triumphs of the ablest Adversary our Church ever had; and has since protected it against its worst, its domestick Enemies, treacherously undermining the Constitution; who, as he treats all with that condescending Goodness inseparable from true Greatness, so he encourages Piety and Virtue, without Distinction of Parties: And tho' he has with equal Prudence expos'd both *Popish* and *Protestant Persecution*; yet both the *Sorbonne* and *Geneva*, however differing in most other Things, agree in owning so illustrious a Merit. And I may challenge all Church-History to shew three such Bishops, as to the Honour of the *Revolution*, have, since that blessed Time, succeeded one another at *Lambeth*.

Wake's Sermon.  
Vol. 3. p. 4.

I must beg your Patience for adding, on this inexhaustible Subject, one Reason more, for Mens being govern'd by Things rather than Words: It has been a general Practice with the Introducers of Civil Tyranny, tho' they chang'd the Form of Government, to retain the old Names; the better to hinder the People from being sensible of the Change: And may not this have happen'd in Church-Matters? And may not Ecclesiastical Tyranny be brought in, and supported by the same Means? Has not this very Term *Church*, had a different Meaning put on it,

it, from what it has in the Original? And is not the *Greek Word* sometimes translated *Assembly*, sometimes *Church*; the better to confound the *Rights of the Church*, or *People*, as that Word in Scripture always signifies? In one of our Articles, *the Church* is defin'd to be a *Congregation of the Faithful*, &c. yet is it not every where else taken for the *Clergy*? When 'tis said in the very next Article, "The Church has Power to decree Rites and Ceremonies, and Authority in Matters of Faith;" is it meant of the *Congregation of the Faithful*? And is it not a constant Practice with some Men, to talk of the Power and Authority of the Church, when they only mean their own; in hopes to make that, which otherwise People might start at, go down under its sacred Name?

ARE the People now taught to conceive the same thing by the Word *Bishop*, as it means in the Original; where *Bishop* and *Presbyter* are synonymous Terms? Is it not to prevent their seeing it, that we translate the *Greek Word* sometimes by *Overseer*, sometimes by *Bishop*? For the first three or four Centuries, every Congregation had its own Bishop, who was constantly oblig'd to reside, and to officiate in the Parish-Church: And as among the *Jews*, the *Ruler of one Synagogue* had nothing to do in any other; so among the primitive Christians (whose Discipline was accommodated to that of the *Jews*;) it would have been thought highly anti-christian, and invading the Rights of his Brethren, for one Bishop to have more than one *Altar*, or *Communion-Table*. But things continually changing, a Parish-Bishop, maintain'd by the Alms of his Congregation, commenc'd a Bishop, not only of many Parishes, but of a whole Province; nay, of many Provinces, with the Titles, Pomp, and Grandeur of Princes; and at last, to an *Universal Bishop*, *Pope*, or *Vice-God*.

THE only Church that has now any Pretence to primitive Episcopacy, is that of *North-Britain*; where since the *Blessed Revolution*, a Parity of Parish-Bishops

has been establish'd: If you want fully to understand the Constitution of the primitive Church, in this, and all other Points, you need only read the *Inquiry into the Constitution, Discipline, Unity and Worship of the Primitive Church, &c.* written by the greatest Critick, Divine, and Lawyer of this, or, perhaps, any other Age.

\*[Is not Deacon a new Office under an old Name, and are not Overseers of the Poor the true Scripture-Deacons?] And what other Reason can be assign'd, why *διδάκων*, *Rom.* 16. 1. is not render'd *Diaconess*, as well as elsewhere *Deacon*; but *Servant of the Church*; except it be to hinder the People from perceiving, that there was in the Days of the Apostles, an *Order of Women*, who had something more to do in the Church than to sweep it; and who, even at the Council of *Nice* (*Can.* 19.) are reckon'd among the Clergy? Did *Heresy*, or *Schism*, (those religious *Scare-Crowes*, as the memorable *Mr. Hales* calls them;) signify any such thing in the Days of the Apostles, as afterwards, to the infinite Prejudice of *Christendom*, they were made to mean? Why do we give the Name of *Priest* to the *Jewish Sacrificer*, as well as to the *Christian Elder* (Things so widely different;) but to make People believe the latter have a *Divine Right* to every thing, which, under the *Theocracy*, belong'd to the former? And as in the New Testament the *Preachers of the Gospel* are never term'd *ἱερεῖς*, or *Priests*; so *Scaliger* remarks that the Word so apply'd, is not to be met with till after *Justin's* Time.

HAS the Word *Clergy* the same Meaning now, as in the New Testament, where 'tis taken in opposition to those we now call so? And did not Ecclesiastical Tyranny, and the ingrossing that Name by the Ministers of the Church, commence together?

NOR is it difficult to see the Reason, why the Word *βαπτίζω* was not translated but naturaliz'd; since the People would then have perceiv'd, that, not *Sprinkling*, but *Dipping*, or *Immersing*, was meant by

by it; but should any now (so much Custom has prevail'd) say *John the Dipper*, instead of *John the Baptist*, People would think it profane.

IF Words have been thus artfully manag'd in relation to things; have not People much more reason to suspect the same Management in relation to speculative Points, where Words allow a greater Latitude? If Zeal had had the same Meaning in After-Times, as in the Scripture, it had never occasion'd so much Mischief. And what Mischief have not those two misinterpreted Words, *Zeal* and *Church*, by the artful Management of designing Men, occasion'd? Nay, Is not *Religion* made to signify something very different from what it does in Scripture? How few, when they hear that Word, think of the Description given by St. *James*, of *pure and undefil'd Religion*? What Absurdities have not People brought into Religion, by fixing a Sense on the Word *Mystery* unknown to the Scripture? Nay, have not some People, if the University of *Oxford* is a good Judge, advanc'd false, impious, and heretical Doctrines concerning the Godhead, in declaring the *three Persons, are three distinct, in- definite Minds, or Spirits*; tho', now reviv'd by Dr. *W——d*, with the Applause of those who before condemn'd it? And did not they, who espous'd those Doctrines, represent their Adversaries as absurd *Sabellians*; in either making the three Persons in the divine Being, to be analogous to three Postures in a human Being; (for this was the utmost Dr. *South's* Divinity could reach to:) Or with Dr. *Wallis, three Somewhats*; of which they themselves had no Idea? Good God! what pains Men take to deface the Idea, which the Light of Nature as well as the Scripture gives of God; and which every one conceives, when he hears him mention'd on either a natural, political, or religious Account!

IN short, was it not running too far from our present Purpose, it would not be very difficult to shew, that there are very few Terms in Scripture,

*Oxford* Decree made by the Heads of Colleges and Halls in 1693.

which have Things of Moment depending on them, but what have lost their original Meaning to become orthodox.

IF they, who have the translating any old Book capable of vastly different Senses, make it speak what is most for their Interest; must not others be very good Men indeed, who will find fault with a Translation in such Points as make for their common Advantage; or be at the pains in such Case, to discover any favourable Additions, Subtractions, or Alterations that might have been made in the Scriptures, or other ancient Writings? especially, if it be true what Mr. *Whiston* complains of, “ That  
 “ it is frequently in the Mouths of the Writers for  
 “ the Church, that some Things are to be con-  
 “ ceal’d for fear they gratify *Atheists* and *Deists*;  
 “ and *says*, Certainly, nothing prejudices them  
 “ more than such Procedure and Expressions, while  
 “ they thereby perceive Remains of pious Frauds  
 “ every where, and suspect it has been so from the  
 “ Beginning. They see they are not to be let  
 “ plainly into the Truth of Facts, but to be ma-  
 “ nag’d with Cunning, and worldly Prudence, for  
 “ fear of being disgusted at Christianity.”

Postscript to  
 the Convoc.  
 Proceedings,  
 p. 90.

MUST not the People be at a loss, when they see how differently the Texts in the most momentous Parts are interpreted? Dr. *S. Clark* has reckon’d up more than 1250 Texts relating to the Doctrine of the *Trinity*; and how few of them are interpreted alike by the contending Parties? ’Tis chiefly owing to these different Interpretations, that, where Force has not interpos’d, it has from Age to Age been disputed, whether we have but one, or more than one Object of supreme Worship. A Point, which, was Reason allow’d to be a competent Judge, would not meet with the least Difficulty; and had we a Bible translated by *Unitarians*, many Texts would be very differently translated from what they are at present; and some left out as forg’d. When so judicious a Divine and Critick as the now Bishop of  
 A—



A— says, “ We should have more of the true Clergyman's  
 “ Text by being less tenacious of the printed one ;” Thanks to  
 must not that give great Uneasiness to those, who Philol.  
 have nothing to trust to but the printed Text?  
 And will this Uneasiness be abated by his affirming,  
 “ that it may with great Truth be said of *Chilling-* Defen. of his  
 “ *worth*, (the greatest Champion the *Protestant* Serm. against  
 “ Cause ever had) that he was abler at pulling the Bp. of  
 “ down than building up; towards which little can Bangor, p. 31.  
 “ be expected from one, who is by his own Argu-  
 “ ments push'd so hard in the Defence he would  
 “ make of *Protestantism*; that he has nothing left  
 “ but to cry out, *The Bible*, I say, *The Bible is the*  
 “ *Religion* of Protestants.” Nay, must not that Un-  
 easiness be very much increas'd by Divines, perpetually endeavouring to mend by their Criticisms several capital Places in the sacred Writers; nay, who pretend daily to make new and momentous Discoveries? How must their Hearers be edify'd, when they tell them 'tis *thus* or *thus*, in such an ancient *Manuscript*, *Father*, or *Assembly of Fathers*; or cry, 'tis render'd more agreeable to the Mind of the Holy Ghost in the *Septuagint*, *Vulgar Latin*, *Syriack*, *Chaldaick*, *Ethiopick*, *Coptick*, *Gothick*, or some other Version?

IF no Court of Judicature, tho' in a Thing of small moment, will admit of a Copy, tho' taken from the Original, without Oath made by a disinterested Person of his having compar'd it; because the least Mistake, a various Pointing, a Parenthesis, a Letter misplac'd may alter the Sense; how can we absolutely depend in things of the greatest Moment on voluminous Writings, which have been so often transcrib'd by Men, who never saw the Original; (as none, even of the most early Writers pretend they did :) And Men too, who even in the earliest Times, if we may judge by the Number of forg'd Passages, and even forg'd Books, would scruple no pious Frauds. And tho' there have been innumerable Copies of the New Testament lost,

which, no doubt, had their different Readings, yet, as it stands at present, we are told, there are no less than 30000 various Readings.

Proposals for  
Printing by  
Subscription  
a new Edit.  
of the New  
Testament.

B. THO' there are so many various Readings, yet does not that great Critick, Dr. Bentley, in his Proposal for printing by Subscription, a new Edition of the New Testament, assure the World, "That out of a Labyrinth of 30000 various Readings, which crowd the Pages of our present best Editions, all put upon an equal Credit to the Offence of many good Persons, that his *Clue*, as he calls it, so leads and extricates us, that there will be scarce 200 out of so many Thousands, that can deserve the least Consideration?"

Whiston's Es-  
say, p. 10.

A. HAS this Critick lost his *Clue*, and so forc'd to drop the noble Design of ascertaining the Text of the New Testament, and let the 30000 various Readings remain on an equal Foot to the Offence of many good Persons? who will now as much despair of seeing it done, as they do of Mr. Whiston's restoring the true Text of the Old Testament; which, he says, "has been greatly corrupted both in the Hebrew and Septuagint by the Jews, to make the Reasonings of the Apostles from the Old Testament inconclusive and ridiculous."

DR. Bentley, certainly, ought to go on with his Proposal; because the World will hardly take the Doctor's Word, that in a Book, where most things are own'd to be of the greatest Moment, there should be so many various Readings of no Moment; tho' one or two may be of that Consequence, as to destroy the Design of the whole Book. In a Prescription where there are ever so many wholesome Drugs, yet if a poisonous one happens to be mix'd, it may turn the Whole into rank Poison. If the Doctrine of the *Trinity* is of the greatest Moment, was not the Church highly concern'd to prevent various Readings in that important Point, as well as some forg'd Texts?

HAD the Scripture been better guarded in many  
other

other Matters of Consequence, there could not have been so many Texts seemingly clashing with one another; that there are such, is deny'd by none: Dr. *Scott* lays it down as certain, that "That Christ. Life,  
 " Opinion is false, or of little Moment, that has p. 2. vol. 1.  
 " but one, or two Texts to countenance it; and Ch. 6. P. 384.  
 " That very dubious, which has none but obscure  
 " Texts to rely on; but when there are more, and  
 " much plainer Texts for it than against it, it must  
 " be false."

AND another judicious Divine says, that " Our G. Burnet's  
 " Faith is not to be built on single Texts, because Answer to  
 " they may have been corrupted; tho' we have Lawes, about  
 " no Manuscript to point out to us, that the other Ch. Authori-  
 " Manuscripts have been so corrupted in these Pas- ty, p. 114.  
 " sages." But,

IF we can't depend on single Texts; and where there are several, the plainest are to carry it; the Difficulty will be to know which are the plainest; since the different Sects of Christians have ever pretended, that the plainest Texts are on their Side; and wonder'd how their Adversaries cou'd mistake their Meaning.

THE plain Texts from St. *Austin's* Days, at least in the *West*, were all in favour of *Predestination*; and upon those plain Texts the Articles of our most excellent Church, and all other *Protestant* Churches are founded: It's true, in Queen *Elizabeth's* Reign, there were some few among the inferior Clergy for *Free-will*; but then those *incorrigible* Strype's Ann.  
*Free-will* Men, as they were call'd, were, by the c. 17.  
 Direction of the Bishops, sent to Prison; there to live on hard Labour, till they repented of their Errors. But since the Court in *Charles I's* Reign, help'd to open the Eyes of our Divines, they, no longer blinded by their Articles, clearly see, that all those plain Texts (and what a Number are muster'd up on both Sides) are all for *Free-will*; against which, now, there are none but are look'd on as *incorrigible*.

B. THO' those Books, which contain the traditional Religions of other Nations, have, notwithstanding all the Care taken to prevent it, been mix'd with Fables and monstrous Tales: yet we say, that the Scripture, especially the New Testament, tho' there are ever so many various Readings, must needs be free from all Errors of Consequence; because that being design'd by God for a plain, and unalterable Rule, for the Actions of Mankind, cannot but be so guarded by Providence, as to hinder any Mistakes of Moment.

A. YOUR Reasoning, I grant, holds good in relation to the Law of Nature, which equally obliges, at all Times and Places, the whole Race of Mankind; but then that depends not on the Knowledge of any Language dead, or living; or on the Skill, or Honesty of Transcribers, or Translators; but on that, which as it is apparent to the whole World, so it is not in the power of Mortals to alter; viz. the unchangeable Relation of things, and the Duties resulting from thence.

De usu Patr. p. 1. l. 1. c. 3. “ The Transcribers of Books (as that learned and judicious Critick *Daille* observes) “ have been guilty of innumerable Mistakes;” and that S. Epist. 28. ad *Jerom* (the most learned of the Fathers) complains, Lucam. p. 247. “ they wrote not what they found, but what they understood:” and he gives Instances of Attempts made on the New Testament by the Orthodox themselves; particularly St. *Epiphanius*, for saying, l. 1. c. 4. “ that in the true, and most Correct Copies of St. Luke, it was writ, that *Jesus Christ wept*;” and that this Passage had been alledg'd by St. *Ireneus*, but that the *Catholicks* had blotted out the Word, fearing that the *Hereticks* might abuse it. The same St. *Jerom* says, the last twelve Verses in the last Chapter of *Mark* were left out in most *Greek* Bibles; *Omnibus Græciæ Libris pene hoc capitulum non habentibus*. *Grotius* imputes this Omission to the Transcribers: But *Maldonat* will not allow of *Grotius*'s Reason, because he says, *Luke* and *John* differ

fer more with *Matthew* than *Mark* does. *Major* Maldonat. in  
*enim inter illos & Matthæum, quam inter Matthæum* loc.  
*& Marcum apparet repugnantia.*

*Hilary*, speaking of *Christ's* bloody Sweat, and  
 the Angel sent to comfort him, says, *Nec sanè igno-* Hilary, 1. 10.  
*randum nobis est, in Græcis & Latinis codicibus com-* de Trin.  
*pluribus, de adveniente Angelo, vel de sudore sanguineo*  
*nihil scriptum reperiri.* This *S. Jerom* seems to con- Lib, 2. adver.  
 firm. Pelag.

FOR my part, I think, that at least, till we are  
 extricated by *Dr. Bentley's* Clue, the best Way not  
 to be mistaken, is to admit all for divine Scripture,  
 that tends to the Honour of God, and the Good  
 of Man; and nothing which does not. This Clue,  
 I think, will extricate the Learned as well as Un-  
 learned out of many otherwise insuperable Difficul-  
 ties; and make the Laws of God, which way so-  
 ever reveal'd, entirely to agree; and destroy that  
 absurd Notion of God's acting arbitrarily, and  
 commanding for commanding-sake: And does not  
*St. Paul* suppose no Scripture to be divinely inspir'd, 2 Tim. 3. 16.  
 but *what is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for* See Grotius in  
*Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness?* And if loc. and the 5  
 this be the Test, ought we to admit any thing to be Letters about  
 writ by Inspiration, tho' it occurs ever so often in Inspiration,  
 Scripture, till we are certain it will bear this Test? p. 190, &c.  
 And, indeed, was it otherwise, we should be in a Eng. Transl.  
 sad Condition, since there's scarce any Opinion,  
 tho' ever so absurd, or ridiculous, but has its  
 Vouchers, who quote Texts on Texts, for its Sup-  
 port. Good Lord! what a Load have the different  
 Parties laid on it, by their not observing this Rule?  
 But,

COU'D we suppose any Difference between *Nat-*  
*ural* and *Traditional* Religion; to prefer the latter,  
 wou'd be acting irrationally; as that Prophet did,  
 who went contrary to what God had commanded  
 him by an immediate Revelation; because a known 1 Kings 13.  
 Prophet assur'd him, he had afterwards a different  
 Revelation for him. A Crime so heinous in the  
 Eyes

Eyes of the Lord, that he destroy'd this Prophet after a most signal Manner; tho' he had to plead for himself, that the Prophet, who spoke to him in the Name of the Lord, cou'd have no Interest in deceiving him; and that there was nothing in the Command, but might as well come from the Lord, as what himself had receiv'd. And 'tis worth observing, that the lying Prophet was so far from being punish'd, that the Lord continued to him the Gift of Prophecy; nay, pronounc'd by his Mouth the Doom of the Prophet, he so *fatally deceiv'd*.

- B. WHY is this more worth observing than the Case of *Abimelech*, who, upon both *Abraham's* and *Sarab's* lying to him, took *Sarab*, as the Lord himself owns, *in the Integrity of his Heart*; and tho' he sent her back untouch'd, and gave considerable Presents both to Wife and Husband; yet neither *He*, nor *His*, were to be pardon'd, till *Abraham* (the offending Person) being a Prophet, was to pray for him: *So Abraham pray'd unto God, and God heal'd Abimelech, and his Wife, and Maid-servants; and they bare Children.* And yet this holy Prophet was soon after guilty of a very barbarous Action, in sending out *Hagar, whom Sarah had given him to Wife, and his Son Ishmael, to perish in the Wilderness*; for no other reason, but because *Sarab* had seen *the Son of Hagar mocking*; and 'tis likely they had both perish'd, had not *an Angel calling out of Heaven*, directed *Hagar* to a *Well of Water*: And perhaps, the same Angel, who, when she before fled from *Sarab*, who had dealt hardly with her; bid her *return, and submit*: But in this last domestick Quarrel, God himself miraculously interposes, and says, *In all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her Voice.* But begging pardon for this Interruption, pray go on.

A. WE, certainly, ought to adhere strictly to the Light of Nature; if, (as a Learned and Reverend Critick observes) "It must be allow'd by the judicious and impartial, that many Corruptions are found in our present Copies of the Holy Bible; and

“ and that we have not now this blessed Book in  
“ that Perfection and Integrity, that it was first  
“ written. It is alter’d in many Places, and in  
“ some of the greatest Moment.— I cou’d prove, I  
“ think, by undeniable and unavoidable Instances,  
“ what Mr. *Gregory of Oxford* says in his Preface  
“ to some critical Notes on the Scripture, that he  
“ publish’d. There’s no Author whatsoever, says  
“ this learned Critick, that has suffer’d so much  
“ by the Hand of Time as the Bible has.” If this,  
I say, must be allow’d, ought we not, in order to  
prevent all Mistakes, in the first place, to get clear  
Ideas of the moral Character of the Divine Being;  
and when by Reasons much stronger than any drawn  
from human Tradition, we have discover’d his Cha-  
racter, ought we not to compare what we are told  
of him, by what we already know of him, and so  
judge of what Men teach us concerning God, by  
what God himself teaches us; for *we are all taught  
of him*: And then we shall be as certain, as there is  
a God perfectly wise, and infinitely good, that no  
Doctrines can come from him that have not these  
Characters stamp’d on them. Thus were there more  
false Readings crept into the Scripture than these  
Divines suppose, yet we might still know our Duty;  
and be certain that by doing our best to promote  
our mutual Happiness, we answer the End of our  
Creation; and that if we deviate from this Rule for  
the sake of what depends on human Tradition, we  
quit Certainty for that, which is not pretended to  
amount to more than Probability.

And it is no small Encouragement for us to ob-  
serve this Rule, since we find, that Men, if like  
Pedants, or School-Masters, they read Books, not  
to examine the Force and Cogency of the Argu-  
ments they meet with; but for the sake of Words  
and Phrases, without considering the Nature, Rea-  
son and Tendency of things; understand very little  
of things. Have not great Numbers from Age to  
Age, tho’ Men of good natural Parts, had their Un-  
derstandings

derstandings confounded by thus injudiciously employing them; and instead of clearing Doubts increased them; and fill'd the World with useleſs Criticiſms, and trifling Diſputes? While they, who made Words give place to Things, and argu'd from the relation things bear to each other, have ſhewn themſelves able *Cafuiſts*; and enrich'd the World with moſt uſeful Diſcourſes, for promoting the Honour of God, and the Good of Man. And therefore, we are often caution'd by the beſt Authors, not to ſtick too cloſe to the Letter in reading the Scripture; ſince they ſay the Style of Holy Writ is far from being exact; and that the laying too great ſtreſs on Words, has been the Occaſion of moſt of the Diſputes among Chriſtians.

To ſhew how little we are to depend on Words and Phraſes; they ſay, a number of Texts might be produc'd to prove *Mofes* to be a God: " For he is

- a* Exod. 7. 1. " call'd (a) *God* and *Lord*; and pray'd to, under  
 Ib. 4. 6. " that Appellation, *to forgive Sin* (b;) has attri-  
*b* Num. 12. 11. " buted to him the ſame miraculous Work of *bring-*  
 Exod. 10. 16, " *ing the Children of Iſrael out of Egypt*, as is aſcri-  
 17. " bed to God (c;) that the *Iſraelites* did believe  
*c* Exod. 32. 7. " *in him*, as well as *in the Lord* (d,) and were re-  
 Ib. 33. 1. " quir'd ſo to do; that *he promis'd Rain in due Season*  
*d* Exod. 14. ult. " *to ſuch as kept his Commandments* (e;) and to *Joſhua*,  
 Ib. 19. 9. " that *he wou'd be with him in carrying the People into*  
*e* Deut. 11. " *Canaan* (f;) altho' as a Man, he was to die be-  
 13, 14, 15, &c. " fore: That he did *great Works*; yea, *Miracles in*  
*f* Deut. 31. 23. " *the ſight of the Iſraelites*, on purpoſe *that they might*  
 " *know that he was the Lord their God* (g;) that *Aaron*  
*g* Deut. 29. " is ſaid to be *his Prophet* (h,) which is proper to the  
 5, 6. " true God only; and in fine, that the *Iſraelites*  
*b* Exod. 7. " were *baptiz'd unto*, or *into Moſes* (i.)  
*i* 1 Cor. 10. "   
 1, 2. "

THESE Authors tell us, that in the *Ethicks* of *Ariſtotle*, in the *Offices* of *Tully*, in the *Moral Treatiſes* of *Grotius*, *Puffendorf*, &c. the Nature and Reason of our Duties, the Connexion between them, and the Dependance they have on one another are plainly ſeen; but in the Scripture, Things, *ſay they*, are



not so generally treated, as that Men may precisely know the Nature and Extent of their Duty. Are they not, *say they*, for the most part, deliver'd in such a general, undetermin'd, nay, sometimes parabolical and hyperbolical Manner, as, did we not consult our Reason, and learn our Duty from thence, the Letter might lead us wrong; nay, the Apostle himself says, *the Letter killeth.*

B. I can't believe things of any Moment are thus represented; because, as God could have no other End in giving us a Revelation, than the rightly directing our Minds; so that End could not have been answer'd, except it was deliver'd in a way most plain, and easy to be understood in all Times and Places: For if there are Propositions in Scripture, which naturally tend to mislead us; or if the Use of Languages is perverted in some Instances, how can we be certain, but it may be in others?

