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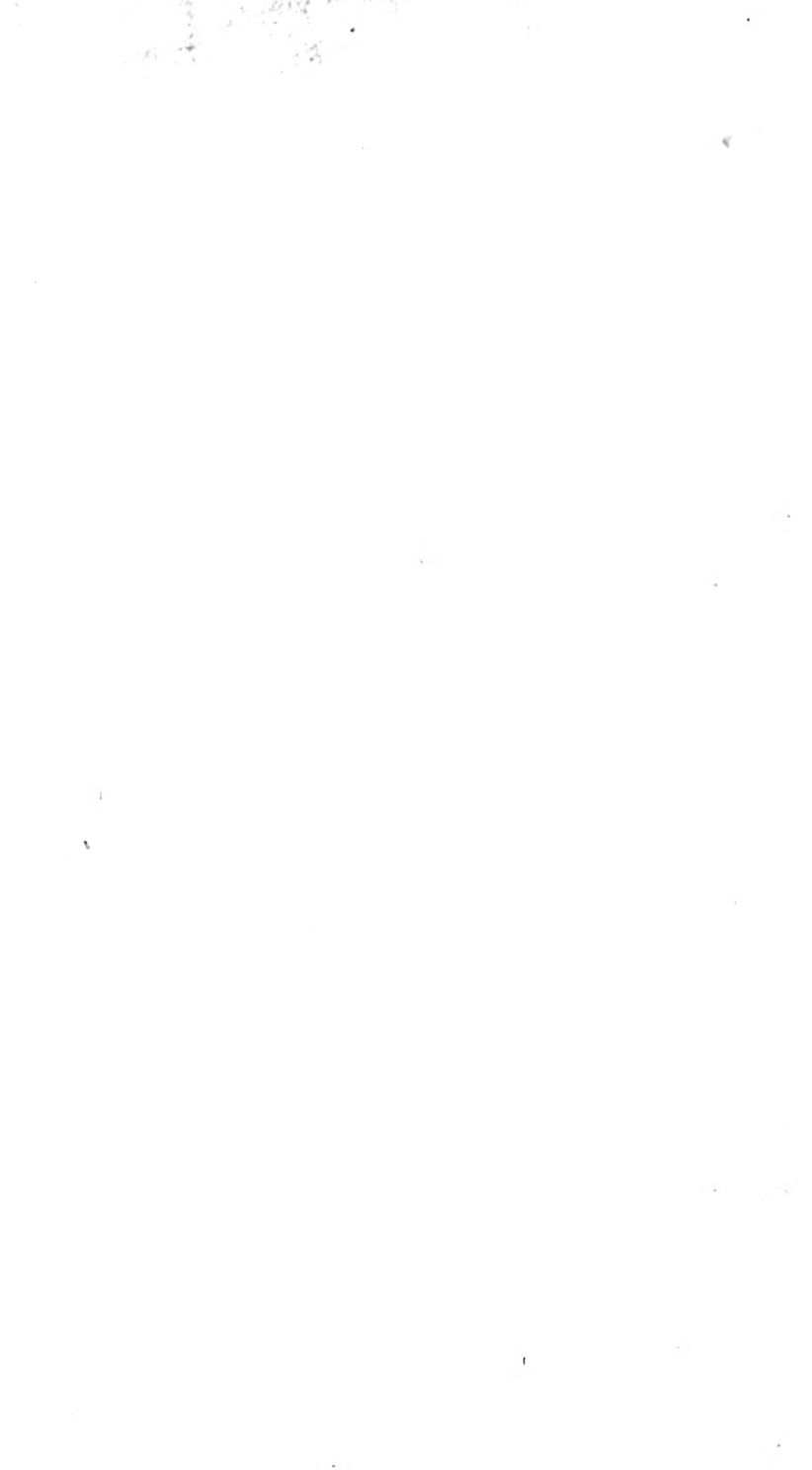
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CHRISTIANITY
AS
OLD AS THE CREATION :
OR THE
GOSPEL,
A
REPUBLICATION
OF THE
RELIGION OF NATURE.

BY MATTHEW VINDAL, L. L. D.

THE GENTILES, WHICH HAVE NOT THE LAW, DO BY NATURE THE THINGS
CONTAINED IN THE LAW.—ROM. II. 14
GOD IS NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS; BUT IN EVERY NATION. HE THAT
FEARETH HIM, AND WORKETH RIGHTEOUSNESS, IS ACCEPTED
WITH HIM—ACTS X. 34, 35.

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 —DR. SHERLOCK.

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 obliged to govern themselves in all their actions by the same eternal rule of reason.

DR. S. CLARK.

NEWBURGH :

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A

S H O R T S K E T C H

OF THE

AUTHOR, AND OF HIS WRITINGS.

EXTRACTED FROM THE BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY.

MATTHEW TINDAL, a most celebrated English writer, was the son of a clergyman of Beer-Ferres, in Devonshire, and born about 1657. He became a commoner of Lincoln College, Oxford, in 1672, where he had the well known Dr. Hickes for his tutor, and thence removed to Exeter College. In 1676, he took the degree of Bachelor of Arts, and was afterwards elected fellow of All-Souls College. In 1679 he took Bachelor of Laws degree; and in July 1685 became a Doctor in that faculty. In the reign of James II. he declared himself a Roman Catholic, but afterwards renounced that religion,

He was greatly distinguished in his time by two very extraordinary books which he published, one came out in 1706, under the title of “The Rights of the Christian Church asserted, against the Romish and all other Priests who claim an independent power over it; with a

Preface concerning the Government of the Church of England, as by law established." The other came out at London, 1730, under the title of "Christianity as Old as the Creation: or, the Gospel; a Republication of the Religion of Nature."

Besides these two important works, he wrote a great number of smaller pieces or pamphlets in defence of Civil and Religious Liberty. He died at London, in August 1733, Fellow of All-Souls-College, and it appears that the faculties of his mind wore well; for, although he was about seventy-three when he published his "Christianity as Old as the Creation," yet he left a second volume of that work in manuscript, by way of general-reply to all his answers; the publication of which was prevented by Gibson, bishop of London. He was indisputably a man of great reasoning powers, and very sufficient learning; and Churchmen might have wished with reason, that he had been one of them.

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CHRISTIANITY,

AS OLD AS THE

CREATION, &c.

CHAPTER 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, though 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 exposed with warmth, how justly, I will not determine, until we have talked 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 cannot be too much pressed; this being the only way to discover true Christianity. The Apostles thought themselves obliged, in making proselytes, to recommend an impartial search; they both desired and required 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 impressed on their minds, and embrace another directly contrary to the notions and prejudices they had imbibed. 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 convinced of its truth. And I might add, that could we suppose, a sincere examination would 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 cannot be laid on natural religion; which, as I take it, differs not from revealed, but in the manner of its being communicated: the one being the internal, and 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 revealed religion dif-

fer in nothing, but the manner of their being conveyed 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 informed, whether God has not, from the beginning, given some rule, or law for their conduct ? and whether the observing that, did not make them acceptable to him ?

B. There can be no doubt, but the observing such a law, must have answered 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 revelation 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 would, 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 of 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 designed they should 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, designed 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 it is their duty to know, believe, profess, and practise it; so that Christianity, though 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 cannot see any heterodoxy in affirming, that the means to effect this end of infinite wisdom, must be as extensive and universal 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 asked 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 to 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 these 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 com-

municated. 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 distinguished 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 would be in vain to use it, if the use of it would 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 mankind should 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 it is his will that we act up to the dignity of our natures, so reason must tell us 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 offered to us as such, be really so, it is 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 the will of God, 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 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 contraries; 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 them, 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 obliged, by the will of God, to hold and act contrarieties.

B. Though this subject is attended with the utmost difficulties, yet I find little or nothing said to solve them. I, for my part, know not how to deny men being acceptable to God, whatever their opinions may be, after having used all the means God has endowed them with for the discovery of his will; and yet I do not know how to admit it; for then, what religion soever men are of, if they have duly used such means as God ordained for the discovery of his will; that, how opposite soever to Christianity, must be the religion God designed them. And, on the other hand, should I own, that the duly using those means would have caused men to have been all of one religion; yet I cannot 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, as could not answer the end of its being instituted by an infinitely wise legislator; this seems, to my bewildered reason, to imply, that there was, from the beginning, but one true religion, which all men might know was their duty to em-

brace. And if this is true, I cannot 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 them.

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; though I may venture to say, that I take mine to be the only one that 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 is a law of nature, or reason; which is so called, 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 mixed with it: So that true christianity is not a religion of yesterday, but what God, at the beginning, dictated, and still continues to dictate 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 honor 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 is sufficient evidence of the person's being sent from God who published 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 rightly exalted for so doing, so

we, if we use our best endeavours, may expect a suitable reward, This, and every other thing of the same nature, I free'y own, which is not inconsistent with the law of God's being the same, whether internally or externally revealed.

B. Your design I must own is highly commendable; but in order to succeed you are to prove two things. First, that the supreme governor 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 revealed. 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 supposed novelty of the 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, though far older, are ordinarily challenged for bringing in new opinions; and there is no greater absurdity stirring this day in Christendom." 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 is a God, who governs mankind, but believe he has given them a law for the governing their actions; this being implied in the very notion of governor 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 could 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.*

If then, it is absurd to suppose, that men, though they lived 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 could 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 a thousand 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 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, who 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 il-

* Preface to Wilkins's of Natural Religion.

luminate them? What other reason can you assign, why infinite wisdom should act thus; but give mankind standing rules to distinguish truth from falsehood, 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, continued the same for any long time; and though 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 owned 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 would, 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 false traditions, or false interpretations of the true tradition.

CHAP. 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. B 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 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 recte rationis, indicans actui aliquid, ex ejus convenientia aut inconvenientia cum ipsa natura rationali, inesse, moralem turpitudinem, aut necessitatem moralem, ac consequenter ab auctore naturæ, Deo talem auctum aut vetari aut præcipi.*

I suppose you will allow, that it is 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; and that what perfections soever the creatures have, they are wholly derived from him.

B. This, no doubt, has been demonstrated over and over; and I must own, that I cannot 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, nor 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 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 prescribed them, could add to, or take from his happiness.

If then a being infinitely happy in himself, could 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 cannot 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 cannot sin against him, but by acting against ourselves, that is, our reasonable natures : these reflections, which occur to every one who in the least considers, must give us a wonderful and surprising sense of the divine goodness, fill us with admiration, transport and extacy ; (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 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 endeavor 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 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 one another: these we cannot 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, cannot fail to give us sufficient information.

With relation to ourselves, we cannot but know how we are to act; if we consider, that God has endowed man with such a nature, as makes him necessarily desire his own good; and therefore, may be sure, that God, who has bellowed 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 conducive 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 cannot 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 considered 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, cannot 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 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 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 mens mutual happiness, to be treated like a common enemy, not only by the persons injured, 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 is 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 cannot live without society and mutual assistance; and that God has endowed them with reason, speech, and other faculties, evidently fitted to enable them to assist each other in all the concerns of life; that, therefore, it is the will of God who gives them this nature, and endows them with those faculties; that they should employ them for their common benefit and mutual assistance. And the philosophers, who saw that all society would be dissolved, and men soon become destitute even of 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 man were by their nature framed to be useful to one another; *ad tuendos confisuntibusque homines hominem natum esse* says Cicero.

his creatures ; so he has implanted in man, 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 fatigues ; as, on the contrary, actions of ill-nature, envy, malice, &c. never fail to produce shame, and everlasting self reproach.

And now let any one say, how it is 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, cannot belong to a being infinitely wise and powerful ; what unerring wisdom has once instituted, can have no defects ; and as God is entirely 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 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 changed 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 altered.

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 another end than the good of the governed; and consequently, whoever does his best for the good of his fellow creatures, does all that 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 are able, thereby render ourselves acceptable to God in answering the end of his creation.

CHAP. 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.

TO 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 cannot be determined; and when it is 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 obliged 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 inflexible dictates of his own reason: Hence arises his infinite complacency in himself, that there is 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."

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, should 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, though not for degree, is of the same nature as that of God's; nay, it is our reason which makes us the image of God himself, and is the common bond which unites Heaven and Earth; the creatures and creator; and if our happiness is limited, it is because our reason is so: It is God alone, who has an unlimited reason and happiness.

The excellent author just now mentioned, says, "The best thing we can receive from God is himself, and himself we do receive in our strict compliance with the eternal laws of goodness; which laws being transcribed 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; 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 omni-

tency could not hinder him from being continually exposed 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 men's misery and happiness the necessary and inseparable consequence of their actions; and that rational actions carry with them their own reward, and irrational their own punishment: This, I think, can not be denied, as long as there are some actions naturally beneficial to us, and others as hurtful; and that there is no virtue, but what has some good inseparably annexed to it; and no vice, but what 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, it is true, we cannot be perfectly happy; as subject to diseases and disasters: We are imperfect ourselves, and have none to converse with but imperfect creatures; and yet if we act according to the dictates of right reason, we shall receive, even here, true inward comfort and satisfaction; and hereafter, when we are freed from those imperfections, complete happiness: on the contrary, the man who abandons his reason, besides the misery of all sorts of irrational conduct will bring on him, must feel in his mind, pain and anguish even in his life; and in the life to come, when there are no sensual things to divert his thoughts, insupportable grief and misery.

Though 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 straitened, 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 fixed and immoveable: And consequently, our happiness de-

pend 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 deceived, or influenced by any wrong affections, acts in constant conformity to the reason and nature of things; and it is a contradiction to his nature for him to do any thing that is not fit and reasonable; so he would have framed our nature in contradiction to his own, if he had obliged 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 answered the end for which infinite wisdom and goodness bestowed that excellent Gift; and for which we cannot adore enough the goodness of God.

Had God, from time to time, spoke to all mankind in their several languages, and his words had miraculously conveyed 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 it is impossible in any book, or books, that a particular rule could be given for every case, we must even then have had recourse to the light of nature to teach us our duty in most cases; especially considering the numberless circumstances which attend us, and which, perpetually varying, and 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 for their meaning, not merely by the letter, but 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 delivered after an obscure manner, when they

might have been delivered 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; though I must own, I cannot 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." It is well this author, who talks of people being stark *bible-mad*, stopped here; and did not with a celebrated wit* cry, The truly illuminated books are the darkest of all.

The writer above-mentioned supposes it impossible, that God's will should be fully revealed by books; "Except, says he, it might be said perhaps without a figure, that even the word itself could not contain the books which should be written." But with submission to this reverend person, I cannot help thinking, but that (such is the divine goodness) God's will is so clearly, and fully manifested in the book of nature, that he who runs may read it.

This cannot be denied, if the book of nature shows us in character 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 encompassed with many artificial relations, such as governor and governed, master and servant, husband and wife, &c. and the end of these relations teaches us what they require; and

* Dean Swift.

they being entered into for the sake of each other's assistance, either party is injured by the others not observing what these relations demand, or by exacting more than the end of entering into them requires.

Though 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 governor; 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 governor, to exact things of his subjects, that do not contribute to the end for which this relation between them was entered into; can we suppose a governor of infinite wisdom and goodness, who 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 is 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 it is 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 design? Whereas God, whose actions are governed by infinite goodness, could have no motive to bring us in-

to 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 informs us of the nature of our great creator and governor, we cannot 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 is no rule in the world, but only that of his nature, by which you can certainly conclude 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 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 favor to day, might make them incur his displeasure to-morrow: Nay, he might at the same time have a secret will opposite to his revealed 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, it is scarce possible, that men (though now end-

lessly divided upon the account of their different traditions) should mistake the duty; since a mind that is 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, it is not in our power, though ever so often commanded, to love the Deity, while we conceive him an arbitrary being acting out of humor 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 cannot but love, and adore him as we ought.

Thus, I think, I have fully proved from the nature of God and man, and the relations we stand in to him and one another, that the divine precepts cannot 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 its 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 beloved, 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 the health of our bodies; as politicians would allow to be needful for the peace of the state; as Epicurian philosophers re-

commend for the tranquility of our minds, and pleasures of our lives; such as reason dictates, and daily shews conducive to our welfare in all respects; which consequently, were there no law enacting them, we should in wisdom choose to observe, and voluntarily impose them on our selves; 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 reasonable and wise, requiring such duties as are suitable to the light of nature, and do approve themselves 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 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 is unnecessary, they omit nothing that may tend to the glory of God, or the welfare 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 humors and passions, to make ourselves fools and beasts.——In a word, nothing but what tends to our private harm, or prejudice, or to public disorder and confusion."

The late Dean of Canterbury, in a sermon preached in defence of christianity, says, "What can be 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 called to do, and thence to be duly sensible how gracious a master he serves; one that is so far from loading him with fruitless, arbitrary, and tyrannical impositions, that each command abstracted from his command who issues it, is able to recommend itself; and nothing required but what every wise man would choose of his own accord; and cannot without being his own enemy, wish to be exempted from." And this character of

christianity he makes to be essential to its being from God, and therefore must make it the same with natural religion, which has this character impressed on it.

“There was none of the doctrines of our saviour (says the late archbishop of York) calculated for the gratification of mens idle curiosities, the busying and amusing them with airy and useles 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 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, upon which all human and divine virtues were naturally to be superstruced.”— Does not every one see, that if the religion of nature had been put instead of christianity, these descriptions would have exactly agreed with it?

The judicious Dr. Scott affirms, “God never imposes 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 prescribe 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?”

Nay, the most considerable men, even among the Papists, do not scruple to maintain there is nothing in religion but what is moral. The divines of Port-Royal for instance say, “All the precepts, and all the mysteries that are expressed 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

neighbors as ourselves : For the scripture (it is St. Austin who says it) forbids but one only thing, which is concupiscence, 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 religion ; and it is unto this, say they, according to the expression of Jesus Christ, that all the ancient law and 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 have quoted a known saying of his father, *Omnia peccata sunt in univrsam contra rationem & naturæ 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 favor of virtue." And the famous *Pere Quesnelle* says on *Acts 2. 21.* *Le vrai culte n'est plus attache a un peuple ; le Christianisme est une religion universelle.*

B. Do divines always give this character of christianity, do they never distinguish it from the religion of nature, by supposing it contains certain arbitrary precepts ?

A. When they consider how repugnant it is to the nature of God to give any arbitrary commands, then indeed the force of truth obliges them to declare there is nothing in religion but what tends to the good of mankind ; but if at any time they talk otherwise, it is for the sake of such things as either directly or indirectly serve their interest. But to remove all scruples, I shall more fully prove.

 CHAP. IV.

That not only the matter of all God's laws, but the penalties annexed to them, are for the good of mankind; even for those who suffer for the breach of them.

B. SHOULD 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, occasioned the almighty to create man, and to give him laws?

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 aimed at and intended the manifestation of his wisdom, power, and goodness in the creation of the world, it is 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 is very probable, that neither of these are the meaning of the text, which may be rendered with much better sense, and nearer to the Hebrew thus; God hath ordained every thing to that which is fit for it, and the wicked hath he ordained 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. And here let me add, that if there are in-

* Prov. 16. 4.

numerable 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 determined 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 designed 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. Though it be allowed, that God framed his laws, and consequently, the sanctions that make them laws, for the good of man; yet a due regard to his own honor, 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 cannot be in the least affected, whether his laws be, or be not observed; and consequently in punishing, no more than rewarding, does he act as a party, much less an injured party, who wants satisfaction, or reparation of honor. And indeed, to suppose it, is highly to dishonor him, since God, as he never can be injured. so he can never want reparation; and he who

is infinitely satisfied in himself, can gain no addition of satisfaction by his creatures observing his laws; nor can he, by their not observing them, be reduced to a condition of wanting satisfaction, or reparation of honor, 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 punished, (since what is past cannot be helped) but to prevent a future breach of the law; and all laws being designed 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 though all own, it would be tyranny in an earthly governor to multiply punishments, on pretence of vindicating the honor 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 punished when, and no further than their good required.

Do not we bring God down to ourselves, when we suppose he acts like us poor indigent creatures, in seeking worship and honor 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 honor and power, love of fame and glory can only belong to limited creatures; but are as necessarily excluded from 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, provoked, or grieved by the conduct of us wretched mortals, he would 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 them 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 though 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 useless to them.

The sum of what I have been saying is fully expressed by Job in these words; If thou sinnest, what dost thou against him? Or if thy transgression be multiplied, 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.* Or, as Esdras 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.†

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 suffered 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. Though justice and mercy cannot at the same time be exercised in one and the same instance on the same subject; yet your system-writers, lest they should

* Chap. 35. 6.

† 2 Esdras 8. 34.

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 to 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 oblig 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, it is an act of justice to the public: and when he pardons him, it is an act of mercy to the criminal, though an act of injustice to the public; except in such circumstances, where he has ground to believe that pardoning him may be no disadvantage to the public, 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 involved in the good of the whole, and by the breach of his laws may be injured; and as a party injured, may exact reparation and satisfaction: But this without blasphemy cannot 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, though none of them did obey his laws, or acknowledge his being; and therefore, in doing acts of justice he cannot, 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 ex-

tending to annihilation) must not be only for the good of others, but even of the persons punished; 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 mere cruelty and malice, which can never be in God; nor can he hate any thing that is 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 desired 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 designed to amend, strike at the absolute eternity of hell-torments? Since there is 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, "The right that God hath in his creatures is founded in the benefits he hath conferred on them and the obligation they have to him on that account. Now there is 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 torments; and what will be the condition of those, who die before they are capable of undergoing a trial; or knowing any thing of religion. A subject, which, I think, has scarce been considered by any one.

CHAP. 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. YOUR 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, it is a sign they have not been well instructed; the most eminent of our divines would teach them, that prayer itself, God knowing before hand what we will ask, chiefly becomes 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 dependence 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 contrived before the foundation of the world for putting things in a regular course.

“It is, says archbishop Tillotson, a great condescension and goodness in him, to accept our imperfect praise-

es, and ignorant admiration of him; and were he not as worthily good, as he is great and glorious, he would not suffer us to fully his great and glorious name by taking it in our mouths; and were it not for our advantage and happiness to own and acknowledge his benefits, for any real happiness and glory that comes to him by it, he could well enough be without it, and dispense with us for ever entertaining 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."

"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 forced to roam abroad, and raise taxes on his creatures, to enrich and supply himself: So that whatsoever some high flown enthusiasts may pretend, that it is sordid and mercenary to serve God for our good, I am sure, to serve him for his good, is profane and blasphemous."

As able a divine as this, or perhaps any other age has produced, Le Clerk, observes, that "nothing can be more false, or contrary to the nature of the gospel, than to fancy God in part designed to shew he was master, by enjoining some commands, which have no relation to the good of mankind; religion was revealed for us, and not for God, who, absolutely speaking, neither wants 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 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 di-

vinity as well as politics, 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 ordained 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 public worship is not performed 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, though 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 superstitious as to think, that all-self defence was then unlawful; and therefore durst not lift up their hands against their enemies, who butchered them as they pleased; And many of the primitive fathers tho't the gospel forbid all self-defence; and herein they are followed by a modern sect, who are their strict imitators in most things.

It is no wonder, if some ecclesiastics have not been very forward to teach people, that what worship God requires of them, is for their own sakes; since that

they could not, on pretence of that worship, have claimed 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 it is their duty to do good to all, notwithstanding their widest differences as to worship, or any other matter of meer religion; and it is to the honor of our clergy at present, that so many of them now endeavor to infuse such humane and benevolent principles into a people, who, not long since, thought they shewed a sufficient zeal for religion, in hating those their priests hated, without knowing wherefore; and, fired by their pulpit invectives, 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 is one difficulty, which to me seems insuperable, how to make the faith required 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 not required for God's sake, but our own; can faith in one sent by God be required 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* conquered *Pompey*, we have no idea of either, can only mean, some-body conquered some-body; and have we more distinct ideas of *Jesus* and *Pilate*? And though 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 required for a cause antecedent to his being so sent, founded in his and our nature, and the relation we always stood in to him; would not the eternal reason of things have made it manifest? That which concerned 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 preached 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, supposed 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 physic. And to confirm this, he adds, I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance: and that there is 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 with the latter. The not observing this distinction, has been the occasion of many uncharitable and gross mistakes; and it is 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 respecter 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: Is it not absurd to suppose, that till then none had sufficient means

* Matt. 15. 24. † Ib. 18. 11. ‡ Luke 15. 7. § Matt. 9. 12. || Ib. 13.

given them to answer the end for which all were created?

The Catholic epistle of St. Barnabas will inform you of the sentiments of the ancients on this head. This great apostle (as translated by Dr. Wake) says, "That Jesus, when he chose his apostles, which were afterwards to publish the 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, *ONTAS HUPER PAS AN HAMARTIAN ANOMOTEROUS.*

B. This may be a forged passage.

A. Origen owns it to be genuine, for when Celsus (I will give you his own words in the Latin translation) says, *Jesum ascitis decem undecimve famosi hominibus, publicanis nautisque nequissimis, cum his ultro citroque fugitasse, corrogantem cibos sordide ac turpiter.* Origen says, *extat sane in Barnabæ catholica epistola scriptum, ad apostolicam functionem elegisse homines omni iniquitate iniquiores.* And it may be laid in support of St. Barnabas, that the apostles first became Jesus's disciples upon temporal motives; and the 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 meanest (as bishop Parker expresses it) hoped at least to have been made Lord Mayor of Capernaum." And even at his ascension the only question his disciples asked was, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? ‡

But to take away all subtrefuges, what can be more required than such 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 qualifications, but living up to the law of reason, in exercising acts of be-

* Matt. 9. 13.

† Luke 22. 24.