A. Is not the New Testament full of Parables, nay, is it not said, that *Without a Parable Jesus spake* Mat. 13. 34. *not to the Multitude*; and for this remarkable Reason, *That seeing they might see, and not perceive; and hearing they might hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their Sins be forgiven them?* Is not St. John's Gospel, for the most part, writ after an obscure, allegorical Manner, especially in relation to the Person of Christ? And do not Commentators own, we labour under much the same Difficulties in interpreting St. Paul? The honourable Mr. Boyle says, "That sometimes in St. Boyle's Style of  
" Paul's Writings many Passages are so penn'd, as Scrip. p. 64.  
" to contain a tacit kind of a Dialogue; and that  
" unskillfully by Readers, and even Interpreters,  
" taken for an Argument, which, indeed, is an  
" Objection. It's said it was the way of the East,  
" to make use of dark, and involv'd Sentences,  
" figurative and parabolical Discourses, abrupt,  
" and maim'd Ways of expressing themselves, with  
" a Neglect of annexing Transitions."

As for hyperbolical Expressions, it was customary among the *Eastern Nations* to express themselves after a pompous and most high-strained Manner. This way of speaking was a main Part of Learning, taught in the Schools of the Prophets among the *Jews*; and happy was he, who cou'd most excel in this elevated, romantick Way; and both the Old and new Testament abound with Expressions of this Nature. *Isaiah*, in prophesying the Destruction of *Babylon*, says, *The Stars of Heaven shall not give their Light, the Sun shall be darkned—— I will shake the Heavens, and the Earth shall remove out of her Place, in the Wrath of the Lord of Hosts, and in the Day of his fierce Anger.* And the Destruction of the City of *Jerusalem* in the New Testament is describ'd after such a Manner, as if Nature was un-  
 Ifa. 13. 10. giving  
 Ib. Ver. 13.

Thanksgiv.  
 Sermon. June 7,  
 1716.

BP. *Fleetwood*, on *Psalms* xviii. says, "That without remembering *David's* History, one wou'd imagine "Heaven and Earth were mov'd on his Behalf; "and that the Course of Nature had been over-  
 "thrown, and his Life cover'd by continual Mi-  
 "racles:" And he there observes, "that the *Jewish*  
 "Expressions, and the Expressions of all People  
 "that dwelt *Eastward* are full of Pomp, and Am-  
 "plification of Fancy and Hyperbole." And, I think, under this Head we may reckon these Texts,  
 2 Chron. 9. that *All the Kings of the Earth sought the Presence of*  
 23. *Solomon.* That *If the Things which Jesus did were*  
 John 21. 25. *written, the World itself could not contain the Books.* And are not most of the Expressions of *St. John* as figurative, as *Eating the Flesh, and Drinking the Blood of the Son of Man?* And what monstrous Practices did those Words taken literally, produce, even in the primitive Times; and what senseless Disputes since? And,

MUST we not put under this Head a Number of  
 John 14. 13. other Texts? *Whatsoever you shall ask in my Name,*  
 Mat. 18. 19. *that will I do. If Two of you shall agree on Earth,*  
*touching any thing they shall ask, it shall be done for*

them of my Father, which is in Heaven. If you have Mat. 17. 20.  
*Faith as a Grain of Mustard-Seed, you shall remove*  
*Mountains, and nothing shall be impossible to you. And*  
*you may say to this Sycamine Tree, Be thou pluck'd up* Luke 17. 6.  
*by the Roots, and be thou planted in the Sea, and it*  
*shall obey you. Whatsoever thou shalt bind on Earth,* Mat. 16. 19.  
*shall be bound in Heaven. He that is spiritual, judg-* 1 Cor. 2. 15.  
*eth all Things; (which the Papists say is the Pope)*  
*yet he himself is judged of no Man. Things present,* 1 Cor. 3. 22.  
*and Things to come; all are yours. St. John's little* 1 John 2. 20.  
*Children are said to have an Unction, and to know all*  
*Things. And what more cou'd be said of the A-*  
*nointed, or Christ himself? Men are bid to be Par-* 2 Pet. 1. 4.  
*takers of the Divine Nature; and to be as perfect as* Mat. 5. 48.  
*their heavenly Father is perfect. What Blessings are*  
*not Christians promis'd, even in this Life? Is it not*  
*said, Christ has made us Kings and Priests unto God;* Rev. 1. 6.  
*— and we shall reign on the Earth? And are not* Ib. 5. 10.  
*the Meek to inherit the Earth? And, is not every one* Mat. 5. 5.  
*that hath forsaken Houses, or Brethren, or Sisters, or* Mat. 19. 29.  
*Father, or Mother, or Wife, or Children, or Lands,*  
*for my Name sake, to receive an hundred fold, and to in-*  
*herit everlasting Life? What one is sent to declare*  
*is to be done, That he is said to do: So Jeremiah* Jer. 1. 10.  
*is said to be set over the Nations, and over the King-*  
*doms, to root out, pull down, and destroy. What is*  
*design'd to be done, shall be said to be actually*  
*done: As, the Lamb slain from the Foundation of the* Rev. 13. 8.  
*World. Before Abraham was, I was; or as we (to John 8. 58.*  
*make it more mysterious) render it, I am: Nay, a*  
*Creature not born long before, is said to be the* Col. 1. 15.  
*First-born of every Creature. Advice is called Sub-*  
*mission, Subjection, and Obedience; Ye younger, sub-* 1 Pet. 5. 5.  
*mit yourselves to the Elder; yea, be subject to one ano-*  
*ther. Obey them that have the Rule over you; and* Heb. 13. 17.  
*submit yourselves. Persuasion is call'd Compulsion, as* Luke 14. 23.  
*Compel them to come in. And what rooting Work*  
*have not the Papists made from this Text: Every* Mat. 15. 13.  
*Plant my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted*  
*up; and such other misapply'd Places? Is not God's*  
*permitting*

- Amos 3. 6. *permitting Evil, call'd doing it? Shall there be Evil in a City, and the Lord has not done it? Nay, is not the Lord said to have created Evil? And to have harden'd Mens Hearts; and then to punish them for their being harden'd? And to tempt Men? Are we not to pray against God's leading us into Temptation? Nay, is not God, if the Words are to be taken literally, represented as an arbitrary Being, hating Children not yet born; neither having done any Good, or Evil? Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated — Therefore hath he Mercy on whom he will have Mercy; and whom he will, he hardeneth: Hath not the Potter Power over his Clay? —*
- Rom. 9. 11.  
—Ver. 13.  
—Ver. 18.  
—Ver. 21.

ARE not Things in Scripture absolutely condemn'd, which are only so conditionally? As the Jewish Rites and Sacrifices are, in the Old Testament, represented as an Iniquity, and an Abomination to the Lord. Things commanded are positively said

- Jer. 7. 22. *not to be commanded; As I spake not to your Fathers, nor commanded them in that Day I brought them out of the Land of Egypt, concerning Burnt Offerings and Sacrifices. What can be more figurative than Jesus's saying, If any Man come to me, and hate not his Father, and Mother, and Wife, and Children, and Brethren, and Sisters, yea, and his own Life also, he can't be my Disciple? Things spoken in an unlimited, are to be taken in a restrained Sense:*
- Luke 14. 26.
- Mat. 5. 34.  
Eph. 6. 1, 5.  
1 Tim. 6. 10.  
Mat. 23. 3.  
1 Theff. 5. 16,  
17, 21.

- Swear not at all. Children and Servants, obey your Parents and Masters in all Things. The Love of Money is the Root of all Evil. Whatsoever the Pharisees bid you do, that do, and observe. Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. Prove all Things. And sometimes a short Duration is express'd by the Words for ever; or for everlasting; or for the End of the World. So Jonah, after he came out of the Fish's Belly, says, The Earth with her Bars was about me for ever; and an hundred other such Texts. So that, whether any Duration is to be everlasting, (in the Sense we take that Word) can't be known from the Words in Scripture; but it must be judg'd*
- Jonah 2. 6.

of from the Nature of the Things which are said thus to endure. But,

WHAT can be more surprizing, than Christ's declaring in most express Terms, he came to do That, which we must suppose he came to hinder: *Think not, (says he) I am come to send Peace; I come not to send Peace, but a Sword. For I am come to set a Man at variance with his Father, &c. And, Suppose ye, I am come to give Peace on Earth, I tell you nay; but rather Division. And again, I am come to send Fire on Earth, and what will I, if it be already kindled?*—*Ver. 49.* And has not that Fire burnt outrageously ever since, being blown up by those, whose Business it was to have extinguish'd it? And have they not so acted as if this was a Prophetick Saying, they were at all Times bound to see fulfill'd; tho' to the Destruction of all moral Duties whatever?

ANOTHER Difficulty in understanding both the Old and New Testament, is, that most Things, tho' owing to second Causes, are referr'd immediately to God. In the New Testament, *Pilate is said to have his Power from Above, even while he was condemning Jesus. And there is no Power but of God: the Powers that be, are ordain'd of God: Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the Flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you Overseers. Nay, every good Motion is imputed to the Spirit, whether with, or without Understanding. I will pray with the Spirit, and with the Understanding also: I will sing with the Spirit, and with the Understanding also.* *1 Cor. 14. 15.* Or, if a Man talk'd in an unknown Tongue, and cou'd not interpret what he said; or any of the Congregation understood him; yet it was *Prophecy, and the Gift of the Spirit.* And *St. Paul calls a Heathen Poet a Prophet. And is not Spirit, nay, the Spirit of God, taken, at least, in twenty different Senses in the Scripture?* *See Tractat. Theol. Polit. P. 14, &c.*

IN short, *the Words of Scripture, on which things of the greatest Consequence depend, are, as is shewn by a learned Author, sometimes taken, not on-*

Stapleton of  
Controv. 1. 4.  
c. 10.

only in a different, but contrary Sense. However, to give one Instance, *Nature* in *Rom.* 2. 14. and *Nature* in *Eph.* 2. 3. if rightly translated, are taken in opposite Senses; and that Word in *1 Cor.* 11. 24. is taken in a Sense different from both.

How can we know from Scripture, what Things are owing immediately to God, or to second Causes; since every thing that was thought to be good, not only the Powers and Faculties of Mens Minds, but voluntary Actions themselves, are immediately ascrib'd to God. For instance, *Bezaleel* is said to be  
Exod. 31. 3, 4. fill'd with the Spirit of God in Wisdom, and Understanding; because he cou'd devise cunning Works of Gold, and Silver, &c. And the Prophet *Isaiab*, after he had describ'd the whole art of Plowing and Sowing,  
Isaiab 28. 26. ing, says of the Plowman, *His God does instruct him to Discretion, and teach him.*——— And speaking of the Art of Threshing, he says, *This also comes from the Lord of Hosts, which is wonderful in Counsel, and excellent in working.* Can the Clergy have a better Pretence to a *Jure-divino-ship*, than the Plowman and Thresher? Where is it said of them, that *their God instructs them to Discretion, and teaches them?* Or, that *their Art comes from the Lord of Hosts, which is wonderful in Counsel, and excellent in Working?*

2 Sam. 24.  
1 Chron. 21.

As some Things are immediately referr'd to God, so others are as immediately referr'd to Satan; nay, the same Action is imputed both to God and Satan. These few, among numberless Instances, I mention, to shew, that the Scripture supposes, that from our Reason we have such infallible Tests, to judge what is the Will of God, that we are safe from being misled by any Expressions of this Nature.

*B. SURELY*, the moral Precepts deliver'd by our Saviour, are not express'd thus obscurely.

*A. THESE*, no doubt, are the plainest; yet even These, generally speaking, are not to be taken in their obvious and literal Meaning: As for Instance, *Lend, hoping for nothing again. He that takes away*

Luke 6. 35.

away thy Coat, let him have thy Cloak also. Of him Mat. 5. 40.  
 who takes away thy Goods, ask them not again. And Luke 6. 30.  
 should we not, without having recourse to the Reason of Things, be apt to think, that the Poor, as such, were the only Favourites of Heaven: *Blessed* Luke 6. 20,  
*be ye Poor; for Yours is the Kingdom of God. Blessed* 21.  
*are ye that hunger, for ye shall be filled.* And should we not be likewise apt to imagine, that the Gospel was an Enemy to the Rich, as such; and consequently, to all those Methods which make a Nation rich: As, *Woe unto you Rich; for you have received your Consolation. It is easier for a Camel to pass thro' the Eye of a Needle, than for a rich Man to enter into the Kingdom of God.* And that no Man might be rich, it was a general Precept, *Sell what ye have, and give Alms.* Nay, the *Woman that cast into the Treasury her two Mites* is commended, because she cast in *all she had, even all her Living.* And to shew that none were exempt from this Precept, Jesus says to the Man, who had observ'd all the Mark 10. 21.  
*Precepts from his Youth, One Thing thou lackest, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the Poor.* This Precept is impracticable in a Christian State, because there could be no Buyers where all were to be Sellers; and so is a Community of Goods, tho' in use among the *Essenes*, and the Christians at first.

'Tis certain, that such Passages, as, *Blessed are they that mourn; Blessed are ye that weep: Woe unto you that laugh now, ye shall mourn and weep:* And Ib. ver. 25.  
 other Texts about Self-denial, and taking up the Cross; and *Take no Thought for your Life, what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink. Take no Thought for the Morrow; Consider the Ravens, for they neither sow, nor reap.----- Consider the Lilies, how they grow, they toil not, they spin not, and yet, I say, Solomon, in all his Glory, was not aray'd like one of these.* 'Tis certain, I say, that such like Texts have, by being interpreted literally, run Men into monstrous Absurdities.

Mat. 5. 39.

FROM this Text, *Resist not Evil; but whoever shall smite thee on thy right Cheek, turn to him the other also*; and some others of the like nature: Not only the primitive Fathers, but a considerable Sect, even now among the *Protestants*, think all Self-defence unlawful.

Mat. 19. 12.

FROM these Sayings of our Saviour, *There are some Eunuchs, which were so born from their Mothers Womb; and there are some Eunuchs, which were made Eunuchs of Men; and there be Eunuchs, which have made themselves Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake*: The primitive Fathers, who thought they ought not to put a different Meaning on the Word *Eunuch* in the latter End of the Verse, from what it had twice before; believ'd it a piece of heroick Virtue for Men to castrate themselves: And tho' by the *Roman Law*, no One could be castrated without Leave of the President, as *Justin* observes; yet he commends a Youth, who perform'd this Operation on himself without it. And you know that the Bishop of *Alexandria* highly approv'd this Action in *Origen*, as an Instance of heroick Virtue; tho' afterwards, when he became his capital Enemy, he as much condemn'd it. Do not these things sufficiently shew, that we must not deviate one Tittle from what our Reason dictates in any of these important Points? Nay, even the Precept of *forgiving Injuries, not only seven, but seventy Times seven*, except interpreted consistently with what the Light of Nature dictates to be our Duty, in preserving our Reputation, Liberty, and Property; and in doing all we can in our several Stations, to hinder all Injury and Injustice from others, as well as ourselves; would be a Doctrine attended with fatal Consequences: So that the Expediency, or even Lawfulness of forgiving Injuries, depends on such Circumstances as human Discretion is to judge of.

Apol. Sect 37.

Mat. 18. 22.

As I am a Member of the Common-wealth, I can't be a Judge in my own Cause; and tho' I may legally prosecute a Man who has injur'd me,



yet if the Injury be but slight, and by my overlooking it, he may become my Friend; common Prudence will oblige me to forgive him: But if he, taking Advantage of my Good Nature, injures me the more, and more frequently, because he may do it with Impunity; the Precept of *forgiving*, tho' it forbids me to punish for Punishment-sake, does no more in this Case bar me of a legal Remedy, than it does Nations of resenting National Injuries: And all good Governments oblige People, for the sake of the Common Good, to prosecute those who have injur'd them by robbing, stealing, or any other ways of cheating or defrauding them. So that 'tis the Reason of things, which in all Circumstances, must determine us how to act; and consequently, when this Precept is truly stated, there is nothing new in it: But if it be not truly stated, it is such a new Doctrine, as may be attended with fatal Consequences.

*Celsus* says, that “ the Doctrine of *forgiving Injuries*, was not peculiar to the Christians, tho' they taught it after a grosser manner.” And *Confucius* thus expresses this Doctrine, “ Acknowledge thy Benefits by the Return of Benefits; but never revenge Injuries.”

Origen contra Celsum. l. 7. p. 373.  
Max. 23. in the translated Morals of Confucius.

*B. Confucius*, tho' he forbids the revenging Injuries, yet he did not carry things to that State of Perfection, as to teach the *loving our Enemies*; but on the contrary maintains, “ We may have an Aversion for an Enemy without desiring Revenge; the Motions of Nature are not always criminal: And 'tis only the good Man, who can love, and hate with Reason.”

Max. 63.  
Max. 15.

*A. ARE* not the Passions of Love and Hatred given us by God, to be exercis'd on proper Objects? Actions, abstractedly consider'd, are not the Objects of Love and Hate, but Persons for the sake of their Actions: And are not the Actions of some Men too detestable to create in us any Sentiments, but of Aversion; so as to oblige us to bring



A. SUPPOSE those Precepts are capable of being thus paraphras'd, yet how do we know this was the Design of the Preacher? The *Essenes* (a Sect our Saviour never found fault with) had, as is plain from *Philo* and *Josephus*, Rules much the same; which they interpreted according to the plain and literal Meaning: And the Christians, as I shall shew hereafter, for some Centuries, understood most of these Precepts after the same manner; believing that the Nature of moral Rules requir'd they should be thus interpreted; especially such as are design'd to govern the Actions of the most ignorant and illiterate; and taught too by a Person, whose infinite Knowledge must enable him so to express himself, as that his Words should not be liable to the least Misconstruction.

B. HOWEVER Christians at first depending on the Grammatical, and obvious Meaning of the Words, might mistake; yet Reason taught them afterwards how they were to be interpreted.

A. REASON, then, must be our Guide; and we must know our Duty from the Light of Nature, antecedently to those Precepts; otherwise we cou'd never know it was our Duty to put such Senses on Words, as they otherwise seem not to bear. Besides,

SHOU'D not Rules concerning Morality, be suited to Mens particular Circumstances, plainly describing that Conduct which they require? Is not this the Design of the Municipal Laws in every Country? What Benefit cou'd Subjects have, from Laws written in such a loose, general, and undetermin'd manner; as *Lend, hoping for Nothing again: If any Man will sue thee at Law, and take away thy Coat, let him have thy Cloak also: Of him who takes away thy Goods, ask them not again*; Or those other Texts which seem to condemn the Rich as such, and require, not the setting the Poor at Work, but the *selling All, and giving to the Poor*; Or those other Precepts, which seem to forbid *Self-defence*;

Col. 3. 23.  
Titus 2. 9.

Or require us to *take no Thought for your Life*; Or for *the Morrow*? And that too by Arguments drawn from *Lilies, neither toiling, nor spinning*? The same may be said of all general, and undetermin'd Rules in the New Testament, tho' more plainly deliver'd: As for instance, tho' 'tis said, *Servants, obey your Masters in all Things*; and *please them well in all Things*; yet is the Measure of Obedience due from Servants to Masters any otherwise to be learnt, than from the Agreement of the Parties, or the Custom of the Country? 'Tis said, *We are to render to Cæsar, the Things that are Cæsar's*; but must we not learn from the Laws in every Nation, who is *Cæsar*? And what is his Due? Otherwise we shou'd act like those wicked Priests, who, not long since, from general Words of *Obedience*, wou'd have destroy'd our happy Constitution, and treacherously invested the Prince with an Absolute Power. We are to *render all Men their Dues*; but what those Dues are, we are to learn from the Reason of Things, and the Laws of the Country.

IN a word, 'tis the Tendency of Actions, which makes them either good or bad; they that tend to promote human Happiness are always good; and those that have a contrary Tendency, are always bad. And 'tis the Circumstances Men are under, by which we are to judge of the Tendency of Actions. As for Instance, the killing a Man, consider'd without its Circumstances, is an Action, neither good or bad; but by the Magistrate, when the publick Good requires; or by a private Man, when necessary for Self-defence, is an Action always good: But done when the publick Good does not require it, when there is no such Danger, and with Malice propense; 'tis always evil. Taking up Arms against a Person entrusted with the Protection of the Common-wealth, can't be determin'd to be good, or bad, without considering Circumstances: If he has not abus'd his Trust, it will be Rebellion, the highest of Crimes; but if he has betray'd

betray'd that Trust, and oppress'd the Community, then a just and necessary Defence. Injoying a Woman, or lusting after her, can't be said, without considering the Circumstances, to be either good, or evil; that warm Desire, which is implanted in Humane Nature, can't be criminal when persu'd after such a manner, as tends most to promote the Happiness of the Parties; and to propagate and preserve the Species. What we call *Incest*, is now for many good Reasons not to be allowed of; yet it was a Duty in the Children of *Adam* and *Eve*: And if the nearest of Kin were now thrown on a desert Island, I see no Reason, but that they might act as the first-born Pair did.

THO' there were ever so many Texts in the New as well as Old Testament against Usury, and those too back'd by the unanimous Authority of all the Fathers; yet the forbidding it, especially in trading Nations, wou'd now be immoral; since without it Industry wou'd in a great measure be discourag'd, Arts unimprov'd, and Trade and Commerce, consisting chiefly in Credit, destroy'd. Besides, what Reason can be assign'd, why a Man shou'd any more lend his Money, than let his Lands for nothing? And when that common Rule of doing as we would be done unto, supposes an Action fit to be done; or at least, without any ill Tendency. Nay, to go a little farther; was not the Command of *abstaining from Blood*, given after the Deluge to the then whole Race of Mankind, and often repeated in the Law? And in the New Testament, is not this same Precept enjoyn'd the *Gentile* Converts, by the unanimous Decree of the Apostles, and by the Holy Ghost too, as necessary? nay, equally so with the abstaining from Fornication; and thought by all Christians, for many Ages, to be of perpetual Obligation? Yet who is now so ridiculous, as out of Religion to abstain from Black-Puddings? Who now, to give another Instance, thinks it a Duty to wash his Neighbour's Feet?

Feet? tho' a Thing not only commanded by a dying Saviour, after the most solemn Manner, and under no less Penalty than *having no Part in him*; but enforc'd, and inculcated by his own Example.

Mat. 5. 34.  
James 5. 12.

Our Saviour commands Men *not to swear at all*; and St. James impresses the same Precepts, by saying, *Above all Things swear not*; and by the Manner of its being introduc'd by our Saviour, it seems chiefly to relate to Oaths taken on solemn Occasions: *It is said of Old, thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine Oaths; But I say unto you, swear not at all.*——— And yet, who now, besides *Quakers*, refuse to swear at all? By these, you see, tho' several other Instances might be produc'd, how Christians have, in the main, taken the Tendency of Actions to be the Rule, to judge of their Lawfulness or Unlawfulness, Goodness or Badness: And in those few things Superstition has made them judge otherwise, has it not always been to their Prejudice?

Mat. 5. 33,  
34.

*B.* Is there no Exception to this Rule? Must Men, at all Times, make their Words and Thoughts agree; and never speak, but just as they think?

*A.* THE Rule I have laid down holds even here; for tho' Speech was given to Men to communicate their Thoughts, and 'tis generally for their common Good, that Men shou'd speak as they think, yet this common Good prescribes certain Restrictions: Deceiving an Enemy in a just War, either by Words or Actions, if it tends to bring about the End of War, Peace; is certainly a Duty: And the same Reason obliges People not to keep those Promises, tho' sworn to, which they have been forc'd to make to Robbers and Thieves. And some go so far, as to think, that those who wou'd force others to declare their Opinions to their own prejudice, in such Matters where the Government has no Concern; have no more Right to Truth than Robbers, and other publick Enemies.

FRIENDSHIP will sometimes oblige Men to deceive People, when it manifestly tends to their Good, and none are prejudic'd by it; and all practise it with relation to Children, sick People, and Men in Passion: Must not he be an ill Man, indeed, who would not save an innocent Person, by telling his Persuer a Falshood? This is a Duty he owes to both, the Persuer and Persu'd. And if Men, (as none scruple it) may bid their Servants say, *They are not at home*; and do several other Things of this nature: Why may they not, when Silence will be interpreted to their Prejudice, deceive impertinent People, in such Matters where they have no Concern? Thus, you see, there are certain Exceptions to this Rule, which, as well as the Rule itself, are built on the Good of Mankind; and yet these Exceptions will by no means justify mental Reservations, or Equivocations.

THE Children of *Israel*, in the time of the *Judges*, were certainly none of the best *Casuists*; who, when in a Quarrel (the oddest that ever was) having sworn before the Lord at *Mispath*, not to give Judges 21. 1. any of their Daughters to Wife to Benjamin; and, in pursuance of this Quarrel, destroy'd them with their Wives and Children, except 600, who escap'd by flying into a Cave; and then reflecting that a whole Tribe would be lost, if they did not give them Wives; and their Oaths, accompany'd with a Curse, violated, if they did; found out these two Expedients: The Men of *Jabels Gilead*, not concerning themselves in this Quarrel, nor coming to Ib. ver. 8. the general Assembly, they destroy'd with their Wives and Children, except 400 Virgins; whom they Ib. ver. 12. gave for Wives to these *Benjamites*: But these not being a sufficient Number, they advis'd, nay, com- Ib. ver. 20, manded them to seize on some of their Daughters as 31. they were dancing, and to carry them off. Thus these merciful and religious People preserv'd their Oaths, and their Brother *Benjamin*.

B. THE Hebrew Midwives, no doubt, acted according to your Rule in deceiving *Pharaob*, by not destroying the Hebrew Male Children; because they said, *They feared God, and God dealt well with them, and made them Houses*; but there's another Precedent in the same History, which seems very surprizing: The Lord, tho' he told *Moses*, and the Elders of *Israel*, his real Design of *bringing his People out of Egypt into the Land of the Canaanites*; yet bids them say to the King of *Egypt*, *Let us go three Days Journey into the Wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God; lest he fall upon us with Pestilence, or with the Sword: We can't sacrifice in the Land, for we shall sacrifice the Abomination of the Egyptians: Our Cattle must go with us, for thereof we must serve the Lord.* And at last, when *Pharaob*, whose Heart God had frequently harden'd, comply'd with their Request, he bids them go *serve the Lord as ye have said*; and upon this Occasion, they borrow'd of the *Egyptians*, as the Lord order'd them, *Jewels of Gold and Silver, and Raiment, even to the spoiling of them*; and when *Pharaob* (who all along seem'd jealous of their Design, and bids them *not go far away*;) found that this solemn Sacrifice was a meer Pretence; and that they really fled with all they had borrow'd of his People, he persu'd the Fugitives; the Consequence was, that the *Egyptians*, instead of obtaining Restitution, were miraculously destroy'd, and *Pharaob* lost his Life as well as his Subjects; and those who had dealt thus treacherously with them, were as miraculously preserv'd.

A. As to this Point, I can only advise you to consult our learned Commentators, who will satisfy you in this Matter, as well as why the *Terror of the Lord* hinder'd Justice to be done upon the two Sons of *Jacob*, for the vilest Piece of Cruelty and Treachery they committed on the *Skechemites*. But not to meddle with things foreign to our purpose,



I will venture to say, that this Rule of acting according as the Circumstances we are under, point out to us to be for the general Good, is a Rule without Exception; whereas all other general Rules are of little use, when apply'd to particular Cases; because of the many Exceptions to them, founded on other Rules, equally general: And further, that this universal, and unexceptionable Rule is highly necessary, in explaining all the Precepts of our Saviour; especially those relating to *loving of Enemies*, and *forgiving Injuries*. And the rather, because

THE Ecclesiasticks, tho' they cry up the Precepts of Mens *loving their own Enemies*; yet they effectually evade this, and all other moral Precepts, by telling them 'tis their Duty to *hate God's Enemies*; and those to be sure are God's Enemies, who refuse blindly to submit to their Dictates; especially in Matters relating to their Power and Profit: And have too found out many Ways of making the Precept of forgiving Injuries uselefs; more particularly by telling Men, that 'tis for the Correction of Manners, for the Good of their own, as well as their Neighbours Souls, that the *Spiritual Courts* are erected; where People, for such haughty and angry Words, as no Action (there being no real Damage) will lie for at *Common Law*, are to be censur'd. And thus Numbers of ordinary People are, on this pretence, to the great Benefit of those Courts, frequently undone; and spiteful Persons gratify their Malice, without any Satisfaction, but that of ruining their Neighbours, and very often themselves.

I might shew you, in support of my never-failing Rule of judging of Actions by their Tendency, that we are carefully to distinguish between the Actions of Jesus himself; since in some (these being no otherwise to be accounted for) he, as Divines themselves own, acted by virtue of his Prophetical Office; these, consequently, can be no Precedent for us: But of this hereafter.

B. YOU have already, I must own, taken a great deal of pains, to shew, that God, in creating Mankind, had no other Design than their Happiness; and that all the Rules he gave them (it being repugnant to his Nature to have any arbitrary Commands) cou'd have no other Tendency; and that by making them moral Agents, he made them capable of knowing wherein their Happiness consists; or in other Words, of discovering whatever the Relations they stand in to God, and their Fellow-Creatures, make fit to be observ'd. And from thence you conclude, Mens Happiness, at one time as well as another, consisting in the same things; that the Gospel (which can make no Alteration in the Relations Men stand in to God, and one another, or the Duties that flow from thence,) cou'd only be a Republication, or Restoration of that Religion, which is founded on the eternal Reason of Things: Which, you suppose, is what we are still govern'd by; since we are oblig'd to recede from *the Letter*, tho' the Words are ever so plain, if that recedes from the Reason of Things; as all own the *Letter* does, in innumerable Places relating to God himself; by imputing human Parts, human Infirmities, and human Passions, even of the worst kind, to him; and making those the Cause of many of his Actions: And that as in the Old Testament there are several things, either commanded, or approved, which wou'd be criminal in us to observe, because we can't reconcile our doing them with the Reason of things; so in the New Testament, its Precepts are for the most part deliver'd either so hyperbolically, that they would lead Men astray, were they govern'd by the usual Meaning of Words, or else express'd in so loose, general, and undetermin'd a manner, that Men are as much left to be govern'd by the Reason of things, as if there were no such Precepts: And the Scripture not distinguishing between those Precepts which are occasional, and which are not, we have no ways

to distinguish them, but from the Nature of Things; which will point out to us those Rules, which eternally oblige, whether deliver'd in Scripture, or not. These Sentiments you so strongly inforcé, that I should find it difficult not to yield, had I not so able a Combatant as Dr. S. Clark, for my Second; who, in his Excellent *Discourse of the unalterable Obligation of natural Religion, and the Truth, and Certainty of the Christian Revelation*; not only shews, that they are distinct Religions; but the infinite Advantage the latter has above the former: And tho' this Good, as well as Great Man is dead, whereby the Church has sustain'd an irreparable Loss, yet he will for ever live in this immortal Work.

## C H A P. XIV.

*Dr. CLARK's Discourse of The Unchangeable Obligation of Natural Religion, and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation, consider'd; and from thence 'tis shewn, how inconsistent soever with the Design of that Discourse, that nothing can be a Part of Religion, but what is founded on the Nature, and Reason of Things.*

A. I Own, the Doctor got immortal Honour by that Discourse; how 'tis admir'd, the seventh Edition shews: And we may well imagine, an Author, who usually exhausts the Subject he writes on, has here omitted nothing that makes for his purpose. And, therefore, since 'tis your Pleasure, I will fully consider this Discourse, and begin with the Character he gives the *Law of Nature*; and see whether he does not represent it so absolutely perfect, as to take in every thing that God requires of Mankind: And then examine what he says in  
behalf

behalf of Revelation, in contradiction to the Religion of Nature.

Edit. 4. p. 82. THE Doctor not only maintains, that “ the Law  
 “ of Nature is eternal, universal, and absolutely  
 “ unchangeable;” but has two Sections to prove,  
 pag. 47. “ That the *Will of God* always determines itself to  
 “ act according to the eternal *Reason of Things* ;  
 pag. 48. “ and that all *rational Creatures* are oblig’d to go-  
 “ vern themselves in all their Actions by the same  
 “ eternal *Rule of Reason* :” Which supposes, that  
 all rational Creatures are not only capable of know-  
 ing this eternal Rule of Reason, but likewise of  
 knowing there can be no other Rule, for the Acti-  
 ons both of God and Man. In his previous Dis-  
 course of the *Being of a God*, he affirms, that  
 pag. 131. “ They, who are not govern’d by this Law, are  
 “ for setting up their own unreasonable Self-will,  
 “ in opposition to the Nature, and Reason of  
 “ Things——acting contrary to their own Rea-  
 “ son and Knowledge ; attempting to destroy that  
 “ Order, by which the Universe subsists ; and by  
 “ consequence, offering the highest affront imagi-  
 “ nable to the Creator of all Things, who himself  
 “ governs all his Actions by these Rules, and can-  
 “ not but require the same of all his reasonable  
 “ Creatures.” And in this Discourse he says,  
 pag. 149. “ The All-powerful Creator and Governor of  
 “ the Universe, who has the absolute, and uncon-  
 “ troulable Dominion of all things in his own  
 “ hands, and is accountable to none for what he  
 “ does, yet thinks it no Diminution of his Power,  
 “ to make this *Reason of Things* the unalterable Rule,  
 “ and Law of all his own Actions in the Govern-  
 “ ment of the World, and does nothing by mere  
 “ Will and Arbitrariness,” And indeed, if God  
 does nothing by mere Will and Arbitrariness, ’tis  
 impossible there can be any other Rule but the Rea-  
 son of Things. And accordingly he says, “ The  
 “ eternal and unchangeable Nature and Reason of  
 “ the things themselves are the Law of God ; not  
 “ only

“ only to his Creatures, but also to himself; as be-  
 “ ing the Rule of his own Actions in the Govern-  
 “ ment of the World.” And, as a learned Pre- pag. 87, 88.  
 late of our own has excellently shewn, “ not  
 “ barely his infinite Power, but the Rules of this  
 “ eternal Law, are the true Foundation, and the  
 “ Measure of his Dominion over his Creatures.  
 “ Now, for the same Reason, that *God*, who hath  
 “ no *Superior* to determine him, yet constantly di-  
 “ rects all his own Actions by the eternal Rule of  
 “ Justice and Goodness; ’tis evident all *intelligent*  
 “ *Creatures* in their several Spheres and Proportions,  
 “ *ought* to obey the same Rule according to the  
 “ Law of their Nature.” Which is supposing it  
 wou’d be Tyranny in God to have any arbitrary  
 Commands, or give Man any other Rules, but the  
 Rules of this eternal Law; the *true Foundation, and*  
*Measure of his Dominion over his Creatures.* And  
 again, “ God who is infinitely self-sufficient to his pag. 121.  
 “ own Happiness, cou’d have no Motive to create  
 “ Things at all, but only that he might communi-  
 “ cate to them his Goodness and Happiness.” If  
 so, They, who do all the Good they can to them-  
 selves, and Fellow-Creatures, answer the End of  
 their Creation. “ And *he says*, that in Matters pag. 86, 87.  
 “ of Natural Reason and Morality, that which is  
 “ holy and good is not therefore holy and good,  
 “ because it is commanded to be done; but it is  
 “ therefore commanded by God, because it is holy  
 “ and good;” Which supposes that all God’s Com-  
 mands, if they are all holy and good, (between which,  
 I think, the Distinction is only verbal;) are found-  
 ed on the Nature, and Reason of Things. And ac-  
 cordingly he says, “ that God has made (his intel- pag. 43.  
 “ ligent Creatures) so far like himself, as to en-  
 “ due them with those excellent Faculties of Rea-  
 “ son and Will, whereby they are enabled to distin-  
 “ guish Good from Evil, and to choose the one, and  
 “ refuse the other.” Which supposes those are  
 the only Things which God commands, or forbids;

bids; otherwise these excellent Faculties wou'd only enable them to know but Part of the Will of God; tho' God can will nothing but what is for their Good, that being the sole End of his creating them.

AND he supposes, That " this Law of Nature  
 " is not founded in the positive Will of God, but  
 " arises from the different Relations and Respects  
 " which Things have to one another, which makes  
 " some Things fit, and others unfit to be done:"

pag. 89. And says, that " the Law of Nature has its full  
 " obligatory Power, antecedent to all Considerati-  
 " ons of any particular *private* and *personal Reward*  
 " or *Punishment*, annex'd either by natural Conse-  
 " quence, or by positive Appointment, to the Ob-  
 " servance, or Neglect of it. This also is very  
 " evident: Because if Good and Evil, Right or  
 " Wrong, Fitness or Unfitness of being practis'd,  
 " be (as has been shewn) originally, eternally, and  
 " necessarily, in the Nature of the Things themselves;  
 " 'tis plain, that the View of *particular Rewards* or  
 " *Punishments*, which is only an After-Considera-  
 " tion, and does not at all alter the Nature of  
 " Things, cannot be the original Cause of the Ob-  
 " ligation of the Law, but is only an additional  
 " Weight to enforce the Practice of what Men  
 " were before oblig'd to by right Reason." And to  
 " prove this he says, that " the Judgment and Con-  
 " science of a Man's own Mind, concerning the  
 " Reasonableness, and Fitness of the Thing, that  
 " his Actions should be conform'd to such, or such  
 " a Rule, or Law; is the truest, or formallest *Ob-*  
 " *ligation*, even more properly, and strictly so, than  
 " any Opinion whatsoever of the Authority of  
 " the Giver of a Law, or any Regard he may have  
 " to its Sanctions by Rewards and Punishments.  
 " For whoever acts contrary to this Sense, and  
 " Conscience of his own Mind, is necessarily self-  
 " condemned and the greatest, and strongest of  
 " all the Obligations is That, which a Man cannot  
 " break

pag. 53.

“ break through without condemning himself.”

And,

HE likewise affirms, that “ these eternal moral pag. 114.

“ Obligations, as they are really in perpetual Force,

“ merely from their own Nature, and the abstract

“ Reason of Things ; so also they are moreover the

“ exprefs and unalterable Will, and Command of

“ God to his Creatures, which he cannot but ex-

“ pect should, in Obedience to his supreme Autho-

“ rity, as well as in Compliance with the natural

“ Reason of Things, be regularly, and constantly

“ observ'd thro' the whole Creation.” Which not

only supposes, that the Reason of Things, and the

divine Commands are inseparable ; but that 'tis the

Reason, or the Fitness of the Thing, that makes it a

divine Law ; and consequently, that they who never

heard of any external Revelation ; yet if they knew,

from the Nature of Things, what's fit for them to

do, they know all that God will, or can require of

them ; since his Commands are to be measur'd by

the antecedent Fitness of things ; and Things can

only be said to be fit, or unfit, but as they are for,

or against the common Good. And if the Creator

will do every thing, the Relation he stands in to

his Creatures makes fit for him to do ; and ex-

pects nothing from them, but what the Relation

they stand in to him, and one another, makes like-

wise fit for them to do ; how can they be ignorant

of their Duty ? Especially, if, as the Doctor demon-

strates, “ All the same Reasons and Arguments, pag. 118.

“ which discover to Men the natural Fitnesses, or

“ Unfitnesses of Things, and the necessary Perfec-

“ tions, or Attributes of God ; prove equally at

“ the same time, that That, which is truly the

“ Law of Nature, or the Reason of Things, is in

“ like Manner the Will of God.” And,

HE justly observes, that tho' “ This Method of pag 119.

“ deducing the Will of God from his Attributes,

“ is of all other the best and clearest, the certainest

“ and most universal, that the Light of Nature af-

“ fords ; yet there are other collateral Considerations, which prove, and confirm the same.” And that,

pag. 121.

“ THE same may be prov'd from the Tendency, and Practice of Morality, to the Good and Happiness of the whole World :” Which, indeed, wou'd be no proof, were any thing commanded that had no Tendency ; for such things, according to the Penalties they were to be enforc'd by, would be more or less to the hurt of Mankind.

pag. 34.

To shew the natural Connection there is between all the Parts of Religion, he says, “ Who believes the Being, and natural Attributes of God, must of necessity confess his moral Attributes also. Next, he who owns, and has just Notions of the moral Attributes of God, cannot avoid acknowledging the Obligations of Morality, and Natural Religion. In like manner, he who owns the Obligations of Morality and Natural Religion, must needs, to support those Obligations, and make them effectual in Practice, believe a future State of Rewards and Punishments.” And he affirms,

pag 8.

that “ the Certainty of a future State of Rewards and Punishments, is in general deducible, even demonstrably, by a Chain of clear, and undeniable Reasoning :” nay, he says, “ 'tis a Propo-

pag. 125.

sition in a manner self-evident.” And speaking of some Argument he had before mention'd, he says, “ These are very good, and strong Arguments

pag. 154.

“ for the great Probability of a future State ; but That drawn from the Consideration of the moral Attributes of God, seems to amount even to a

pag 140, 141.

“ Demonstration: Nay, to a complet Demonstration.”

In short, the Doctor's *Hypothesis*, That upon God's framing Mankind after the Manner he has done, there are certain Things resulting from thence, which naturally, and necessarily conduce to their Good or Hurt ; and that the way to know the Will of God, is to know what those Things are,



in order to do the one, and to avoid the other. For which reason God gave Man Understanding, which (without blaspheming the infinite Wisdom and Goodness of God) must be allowed to be sufficient to answer the End for which it was given. And that a Being infinitely wise and good, as well as wholly disinterested, can require nothing of Men, but what they, for the sake of their own Interest, tho' there were no positive divine Commands, were oblig'd to do; and consequently, that whoever acts for his own Good, in Subserviency to that of the Publick, answers the End of his Creation. As this Scheme of Things, to do the Doctor justice, gives us the highest Idea of the Goodness, Wisdom, and Perfection of the divine Being; so to compleat his moral Character, the Doctor represents the Laws of God, by which Mankind are to govern all their Actions, most plain and obvious, and even impress'd on human Nature. And therefore says, that

“ ALL rational Creatures are oblig'd to govern pag. 48.  
 “ themselves, in all their Actions, by the eternal  
 “ Reason of Things, is evident from the Sense, all, *Contents* p. 52.  
 “ even wicked Men, unavoidably have of their be-  
 “ ing under such an Obligation; and from the  
 “ Judgment of Mens Consciences on their own  
 “ Actions.” And that “ the most profligate of all *Ib.* p. 54.  
 “ Mankind, however industriously they endeavour  
 “ to conceal, and deny their Self-condemnation, yet pag. 57.  
 “ cannot avoid making a Discovery of it sometimes  
 “ when they are not aware of it.” And that no  
 “ Man, but “ by the Reason of his Mind, cannot pag. 53.  
 “ but be compell'd to own, and acknowledge, that  
 “ there is really such an Obligation indispensably  
 “ incumbent upon him.” And “ They who *do* pag. 60.  
 “ Evil, yet see, and approve what is good, and con-  
 “ demn in others what they blindly allow in them-  
 “ selves; nay, very frequently condemn even them-  
 “ selves also, not without great Disorder, and Un-  
 “ easiness of Mind in those very Things wherein  
 “ they allow themselves.” And herein, give me

leave to say, consists the Excellency of the Law of Nature, that tho' a Man is so brutish as not to observe it himself, yet he would have all others religiously observe it; and no Rule can be calculated for the general Good, but what is so fram'd: And if Men wou'd make this a Test of the Will of God, how happy wou'd they be?

p. 53.

THE Doctor more fully to prove his Point, says, That "the Mind of Man naturally, and necessarily  
" assents to the eternal Law of Righteousness, may  
" still better, and more clearly, and more univer-  
" sally appear, from the Judgment that Men pass  
" on each *other's* Actions, than what we can discern  
" concerning their Conscience of their own."

p. 61.

And there he shews, That "the unprejudic'd Mind  
" of Man as naturally disapproves Injustice in  
" moral Matters, as in natural Things it cannot but  
" dissent from Falshood, or dislike Incongruities."  
And again,

p. 54.

"THE Case is truly thus, that the eternal Dif-  
" ferences of Good and Evil, the unalterable Rule  
" of Right and Equity, do necessarily, and un-  
" avoidably determine the Judgment, and force the  
" Assent of all that use any Consideration, is unde-  
" niably manifest from the universal Experience of

pag. 55.

"Mankind. For no Man *willingly*, and *deliberately*  
" transgresses this Rule in any *great*, and *consider-*  
" *able* Instance; but he acts contrary to the Judg-  
" ment, and Reason of his own Mind, and secretly  
" reproaches himself for so doing: And no Man  
" observes, and obeys it steadily, especially in  
" Cases of *Difficulty* and *Temptation*, when it in-  
" terferes with any present Interest, Pleasure, or  
" Passion; but his own Mind commends, and ap-  
" plauds him for his Resolution, in executing what  
" his Conscience cou'd not forbear giving its Assent  
" to, as just, and right. And this is what *St. Paul*  
" means, when he says, (*Rom. 2. 14, 15.*) that  
" *When the Gentiles, which have not the Law, do by*  
" *Nature the Things contain'd in the Law.*" And in  
another

another Place he says, “ No Man does good, pag. 52.  
 “ brave, and generous Actions, but the Reason of  
 “ his own Mind applauds him for his so doing;  
 “ and no Man, at any Time, does Things base,  
 “ vile, dishonourable, and wicked; but at the  
 “ same Time he condemns himself.” And he says,  
 “ that the eternal Rule of Right ought as indis- pag. 54.  
 “ pensably to govern Mens Actions, as it cannot  
 “ but necessarily determine their Assent.”

ONE would be apt to think, that the Doctor believ'd that Man without Reflection, cou'd not but know the Law of Nature, and be in love with it; since he says, “ That in reading Histories of far, pag. 61  
 “ and distant Countries, where 'tis manifest we can  
 “ have no Concern for the Event of Things, nor  
 “ Prejudices concerning the Characters of Persons;  
 “ who is there that does not praise and admire;  
 “ nay, highly esteem, and in his Imagination love,  
 “ as it were, the Equity, Truth, Justice, and Fi-  
 “ delity of some Persons; and with the greatest  
 “ Indignation and Hatred, detest the Barbarity,  
 “ and Injustice of Others? Nay further, when the  
 “ Prejudices of corrupt Minds lie all on the side of  
 “ Injustice, as when we have obtain'd some very  
 “ great Profit or Advantage, thro' another Man's  
 “ Treachery, or Breach of Faith; yet who is there,  
 “ that upon that very Occasion does not (even to  
 “ a Proverb) dislike the *Persons*, and the *Action*,  
 “ how much soever he may rejoice at the Event?”

THESE Reasons shew the infinite Goodness of God, by not only thus deeply impressing that Law on human Nature, by which God expects all Men should govern all their Actions; but in making the very observing this Law, to carry with it, distinct from the Good it produces, the highest Satisfaction, and rational Enjoyment; and the contrary, that Sorrow, Remorse, and Self-condemnation, which are the unavoidable Consequence of acting against it: And of this the Philosophers of Old, and I believe, all since, who do not adulterate Religion with

p. 38.

things that are not moral ; and consequently, carry no Satisfaction with them, must be sensible : But as it would be endless, to mention all the Doctor says of the irresistible Evidence, as well as the absolute Perfection of the eternal, and immutable Law of Nature ; I shall recite but one Passage more, which he supports by the Authority of Bishop *Cumberland*. “ This, says he, is that Law of Nature, to which the Reason of all Men, every where, as naturally, and necessarily assents, as all Animals conspire in the Pulse, and Motion of their Heart and Arteries ; or as all Men agree in their Judgment concerning the Whiteness of Snow, or the Brightness of the Sun.”

*B.* THIS, indeed, is so full and home, that no ancient or modern Deist cou'd have said more in praise of the unlimited Wisdom, and universal Goodness of God ; than in supposing the common Parent of Mankind, has given all his Children, even those of the lowest Capacities, and at all Times, sufficient Means, of discovering whatever makes for their present, and future Happiness ; and that no Man can plead Ignorance of a Law as evident as that the Sun is bright, or Snow white ; and as inseparable from rational Nature, as the Pulse of the Heart and Arteries are from animal Nature.