‡ Acts 1. 6.

nevolence, 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; though they pleaded, they had prophesied in his name, and in his name cast out devils, and done many wonderful works * St. Paul, in his first chapter to the Romans, shews, 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 respecter of persons will deal with every one both Jew and Gentile according to their deeds; and those by which they are to be judged are either moral or immoral: and had there been any thing else required by the written law, it could not be said that the Gentiles, who were 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 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 forth good fruit, the means by which this good fruit is to be produced 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 believed: but what you have done more than others. God is pleased 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 considered 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 favor to one for believing

* Matt. 7, 22, 23.

† 2 Cor. 5 10

‡ Matt. 7 19.

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 esteemed 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 called, 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 informed. 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 affectation of believing any point too hard for our understanding, can entitle us to the favor of God.

If charity, which comprehends doing all possible good to our fellow creatures, is to be destroyed 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.

Here is the practice of the Christian world on the side of faith, sacrificing charity, and all that is 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 though I have all faith, and could remove mountains, and have no chari-

* 1 Cor. 13.

ty, I am nothing; or though 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 his 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 cannot 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 liar.** And is not he likewise a liar, 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 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 this, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.‡‡ And Christ, in saying, by this shall all men know ye are my disciples, if ye love one another;§§ supposes the love of men one to 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, “It is the conformity of our faith with the common innate notions of all mankind, that has given it en-

* 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. §§ John 13. 35.

trance into the minds of candid and ingenuous hearers."

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 censured 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 it is 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 governor 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 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 reduced to this, as so many branches springing from it; and to explain them in any other sense, as if faith and reason were opposed to each other, and religion and virtue two different things, is to bind the understanding of men, and 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 obliged to the belief and practice of what is really the Christian religion; because it is nothing else, as to the faith and morals of it, but natural religion."

The great Grotius, in a discourse owned to be the best that was ever wrote in defence of Christianity, lays it down as a maxim, that "it is 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 submitting themselves entirely to his providence, should be able to find it." And if this is too evident to be denied, 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.

And an eminent divine, who is not looked 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, to perish for want of any knowledge necessary; and what is more, sufficient to save him." Which supposes no faith, or knowledge necessary to salvation, but what all are capable of acquiring by virtue of that light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.* And our Savior himself says, seek, and you shall find.† By this you may see what faith is required, 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 benevolence; and if reason, which is the proper nature of man, can never lead men to any thing but universal love and kindness, and there be no part of natural religion, or any faith it requires, but highly tends to improve this kind and benign temper; how comes it to pass, that what is taught for religion in so many places of Christendom, has transformed 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 destroyed all good works; and is utterly inconsist-

* John 1. 9. † Matt. 7. 7.

ent 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 persecute each other on the same account.

The Epicureans, though they had exalted notions of their gods, yet because they asserted it beneath their dignity to concern themselves with human affairs, were at all times censured as atheists; which shews that it was accounted much the same to believe no Gods, as to believe them useles to mankind: but certainly, believing the deity to be indolent, cannot 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 in what age of the church could not those conscientious people, that chanced to be undermost, have thought themselves happy, if the men in power had not had a worse notion of the deity, than that of indolence.

CHAP. 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 revealed, must be the same.

HAVING proved, that God requires nothing for his own sake; I shall now, the way being thus prepared, 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 it is 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 consequently, it is 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 observed in this world, and ten thousand more, were there so many, but in heaven itself, and that too forever.

B. Should 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 owned, 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 tried by that which is the touchstone 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 allowed, that there is a religion of nature and reason, written in the hearts of every one of us from the first creation ; 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 delivered ? 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 repealed, or altered, 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, was Christianity a new religion, which destroys itself ; since from the time it commenced, 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 immuta-

ble, is, because it is founded on a reasonable 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 is the fundamental law of the universe; a ray and beam of the divine nature, which flows from, and has a necessary connection and dependence upon that eternal 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: the honesty of this man is essential to, and inseparable from him, not precarious and uncertain, and owing merely 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 perpetual, the obligation of it is lasting and inviolable; the equity and reason of it are eternal, written in large and inelible characters, no accident 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 for some law or rule to mankind? What can books or masters tell thee, which thou mightest not tell thyself? What can study or travel shew, which, without being at the expence of so much pains, thou mightest not see at home, by descending into thy own conscience, and hearkening attentively to its own admonitions?

“To what purpose is all this labor and cost? The toilsome tumbling over of codes and institutes?—The two tables of Moses, the twelve tables of the Greeks, the law written in the hearts of those 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 produced in open court, and published 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 derived 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 understanding 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 nations, or those of particular countries, are only the law of nature adjusted, and accommodated to circumstances, 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; and 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 though a man, hurried with the violence of his passions, breaks it himself, yet he would 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 should 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 is 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 cannot be applied to any particular 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, it is owned, 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 ever visible to the whole world: and therefore 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 it is 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."

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 enjoyed 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 would 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 revealed will; or has not since changed his will? This cannot be known from any external revelation, though it expressed 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 resolved 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 revealed: Nor could 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 determined by the nature and reason of things: otherwise falſehood 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 would 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 could command, or forbid his creatures antecedently to any external revelation, we could not diſtinguiſh the true inſtituted religion from the many falſe ones: or if by accident we ſtumbled on it, avoid running into many abſurdities in the interpretation of it, through the difficulties that muſt attend a book written in a dead language, and ſo many ages ſince; and where, through the vaſt variety of readings, we might miſtake the true reading; and though 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 could 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 impoſed on by controverted, or miſ-interpreted, not to ſay forced texts, as to admit of 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 falſehood; we muſt own, ſince there can be no diſagreement in truth, that there is an exact conformity between internal and external revelation; with no other difference but as to the

* 2 Cor. 3. 6.

manner of their being revealed ; or in other words, that the gospel, since it is impossible for men at the same time to be under different obligations, cannot 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 superfluous ; 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 universal causes of the great differences among men in matters of religion, is, that they have not examined things to the bottom ; they have failed 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 reason, which only is capable to produce true symmetry in their intellectual buildings ; and they have applied themselves without any rule to the interpretation of words and phrases, which being easily susceptible of various senses, have produced as many deformed irregularities."

Though 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 enquiry ; 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 stiled 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

A man hath a correct knowledge of the law of nature, then they must have perfect knowledge of God. Many of the Christian theologians are guilty of a libel on the law of nature.

actions are such, we do all that is 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.

CHAP. IV.

That natural and revealed religion having the same end, their precepts must be the same.

B. ALLOWING 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 more noble edifice, by extending it to such things as the light of nature could 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 could be added to it; and that the truth of all revelation was to be judged of by its agreement with it: however, since this objection is the most plausible of any that 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

*Man and his fellow
creatures*

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 religion comprehends every thing obligatory on the account of its excellency ; that is, every thing which tends to the honor 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 honor of God, or the good of man, can belong either to natural or revealed religion.

By the law of nature, as well as the gospel, the honor 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 if it become prejudiced 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 cannot be rules, so there cannot be exceptions *ad infinitum* : and I suppose you will not deny, but that these two grand rules, or commandments, the honor of God, and the good of man, are obligatory without exception. And yet these would be to little purpose, could 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 honor of God, take place ?

A. These two grand laws are in effect the same, since what promotes the honor of God, necessarily promotes the good of man ; the more we love and honor 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 honors God, the more zealous will he be to act the patriot; and the more he does that, the more he honors God; because the happier men are, the more reason they have to honor that God who made them 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 neighbor, include each other. If says the apostle, a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar.‡ And, if we love one another, God dwelleth in us; and the love of God is perfected in us.§ 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 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 Antonius 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 uses it has to things human."

In a word, as man is by nature qualified 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 unsocial and hurtful part, he reflects dishonor on his creator, by defeating, as far as in him lies, the design of God, in making him a social creature. But,

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* Mat. 5. 16. † John. 15. 8. ‡ I John 4. 20. § Ib. 12. ¶ Ib. 7. 8. ¶ John 2. 17

Because bigots represent these two grand obligations as frequently clashing; and oppose things which are for the good of man, on pretence that the honor 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 to that proverbial saying, *In nomine Domini incipit omne malum*: give me leave to say, that we can no otherwise honor 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 dishonor him; it is to destroy his impartial goodness, and make his power and wisdom degenerate into cruelty and craft.

Though 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 rendering the creature miserable, on pretence of doing honor to the creator; who, as he has impressed on bodies, in order to preserve the natural word, 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 cannot but applaud the person who does brave and generous actions, even though we suffer by them; and as much condemn him who acts basely and treacherously, though we are ever so great gainers.

“Is there then (*says a noble author*) a natural beauty of figures; and is there not as natural 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 acknowledged. No sooner are ac-

tions viewed, no sooner the human affections and passions discerned (and they are most of them as soon discerned as felt) than straight an inward eye distinguishes, the fair and shapely, the amiable and admirable apart from the deformed, 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 for nature, or such a benevolent disposition?

A. An execrable superstition has in many christian countries, in a manner, extinguished 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 is 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, "If there be a religion that teaches the adoration and love of a God, whose character is to be captious, and of high resentment, subject to wrath and anger, furious, revengeful, and revenging himself, when offended, on others than those who gave the offence; and if there be added to the character of this God, a fraudulent disposition, encouraging deceit and treachery among men; favorable to a few, though for slight causes, and cruel to the rest; it is evident that such a religion as this, being strongly enforced, 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

admired 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 the same time, a love and admiration of that ill, and causes that to be taken for good and amiable, which is in itself horrid and detestable.”

Archbishop Tillotson, than whom none better understood human nature, says, that “ according as men’s notions of God are, such will their religion be. If they have gross and false conceptions of God, their religion will be absurd and superstitious : if men fancy God to be an ill-natured being, armed with infinite power, who takes delight in the misery and ruin of his creatures, 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.”

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 principal reason and motive of our loving him.”

And indeed power and knowledge of themselves, cannot engage our love ; if they could, we should love the devil in proportion to his power and knowledge : it is goodness alone which can beget confidence, love and veneration ; and there is none of those questions, whether relating to God or man, but may be easily determined, by considering which side of the question carries with it the greatest 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 consider how repugnant it is to his goodness, to require

any thing of them which they had no reason to obey, but because they had no power to disobey; they 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 cannot fail of the true religion, happily seated in the middle between these extremes. And, as such a person cannot 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 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 it is 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 convinced he requires nothing of them but what is for their good; and they cannot 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 it will 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 beloved 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.

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 public meetings in the temples, nor any other diverting parties, fights or entertainments, are more delightful, or rejoicing, than what we ourselves behold, and practice 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 despotic 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 esteemed the nearest, and most immediately present, these horrors and amazement are the furthest banished ; 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 filled 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 straits. Is it not every man’s interest, that there should be such a governor 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 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 Shatlbury will say the same as a Tillotson.

“If there be” says that noble author “a general mind; it can have no particular interest; but the general good, and the good of the whole, 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 provoked 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 satisfied, that it is the best natured 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. Though, as religion stands amongst us, there are many good people who would have less fear in being thus exposed; and would be easier, perhaps, in their minds, if they were assured they had only mere chance to trust to. For no body acables to think there should be no God, but rather, that there should 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 necessity 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 endeavor all

we can to be superior to, and which, we find, we every day conquer as we grow better."

In recapitulating what I have said of the agreement of natural and revealed religion. I cannot 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 reference to the law of reason and nature, against which men had every where offended: And since repentance infers the necessity of a future reformation, and a return to that duty and obedience, from which, by transgression, we are fallen; the consequence is manifestly this, that the gospel was a republication of the law of nature, and its precepts declarative of that original religion, which was as old as the creation.

"This," continues he, "will appear, by considering the nature of the thing itself. The notions of good and evil are eternally and unalterably the same; which notions are the rules and measures of all moral actions, and are consequently necessary, and constitute parts of religion. And therefore, if the religion of nature, in her primitive state, was pure and uncorrupt, which will not, I presume, be denied, though there was sufficient reason for a republication of it because of the great ignorance and superstition which had grown upon the world; yet there could be no reason for any alteration of it: For though the world was the worse for abusing the religion of nature, and might want to be reformed by a divine mission, yet the religion of nature was not the worse for being abused, but still retained its first purity and simplicity. The duties of religion, considered 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 unaltered. If our first parent was the creature of God, so are we; and whatever service and duty he owed in vir-

due 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 therefore 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 reasonable to suppose, that the 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 habitudes and relations from which they flow continuing always the same.

“ That the case is in fact what I have represented it to be, might be shewn from the particular 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 doctrine.—If the law and the prophets hang on these two great commandments, viz. The love of God, and the love of our neighbor; then the doctrine of our saviour, which is the perfection 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 neighbor, are fundamentals in the law of reason and nature (as undoubtedly they are) you must also allow, that whatever may be deduced 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 consequently 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 received independent of those miracles which were wrought for its confirmation; will be admitted by all who allow the force and obligation of natural reli-

gon; and can be denied by none who know or understand themselves. The principles of religion are interwoven with the very frame and make of our minds, and we may as well run from ourselves, 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 Christianity, which, though not different, yet are distinct from the principles of reason and nature?

A. There is 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, though not different, are distinct from the principles of reason and nature:" but he does not say they are distinct from those doctrines which flow from the principles of reason and nature. And what he immediately adds, that "Our saviour came into the world to supply the defects, not of religion, which continued 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 the defects of nature could only be supplied by obliging people to live up to this natural law of unchangeable purity and perfection.

This is doing justice to revealed 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 si 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 recommend ourselves to his favor) 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 countries, 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 neighbor as ourselves.* This was the religion that the patriarchs, and all the pious men of old lived in, and by which they obtained the favor and acceptance of God; when as yet there was no revealed 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 savior's institution there is hardly any one thing recommended to us, that doth not directly relate to this matter; that is not either an instance wherein we are to express our love to God, and our neighbor; or a means whereby we may be furthered in the practising of those duties; or an argument, and motive, and encouragement to excite us to the practising of them. It is the design of all his doctrines, to give us right notions of God, and our neighbor; 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 mankind (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 revealed Dispensation as we have either in the Old or New Testament; do sufficiently instruct us in the main heads of it. Nay I dare be bold to say, so long as mankind do retain their nature, and are not transformed 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 neighbor."

CHAP. VI.

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 account of religion, have done either to themselves, or one another.

HAVING in general shewn the absurdity of not being governed 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 !"

It is 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 believed 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 not only knew what they desired, but their

real wants, and what would relieve them, better than any mediatory beings whatever.

B. They addressed 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 could either suggest to the supreme God some reasons he was before ignorant of ; or that by their importunities they could prevail on his weakness, to do what otherwise he was not willing to do.

This heathen notion, as it supposed 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 solicitations made him better natured than otherwise he would be ; this of course took off their love from the supreme, and piaced 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 honor 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 would have made their religion an arrant jumble, if they had worshipped these Gods sometimes as mediators only, sometimes as sovereign disposers of things ; and sometimes as both together.

Had the heathen believed God to have been a purely-spiritual, invisible being, they could never have supposed him visible to mortals, or have thought that an unlimited being could appear under the limited form of a man, or other animal ; or that an omnipre-

sent being could any more be present in one place, or creature, than another; or that such a being could be confined to a small spot of earth, while another equally omnipresent was in heaven, and a third descending from thence, &c. Or that one God could be sent on the errand of another God, after the manner that God Mercury was by God Jupiter; though there was nothing too absurd for the heathen to believe, after they had destroyed the unity of God; except it was, that Jupiter and Mercury, the sender and the sent, were the same God.

The primitive fathers bitterly inveighed 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 the earth; the God of the universe can neither ascend, nor descend, nor come into any place." Tertullian says, "he would not believe the sovereign God descended into the womb of a woman, though even the scripture itself should say it." "It is 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, "it is 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 cannot 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 satisfied." Thus the fathers exposed the pagan polytheism.

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 occasioned among men with relation to themselves, and one another.

If we take a general view of those mischiefs mankind have at all times practised on a religious account, either upon themselves or others ; we shall find them owing to their entertaining such notions of God, as are entirely inconsistent with his nature ; and contrary to what their reason, if attended to, would 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 could never have imagined, 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 provoked their judges to do them that favor. And under Trajan, all the christians in a city in Asia came in a body to the proconsul, and offered themselves to the slaughter, which made him cry, O ! ye unhappy people, if ye have a mind to die, have ye not halts and precipices enough to end your lives ; but ye must come here for executioners ? And this was a general practice under the *Antonini* ; and Marcus Antonius severely reflects on the obliquity of the christians, in thus running headlong to death. And St. Cyprian labors to comfort those who might be so unhappy, by the ceasing of the then persecution, to miss the crown of martyrdom ; though one would think there were but few who wanted this consolation ; since he says, many of the clergy, and the far greater part of the laity apostatized. But when by the empire's

becoming christian, the crown of martyrdom was no longer to be obtained by the prevailing party of christians, then exercising cruelties on themselves was esteemed the next best thing; and many devotees put monstrous hardships on themselves, while others chose poverty, rags, and nastiness, or else retired to caves, deserts, and other solitary places, to sigh away their miserable lives; and ecclesiastical 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 it was 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 helped to increase this superstition; whilst the prelates, tho' they encouraged those severities on others, were far from practising any on themselves.

Had such notions been adhered 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 performed without great pain and hazard) could have been esteemed 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 required such an operation, nature, being always the same, would still have required it.

This institution, as is proved by Marsham and others, seems to be owing to the Egyptians, who thought all to be profane who used it not; and it was after Abraham had been in Egypt, that circumcision was instituted, in order, it is 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 it was not till after the Lord had ordered Moses 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 observed during their stay in the wilderness, when they had no communication with Egypt) the Lord himself says, this day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you.†

The heathen world must have very gross conceptions not only of their inferior Gods, but of the father of Gods and men ; when they imagine him of so cruel a nature as to be delighted butchering of innocent animals ; and that the stench of burnt flesh should be a sweet smelling favour 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 destroyed the innocent beasts.

*Non bove mactato cœlestia numina gaudent ;
Sed, quæ præstanda est, & sine Teste, Fide.*

Ovid. Epist. p. 89. Ep. 20. v. 181.

If the Pagans believed 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?

It is probable, that the heathen priests who shared with their Gods, and reserved the 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 suffered by the scarcity of provisions, caused by the great number of sacrifices, were at vast expence in maintaining these holy butchers, whose very trade inspired them with cruelty.

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* Exodus 4. 24.

† Joshua 5. 2--9.

And it is probable, this absurd notion prevailed 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 the family, upon shearing his sheep, gathering in the fruits of the earth, &c. where those that assisted him were entertained, and joyfully joined 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 resolved to have the best share in all those religious feasts, they persuaded 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 favour of burnt flesh; and the better part to be reserved unburnt for themselves, to whom the slaying of the animals, and the offering them up was appropriated. It is then no wonder the number of the Gods multiplied, since the more Gods the more sacrifices, and the priests had better fare; and that they might not want plentiful feasting, the people were made to believe, that they could learn their fortunes from the intrails of the beasts they sacrificed; and this method continues to this day in those places, where 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.*

The Pagans sacrificing of beasts was not so bad in it-

self, as what it soon occasioned, human sacrifices ; which men, being of greater value than beasts, were believed to be more acceptable ; and parents, stifling all natural affections, offered up their own children, as the most precious gifts they could bestow on the God ; 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 crushed 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 could 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 purchased 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 honor to accept for burnt-offerings : and indeed, after people once gave themselves up to believe in their priests, there was nothing too absurd to be received 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 signified to them by those sacred messengers of their will ; and this blind devotion

might have continued till now, had not an infidel prince, bred up in the prophane philosophy of the Greeks, put a stop to it by surprizing, and destroying at once all those holy impostors.

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, adorned with all the incombustible riches they could procure on their own account, or that the folly of others would 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 touched by any but themselves.

B. Though human sacrifices obtained among the heathen, yet sure the Levitical law did not approve, or countenance any such practises.

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 Leviticus 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 verse 28. it comes to things devoted, and says, notwithstanding. no devoted thing that a man shall devote unto the Lord. of all that he hath, both of men and beasts, and of the field of his possession, shall be sold or redeemed; every thing devoted is most holy unto the Lord. And what is meant by being most holy unto the Lord, is explained in the next verse, none devoted, which shall be devoted, of man, shall be redeemed, but shall surely be put to death. And they say it was before declared, 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 redeemed;* and that of an ass, if not redeemed by a lamb, was to have its neck broke; and the captives taken in

* Exod. 30. 12, 13, & 24. 10, 20.

war, which fell to the Lord's share, there being no order for redeeming, were, as is owned by all, to be slain.

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-offering, 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 supposed to have argued, after he had preferred justice and mercy to a thing commanded by God, if he should go on to prefer it before a thing abhorred 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, whatsoever (or rather whosoever) cometh forth of 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 though something extraordinary pleasing to God, was designed by that vow; which, though domestic 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

* Mic. 6. 6. to 8.

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 mourned by the daughters of Israel.

St. Jerome; as well as the author of the *Questions to the Orthodox*, thinks that Jephtha's piety in sacrificing his daughter, was the reason of St Paul's numbering him among the just persons. And

Bishop Smalridge, in his sermon about Jephtha'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 extolled for being ready to sacrifice his only son, and that too without the least expostulation; though 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 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 destroyed.*

Had the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, who reckons Jephtha among the Jewish heroes, though the Jews abhorred all human sacrifices, he would not, at least without some apology for the lawfulness of human sacrifices, have declared one such sacrifice, where the same person was both sacrificer and sacrifice, to have been of infinite value; in saying, that Christ offered up himself;† and that he put away sin by the sacrifice of himself;‡ and endeavors to shew the Hebrews. that

* Numb. 21. 2, 3. Chap. 11. 32. † Heb. 7. 27—‡ 9. 26.

the blood of the beasts that were sacrificed, was of no value in comparison of the blood of Christ, who, thro' the eternal spirit, offered himself up without spot to God.*

B. Admitting the Jewish law allowed human sacrifices, yet the Christian religion, sure, forbids (since Christ, according to the apostle, sacrificed himself) all human sacrifices.

A. If putting innocent and consciencious men to death on account of religion, may be called sacrificing them, there have been more human sacrifices than ever were before in the world ; and those too not offered 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 entertained of the divine perfections ; imagining they do service to the creator, by hurting and destroying his creatures ? The fiery zeal of such wretches is capable of any mischief : most other men, though ever so wicked, have some remains of pity and humanity, some checks of conscience, and though ever so much provoked, 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 cruelest 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

* Ver. 13.—14

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 judged 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 deisidemony, or superstition, to prove that atheism, though an opinion false, and even stupid, yet it is far less hurtful to men than superstition, and reflects less dishonor on the deity itself, for he interprets deisidemony 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 exposed 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.

“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 paternal; for mischievously inclined, what is full of providential care; nay, for a being brutally savage and fierce, what is mere goodness itself. Shall then the atheist be accounted 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 revenge himself upon the slightest occasion, and full of indignation for mere 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 frightened 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, honor, and reverence. Thus inconsiderate men, shocked at the deformity of superstition, run directly into its opposite extreme, atheism, heedlessly skipping over true piety, that is, the golden mean between both." So much for this philosopher of the Gentiles, I shall now quote a noble christian 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, though 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 weary of themselves, as looking no further : 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 atheist in masquerade may do most mischief ; but then it is by hiding the atheist, and personating the bigot ; and under color of promoting religion, advancing priest-craft. And there are no small number of these atheists, if what the famous Scaliger says is true ; *Quicumque, Jesuicæ vel Ecclesiastici Romæ in honoribus vivunt, athei sunt.* 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 heathen distinguished 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 worshipped; but we do not find (except in Egypt, that mother-land of superstition) they ever quarrelled about their Gods, tho' their Gods sometimes quarrelled, and fought about their votaries: no, it was a maxim with them, *Deorum injuriæ, Diis curæ*.

By the universal liberty that was allowed amongst the ancient's "Matters" (as a noble author observes) "were so ballanced that reason had fair play; learning and science flourished; wonderful was the harmony and temper which arose from these contrarieties. Thus superstition and enthusiasm were mildly treated; and being let alone, they never raged to that degree as to occasion bloodshed, wars persecutions, and devastations; but a new sort of policy,—has made us leap the bounds of natural humanity, and out of a supernatural charity, has taught us the way of plaguing one another most devoutly. It has raised an antipathy, that no temporal interest could ever do, and entailed 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."

And as this noble author observes "the ZEUS ZENIOS (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 ancient 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 authorising some among them to judge for others, and to punish them for not acting according to the consciences

of those judges, though ever so much against their own.

These bigots thought they were authorised to punish all those that differ from them in their religious worship, as the enemies of God; but had they considered, that God alone could discern the hearts of men, and alone discover whether any, by conscienciously 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 concerned, and as likely to be mistaken as those they would punish. Can one, without horror, think of men's 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 impious wretches suppose, that God is not able to judge for himself, or not able to execute his own judgment? And that, because he has recourse, forsooth, to their help, in order to overcome his opposer; and they are to revenge his injuries, and to restore his lost honor, with the destruction of the better part of the world? but,

To all the propagators of these blasphemous notions justice be done; 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 endeavor to support them by traditional religion, especially by misinterpreted texts from the old testament; and thereby make not only natural and revealed 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 the laws of God, whether internally or externally revealed, are not at all times the same, when the author of them is, and has been, immutably the same for ever ?