*A.* IF this be talking like a Deist, all who write on this Subject talk thus, since they all maintain, that “ there must be a Law of eternal Rectitude flowing from the Nature of Things, otherwise there could be no Actions good, or lovely in themselves ; no real Distinction between Virtue and Vice ; Good or Evil ; and that God can't dispense with his Creatures, or with himself, for not observing it ; otherwise an arbitrary Will, which might change every Moment, would govern every thing ;” and that “ this Law of eternal Rectitude is implanted in Man at his very Creation ; and that no Man can act contrary

“ trary to it, but does Violence to himself, and  
 “ sins against his very Make, and Constitution.”  
 And can it be otherwise, when the only innate  
 Principle in Man is the Desire of his own Happi-  
 ness; and the Goodness of God requires no more  
 than a right cultivating this Principle; in prefer-  
 ring a general, or publick; to a particular, or  
 private Good? And where there are two Evils,  
 and both can't be avoided, to choose the less *sub*  
*ratione boni.*

THE latter part of the Doctor's Discourse is  
 chiefly levell'd against those he calls the *True Deists*;  
 and that you may know what sort of Men they are  
 he combats, he gives you their Creed.

“ THESE Deists, *says he*, did they believe what p. 27.  
 “ they pretend, have just, and right Notions of  
 “ God, and of all the divine Attributes in every  
 “ Respect; who declare they believe there is one  
 “ Eternal, Infinite, Intelligent, All-powerful, and  
 “ Wise Being; the Creator, Preserver, and Gover-  
 “ nor of all things; *that* this supreme Cause is a  
 “ Being of infinite Justice, Goodness and Truth,  
 “ and all other moral as well as natural Perfec-  
 “ tions; *that* he made the World for the Manifesta-  
 “ tion of his Power and Wisdom, and to commu-  
 “ nicate his Goodness and Happiness to his Crea-  
 “ tures; *that* he preserves it by his continual all-  
 “ wise Providence, and governs it according to the  
 “ eternal Rules of infinite Justice, Equity, Good-  
 “ ness, Mercy and Truth; *that* all created, ratio-  
 “ nal Beings, depending continually upon Him, are  
 “ bound to adore, worship, and obey Him; to  
 “ praise Him for all things they enjoy, and to  
 “ pray to Him for every thing they want; *that*  
 “ they are all oblig'd to promote in their pro-  
 “ portion, and according to the Extent of their se-  
 “ veral Powers and Abilities, the general Good  
 “ and Welfare of those Parts of the World where-  
 “ in they are plac'd: In like Manner, as the di-  
 “ vine Goodness is continually promoting the uni-  
 “ versal

“ verſal Benefit of the Whole ; *that* Men, in parti-  
 “ cular, are every where oblig’d to make it their  
 “ Buſineſs, by an univerſal Benevolence, to promote  
 “ the Happineſs of all others ; *that* in order to this,  
 “ every Man is bound always to behave himſelf ſo  
 “ towards others, as in Reaſon he would deſire  
 “ they ſhould in the like Circumſtances deal with  
 “ him ; wherefore he is oblig’d to obey, and  
 “ ſubmit to his Superiors in all juſt, and right  
 “ things, for the Preſervation of Society, and the  
 “ Peace and Benefit of the Publick ; to be juſt and  
 “ honeſt, equitable and ſincere in all his Dealings  
 “ with his Equals, for the keeping inviolable the  
 “ everlaſting Rule of Righteouſneſs, and main-  
 “ taining an univerſal Truſt and Confidence,  
 “ Friendſhip and Affection amongſt Men ; and to-  
 “ wards his Inferiors to be gentle and kind, eaſy  
 “ and affable, charitable and willing to aſſiſt as  
 “ many as ſtand in need of his Help, for the Pre-  
 “ ſervation of univerſal Love and Benevolence  
 “ amongſt Mankind, and in imitation of the Good-  
 “ neſs of God, who preſerves, and does Good to  
 “ all his Creatures, which depend entirely upon him  
 “ for their very Being, and all that they enjoy ;  
 “ *that* in reſpect of himſelf, every Man is bound  
 “ to preſerve, as much as in him lies, his own  
 “ Being, and the right uſe of all his Faculties, ſo  
 “ long as it ſhall pleaſe God, who appointed him  
 “ his Station in this World, to continue him there-  
 “ in ; *that* therefore, he is bound to have an exact  
 “ Government of his Paſſions, and carefully to  
 “ abſtain from all Debaucheries and Abuſes of  
 “ himſelf, which tend either to the Deſtruction of  
 “ his own Being, or to the Diſorders of his Facul-  
 “ ties, and diſabling him from performing his  
 “ Duty, or hurrying him into the Practice of un-  
 “ reaſonable and unjuſt Things : Laſtly, *that* ac-  
 “ cording as Men regard, or neglect theſe Obliga-  
 “ tions, ſo they are proportionably acceptable, or  
 “ diſpleaſing unto God ; who being ſupreme Go-  
 “ vernor

“ verner of the World, cannot but testify his Fa-  
 “ vor or Displeasure, at some Times, or other ;  
 “ and consequently, since this is not done in the  
 “ present State, therefore there must be a future  
 “ State of Rewards and Punishments in a Life to  
 “ come.”

THE Deists, no doubt, will own, that the Doc-  
 tor has done them Justice ; since all their Principles,  
 as he represents them, have a direct Tendency to  
 make them good Men ; and contain nothing to  
 divert them from intirely attending to all the  
 Duties of Morality, in which the whole of their  
 Religion consists ; and which leaves them no room  
 for those endless Quarrels and fatal Divisions,  
 which Zeal for other Things has occasion'd among  
 their Fellow-Creatures ; and whom they pity upon  
 the account of that insupportable Bondage, which  
 Superstition has, in most Places, laid them under :  
 And must not a Religion, which the Doctor has  
 prov'd to be demonstrably founded on the eternal  
 Reason of Things, have a more powerful Influence  
 on rational Beings, than if it was laid on any other  
 Bottom ? How can a Religion, which, as the Doc-  
 tor describes it, carries in all its Parts, such evi-  
 dent Marks of Wisdom and Goodness, fail to  
 make Men in love with their Duty ; when they  
 must plainly see, That, and their Interest to be in-  
 separable ? If Princes requir'd no more of their  
 Subjects, and private Men of their Neighbours,  
 than to be govern'd by these Principles ; how hap-  
 py wou'd the World be, thus govern'd ?

I do not perceive the Doctor himself finds any  
 Defect in their Principles ; but only objects to  
 their Manner of taking them as they are discover-  
 able by the Light of Nature, and the Reason of p. 29.  
 Things.

B. Is not that a very just Objection ?

A. NOT from one who supposes, that “ the  
 “ eternal Reason of things ought to be the Rule  
 “ by which all Men should govern all their Ac-  
 “ tions ;”

P. 54.

“ tions ;” and who, among other things of the like nature, affirms, that “ the original Obligation of all is the eternal Reason of Things ; that Reason, which God himself, who has no Superior to direct him, or to whose Happiness nothing can be added, or any thing diminish’d from it, yet constantly obliges himself to govern the World by : And the more excellent and perfect his Creatures are, the more chearfully, and steddily are their Wills determin’d by this *supreme Obligation*, in Conformity to the Nature, and in Imitation of the most perfect Will of God.”

B. WHY do you think This favours *Deism* ?

A. BECAUSE, if the eternal Reason of Things is the *supreme Obligation*, must not That, if there’s any difference between It and External Revelation, take place ? And must not that Rule, which can annul any other, be not only the supreme, but the sole Rule ? For as far as Men take any other Rule, so far they lose of their Perfection, by ceasing to be govern’d by this Rule, in Conformity to the Nature, and in Imitation of the perfect Will of God. And if this most perfect Will of God is to be thus known, can things that have another Original, and are of a later Date, be any Part of the most perfect Will of God ? Or, can the eternal Reason of things extend to things that do not belong to Reason ; or, as Divines love to speak, are above Reason ? Or, can the Doctor suppose, there’s any other Rule, than the Nature, or Reason of Things, when he makes no Medium between Mens being govern’d by it, and by their own unreasonable Will ?

*Demonstration of the Being and Attrib. of God,* p. 131.

IN short, ’tis the View with which an Action is done, that makes it moral : He, who pays his Debts out of a Principle of Honesty, does a moral Action ; while he that does the same for fear of the Law, can’t be said to act morally : And can he, who does a thing to avoid being punish’d, or  
in



in hopes of being rewarded hereafter; and for the same Reason is ready to do the contrary; merit, at least, equally with him, who is in love with his Duty, and is govern'd, not by fervile Motives, but by the original Obligation of the moral Fitness of things; in Conformity to the Nature, and in Imitation of the perfect Will of God. This the Doctor will not deny to be true Deism; and that they who do not act thus, deserve not the Title of *True Deists*.

THE DOCTOR, after he has himself given us a consistent Scheme of *Deism*, says, “ There is *now* PAG. 33.  
 “ no such thing, as a consistent Scheme of *Deism* :  
 “ That which alone was *once* such — — ceases *now*  
 “ to be so, after the Appearance of Revelation.”  
 If Christianity, as well as *Deism*, consists in being govern'd by the original Obligation of the moral Fitness of Things, in Conformity to the Nature, and in Imitation of the perfect Will of God; then they both must be the same: But if Christianity consists in being govern'd by any other Rule, or requires any other Things, has not the Doctor himself given the Advantage to *Deism*?

THESE *True Christian Deists*, as, I think, the Doctor ought to call them, say; that tho' the Doctor's Discourse is chiefly levell'd against them, yet he can't differ with them, without differing from himself; and condemning in one Part of his elaborate Treatise, what he has approv'd in the other.  
 For,

IF Christianity has not, *say they*, destroy'd Mens moral Agency; or forbid them to act as moral Agents; they must now, as well as formerly, judge of the Will of God, by that Reason given them by an All-gracious God, to distinguish between Good and Evil; the only things to which the Precepts of a Being, who, as the Doctor owns, is incapable of acting arbitrarily, can extend; and these *Deists* agree with the Doctor in his two first Propositions, upon which, the whole of his Reasoning

See the Contents of the Doctor's Book.

soning is built: "That from the eternal, and necessary Differences of Things, there naturally arise certain moral Obligations; which are of themselves incumbent on all rational Creatures, antecedent to all positive Institution, and to all Expectation of Reward and Punishment." And, "THAT the same eternal moral Obligations, which arise necessarily from the natural Differences of Things, are moreover the exprefs Will and Command of God to all rational Creatures:"

And accordingly they judge of the positive Will of God, from those eternal moral Obligations, which arise necessarily from the natural Differences of Things; which being incumbent on all rational Creatures, antecedent to all positive Institution, can't but be so knowable by them; and having, agreeable to the Doctor's Direction, thus chosen their Religion, *they say*, 'tis impossible for them (since there can't be two Originals of the same thing) to choose that Religion, from external Revelation, which they have already chosen from internal Revelation: And if external Revelation can't alter the Nature of Things, and make that to be fit, which is in itself unfit; or make that necessary, which is in itself unnecessary; it can only be a Transcript of the Religion of Nature; and so every thing it says, is to be judg'd of by the Reason, and Nature of Things; otherwise, say they, we might be oblig'd to admit things, which, for ought we know, are as necessarily false, as God is true; since "all Doctrines inconsistent with Morality, are, *as the Doctor justly observes*, as certainly, and necessarily false, as God is true."

P. 113.

BESIDES, if these moral Obligations, which of themselves are incumbent on all rational Creatures, and which likewise shew themselves from their internal Excellency, to be the Will of God; are as evident, as the Sun is bright; how can Men, say these *Deists*, believe on lesser Evidence, what they know before to be certain on the greatest? In

this

this Case, must not Faith be swallow'd up by Knowledge; and Probability by Demonstration?

THESE *Deists* intirely agree with the Doctor, when he asserts, that “ Some Doctrines are in P. 113. their own nature *necessarily and demonstrably* true; such as are all those which concern the Obligation of plain *moral Precepts*; and these neither need, nor can receive any stronger Proof from Miracles, than what they have already, (tho’ not, perhaps, so clearly indeed to all Capacities;) from the Evidence of right Reason. Other Doctrines are in their own nature *necessarily false, and impossible to be true*; such as are all *Absurdities and Contradictions*, and all Doctrines that tend to promote Vice; and these can never receive any Degree of Proof from all the Miracles in the World.” But as to what the Doctor adds, “ That other Doctrines are in their P. 114. own Nature *indifferent, or possible, or, perhaps, probable* to be true; and those cou’d not have been known to be positively true, but by the Evidence of Miracles, which prove them to be certain;” Here these *Deists* beg leave to differ with him, as to any Doctrines, in their own nature indifferent, being the Will of God; for that would be to suppose, what the Doctor has prov’d to be impossible, that God acts arbitrarily, and out of meer Wilfulness. And here they wou’d ask him, since, as he owns, “ Evil Spirits can do P. 306. Miracles, and the Nature of the Doctrine to be P. 312. prov’d to be divine, must be taken into Consideration;” how the Miracles can prove a Doctrine, relating to indifferent Things, to be from God? Or, how there can be any such Doctrines in the Christian Religion, if what he says be true; “ That every one of the Doctrines it teaches, as P. 184. Matter of Truth, has a natural Tendency, and a direct powerful Influence to reform Mens Lives, and correct their Manners.” “ This, *adds* *be*, “ is the great End and ultimate Design of all  
 “ true

“ true Religion : And ’tis a great and fatal Mistake  
 “ to think that any Doctrine, or any Belief what-  
 “ ever, can be any otherwise of any benefit to  
 “ Men, than as it is fitted to promote this main  
 “ End.”

THIS supposes Men, by their Reason, are not only able to know, that it is repugnant to the Nature of God, to require any thing of them, except it has a natural Tendency, and a direct powerful Influence to reform their Lives, or correct their Manners ; but likewise to discern what Doctrines have this Tendency : And that, if, upon Examination, they find every Doctrine contain’d in Scripture has this Tendency, they may, then, safely pronounce them all to be divine. This previous Examination, therefore, is highly necessary to prevent what he calls a *fatal Mistake*.

THE Difference between those, who wou’d engross the Name of Christians to themselves, and these *Christian Deists*, as I may justly call them ; is, that the former dare not examine into the Truth of Scripture-Doctrines, lest they shou’d seem to question the Veracity of the Scriptures : Whereas the Latter, who believe not the Doctrines, because contain’d in Scripture ; but the Scripture, on account of the Doctrines ; are under no such Apprehension : For having critically examin’d those Doctrines by that Reason, which God has given them to distinguish Religion from Superstition ; they are sure not to run into any Errors of moment ; notwithstanding the confess’d Obscurity of the Scriptures, and those many Mistakes that have crept into the Text, whether by Accident, or Design.

P. 314.

THE Doctor says, “ The moral Part of our Sa-  
 “ viour’s Doctrine would have appear’d infallibly  
 “ true, whether he had ever work’d Miracles ; or  
 “ no. The rest of his Doctrines was what evi-  
 “ dently tended to promote the Honour of God,  
 “ and the Practice of Righteousness amongst Men.  
 “ Therefore That Part also of his Doctrine was  
 “ possible

“ possible, and very probable to be true ; but yet it  
 “ cou’d not from thence be known to be certainly  
 “ true ; nor ought to have been receiv’d as a Reve-  
 “ lation from God, unless it had been prov’d by  
 “ undeniable Miracles.”

HERE the *Deists* can, by no means, come into the Doctor’s Distinction, between the moral Part of our Saviour’s Doctrine, and that Part which evidently tends to promote the Honour of God, and the Practice of Righteousness ; it being manifestly a Distinction without any Difference : And if the whole of Religion consists in the Honour of God, and the Good of Man, which he is far from denying ; nothing can more effectually strike at the Certainty of all Religion, than the supposing, that Mankind cou’d not be certain, that whatever evidently tended to promote the Honour of God, and the Practice of Righteousness, was the Will of God, ’till they were convinc’d of it by undeniable Miracles.

’TIS possible, *say they*, a Man may doubt, whether there is a God ; but none sure, who believe one, can doubt, but that ’tis demonstrably fit, just, and reasonable for Men, to do every thing, that evidently tends to promote the Honour of God, and the Practice of Righteousness. And, if the  
 “ Mind of Man, *as the Doctor says*, can’t avoid pag. 63.  
 “ giving its Assent to the eternal Law of Righte-  
 “ ousness ;” can the Mind of Man avoid assenting to the Practice of Righteousness as his indispensable Duty ? But if it be but probable, that whatever evidently tends to promote the Honour of God, and the Practice of Righteousness, is from God ; it can’t be more than probable, that Miracles done in their Behalf are from God. Does not the Doctor here destroy the Certainty of these Doctrines, which he had before demonstrated ; and this too only to prove their Probability ?

THESE *Christian Deists* own the Doctor is in the right, for contending, that the necessary Relation that is between Things, makes some Actions moral,

and others immoral; but then they wou'd ask, Whether there be any other Way to distinguish them, but from their Nature and Tendency; for they can't but conclude, that those which evidently tend to promote the Honour of God, and the Practice of Righteousness, are plain moral Duties, and perpetually oblige. And,

pag. 315.

“ IF no Miracle, *as the Doct̄or owns*, can prove a “ Doctrine that's vicious in its Tendency and Con- “ sequences, to be from God;” must not, *say they*, that Doctrine, which has the contrary Tendency and Consequences, be from God; tho' ever so many Miracles are done in Opposition to it? And,

pag. 221.

THEY likewise *say*, As evidently as God is not only a good and perfect, but also the only perfect Being; so evident is it, that every Doctrine, that carries any Degree, much more the highest Degree of Goodness and Perfection in it, has the Character of Divinity impress'd on it; and therefore, can't agree with the Doct̄or, “ That neither can any De- “ gree of Goodness, and Excellency in the Doctrine “ itself, make it certain, but only highly probable “ to come from God.”

IF no Miracles can prove any different Thing to be the Will of God; and all that evidently tends to promote the Honour of God, and the Practice of Righteousness, are plain, moral Duties, as the Doct̄or contends; and all such Duties neither need, nor can receive any stronger Proof from Miracles, than what they have already from the Evidence of Right Reason: how can Miracles, *say these Deists*, have any other Use, than to make Men consider the Nature, and Tendency of a Doctrine; and judge from thence whether it be from God? But,

ALLOWING the Doct̄or what *Hypothesis* he pleases, in relation to Miracles; yet if the Doctrines themselves, from their internal Excellency, do not give us a certain Proof of the Will of God, no traditional Miracles can do it; because one Probability added to another will not amount to Certainty.

B. I thought the Doctor had built his Arguments in favour of Revelation, upon the Obscurity of the Law of Nature; and wou'd not have declar'd, that "the Reason of all Men, every where, as naturally, and necessarily assents to it, as all Animals conspire in the Pulse and Motion of their Heart and Arteries; or as all Men agree in their Judgment concerning the Whiteness of Snow, or the Brightness of the Sun."

A. HAVE patience, and you shall see, that *Snow is no longer white, or the Sun bright*; and in order to it, I'll shew you, that the Doctor's New Scheme consists in supposing, that tho' "in the original uncorrupted State of Human Nature, right Reason may justly be supposed to have been a sufficient Guide; and a Principle powerful enough to have preserv'd Men in the constant Practice of their Duty: yet upon the Fall, Mankind were in a very bad State; as wanting greater Help, and Assistance, than the Light of Nature could afford them. And *That* there was plainly wanting some extraordinary, and super-natural Assistance, that was above the Reach of bare Reason and Philosophy to procure. There was plainly wanting a divine Revelation to recover Mankind out of their universally degenerate State, into a State suitable to the original Dignity of their Nature." And again, "There was plainly wanting a divine Revelation to recover Mankind out of their universal Corruption and Degeneracy." *And in the Margin,* "A divine Revelation absolutely necessary for the Recovery of Mankind." But if a divine Revelation was absolutely necessary to this End, Men were under an absolute Impossibility of recovering without it.

THIS is supposing, God had left all Mankind for 4000 Years together, and even the greatest Part to this Day, destitute of sufficient Means to do their Duty, and to preserve themselves from sinking into a corrupted and degenerate State; and that it was

impossible for them when thus sunk, to recover themselves; and yet that God (their Duty being the same after, as before the Fall) expected Impossibilities from them; *viz.* either to preserve themselves from thus falling; or if fallen, to recover themselves. But if they had not Power to do This, and it was not their Fault, that they at first were in, and after remain'd in what he calls a State of universal Degeneracy and Corruption; this must then be the State God design'd they shou'd be in: And it wou'd seem not only to be in vain, but a Crime in them, to endeavour to change that State, in which, God, of his infinite Wisdom and Goodness, thought fit to place them. But,

IF Men alike, at all Times, owe their Existence to God, they at all Times must be created in a State of Innocence, capable of knowing, and doing all God requires of them; and we must conclude from the Wisdom and Goodness of God, that he will, at no time, command any thing not fit for him to command, or for Man to do: and therefore, cou'd we suppose some Things commanded by external Revelation, which were not commanded by the Light of Nature; we must conclude, that 'till then it was not fit for God to command them, or for Man uncommanded to do them.

pag. 278.

THE DOCTOR, to shew the Fault was not in Mankind, but in the Guide God gave them; says, "The Light of Nature, and Right Reason, was altogether insufficient to restore true Piety:" and as tho' this was not enough, he adds, "that the Light of Nature no where appear'd." Which Sentences seem inconsistent, since the first supposes a Light, tho' insufficient, appearing to Mens Minds; but the Doctor does not seem to know whether they had no Light at all; or "a Light, which, *he says,* has undeniable Defects in it."

pag. 214.

B. MAY not the Law of Nature be very clear, tho' the Light of Nature may be so very dim, as to have undeniable Defects?



A. CAN the Law of Nature be clear, and the Light of Nature dim; when the Law of Nature is nothing, but what the Light of Nature, or Reason dictates? Or, as Dr. *Scott* expresses it, Christ. Life, p. 2. Vol. 1. Ch. 2. P. 75.  
 “ Right Reason pronouncing such Actions good,  
 “ and such evil, is the Law of Nature; and those  
 “ eternal Reasons, upon which it so pronounces  
 “ them, are the Creed of Nature; both which to-  
 “ gether make *Natural Religion*.”

THE DOCTOR, to pursue this Point, and to shew that the Fault was not in the Creatures, but the Creator; says, that “ Even those few extraordinary pag. 176.  
 “ Men of the Philosophers, who did sincerely en-  
 “ deavour to reform Mankind, were themselves in-  
 “ tirely ignorant of some Doctrines, absolutely ne-  
 “ cessary for bringing about this great End of the  
 “ Reformation, and Recovery of Mankind:—  
 “ Their whole Attempt to discover the Truth of  
 “ Things, and to instruct others therein, was like  
 “ wandering in the wide Sea, without knowing  
 “ whither to go, or which way to take, or having  
 “ any Guide to conduct them.”

AND that you might be sure, that the Fault was in the eternal, universal, and unchangeable Law of Nature; he calls those Philosophers, who thus wander'd in the wide Sea, “ wise, brave, and good pag. 167.  
 “ Men, who made it their business to study, and  
 “ practise the Duties of Natural Religion them-  
 “ selves, and to teach and exhort others to do the  
 “ like:” nay, one would imagine he thought them, notwithstanding their unavoidable Ignorance, inspir'd; since he says, “ There never was a great pag. 197.  
 “ Man, but who was inspir'd; *Nemo unquam mag-  
 “ nus Vir sine divino afflatu fuit:*” And for this he quotes the Authority of *Cicero*, who, if the Doctor's Reasoning is just, was certainly inspir'd.

THE DOCTOR'S Scheme outdoes that of the most rigid *Predestinarians*; for that at all times saves the Elect: But here are no Elect; but all, for many

Ages are inextricably involv'd in a most deprav'd, corrupted, and impious State.

pag. 241.

THE Doctor justly says, " Let none on pretence of maintaining Natural Religion, revile, and blaspheme the Christian ; lest they be found Lyars unto God : " And for the same Reason, may not I say, let none blaspheme Natural Religion ? Tho' if Natural and Reveal'd Religion can differ, it must be a greater Crime to revile a Religion, that is eternal, universal, and unchangeable ; than a Religion that is not so. And,

pag. 214.