CHAP. 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. SHOULD I grant you, that natural and revealed 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 considered 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 prescribed in the gospel ; but that, agreeably to the law of nature, they are to be varied 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

is the 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 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 confused and perplexed, can never come from the clear fountain of all knowledge, nor that which is obscure, from the fathet 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 is the framet of the understanding of those to whom he dictates his laws, cannot but adapt one to the other. But how can we say, that infinite wisdom speaks plainly to mankind through all generations, except we allow that his commands extend not beyond mortal things; and that in all matters of a mutable nature, which can only be considered as means, he obliges them to a second-

ing 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 stile, without any allegorical, metaphorical, hyperbolic, or other forced way of expression ; and if time discovers any inconvenience, or any unforeseen difficulties want to be cleared 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 cannot 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 disposed things in that order, and placed him in those circumstances. It is for want of observing this rule, that the divine writings are rendered 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 honor 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 hindering them from judging for themselves, of the means which

best tend to promote this end ; and imposing on them by the terrors of temporal and eternal punishment, such needless speculations and useless observances, as cannot be considered either as means or ends ?

B. You know that divines, though they cannot deny what you say to be true in general ; yet they think there is 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 usurped ; which, though 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 policy ; nor have the ecclesiastics been less embroiled 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 ever contended among themselves about superiority, the right of their sees, and the limits of their jurisdiction ; and when their choice depended on the

people, they frequently, especially in their contentions about the greater fees, run things on to blood and slaughter; and I appeal to their own historians, whether the ecclesiastics 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 exercised to the height, more fatal effects than all the superstition of the Gentiles? look the world round, you shall every where find men more or less miser'ble, as they have been more or less debarred the rights 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 maintained their own ministers, and ordered among themselves what required a special determination, no inconveniences happened; but as soon as this simple and natural method was broke, and the clergy were formed into a society-united body, with that subordination and dependance they had to one another, the christian world was enslaved, and religion forced to give way to destructive superstition.

Which could never have happened; 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 honor 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 cannot make over this right to any other, must not all church-matters be managed 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 is nothing of a mutable nature, if

once esteemed immutably fixed by God, but must sometimes become prejudicial to the end it was to promote; especially in a religion designed 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 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, he has left the parties concerned, to act in all places according to discretion in such mutable matters.

B. You labor this point; but there are few of your sentiment.

A. If you mean ecclesiastics, perhaps, you are in the right; though I am sure, I have the church of England on my side, if judicious Hooker may be allowed to understand its constitution, as well as the nature of the 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 necessity of some special truth doth cause to be enjoined, binds no longer than that time: but does afterwards become free. Law, though both ordained of God himself, and the ends for which they were ordained continuing, may notwithstanding cease, if by alteration of time, or persons, they are found insufficient to attain to that end. In which respect why may we not presume, that God doth even call for such a change or alteration, as the very nature of the things themselves

doth make necessary? God never ordained any thing which could be bettered, yet many things he hath, that have been changed, and that for the better; that which succeedeth as better now, when change is required had been worse, when that which is now changed was instituted. In this case, men do not presume to change the ordinance of God, but yield thereunto, requiring itself to be changed." And he applies this reason honestly in saying, "the best way for us were to hold, even as they do, that in the scripture there must needs be found some particular form of church polity, which God has instituted, and which for that very cause belongeth to all churches, to all times; but with any such partial eye to respect ourselves, and by cunning to make those things seem the truest, which are the fittest to serve our purpose, is a thing we neither like, nor mean to follow." And let me add, that most, if not all our divines from the reformation till the time of the Laudian faction, were in the same sentiments; and from the mutability of such things as are means to an end, proved, there could be no particular form of church-polity established by divine authority: and they argued from the example of good king Hezekiah, who, without regard to the salutiferous virtue the brazen serpent once had, broke it to pieces when perverted to superstitious use. 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 preached 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 mixed 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 ceased, the matter of the command was lost; and the whole reason and force of it

funk of course : Now those things being ofentimes delivered 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."

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 considered 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-mentioned author observes, that " the circumstances of human life are infinite, and depend on a multitude of actions 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 fulfilled by running contrary to the letter ; and therefore, reason and honesty must guide us to the finess 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 another ; especially considering that in all God's laws, it is the reason of the law that makes it law.

B. By the reasoning of such divines, I cannot perceive the use of any occasional commands, since they suppose these cannot oblige people longer than they judge it fit to observe them ; otherwise there could be no difference between occasional and eternal precepts ; and what they judge fit and proper to be done, they are obliged to do without any occasional commands ; so that according to them, whether there are, or are not any occasional commands, human discretion is left at liberty to judge what is fit, or not fit to be observed ; which, I think, is supposing all such commands needless : yet the

authors you quote suppose, contrary to your hypothesis, there have been such commands ; particularly 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 pleased ; 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 universe, 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 though 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 arguments of this nature, more fully hereafter.

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 merely positive ; nay, that rights, and ceremonies, signs, or symbols might be arbitrarily enjoined, 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 revealed 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 that differs from that of nature, its precepts must be arbitrary, as not founded on the nature and reason of things, but depending on mere will and pleasure ; otherwise it would be

the same with natural religion : and though it is difficult to prove a negative, yet I think, I can fully shew you, by adding other reasons to those already mentioned, that God, the great governor of the universe, cannot give mankind any such precepts ; and consequently, that natural and revealed religion only differ in the manner of their being delivered.

CHAP. X.

God does not act arbitrarily, or interpose unnecessarily ; but leaves those things, that can only be considered as means (and 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.

IN order to settle this point, it is necessary to see how far this natural law extends ; it not only commands that evil doers should be punished, but that men according to the different circumstances they are under, should take the most proper methods for doing it, and vary as exigencies may require ; so it not only requires that justice should be done men as to their 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 matters relating to the worship of God, it is the voice of nature that God should be publicly worshipped ; 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 is 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 weak persons what they please, on pretence of divine right.

This being premised, 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 issued out certain commands which have no foundation in reason; by obliging men to observe such things, as would not oblige were they not imposed; 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 conduive to the end, for whose sake alone they were designed: Can there be any cause, why a being, which never acts unnecessarily, and whose commands are all the effects of infinite wisdom, should interpose? It is so far from being necessary for God to interpose in such cases as these, that it only serves for a handle to inhuman imposition; for there is nothing so indifferent, but may, if believed to have divinity stamped upon it, be perverted by designing men to the vilest purposes; and in truth, there is nothing of this nature introduced into religion, but what, I am afraid, has been some time or other so perverted.

One would think it a thing wholly indifferent, who sprinkled an infant, or from whose hands we received

the sacramental bread and wine, as long as the rules of decency and order were observed; yet has there not been a set of men, who, on a pretence of a divine right to do these things, have made the Christian world believe, they have a discretionary power to bestow, or withhold the means of salvation; and, by virtue of this claim, have over-awed them into slavish obedience, and a blind submission.

There is no good or hurt in drawing two lines cross one another, and yet what have 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 their chief engines of their craft, for the better carrying on of which, they persuaded the people to adore the cross, miraculously founded after it had been buried about three hundred years; and the wood of it has since so wonderfully encreased, as to be able to make innumerable crosses, whereof each bit contained 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 Popish 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 governed 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 looked on as very medicinal, and generally used in sickness; they prayed, and anointed the sick in hopes of a recovery: But though 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 is hopes of recovery.

What can be more indifferent, or harmless, considered 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 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 ancient custom among the Hebrews, when they prayed 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 prayed that he might duly execute that office, to which they had ordained 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 ordained, however unqualified they might think him.

It is 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 increased, 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 catholic doctrine, than for the author 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 introduced, 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 hooked in the cognizance of all carnal causes, incontinence in single as well as married persons. Thus you see, how easily mankind may be abused, where it is believed, that religion can require any thing inconsistent with the rights and liberties God has allowed them by the law of nature; and how dangerous it is 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 married a lady of the house of Burgundy, a match very advantageous to the state, and though he had the consent of his bishops, yet he, and the whole kingdom were excommunicated by the pope, because his lady was in the fourth degree of consanguinity, and the king had been god-father to the child by a former husband; which so distressed the poor king, that all his servants, except three or four, deserted him; and no one would touch the viſuals which came from his table, which were, therefore, thrown to the dogs."

I shall give one instance more: Men are obliged 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, compassed 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 though this is no more than what is daily done in private societies, and was easily practised 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 not only excluded the congregation from this their natural right; but claimed, as given them by Heaven, a power to excommunicate whom they please, even their own sovereign; and that too for things relat-

ing 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 ordained, 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 claimed the same power over them as over other Christians; looking on all to be alike subject to their spiritual power. And accordingly kings were excommunicated, their subjects absolved 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 required it, absolved princes of their oaths to their subjects, and subjects of theirs to their sovereigns; and by virtue of her spiritual power, disposed, as she thought fit, of the estates of men, honors, 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 is nothing in itself so indifferent, either as to matter or manner, but if it be engrafted into religion, and monopolized by the priests, may endanger the substance of it: This has been plainly shewn by those divines, who, at the reformation, and since, have argued against all impositions; they have proved that most of the corruptions of popery began at some rites, which seemed at first very innocent; but were afterwards abused to superstition and idolatry, and swelled up to that bulk as to oppress, and stifle true religion with their number and weight. And, indeed, there is no sect, but complains how superstitiously rites and ceremonies are used 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 cannot give up; I do not doubt but you

will hear me with patience, because if I prove my point, I shall, it may be hoped, 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 it is 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 honor him. The arbitrary commands of a tyrant may be obeyed 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 in 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.

Though a judicious author supposes a form of divine worship, in itself indifferent, may be required 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 misery to ourselves, or confusion to the public; because that would be preferring a thing in itself indifferent to the happiness of our lives, and the peace of the public; and that to suppose the contrary, would be breaking in upon the spo-

less character of our heavenly father, by representing him not as a wise and good, but a peevish and ill-natured being; who takes an unreasonable 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 public? Whereas these blessings of peace and unity can never be obtained by a forced 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 is 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 is 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? 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 honorable conception of it, who believe it has no such mixture to spoil its beauty, and destroy its simplicity; but that like its author, it is wholly spiritual, and as such, worthy its divine original.

One would think these men must appear ridiculous to themselves, who, though 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 of the Jews had; and put a greater stress upon them, than ever the Jews did on any of theirs.

If the works of God shew infinite wisdom, there is no reason to think, 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 impressed on them, and both alike discover their divine original.

If all the laws of God are of a piece, must they not 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 arbitrary 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 impressed on them the same character of the highest wisdom and goodness, that is impressed on the whole frame of nature, and on every part of it.

It is 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 distinguished from the uncertain opinions of weak and fallible men; not to say the whimsies and reveries of crack-brained enthusiasts? How shocking is it to hear divines cry, that, "certain things, were they not to be adored as mysteries, ought to be exploded as absurdities!"

If we suppose any arbitrary commands in the gospel, we place Christians in a worse condition than these understand no law but that of nature, which requires nothing but what is moral; and consequently the greatest part of

mankind, who are to be judged 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 favor of God by any mistakes, or omissions in such matters.

To suppose some men, who though they exactly obey the law of nature, may yet be punished, 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 involved, 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, those who think original and traditional religion do not differ, are in the better state; since they take delight in their duty, as having nothing required of them, but what they must evidently perform for their good; and consequently free (in temporal happiness) from all panic fear: but those who believe there are things mentioned in religion, of which reason affords no light how they are to be performed, 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, it is 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, though 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 their bare opinions; or about such things too, as have no foundation in reason. And perhaps the desire to drown all thoughts of such a tyrannical deity, is no small occasion of that gross absurdity which does every where prevail, and which must prevail where superstition abounds.

It is mens not being governed by the reason of things, which makes them divide about trifles; and lay the utmost stress on such things as wise men would be ashamed of. It is on the account of these, that the different sects set the highest value on themselves, and think they are the peculiar favorites 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 rights 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 stress 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 mystic 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 mills of our children are, at a certain time, to be paved by

certain persons with certain ceremonies, in order to make them capable of salvation; and that such as died before their nails were thus paired, remained 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 obliged to have their nails paired during their sickness, if they apprehend it to be mortal.

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.

*Ah nimium faciles, qui tristia crimina cædis
Fluminea, tolli posse putet is aqua.*

The *Taurobolia*, or the bedaubing a man in a pit, all over with the blood of a bull, which fell on him through holes made in the plank on which the beast was slain, was believed 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 Fotenelle's history of oracles, taken from Prudentius.

Though the heathen priests made the people believe they could be clean 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:

though the men of sense amongst the pagans were not thus to be imposed on; which made Tully say,

Animi labes nec diuturnitate evanescere, nec amnibus ullis elui potest.

Lactantius seems to be of another opinion, in saying, “give us one that is unjust, foolish and a sinner; and in one instant he shall be just, prudent and innocent; with one laver all his wickedness shall be washed 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 despised; as allowing no succedaneum, no commuting or compounding with heaven. And indeed all such commuting, or compounding powers, where they are supposed to be lodged, serve as a bank of credit for the transgressors; and are mighty incitements to all manner of villany: and in former days, the great men, after having oppressed and plundered people, thought to compound with heaven, by letting the clergy share in the spoil; and it is on this notion so many abbeys and monasteries have been founded; and the superstitious, as long as they are persuaded 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 transferred 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 believed 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 changed his mind, and repented of his great goodness ; and arbitrarily deprived, they will not say, all mankind but no small number of this liberty ; and required of them the belief of certain useless 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 involved in great obscurity? Whereas, if merely positive things were required, 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 applied, as well as that they were to be obligatory for ever.

B. If God has revealed any thing in a way liable to be mistaken, he cannot be displeas'd with sincere people for mistaking it.

A. That is 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 them 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 proved at large, that morality is capable of demonstration, concludes by saying, * “ I shall only here repeat, that man being a reasonable agent, reason is the law and rule of his actions; there is no truth in the mathematics more clear, and incontestible than

* Middle'sholy of Liberty, p. 11. 2. c. 11.

this. Now it is easy for him, when he examines his actions by this rule, to see whether they agree together, as to know when two lines are compared, whether they are of the same, or a different length.—Why should demonstration be confined 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 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 now 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 it not as reasonable to suppose, he may command some indifferent things to day, and others to-morrow; or some in this part of the world, or some in another; as at first to command moral, and then superadd indifferent things? If different things can contribute to the perfection of revelation, there may be endless revelations; and the last always most 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 owned by the translator of his apology, says, "that the law, and the prophets were to be looked 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 spake by Montanus." But to make some apology for his lapsed

father, he says, “ the arch heretic Montanus supported the character of the most holy, mortified, and extraordinary person for a considerable time ; the world rung with visions and prophecies of him, and his two damsels ; and the face of severity and saintship consecrated their reveries, and made real possession pass for inspiration.—The churches of Phrygia, and afterwards other churches, divided upon the account of these new revelations ; and even the very bishop of Rome himself for some time espoused the vanity, and made much of the impostor.” And had he continued so to do, it might, perhaps, have obtained ; since we find the christians in the primitive times came intirely into a more gross imposture, and had faith for the most palpable forgery of the Sybilline oracles being writ by real prophetesses under divine inspiration. And the whole christian world for more than the two first centuries believed the millenarian heresy, as it is now called ; for which, indeed, they pretended other proofs than the divine authority of the Sybils. 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 ; though the monks in the twelfth century were not satisfied even with that ; and therefore endeavoured to introduce a new gospel, called *evangelium æternum*, or the gospel of the Holy Ghost : and affirmed that this gospel of the spirit excelled that of Christ’s, as much as the light of the Sun does that of the Moon.

In short, to this belief, that there may be things in religion not founded on nature and reason, and that these may be reserved for this, or that period of time, are owing all the visions and reveries among the papists, and other ecclesiastic christians ; and upon this absurd notion is founded the most spreading religion of Mahomet, who pretended to be the paraclete promised by Jesus to comp’eat, 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 imposed on by mad-men; as well as impostors.

If God can command some things arbitrarily we cannot be certain, but that he may command all things; so; for though 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 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 enjoined nothing in relation to indifferent things; so that there is a large field in which all legislators, human as well as divine, may exert their power.

A. It is 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 it is 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 injured; and herein the whole of human liberty consists, the contrary being a state of mere servitude; and men are more or less miserable, according as they are more or less deprived of this liberty; especially in matters of mere religion, wherein they ought to be most free.

To suppose God has *in these things* as they are called in scripture, deprived any nation or people 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, it is not capable of additions ; if the last does it not argue the 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 merely 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 revealed.

If men have been at all times obliged 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, as bishop Tillotson says, "because 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 practice 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 honor 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 not be done, as done ; or as well done this, as that way. Superstition is defined 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 appeased or else moved to wrath. Can any thing be more trivial than useless speculations and unnecessary observations.

How numerous soever christians may be, though 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 for a temple

they complain of one another's uncharitableness, yet they excluding all other sects, either as schismatics or heretics, 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 crumbled 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 ought I know there may be five thousand) it is five hundred to one, but that every one is damned; because every one damns all but itself; and itself is damned by four hundred and ninety nine:" how, I say, can these differences be avoided, as long as men take into their 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 called, 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 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 is 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 Hamburgh; what is there so indifferent, if once believed to belong to religion, but may have pernicious effects? And there are a number of instances in all ages, where things as trifling have occasioned 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 worse than error, if I may so speak, (for it was no less than a point of Judicium forced upon the church) though 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 on the Sunday following? This matter, though most unnecessary, most vain, yet caused 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 cannot 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 befel them, through the ignorance of their guides; and because thro' sloth and blind obedience men examined not the things they were taught; but like beasts of burthen patiently couched down, and indifferently underwent whatever their superiors laid upon them."

"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, looked on till they were destroyed by the Ottoman family?"

And other instances he gives of fatal disturbances from disputes about trifles; as the removing the pictures of certain bishops out of a church occasioned image-worship; for those who opposed their removal, went so far as to maintain, that pictures ought not only to be set up, but worshipped; which caused not only great disorder

ders 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 Lutherans and Calvinists about the sacrament, though it has created such fierce animosities, is merely verbal 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 persecutions about such trifling things, as rites and ceremonies, nay, habits and postures, would in all likelihood have ended in the utter ruin both of church and state, had not the blessed revolution interposed.

B. I would not have you treat what you call postures so irreverently; ought not people to kneel at their devotions?

A. The whole christian world for many ages thought not; and the *Anti-Nicene* fathers, as well as the council of Nice forbid kneeling on all Sundays, and all other days between Easter and Whitfunday.

In a word, if those sentiments must be true, which tend most to make men love and honor 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 honor 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 it is 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 to those that are; which requiring the application of the whole man, can never be rightly performed, while the mind, by laying stress on other things, is diverted from attending on them; especially if it be considered, that superstition, if once suffered to mix with religion, will always be gaining ground. If religion 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 is 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 assured 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 bravoës most religiously observe the orders of their church, about not eating flesh, &c. and instances of this nature might be produced from the most immoral in all churches; who, not satisfied with practising such things themselves, think it highly meritorious to compel others to do the same. And, indeed, the substance of religion has been destroyed 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 reformed churches, of the same sentiments with those Dr. Scott complains of? "Who," he says, "persuade themselves, that God is wonderfully concerned 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 outsides 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,

I am afraid it is too true, as is observed in the letters concerning inspiration; that "men have thought it an honor to be stiled that which they call zealous orthodox, to be firmly linked 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 fervor 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, should be

form his judgment from what he sees most praised. "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 stigmatized, is their being zealous for the positives, and cold and indifferent as to the morals of religion."

"And, in general, we find mere moral principles of such weight, that in our dealings with men, we are seldom satisfied by the full assurance given us of their zeal in religion, until 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 natural justice and good temper, we seldom think of the other question, Whether he be religious and devout." *sophistic*

It is a general observation in history, that where any thing has had the appearance only of piety, and might be observed 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, believed it could not maintain itself without the help of outward objects; and I know not what heathenish pomp, which at last extinguished 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; (though considering the impieties committed there, it might be called 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 cruelly flagitious.

B. If this was superstition, it was built on a notion which had long before prevailed, of believing it a piece of piety to visit Jerufalem, and the holy places there. The great St. Jerome fays, *Certe adcrasse ubi steturunt 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 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 fays, 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, fays, Sulpicious 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 calcat adiripiat, damnum tamen arena non sentiat: & eadem adhuc sui speciem, velut impressis signata vestigiis, terra custodit.* And Paulinus fays the same.

A strict observance of such things as require no virtue in the practice, and may with great ease be punctually observed, makes the superstitious liable to be every where cheated by your Tartuffs, or Mackw—ths; while men who put their whole strefs 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; though this cannot fail to make men see the folly of licentiousness in acting.

And indeed, we shall generally find those ecclesiastics, 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 honor of the church, though to the dishonor 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 is worth while to remark, how differently men are treated for civil and ecclesiastical offences: "In civil cases," as a right reverend and excellent author observes, the offender, if his crime be not capital, suffers a temporary punishment, proportioned to the fault he has committed; and when he has undergone that, nothing further is required of him, except in some cases to find security for his good behaviour for the future. 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. It is not enough to have suffered the severest punishment, though for the smallest offence; it is not enough to give security of not offending for the future: The innocent offender must declare (what it is oftentimes impossible he should declare) that he has changed his sentiments, and is become orthodox; and this, though perhaps no methods of conviction have been used, except that of punishment 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 (though they go not beyond his own heart) the punishment of this overt-act has once drawn upon him. To punish *toties quoties*, as often as these overt-acts are repeated, will not satisfy the holy office.—If an offender cannot be convicted of heresy, he may however be convicted of writing, or speaking against the established doctrine of the church; and that will draw on him all the same consequences, that heresy would do.—Well does this author advise, 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 suffered more by their zeal for orthodoxy, and by the violent methods taken to promote it; than from the utmost efforts of their greatest enemies. But for all that, the world will still think the same methods necessary."

A man, who has, or pretends to have a blind zeal for those things, which discriminate his sect, though he be ever so immoral, too often finds countenance and credit from them; and though thought a devil by others, passes for a saint with his own party: So that the superstitious lie under temptation, to be vicious, and the vicious to act superstitiously. 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.—The Jews pitched 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 become better.

"And thus it is among ourselves, when we apprehend God is displeas'd with us.—We are content to do any thing, but to learn righteousness.

"As to the church of Rome,"—he says, "they (as they pretend) are the most skilful people in the world to pacify God.—I do not wrong them by representing them enquiring after this manner: Shall I go before a crucifix, and bow myself to it, as to the high God?—To which of the saints and angels shall I go to mediate for me, and intercede on my behalf? Will the Lord be pleas'd with thousands of *pater-ners*, or with ten thousands of *Ave-Maries*? Shall the host travel in possession, or myself undertake a tedious pilgrimage? Or shall I lift myself a soldier for the holy war? Shall I give my estate to a convent? Or chastise, and punish my body for the sin of my soul?"

The heathen priests, knowing what could render them acceptable to the people, made the chief part of their religion to consist in gaudy shews, pompous ceremo-

nies; and such other tricks as served to amuse, and divert them, who, provided they entertained such notions as created a reverence for their priests, and believed 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, calved at such a time, and let his throat be cut by a religious butcher, in a such dress, with a consecrated knife; and the Gods, as you will find by the entrails, will be strait appeased."

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 pretence. And what vile things has not the abused name of the church patronized? Nay, even in the best constituted church, have we not lately had numbers of men fond of the name of high-church, whose religion chiefly consisted in drinking for the church; cursing, swearing, and lying for the church; raising riots, tumults, and sedition, in favor 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 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 gained by their arts of reconciling the practice of vice with the prospect of Heaven. The Jesuits, tho' the young-

est 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, it is but reasonable, that the places where they learn vile things, should protect them when they have committed the vilest. It is by these means that holy church gets a terrible party, who cannot refuse to maim or murder, as their spiritual protectors direct, for fear of being delivered up to civil justice; and not only your mean rogues, but even the greatest, have been frequently screened 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, and to make men have recourse to them upon all occasions, though ever so unseasonable. If people can be so far imposed on, as to admit such things into their religion, they will as easily be persuaded to put a greater stress on things, though 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 reckoned 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, though to the neglect of their family-concerns, went from church to chapel, from chapel 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 proved big with the worst of pride, spiritual pride; censuring and despising their neighbors, though ever so good, if they were not as punctual as

themselves in observing those things; and the conceit they had their own godliness, has made them as troublesome at home as abroad, as bad wives as neighbors.

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 religion founded on reason? The precepts of natural religion, and the rules of right reason, cannot but make strong impressions on rational creatures; what is fixed on the minds of men, and wrought in as it were with their very constitution, cannot easily be broke through; 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 looked 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 built on their own reasonableness, they, who attend to the dictates of their reason, can scarce fail to pay a ready and cheerful 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 cheerful mind; but slavishly obey, out of fear, the supposed 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 governed by that law; the believing God requires nothing of them but 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,

It is to this principle we owe the most cruel persecutions, inquisitions, cruades and massacres; and that princes have endeavored, not only to destroy their subjects, but to disinherit their own issue, and to make room for supposititious children. And,

It is 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 whom this principle governs cannot be good men, good subjects, good citizens, or good neighbors; 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.

They 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 exercised 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, modes and ceremonies; are for the most part sour ill-natured 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, claimed, as well they might, a divine right to judge of

the extent of that empire, and to do all they judged 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 judged it necessary for the safety of the church. It is 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 allowed; 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 carried their power to such a height, as disposed princes to enter into agreements with the popes, to whom they yielded a great deal, to be protected in what they had reserved 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 failed to shew it, whenever they have found it their interest.