THO' I pay a due Deference to the Doctor's deep Penetration in matters of Religion, I dare not say, there's the least Difference between the *Law of Nature*, and *the Gospel* ; for that wou'd suppose some Defect in one of them, and reflect on the Author of both ; who, certainly, was equally good, and equally wise, when he gave the one, as when he gave the other (if it may be call'd another) Law. Nor dare I be so rash, as to charge the Light of Nature with *undeniable Defects*, as the Doctor presumes to do ; since, if that Light was sufficient to answer the End design'd by God, which was to be a competent Guide to Men, in relation to their present, and future Happiness ; there cou'd be no deficiency : If not, then there must have been an undeniable default in the Giver of it, in appointing Means not sufficient to answer their design'd Ends ; tho' both Means and Ends were intirely in his Power. Nor dare I say, " There are several necessary Truths, not possible to be discover'd with any Certainty by the Light of Nature ; " because God's Means of Information will, and must always bear an exact Proportion to the Necessity of our knowing what we are oblig'd to know ; especially touching the *Nature*, and *Attributes of God* ; which, he supposes, " were very difficult for the wisest Men to find-out ; and more difficult for them to explain. " But here I must do the Doctor that Justice, as to observe, that he,

in

pag. 178.

in another Place, is so far from finding any such Defect in this Light, even with relation to the Nature and Attributes of God ; that he says, “ All pag. 161.  
 “ the heathen World had certain Means of know-  
 “ ing God ; for, *That which may be known of God,* pag. 160.  
 “ was manifest enough unto Men in all Ages.”  
 And if no Age can know more of God, than *that*  
*which may be known* ; and if that which *may* be  
 known of him was manifest enough in all Ages ;  
 what Advantage can one Age in this grand Point  
 have above another ? And, therefore, I must con-  
 clude,

IT can't be imputed to any Defect in the Light of Nature, that the Pagan World ran into Idolatry ; but to their being intirely govern'd by Priests, who pretended Communication with their Gods ; and to have thence their Revelations, which they impos'd on the Credulous as divine Oracles : Whereas the Business of the Christian Dispensation was to destroy all those traditional Revelations ; and restore, free from all Idolatry, the true primitive, and natural Religion, implanted in Mankind from the Creation.

THE DOCTOR, however, seems afraid, lest he had allow'd too much to the Light of Nature, in relation to the Discovery of our Duty both to God and Man ; and not left room for Revelation to make any Addition : he therefore supposes, “ there pag. 239.  
 “ are some Duties, which Nature hints at only in  
 “ in general.” But, if we can't, without highly reflecting on the Wisdom and Goodness of God, suppose, that he has not, at all Times, given the whole rational Creation a plain Rule for their Conduct, in relation to those Duties they owe to God, themselves, and one another ; must we not suppose Reason, and Religion (that *Rule* of all other *Rules*) inseparable ; so that no rational Creature can be ignorant of it, who attends to the Dictates of his own Mind ; I mean, as far as 'tis necessary for him to know it ? An ignorant Peasant may know what

is sufficient for him, without knowing as much as the learned Rector of *St. James's*.

THO' the Doctor says, "the Knowledge of the Law of Nature is in Fact, by no means, universal;" yet he asserts, that "Man is plainly in his own Nature an accountable Creature;" which supposes that the Light of Nature plainly, and undeniably teaches him that Law, for Breach of which he is naturally accountable; and did not the Doctor believe this Law to be universal, he cou'd not infer a future Judgment from the Conscience All Men have of their Actions, or the Judgment they pass on them in their own Minds; whereby "They that have not any Law, are a Law unto themselves; their Consciences bearing Witness, and their Thoughts accusing, or excusing one another:" Which is supposing but one Law, whether that Law be written on Paper, or in Mens Hearts only; and that all Men, by the Judgment they pass on their own Actions, are conscious of this Law. And,

THE Apostle *Paul*, tho' quoted by the Doctor, is so far from favouring his *Hypothesis* of any invincible Ignorance, even in the Wisest, and Best of the Philosophers; that he, by saying, *The Gentiles that have not the Law, do by Nature the Things contained in the Law*; makes the Law of Nature and Grace to be the same: And supposes the Reason why they were to be punish'd, was their sinning against Light and Knowledge: *That which may be known of God was manifest in them, and when they knew God, they glorify'd him not as God*: And they were likewise guilty of abominable Corruptions, not ignorantly, but knowing the Judgment of God, that they who do such Things are worthy of Death. Had the Doctor but consider'd this self-evident Proposition, that *There can be no Transgression where there is no Law*; and that an unknown Law is the same as no Law; and consequently, that all Mankind, at all Times, must be capable of knowing all (whether more or less,) that God requires: It would have prevented his

pag. 152.

pag. 152.

Rom. 2. 14.

Rom. 1. 19,  
21.

—Ver. 32.

his endeavouring to prove, that 'till the Gospel-Dispensation, Mankind were intirely, and unavoidably ignorant of their Duty in several important Points; and thus charging the Light of Nature with undeniable Defects.

I think it is no Compliment to External Revelation, tho' the Doctor design'd it as the highest; to say, it prevail'd, when the Light of Nature was, as he supposes, in a Manner extinct; since then an irrational Religion might as easily obtain, as a rational one.

THE Doctor, to prove that Revelation has supply'd the Insufficiency, and undeniable Defects of the Light of Nature, refers us to *Phil. iv. 8.* which he introduces after this pompous Manner; "Let pag. 229.  
 " any Man of an honest and sincere Mind consider, whether that practical Doctrine has not, even *in itself*, the greatest Marks of a divine Original, wherein *Whatsoever Things are true, whatsoever Things are honest, whatsoever Things are just, whatsoever Things are pure, whatsoever Things are lovely, whatsoever Things are of good Report, if there be any Virtue, if there be any Thing praiseworthy; all these, and these only, are the Things earnestly recommended to Mens Practice.*" Phil 4. 8.

I wou'd ask the Doctor how he can know what these Things are, which are thus only earnestly recommended to Mens Practice; or, why they have, in themselves, the greatest Marks of a divine Original; but from the Light of Nature? Nay, how can the Doctor know, there are Defects in the Light of Nature, but from the Light itself? which supposes this Light is all we have to trust to; and consequently, all the Doctor has been doing, on pretence of promoting the Honour of Revelation, is introducing universal Scepticism: And I am concern'd, and griev'd, to see a Man, who had so great a Share of the Light of Nature, imploying it to expose that Light, of which before he had given the highest Commendation; and which can have

no other Effect, than to weaken even his own Demonstration, drawn from that Light, for the Being of a God.

I shall mention but one Text more, which, had not the Doctor thought it highly to his purpose, for shewing the Insufficiency of the Light of Nature, he would not have usher'd it in after this most solemn Manner: "When Men have put themselves  
 pag. 341. " into this Temper and Frame of Mind, let them  
 " try if they can any longer reject the Evidence of  
 John 7. 17. " the Gospel: *If any Man will do his Will, he shall*  
 " *know of the Doctrine; whether it be of God.*"

Is it not strange, to see so judicious a Divine write after such a Manner, as if he thought the best Way to support the Dignity of Revelation, was to derogate from the immutable, and eternal Law of Nature? and while he is depressing it, extol Revelation for those very Things it borrows from that Law? in which, tho' he asserts there are undeniable Defects, yet he owns, that God governs all his own Actions by it, and expects that all Men shou'd so govern theirs. But,

I find the Doctor's own Brother, the Dean of Sarum, is intirely of my Mind, as to those two Texts the Doctor quotes; viz. Rom. 2. 14. and Phil. 4. 8. As to the first, viz. Rom. 2. 14. he says,  
 " The Apostle supposes, that the moral Law is  
 " founded in the Nature and Reason of Things;  
 " that every Man is endu'd with such Powers and  
 " Faculties of Mind, as render him capable of  
 " seeing, and taking notice of this Law: and also  
 " with such a Sense and Judgment of the Reasonableness, and Fitness of conforming his Actions  
 " to it, that he cannot but in his own Mind acquit himself when he does so; and condemn  
 " himself when he does otherwise." And as to the second, viz. Phil. 4. 8. where the same Apostle recommends the Practice of Vertue, upon the foremention'd Principles of Comeliness and Reputation: " These Principles, says he, if duly attended

*Eng. into the Cause & Origin of Moral Evil, p. 154, 155, 156, 157.*

“ to, were sufficient to instruct Men in the Whole  
 “ of their Duty towards themselves, and towards  
 “ each other: and they wou’d also have taught  
 “ them their Duty towards God, their Creator and  
 “ Governor, if they had diligently pursu’d them :  
 “ For according as the Apostle expresses it, *Rom. 1.*  
 “ *20. The invisible things of God from the Creation*  
 “ *of the World, are clearly seen, being understood by*  
 “ *the things that are made, even his eternal Power*  
 “ *and Godhead.*—The same Fitness and Decency  
 “ that appears in Mens regular Behaviour towards  
 “ each other, appears also in their Behaviour to-  
 “ wards God: And this, likewise, is founded in  
 “ the Nature and Reason of Things; and is what  
 “ the Circumstances and Condition they are in, do  
 “ absolutely require. Thus we see wherein Moral  
 “ Virtue, or Good consists, and what the Obliga-  
 “ tion to it is, from its own native Beauty and  
 “ Excellency.”

B. IF God, as the Doctor asserts, does abhor all  
 arbitrary Commands, and Natural Religion compre-  
 hends every thing that is not arbitrary; and withal,  
 is so deeply impress’d on Mens Mind, that they can’t  
 violate its Precepts without Self-condemnation: I  
 can’t apprehend how these Philosophers, who made  
 it their Business to study, and practise Natural Re-  
 ligion, cou’d be entirely ignorant of any Doctrines  
 absolutely necessary for the Reformation of Man-  
 kind: Nay, that “ their whole Attempt to discover  
 “ the Truth of Things, was like wandering in the  
 “ wide Sea, without any Guide;” and therefore, I  
 shou’d be glad to know, what are these absolutely  
 necessary Doctrines, they were thus entirely igno-  
 rant of.

A. “ THESE Philosophers, *the Doctor says*, had pag. 176.  
 “ no Knowledge of the whole Scheme, Order, and  
 “ State of Things.” This, I think, may be al-  
 low’d; since I believe there’s none at present, who  
 have, or pretend to have so extensive a Knowledge.  
 “ But they had no Knowledge of the Method of God’s  
 “ go-

“governing the World.” Then they must be blind; if living in the World, they did not see how the things of this World were govern’d by Providence. “Then they did not know the Ground and Circumstances of Mens present corrupt Condition.” If so, they did not understand Human Nature, and how Prejudices and Passions work on Mankind. “They did not know, *says he*, the Manner of the divine Interposition necessary for their Recovery, and the glorious End, to which God intended finally to conduct them.” It must be own’d, they were not in the least acquainted with the Doctor’s glorious Scheme, of all Mankind’s being for four thousand Years together, and the greatest part too, at present, by the very Frame of their Constitution, and the Condition of their Being, plac’d by God in a most deprav’d, degenerate State; without possibility of recovering from it. “But they had, it seems, no Knowledge of God’s Design in creating Mankind.” Sure, the Doctor had forgot what he quotes from *Cicero* to this Purpose; “*Ad tuendos conservandosque homines hominem natum esse. Homines hominum causa sunt generati, ut ipsi inter se alii aliis prodesse possint. Hominem, naturæ obedientem, homini nocere non posse.*” And does not the Doctor maintain the same thing, in saying, that “God cou’d have no Motive to create Things at first, but only that he might communicate to them his Goodness and Happiness.”

Pag. 57.

pag. 121.

pag. 17.

“THESE Philosophers, *he says*, were ignorant of the original Dignity of Human Nature:” And because he frequently insists on it, I shall fully consider this Matter; and will confess, ’tis probable, they thought that Human Nature, Men, at all times, having the same common Faculties, was always the same. Had they known the sacred Story of *Adam* and *Eve*, that wou’d have confirm’d them in their Sentiments. The most they cou’d perceive by it wou’d be, that the first Pair came into the World in every Sense naked, destitute of all that Knowledge,  
Expe-



Experience gave their Posterity ; and therefore, God, the better to support them in this State of universal Ignorance, planted a Garden for them ; that they might live on the Fruit of it : How weak was their Reason, how strong their Appetites ! when they cou'd not abstain (the sole Command given them) from the Fruit of but one Tree ; in a Garden too, where must needs be an infinite Variety, and the choicest Fruit !

THESE Philosophers wou'd have been at a loss to conceive, how *Eve* cou'd entertain a Conference with a Serpent (incapable of human Voice) even before Consent had given any Meaning to Sounds. And they wou'd be apt to ask, Why, tho' Custom had made it shameful to go without Cloaths in those Places where Cloaths are worn ; the first Pair shou'd nevertheless, tho' they knew not what Cloaths were, be asham'd to be seen uncloth'd by one another, and by God himself ? So that, when *They heard the Voice* Gen. 3. 8. *of God walking in the Garden, in the Cool of the Evening,* (a strange Representation these Philosophers wou'd think of God ! ) *they hid themselves from his Presence :* Nay, God himself, their *Fig-leave Aprons,* which *they* (having, it seems, all things necessary for sewing) *sew'd together,* not being sufficient to hide their Shame, *made them Coats of the Skins of the Beasts,* newly created in Pairs. And they wou'd, likewise, desire to be inform'd, how *Eve,* before her Eyes were open'd, *saw that the Tree was good for* Gen. 3. 6. *Food ; and that it was pleasant to the Eyes, and a Tree to be desir'd to make one wise.*

UPON the whole, I grant, that these Philosophers wou'd be so far from finding out this original Dignity in the first Pair, that they wou'd be apt to think, by the Serpent's so easily imposing on her, that the original Serpentine Nature, was too subtle for the original Human Nature ; and that there being nothing done by any Serpent since the Fall, which cou'd occasion the Precept of Mens being bid to be as *wise as Serpents,* it must allude to this Transaction

Iren. 1. 1.  
c. 34.  
Tertull. Præ-  
script. c. 47.

between the Woman and the Serpent ; tho' they cou'd never come into the Belief of the *Ophitæ*, (with whom the *Marcionites* may be join'd) who thought, that *Wisdom* herself was the Serpent, which they preferr'd to Christ, as teaching them to know Good and Evil ; and designing for them Immortality and Deity ; and foretelling that *Adam*, tho' threaten'd with certain *Death on the Day he eat the forbidden Fruit*, shou'd not then die ; who accordingly liv'd after that Sentence about 900 Years : And that *Moses's* erecting the brazen, healing Serpent, was in honour of this Serpent ; who design'd so much Good to Mankind.

B. THESE Philosophers wou'd be grossly mistaken, did they believe this done by a Serpent : We say, it was the Devil, in the shape of a Serpent, that tempted them.

A. THESE Philosophers, indeed, wou'd see, that the Christians are now asham'd of the literal Interpretation of this Story ; tho' *St. Paul* was of another Mind, who expressly says, *The Serpent deceiv'd Eve thro' Subtlety*. And they, perhaps, wou'd ask, Whether it was the Devil, who is said to be *more subtle than any Beast of the Field* ; since it was this subtle Beast that said to the Woman, *Ye shall not surely die*. And it was upon the Woman's saying, *The Serpent beguiled me, and I did eat* ; that the Lord said to the Serpent, *Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all the Cattle, and above every Beast of the Field : Upon thy Belly thou shalt go, and Dust thou shalt eat all the days of thy Life*. Does this Character agree to an immaterial, immortal Being ? Did he all the Days of his Life go upon his Belly, and eat Dust ? Does not God, continuing his Discourse to the Serpent, say, *I will put Enmity between thee and the Woman ; between thy Seed, and her Seed ; it shall bruise thy Head, and thou shalt bruise his Heels*. And is not this the Consequence of Serpents going on their Belly ? Do they not frequently bite Men by the Heel ; especially in hot Countrys, where Serpents

Gen. 3. 4, 5.

— v. 13.

— v. 14.

pents are numerous, and Mens Heels bare? Why shall *thy Seed*, not signify *thy Seed*; but the Seed of a Being not mention'd in all this Story; and who has no Seed, but metaphorical Seed: which, since the Woman's Seed is taken literally, wou'd be immediately changing the Meaning of the Word *Seed*? Does this Text afford the least Argument, to imagine God did not as much speak to the Serpent, as to *Adam* and *Eve*? If a Book is to be interpreted thus, especially in relation to historical Facts; how can we, these Philosophers wou'd say, be sure of its Meaning in any one Place? Besides, wou'd they not ask, Why the whole Race of Serpents shou'd be curs'd for the Crime of a fallen Angel?

B. THEY might as well ask, Why all other Animals shou'd bring forth in Pain, for the Fault of *Eve*? For had Nature form'd all Females at first, as they have been ever since *Eve* eat the forbidden Fruit, none of them, except by Miracles, cou'd be deliver'd without pain; no more than Serpents, had they at first been form'd, as at present, creep otherwise than they do.

A. THOSE Philosophers, perhaps, wou'd not think the Matter a jot mended, by substituting (did the Story afford room for it) a Devil, instead of a Serpent; since they cou'd not see, how an infinitely good God cou'd permit a most malicious cunning Spirit to work on the Weakness of a Woman, just plac'd in a new World; without interposing in this unequal Conflict, or giving notice of any such wicked Spirit; Angels, neither good, or bad, being mention'd in the History of the Creation: And yet that after the Fact was committed, God shou'd thus revenge it on all their innocent Posterity for ever; by *curfing the Ground*, &c.

WHAT wou'd seem to them most unaccountable, is, That God shou'd continue to suffer this subtle, and malignant Spirit, endow'd with an universal Knowledge of what is past, and a deep Penetration into Futurity; to range about, deceiving, and  
cir-

circumventing Mankind; who, having a Capacity vastly superior to them, is continually sowing the Seeds of Mischief, and scattering the Poison of universal Discord; making use of those very Men as his Instruments, whose profess'd Business it is, to promote universal Concord.

THE poor *Indians*, you know, when our Missionaries give such an Account of the Devil, say, "Is not your God a good God, and loves Mankind?" "Why does he then permit this Devil, to be continually doing them such infinite Hurt? Why is he not put under Confinement, if not depriv'd of a Being, of which he has made himself unworthy? With us, one, who does not hinder a Mischief, when it is in his Power, it thought not much better than he who does it."

BUT to return to the Doctor: Where is the Difference in relation to the Goodness of God, and the Happiness of Mankind, between God's creating them in a State, as he calls it, of universal Degeneracy and Corruption; or causing them by the Folly of *Adam*, which infinite Wisdom cou'd not but foresee, to fall unavoidably into this bad State? What Dignity, what Perfection cou'd *Adam's* Nature have, that the Nature of his Posterity has not? Are they not as much fram'd after the Image of their Maker? Are not their Souls as much immediately from God as *Adam's*? And are not their Bodies exactly made after the same Manner? Were not all other Animals at first created by God as well as Men? Had these any Dignity, or Perfection in their Animal Nature, which the same Creatures since have not? Besides, is not this suppos'd high State of Perfection in *Adam*, giving the Lye to the History? since this very perfect Man, notwithstanding all the original Dignity of his Nature, had no better Excuse for his yielding to the first Temptation, than that *the Woman, whom Thou gavest to be with me, gave me of the Tree, and I did eat.* How can we suppose his Understanding was

Gen. 3. 12.

in the least impair'd by this Crime, since God himself says (tho' to whom, it does not appear) *Behold, Gen. 3. 22. the Man is become like one of us to know Good and Evil;* and to prevent his being so, both for Immortality as well as Knowledge, *God placed Cherubims with a flaming Sword, which turned every way to keep the Way of the Tree of Life.* — v. 24. Wou'd it not be very strange, that his Posterity (while his Understanding receiv'd no Hurt) shou'd suffer so greatly in theirs; as the Doctor wou'd have it thought? Indeed, *St. Austin De Civit. Dei, l. 14. c. 23, 24.* supposes, that *Adam* before the Fall cou'd have erected his *Membrum genitale ad voluntatis nutum*; and that Motions of the Flesh were perfectly subordinate to his Will, like his Fingers. But this Notion not being Orthodox at present, and the Loss of this Faculty no ways infers the Loss of Understanding; I may venture to say, that the Doctor's Description of Human Nature in all, but one Pair, (and that too, perhaps, but for a Day) is a Libel on the Dignity of Human Nature, and an high Reflection on the Wisdom and Goodness of its Author; in placing them, without any Fault of theirs, in an unavoidable State of Degeneracy and Corruption for 4000 Years together; and continuing the greatest Part still in the same State.

BUT let us see, whether the Doctor has better Success with his other Arguments, by which he endeavours to curtail the universal Goodness of God; and therefore, I shall take notice of two other things, which he insists on, to shew the gross, and unavoidable Ignorance of the Philosophers, in the most momentous Points of Religion: The first is, "That which of all things the best, and wisest of pag. 182. the Philosophers were entirely, and unavoidably ignorant of; and yet was of the greatest Importance for sinful Men to know; viz. *The Method by which such as have erred from the right Way, and have offended God, may yet restore themselves to his Favour.*" And here he concludes, "That there arises from Nature no sufficient Comfort pag. 183.

“ to Sinners, but an anxious, and endless Solitude,  
 “ about the Means of appeasing the Deity.”

*Nye of Nat.  
 and Rev. Re-  
 lig. p. 85, 86.*

To answer the Doctor I need only quote what another able Divine, writing on the same Subject of Natural, and Reveal'd Religion, says, “ I affirm, “ it is an Article of Natural Religion, that Forgiveness does certainly follow Repentance. If “ God be a merciful and benign Being, he will accept the Payment we are able to make; and not “ insist on impossible Demands, with his frail, bankrupt Creatures. No generous Man, but will “ forgive his Enemy, much more his Child; if he “ disapproves the Wrong he has done, is really “ griev'd for it, is desirous to make Amends, even “ by suffering for the Honour of the Person injur'd: “ How much more shall God forgive all Persons “ thus dispos'd, and reform'd; since there is no “ Generosity in Man, but what is, with his Nature, infus'd into him by God?

“ Not only Mercy, but Wisdom will effectually “ dispose God to forgive the Penitent, because the “ Creature reform'd by Penitence is such as it ought “ to be, and such as God willeth it; which being “ so, it can be no Wisdom in God to afflict it unnecessarily. 'Tis not Justice, but Rage, to punish “ where the Person is already mended. When we “ argue thus, from any of the known, and certain “ Attributes of God, we are as sure of the Conclusion, as if the thing was to be discern'd by “ Sense; since no sensible thing is more certain than “ the Attributes of God.”

*Reasonablen.  
 of Christi-  
 anity, &c. p. 255,  
 562.*

Mr. *Locke* has the same Sentiments, and says, “ God “ had, by the Light of Reason, reveal'd to all “ Mankind, who wou'd make use of that Light, “ that he was Good, and Merciful. The same “ Spark of the Divine Nature, and Knowledge in “ Man, which making him a Man, shewed him “ the Law he was under as a Man; shewed him “ also the way of atoning the merciful, kind, compassionate Author, and Father of him, and his “ Being,

“ Being, when he had transgressed that Law. He  
 “ that made Use of this Candle of the Lord, so far  
 “ as to find what was his Duty; cou’d not miss  
 “ to find also the Way to Reconciliation and For-  
 “ giveness, when he had fail’d of his Duty.—

“ THE Law is the eternal, immutable Stan-  
 “ dard of Right. And a Part of that Law is, that  
 “ a Man shou’d forgive, not only his Children,  
 “ but his Enemies, upon their Repentance, asking  
 “ Pardon, and Amendment. And therefore, he  
 “ cou’d not doubt, that the Author of this Law,  
 “ and God of Patience and Consolation, who is  
 “ rich in Mercy, wou’d forgive his frail Off-spring;  
 “ if they acknowledg’d their Faults, disapproved  
 “ the Iniquity of their Transgressions, begg’d his  
 “ Pardon, and resolv’d in earnest for the future,  
 “ to conform their Actions to this Rule, which  
 “ they own’d to be Just and Right. This way of  
 “ Reconciliation, this hope of Atonement, the  
 “ Light of Nature revealed to them.”

HAD the Doctor only said, that we can’t know from the Light of Nature, that *There’s more Joy in Heaven over one Sinner that repents, than over ninety nine just Persons, who need no Repentance*; That, if strictly taken, might, perhaps, be better disputed; but nothing, sure, can be more shocking than to suppose the unchangeable God, *whose Nature, and Property is ever to forgive*, was not, at all Times, equally willing to pardon repenting Sinners; and equally willing they shou’d have the Satisfaction of knowing it.

IF *God’s Ways are equal*, and he has, at one Time as well as another, the same Goodness for the Sons of Men, in relation to their eternal Happiness; how can we suppose he left all Mankind, for so many Ages, and the greatest Part, even at present, in a most miserable State of Doubt, and Uncertainty, about the Pardon of Sin; and consequently, about the Possibility of any Man’s being sav’d? If this Notion, that even the best, and wisest

of Mankind, were, not only absolutely, but most absolutely ignorant of That which of all things, it was of the greatest Importance for Mankind to know, be not inconsistent with the divine Goodness; I am at a loss to know what is so.

IF the Design of God, in communicating any thing of himself to Men, was their Happiness; wou'd not that Design have oblig'd him, who, at all Times, alike desires their Happiness, to have, at all Times, alike communicated it to them? If God always acts for the Good of his Creatures, what Reason can be assign'd, why he shou'd not, from the Beginning, have discover'd such things, as make for their Good; but defer the doing of it till the Time of *Tiberius*? since the sooner This was done, the greater wou'd his Goodness appear to be: Nay, is it consistent with infinite Benevolence, to hide That for many Ages, which he knew, was as useful at first to prevent, as afterwards it cou'd be, to put a stop to any thing he dislik'd?

AND, indeed, without denying that God, at all Times, intended Mankind That Happiness, their Nature is capable of; we must allow, that, at all Times, he has given them the Means of obtaining it, by the Rules he has prescrib'd them for their Conduct; and consequently, these Rules must have been discoverable at all Times. For, if God acts upon rational Motives, must not the same Motives which oblig'd him to discover any Thing that's for the Good of Mankind, have oblig'd him to discover every Thing that is so; and that too, after the same plain Manner? And not do this, as it were, grudgingly, little by little; here a Bit, and there a Bit; and that to one favourite Nation only, under the Veil of Types, Allegories, &c. And at last, tho' he discover'd some Things more plainly, yet it was but to a small Part of Mankind, the Bulk of them to this day remaining in deplorable Ignorance.

B. ANOTHER Argument the Doctor brings for the undeniable Defect of the Light of Nature is, that



that tho' it is *evident* from this Light, that *God ought* pag. 178.  
*to be worshipp'd*, yet “ *the Manner*, in which he  
 “ *might be acceptably worshipp'd*, the wisest, and  
 “ *best of the Philosophers were intirely, and una-*  
 “ *voidably ignorant of.*”

A. WHO can forbear pitying these unhappy  
 Philosophers, indispensably oblig'd to worship God  
 acceptably; and yet, hard Fate! unavoidably ig-  
 norant how to perform this acceptable Worship?  
 But,

IF God cou'd not will to be worshipp'd, with-  
 out willing some Way, or other, of being wor-  
 shipp'd; and if he left it to the Light of Nature to  
 discover how he wou'd be worshipp'd, cou'd That  
 be for any other Reason, but because it was accep-  
 table to him, to be worshipp'd as that Light di-  
 rected? Is it not a contradiction, to suppose God  
 wou'd be acceptably worshipp'd, and yet let Men,  
 even the best. be intirely and unavoidably ignorant,  
 how to worship him acceptably? Does not the  
 Light of Nature tell us, that God is a Being of in-  
 finite Wisdom and Goodness; and that all his na-  
 tural Faculties are directed by these two Attri-  
 butes, to serve the Purposes of Benevolence? How  
 then can we be ignorant, what Worship, what Ser-  
 vice, we are to render him? Can we doubt, if  
 we endeavour to have the same Frame of Mind,  
 and govern our Actions by the same Law of Bene-  
 volence; whether we shall obtain his Favour? since  
*to imitate him, is to pay him the highest Adoration; and*  
*to keep his Commandments, shews the highest Veneration.*

'Tis for such Reasons as these, that Dr. Scott in-  
 tirely differs from this learned Author, and says,  
 “ If we truly understand what God is, we can't  
 “ but apprehend what Worship is suitable to him,  
 “ from the eternal Congruity and Proportion, that  
 “ there is between Things and Things, as obvious  
 “ to the Mind, as Sounds and Colours are to the  
 “ Ears and Eyes.”

Christ. Life,  
 p. 2. Vol. 1.  
 Ch. 6. p. 323.

pag. 178.

pag. 179.

B. Dr. Clarke owns, that "Obedience to the  
" Obligations of Nature, and Imitation of the mo-  
" ral Attributes of God; the wisest Philosophers  
" easily knew, was, undoubtedly, the *most ac-*  
" *ceptable* Service to God;" and what he insists  
upon as necessary, is only some external Adoration.

A. BUT since external Adoration can't be per-  
form'd, but by external Signs, these must be diffe-  
rent in different Places; because what are Marks  
of Respect in one Country, are Marks of Disrespect  
in another; or, at least, look ridiculous.

pag. 179.

B. THE Reason that the Doctor gives, why  
the wisest Men were intirely, and unavoidably  
ignorant, how God wou'd be acceptably worshipp'd  
with external Adoration, is, because *they fell lamen-*  
*tably into the Practice of the most foolish Idolatry.*

pag. 179.

A. NEVER any before, call'd the worshipping  
of Idols, the worshipping of the true God, tho' un-  
acceptably. But however, since you lay such Strefs  
on this Discourse, I shall consider, what the Doc-  
tor says, to prove this Paradox.

pag. 181.

" *Plato*, says he, after having deliver'd almost  
" divine Truths, concerning the Nature, and At-  
" tributes of the supreme God, weakly advises  
" Men to worship likewise inferior Gods; nor  
" dare to condemn the worshipping even of Statues.  
" ————And so he spoil'd the best Philosophy in  
" the World, by adding Idolatry to that Worship,  
" which he had wisely, and bravely before prov'd  
" to be due to the Creator of all Things." But  
cou'd he be intirely, and unavoidably ignorant of  
what he has bravely, and wisely prov'd?

pag. 179.

" *Socrates*, he says, superstitiously offer'd a Cock  
" to *Esculapius*, unless it was done in Mockery to  
" him, looking on Death to be his greatest Deli-  
" verance:" But since he doubted what *Socrates* in-  
tended, why does he instance in him, as one in-  
tirely, and unavoidably ignorant, how God was to  
be acceptably worshipp'd?

“ *Cicero*, he says, allow’d Men to continue the pag. 180.  
 “ Idolatry of their Ancestors, advis’d them to con-  
 “ form themselves to the superstitious Religion of  
 “ their Country.—In which he fondly contra-  
 “ dicts himself, by inexcusably complying with the  
 “ Practices of those Men, whom, in many of his  
 “ Writings, he largely, and excellently proves to  
 “ be extremely foolish, upon the account of those  
 “ very Practices.” But does this prove any un-  
 avoidable Ignorance in *Cicero*, in relation to the  
 Worship of the true God? But only that he, as a  
 Philosopher, not only knew, but spoke the Truth;  
 tho’ as a Priest, he thought fit to dissemble: Per-  
 haps, he suppos’d it not prudent, without some such  
 softning Expressions, so plainly to attack the reign-  
 ing Superstition. But,

SINCE the Reasoning of the ancient Philosophers  
 fully shew’d their Sense, these Reflections might  
 have been spar’d; were it but for the sake of some  
 modern Philosophers; whose philosophical Faith is  
 as little reconcilable with the *Creeeds* and *Litanies*,  
 they, as Priests, solemnly repeat; and the *Articles*  
 they as solemnly subscribe; as any thing *Cicero*,  
 the Priest, cou’d say in opposition to *Cicero*, the  
 Philosopher; who describes our moral Obligations  
 after so beautiful a manner; and by such plain,  
 and irresistible Arguments, shews the necessary  
 Connexion between Virtue and Happiness; Vice  
 and Misery; as can’t but make us highly delighted  
 with the One, and create in us a just Aversion to  
 the Other.

THE Doctor had here a fair Opportunity, of  
 shewing the Absurdity of arguing from what even  
 the best of Men say; when it is not safe, to talk  
 otherwise. This had been more agreeable to his  
 Candor, than taking a Handle from hence to ex-  
 pose the Light, and Law of Nature, as well as  
 those great Men; to whom we are infinitely ob-  
 lig’d, for writing under these Disadvantages so  
 freely as they have done; especially *Cicero*, from

*Arnob. contra  
Gent. l. 3.  
p. 120.* whom the Fathers have borrow'd their best Arguments against Paganism. *Arnobius* says, that if his Works had been read, as they ought, by the Heathens, there had been no need of Christian Writers. And in answer to those *Gentiles*, who, seeing the Use the Christians made of them, were for soliciting the Senate to burn, or otherwise suppress them; he says, *That were, not to defend the Gods, but to fear the Testimony of Truth.* Which Pagan Method has not only been us'd ever since, by all who fear'd the Testimony of Truth, to the Loss of an immense Treasure of Learning; but they have improv'd it too, and been for burning of Men, as well as Books: And thereby introduc'd a Superstition more abominable than Paganism. And give me leave to add, that

IN Old *Rome*, as long as there was civil Liberty, there was an intire Liberty of Conscience; and even the Priests of the National Church, provided they comply'd with its Ceremonies, had no speculative *Credo's*, or *Articles* to subscribe; but were intirely free to maintain what Opinions they pleas'd. Of this, *Cicero* is a remarkable Instance; who, in his Book *de Divinatione*, exposes the Superstition of his own Country-men, and ridicules those Miracles, with which the Annals of the Church-Priests were fill'd: And he, tho' a Priest himself, every where treats his Brethren with great Freedom; and in his Address to them, speaking of an ambitious, intriguing Priest, who wou'd hide his Malice under the cover of Religion (for some such there have been in all Religions) says, " If *Publius Claudius* " is to defend his pestilent, and deadly Ministry " by the sacred Name of divine Religion, when 'tis " impossible for him to do it by human Equity; 'tis " high Time to look for other Ceremonies, other " Ministers of the immortal Gods, and other In- " terpreters of Religion." But to return,

THE Doctor having thus expos'd the Light of Nature, and, as he thinks, shewn its undeniable Defects in the Persons of these Philosophers; demands

Orat. pro  
Domo sua  
ad Pontifi-  
ces, c. 1.

mands what Grounds our modern Deists have to imagine, that if they themselves had liv'd without the Light of the Gospel, they should have been wiser than *Plato*, *Socrates*, and *Cicero*. But sure no great Wisdom is requir'd to know the Law of Nature, was it but half so plain, as the Doctor, from Bishop *Cumberland*, has represented it; and which no well-meaning *Gentiles*, who *did by Nature the Things contain'd in the Law*, cou'd be ignorant of. And,

I am surpriz'd to find the Doctor arguing as if pag. 50. that Law, "which is a most perfect Rule to the most perfect Being, is not perfect enough for his imperfect Creatures;" tho' their whole Perfection consists in imitating him, and governing their Actions by the same Rule: A Rule, which, it can't be deny'd, had Mankind govern'd their Actions by it, wou'd have render'd them as perfect as their Nature was capable of. I shou'd be glad to know, why this Rule has lost its Virtue, and will not now render Men as acceptable to God as ever? But cou'd we suppose a God of infinite Perfection, might ordain an imperfect, or insufficient Rule, for the Actions of his Creatures; or, which comes to the same, afford them another Light for the Discovery of it, but what had such undeniable Defects, as made them incapable of knowing their Duty; nor was sufficient to hinder them from falling into, and continuing from Age to Age, in a deplorable State of Corruption: I wou'd ask, whether God did this knowingly, or ignorantly, not foreseeing the Consequences? To suppose the first, is to make God act out of Spite, and Hatred to his Creatures, in bringing them into Being, and making that Being a Curse to them: Or if the last, why were not these Defects supply'd as soon as discover'd? Or, were they not discover'd by infinite Wisdom till these latter Times; and then reveal'd only to a small Number, tho' all Mankind had equal need of them? And then too, so imperfectly, that Men have ever since been in continual Quarrels, about the Meaning of most of those Things,

I

which

which are suppos'd to have been added, to supply the Defects of the Law of Nature?

WHAT human Legislator, if he found a Defect in his Laws, and thought it for the Good of his Subject to add new Laws, wou'd not promulgate them to all his People? Or, what Parent wou'd act after so partial a Manner, as the Doctor, in a self-confounding Scheme, supposes the common Parent of Mankind has done? And not let all his Children know as soon as possible, what was for their common Good? especially, if they were in such a forlorn, and miserable Condition, as he represents all Mankind to have been in, almost as soon as created.

pag. 116.

THE Doctor very rightly observes, that “ Even among Men, there's no earthly Father, but, in those Things he esteems his own Excellencies, desires, and expects to be imitated by his Children; how much more, *says he*, is it necessary, that God, who is infinitely far from being subject to Passions, and Variableness, as frail Men are; and has an infinitely tenderer, and heartier Concern for the Happiness of his Creatures, than mortal Men can have for the Welfare of their Posterity, must desire to be imitated by his Creatures in those Perfections, which are the Foundation of his own unchangeable Happiness?” How far this Invariableness of God, and his great Love for his Creatures is consistent with that Scheme of Things, which the Doctor has hitherto advanc'd, has, I think been made appear. We will now examine what he adds, to shew that God has an infinitely more tender and hearty Concern for the Happiness of his Creatures, than mortal Men can have for the Welfare of their Posterity: What he says, is, that “ both the Necessities of Men, and their natural Notions of God gave them reasonable Ground to expect and hope for a divine Revelation, to recover Mankind out of their universally degenerate Estate, into one suitable to the original Excellence

pag. 197.

“ cenance of their Nature.” And that “ it was *Contents,*  
 “ agreeable to the Dictates of Nature, and Right pag. 201.  
 “ Reason, to hope for such a divine Revelation ;  
 “ That it is agreeable to the natural Hopes and pag. 214.  
 “ Expectations of Men, that is, of Right Reason  
 “ duly improv’d, to suppose God making some par-  
 “ ticular Revelation of his Will to Mankind.—  
 “ And that this was most suitable to the divine  
 “ Attributes.” Yet notwithstanding these, and a  
 great many other fine Sayings to the same purpose,  
 he denies that God was oblig’d to make such a Re-  
 velation : But, with Submission, what other Reason  
 have we to say, God is oblig’d to do any one thing  
 whatever ; but that ’tis agreeable to the natural  
 Notions we have of his Wisdom and Goodness, and  
 to the Dictates of Nature and Reason, for him so  
 to do : And if the Necessities of Mankind have al-  
 ways been as great, and the Goodness of God al-  
 ways the same ; wou’d not these oblige him to have  
 prescrib’d an immediate Remedy to the Disease,  
 and not deferr’d it for four thousand Years to-  
 gether ; and then apply’d it but to a few, tho’ all had  
 equal Need of it ? And a Need occasion’d (*as the*  
*Doctor supposes*) by God himself, in not affording  
 them any other Light, but what was insufficient to  
 answer the End for which it was given.

B. THE DOCTOR supposes, that this Revelation  
 was not the Effect of God’s *Justice* ; for then it pag. 215.  
 must needs have been given in all Ages, and to all  
 Nations ; *but of Mercy and condescending Goodness.*

A. CAN a Being be denominated merciful, and  
 good, who is so only to a few ; but cruel, and un-  
 merciful to the rest ? And certainly all the Argu-  
 ments the Doctor can urge from the Necessities of  
 Mankind, and the abundant Goodness of God,  
 will equally prove, that this Revelation, did it teach  
 a new Religion, shou’d be universal ; as that it  
 shou’d be at all. But,

IF Revelation was absolutely necessary to re-  
 cover Mankind, out of their universally degenerate,  
 and

pag. 166.

and corrupted State, and replace them in a State suitable to the original Dignity, and excellency of their Nature; and more effectually to do this, there was instituted an Order of Men, who were to be, as the Doctor calls them, *The Instruments of conveying extraordinary Assistances for this Purpose*; must not Revelation have had its intended Effect, and made Christians, especially where these Instruments of conveying extraordinary Assistances are in great Numbers, and in great Authority; much more perfect and excellent, than Men cou'd possibly be in, when under Times of Unavoidable Corruption? And yet,

p. 153.

THE DOCTOR having taken a large Passage from *Cicero*, where the Orator very rhetorically describes the great Corruptions of his Time, and assigns the Causes thereof; makes this Remark, "*That a livelier Description of the present corrupt State of Human Nature is not easy to be met with:*" Which, I think, is sufficiently owning, that Human Nature at present is far from being exalted to so high a State of Perfection, or in the least mended. And the Doctor frequently quotes *Cicero* for the Support of his Opinion, yet *Cicero* is far from supposing any such Defect in Nature: For a Proof of which, I need only mention these two short Passages. "'Tis impossible to err, as long as we follow the Guidance of Nature.—There's no Man, who following the Conduct of Nature, but may arrive at Perfection." And the Doctor himself quotes a Passage from him, to shew that Nature has not been wanting to declare her Mind; *Multis signis natura declarat quid velit*. And it might be as easily shewn, he as much mistakes the Meaning of those other Philosophers he quotes. And indeed, how cou'd any Men, except they had a very absurd *Hypothesis* to serve, assert, that any thing cou'd be Mens Duty they were unavoidably ignorant of? Yet,

De Leg. l. 1.

Ib.

p. 42.

THE DOCTOR, to prove this invincible Ignorance in the *Gentile* World, has frequent recourse to the  
Au-



Authority of *Lactantius*, a primitive Father, without shewing that he had a greater regard for Truth than other Fathers: And I am afraid the Doctor himself seems here not much to regard it, in maining a Sentence of *Lactantius*; *Maximum itaque argumentum est, philosophiam neque ad sapientiam tendere, neque ipsam esse sapientiam; quod mysterium ejus, barba tantum celebratur, & pallio.* Whereas the whole Sentence runs thus; *Non est ergo sapientia, si ab hominum cœtu abhorret; quoniam si sapientia homini data est, sine ullo discrimine omnibus data est; ut nemo sit prorusus, qui eam capere non possit. At illi [Philosophi] virtutem humano generi datam sic amplexantur, ut soli omnium publico bono frui velle videantur; tam invidi, quam si velint deligare oculos, aut effodere cæteris, ne solem videant.— Quod si natura hominis sapientiæ capax est; oportuit opifices, & rusticos, & mulieres, & omnes denique qui humanam formam gerunt, doceri, ut sapiant; populumque ex omni lingua, & conditione, & sexu, & ætate consulari.* Then follows what the Doctor quoted.

pag. 189.

Lactant. Inst. Divin. l. 3. c. 25. N. 3--6. Edit. Cellar.

THIS had been a full Answer to all the Doctor has taken from him; if not to all the Doctor has said on this Head: And it plainly shews, this Father here thought, that Wisdom, as it was design'd for all, was within the reach of all; and that which the lowest of Mankind could not attain, was neither Wisdom, nor Virtue; and that those Philosophers, who wou'd confine this universal Light to themselves, were as envious, as if they would exclude others from the Light of the Sun. And that this alone was a sufficient Proof, that their Philosophy consisted only in the Beard, and the Cloak.

THIS Father asserts nothing here, but what the wisest of Men had long before own'd, in saying, that *Wisdom is easily seen of them that love her; and found of such as seek her.* — *She goes about seeking such as are worthy of her; shews herself favourable to them in the Ways; and meeteth them in every Thought.*

Wisd. of Solomon 6. 12. &amp; 16.

And,

WHAT

WHAT impartial Man, who has compar'd the former, and present Condition of Mankind, can think the World much mended since the Times of *Tiberius*; or tho' ever so well vers'd in Church-History, can, from the Conduct of Christians, find, that they are arriv'd to any higher State of Perfection, than the rest of Mankind; who are suppos'd to continue in their Degeneracy, and Corruption? What was the Opinion of a late eminent Philosopher, as well as Divine, is plain, by his saying,

Burnet de Fide  
& Offic. Christi-  
anorum,  
p. 98.

*Si resurgerent Philosophi & Gentilium Sapientes, & perlustrato orbe à nobis quærerent, quid profuerit humano generi Religio Christiana, quoad mores & vitæ probitatem? quoad pacem & bonum publicum? nos utique appellatis Barbaros per opprobrium: sed nobis Barbaris quid præstatis vos Christiani?*

Præfatio ad  
novissimam Si-  
nica.

Monfieur *Leibnitz*, a great Statesman as well as Philosopher, in comparing the Christians at present, with the Infidels of *China*, does not scruple to give the preference to the latter, in relation to all *moral Virtue*; ——— and after having said of them, *Dici enim non potest, quam pulchre omnia ad tranquillitatem publicam, orainemque hominum inter se, ut quam minimum sibi ipsi incommodent, supra aliarum gentium leges apud Sinenses sint ordinata*: He adds, *Certe talis nostrarum rerum mihi videtur esse conditio, gliscentibus in immensum corruptelis, ut propemodum necessarium videatur missionarios Sinensium ad nos mitti, qui Theologiæ naturalis usum praxinque nos doceant, quemadmodum nos illis mittimus qui Theologiam eos doceant revelatam.*

Alpetan.  
quest. 1. 3. p.  
419.

And the learned *Huetius* tells us, that “ There’s such a constant Agreement between the *Chinese* themselves, and their Neighbours, as they seem to be all but one Family.”

*Navarette’s*  
Acc. of *China*  
in *Churchill’s*  
Collection of  
Voy. V. 1.  
l. 2. c. 13.

*Navarette*, a *Chinese* Missionary, agrees with *Leibnitz*, and says, that “ It is God’s special Providence, that the *Chinese* did not know what is done in *Christianity*; for-if they did, there wou’d be never a Man among them, but wou’d spit in our Faces.” And he adds, with respect to the

Manners

Manners of those *European* Christians, who come into the *East-Indies*, and of the Converts made by the *Missionaries*; “ That there are few converted in those Parts, where they converse with the *Euro-peans*; and when it happens that any are converted, they prove so bad, it were better they had never been baptiz’d.” And I am afraid, ’tis much the same in relation to the *West-Indies*.  
And,

BISHOP *Kidder* says of Christians in general, “ That were a wise Man to choose his Religion by the Lives of those who profess it; perhaps, Christianity would be the last Religion he would choose.” And who, that has been abroad, and compar’d the Lives of Believers and Unbelievers, does not say the same Things?

AND Dr. *Clarke* himself, in the Discourse we are now considering, has sufficiently prov’d, that Man is naturally a social Creature, full of Benevolence, Pity, and Tenderness; and he says, that “ Reason, which is the proper Nature of Man, pag. 107. can never lead Men to any thing else than universal Love, and Benevolence;” and that “ Wars, Hatred, and Violence can never arise, but from extreme Corruptions.” Tho’ there’s no part of Natural Religion, but highly tends to improve this social, and benign Temper; yet alas! we find, that what, in most Places, passes for the Christian Religion, if not the chiefest part of it, has transform’d this social, and benign Creature into one fierce, and cruel; and made him act with such Rage and Fury against those, who never did, or design’d him the least Injury; as could not have enter’d into the Hearts of Men to conceive, even tho’ they were in the Doctor’s unavoidable State of Degeneracy and Corruption.

IF People are once persuaded, that what their Priests call *Schism*, *Heresy*, *Infidelity*, &c. tho’ held with the utmost Sincerity, are damnable Sins; it wants not much Skill to persuade them to hate those  
mor-

morally, whom God, they are already persuaded, will hate to all Eternity ; and that, as they regard the Preservation of the Orthodox Faith, and the saving their own Souls, and the Souls of all that are dear to them, they ought to take the most effectual Methods to root out all such damnable Opinions. 'Tis upon this common Principle, that the *Inquisition* is establish'd ; and the *Papists*, to do them justice, act up to it ; tho' perhaps, even among them, there are some Lay-men, where Nature is too hard for Principles.