And though at first those princes were idolized, 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 forced to submit; and had just cause to curse their own predecessors bigotry, which enabled the ecclesiastics to insult them as they pleased. And what disturbances have not your Becketts, 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 though under a king, makes me very jealous ; for should they have an easy prince or an archbishop of a high spirit, the kingly power must sink by the bishops 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 ; imposture and zeal, bigotry and hypocrisy were strangely blended together. And as we are assured 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 superceded, 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 confessed what at the bottom influences all those, who, though they have not the grace to own it, make things, not of a moral nature, necessary ingredients of religion, and thereby give too just occasion 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 necessary to overbalance the fury of a blind zeal ; since several zealots had been excellent men, if their religion had not hindered them ; if the doctrines and principles of their church had not spoiled their 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, it is 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

* Ep. Burnet’s sum of affairs before the restorat. p. 46—79.

they who believe that God will damn men for things not moral, must believe, that in order to prevent damnable opinions from spreading, and to shew themselves holy, as their heavenly father is holy, they cannot shew too much enmity to those, against whom God declares an eternal enmity; 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 exercised the utmost cruelties on one another; the most cursing and damning churches having always proved the most persecuting. The Papists, though they declare it to be their duty to love their own enemies, yet looking on all protestants as the enemies of God, think it meritorious to murder them; and protestants had no sooner renounced those persecuting principles of popery, but they too shamefully practised the same themselves, for the support of such trifling notions as the public had not the least interest in. And before the happy revolution, the spirit of persecution was so outrageous, that protestants ruined protestants upon the account of rites, ceremonies, habits, &c. to the great joy of the common enemy. And,

Though there may be, even now, some who will not forgive their being debared the exercise of their former tyranny, and would be glad, at any rate, to destroy that hated liberty we are now blessed 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, established 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 nor ecclesiastical liberty can be preserved 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, would have been highly pleased to have it an established 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 cannot be supported by reason, (as what church, when it has power, does not ?) cannot but think fraud so too ; especially when it is used not only for men's 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 it is 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 joined with the spiritual interest of the deceived ; 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 it is to hinder millions from imbibing such notions, as are rank poison to their immortal souls ?

It is 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 sponges, 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 assured estima-

tion 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 a hindrance to it : Neither 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 honor 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 principles, though they go under the name of fathers and saints, there is 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 believed, that a certain set of opinions was necessary to salvation, then they must have thought themselves in charity obliged to take the most proper methods to bring men to embrace them ; and consequently must have believed it their duty to substitute some words of their own, which would best express those opinions, on which the salvation of men 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 obliged them to impose their own works, 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 altered 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? "It is no wonder," says that primitive father Dyonyfius, bishop of Corinth, "that some attempt to adulterate the holy writings of our Lord; since they have basely falsified 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 in that book. And it is 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 evil, while they suppose it to be useful for the saving of the souls of men, 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 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 quomocunque a 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 Maho-

metans; but can you charge protestant writers, much less the holy fathers, with any such practices?

A. I hope, it is 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 beginning, maintained with falsifications and calumnies, whereof the prime controverfy-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 proved 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 authority in controversies of faith, had neither the sanction of parliament or convocation; that no one has offered the least reply, though for the honor of those good church-men who first forged it, and those who since defended it, we might expect all that could be said, though 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 representations of modern divines, we may, in some measure, learn from a pamphlet entitled, *The Representation of the present State of Religion; with regard to the late excessive Growth of Infidelity, Heresy and profaneness, as it passed the lower house of Convocation: Where are almost as many notorious falsehoods, 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 constant practice of a certain set of men, not only to impute to their adversaries opinions which they disowned; 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 revered for their great zeal, but to have new powers 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. raised a crusade against those poor people.

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 their's were such) obliged to speak the truth; but that every thing was lawful which served to gain the victory. They thought they might by way of economy or dispensation, say one thing and mean the contrary: "Origen, Methodius, Eusebius, Appollinaris," (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 used. They alledged against the Gentiles, not what they believed, 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, Victorinus, Lactantius, and Hilary; lest I should seem rather to accuse others, than defend myself:" 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 changed, 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 falsified; and those forged canons of Nice the popes for many ages imposed on the Christian world as genuine; and the ancient Liturgies, though things of daily use, underwent divers alterations: Nay, even the creeds themselves, though thought to be the sacred depositum of the faith, have had the same fate. "It is well known," says Bennet, "that the Apostles creed has received various additions to the original form; That the Nicene creed was enlarged by the Constantinopolitan fathers, and he also, with respect to the filioque, been interpolated by the Latin church; that it is 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 cen-

fully. Nor did they confine their forgeries to church-matters, but practised on the imperial laws, and inserted in the Theodosian code, a rescript of Constantine, relating to the power of bishops, long before repealed.

The farther back we go, the greater was the recourse to pious frauds. Scaliger, speaking of the primitive Christians, says, *omnia, quæ putabant Christianismo conducere, bibliis interseruerunt*. And as he supposes, nothing certain of the church till the times of Pliny, so he says, speaking of the second century, *Adeo verbum Dei inefficax esse censuerunt ut regnum Christi sine mendacio—promoveri posse diffiderunt, ut qui utinam illi primi mentiri cepissent*. And Cassaubon says, *Illud me vehementer movit, quod videam primis ecclesiæ temporibus quam plurimos extitisse, qui facinus palmarium indicabant, cælestem veritatem figmentis suis ire adiutus; que 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 profane authors, than the Christian writers.”

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 deceived 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 sæculis fingendi licentia, tam prona in credendo facilitas, ut rerum gestarum fides exinde graviter laboraverit; nec orbis tantum terrarum, sed & Dei ecclesiæ de temporibus suis mysticis merito queratur*.

How unhappy were we of the late had we not the

reason and nature of things (which no priests can alter) to depend on, but were intirely obliged to take our religious sentiments from men, who as far as we have any account of things, have, even from the earliest times, not scrupled to forge, not only whole passages, but whole books; and left nothing entire on which they they could lay their foul hands: Which, as that great and honest critic Daillé observes, “has rendered the writings and venerable monuments of antiquity so imbroided, and perplexed, 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 endeavored to conceal from us.” As to this imposing temper of the ecclesiastics, 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 proved 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 flourished when the trade of creed-making was at its height. “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 cannot be ignorant, that since the council of Nice,” (there it seems the fatal mischief began) “we have done nothing but make 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 that of others; and reciprocally tearing one another in pieces, we have been the cause of one another’s ruin.”

Thus you see, how fraud and force are unavoidable, when it is believed things, having no foundation in nature and reason, are necessary parts of religion; and

ecclesiastical history contains a continued scene of villainy, for the support of such notions: And that the more good sense, piety, and virtue any man was endowed 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 the good of mankind?

Though 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 more ſocially together; except ſuch carnivorous creatures which neceſſity ſeparates. The ants, notwithstanding they have ſtings, are crouded 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 republic. And much the ſame may be ſaid concerning the bees and other animals; yet men though they cannot ſubſiſt but in ſociety, and have hands, ſpeech, and reaſon to qualify them for the bleſſings of it above all other animals; nay, what is more, have religion, deſigned to unite them in the firm books of love and friendſhip, and to engage them to vie with one another in all good offices; and the good natured laity too have, at a vaſt expence, hired perſons to inculcate theſe generous notions; yet alas! in ſpite of theſe of all 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 religious, and the more expence people have been at in maintaining them, the more of these mischiefs have they most ungratefully occasioned to their generous benefactors.

B. Granting that a deluge of every thing that is ill has overflowed Christendom, and does so still in most places; and that religion has been made a handle for such barbarities, as human nature, left to itself, would startle at; yet how is this to be remedied?

A. Education is justly esteemed 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 honor 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 would then be little room for so odious a thing as vice to take possession of the minds of the people, and juggle out virtue so firmly rooted. For these ideas, thus early associated, would 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.

It was after this manner, that the heroes of old, those benefactors to mankind, were educated; and the discourses of the philosophers, who had the instructing them, were full of the intrinsic 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, devot-

ed 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 called 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 dressed up vice in such lovely, and virtue in such odious colours, as to maintain, that bating the consequences of a future state, they would act like fools, who did not indulge themselves in a vicious course. And I believe, men of such principles cannot boast of much more virtue, than a late prelate of uncommon parts and learning, who from the pulpit endeavored to prove, that "in this life the virtuous man is most miserable;"* and who, by all his actions, especially, by his late monstrous practices, shewed how firmly he had believed his own doctrine; and how resolved he was, that virtue should not make his present life miserable.

B. I grant you, it is of the utmost consequence to the common-wealth, 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 clergy-men?

A. I do not think so, when they are such clergy-men as those who have at present the instructing our youth; otherwise I cannot 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 lived in as possible. There they were trained up to exercise and labor, 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 served to quicken them up to this; they recommended above all things the duty to their country, the preservation of the laws and public liberty; subservient to which they

* Archbishop's sermon on Mr. Bennet.

preached up moral virtues, such as fortitude, temperance, justice, a contempt of death, &c. They taught their youth how, and when to speak pertinently; how to act like men, to subdue their passions, to be public-spirited; to despise death, torments and reproaches, riches, and the smiles of princes as well as their frowns, if they stood between them and their duty. This manner of education produced men of of another stamp than appears now upon the theatre of the world, such as we are scarce worthy to mention, and must never think to imitate, till the like manner of institution grows again into reputation: Which in enslaved countries it is never like to do, as long as the ecclesiastics, who have an opposite interest, keep not only the education 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 looked on as superstitious which is not of a moral nature, superstition has spread itself over the face of the earth, and prevailed more or less to all times and places.

A. This is no more than what hath been owned long ago by a very good judge, who says, *superstitio fusa pergentes, oppressit omnium fere animos, atque hominum occupavit imbecillitatem.* And the universality of superstition is in effect owned by every sect, in affirming that superstition is crept into all sects; and that it is the chief business 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?

It is the observation of the 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 practised on, not by creatures of different species, but by those of their own; who, by a confident pretence of knowing more than

their neighbors, have first circumvented the many, the credulous and unwary; and afterwards forced 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, cannot but know that the better sort are sensible of the prevailing absurdities; but, overawed by the priests and mob, are forced to submit. And,

The more superstition the people have, the easier they may be imposed on by besieging ecclesiastics; and the less religion the clergy have, the more unanimous they will be 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 they place their religion in morality: For then all indifferent things are looked 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 esteemed only in proportion to the good they do; and every evil they commit is reckoned a breach of trust, they being maintained 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 too laborious and fervile. They have (I mean, where popery prevails) as masters of the religious ceremonies, most effectually gained 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 caused their temporal happiness; and only to be dispensed by them, in order to get the sole management of spirituals to themselves; and consequently, (since there cannot be at the same time two supreme powers) of temporals also: And so well have they succeeded, that, in

in most places, the temporal interest of the clergy passes 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 revered; not to say adored by the unthinking multitude; as they are in the church of Rome. "That church has," as archbishop Tillotson observes, "weakened the force of Christianity upon the hearts and lives of men, by amusing them with external rites, which they have multiplied to that excessive degree, as to make the yoke of Christ really heavier than 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 Christian worship they have incumbered with so many frivolous rites and observances, as not only render it more burdensome, but less apt to make men inwardly and substantially good, than Judaism itself."

This great man observes, that "those things 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 free from those many outward positive observances, that the Jewish religion was incumbered 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 superadded any outward positive things of its own, to hinder us from being wholly intent on these duties?

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, imposing, on the highest pain, the practice of ridiculous ceremonies, and the belief of absurd doctrines; as a fantastical being, angry without cause, and pleased without reason; as a vain-glorious being, fond of having his ministers and favorites, that is, themselves, live in pomp, splendor, and luxury, to the miserable oppression of the people. But it is no wonder, that they are made to believe, that God requires the observing indifferent things on the severest 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 urged that lights, holy water, and such like, might as well be imposed as the cross and surplice; replied, 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 ordained 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 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, no doubt, owing to the use of hieroglyphics 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 worshipped 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 occasioned: But supposing such symbolical representations might be occasionally used; is it not, for the reasons already given, incumbent on the parties concerned, 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 his holiness consists in a good and pious disposition of mind; so the actions of men are no other wise holy, but as they flow from, and are signs of a 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 employed. 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 destroyed for peeping into it.* Nay, persons who want all real holiness, may yet have a relative holiness, as ministers employed 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 it is derived. Thus all the relative holiness which concerns public worship, whether as to persons, places, or things, must be derived 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, of timber, stone, &c. And therefore the method used by archbishop Laud, in consecrating a church, was generally cried 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

* 1 Samuel 6: 17.

But it is no wonder, if they who claim this power in relation to inanimate things, should pretend to convey men, though ever so wicked, a real inherent, nay, indelible holy character; though wherein that consists, they themselves cannot 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 sanctified 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 conveyed 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 his 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.

B. Though 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 the creatures of God; 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 thi-

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; 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 fore knows what men will do on all occasions, can need no such trial. If earthly kings, who may be deceived, and for the most part are so, would be justly esteemed 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? Though was a trial necessary, moral and immoral things would be the most proper subjects for it; because we cannot practice 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 indulged in any one darling vice?

And now do not 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 in religion which makes for the the good of man, and nothing that does not, we cannot 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 governed, ordered, or regulated for the best,

by a designing principle, or mind, necessarily good and permanent, is to be a perfect Theist.

“ To believe no one supreme designing principle, or mind, but rather two, three, or more, (though in their nature good) is to be a Polytheist.

“ To believe the governing mind, or minds, not absolutely and necessarily good, nor confined to what is best, but capable of acting according to mere will or fancy, is to be a Dæmonist.”*

CHAP. XII

That they, who, to magnify revelation, weaken the force of the religion of reason and nature, strike at all religion; and there cannot be two independent rules for the government of human actions.

B. IN 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 candor than myself, take you for an errant free-thinker.

A. Whatever is true by reason, can never be false by revelation; and if God cannot be deceived 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.

They 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, though a matter directly under their cognizance; nay the absurdity, I think, is

* Characterist. vol. 2. p. 15.

greater in the first case, because reason is to judge whether our senses are deceived: 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.

In a word, to suppose any thing in revelation inconsistent with reason, and, at the same time, 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 can deceive us, we cannot be sure of the truth of any one proposition; but every thing would 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, endeavor to weaken the force of reason, (though 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 surprized, to see some endeavor to reason men out of their reason; though 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 surprized, if for so laudable an attempt, as reconciling reason and revelation, which have been so long set at variance, I should be censured as a free-thinker; a title, that, however invidious it may seem, I am far from being ashamed 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 again, when the laity shall stifle every thought rising in their minds, though 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. Though you talk so much about reason, you have not defined what you mean by that word.

A. When we attribute any operation to it, as distinguishing between truth and falsehood, &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 expressed by single terms; when joined, under the judgment, and expressed by propositions; when so joined as to need the intervention of some other idea to compare them with, in order to form a judgment, they become by that intervention, the subject of inference, or argumentation; and this is termed, syllogism or argument. It must be observed 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, when joined together, so as to be affirmed or denied of each other, make what we call a proposition; when considered apart, what we call the terms of that proposition; the agreement, or disagreement of which terms being expressed by the rightly affirming, or denying them 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 joined, and is therefore styled 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 called the medium, by which reason judges of their agreement or disagreement; and this is called 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 proved, it would be in vain for men to argue with one another; because they then could bring no proofs but what needed to be proved.—Those propositions which need no proof, we call self-evident; because by comparing the ideas, signified 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 called divine inspiration; as being immediately from God, and not acquired 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 cannot be made evident, by comparing the two ideas or terms of it with each other,

it is rendered so by intermediate ideas or terms; whereby the agreement, or disagreement of the ideas under examination, or the truth of that proposition is perceived; 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 connection between the terms of a proposition, and the intermediate proofs of it: So that every proposition that is 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 of any sort can be discovered, 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 is a probable connexion, when there is 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 governed 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. It is strange, that all mankind should have a principle of acting, of which they never were sensible; nor can these modern discoverers 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 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 it is the highest commendation of religion, that it 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 exposed to others, for such senseless notions, as can only serve to prejudice people against their other rational principles? But it is 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 framed, 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 God and natural religion; which, though not knowable by intuition, are to be demonstrated by proofs, which have, mediately or immediately, a necessary connection 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 give probably its due weight, is to strike at the authority of that revelation you contend for; because, that God revealed 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, though perhaps, not in the same degree of probability, that he made this, or that revelation: And this evidence all pretend to, since, perhaps, there never was a time or place, where some external revelation was not believed, 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 imposed 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 conveyed intire to distant times and places; especially, if the revelation be of any bulk; and which may have gone through 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 forged 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 would 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 has published, as he thinks, a demonstration of this, with relation to facts recorded in scripture; and has gone so far as to fix the precise time, when all probability of the truth of the history of Christ, will be entirely spent, and exhausted.

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, if the doctrine of the scripture was not as good, and as fit to come from God, the fountain of goodness, as the miracles, by which it was confirmed, were great; I should want one main pillar of my faith: And for want of it, I fear, should be much staggered 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, endeavor to weaken the force of reason.

B. I do not 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 cannot see how that is possible; for if you are to be governed by the latter, that supposes you must take every thing on trust; or merely because it is 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 governed 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 obliged to receive it; and indeed, it is an odd jumble, to prove the truth of a book by the doctrines it contains, and at the same time conclude those doctrines to be true, because contained in that book; and yet this is a jumble every one makes, who contends for men's being absolutely governed 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 cannot be defended by reason, have recourse to any method of interpretation, though ever so forced, in order to make it appear reasonable. And do not all parties, when pressed, 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 te ad sensum rei, quam ad sonum vocabuli exercitas.* But

sometimes the letter of the scripture is such an authority, as cannot be parted with without sacrilege; and sometimes it is 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 tried 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 proved, every thing would want a farther proof; and if there are such evident truths, must not all others be tried 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 things 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 supposed 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, 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 imposed 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 commenced, 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 the texts; and to admit that only to be the will of God, though ever so inconsistent with the light of nature, and the eternal reason of things. Is not this to infer, there is nothing good or evil in itself, but that all depends on the will of an arbitrary being, which, though 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 is a law of reason, antecedent to any external revelation, that God cannot dispense, 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 with it. If so, how can we affirm any one thing in revelation to be true, until 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 cannot believe otherwise than as things appear to our understandings, to suppose God requires us to give up our understandings (a matter we cannot 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 observes, "It is reason that is the judge; and fathers, councils, tradition and scripture the evidence." 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 rests, by which it could try all evidences relating to religious matters.

B. Though 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 contained 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 the eyes of another; or that one ship can be guided by the helm of another: And therefore, he, who demands the assent of a man 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, though ever so certain to one man, can be infused 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 governed by reason, though 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 employed 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 alike unto God, and framed after his image; and that reason is the most excellent 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 people whatever?

Can we lay too great a stress on reason, when we consider, it is 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 the cool deliberation of men, and strict examination; since it is from the marks we discern in the laws of the universe, and its government, that we can demonstrate it to be governed 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 honor to the scripture, who suppose it deals with men as with rational creatures; and therefore admit not of any its doctrines without a strict examination: And those who take a contrary method, would, if they lived in Turkey, 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 is nothing but miracles to plead; and miracles true or false, if they are believed (and where are they not?) will have the same effect: Nay, if miracles can be performed 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, *THAUMANA MOROIS* 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.

Would 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 tried, 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 the laws of God; 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 imagined whether it had those internal marks? Or can we say, we

cannot 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.

We find St. Paul himself saying, that though we, (the apostles) or an angel from Heaven, preach any other gospel, let him be accursed:* And is not laying the whole stress on its internal marks? Since there is nothing in the nature of such things as have not those marks, to hinder them from being changed 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?

In the prophet Isaiah, 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 Ezekial, 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 Micha, he says, He will plead with them; asks what he has done, and bids them testify against him.|| And in the prophet Isaiah, after the Lord had said,

* Gal. i. 8. † Job xxii. 8. ‡ Isa. v. 7. § Ezek. xvii. 25. || Mich. vi. 2. 3.

Wash ye, make ye clean, put away the 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 ; though 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, though 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 reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath. And again, he reasoned with them out of the scriptures. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled ; ‡ Which, certainly, he had never done, had Paul talked 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 the will of God by, which way soever revealed.

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 observed them, there could have been no occasion for an external revela-

* Isa. i. 16, 18. † Job xiii. 3. ‡ Acts xviii. 4. c. xvii. 2. c. xxiv. 25.

tion; and its great use now is, to make men observe those neglected rules, which God, of his infinite wisdom and goodness, designed 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 is 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, though he gave them immortal souls capable of it; or else, that though he designed it, he prescribed 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 revealed 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 to any one nation, or person? Or in all languages, as in 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 concerned to know, or when known, obliged to observe them; nor did they bind the Jews themselves, for a time; and even then, they were for the most part impracticable out of the land of Canaan; where God, as I shall fully shew hereafter, acted not as governor of the universe, but king of the Jews, by virtue of the Horeb covenant; which he obtained at his own request. But when God acts as governor of the universe, his laws are all alike designed 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 governor 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 obliged 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 forced 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 should 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, contained 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, 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 revealed, 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 stress you lay on reason, the more you extol revelation? which being designed 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 Ecclesiastics in most places entirely defeated this design, and so far debased 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 over this, if the perfection of any nature, whether human, angelical, or divine, consists in being governed by the law of its nature; and ours, in acting that part, for which we were created; by observing 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 tried? And,

If nothing but reasoning can improve reasoning, 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 reason, that it forbids the use of it; and reasoning faculties unexercised, will have as little force, as unexercised limbs; he that is always carried, will at length become unable to go: "And if the holy ghost," as bishop Taylor says, "works by heightening 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 improved, by studying the nature and reason of things: I applied 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 cannot deal with men as rational creatures, but by proposing arguments to convince their understandings, and influence their wills, in the same manner as if proposed 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, it is then, and only then, he can be sure of their truth. And

though 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 judged by the nature of the things suggested. For it is in vain to have recourse to miracles, if evil as 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 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 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 would think, none could deny was absolutely necessary in reading a book, where it is owned 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 de-

* Deut. xiii. 1, 3

† Mat. xxiv. 24.

fects of reason. Is there a divine, who, though he pretends ever so high a veneration for the scripture, but will own there are many places, where it is 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 is the same in both cases, which makes him approve the literal sense in one case, and condemn it in another. And were men not governed 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 endeavor 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 is no book, but you may own its infallibility, and yet be entirely governed 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 governed by his alchoran, who, upon all occasions, should thus depart from the literal sense; nay, would you not tell him, that his inspired book fell infinitely short of Cicero's uninspired writings; where there is no such occasion to recede from the letter?

The Moammorites, a famous sect among the Mahometans, and the Mysticks, very numerous in Turkey, sensible of the difficulties and uncertainties that attend all traditional facts, maintain, that "God can never discover himself with certainty any other way, than by

speaking to the reason and understanding of men ; for if we depend," say they, "on oral tradition, we lay ourselves open to the greatest falsities and impositions ; there being nothing so liable to infinite changes and alterations ; numberless mistakes, additions and subtractions, according as the opinions of men vary by the change of times and circumstances : 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 different 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 uncertainty will still remain ; if we consider, how many metaphors and allegories, and other figures of speech ; how many obscure, ambiguous, intricate 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 knowledge of the truth, is to consult God himself, wait his inspirations, live just and honest lives, be kind and beneficent to all our fellow-creatures, 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 perfect ; and it is 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 of nature useles? but if we are still moral agents, and as such are capable of judging between religion and superstition ; can we think otherwise of the gospel than that it is designed, not to free us from the eternal law of nature, but from those absurdities, which the folly or knavery of men have introduced in opposition to it ? Hence it is, that the scripture speaks in general terms, without defining those things which it commands, or for

bids ; because it supposes men moral agents, capable by their reason to discern good from evil, virtue from vice, religion from superstition.

If Mr. Locke reasons justly, “ no mission can be looked on to be divine, that delivers any thing derogating from the honor of the one only true invisible God ; or inconsistent with natural religion and the rules of morality ; because God having discovered to men the unity and majesty of his eternal Godhead, and the truths of natural religion and morality by the light of reason, he cannot be supposed to back the contrary by revelation ; for that would be to destroy the evidence and use of reason, without which men cannot be able to distinguish divine revelation from diabolical imposture.”

Does not this suppose, first, that no mission can be divine, or its revelation true, that admits of more than one only true invisible God ? Secondly, that men, by their reason must know, wherein the honor of this one only, true, invisible God consists ; otherwise they might (for aught they know) be obliged by revelation to admit what is derogatory to his honor ? Thirdly, they must know by the light of reason, what are the truths of natural religion and rules of morality ; because otherwise they might be obliged to admit things inconsistent with them ; and that to suppose the contrary, would 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 honor 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, though they plead endless miracles, must be looked upon as diabolical impostures.

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 :*

* Phil. 4. 8.

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, though 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. Though they argue thus, yet at the same time they find themselves obliged 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 answers, which seem inconsistent: first, that it is 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. Though 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 is more than one that is God: though reason tells us, that there are not three Gods, yet reason could never tell us, that, though in the idea of a divine person, the idea of God be included, each person being by himself God; yet the multiplying of divine persons, was not the multiplying of Gods? And though reason declares there is difference between three and one; yet reason will never discover, that there is 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 specific 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 is nothing reason tells 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 determined by their reason as if there was no such book.

B. This, sure, cannot be the case with relation to the scriptures.

A. I shall only tell you what the most celebrated fathers say on that head. Athanasius says, "should we understand a great part of the sacred writ literally, we should fall into the most enormous blasphemies. St. Cyril says much the same. St. Gregory the first says, "the scripture is not only dead, but deadly; for it written, the letter kills, but the spirit quickneth; and this is what the whole divine letter does." And in another place he compares them to beasts who regard the letter. And St. Jerome says, "If we adhere to the flesh of the letter, it will be the occasion of many evils." And Gregory Nyssen makes the like reflection.

B. I durst not have made so bold with the scriptures

as these fathers; but content myself 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 testify heir sentiments in natural, historical, or chronological matters; to mend their logic, or rhetoric when it is defective, but has no ill influence on piety, is not the business of revelation.—Needlessly to contradict innocent vulgar notions, is the sure way to lose the peoples affections, and to forego a prudential way of gaining them."

A. With submission to this learned author, is there no difference between God's not rectifying men's sentiments in those matters, and using himself such sentiments as needs be rectified; or between God's not mending men's logic, or rhetoric, where it is 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 people's 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 logic, or rhetoric; and speaks in natural, historical, and chronological matters, not according to the truth of things, but according to the conception of the vulgar, to whom he directs his speech? Nor can I think of any falsehood, supposed to be authorised by the God of truth, but may be made use of to some ill purpose; in divinity, as well as mathematics it is a certain maxim, *uno absurdo dato mille sequuntur*.

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?"

Dr. Prideaux, speaking of the marks of imposture, says, "If there be but one known truth in the whole scheme of nature, with which it interferes, this must make the discovery; and there is no man that forgeth an imposture, but makes himself liable to be this way convicted of it." The Doctor, sure, would not have asserted this so roundly, had he not compared the philosophical, and scriptural scheme of nature, and perceived their exact agreement. But,

Not only Dr. Burnet, in defence of his *Archæologia*, but all, who maintain, that the sun is immoveable, and that it is the earth that moves; sufficiently shew, that the scriptural and philosophical account of natural things seldom agree: However, to give one instance, there is scarce a country-man so ignorant, as not to know, that if the seed thrown into the earth is killed 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, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die:* 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 day, make use of boiled 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 obliged intirely 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 governed by it, but with the rest of the members, equally to rely on the churches infallible decisions.

* 1 Cor. xv. 36.

† John xii. 24.

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 governed; it can be for no other cause, but to prevent their discovering in that church such errors, as they could not well know before; and which, if known, would have hindered 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 men's 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 a divine original: before examining what men teach, there is no reason to have an implicit faith in one set of men, more than another: and examination destroys all implicit faith, and all authority ^{they} whatever; since if they then embrace the opinions of others, whether apostles or not, it is 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 governed 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 doctrine, but what are agreeable to his will; (for this," say they, "you must allow reason capable of discovering, other-

wife it could never lead men to believe what the apostles taught;) you alike put the whole stress on reason. And you must own, either that men are entirely to be governed by reason, and then you destroy all authority whatever; or else not to be governed by it, and then you cannot, by reason, shew the absurdity of that implicit faith the catholic church requires."

B. You know, that in answer to all objections of this nature, we say as bishop Burnet does, in the exposition of the articles of our church; "That if we observe the stile and method of the scriptures, we shall find in them all over a constant appeal to the reason of men, and to their intellectual faculties. If the mere dictates of the church, or of infallible men, had been the resolution and foundation of faith, there had been no need of such a long thread of reasoning and discourse, as both our saviour used when on earth, and the apostles used in their writings. We see the way of authority is not taken, but explanations are offered; proofs, and illustrations are brought, to convince the mind; which shews that God, in the clearest manifestation of his will, would deal with us as with rational creatures, who are not to believe, but on persuasion; and to use our reason in order to the attaining that persuasion."

A. This is all I contend for and had not what the bishop says (though 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 examined into all parts of his exposition of the articles, would never have let this passage escape without remarks. And therefore, since it is 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 ; though upon examination, they are not convinced by his reasons. To require more, would be to require impossibilities ; since it is not in the power of men, after they have considered things as well as they are able, to believe otherwise than they do. And had the apostles said to those they designed 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, talked after this manner, do you think they could have gained 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 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 tried, the brighter they will appear : This will be ennobling yourselves, and doing justice to your own understandings, as well as to our doctrines.” † If men have any authority, it is then only, when they renounce all peremptory authority ; and instead of claiming dominion over the faith of men, desire they would prove every thing by those tests God had given them, in order to discern good from evil ; truth from falsehood ; religion from superstition. Thus the apostle seeks to maintain his credit and authority with the Thessalonians ; 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 ?

* 1 Thes. v. 21.

† 1 Cor. xiv. 11

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 awhile, 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 in scripture to lay aside our reason or understanding; but directly the contrary is there affirmed 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 exhorting men to attend seriously, † to weigh diligently, their doctrines and precepts," &c. and then asks, "are these, and such like expressions, calculated to enslave the understandings of men, and to induce a blind and implicit obedience? Such methods may serve the purpose of superstition, but true religion can gain nothing by them."

Dr. Whitcot does this justice to external revelation, as to say, "The scripture's way of dealing with

* Rom. vii. 1.

† Mat. xi. 15.

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 the superstition of man, and not religion of God's making." What an infinity of disputes would this rule have cut off? What, I pray was the grand occasion of so many monstrous heresies, even in the primitive 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 philosopher, who thus concisely distinguishes them; tales publicly allowed, religion; disallowed, superstition.

Bishop Hoadley, the strenuous assertor of our religious, as well as civil rights, says, "Authority is the greatest and most irreconcilable enemy to truth and argument, that this world ever furnished out; all the sophistry; all the colour of plausibility; all the artifice and cunning of the subtlest disputer in the world. may be laid open, and turned to the advantage of that very truth, which they designed to hide, or to depress: But against authority there is no defence." And after having shewn, that it was authority that crushed the noble sentiments of Socrates, and others; and that it was by authority, that the Jews and heathens combated the truth of the gospel; he says, "When christians were increased 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 honor of christianity, but well nigh extinguished 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 was 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, amongst men, should in any age, or any country, become a friend and guardian of

them?" And to obviate an objection easily foreseen, he adds, "It was authority, which hindered 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 is no christian doctrine, but what has powerful arguments to support it; or in other words, has divinity stamped 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 received for the sake of the former, it could not avail. His words are, "Where truth happens to be received for the sake of authority; there is just so much diminished 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 divine reasonings about divine revelation are necessarily gathered by our natural notions about religion; and therefore, he, who sincerely desires to do the will of God, is not apt to be imposed on by vain, and confident pretences of divine revelation; but if any doctrine be proposed 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, though 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 frightened 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 prevailed 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."

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 proneness 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. After a laborious and fruitless search of future happiness, men were apt to embrace any system of religion presented to them; if it flattered their hopes of future felicity, they were loth to discover the error and illusion of any pleasing revelation; they wished it might be true, and at first, what they wished, they at last believed to be true.—Many feared they should be injurious to the divine majesty, and incur the guilt of atheism, if they should scrupulously examine what pretended to carry the stamp of his authority, and to have been revealed by him. To entertain scruples in this case, was thought no less than sacrilege, and every doubt was esteemed an affront to God; to which may be added, that they should contract no small merit, and ever lay an obligation on God, if they immediately resigned up their judgment to his supposed revelation, and blindly received it without any doubt or hesitation.

"This, in all ages, opened a wide gap, and prepared a way for error and superstition; while the whimsies of

every foolish enthusiast, and the follies of every bold impostor were proposed under the venerable name of divine oracles.—Hence all the absurdities of the pagan religion found belief, and entertainment in the world; and for the most extravagant impostors never wanted profelytes. Hence the most pernicious errors of heretics, found admission into the church; and the pretence of new revelations seduced some part of the christian world.

“ To this fatal credulity, and danger of illusion arising from it, God and nature have prescribed an excellent remedy; the use of reason, which may examine the grounds and testimonies of all pretended revelations; enquire into their truth, and after a scrupulous trial, pass sentence on them. This, the interest of truth, and the honor of our nation requires us to perform, that we may neither prostitute the former, nor depreciate the latter.—Without this precedent enquiry, our belief would become unlawful; for to obviate the rules of conduct, prescribed to our understanding, were to overthrow all the laws of nature, to debase the dignity of mankind, and to efface the image of God implanted in us. These rules assure us, that God cannot command any thing foolish or ridiculous.—No greater injury can be offered to the deity, than to believe him the author of any religion, which prescribes, or encourages foolish or superstitious practices.—Justly does Plutarch wonder, why atheism should rather be accused of impiety, than superstition; since few are moved any by defect in the order of government, to call in question the existence of God; but the trick and cheats of superstitious persons, their enthusiastic 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 al-

* Stillingfleet.

low, at least, when they write against the enthusiasm of the church of Rome; does it not follow, that it is 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 honor of man's nature requires 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? It would be ridiculous to tell men, that is a crime worse than atheism, 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 among Christians, have been occasioned through 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 of having God for its author. And if it be evident that we cannot 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 revealed religion cannot 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 revealed religion. It is upon this very plan, that I have endeavored 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 cannot act arbitrarily in the government of the world, or command things for commanding's 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 bishop Tillotson says, "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.

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, or act any thing, but what his own essential wisdom, goodness and justice do approve.—To affirm, he is not obliged 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 believed, 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, it is reason must inform me, whether it is certain, probable, or uncertain; and even in propositions relating to such facts as we learn from report, it is by our reason alone, in comparing circumstances, &c. that we must judge of their probability. But,

Although designing men very well know, that it is 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 the understandings of men, and prevent all enquiry, 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 rendered 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 murdered each other. But,

If the scripture was designed to be understood, it must be within the reach of human understanding; and consequently, it cannot 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 designed 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 men's thoughts and actions, it must (as necessary to that end) be delivered 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 designed for the common people, incapable of such explications ; and that their priests, instead of defending it, rendered 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. owned as much.

Nor did the heathens fail to retort the like objection upon the christians ; and, in truth, they equalled, if not out-did them in allegorising away, not only the plainest texts, but even matter of fact ; which proved the occasion of innumerable heresies.

Dupin, speaking of the extravagant opinions, which obtained among silly people in the primitive times, says, " They sprang from the principles of Pagan philosophers ; and from the mysteries, which cracked brained 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, published them gravely as great mysteries to the simple, who were all disposed to receive them." But could any cracked-brained 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 published their mysterious reveries with greater gravity to simple people, always disposed to receive what they did not understand?

The same author, speaking of St. Bernabas' catholic epistle in answer to this objection, "that it was incredible so great an apostle, full of the holy ghost, and colleague of St. Paul, should be the author of such forced 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."

I think, none of our celebrated writers reject this epistle as spurious, because of the allegories it abounds with: Our excellent archbishop Wake says, "Even St. Paul himself in his epistles, received 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 observed." And those christians St. Paul mentions, for believing the resurrection was past, were, no doubt, great allegorists.

The primitive fathers exactly followed the precedent set them by the apostle Barnabas, and other apostolical men: Clemens of Alexandria says, "The œconomy 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 almost in all points figurative." And Le Clerk observes, that "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 esteemed the greatest champion of christianity, next to the apostles; and since what he says, was not only its 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 of 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. *Literam sequentes in infidelitatem, & varias superstitiones incurrunt.* And he objects to Marcion the heretic, 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-natured 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 acknowledged the sovereignty of reason, in allegorising away matters of fact, that were in truth, incapable of being allegorised; though 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 cannot 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 allego-

rising, that for the sake of it, he contradicts the scripture, and says, "The harlot Rahab entertained 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 edified," says Origen, "in reading that so great a patriarch as Abraham, not only lyed to Abimelech, but also betrayed 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 exposed to be debauched 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."

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 he do also; and greater works than these shall he do. John xiv. 12, &c. which he shews, was not verified literally, but spiritually." And,

"That it was want of knowledge in the scriptures, to think, that God spent six real days in the work of the creation."

He desires any one to shew, "How the truth of the gospels can be maintained, or their seeming contrarieties cleared by any other than the anagogical method; which he affirms necessary for that purpose."

He says. "The pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons, offered 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 contemplation," &c.

If you desire to be more plentifully furnished with instances of the like nature with those above-mentioned, consult the philocalia of Origen.

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 personating his brother Esau, literally, lest the scripture should seem to encourage lying."

And speaking of Jesus cursing the fig-tree, says, *hec 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 instant." And though there is not one word about angels in the text, yet this angelical Doctor makes part of the six days labor relate to the creation of angels.

B. But how could he account for God's instituting the Sabbath, upon his resting from his six days labor, if all things were created in an instant?

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 followed, runs thus; Upon thy breast, and upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all 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 thou shalt 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 placed in the clouds; and saith, "Far be it from us to call this God's bow; for this bow, which is called 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 turned and twisted

the scripture, with a pious intention to make it speak nothing but what they thought agreeable to reason; that they have rendered 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 destroyed its certainty; since as Le Clerk 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; 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 fulfilled, 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, roundly 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 killed themselves to preserve their chastity. But the most eloquent St. Chrysostom enlarges very much in commendation of Abraham and Sarah, and says, "Though nothing gives a husband more uneasiness, than to imagine his wife has to do with another, yet this just man did what he could, even to accomplish the act of adultery."—And adds, that "Sarah too" whom he sets as a pattern for all married women, "accepted the proposal very courageously;" 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 continence, and at her great age, readily consented to this act of adultery, and to let

the barbarian have the use of her body, to save her husband ?

A. Might not those fathers as well have allegorized, as talked thus absurdly ? It is chiefly 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 though two parties may agree, in taking the same words in an allegorical sense ; yet by allegorizing them indifferently, they may be of different religions. By allegorizing 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 allegorized ; since he supposes the catholic church has all along allegorized plain love-songs, between Solomon 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 it is studied the less it is understood ; as generally finding a man cracked, or making himself so. And had not the mahometan divines had the knack of allegorizing nonsense, fools and frantic persons would not have been had in such honor 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 to be the will of God, even to the ignorant and illiterate ; if they have but courage and honesty to make use of their reason ; other-

wife the scripture would not be plain in all necessary things; even to babes and sucklings.

B. You suppose then, that the bulk of mankind are taught by God himself, to know what religion comes from him; even though they want letters, to make them capable of understanding those external proofs, on which all traditional religions do, and must depend.

CHAP. 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 failed to do so, when occasion served.

Can people, if incapable by their reason to distinguish truth from falsehood, 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 along while ago revealed to certain persons, who, as they on their priestly words assure them, were too wise to be imposed 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 received it : and that it was morally impossible, innovations should creep in, since it would be the highest folly in any to attempt to introduce new doctrines, as a tradition received from their ancestors, when all must know they had received 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 though all other extraordinary religions are full of gross falsehoods, 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 believed 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, though 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 falsehood, and the ancestors of men having once possessed it, no change could afterward ever happen : Whereas on the contrary, though there have been at times great numbers of traditional religions, yet as far as it appears, no one of them has long remained 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 fixed 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 traditional 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, number of profelytes, agreement among themselves; and all those other external arguments, that the papists and mahometans 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 suffered to be published, 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 governed 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 blessed, 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 concerned, I shall beg leave to mention, though it be somewhat long, what Mr. Locke says on this head.

Have the bulk of mankind no other guide, "but accident, and blind chance, to conduct them to their happiness or misery? Are the current opinions, and licensed guides of every country sufficient evidence and security to every man to venture his great concerns on; nay, his everlasting happiness or misery? Or, can those be the certain and infallible oracles and standards of truth, which teach one thing in Chrillendom, and another in Turkey? Or, shall a poor country-man be eternally happy, for having the chance to be born in Italy; or a day laborer be unavoidably lost, because he had the ill-luck to be born in England? 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 cannot be a more dangerous thing to rely on, than the opinion of others, nor more likely to mislead one; since there is much more falsehood and error among men than truth and knowledge: 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, mahometans in Turkey, papists in Spain, protestants in England, and lutherans in Sweden.

Was 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 concerned them) whether any set of priests are in the right; and if men cannot believe, when they see no reason for believing, 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 authority, are believed to belong to every one of them; such as visions, dreams, trances, extacies, inspirations, conferences with spirits, traditionary report about miracles, &c.? And should the chance of education throw men into the true traditionary religion, yet considering its style is not very exact, there being generally more expressed than is meant; and things of the greatest consequence are often so treated, as that men cannot from thence perceive the nature and extent of their duty; and even precepts of the greatest moment are sometimes so far from being delivered plainly and simply, that they are expressed after a general, undetermined, nay, hyperbolical manner; so that even in this case, there is 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 called) 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 prevailed 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 heretics, 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 used in other tongues; the sublime and metaphorical expressions most frequent to 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 these 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 would 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 esteemed 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 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 improprieties of language, whose understanding depends upon such circumstances, that it is almost impossible to know the proper interpretation; now that the knowledge of such circumstances, and particular stories, is irrecoverably lost: since there are some mysteries, which at the best advantage of expression, are not easy to be apprehended; and whose explication, by reason of our imperfections, must needs be dark, sometimes unintelligible: and lastly, since those ordinary means of expounding scripture, as searching the originals, conference of places, parity of reason, analogy of faith, are all dubious, uncertain and very fallible; he that is wisest, and by consequence, the best

liest 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 improbability and uncertainty, all depressing our certainty of finding out truth in such mysteries, and amidst so many difficulties.

And in another place, "The obscurity of some questions, the niceties of some articles, the intricacy of some revelations, the variety of human understandings, the winding of logic, the tricks of adversaries, the subtilty of sophisters, 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 uncertainty of others, the several degrees of probability, the difficulties of scripture, the invalidity of probation, of tradition, the opposition of all exterior arguments to one another, and their open contestation, the public violence done to authors and records, the private 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 deceived." And I might add in confirmation of the bishop's sentiments, and demonstrate too, were it not endless to go through particulars, that there is scarce a text, 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 labor to be competently skilled; And tell us, that they, who have spent their time in studying it, cannot have too much honor 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 pronounced in synods and councils, against those who refuse to submit to their decisions; and that it is 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 a duty in them so to believe, and so to profess; and consequently, that the religion of the laity consists in believing the priests; and what ever 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 is only a verbal difference between a law-maker and a sovereign interpreter of laws, to whose interpretations all are obliged to submit; so that ever since the council of——people have been taught to renounce both natural and revealed religion: and become priest 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 of their sentences, by which they bind, or loose mens sins to eternity.

And this notion carries with it the highest blasphemy and idolatry, so I think it is treated too gently by Mr. Chillingworth, in saying, “This 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 enforcing them upon others; this restraining of the word of God from that latitude and generality; and the understanding of men from that liberty, which christ and his apostles left them; is and

hath been the only fountain of all the schisms of the church; and that which makes the 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 cannot but be plain, simple, and natural, as designed for all mankind, adapted to every capacity, and suited to every condition and circumstance of life; and if it be rendered 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 adored notwithstanding the grossest immoralities, as the sole dispensers of such things, as no way 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,

Though the clergy have taken all possible methods for a blind submission, and a forced uniformity, yet they have not been able to hinder christians from being endlessly divided, even in what they call fundamentals. And though no one sect, as far as I can find, have ventured to give us a complete 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 reflection 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? Though 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 would make christians unhappy? or, what prejudice it will be to them, to suppose God is no respecter 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 the 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 could not be imposed on themselves, or would not impose on others? or in other words, were infallible, and impeccable? But since numbers have taken reveries for divine inspirations, 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 impressed are owing, but from their natural tendency; or those internal marks of wisdom and goodness, by which they plainly shew themselves to be a part of natural religion? If so, can external proofs carry us farther than the internal proofs do? But,

It is not enough to be certain, these men were not imposed on; we must be certain, they would 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 inspired persons as much governed by their passions as uninspired? Was not Abraham, though a prophet, and so dear to God, that he would not destroy a neighbouring town without acquainting him with it, guilty of an incestuous marriage, his wife being his sister by the fathers 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, though a prophet, and a man after God's own heart, guilty of many enormous crimes, from the time he designed to have murdered all the males in Nabal's family, because he would not pay contributions to him, and those men, who out of debt, discontent and distress joined him? though Nabal, by so doing, might have incurred the fate of those priests, from whom David by several falsehoods got both shew-bread and Goliath's sword.† What could be more treacherous, than his invading people, that were at least in peace, if not allies of the king of Gath, to whom he fled for safety; and having neither saved man or woman alive to bring tidings, told his generous protector, he had been making an inroad in Judaea. ‡

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 Shemei to death, § though he had sworn before the lord, that he would not put him to death, and that he should not die? ||

Solomon, though inspired 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, it is

* Gen. xviii. 15. xx. 12. xii. 19. xx. 2. xii. 26. xx. 16.
 xv. 6, 6. xii. 13. † 1 Sam. xcv. 22. xxii. 2. xxi 6, 9.
 xxvii. 8, 12. ‡ 1 Kings ii. 8, 9. § 1 Sam. xix. 23.
 † 1 Kings xiii. 19.

plain, by what our saviour says to those, who had prophesied, 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, though he, with the rest, had the power of doing miracles, even to the raising of the dead, betraying his master for the paltry sum of thirty pieces of silver? and the other apostles not only fled, and deserted him; but the chief of them foreswore him, as oft as he was asked 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, though 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 the evil which I would not do, that I do.—but I see another law in my members, warring against the 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, though many more might be added, plainly shew, that inspired 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 delivered? 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 conveyed 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 conveyed. Admitting tradition had been a

* Mat. vii. 22, 23. x. 8. xxvi. 72. † Gal. ii. 13. ‡ Acts xiii. 59. § Rom. vii. 19, 20.

faithful conveyancer, yet how can the common people be certain the scripture has been truly translated? But granting even that; yet since most texts are 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 would eternally oblige, whether delivered in scripture or not? And,

Let me further add, that to make external revelation of any use, must we not, as I have already observed, be able to determine, whether God is obliged 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 could command at one time for commanding's 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 cannot 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 revealed by himself or any messenger, not to be unchangeably the same, destroy all possible proof, that any external revelation could 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 reckoned to stand in the foremost rank ; and this judicious divine says, that “ natural religion is the only foundation, upon which revelation can be supported : and which must be understood, before any man is capable of judging either of the nature and evidence of christianity : and I am persuaded,” says he, “ that it is to the want of a due knowledge of the first principles of all religion, those mistakes about the christian are owing, that have obscured the simplicity of it, and prejudiced many against entertaining, and believing it.—If natural religion is not part of the religion of Christ. it is scarce worth while to enquire at all what his religion is. If it be, then the preaching natural religion is preaching Christ.—The religion of Christ must be understood before it can or ought to be believed ; and that it must be proved 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 enquiry ; but that the rigid directors of the faith and consciences of men will lose their authority, and human schemes and creeds, that have been set up in the room of Christianity, will fall into the contempt they so justly deserve.

“ It is 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 eternal 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 summing up what I have been endeavouring to prove at large; says, "a revelation coming from God, unless it 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 offers 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, confined 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."

In answer to these, and such like objections, he says, "We are well assured, 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 reason, how can I be assured that any doctrine 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 trial and conviction of my reason, then it is 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 frequently 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 and sufficient reason to see they were obliged 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, whether this is consistent with the character we have from the light of nature, of the impartial and universal goodness of God, to damn men for impossibilities? Or, whether one can be said to be sent as a favour of mankind, if he comes to shut the gates of Heaven against those, to whom before they were open; provided they followed 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

* Deut. 1. 34. † Psalms 95. 11. Heb. 3. 11.

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 cannot 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 favorite people statutes, which were not good; and judgments, by which they could not live?‡ And does not St. Peter (to mention no other apostle) though 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 grieved 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, could not their reason direct them right, have of the supreme being, when he is said to have rested, and to be refreshed;*** 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 hissing;‡‡ God being in three places of the prophets said to hiss; and in one place to hiss 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

* Nah. 1. 2. † Ezek. 38. 18. 19. ‡ Ezek. 20. 21. 25. § Act. 15. 10. || Gen. 6. 6. ¶ Jer. 15. 6. *** Exod. 31. 17. †† Judges. 9. 13. ‡‡ Isa. 5. 26. §§ Zach. 10. 8. ||| Isa. 7. 18.

is unworthy of God; as being inconsistent with his wisdom, goodness, justice, 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 required 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 delivered 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 mentioned; and that the nobles, on whom God laid not his hand, saw God, and did eat, and drink.* And bishop Patrick says, “that after they saw God, they were so far from receiving any harm, that they feasted with him upon the relics of the peace-offerings, with great joy and gladness.” And though it is 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 is certain, since God, in the same chapter, says to Moses, Thou canst not see my face; for there shall no man see me, and live.