IF once pernicious Opinions are believ'd to be contain'd in any Revelation, they will have the same Effect, as if really there. Has not the Belief of the judicial Power of the Clergy, as to the next World ; and their independent Power in this World, done the same Mischief, as if they had really been contain'd in Scripture ? And if they, who maintain these, and other as vile Maxims, have got possession of Mens Minds, by ingrossing (not to mention other Arts) the teaching the Young, as well as instructing the Old ; what less than a new Revelation can expose their Expositions, or explain away their Explanations of the present Revelation, which have prov'd more fatal to the Happiness of Mankind, than all the Superstitions of the *Pagan* World. Had the *Bees* Speech and Reason, would they, think you, from Age to Age, have continu'd to give the best part of their Honey to such haranguing Drones, who, for the most part, employ'd their Talents, to set not only Hive against Hive ; but the *Bees* of the same Hive against one another, for such things as had no other Tendency, than to make the idle Drones lord it over the industrious Bees ? But not to deviate,

WE have no great Reason to hope, it will ever be so well with Mankind ; but that there will always be too much room for such Arguments, as the Doctor urges from the Corruptions of Mankind, for new Revelations. Have not Impostors always  
made

made use of this Plea? Was it not on the Carnality of the primitive Orthodox Christians, that the spiritual *Montanus* founded his new Gospel; which divided the Christian World for no small Time, and made the celebrated *Tertullian* say; That “ the Law  
 “ and Prophets were to be look’d on as the Infancy;  
 “ and the Gospel, as it were, the Youth; but that  
 “ there was no compleat Perfection to be found,  
 “ but in the Instruction of the Holy Ghost, who  
 “ spoke by *Montanus*?”

AND it was the ill Lives of the Professors of Christianity, as ’tis own’d by Christian as well as *Arabick* Writers, which prepar’d the way for that Success which *Mahomet* met with; whose Religion, as it gain’d in a short Time more profelytes than any other, so it is still gaining ground: For which Father *Marracci*, who has so well translated, and makes such just Reflections on the *Alcoran*, gives this odd Reason: *Habet nimirum hæc Superstitio (Ma-*  
*humedana) quicquid plausible, ac probabile in Christi-*  
*ana Religione reperitur, & quæ Naturæ legi ac lumini*  
*consentanea videntur. Mystera illa Fidei nostræ, quæ*  
*primo aspectu, incredibilia, & impossibilia apparent;*  
*& præcipue, quæ nimis ardua humanæ naturæ censentur,*  
*penitus excludit. Hinc moderni Idolorum Cultores,*  
*facilius ac promptius Saracenicam, quam Evangelicam,*  
*Legem amplectuntur.* But,

THE DOCTOR is so far from solving the Difficulties attending this Scheme, that he quits it, and artfully introduces a new Scene; and tho’ he had before laid it down as a most evident Truth, that God does nothing by meer Will and Arbitrariness; yet this new Hypothesis is wholly built on it, in supposing, that in these latter Times, God intended to give some Men, without regard to their Merits, an higher Degree of Happiness than he did the rest: And to shew how consistent this is with Reason, he says, “ As God was not oblig’d to make  
 “ all his Creatures equal, or to make Men Angels,  
 “ or to endow all Men with the same Capacities

“ and Faculties ; so he was not bound to make all  
 “ Men capable of the *same degree*, or the *same kind*  
 “ of Happiness, or to afford all Men the very same  
 “ *Means and Opportunity* of obtaining it.”

B. B U T how comes this to be shifting the Scene, and introducing a new Hypothesis?

A. B E C A U S E his former supposes Men living and dying in a deprav'd, corrupted, degenerate, and impious State, incapable of Reformation ; whereas in this all Men are allow'd to have, in general, the Means of attaining to a certain Degree of Happiness hereafter ; whilst Christians alone have in particular the Means and Opportunities of gaining this higher degree, and kind of Happiness.

T H O' infinite variety of Creatures, and consequently Inequality, is necessary to shew the great Extent of the divine Goodness, which plainly appears from the beautiful, and well-form'd System of the World, and the due Subordination of Things, all contriv'd for the Happiness of the Whole ; yet sure, it does not from thence follow, that God will not either here, or hereafter, bestow on the rational Creation, all the Happiness their Nature is capable of ; since that was the End why God gave it them.

C A N God, who equally beholds all the Dwellers on Earth, free from Partiality and Prejudice, make some People his Favourites, without any Consideration of their Merits ; and merely because they believe certain Opinions taught in that Country where they happen to be born ; while others, far the greater number, shall, from Age to Age, want his Favour ; not upon the Account of their Demerits, but because destin'd to live in Places, where God, who always acts from Motives of infinite Wisdom and Goodness, thought it best to conceal from them all such Opinions ? What can more represent God as an arbitrary and partial Being, than thus to suppose, that he vouchsafes not to afford the greatest part of Mankind, the Happiness, of which himself had made them capable ?

MUST not every one perceive, that this narrow Notion is inconsistent with the Character of a Being of unlimited Benevolence? is not infinite Goodness always the same? How then can it, in these last Days, make such Inequality among Men? Is not this supposing Inconstancy in the divine Conduct? Is not this Notion repugnant to the natural Idea we have of the divine Goodness? As likewise to those express Texts of Scripture, which declare *God is no Respēter of Persons*; that *every one, of what Nation soever, shall be rewarded according to his Works*? And that *Men are accepted according to what they have, and not according to what they have not*?

IF God, as the Doctor contends, will judge Men as they are accountable, that is, as they are rational; must not the Judgment of the most righteous Judge, hold an exact proportion to the Use they have made of their Reason? And if Men's State in this Life be a State of Probation, and for that Cause they are made moral Agents, capable of knowing Good from Evil, and consequently of doing every thing that's fit to be done; must they not be dealt with hereafter, according to the use they have made of their moral Agency?

How can Men be sure, if God acts thus partially, that this partiality may not even now be in Favour of other Countries, than those they live in; and of other Notions, which not flowing from the Nature and Reason of Things, we may be wholly unacquainted with? If Men may lose any part of God's Favour for Impossibilities; or not observing such Rules as he never gave them; where shall we stop? Cou'd I think God so partial and prejudic'd, as most Sects, for their own Sakes, represent him; how cou'd I admire, love, and adore him, as I ought? Nay, how can any, who have such unworthy Notions of God, be certain, God's Prejudice and Partiality will be in their Favour? If you admit any one Imperfection in God; how can you be sure of his Veracity, Immutability, or any other Perfection whatever?

THO' Dr. *Clark* contends for what terminates in this gross Partiality, as if the Whole of Christianity was founded on it; yet some of our Divines, of the first Rank too, are of a different Opinion; from two of which, I'll give you the following Quotations.

*Wharton's*

Vol. of Serm.

p. 305, &c.

“ GOD'S Goodness and Mercy (*says Mr. Whar-*  
 “ ton) were, from all Ages, equal and uniform;  
 “ his Justice always impartial and universal, in ex-  
 “ cluding none from his Favour, but for Reasons  
 “ common to them with all Mankind.—The  
 “ Universality, and Impartiality of the Divine Ju-  
 “ stice and Favour is founded on the Excellency of  
 “ the Divine Nature; which can't be suppos'd to  
 “ want That, which above all is necessary for the  
 “ Government of the World; impartial Justice in  
 “ the dispensing of Rewards and Punishments.—  
 “ All Men were equally created by God; and if  
 “ we respect That alone, all have an equal Title  
 “ to his Favour.—Otherwise we cou'd not but  
 “ conceive Injustice in God; nor were it possible to  
 “ reconcile such a Partiality with his infinite Ex-  
 “ cellency. The Reason why *God is no Respector of*  
 “ *Persons*, is said to be, because *There is no Iniquity*  
 “ *with the Lord*. All reasonable Preference of one  
 “ Person to another, must be founded on some just  
 “ Cause; otherwise it wou'd be trifling, and fond;  
 “ nay, even unjust, and foolish — Far be it from  
 “ us, to imagine any such Imperfections in God;  
 “ in him there is no Variableness, or Shadow of  
 “ Change.—He ever proceeds upon fixed, and  
 “ immoveable Principles; which equally serve for  
 “ all Actions and Causes.—God has fix'd most  
 “ impartial Laws of Government; which univer-  
 “ sally affect all the Members of Mankind.—  
 “ It is so pleasing a Delusion, to fancy themselves  
 “ dear to God in an extraordinary Manner, and  
 “ for unaccountable Reasons; that it is no wonder  
 “ many have been tempted to entertain such a  
 “ charming Error.—This seduc'd the *Jews*.—

2 Chron. 23.  
49.

“ This



“ This Prejudice has corrupted great Numbers of  
 “ Christians.—Is God the God of the *Jews* and  
 “ *Christians* only? Is he not the God of the *Gentiles*  
 “ also? Are not his Attributes always unalterable ;  
 “ and the Influence of these equally deriv'd down  
 “ to all his Creatures ? ”

THAT celebrated Preacher, Dr. *Ibbott*, affirms, *Serm. Vol. 1.*  
 that, “ 'Tis not our being of any Nation, or any pag. 207.

“ Sect, Members of any particular Church, or  
 “ Society ; that will intitle us to God's Favour ; but  
 “ our working the Work of God, living up to that  
 “ Light and Knowledge which he has afforded us ;  
 “ and being most punctual, and exact in the discharge  
 “ of those moral Duties, which all Mankind, who  
 “ have any true Notions of God and Religion, have  
 “ ever thought themselves oblig'd to.”—*Again,*  
 “ Wherever Men fear God, and love one another, pag. 211.  
 “ they will be accepted without any Regard to their  
 “ Country, or Nation ; their Tribe, or Family ;  
 “ for This is what God would bring all People to,  
 “ *from the rising of the Sun unto the going down thereof.*  
 “ This is that inward Temper of Mind, and that  
 “ outward Practice of Life, which he requires ;  
 “ and which, wherever he meets it, will find Ac-  
 “ ceptance with him.”

THE contrary is a Notion, which lays a Founda-  
 tion for everlasting Persecution ; for if Men flat-  
 ter themselves, that they, upon the Account of their  
 particular Systems, are the Favourites of Heaven ;  
 and that others shall want, even to Eternity, many  
 Degrees of their Happiness ; will not that oblige  
 them, as they love their Children, Families, Friends,  
 Neighbours, and Relations ; to use any Means,  
 come into any persecuting Measures, to prevent  
 such Opinions from spreading, as they imagine,  
 wou'd deprive them of that Degree of Happiness,  
 which otherwise they might ever enjoy ? And is it  
 not chiefly owing to this Absurdity, that even the  
 most moderate of the different Sects, are far from

treating one another with that Benevolence, which the common Ties of Humanity require?

DID Men believe, that all, who were equally sincere, were equally acceptable to God; there cou'd be no pretence for the least Partiality, much less for Persecution, either Positive, or Negative: Nor cou'd any Man love another the less, for the widest Difference in Opinions: And then of course, Mens Indignation wou'd be wholly bent against Immorality, discoverable by the Light of Nature; which, now, alas! is but too often protected by Zeal for mere Speculations.

THIS Principle, and this alone, wou'd cause universal Love, and Benevolence among the whole Race of Mankind; and did it prevail, must soon produce a new, and glorious Face of Things; or, in the Scripture-Phrase, *a new Heaven, and a new Earth*; and wou'd free Men from that miserable Perplexity, in which the Fear of mistaking in speculative Matters involves them.

WHAT Assurance, upon any other Ground, can even the generality of Christians have, that they do not err most dangerously; when they consider what Divisions there have been, from the Beginning, among Christians, about such Points? And that the Guides of their own Churches, even the most able, tho' they agree in saying, *Their Fundamentals are plain*; have not always the same Set of *Fundamentals*; and when they have, widely differ in explaining them: Can they, I say, who consider this, be certain, that it is not the Fear of Loss of Preferment, or some other political Reasons, that keep up any Sort of verbal Agreement among them, even in Things own'd to be of the highest Consequence; and which, as such, are plac'd in their *CreeDs* and *Articles*? Consider, with yourself, what Comfort, what Satisfaction, it must give a Man, especially, on his Death-bed, to be certain, he is not accountable for any Errors in Opinion; if he has, according

as his Circumstances permit, done his best to discover the Will of God?

DR. *Prideaux* says, “ The main Arguments *Mahomet* made use of, to delude Men into the Imposture, were his Promises, and his Threats; being those which easily work on the Affections of the Vulgar.” If the Bulk of Mankind are so easily deluded by Threats and Promises, when join’d to Opinions as absurd as those of *Mahomet*; can there be any other way to avoid their being deluded in proportion to the Greatness of those Promises and Threats; but by annexing them, not to any Set of Opinions, but to Sincerity and Insincerity? For here, the only Effect they can have, is to make Men judge without Prejudice and Partiality.

THE present Bishop of *Sarum* says, “ God is just, equal, and good; and as sure as he is so, he can’t put the Salvation and Happiness of any Man, upon what he has not put it in the Power of any Man on Earth to be intirely satisfy’d of.” And much less, *say I*, can a just, equal, and good God put the Salvation, or any Part of the Happiness of the greatest Part of Mankind, upon that, of which, instead of being entirely satisfied, they are intirely ignorant. Is it possible, a mistaken Christian can have a Title to God’s Favour, and a Man of another Religion not have the same Title; when that Sincerity, on which the Title depends, is common to them both? “ If the Favour of God, *as the Bishop says*, follows Sincerity, as such; and equally follows every Degree of Sincerity;” must not Men of all Religions whatever, if equally sincere, have the same Title to be equally favour’d by God? who is the only infallible Judge of their Sincerity, in the Use of those Talents, whether great, or small, he has endow’d them with. And,

MR. *Chillingworth* was so far from thinking involuntary Errors, Crimes; that he thought it criminal to ask pardon for them: And says, “ That wou’d be to impute to God the strange Tyranny of requiring

Life of *Mahomet*, p. 25. Edit. 7. 8vo.

Preserv. p. 78.

Ib. p. 91.

Answer to the Pref. of Charity maintain’d. Sect. 16.

“ quiring Bricks, where he has given no Straw; of  
 “ expecting to gather, where he has not strow’d;  
 “ to reap, where he sow’d not; of being offended  
 “ with us for not doing, what he knew we cou’d  
 “ not do.” And,

THE *Romanists* themselves, tho’ they own the common People can have but an imperfect Knowledge of what their infallible Church requires; yet say, that “ a Disposition to receive, and an Endeavour  
 “ to understand what it teaches, is sufficient.” And shall not the *Protestants* allow as much to such a Disposition, in relation to the Will of God; as the *Papists* do, to the Will of Man? But since there are some, to whom these Notions about Sincerity, will appear shocking; for their sakes, I will quote a Divine, whom they have in a manner idoliz’d: I

*Lesley* of private Judgm. pag. 221. mean the famous Mr. *Lesley*, who says, “ *In the Beginning God created Man, and left him in the Hands of his own Counsel (Eccles. 15. 14.)* He set  
 “ Life and Death, Blessing and Cursing for him to  
 “ chuse; and God will bless, or curse him, according to what he has set before him; whether  
 “ by Revelation, or his own Natural Reason only:  
 “ And who is Judge of this but God, who always  
 “ knows the Sincerity of any Man’s Intentions,  
 “ and what Endeavours he has used towards the  
 “ right informing his Judgment?”

IN a Word, this is so evident a Truth, that there are none, but who, with the Bishop of *London*, say,  
 “ Christianity requires no further Favour, than a  
 “ fair, and impartial Inquiry into the Grounds and  
 “ Doctrines of it;” even while they are designing the further Favours of *Fines, Pillories* and *Imprisonment*, &c. But to return to the Doctor.

Past. Letter, pag. 54.

I wou’d be glad to know, whether the greater Degree of Happiness, from which Dr. *Clark* wou’d exclude the rest of Mankind; belongs to all those innumerable Sects, that go under the Name of Christians; or to one Sect, by virtue of its peculiar Fundamentals; or else to all Christians, who,  
 tho’

tho' ever so much mistaken, sincerely endeavour to find out the Will of God? If the Doctor says the latter, he can't think this Favour depends on any Set of Notions, but on Sincerity; and consequently, must equally belong to all that are equally sincere: But allowing that Christians are to be rewarded above others, equally sincere; yet if they are likewise subject to be punish'd above others for their Mistakes, even about such abstruse Notions, as divide the most eminent Men of the same most eminent Church; such as Dr. *Waterland*, and Dr. *Clark*; nay, Dr. *Clark*, in some Editions of his Book, and himself in other Editions; where then, is the great Advantage of the Doctor's *Hypothesis*? But,

IF Christians are to be punish'd hereafter, for not observing such Things, as the Happiness of Mankind in general does not depend on; God, certainly, is far from being partial in their Favour; if not, where is the Difference?

BUT does not the Doctor raise an Argument, from Mens different Capacities and Abilities in this Life, for their having different Degrees of Happiness hereafter?

A. THO' Men here have different Capacities, yet if that depends on bodily Organs; all Souls may in Heaven have equal Capacities: But even this Supposition will not serve his Purpose, except the wisest of the Philosophers had not Abilities equal to the meanest Christian; and so (allowing a Proportion between Happiness and Abilities) were naturally incapable of the same Degree, or Kind of Happiness. But,

THE Doctor himself seems conscious of the Weakness, even of this new *Hypothesis*; since he, after he had used it, to get rid of a troublesome Objection; strait quits it in saying, “ That as no  
 “ Man ever deny'd, but that the Benefit of Christ's  
 “ Death extended backward, to those who liv'd  
 “ before his Appearance in the World; so no One  
 “ can prove, but the same Benefit may extend itself  
 “ forward

“ forward to those, who never heard of his Appearance; tho’ they liv’d after it.” If both these, tho’ knowing nothing of Christ, or his Death, reap the Benefit of his Death; what more can the most perfect Believer expect? So that even on this Supposition, the Doctor must have own’d, that all Men, living up to that Light God has given them, are upon a Level, in relation to their future Happiness.

AND indeed, if Sinners, since the coming of Christ, are not to be sav’d without Repentance and Amendment; and Sinners, at all Times, were to be sav’d on these Terms, or else cou’d not be sav’d at all; must not Repentance and Amendment, which suppose a Knowledge of what was to be repented of, and amended; put all Mankind, at all Times, upon a Level, with relation to their future Happiness? Can any thing be more evident, than that, if doing Evil is the only Foundation of God’s Displeasure; ceasing to do Evil, and doing the contrary, must take away that Displeasure? As long as Men continue in their Sins, they must continue the proper Objects of God’s Resentment; but when they, forsaking their Sins, act a Part suitable to their rational Nature, they of course become the proper Objects of his Approbation: And this, sure, can’t be deny’d, except you suppose, Christ, who *came not to call the Righteous, but Sinners to Repentance*; propos’d some other way of reconciling them to God, than by persuading them to *bring forth Fruits meet for Repentance*; or, in other Words, by obliging them to live up to the eternal, and universal Law of Righteousness.

THO’ the Doctor says no more than our Articles affirm, *viz.* that “ the Oblation of Christ once made, is that perfect Redemption, Propitiation, and Satisfaction for the Sins of the whole World, both Original, and Actual;” yet I wish the Doctor had been more explicit, and told us, what Benefit those who never heard of Christ’s Appearance, cou’d gain by his Death.

*B.* The Doctor says, that “ Christ died, to shew pag. 259.  
 “ God’s irreconcilable Hatred to Sin ; and to vin-  
 “ dicate the Honour of his Laws.” pag. 260.

*A.* THESE Reasons, sure, cou’d never influence those, who never heard of Christ ; or, if they had, perhaps, wou’d have been so perverse, as not to imagine, that pardoning the Guilty, and punishing the Innocent, cou’d either shew irreconcilable Enmity to Guilt, or Love for Innocence ; and perhaps, govern’d by Prejudices, might think very oddly of a King, who, tho’ he freely pardon’d his repenting Rebels ; yet shou’d cause his most loyal, and only Son to be put to death, to shew his Hatred to Rebellion ; and to vindicate the Honour of those Laws, which forbid putting an innocent Person to death ; or any Person to be any way instrumental to his own Death ; much more to sacrifice himself. Cou’d these Philosophers, who did not imagine any Virtue in sacrificing of Beasts, to wash away the Sins of pag. 206.  
 Men ; easily conceive a Human Sacrifice, which they believ’d Human Nature abhorr’d, to be an pag. 287.  
 Expiation for Sins ? Or, that Sins freely pardon’d, cou’d want any Expiation ? Or, that all was mere Mercy, and pure Forgiveness, after a full Equivalent paid, and adequate Satisfaction given ?

*B.* THIS, indeed, seems to me as great a Mystery, as that the same God shou’d receive Satisfaction from, and give Satisfaction to the same God : and that the same God, who thus receives, and gives Satisfaction, shou’d neither give, or receive any Satisfaction ; since the Holy Ghost, the same God with God the Father, and God the Son, neither gives, or receives any Satisfaction.

THO’ I have omitted several Things, which well deserve to be criticis’d ; yet, I think, I have said enough to shew the Inconsistency of the Doctor’s Scheme ; and the Weakness of all those Arguments, by which he attempts to destroy the All-sufficiency, absolute Perfection, Plainness, and Perspicuity of the Law of Nature ; which he had before so fully de-

demonstrated. Who cou'd expect, after we had been told, that as God governs all his own Actions by the eternal Rule of Reason; so all his rational Creatures are oblig'd to govern themselves in all theirs, by the same eternal Rule: A Rule too, own'd to be so plain, that the *Reason of all Men every where naturally, and necessarily assents to it*: Who, I say, after these, and a Number of other such Expressions, cou'd imagine, that all this shou'd be unsaid, and the utmost Art employ'd, to shew the Imperfection, Insufficiency, Obscurity, and Uncertainty of the Light of Nature; and that by Reason of its many Defects, all Mankind, from Age to Age, were in an unavoidable State of Corruption? And that, even those few Men, who made it their Business to study Natural Religion, were intirely ignorant of some Doctrines, absolutely necessary for the Reformation of Mankind? Nay, that they were (here the Doctor, perhaps, describes his own Conduct) “like Men wandering in the wide  
 “ Sea, without knowing whither to go, or which  
 “ Way to take; or having any Guide to conduct  
 “ them?” And, in support of his *Hypothesis*, make no scruple to represent God, not alike Good at all Times and Places; and to have acted for many Ages with so little Foresight; as to give Mankind no other Light for their Conduct, than such, as disabled them from answering that End, for which it was given: And afterward, with so little Goodness; as when he saw this Defect, still to continue the greatest Part of Mankind in that dismal State of Darkness, in which all before were involv'd? And then, after he had made the most of this strange *Hypothesis*, to quit it for the sake of another, no less strange? And, tho' he had declar'd, that *God does nothing in the Government of the World, out of mere Will and Arbitrariness*; yet to suppose, that God acts thus with his rational Creatures; and without regard to Merit, arbitrarily designs Christians a greater Degree of Happiness than others? And at  
 last



last quit too, even this *Hypothesis*; by supposing all Men, tho' they never heard of Christ's Death, to be upon a level, in relation to any Benefits receiv'd from it? And, I may add,

WHEN Men consider, how often this Discourse has been reprinted, and review'd by a Man own'd to be as great a Master of Reason, as ever appear'd in print; and withal, both a subtle *Metaphysician*, and excellent *Mathematician*; an acute *Philosopher*, as well as a deep *Divine*; one, who never fails to exhaust the Subject he handles: When Men, I say, consider all this, will they not be apt to cry?

*Si Pergama dextra, &c.*

Virg. *Æn.* 2,  
291.

B. I must own, you have produced several weighty Arguments, many of them new, at least, to me; to prove that Religion was, and always must be invariably the same; but since you go out of the common Road, and the Path you take, is scarce at all trodden; you must expect, it will be said of you, as of some modern Writers, that you are better at pulling down, than building up.

A. WHEN any Notion, in Defence of which People have little to say, is attack'd, they usually cry, *Why will you pull down, except you build up?* When in reality, Error must be remov'd, in order to make way for Truth: You must pull down one, before you can build up the other. But here, I hope, there's no room for that Objection; because, as nothing but Rubbish is remov'd, nothing but what is either inconsistent with, or, at least, takes off from, the full Exercise of Piety, and Virtue; so every Thing is advanc'd, which tends to promote the Honour of God, and the Happiness of Human Societies. And, I may add, that as in attacking the Superstition of any one Party, all the rest wou'd think me in the right; so here all Parties, without coming into the *Hypothesis* of their Adversaries, may, by equally receding from these arbitrary Things they

they have brought into Religion, come to an happy Agreement.

FOR my part, I think, there's none who wish well to Mankind, but must likewise wish this *Hypothesis* to be true; and can there be a greater Proof of its Truth, than that it is, in all its Parts, so exactly calculated for the Good of Mankind, that either to add to, or take from it, will be to their manifest Prejudice? And,

Introduct. to  
Def. of Christ.  
p. 2.

IF, as Bishop *Chandler* remarks, "They are Deceivers, and true Enemies to Mankind, who do not teach a Religion most worthy of God, most friendly to Society, most helpful to Government, and most beneficial to every Individual;" what need we run to his *Jewish Rabbies*, or any other *Rabbies*, to discover this true Religion? If it is by this Test, that our Reason must judge of the Truth of all Religion; are not they the best Friends to Mankind, who teach such a Religion, without the least Mixture of those Arbitrary Things, that have caus'd such fatal Contentions among Christians? And which, at the best, *serve only to divert them from attending to a Religion most worthy of God, most friendly to Society, most helpful to Government, and most beneficial to every Individual*; and withal, is a Religion, as I hope is here fully prov'd, founded upon such demonstrable Principles, as are obvious to the meanest Capacity; and most effectually prevents the Growth, both of Scepticism and Enthusiasm.

I intirely agree with this Right Reverend Father, that "Christianity in itself, stripp'd of the Additions that Policy, Mistake, and the Circumstances of Time, have made to it, is a most holy Religion;" but I may add, that by reason of these Additions, it is become, in most Places, a most unholy Religion. And can we hope to get rid of these Additions, but by bringing them to the Bishop's own Test? I might here ask him, Who are they, that have brought in, and still defend these

Additions to Christianity ; which, as all fair, and candid Writers own, have given great Advantages to its Adversaries ?

WHAT good Christian is not ready to join with the excellent Dr. *Sykes*, in wishing, “ That Christians wou’d not vend under the Name of Evangelical Truths, the absurd, and contradictory Schemes of ignorant, or wicked Men ? That they wou’d part with the Load of Rubbish, which makes thinking Men sink under the Weight, and gives too great a Handle to Infidelity ? ”

The Hands of Friends to Christianity, *he says*, Sykes’s Essay on the Truth of the Christ. Relig. p. 204. Ib. Pref. have been much embarrass’d, thro’ Fear of speaking against local Truths ; and its Adversaries have so successfully attack’d those Weaknesses, that Christianity itself has been deem’d indefensible ; when, in reality, the Follies of Christians alone have been so.” If this be true, have I not shewn some Resolution, in daring to attack the darling Weaknesses, and Follies of false Christians, in proving that true Christianity is so far from being indefensible ; that it carries its own Evidences with it ; or in other words, all its Doctrines plainly speak themselves to be the Will of an infinitely wise, and good God ; as being *most friendly to Society, most helpful to Government, and most beneficial to every Individual* ; or, in one word, free from all Priestcraft ?

B. THERE’S one Objection which will always stick, you will be represented as an Affecter of Novelty ; and that ’tis Pride and Vain-Glory, which makes you go out of the common Road.

A. THAT is a Reflection all must expect, who endeavour to reform any prevailing Abuses : They little understand Human Nature, who do not see, that Novelty, in this Case, can only serve to make a Man despis’d by the Majority, for his Ignorance ; in not being able to discover that Truth, which they, at first sight, clearly perceive ; as well as hated by them, for propagating false Doctrine ;  
and

and inhumanly treated for it, if it clashes (and where does not Reformation clash) with the Interest of a certain Set of Men, who have two Thirds of Mankind, *viz.* the *Bigots* and *Immoral*, intirely at their Devotions. But,

I am so far from being a *Novelist*, that all, except where they disagree with themselves, must agree with me: Are not all of my Sentiments, who own, that their Religion contains all Things worthy of having God for its Author? For that supposes, that Reason, antecedently to Revelation, can tell them what is, or is not worthy of having God for its Author: And do not all recede from Revelation, or, which is the same, recede from the plain obvious, grammatical Construction of its Words, whenever that, in the least Point, recedes from the Religion of Nature and Reason? Which being, *as Dr. Prideaux owns*, wrote in the Hearts of every one of us from the Creation; is “the Touchstone of all Religion;” and that, “if the Gospel varies from it in any particular, or in the minutest Circumstance is contrary to its Righteousness; that is strong enough to destroy the whole Cause; and make all Things else that can be said for its Support, totally ineffectual.” Which supposes, we can’t judge of the Truth of any Revelation, till we apply to it the Touchstone of all Religion; and see whether it agrees with that in all Particulars. And do not all, without regard to the plain Meaning of the Words, in interpreting the Precepts of the Gospel, (which are, for the most part, deliver’d in general, undetermin’d, and very often, hyperbolical Terms;) so explain, limit, and restrain these Precepts, as to make them agreeable to the Touchstone of all Religion, the Nature, and Reason of things; for fear, that otherwise they might depreciate Morality? And in this Case, they, as it is allow’d, are the best Interpreters, who most recede from the *killing Letter*. And is not this, in effect, saying with the

See pag. 60,  
61. where  
the Passages  
are at large.

present Bishop of *Bangor*, “ That the Gospel is a See the Quo-  
 “ Republication of the Law of Nature; and its tation at large  
 “ Precepts declarative of that original Religion, p. 68, &c.  
 “ which is as old as the Creation. And, “ ’Tis  
 “ as reasonable to suppose, that three Angles of a  
 “ Triangle should be equal to two right ones in one  
 “ Age, and unequal in another; as to suppose,  
 “ that the Duties of Religion should differ in one  
 “ Age, from what they were in another; the Ha-  
 “ bitudes, and Relations from which they flow,  
 “ continuing always the same.”

THE Principles I maintain are so evident, that they who are introducing Things in opposition to them, must yet own their Force. Dare any say, that God is an Arbitrary Being, and his Laws not founded on the eternal Reason of Things; even while they are contending for his acting arbitrarily, and giving us such Laws as are founded on mere Will and Pleasure? Will any maintain, that our reasoning Faculties were not given us, to distinguish between Good and Evil, Religion and Superstition? Or that they will not answer the End for which they were given?

WILL any affirm, that the Nature of God is not eternally the same? Or that the Nature of Man is chang’d? Or that the Relations God and Man stand in to one another, are not always the same; nay, even while they are making Alterations in these Relations, by supposing new Laws, and new Duties?

IF All own, that God, at no Time, cou’d have any Motive to give Laws to Mankind, but for their Good; and that he is, at all Times, equally good, and, at all Times, acts upon the same Motives; must they not own with me, except they are inconsistent with themselves, that his Laws, at all Times must be the same? And that the Good of Mankind is the Test, the *Criterion*, or the internal Evidence, by which we are to judge of all his Laws? But,

- IF, after all, I am still criminal, it must be in not owning, that God created the greatest Part of Mankind to be damn'd; or, which is the same, made such Things necessary to their Salvation, as they were incapable of knowing: And in my as-
- Heb. 11. 6. *fering, that God is a Rewarder of those, who diligently seek him; tho' they do not seek him under the Direction of this, or that Set of Men; who, provided they can make themselves necessary here, care not who they damn hereafter. And thus,*
- Acts 10. 34, 35. *IN believing with St. Peter, that God is no Respector of Persons; but in every Nation he that feareth him, and worketh Righteousness, is accepted with him:*
- Rom. 2. 14. *And with St. Paul, that the Gentiles do by Nature the*
- Rom. 2. 6. *Things contained in the Law: And that God will render to every Man (whether Believer, or Unbeliever,)*
- Tit. 2. 11, 12. *according to his Deeds: And that the Grace of God, which bringeth Salvation, — Teaching us, — we shou'd live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present World, (which takes in the whole of our Duty) has appear'd to all Men, and at all Times. And,*
- Mat. 9. 12. *IN believing with our Saviour, that the Whole*
- John 7. 17. *need not a Physician; and that the Doctrine he taught shews itself to be the Will of God; and that he did not speak of himself; and in believing the Description, that God himself gives of the New Covenant, I will*
- Heb. 8. 10. *put my Laws into their Minds, and write them in their*
- Ver. 11. *Hearts: — They shall not teach every Man his Neighbour. — They shall all know me from the least to the greatest.*
- IN a word, All are forc'd to own these Sentiments I contend for, except the *Anthropomorphites*; they, indeed, said, that *Fallible Reason must give place to infallible Revelation*; or in *Dr. Waterland's*
- Remarks on *Words, "That to advance Natural Light, that is,*
- Dr. Clarke's *" Pagan Darkness, in opposition to Scripture Evi-*
- Exposit. of the *" dence, is setting up human Conjectures above*
- Ch. Cate- *" divine Truths:" And that, since the Scripture*
- chism, p. 66. *so frequently imputes human Parts, and Passions to God, we ought not to doubt of it; only be-*
- cause*

cause we can't reconcile it with that Philosophy, which the Bulk of Mankind, for whom the Scripture was chiefly wrote, are intirely ignorant of.

IN our next Conference (it being high Time to put an End to this) I shew you, that all Mankind, *Jews, Gentiles, Mahometans, &c.* agree, in owning the Sufficiency of the Law of Nature, to make Men acceptable to God; and that the primitive Christians believ'd, there was an exact Agreement between *Natural* and *Reveal'd Religion*; and that the Excellency of the Latter, did consist in being a Republication of the Former.

FOR the present, take these few Authorities:

“ If, says the renowned *Origen*, we admit the Origen contra  
 “ Judgment of God to be just, we must acknow- Celsum, l. 1.  
 “ ledge, that there can be no Ground for the Pu- p. 6.  
 “ nishment of Sinners, unless the common Concep-  
 “ tions of all Men, are sufficient to give them a  
 “ sound Understanding in the Duties of Morality.  
 “ And, therefore, it is not to be thought strange,  
 “ that those Things that God has taught us by the  
 “ Prophets, and by our Saviour, were implanted  
 “ by him in the Minds of all Men; that so every  
 “ Man, having had the Intention, and Meaning of  
 “ the Law written in his own Heart, shou'd be  
 “ left without excuse before the Divine Tribunal.”  
 And,

*Laetantius*, the most eloquent of the Fathers, seems ravish'd with the Description *Cicero* gives of the Law of Nature; and therefore, chuses to express his own Sense of it, in the Words of that Philosopher. “ The Law of God, *says he*, is necessary l. 6. c. 3.  
 “ to be observ'd, That will lead us into the Way  
 “ of Happiness; that holy and heavenly Law, I  
 “ mean, which *Marcus Tullius* has, as it were, di-  
 “ vinely describ'd in his third Book *de Republica*;  
 “ and whose Words, I will, therefore, subjoin.  
 “ Right Reason is a Law of Truth, consonant to  
 “ Nature, implanted in all Men, uniform and eter-

nal.— This Law neither needs to be propos'd, nor can it ever be, either in whole, or part, repeal'd ; neither Senate, nor People, can discharge us from the Obligation of it ; we need not look abroad for an Expofitor, to make us understand it. It is not one Law at *Rome*, another at *Athens* ; one at this Time, another hereafter ; but one, and the fame immutable Law continues, and extends itfelf to all Times and Nations ; and one God is the common Lord, and Governor of all Things. He it is, that has fram'd, propounded, and establish'd this Law ; and whofoever obeys not him, abandons even himfelf, renounces his own Nature ; and in fo doing, fuffers actually in himfelf the greateft Punifhment, tho' he escapes all Things elfe which are deem'd fo."

In Pfal. 57.

ST. *Aufin* fays, " The Reason why God has given us a written Law, is not becaufe his Law was not already written in our Hearts ; but becaufe Men letting out their Appetites after Things abroad, became Strangers to themfelves ; and therefore, we have been fummon'd, and call'd upon by him, who is every where present, to return into ourfelves : For what is that the outward written Law calls for, unto thofe who have forfaken the Law written in their Hearts ; but *Return, O ye Transgressors, to your own Hearts?*"

Isaiah 46. 8.

I fhall, likewise, fhew you, that the Law of

James 1. 25.

Liberty, that *perfect Law of Liberty*, which we are oblig'd to maintain in all our Words and Actions,

Ib. 2. 21.

as *the Law we are to be judg'd by* ; does not confift in a Freedom from Things of a moral Nature, for that would be perfect Slavery ; but from all thofe things as are not of fuch a Nature : And that 'tis evident from the Reasoning, which runs thro' all the Epiftles, that the placing Religion in any indifferent Thing, is inconsistent with the Nature of Chriftianity ; 'tis introducing *Judaifm*, or what (as Chriftians have found to their Coft) is ftill more prejudicial.



AND therefore, instead of transcribing the best Part of the Epistles, I shall only mention a Text, or two: The Apostle of the *Gentiles* not only says, *Stand fast in the Liberty, wherewith Christ hath made you free*; but declares, *wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is Liberty*; and consequently, that they who impose any indifferent Things, as part of Religion, sin against our Christian Liberty; and act by another Spirit than that of the Lord: And I am afraid, that in this, as well as in many other Cases, the Spirit of the Lord, and the Spirit of the Church, in most Places, have been very opposite. And lest we shou'd mistake in this important Point, the Apostle likewise tells us, not only in what Things the Kingdom of God does, but in what Things it does not consist. *The Kingdom of God is not Meat and Drink, but Righteousness, Peace, and Joy in the Holy Ghost*; for he that in these Things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God, and approv'd of Man: Let us, therefore, follow after the Things which make for Peace, and Things wherewith we may edify one another. If these are the only Things, by which we can serve Christ, and which will make us acceptable to God, and approv'd of Men; can such Things, as have no Tendency to promote Righteousness, Peace, and Joy in the Holy Ghost, make us serviceable to Christ, or acceptable either to God, or Man?

THESE Words of the Apostle, tho' they need no Paraphrase, yet I shall mention what *Calvin* says on this Place; *Nam fieri non potest, ubi quispiam Deo acceptus est ac hominibus probatus, quin perfectè in ipso vigeat ac floreat regnum Dei. Qui tranquilla placidaq; Conscientia per Justitiam servit Christo, tam hominibus quam Deo se approbat. Ubi ergo est justitia, & pax, & gaudium spirituale, illic regnum Dei suis omnibus numeris est absolutum.* And with him *Bucer*, *Musculus*, and others of our first Reformers, agree. And if the Kingdom of God, which has these Things, is absolutely perfect, *omnibus suis numeris absolutum*; it can only be the Kingdom of Satan, which

which requires things of a different Nature: And if 'tis in these Things only we can serve Christ, others can't be introduc'd, but for the service of Antichrist.

HOWEVER, I shall, at present, content myself with saying, There are but two ways for any thing to oblige; either from the Reason of the Thing, or else from a positive Command: Now, if there are no such Things, as are commanded to be observ'd at all Times, and by all People; and no Commands can oblige those, to whom they were not given; we have no way left, to know what Things oblige perpetually, but from their Nature; which will sufficiently distinguish them from those, which (in so miscellaneous a Book as the Bible, taking in such a vast Period of Time) might be given upon certain Occasions, and particular Reasons; in which we are no other ways concern'd, than like them, to act according as the Circumstances we are in require. Without this, Christians wou'd have no certain Rule, to know what Precepts oblige perpetually; all being alike commanded in Scripture, without making any Difference; no Precepts being said to bind all Mankind, or to bind any for ever, except those relating to the *Jewish* Oeconomy; which, in an hundred Places, we are told, are to last for ever.

To comprise the Matter in few Words; what I have been endeavouring to prove, is,

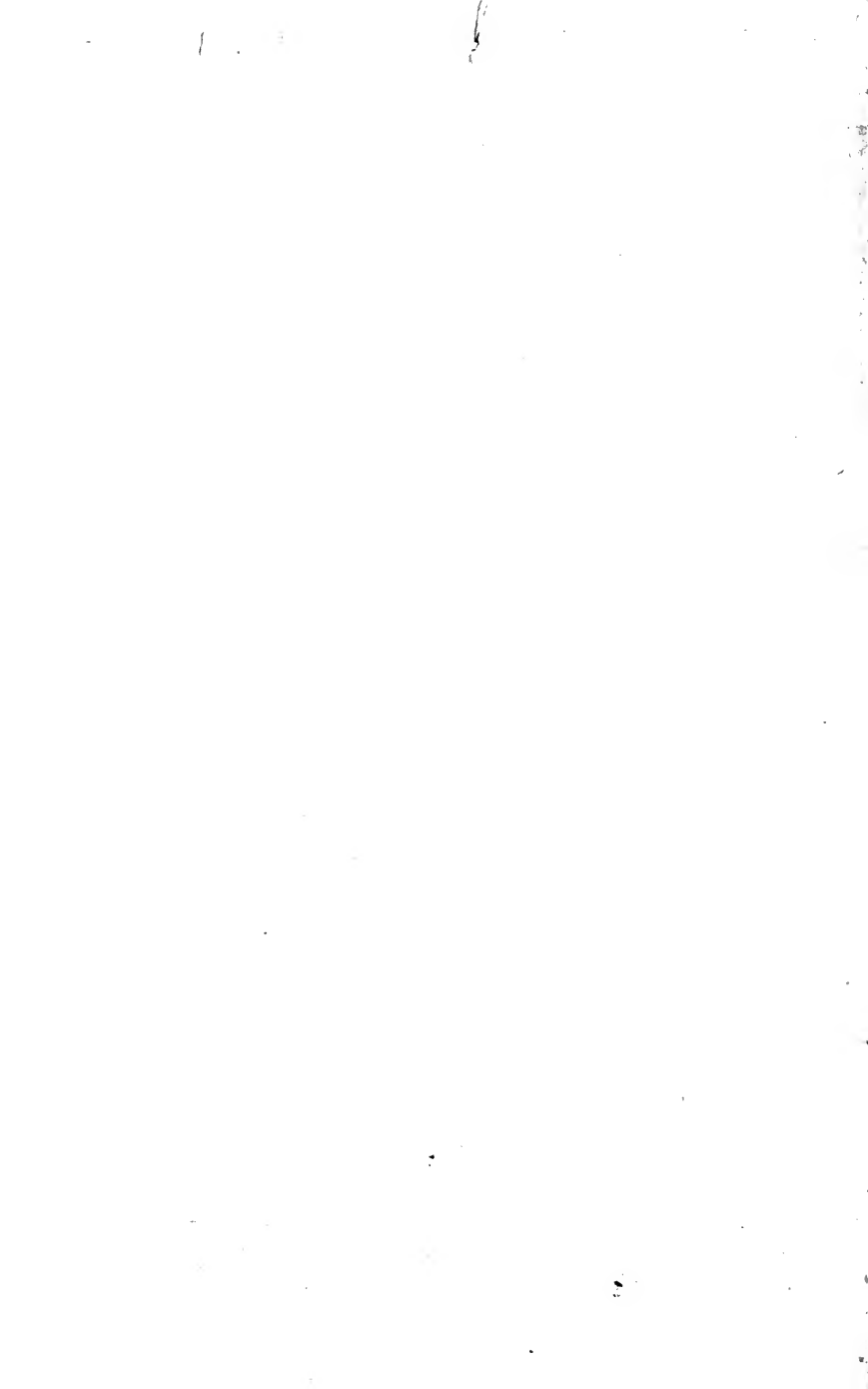
*First*, T H A T there are Things, which, by their internal Excellency, shew themselves to be the Will of an infinitely wise, and good God.

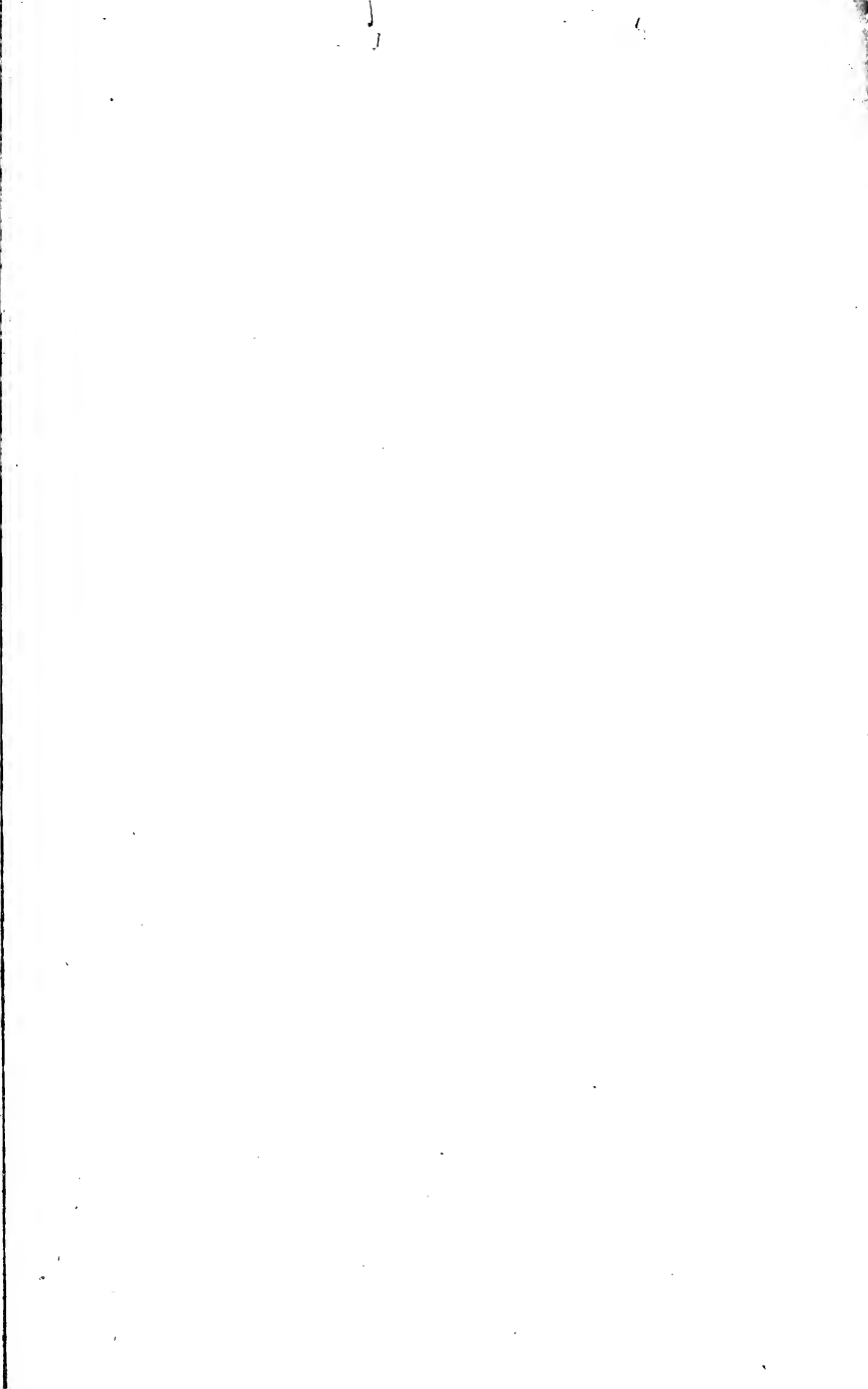
*Secondly*, T H E R E are Things, which have no Worth in themselves; yet because those that have, can't many times be perform'd without them, these are to be consider'd as Means to an End; and being of a mutable Nature, are left to human Discretion, to be vary'd as best suits those Ends; for the sake of which only they are instituted.

*Thirdly*, THAT there are some Things so indifferent, as not to be consider'd either as Means, or Ends; and to place any part of Religion in the Observation of These, is highly superstitious. And I may venture to say, He that carries these Distinctions in his Mind, will have a truer Notion of Religion, than if he had read all the *Schoolmen, Fathers,* and *Councils*.

*B.* I own, 'tis time to give you some Respite, and to thank you for a Favour, which can't be too much acknowledg'd; in thus freely communicating your Thoughts on this important Subject; and doing it after such a Manner, as cannot, were this Conference to be publish'd, offend Persons, tho' of the greatest Gravity, who have the Interest of Truth at Heart.

*A.* BEFORE we part, I must remind you of the Occasion of this Conference; for tho' you plainly saw, that God never intended Mankind shou'd be without Religion; or cou'd ordain an imperfect Religion; and therefore, did not see how to avoid concluding, there must have been, from the Beginning, a Religion most perfect, which Mankind, at all Times, were capable of knowing; yet you were at a loss, how to make out Christianity to be this perfect, this original Religion: How far I have gone in removing this Difficulty, you best know. All I can say, is, I am willing, whenever you please, to resume the Conference; and begging leave to repeat what I mention'd at first, am ready to give up my *Hypothesis*, if you can name one attended with fewer Difficulties; and likewise, to assure you, that if I have advanc'd any Notion, which does not naturally, and necessarily shew itself to be the Will of God; by tending to promote his Honour, and the Good of Man; I here intirely renounce it: And by not persisting to defend Error, give this uncommon Mark of an ingenuous Disposition. *Errare possum, Hæreticus esse nolo.*









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