A. Does not God immediately add, Behold there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock. And 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 shalt not be seen.‡ And since reason tells us, God has neither fore-parts, or back-parts, must not the

* Exod. 24. 10. 11. † Exod. 33. 11. ‡ Ver. 21, 22, 23.

rock, the cleft of the rock, and the hand that covered 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 acknowledged maxims, you have laid down from divines, we must not take literally the two conferences mentioned 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 would not otherwise be satisfied of Job's integrity, permitted him to slay Job's children and servants, and reduce him to the extremity to make the experiment. The same may be said of the Lord's saying 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 could talk to Eve, and delude the mother of mankind, though in the high state of perfection; even though the apostle says, The serpent deceived Eve by his subtilty.†

Some would be almost apt to imagine, that the author of the book of Genesis thought, that words had ideas naturally fixed 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 called every living creature, that was the name thereof;‡ and that the serpent and Eve, almost as soon as created, entertained 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 to the city and tower, whose top was designed to reach to Heaven; and then saying, this they begin to do; and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they

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* Job. i. 6. † 2 Cor. xi. 3. ‡ Gen. ii. 19

have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound the language.* And, perhaps, the not knowing the natural cause of the rain-bow, occasioned 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 him, and changing his name; "Interpreters of note, whether Jews or Christians" (as Mr. Nye observes) "understood it done, not in fact, but in vision only:" Though one would imagine the Jews thought it literally true, because the text says, they eat not of the finew; that finew, which shrank, unto this very day.†

What a number of ideas must Balaam's asfs have to be able to reason with his master; when he saw, and knew an angel: And though it is said by Peter, that the dumb asfs speaking with man's voice, 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 enjoined him; and declares though Balak would give him 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 then follows the dialogue between the asfs 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 Isaiah walked for three years together naked for a sign.|| Jeremiah is commanded to carry his girdle as far as Euphrates, 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 his neck, and to send them to several kings. Ezekiel is commanded by

* Gen. xi. 4, 6, 7. xxxii. 24, 25, 28, 29. † Ver. 30.
 ‡ 2 Pet. ii. 16. § Num. xxii. 28. || Isa. xx. 3. ¶ Jer.
 xiii. 4, 6. xxvii. 2, 3.

the Lord to draw Jerusalem on a tile, and lay siege to it, build a fort against it, set a camp 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. And afterwards the Lord said, I have given thee cow's dung for man's dung. Another time he is 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. John was commanded to eat a book;† so the prophet was commanded to eat a roll; and likewise to clip his hair,‡ and to dispose of the clippings§ after a very odd manner; and several other things as strange, too many here to mention. And the prophet Hosea, who was like a priest, was bid to take a wife of whoredoms;|| (though that by Moses law was forbid a priest,) and children of whoredoms; and had three children by his wife, to whom the Lord himself gave names.

No mathematician could 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 height with a reed.¶ And Tertullian assures us, “that in his time there was seen for forty days together, a city hanging in the air over Judea.” And yet interpreters have since allegorised this great city into a mere 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 could not be deceived himself, or deceive us; the prophet Jeremiah would not

* Ezek. iv. 1, 2, 3, 4. iv. 12, 15. xii. 5, 6. † Rev. x. 9. Ezek. iii. 1, 3. v. 1, 2. § Hof. i. 1, &c. || Lev. xxi. 14. Rev. xxi. 10, &c.

have said, O Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived; thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed. —Wilt thou be altogether unto me as a liar, and as waters that fail? * And in another prophet the Lord says, The days are prolonged, and every vision fails. And though the Lord adds, Thus shall none of my words be prolonged any more, but the word which I have spoken shall be done; yet he afterwards says, If the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I, the Lord have deceived that prophet. † And if the prophet is deceived, must not the people, who rely on that prophet, be deceived? And does not the prophet Jeremiah say, Ah! Lord God, surely thou hast greatly deceived this people? ‡ And to the same purpose the prophet Isaiah, O Lord thou hast made us to err. §

There are other texts which go farther, and, if taken literally, represent God not only as 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 Psalm 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 kindneses which thou swearest to David in thy truth? ¶ And there are several facts mentioned in scripture, which, if taken literally, look as though the prophets were either deceived 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

* Jer. xx. 7. xv. 18. † Ezek. xii. 22, 28. xiv. 9.
 ‡ Jer. iv. 10. § Isa. lxiii. 17. || Num. xiv. 30, 34.
 ¶ Psalm lxxxix. 39. 49.

though 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 should be gathered to his grave in peace; and yet soon after he received a mortal wound.† of which he died. The prophet Elisha 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 rendered) 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 looked the more ungrateful in the prophet, because he had received 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 deceived, when the scripture tells us of four hundred being deceived 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.||

As to the new testament, I shall now only observe that though St. Jude, 9. 12. quotes (besides the assump-

* Jer. xxxv. 5. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60. 61. 62. 63. 64. 65. 66. 67. 68. 69. 70. 71. 72. 73. 74. 75. 76. 77. 78. 79. 80. 81. 82. 83. 84. 85. 86. 87. 88. 89. 90. 91. 92. 93. 94. 95. 96. 97. 98. 99. 100.

tion 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 seemed unworthy of God, and could not be well allegorized; the authority of an inspired person quoting it as an inspired book, could not support its credit, but it fell into contempt, and was lost.

B. Though you allow reason to be the proper judge in things of mortality, 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 these prophecies, if they may be so called, 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 foretell 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 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 practise 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 though they do not pretend to tell the very day and hour, when these things must happen; yet they thought it would be during their time, and continually expected it. Timothy is charged to keep this commandment—till the

coming of the lord.* So Paul says, to the corinthians, as oft as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the lords death till he comes.† And I think, it is plain, Paul himself expected to be alive at the coming of the lord, and that he had the word of God for it. For this we say unto you by the word of the lord, that we which are alive, and remain unto the coming of the lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep.—The dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive, and 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.

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 would happen in his time; 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 that Antichrist shall come, even now there are many Antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.||

B. Does not St. Peter say, there shall come in the last day, 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 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 all on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent

* 1 Tim. vi. 13, 14. † 1 Cor. xi. 26. ‡ 1 Thes. iv. 15, 16, 17, 18.
 § 2 Thes. ii. 3, 7. ¶ 2 Pet. iii. 3, 4.

heat : nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens, and a new earth. *

B. Does not St. Peter say, behold 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 psalm xc. 4. where it is said, a thousand years in thy sight, are but as yesterday when it is past. And surely St. Peter could not imagine, that God effected to speak unintelligibly ; and by one day meant a thousand years ; and by a thousand years one day ; and refer to this place for proof.

B. Divines are at a loss how to account for the apostles so frequently declaring, the end of all things are at hand, and Christ to be then coming ; when our saviour says, of that day and hour knoweth no man ; no, not the angels in heaven, but my father only. ‡

A. Those divines would 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 ; 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 those 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 he, shall pass away ; but my words shall not pass away. And his adding, but of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels in heaven, but my father only ; was not meant to contradict what he just before declared, that this generation shall not pass till these things be fulfilled ; § 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

* 2 Pet. iii. 9,—13. † Ver. 8. ‡ Mat. xxiv. 36.
§ Ver. 3. 33. 34. 35. 36.

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 would have watched.*—And the apostles, agreeable to this admonition of the Lord, say, yourselves now perfectly, that the day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the 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 that to thee ?‡ and the last thing his disciples asked him on his ascension is, wilt thou at this time restore 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 restored again during their lives. And by our saviour's saying when the last supper was ended, I will not 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, believed this happy time was not far off. But,

If most of the apostles, from 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 inspired in what they said in their writings concerning the then coming of Christ ; how could they be inspired 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, could 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 mentioind in the revelation, would have happened 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 instan-

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* Mat. xxiv. 42. † 2 Pet. iii. 10 ‡ John xxi. 22

§ Act. i. 6. ¶ Mat. xxvi. 29.

ces where divines themselves own, that though 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 approved of in 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 lie obtain his blessing ; nay hope that God would confirm it, when he sees how Jacob obtained the greatest blessing from God.

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 spoiled 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 for nothing again ; and a command to borrow, without returning any thing again, seem to be very different commands.*

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 saved 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. ‡] are they not in danger, if they find their advantage in it, and it is for the service of those they judge to be true Israelites, to do the same ? it is not pretended the harlot had more special command for so doing, than Jael had for an act of the highest treachery ; for which, because it served the interest of Israel, she is declared by the prophetess Deborah to be blessed above all other women. §

What prince can ever want a pretence of going to war ;

* Exod. iii. 21, 22, † Heb. xi. 31. ‡ Josh. ii. 15. § Judg. vi. 24

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 hewed in pieces before the Lord;) and preserving some of the cattle for sacrifice, the Lord rejected him from being king; nay, ordered Samuel, lest Saul should suspect the design, to pretend a sacrifice, when he sent him to anoint David?*

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 neighboring, 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 murdered so many millions in the Indies, had they not thought they might have used them like Canaanites.

How many precedents, besides that of Ehud, (who, on a message from the Lord, stabbed the king to whom his people sent him with a present) did the Popish 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.†

Though the Lord bids the Jews to pray for the peace of Babylon, whither he had caused them to be carried 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 desired of her captives one of the songs of Zion.§

The holier men in the Old Testament are represented,

* 1 Sam. xv. 8, 9, &c. xvi. 2, &c. † Jud. iii. 15, 20, 21. ‡ Jer. xlix. 7. § Ps. cxxxvii. 8, 9. 1.

the more cruel they seem to be, as well as more addicted to cursing: How plentifully does David in the 109th Psalm 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?*

Who is not surpris'd to find the holy prophet Elifha cursing in the name of the Lord, little children; for calling him bald pate? And what is still more surpris'ing, Two she-bears, upon his cursing, strait devoured forty-two little children.

And he likewise entailed the curse of leprosy on his man Gehazi, and his seed for ever; for accepting, without his master's knowledge, a small present from Naaman, the Assyrian; though 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 deceived 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 hindering 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, destroyed 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

* 1 Chron. xx. 3. † 2 Kings ii. 23, 24. v. 27. viii. 9, &c. ‡ Jam. v. 17.

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 God smote Israel and destroyed seventy thousand of them for David's fault : in causing the innocent sheep, as he justly calls them, to be numbered.

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 numbered, 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 it is said God moved David to number Israel : † in another Satan provoked 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 of Saul's reign, § the numbers were rightly calculated ; it is 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 suddenly too ? Yet it is said, God sent an angel to destroy Jerusalem, while the Lord beheld, and repented him of the evil.

* 1 Sam. xxi. 1. † 2 Sam. vi. 1. ‡ 1 Chron. xxi. 1. § 1 Sam. vi. 8.

And can any one think this to be a mere Pestilence, when a real angel is said to be miraculously sent to execute 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; where there is scarce a chapter, which gives any historical account of matters; but there are some things in it, which could not be there originally; and even in this book of Chronicles, there are things mentioned, 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, it is no wonder its abstracts are not always very exact.

I could give you many more instances of this nature, but I am afraid some will think these too many, though I have said nothing, but what Archbishop Tillotson does in effect, in affirming, "The difference between the style of the old and 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 called the God of the old testament; the other good, kind, and merciful, whom they called 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 owned, 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 appeared: for

* 1 Chron. xxi. 15, 16, 18.

though God declares in the decalogue, that he is a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the parents upon their children, to the third and fourth generation;* and accordingly Achan, with all his family, was destroyed for his single crime; yet the Lord afterwards says, The soul that sinneth, it shall die; the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, &c.† * [Though before it was plain the son did, by God's declaring to Abraham, that the uncircumcised man-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 the lives of men, but to save them; condemns their taking 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 received into a Samaritan village, because his face was towards Jerusalem, strait cried, Wilt thou we command fire from Heaven, and consume them, as Elias did? He rebuked them, and said, ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of; for the son of man is not come to destroy the lives of men, but to save them.‡ If any precedent might have been pleaded from the Old Testament, it would, 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 charriot of fire, with horses of fire)|| to meet our saviour on a high mountain.

And if it be contrary to the spirit of the gospel, even to wish to imitate that great prophet so favored of God, the same will hold as strongly, in relation to all the actions that are of a like nature of other holy men, though 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 is

* John. vii. 24. † Ezek. xviii. 20. ‡ Luke. ix. 54. 55. 56. || Luke. xiv. 28.

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 governed by precedents from the Old Testament?

B. Are there any so absurd, as to endeavor thus to reconcile the Old and New Testament?

A. We find the Orthodox, as soon as they had a prince, who refused submission to their decisions in the council of Nice, in express terms owned as much.

Lucifer Claritanus, then a most orthodox bishop, in several discourses addressed 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, an account of his arianism, which he calls idolatry: and for this he quotes Deut. xiii. 6. and 1 Maccab. i 43. to verse 29th of chap. ii. and then insultingly says, “if you had been in the hands of Matthias or Phineas, they would have killed you. You say you suffer despiteful usage from us, contrary to admonitions of holy scripture.—If ever any one of the worshippers of God spared apostates, let what you say of us be true.—Pray shew me but one of them, that ever spared the adversaries of his religion.” And the texts for obedience to magistrates from Titus iii. 1. he evades, by saying, “That the apostles spoke of those princes and magistrates, who as yet had not believed in the holy 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 applaud Lucifer's discourses, and says, “We plainly see the picture of an apostle, the boldness of a prophet, the magistrery 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 established ones, would, no doubt, as these fathers suppose, begin with precepts of the greatest humanity and tenderness, and doing the utmost good to mankind, though of ever so different persuasions: 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 was designed only to draw Jews and gentiles into the church, as gallants gain their mistresses by obsequiousness; 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.

It is, 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 confessors, upon the first occasion, to renounce their former principles; and in defiance of their oaths of allegiance, represent a man inspired 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, though 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 experiment was the only way to support both.

A. By reasoning thus, instead of reconciling both,
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they destroyed 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 is a law of nature, with the observing of which God cannot 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 confirmed 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 unparalleled 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 it is not contrary to the law of nature, and those precepts of the gospel which are founded on it.

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 supposed 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 would 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 neighbors, whom they judge to be idolaters, man, woman and child, in order to possess their country; would not our divines say, no man could 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 could 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 stamped 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 designed what he did to be a terror to others, would he not act after such a signal, and supernatural manner, as all should see it was his own doing; and the reason of his so doing: And in order to shew it, distinguish between the guilty, and the innocent?

If God would punish the Canaanites, for acting con-

trary to the law of nature; would he, in order 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 the vengeance of God on an idolatrous nation? Would God, in such a case, choose people as prone to idolatry as the Canaanites themselves? Some question, when in this case, the plea of a divine command, if taken literally, will not destroy all the internal proofs of the falsehood 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 falsehood? 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, though ever so repugnant to the light of nature.

B. These men carry their reasonings 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 cannot but happen, that some ill men may be a scourge to others; yet that cannot excuse them, if in so doing they act against the eternal rules of justice and equity. Though 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 Israel were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand, and thy counsel determined before to be done:*

* Acts iv. 27. 28.

And yet were not they, and their posterity punished for that fact, which God's hand and counsel had determined 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 their 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?

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 offered up their throats?

A. That did not happen till they were defeated before Gibcon; and consequently till then, it could be no direction to them; and even after that, the lord hardened their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle; and though it is said, that the living God is among you, and that he will not fail to drive out before you the Canaanites, &c. yet Israel could not drive them out of several places: and in one instance, it is 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.†

A reverend author, to solve the difficulties attending this matter, says, “the critics 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 Amorites, introduces Joshua, as requiring the sun and moon to stand still while he and his army destroyed the enemies of the lord. Which indeed, was an opinion common, and very proper in a poem that was written on such an occasion.

* JOSHUA IX, 3.

† JOSHUA X, 11.

And now let me ask you, whether the very endeavoring to reconcile this, or any other fact mentioned 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 reconciled, 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 of Judah and Tamar, we might approve the stratagem, in getting to lie with her father-in-law : for though before he knew himself to be a man, he was resolv'd to burn her ; yet after he cried, She has been more righteous than I :* And for this righteousness she was blessed with twins, from whom the noble house of Judah, with all its kings, and the Messiah himself was descended.

I think, I could not say less than I have, in vindication of the precepts of the gospel ; by shewing that they were not designed merely to draw people into the profession of the Christian religion, and then to be laid aside ; except where they served 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 cannot 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 of God, are mixed with it ; let me ask you, whether God has a greater kindness for the brute, than the rational creation ?

* Gen. xxxviii. 27.

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 for his creatures endowed 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 webbs; the bees their little cells; and the beasts avoid all noxious herbs; and not to multiply instances, how all animals are endowed 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 got from his superior reason, sufficient notices of whatever makes for his greatest, his eternal happiness?

If we cannot charge God with acting thus partially, must we not be obliged 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 governed by reason? And,

Though 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,

Though divines in all ages have, for the most part, shewn themselves mortal enemies to the true exercise of reason; yet now, God be thanked, there are those among them, who dare do it justice.

That eminent divine, Mr. S. Nye, though writing in defence of revelation. says, "It is 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 declared 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." Add,

The judicious Mr. Butler says, That nothing can be more evident, than that exclusive of revelation, mankind cannot be considered 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 is 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 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 approved 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 approved, 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 from doing it.

B. Though 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 it is 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 governed 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, cannot they tell what sentiments inspire them with love and reverence for their 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 honor 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 endeavor 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, cannot they perceive, that it is fit in the nature of things, and agreeable to the mind of their creator, (who has endowed them with reason for this end) to introduce into this 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 the 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 imposed on by artful men; who, in all ages and places, have mixed with pure religion, things tending, indeed, to their own honor, and their own good; but far from being consistent with the honor of God, and the good of man; and then pretended they were necessary to influence the common people, who would not be satisfied with plain, simple truths: And from this score have issued 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, even to have thought of; much less to have raised commotions about them: They, it must be owned, peace and quiet being their interest, are naturally good subjects and good neighbors; 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 designed the interest of pure religion, free from priestcraft and superstition. And the laity, certainly, cannot be too much upon their guard, when they find extraordinary favors, (such as those in a former reign,) are designed 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 Curtius observed of old, the multitude, ensnared by superstition, are more apt to be governed 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, would in a manner be transcribing the history of all nations."

They, I think, would do no small service to mankind, who would improve this hint of Grotius, and shew how the priests in all religions, and in all times, have imposed on the credulity of the people; nor could 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 are so sensi-

ble, 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 commenced, any religion, or not?

B. It must be owned, 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 could 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 cannot be denied, 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, being equivalent terms) and therefore, he could 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 reason for a new religion, we might expect new religions daily: "But," as bishop Sherlock of Bangor observes, "though the world was the worse for abusing the religion of nature, and might want to be reformed by a divine instructor; yet the religion of nature was not the worse for being abused, but still retained its first purity and simplicity;" and consequently, its native efficacy to make us happy. But men not pay-

ing a due regard to this most perfect religion, but mixing with it human inventions, it might, then, be agreeable to the divine goodness, to send persons to recal them to a strict observation of it; which, had it been observed, must have destroyed all contentions, but of outvying one another in all good offices; as the corrupting it has done the contrary.

Which Hypothesis, think you, is most for the honor 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 the laws of God should carry with them such evident marks of goodness and kindness for the whole race of mankind, as that men of the meanest capacities, even though they cannot 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 faith on men, who are but too apt to abuse the credulity of the people to their own profit?

B. There can be no doubt, but it is for the honor of God, and the good of man, that all his laws should have such a signature impressed 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 them 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 favor both of God and man.

Without the common people are governed by those plain, obvious principles I contend for, they would always be in a state of uncertainty; since, as bishop Tay-

lor justly observes, and all history confirms, "There is 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 satisfied with themselves, nor with their own confessions." "Let none on 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."

B. Is there nothing in theology, but what divines have altered?

A. Mr. Le Clerc observes, that "theology is subject to revolutions as well as empires; but though it has undergone considerable changes, yet the humor of divines is much the same."

Whatever noise ecclesiastics make about creeds, or other fundamentals, there is very often something else at the bottom; as whoever is conversant in church history must know: However to give one instance, "When the Eastern and Western churches in the ninth century, fell into an humor of quarrelling upon the account of jurisdiction, after sometime of anger, in which they seemed to be searching for matter to reproach one another with; they found out this difference. The Greeks reproached the Latins, for adding to the faith about the procession 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 charged them for detracting from the dignity of the son. And this became the chief point in controversy between them." I cannot but mention bishop Burnet's remark, on this dispute. "We of this church," says he, "tho' we abhor the cruelty of condemning the Eastern churches for such a difference, yet do receive the creed according to the usage of the Western churches." Which is in effect, damning that creed which damns the Eastern churches.

And it is plain from church-history, that creeds were the spiritual arms, with which contending parties com-

bated each other; and that those who were the majority invented such unscriptural terms, as they thought their adversaries would most scruple, in order to the stripping them of their preferments; and it would have been well if they had stuck there, and not made use of more cruel methods.

None, who consider how differently the circumstances of human affairs, which are continually changing, affect men; but must see it is scarce possible, that the doctrines which were originally taught, or the practice originally used in any institution, should long continue the same; nothing being more easy than to vary the signification of words: The infinite divisions which prevailed, even in the primitive and apostolical times, sufficiently prove this 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 would make no small book, to shew how since that time, our clergy, though their calvinistical articles continue the same, have varied, both as to doctrines and discipline. What a quick change have we seen of those passive principles, once the characteristic of the church? And if we judge by the present disputes now on foot, the clergy are not like to be more fixed for the future. But of all clergy men, they, certainly, are not upon any account to be relied on; who, though by their whole conduct they shew their great zeal for persecution, yet talk against an implicit faith, and recommend Christianity as requiring no further favor, 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 no

more. And herein they act the part of satan, first tempt people, and then punish them for being tempted; so that, strictly speaking, it is 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 consciousness of his religion's being a cheat, because he will not permit it to be examined; not only practice the same themselves, but contend it is 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, it is impossible that after three years converse they should be ignorant of the end of his mission: And if his familiar friends, who daily conversed with him in the same language, and had every minute an opportunity of being satisfied of their doubts, could yet so grossly mistake; well may we at this distance of time, if we are to be governed 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. Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, of a truth, I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.* Till this happened, he, though filled with the holy ghost, confined 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.†

Had there been but one language, and a book writ in that language, in indelible characters, (so that there could be none of these thirty thousand various readings, which are owned to be crept into the New Testament)

* Acts x. 34, 35.

† ch. iv. 12.

and all could have access to it; yet even then, considering how uncertain the meaning of words are, 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,

“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 other persecuting priests, have propagated such destructive notions, that if the devil himself had been to contrive a religion, he could not have invented more pernicious?

Words are the arbitrary marks of the ideas of men, and the meaning of words, as well as the words themselves, are perpetually changing; and it is 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, though 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 Oslander for saying, “There are twenty several opinions concerning 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 critic Daille says, “We have, indeed,

these words Pope, patriarch, mass, oblation, station, procession, moral 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 removed 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 supposed, lay with women, and got children in abundance;) but they thought that God himself was corporeal. Melito, who was believed to be a prophet, and flourished about 170. wrote a book about the embodied God. And Tertullian 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 is nothing but what is corporeal. And it is 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 Godhead bodily; * and talking in several other places of a spiritual body, they concluded that that was the same with a bodily spirit; though our divines 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 answered 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 how frequent must the mistakes then be, in translating the antiquated languages of people, who lived at a vast distance of time, as well as in countries far remote; and affected hyperbolic, parabolical, mystical, allegorical, and typical ways of ex-

* Colos. ii. 9

pressing 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 principle words, and phrases used in the versions, their religion must needs be a very odd jumble of confused 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 would be in a manner intirely governed by sounds; some of which, such, as they used to hear spoken of with respect, they would highly reverence; while others, though of the same signification, they would as much abhor, till custom had made them familiar.

*[“ Sure I am,” says Mr. Locke, “ that the signification 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, though 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 notions, tempers, customs, ornaments and figures of speech, &c. every one of which influenced the signification of their words then, though to us now, they are lost and unknown; it would become us to be charitable one to another in our interpretations or misunderstandings of those ancient writings.—We ought to magnify the goodness of God, that he has spared before all the world, such legible characters of his works and providence; and given all mankind so sufficient a light of reason, that they to whom this written

word never came, could 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 governed by things, but words, the consequence now would be much worse than what happened 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 obliged to take their religion on trust, from men too, as subject to be deceived, as they are often ready to deceive: Nay, the universality of language, could it have preserved religion uncorrupt, would have done so in the antediluvian world, and before the confusion of language, which happened at Babel.

If skill in languages could 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 versed 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 the 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 is 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 cannot even here agree among themselves, there needs no better proof than the disputes of our divines about fundamentals; though they are, to prevent all controversies of this nature, enacted and guarded with penal laws; and all the clergy, at every turn, obliged to subscribe them in the same words. And,

I could name two eminent bishops, who, if they were to give a true account of their religious tenets, it is thought; would 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 cannot 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 derived?

Is not that an admirable hypothesis, which, though it supposes God has endowed 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, hired to maintain the traditional religion of the places where they live; who, perhaps, will tell them, that there was a time (happy those who lived in it) when religion was suited to the capacities of the vulgar; being preached by inspired men in the languages they understood, and miracles for the conviction wrought in their sight; but that now the scene was entirely changed, 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 the 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 distance of place, and change of customs.

become obscure and difficult to the generality of people, and cannot be thoroughly discussed without a great variety of knowledge concerning the ancient 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 them, is having a divine faith: Though one would think, whatever depended on human traditions and translations, could be but a human faith.

B. Though something of this nature is unavoidable, where religion is writ in antiquated languages; yet in the main, are we not now more certain of the truth of our traditional religion, than those who lived 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 observed in the law of England; which is, that though 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 approved as reasonable, and suited to the wisdom and caution to be used 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 further 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 knowledge of it, is a good proof: But if another, equally credible, do witness it from his report, the testimony is weaker; and a third that attests a hear-say of an hear-

say, is yet less considerable. So that in traditional truths, each remove 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, says he, that "what in one age was affirmed upon slight grounds, can never after come to be more valid 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 discernable; the nature and reason of things. Can a religion, designed 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*

Æque pauperibus prodest, locupletibus æque;

Æque neglectum pueris senibusque nocebit.

Hoc opus, hoc studium parvi properemus & ampli,

Si patrae 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, though unable to read in his mother-tongue, may, without pinning his faith on any set 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 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 neighbor, 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 endeavored to free the scripture from that obscurity, in which artful men have involved 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, 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 exception, 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 discovered; and such too, as are proportionate to the capacities of all sorts of persons: 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 revelation for that purpose.—It must be owned, to the eternal glory of the supreme legislator of mankind, as well as to the utter confusion of themselves; that none can complain without injustice, that God has given laws, either impracticable, or invironed with such obscurity, as cannot be penetrated by one who has really his duty at heart, notwithstanding all his pains and application. This the wisest heathens have acknowledged;—(and) the stoics, who make morality their principle study, maintained, that their philology was not above the reach of women and slaves: and that as the way to virtue lies open to all men without distinction; so there is no estate, or condition, with peculiar privileges 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

* Heb. viii. 10, 11. Jer. xxxi. 33, 34.

power, wisdom and goodness; and the idea of ourselves, as intelligent, reasonable, and sociable creatures: These two ideas, I say, if well looked into, and compared together in their whole extent, will always furnish us with steady grounds of duty, and sure rules of conduct; notwithstanding it may so fall out, that, for want of care and attention, we may in some common cases, not know how to apply them; or cannot methodically demonstrate the necessary connexion of some remote consequences, with the first principles of morality.——It is certain, that the entire conformity of the christian 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 acknowledged by all, who have wrote with any solidity on the 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 proportioned to the common capacities of the bulk of mankind.——[Who] When they come at length to consider the evangelical morality, and find it intirely comfortable both to their true interests, and to all those principles, of which every man has by nature the seeds in his own heart; they cannot then help concluding, that the author of it must necessarily be that very being, who has given life, and brought them into this world only to make them happy; provided they will not be wanting to themselves, but contribute on 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 public ministers of religion, in cultivating the science of morality; which,” as he says, “being by them almost banished out of the world, took sanctuary among the laicks, or undignified 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 ecclesiastics, instead of returning thanks to the author for it, every where declar-

ed against him; and his book was not only put into the expurgatory index of the Roman catholic inquisitors, but many, even protestant divines, labored to cry it down. And thus it fared too with Mr. Puffendorff's book of the law of nature and nations; the jesuits of Vienna caused 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 practise 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 considered 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, would 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 to use their reason; must provoke all ecclesiastics of what denomination soever, who expect a blind submission from the laity: though was it not for the authority, that the high church clergy among the reformed lay claim to, when from protestant principles they draw popish conclusions; the pretences of the popish priests for the necessity of an infalible guide, would appear ridiculous.

The substance of what the papists say, is, in short, "that if the principles of the protestants, relating to private judgment, are true, the bulk of mankind cannot go beyond such plain rules of religion, as carry their own evidence with them; since otherwise they would be obliged to admit things, about which they are incapable of judging? If the religion of peasants and mechanics, 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 conveyed 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 catholics and protestants, about the number of canonical books, oral 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 competent judges, that they are not capable of understanding even the terms, in which the learned choose to express themselves, when they endeavour 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 owned to be a true church, and derived their authority from her ;) upon the account of opinions, they were no more capable of judging ; than they were capable of judging, after they had left the church, to which of the numerous sects they should join themselves.

“ All protestant churches have taken the same methods to make people pay an absolute submission to their decision ; as the church of Rome, by excommunicating

and condemning, when they had power, to perpetual imprisonment ; or otherwise punishing those who would not renounce 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 people is, as the protestant clergy pretend, so necessary to preserve unity, that it must belong to every particular, and protestant church, though founded on the breach of catholic unity ; how came the church itself, before the pretended reformation, to want this power so necessary to preserve itself."

B. Protestant divines, when pressed 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* excommunicated, who shall affirm she is not an orthodox and apostolical church ; not to be absolved, but by the archbishop, after having publicly renounced this their impious error." And after the same manner excommunicates " all, who affirm the articles of 1562, made to avoid diversity of opinions, *ulla ex parte superstiosos aut erroneos existere* ; all that speak against her rights 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 established by law, if they assume to themselves the name of a true, and lawful church." Does not this, say the papists, shew, that though the principles of the church of England were anti-papish ; yet that her practices, her laws civil as well as ecclesiastical, before the revolution, were papish ; since the laws against separatists then extended to the loss, not only, of estate and liberty ; but even of life itself.

From these, and such like reasons, the papists concluded, that if the people are obliged to go a step be-

yond 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 concerned for the authority of the scripture, and withal willing in their disputes with the papists to support private Judgement, said, “that the scriptures themselves, from their innate evidence, and by the illumination of the same holy spirit which indited them, sufficiently shewed themselves to be the will of God.”

The Dutch confession published in 1566, in the name of the Belgian churches, after having recited a catalogue of the books of scripture, say; “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 proceeded 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.* Apochryphal books.” And,

The assembly of divines at Westminster maintained, 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.”

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 begot a solid credit to

the scriptures.—The word will never meet with credit in men's minds, 'till it be seal'd by the internal testimony of the spirit who wrote it."

Our learned Whitaker, in his controversey about the scripture against Bellarmine, gives this account of the doctrines of the church: "The sum, says he, of our opinion is, that the scriptures have all their authority and credit from themselves; that they are to be acknowledged and received not because the church has appointed or commanded so, but because they came from God; but that they came from God, cannot be certainly known by the church, but from the Holy Ghost?" And,

Indeed, our church supposes no man can be a good christian, without being inspired; 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 his 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 proposal to us, in the name and majesty of God as such, without the contribution of help, or assistance from tradition, church, or any thing else without themselves, we are obliged 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 evidence of themselves, which God is willing to grant us, or are any way needful for us." And lest the Quakers should take it amiss, if while I quote other Sects, I should overlook them; R. Barclay says, "how necessary it is to seek the certainty of the scripture from the spirit, 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.

The reformed would have argued unanswerably, had they contented themselves with saying, that there are no doctrines of a divine original contained 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,

Our divines, it seems, at last found out, that the reformers, and their successors, had embraced christianity on such grounds, as they believed would 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 espoused by some, who would be thought the only true church-men, is, what the late learned Dr. Rogers maintains; who, though 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 falsehoods, yet in questions, where he must in the event be determined by some au-

* Jer. xxxi. 33. Heb. x. 16. John vi. 45.

thority or other, he may reasonably prefer the authority appointed by public wisdom, and justly be required so to do.

“ The bulk of mankind are manifestly unable to form a judgment, either of the arguments by which he (his antagonist) endeavors to subvert our religion, or 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 conclusions depend ; and we presume our word will go as far as his.” This is asserting, that people are obliged to take their religion on trust, and then to change it as often as there is any change in the state-religion ; or as often as they change their residence ; and in all these changes to be governed by men, who are hired not to find out truth but to make that religion, to which their preferments are annexed, to pass for true. And if people will not be governed, the legislature, or in the Doctor’s phrase, public wisdom may justly require them so to do. Nor is the matter mended, by excepting contradictions and evident falsehoods ; since here too, if private persons and authority differ, public wisdom will certainly be on the side of the authority it sets up ; and it is in such things that the public 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 cannot believe contradictions and evident falsehoods ; and that there are things, which the people are incapable of knowing ; or if known, cannot 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, public wisdom has authorized. Here it must be confessed, the Doctor is against the pope of Rome, but 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 cannot judge, to follow his judgment; and says, "though he may mistake, and in consequence of it mislead them, yet they will have this defence before Christ, that they have sought his will in the methods which he has directed; and where they wanted a guide, preferred one appointed to that office according to his institution." But why may not a parish priest appointed by public 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 framed, 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 popery, 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?

I cannot but remark, how good wits, though they lived 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 could have had any thing innovated in the faith, in which you were bred up for thirty-five 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 it is plain, the apostle was persecuted by the Rogerians of those days, for not keeping his faith to himself.

B. Whatever Vergerius might deserve from popish public wisdom, for misapplying this text, to put a stop to the reformation; a protestant divine could deserve nothing but contempt from protestant public 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, but asserting, that all, who (without a special commission) from the beginning of the world to this day, have “labored by public preaching, or writing, to withdraw the submission of men to the established 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 established by law in king James’s reign, all protestants must have kept their religion in their own breasts; since publicly professing a religion cannot but be unlawful, where there is no coming at it, but by unlawful means. The papists, sure, need no other arguments, to shew the unlawfulness of the reformation in most places, than what this reverend divine has furnished them with. And though he declares himself an enemy to all persecution, and owns, “that if there be no public 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 it is their duty publicly to worship God, though contrary to all human commands; and he himself dares not say he would obey such commands.

A. And his distinction between men’s 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 public profession of all religions but one; why not that one? since I believe, there is scarce any in-

France where the profession of but one has been permitted; but that religion soon degenerated into priestcraft, to the entire destruction of the civil liberties of men; and the magistrate, as well as his subjects, has been forced to submit to the arbitrary, and vile impositions of his own priests.

In short, this noble scheme, if there is 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 governed by their respective parish-popes. And if such a scheme as this, could recommend the person that published it, to a much larger parish popedom than he had before; it is 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 though men could not well be lower in point of understanding, than those to whom the gospel was first preached; 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 apostolic times, it was, certainly, so in all after-ages; and if there are now any such things, by what authority soever introduced, 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 those who teach them are false prophets, seducers and deceivers; and as such, are to be shunned by all christians.

St. Chryostom 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 them

selves, were to believe in their parish-priests. Lactantius, 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 seduced into the errors of other men." 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 would bring them thither; and that the luckiness of the accident, should they stumble on truth, would not atone for the neglect of this grand duty.

A judicious divine of our church, Clagget, 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 falsehood, between reason and sophistry, with their own eye — And whensoever Guides of a party do otherwise, they 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 examined. It is a bad sign, when men are loth to have their opinions seen in the day, but love darkness rather than light.

The fault of the people, even from the beginning, has been, as the memorable Mr. Hales observes, that "They, through sloth and blind obedience, examined not the things they were taught; but like beasts of burden, patiently couched 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; though 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 preserved religion in its native simplicity, as being a thing wholly designed for their general good; and then 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 prevailed 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 Christendom; and see whether all those gross deprivations, and perversions of religion, which have prevailed in most places, were not contrived to advance the separate interests of the ecclesiastics; 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 may add, that in all countries, where people have not had the liberty to judge for themselves in religious matters, no other liberty has been preserved; but men have been slaves both in body and mind: Such power has the united force of ecclesiastics!

A judicious author says, "it was not unreasonable in the beginning of the reign of Edward VI. and queen Elizabeth to think the lords and commons better judges of religion than the bishops and convocation. The whole body can have no 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 concerned in the truth of religion, as the greatest priest; for though his knowledge thereof be not in all respects equally easy, yet in some respects 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 oftener begun amongst 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 verified in all ages: ye suffer fools gladly, seeing yourselves are wise.—Ye taffer if a man bring you into bondage; if a man d your you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man finite you on the face.* And, indeed, the laicks have so seldom thought of asserting their natural rights in religious matters, that they have generally sacrificed to the malice of the priests, all, who have endeavoured to maintain those rights; and if the people throw off one set of ecclesiastical tyrants, it was only to be slaves to another; and were ever ready to join any one, that endeavoured to set them free from ecclesiastical tyranny; under which the whole christian world would have groaned, had not so many accidents concurred at the reformation.

We pray against being led into temptation; but do we not lead the clergy into the almost irresistible temptation, to impose what they please on the people? What may not men, who in a manner, ingross the teaching of the young, and instructing of 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 modelled, may not effect; especially where they are carested by all pratics? nay, even by that, which is by too many of them despised 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

* 2 Cor. xi. 19, 22.

wiser, and by the experience of so many ages, more upon their guard ?

People abroad were surpris'd to find a nation, in former times so miserably oppress'd by the ecclesiastics, capable, even under a whig 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 surpris'ing 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, though of the meanest capacity, have to depend upon the authority of church-men : his words are, " there is 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 people be in, if they are to depend on this gravity, authority and importunity of their respective priests, who, it is 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 concerned ; 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 authorised to offer them, for making alterations in the liturgy; particularly in leaving the clergy at liberty with relation to the Athenasian creed.

In short, whoever in the least reflects, must needs see; that in most churches many of their fundamental articles are defined to impose on the credulous laity; and that the priests themselves cannot believe them. Can the pope of Rome any more believe himself infalible, 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 Bonzes believe the money they borrow in this world, shall be repaid to their creditors in the next? Or can the popish priests, though they made the laity for many ages renounce their senses, have different ideas of the bread and wine, after they have mumbled 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 idelible character? or that there can be *imperium in imperio*? or can the popish 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 ayes on the one hand, and bribes on the other, is the way to promote the protestant principle, of every man's being obliged to judge for himself in all religious matters, without prejudice and partiality? or an hundred other things, which, with the same gravity, authority, and importunity, they impose on the people?

If men, notwithstanding they pretend to be inwardly moved by the holy-ghost, go into orders as they take to a trade, to make the best of its mysteries (and all trades

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 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 favor more of art and learning, than to belong to simple men; especially in those times they were introduced. 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, deceived us, and we have been deceived."

B. This is too severe.

A. You know, that those few good men among the ecclesiastics, 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 complained, that all orders of men were debauched by the clergy, says, *Nec sane mirum, quando malum omne prodire de templo Johannes Chrysoſtomus cenſet; & hieronomus ſcribit. ſe inveniffe neminem qui ſeduxerit populos, præterquam ſacerdotes.* Though it was not always they could corrupt them; for the celebrated St. Ambroſe ſays, *Plerumq; clerus erravit, ſacerdotis nutavit ſententia, a vices cum ſeculi iſti- us terreni rege ſenſerunt, populus fidem propriam reſervavit.*

This can be no reflections on the ecclesiastics among us, who abhor all these principles, by which their predecessors enslaved men both body and soul; and who maintain no opinions, however advantageous to the order, that are against the public good; and are so far from promoting perfection, 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;) cannot be too much esteemed, for conquering the strong prejudice of education, and the stronger of interest. And they, certainly, ought to be as much valued 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 purses, 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; whether they should be permitted to exert themselves.

And here I cannot omit saying, that, if he, who best defends the church, best deserves to rule it; justice has eminently appeared 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 domestic 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 though he has with equal prudence exposed 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 bi-

bishops, as to the honor of the revolution, have, since that blessed time, succeeded one another at Lambeth.

I must beg your patience for adding, on this inexhaustible subject, one reason more, for mens being governed by things rather than words: It has been a general practice with the introducers of civil tyranny, though they changed 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 happened 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, 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 defined to be a congregation of the faithful, &c. yet is it not every where else taken for the clergy? When it is 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 not a constant practice among 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 obliged to reside, and to officiate in the parish-church: And as among the Jews, the ruler of one synnagogue 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 in-

vading the rights of his brethren, for one bishop to have more than one altar, or communion-table. But things continually changing, a parish bishop, maintained by the alms of his congregation, commenced 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 established: 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 critic, 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 assigned, why *DIACONOS*, Rom. xvi. 2. is not rendered *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 reckoned among the clergy? Did heresy, or schism. (those religious scare-crows, 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, belonged to the former? And as in the New Testament the preachers of the gospel are never termed *IEREIS*, or priests; so Scaliger remarks that the word so applied, 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 it is 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 BAPTIZO was not translated but naturalized; since the people would then have perceived, that, not sprinkling, but dipping, or immersing, was meant by it; but should any now (so much custom has prevailed) say John the dipper, instead of John the baptist, people would think it profane.

If words have been thus artfully managed 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 occasioned so much mischief. And what mischief have not those two misinterpreted words, zeal and church, by the artful management of designing men, occasioned? 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 undefiled 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, advanced false, impious, and heretical doctrines concerning the Godhead, in declaring the three persons are three distinct, infinite minds, or spirits; tho' now revived by Dr. W——d, with the applause of those who before condemned it? And did not they, who espoused those doctrines, represent their adversaries as absurd Sabellians; in either making the three persons in the divine being, to be analagous to three persons in a human being, (for this was the utmost Dr. South's divinity could reach to); or with Dr. Wallis,

* Jam. i. 27.

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 mentioned 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, 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 favorable additions, subtractions, or alterations that might have been made in the scriptures or other ancient writings? especially if it be true what Mr. Wiston complains of, that "It is frequently in the mouths of the writers for the church, that some things are to be concealed 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 managed with cunning, and worldly prudence, for fear of being disgusted at Christianity."

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 reckoned up more than 1250 texts relating to the doctrine of the trinity; and how few of them are interpreted alike by the contending parties? It is chiefly owing to these different interpretations, that, where force has not interposed, 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 allowed 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 forged. When so judicious a divine and critic as the now bishop of A—— says, “We should have more of the true text by being less tenacious of the printed one;” must not that give great uneasiness to those who 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 Chillingworth (the greatest champion the protestant cause ever had) that he was abler at pulling down than building up; towards which little can be expected from one, who is by his own arguments pushed so hard in the defence he would make of protestanism, that he has nothing left but to cry out, the bible, I say, the bible is the religion of protestants.” Nay, must not that uneasiness be very much increas’d by divines, perpetually endeavoring 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 edified, when they tell them it is thus or thus, in such an ancient manuscript, father, or assembly of fathers; or cry, it is rendered more agreeable to the mind of the holy ghost in the septuagint, vulgar Latin, Syriack, Chaldaick, Ethiopic, Coptic, Gothick, or some other version?

If no court of judicature, though in a thing of small moment, will admit of a copy, though taken from the original, without oath made by a disinterested person of his having compared it; because the least mistake, a various pointing, a parenthesis, a letter misplaced, may alter the sense; how can we absolutely depend in things of the greatest moment on voluminous writings, which have been so often transcribed 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 forged

passages, and even forged books, would scruple no pious frauds. And though 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 thirty thousand various readings.

B. Though there are so many various readings, yet does not that great critic, 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 thirty thousand 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 two hundred out of so many thousands, that can deserve the least consideration.

A. Has this critic lost his clue, and is forced to drop the noble design of ascertaining the text of the New Testament, and let the thirty thousand 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. Whitton'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 owned to be of the greatest moment, there should be so many various readings of no moment; though 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, if a poisonous one happens to be mixed, it may turn the whole into rank poison. If the doctrine of the trinity is of the greatest moment, was not the church highly concerned to prevent various readings in that important point, as well as some forged texts?

Had the scripture been better guarded in many other matters of consequence, there could not have been so many texts seemingly clashing with one another; that there are such, is denied by none: Dr. Scott lays it down as certain, that "that opinion is false, or of little moment, that has but one, or two texts to countenance it; and 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, Burnet, says that "our faith is not to be built on single texts, because they may have been corrupted; though we have no manuscript to point out to us, that the other manuscripts have been so corrupted in these passages." But,

If we cannot 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 wondered how their adversaries could 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 is true in Queen Elizabeth's reign, there were some few among the inferior clergy for free-will; but then those incorrigible free-will men, as they were called, were by the 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, helped 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 mustered up on both sides) are all for free-will; against which, now, there are none but are looked on as incorrigible.

B. Though those books, which contain the traditional religions of other nations, have, notwithstanding all the care taken to prevent it, been mixed with fables and monstrous tales; yet we say that the scripture, especial-

the new testament, though there are ever so many various readings must needs be free from all errors of consequence ; because that being designed 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.

“ The transcribers of books (as that learned and judicious critick Daillé observes) “ have been guilty of innumerable mistakes ;” and that St. Jerom (the most learned of the fathers) complains, “ 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. “ that in the true, and most correct copies of St. Luke, it was writ. that Jesus Christ wept ;” and that this passage had been alledged by St. Irenæus, but as 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 Grævicæ 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 more with Mathew than Mark does. *Major enim inter illos & Matthæum, quam inter Matthæum & Marcum apparet repugnantia.*

Hilary, speaking of Christ’s bloody sweat, and the angel sent to comfort him says, *Nec sane ignorandum nobis est, in Græcis & Latinis codicibus compluribus, de adveniente Angelo, vel de sudore sanguineo nihil scriptum reperiri.* This St. Jerom seems to confirm.

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 honor of God, and the good of man; and nothing which does not. This clue, I think, will extricate the learned as well as unlearned out of many otherwise insuperable difficulties; and make the laws of God, which way soever revealed, 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 inspired, but what is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*? and if this be the test ought we to admit any thing to be writ by inspiration, though it occurs ever so often in scripture, till we are certain it will bear the test; and, indeed, was it otherwise, we should be in a sad condition, since there is scarce any opinion, though ever so absurd, or ridiculous, but has its vouchers, who quote texts on texts, for its support. Good Lord! what a load have the different parties laid on it, by their not observing this Rule? But,

Could we suppose any difference between natural and traditional Religion; to prefer the latter, would be acting irrationally; as that prophet did, who went contrary to what God had commanded him by an immediate revelation: because a known prophet assured him, he had a different revelation for him. A crime so heinous in the eyes of the Lord that he destroyed this prophet after a most signal manner; though he had to plead for himself, that the prophet, who spoke to him in the name of the Lord, could have no interest in deceiving him; and that their was nothing in the command, but might as well come from the Lord, as what himself had received. And it is worth observing, that the lying prophet was so far from being punished, that the Lord continued to him the gift of prophecy;

* 2 Tim. iii. 16.

nay, pronounced by his mouth the doom of the prophet, he so fatally deceived.

B. why is this more worth observing than the case of Abimelech, who, upon both Abraham's and Sarah's lying to him, took Sarah as the Lord himself owns, in the integrity of his heart; and though he sent her back untouched, and gave considerable presents to both wife and husband; yet neither he, nor his, were to be pardoned, till Abraham (the offending person) being a prophet, was to pray for him: so Abraham prayed unto God, and God healed 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 Sarah had seen the son of Hagar mocking; and it is likely they had both perished, 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 Sarah, who had dealt hardly with her; bid her return, and submit: But in this last domestic quarrel, God himself miraculously interposes, and says, in all that Sarah has 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 critic, Nye, observes) "It must be allowed by the judicious and impartial, that many corruptions are found in our present copies of the holy bible; and that we have not now this blessed book in that perfection and integrity, that it was first written. It is altered in many places, and in some of the greatest moment.—I could 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 published. There is no Author whatsoever, says this learned critic, that

* Gen. xx. 6. 17. xvi. 3. xxi. 9. 19. xvi. 6. 9. xvi. 12.

has suffered so much by the hand of time as the bible has." If this, I say, must be allowed, 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 discovered his character, 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 stamped 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 observe 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 arguments they meet with ; but for the sake of words and phrases, without considering the nature, reason and tendency of things ; understanding very little of things. Have not great numbers from age to age, though men of good natural parts, had their understandings confounded by thus injudiciously employing them ; and instead of clearing doubts increased them ; and filled the world with useless criticisms, and trifling disputes ? While they, who made words give place to things, and argued from the relation things bear to each other, have shewn themselves able casuists ; and enriched the world with most useful discourses, for promoting the honor of God, and the good of man. And therefore, we are often cautioned 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 produced to prove Moses to be a God: "For he is called God and Lord *; and prayed to, under that appellation, to forgive sin †; has attributed to the same miraculous work of bringing the children of Israel out of Egypt, as is ascribed to God; that the Israelites did believe in him, as well as in the Lord ‡, and were required so to do; that he promised rain in due season to such as keep his commandments; and to Joshua, that he would be with him in carrying the people into Canaan; although as a man, he was to die before: That he did great works; yea, miracles in the sight of the Israelites, on purpose that they might know that he was the Lord their God §; that Aaron is said to be his prophet ¶, which is proper to the true God only; and in fine, that the Israelites were baptized unto, or into Moses ¶.

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 dependence 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, delivered in such a general, undermined, 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 cannot believe things of any moment are thus re-

* Exod. vii. 1, 4, 6. † Num. xii. 11 ‡ Exod. x. 19, 17. xxxii. 7. xxxiii. 1. xix. 9. § Deut. xi. 13, 14, 15, &c. ¶ Exod. vii. ¶ 1 Cor. x. 1, 2.

presented; 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 answered, except it was delivered 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 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 labor under much the same difficulties in interpreting St. Paul? The honorable Mr. Boyle says, "that sometimes in St. Paul's writings many passages are so penned as to contain a tacit kind of a dialogue; and that unskilfully by readers, and even interpreters, taken for an argument, which, indeed is an objection. It is said it was the way of the east, to make use of dark and involved sentences, figurative and parabolical discourses, abrupt and maimed 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 could most excel in this elevated, romantic way; and both the old and new testament abound with expressions of this nature. Isaiah, in prophecying the destruction of Babylon, says—the stars of heaven shall not give

* Mat. xiii. 34.

† Mark iv. 12.

their light, the sun shall be darkened.—I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the Lord of host, and in the day of his fierce anger.* And the destruction of the city of Jerusalem in the New Testament is described after such a manner, as if nature was unhinged, and the universe dissolving.

Bishop Fleetwood, on psalm xviii says, that “without remembering David’s history, one would imagine heaven and earth were moved in his behalf; and that the course of nature had been overthrown, and his life covered by continual miracles:” And he there observes, that “the Jewish expressions, and the expressions of all people that dwelt eastward are full of pomp, and amplification of fancy and hyperbole.” And I think under this head we may reckon these texts, that all the kings of the earth sought the presence of Solomon.† That if the things which Jesus did were 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 other texts? Whatever you shall ask in my name, 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 faith as a grain of mustard seed, you shall remove mountains, and nothing shall impossible to you.¶ And you may say to this sycamine tree, be thou plucked up by the roots, and be thou planted in the sea, and it shall obey you.** Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven.†† He that is spiritual, judgeth all things; (which

* Isa. xiii. 10. 13. † 2 Chron. ix. 23. ‡ John xvi. 25.
 § John xiv. 13. || Mat. xviii. 19. ¶ Mat. xvii. 20.
 ** Luke xvii. 6. †† Mat. xvi. 19.

the papists say is the pope) yet he himself is judged of no man. Things present, and things to come; all are yours.* St. John's little children are said to have an unction, and to know all things.† And what more could be said of the anointed, or Christ himself? Men are bid to be partakers of the divine nature; ‡ and to be as perfect as their heavenly father is perfect.§ What blessings are not christians promised, even in this life? Is it not said, Christ has made us kings and priests unto God;—and we shall reign on the earth?|| And are not the meek to inherit the earth? And, is not every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, to receive an hundred fold, and to inherit everlasting life?¶ What one is sent to declare is to be done, that he is said to do: So Jeremiah is said to be set over the nations, and over the kingdoms, to root out, pull down, and destroy.**a* What is designed to be done, shall be said to be actually done: As the lamb slain from the foundation of the world.†*b* Before Abraham was, I was; ‡*c* or as we (to make it more mysterious) render it, I am: Nay, a creature not born long before, is said to be the first born of every creature.§*d* Advice is called submission, subjection, and obedience; Ye younger submit yourselves to the elder; yea, be subject to one another.||*e* Obey them that have the rule over you; and submit yourselves.¶*f* Persuasion is called compulsion, as compel them to walk in.**aa* And what rooting work have not the papists made from this text: Every plant my heavenly father hath not planted shall be rooted up; †*bb* and such other misapplied places; Is not God's permitting evil, called doing it? Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord has not done it? ‡*cc*

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* 1 Cor. ii. 15. iii. 22. † 1 John i. 20. ‡ 2 Pet. i. 4.
 § Mat. v. 48. || Rev. i. 6. v. 10. ¶ Mat. v. 5. xix. 29.
 **a* Jer. i. 10. †*b* Rev. viii. 13. ‡*c* John viii. 58. §*d* Col.
 i. 15. ||*e* 1 Pet. v. 5. ¶*f* Heb. xiii. 17. **aa* Luke xiv. 23.
 †*bb* Mat. xv. 13. ‡*cc* Amos iii. 6.

Nay, is not the Lord said to have created evil? * And to have hardened men's hearts; and then to punish them for their being hardened? 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? †——

Are not things in scripture absolutely condemned, 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 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 cannot be a disciple? § Things spoken in an unlimited, are to be taken in a restrained sense: 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. *a Whatsoever the pharisees bid you do, that do, and observe. †b Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. Prove all things. ‡c And sometimes a short duration is expressed 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; §d and an hundred other such texts. So that, whether any

* Isa. xiv. 7. † Rom. ix. 11. 13. 18. 21. ‡ Jer. vii. 22.
 § Luke xiv. 26. || Mat. v. 34. ¶ Eph. vi. 1, 5. *a 1 Tim. vi. 10. †b Mat. xxiii. 3. ‡c 1 Thess. v. 16, 17, 21.
 §d Jonah ii. 6.

duration is to be everlasting, (in the sense we take that word) cannot be known from the words in scripture; but it must be judged of from the nature of the things which are said thus to endure. But,

What can be more surprising, 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.† And has not that fire burnt outrageously ever since, being blown up by those, whose business it was to have extinguished it? And have they not so acted as if this was a prophetic saying, they were at all times bound to see fulfilled; though to the destruction of all moral duties whatever?

Another difficulty in understanding both the old and new testament, is, that most things, though owing to second causes, are referred 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 ordained 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.¶ Or, if a man talked in an unknown tongue, and could not interpret what he said; or any of the congregation understood him; yet it was prophesying, and the gift of the spirit. And St. Paul calls a heathen poet prophet. And is not spirit, nay, the spirit of God, taken, at least, in twenty different senses in the scripture?

* Mat. x. 24. † Luke xii. 51. 49. ‡ John xix 11.
 § Rom. xiii 1. ¶ Acts xx. 28. ¶ 1 Cor. xiv. 15.

In short, the words of scripture, on which things of the greatest consequence depend, are as is shewn by a learned author, some times taken, not only in a different, but contrary sense, however, to give one instance, nature in Rom. ii. 14, and nature in Eph. ii. 3. if rightly translated, are taken in opposite senses; and that word in 1 Cor. xi. 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 was thought to be good, not only the powers and faculties of the minds of men, but voluntary actions themselves, are immediately ascribed to God. For instance, Bezaleel is said to be filled with the spirit of God in wisdom, and understanding; because he could devise cunning works of gold and silver, &c.* And the prophet Isaiah, after he had described the whole art of plowing and sowing, says 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 host, 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 host, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working?

As some things are immediately referred to God, so are others immediately referred 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 delivered by ouraviour, are not expressed thus obscurely.

* Exod. xxxi. 3, 4. † Isaiah xxviii. 26, 29.

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 thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.† Of him, who takes away thy goods, ask them not again.‡ And should we not, without having recourse to the reason of things, be apt to think, that the poor, as such, were the only favorites of heaven: Blessed are ye poor; for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed 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 your consolation. It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter 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 observed all the precepts from his youth, one thing thou lackest, sell whatever 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, though in use among the Essenes, and the christians at first.

It is certain, that such passages, as, blessed are they that mourn; blessed are they that weep; woe unto you that laugh now, ye shall mourn and weep:¶ and 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.**a*---

* Luke vi. 35. † Mat. v. 40. ‡ Luke vi. 30, 31, 34, xi. 25, xii. 33. § Mark xii. 41, x. 14. || Mat. v. 40. ¶ Luke vi. 21, 25. **a* Mat. vi. 27, 28.

Consider the lilies, how they grow, they toil not, they spin not ; and yet, I say, Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.* It is certain, I say, that such like texts have, by being interpreted literally, run men into monstrous absurdities ?

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.

From these sayings of our saviour, there are some eunuchs, which were born so 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 ; believed it a piece of heroic virtue for men to castrate themselves ; and though by the Roman law, no one could be castrated without leave of the president, as Justin observes ; yet he commends a youth, who performed this operation on himself without it, and you know that the bishop of Alexandria highly approved this action in Origen, as an instance of heroic virtue ; though afterwards, when he became his capital enemy, he as much condemned 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

* Luke xi. 24, 27. Mat. v. 39. xix. 12. xviii. 22

such circumstances as human discretion is to judge of.

As I am a member of the commonwealth, I cannot be a judge in my own cause : and though I may legally prosecute a man who has injured 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 injured them by robbing, stealing, or any other way of cheating or defrauding them. So it is 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, though they taught it after a grocer manner.” And Confucius thus expresses this doctrine, “ acknowledge thy benefits by the return of benefits ; but never revenge injuries.”

B. Confucius, though 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 it is the good man only, who can love, and hate with reason.”

A. Are not the passions of love and hatred given us by God, to be exercised on proper objects ? Actions, abstractedly considered, 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 them to condign punishment? Nay, must not we learn to hate ourselves, before we can learn to love those that hate us.

If we ought not, nay, cannot love the devil, because our enemy; how can we love those devils incarnate, those enemies of God and man, who hate, and persecute men for shewing their love to God, in following the dictates of conscience? If love carries with it complaisance, esteem, and friendship, and these are due to all men; what distinction can we then make between the best, and worst of men? Though God, it is true, makes the sun to shine, and the rain to fall on the evil and the good; and, indeed, how could it be otherwise in the present state of things; Yet certainly, he does not love evil men, though he bears with them for a time.

I am so far from thinking the maxims of Confucius, and Jesus Christ to differ; that I think the plain and simple maxims of the former, will help to illustrate the more obscure ones of the latter, accommodated to the then way of speaking. Our saviour saying, Ye have heard that it hath been said, thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy;* divines have, in vain, puzzled themselves to find out the text in the old law; for could they find it as they do other texts, that our saviour in the same chapter, by this way of speaking, refers to; it would only shew, that the divine precepts were not consistent with one another. Indeed, St. Paul says, If thy enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head:† But treating him thus, cannot sure be an argument of love; since it is in order to have divine vengeance fall on his head.

B. Commentators agree, that these precepts of our saviour are not to be taken in the plain, obvious, and grammatical meaning of the words; but are to be so explained, limited, and restrained, as best serve to promote human happiness.

A. Suppose those precepts are capable of being thus

* Mat. v. 43. † Rom. xii. 20.

paraphrased, yet how do we know this was the design of the preacher? The Effenes (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 required they should be thus interpreted; especially such as are designed 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 could never know it, was our duty to put such a sense upon words, as they otherwise seem not to bear. Besides

Should not rules concerning morality, be suited to men's particular circumstances, plainly describing that conduct which they require? Is not this the design of the municipal laws in every country? What benefit could subjects have, from laws written in such a loose, general, and undetermined manner; as lend hoping for nothing again: if any man will sue thee at law, & 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; 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 undetermined rules in the new testament, though more plainly deliver-

ed : as for instance, though it is 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 ? It is 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 should act like those wicked priests, who, not long since, from general words of obedience, would have destroyed 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, it is 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 it is the circumstances men are under, by which we are to judge of the tendency of actions. As for instance, the killing a man, considered without its circumstances, is an action neither good or bad ; but by the magistrate, when the public good requires ; or by a private man, when necessary for self defence, is an action always good ; but done when the public good does not require it, when there is no such danger, and with malice prepense ; it is always evil. Taking up arms against a Person entrusted with the protection of the common wealth, cannot be determined to be good, or bad, without considering circumstances : if he has not abused his trust, it will be rebellion, the highest of crimes ; but if he has betrayed that trust, and oppressed the community, then a just and necessary defence. Enjoying a woman, or lusting after her, cannot be said, without considering the circumstances, to be either good or evil ; that warm desire, which is implanted in human nature, cannot be criminal when pursued 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 ma-

any 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.

Though there were ever so many texts in the New as well as the old testament against usury, and those too backed by the unanimous authority of all the fathers ; yet the forbidding it, especially in trading nations, would now be immoral ; since without it industry would in a great measure be discouraged, arts unimproved and trade and commerce consisting chiefly in credit, destroyed. Besides, what reason can be assigned, why a man should 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 the same precepts enjoined 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 his duty to wash his neighbour's feet ? though 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 enforced, and inculcated by his own example. 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 introduced by our saviour, it seems chiefly to relate to oaths taken on solemn occasions : it is said of old, thou shalt not forswear thy self, but shall perform unto the lord thine oaths ; but I say

* Mat. v. 34.

† James, v. 12.

unto you, swear not at all.*——And yet, who now, besides Quakers, refuse to swear at all? by these, you see, though several other instances might be produced, 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?

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 though speech was given to men to communicate their thoughts and it is generally for their common good that men should 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, though sworn to, which they have been forced to make to robbers and thieves. And some go so far as to think, that those who would 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 public enemies.

Friendship will sometimes oblige men to deceive people, when it manifestly tends to their good, and none are prejudiced by it; and all practice 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 pursuer a falsehood? This is a duty he owes to both, pursuer and pursued. 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 into prejudice, deceive impertinent people, in such matters where they have

* Mathew, v. 33, 34.

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 any of their daughters to wife to Benjamin; and, in pursuance of this quarrel, destroyed them with their wives and children, except 600, who escaped 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, accompanied with a curse, violated, if they did; found out these two expedients: the men of Jabesh Gilead, not concerning themselves in the quarrel, nor coming to the general assembly, they destroyed with their wives and children, except 400 virgins; whom they gave for wives to these Benjamites: but these not being a sufficient number, they advised, nay, commanded them to seize on some of their daughters as they were dancing, and to carry them off. Thus these merciful and religious people preserved their oaths, and their brother Benjamin.*

B. The Hebrew midwives, no doubt, acted according to your rule in deceiving Pharaoh, 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 is another precedent in the same history, which seems very surprising: the Lord though 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:

* Judges, xi. 1. 8. 19. 20. 31.

we cannot 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 Pharaoh, whose heart God had frequently hardened, complied with their request, he bids them go serve the lord as ye have said ; and upon this occasion, they borrowed of the Egyptians, as the lord ordered them, jewels of gold and silver, and raiment, even to the spoiling of them ; and when Pharaoh (who all along seemed jealous of their design, and bids them not go far away ;*) found that this solemn sacrifice was a mere pretence ; and that they really fled with all they had borrowed of his people, he pursued the fugitives ; the consequence was, that the Egyptians, instead of obtaining restitution, were miraculously destroyed, and Pharaoh lost his life as well as his subjects ; and those who had dealt thus treacherously with them, were as miraculously preserved.

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 hindered justice to be done upon the two sons of Jacob,† for the vilest piece of cruelty and treachery they committed on the Shechemites. 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 applied 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,

* Exod. i. 17, 20, 21. iii. 8. 18. v. 3. viii. 26. xix. 26. xii. 31. xii. 35, 36. viii. 28. † Gen. xxxv. 5.

The ecclesiastics, though they cry up the precepts of men's loving their own enemies; yet they effectually evade this, and all other moral precepts, by telling them it is their duty to hate the enemies of God; and those to be sure are the enemies of God, 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 useless; more particularly by telling men, that it is for the correction of manners, for the good of their own, as well as their neighbor's souls, that the spiritual courts are erected; where people, for such hasty and angry words, as no action (there being no real damage) will lie for a common law, are to be censured. 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 neighbors, 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 prophetic 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) could 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 observed.

And from thence you conclude, the happiness of men, at one time as well as another, consisting in the same things; that the gospel (which can make no alter-

ation in the relations men stand in to God, and one another, or the duties that flow from thence,) could 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 governed by; since we are obliged to recede from the letter, though 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 would be criminal in us to observe, because we cannot reconcile our doing them with the reason of things; so in the new testament, its precepts are for the most part delivered either so hyperbolically, that they would lead men astray, when they were governed by the usual meaning of words, or else expressed in so loose, general, and undetermined a manner, that men are as much left to be governed 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 delivered in scripture or not.

These sentiments you so strongly enforce, 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 though this good, as well as great man is dead, whereby the church has sustained an irreparable loss, yet he will for ever live in this immortal work.

CHAP. XIV.

Dr. Clark's discourse of the unchangeable obligation of Natural Religion, and the truth and certainty of the Christian Revelation, considered ; and from thence it is 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.

I OWN, the Doctor got immortal honour by that discourse ; how much it is admired, 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 it is your pleasure, I will fully consider this discourse, and begin with the character he gives of 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 of revelation, in contradiction to the religion of nature.

The Doctor not only maintains, that “ the law of nature is universal, and absolutely unchangeable ; ” but has two sections to prove, -- that the will of God determines itself to act according to the eternal reason of things : and that all rational creatures are obliged to govern themselves in all their actions by the same eternal rule of reason :” which supposes, that all rational creatures are not only capable of knowing this eternal rule of reason, but likewise knowing there can be no other rule, for the actions both of God and man. In his previous

discourse of the being of a God, he affirms, that “they, who are not governed by this law, are for setting up their own unreasonable self-will, in opposition to nature, and reason of things—acting contrary to their own reason and knowledge; attempting to destroy that order, by which the universe subsists; and by consequence, offering the highest affront imaginable to the creator of all things, who himself governs all his actions by these rules, and cannot but require the same of all his reasonable creatures.” And in this discourse he says, “the all-powerful creator and governor of the universe, who has the absolute, and uncontrollable 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 government of the world, and does nothing by mere will and arbitrariness.” And indeed, if God does nothing by mere will and arbitrariness, it is impossible there can be any other rule but the reason of things. And accordingly he says, “the eternal and unchangeable nature and reason of the things themselves are the law of God; not only his creatures, but also himself, as being the rule of his own actions in the government of the world.” And, as a learned prelate 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 directs all his own actions by the eternal rule of justice and goodness; it is evident all intelligent creatures in their several spheres and proportions, ought to obey the same rule according to the law of nature.” Which is supposing it would be tyranny in God to have any arbitrary commands, or give men 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 own happiness, could have no motive to create things at all, but only that he might

communicate to them his goodness and happiness." If so, they, who do all the good they can to themselves, and fellow creatures, answer the end of their creation. "And he says, that in matters 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 commands, if they are holy and good, (between which I think, the distinction is only verbal ;) are founded on the nature, and reason of things. And accordingly he says, "that God has made (his intelligent creatures) so far like himself, as to endue them with those excellent faculties of reason and will, whereby they are enabled to distinguish good from evil, and to choose the one and refuse the other."—Which supposes those are the only things which God commands, or forbids ; otherwise these excellent faculties would only enable them to know but part of the will of God ; though 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 : " and says, that "the law of nature has its full obligatory power, antecedent to all considerations of any particular private, and personal reward or punishment, annexed either by natural consequence, or by positive appointment, to the observance, or neglect of it. This also is very evident : because if good and evil, right or wrong, fitness or unfitness of being practised, be (as has been shewn) originally, eternally, and necessarily, in the nature of the things themselves, it is plain, that the view of particular rewards or punishments, which is only an after consideration, and does not at all alter the nature of things, cannot be the original cause of the obligation of the law, but is only an additional weight to enforce the practice of what men were before obliged to by right

reason." And to prove this he says, that "the judgment and conscience of a man's own mind, concerning the reasonableness, and fitness of the thing, that his actions should be conformed to such, or such a rule or law; is the truest, or formallest obligation, even more properly and strictly so, than any opinion whatever 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 through without condemning himself." And,

He likewise affirms, "these eternal moral obligations, as they are really in perpetual force, merely from their own nature, and the abstract reason of things; so also they are more over the express and unalterable will, and command of God to his creatures, which he cannot but expect should, in obedience to his supreme authority, as well as in compliance with the natural reason of things, be regularly, and constantly observed through the whole creation." Which not only supposes, the reason of things, and the divine commands are inseparable: but that it is the reason, or 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 is fit for them to do, they know all that God will, or can require of them; since his commands are to be measured 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 expects nothing from them, but what the relation they stand in to him, and one another, makes likewise fit for them to do; how can they be ignorant of their duty? especially, if, as the doctor demonstrates, "all the same reasons and arguments, which discover to men the natural fitnesses, or unfitnesses of things, and the necessary

perfections, 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 though " this method of 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 affords ; yet there are other collateral considerations, which prove, and confirm the same." And that,

" The same may be proved from the tendency, and practice of morality, to the good and happiness of the whole world : " which, indeed, would be no proof, were any thing commanded that had no tendency ; for such things, according to the penalties they were to be enforced by, would be more or less to the hurt of mankind.

To shew the natural connexion 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, 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, " it is a proposition in a manner self-evident " And speaking of some argument he had before mentioned, he says, " There are very good, and strong arguments 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 demonstration ; nay, to a complete demonstration."

In short, the Doctor's hypothesis is, that upon God's framing mankind after the manner he had 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, though there were no positive divine commands, were obliged to do; and consequently, that whoever acts for his own good, in subserviency to that of the public, 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 the 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 impressed on human nature. And therefore says, that

“All rational creatures are obliged to govern themselves, in all their actions, by the eternal reason of things, is evident from the sense, all, even wicked men, unavoidably have of their being under such an obligation; and from the judgment of the consciences of men on their own actions.” And that “the most profligate of all mankind, however industriously they endeavor to conceal, and deny their self-condemnation, yet 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 but be compelled to own, and acknowledge, that there is really such an obligation indispensably incumbent upon him,” and “they who do evil, yet see, and approve what is good, and condemn in others what they blindly allow in themselves; nay, very frequently condemn even themselves also, not without great disorder, and uneasiness of mind in those very things wherein they allow themselves,” and he can, give

me leave to say, consists the excellency of the law of nature, that though 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 framed: and if men would make this a test of the will of God, how happy would they be.

The Doctor more fully to prove this 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 universally appear, from the judgment that men pass on each others actions, than what we can discern concerning their consciousness of their own.” And that he shews, that “the unprejudiced mind of man as naturally disapproves injustice in moral matters, as in natural things it cannot but dissent from falsehood, or dislike incongruities.” And again,

“The case is truly thus, that the eternal differences of good and evil, the unalterable rule of right and equity, do necessarily, and unavoidably determine the judgment, and force the assent of all that use any consideration, is undeniably manifest from the universal experience of mankind. For no man willingly, and deliberately transgresses this rule in any great, and considerable instance; but he acts contrary to the judgment, 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 interferes with any present interest, pleasure, or passion; but his own mind commends, and applauds him for his resolution, in executing what his conscience could not forbear giving its assent to, as just and right. And this is what St. Paul means, when he says, (Rom. ii. 14. 15.) that when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law.” And in another place he says, “No man does good, 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, dishonorable, and wicked; but

at the same time he condemns himself." And he says, "that the eternal rule of right ought as indispensably to govern the actions of men, as it cannot but necessarily determine their assent.

One would be apt to think, that the doctor believed that man without reflection, could not but know the law of nature, and be in love with it; since he says, "that in reading histories of far and distant countries, where it is 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 fidelity of some persons; and with the greatest indignation and hatred detest the barbarity and injustice of others? Nay further, when the prejudice of corrupt minds lie all on the side of injustice, as when we have obtained some very great profit or advantage, through 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 person, and the action, how much sooner 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 of 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 consequences of acting against it: and of this the philosophers of old, and I believe all since, who do not adulterate religion with 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 could 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 cannot 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 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 happiness; and the goodness of God requires no more than a right cultivating this principle; in preferring a general, or public; to a particular, or private good? And where there are two evils, and both cannot be avoided, to choose the less *sub ratione boni*.

The latter part of the Doctor's discourse is chiefly levelled 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 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 governor of all things; that this supreme cause is a being of infinite justice, goodness and truth, and all moral as well as natural perfections; that he made the world for the manifestation of his power and wisdom, and to communicate his goodness and happiness to his creatures; that he preserves it by his continual all-wise providence, and governs it according to the eternal rules of infinite justice, equity, goodness, mercy and truth; that all created, rational 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 obliged to promote in their proportion, and according to the extent of their several powers and abilities, the general good and welfare of those parts of the world wherein they are placed: in like manner, as the divine goodness is continually promoting the universal benefit of the whole; that men in particular, are every where obliged 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 toward others, as in reason he would desire they should in like circumstances deal with him: wherefore he is obliged 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 public; 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 maintaining an universal trust and confidence; friendship and affection amongst men; and towards 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 preservation

of universal love and benevolence amongst mankind, and in imitation of the goodness 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 therein; 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 faculties, and disabling him from performing his duty, or hurrying him into the practice of unreasonable and unjust things: lastly, that according as men regard, or neglect these obligations, so they are proportionably acceptable, or displeasing unto God; who being supreme governor of the world, cannot but testify his favour 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 Doctor has done them justice; since all their principles, as he represents them, have a direct tendency to make them good men; and containing 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 occasioned among their fellow creatures; and whom they pity upon the account of that unsupportable bondage, which superstition has, in most places, laid them under: and must not a religion, which the Doctor has proved 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 Doctor describes it, carries in all its parts, such evident 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 inseparable ? If princes required no more of their subjects, and private men of their neighbours, than to be governed by these principles ; how happy would the world be, thus governed ?

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 discoverable by the light of nature, and the reason of 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 actions ;” 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 diminished from it, yet constantly obliges himself to govern the world by : and the more excellent and perfect his creatures are, the more cheefully, and steadily are their wills determined by this supreme obligation, in conformity to the nature and 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 is 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 loose of their perfection, by ceasing to be governed 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 is any other rule, than the nature, or reason of things, when he

makes no medium between men's being governed by it, and by their own unreasonable will?

In short, it is the view with which the 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, cannot be said to act morally: And can he, who does a thing to avoid being punished, or 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 governed, not by servile 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 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 governed 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 governed 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 though the Doctor's discourse is chiefly levelled against them, yet he cannot differ with them, without differing from himself; and condemning in one part of his elaborate treatise, what he has approved in the other. For,

If christianity has not, say they, destroyed the moral agency of men; 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 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 express 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, cannot but be so knowable by them, and having, agreeable to the Doctor's direction, thus chosen their religion, they say, it is impossible for them (since there cannot 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 cannot 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 judged of by the reason, and nature of things; otherwise, say they, we might be obliged 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."

Besides, if these moral obligations, which of themselves are incumbent on 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 the deists, believe on lesser evidence, what they know before to be certain on the

greatest? In this case, must not faith be swallowed up by knowledge; and probability by demonstration?

These deists intirely agree with the Doctor, when he asserts, that “some doctrines are in 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, (though 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 own nature indifferent, or possible, or, perhaps, probable to be true; and those could 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 proved to be impossible, that God acts arbitrarily, and out of mere willfulness. And here they would ask him, since, as he owns, “Evil spirits can do miracles, and the nature of the doctrine to be proved 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 matter of truth, has a natural tendency, and a direct powerful influence to reform the lives of men, and correct their manners.” “This,” adds he, “is the great end and ultimate design of all true religion: And it is a great and fatal mistake to think that any doctrine, or any belief whatever, 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 contained 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 would 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 should seem to question the veracity of the scriptures: Whereas the latter, who believe not the doctrines, because contained in scripture; but the scripture, on account of the doctrines; are under no such apprehension: For having critically examined 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 confessed obscurity of the scriptures, and those many mistakes that have crept into the text, whether by accident, or design.

The doctor says, "The moral part of our saviour's doctrine would have appeared infallibly true, whether he had ever worked miracles, or no. The rest of his doctrines was what evidently tended to promote the honor of God, and the practice of righteousness amongst men. Therefore that part also of his doctrine was possible, and very probable to be true; but yet it could not from thence be known to be certainly true; nor ought to have been received as a revelation from God, unless it had been proved 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 honor of God, and the practice of righteousness; it being manifestly a distinction without any difference: and if the whole of religion consists in the honor 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 could not be certain, that whatever evidently tended to promote the honor of God, and the practice of righteousness, was the will of God, till they were convinced of it by undeniable miracles.

It is possible, say they, a man may doubt, whether there is a God; but none sure, who believe one, can doubt, but that it is demonstrably fit, just, and reasonable for men, to do every thing that evidently tends to promote the honor of God, and the practice of righteousness. And, if the mind of man," as the doctor says, "cannot avoid giving its assent to the eternal law of righteousness;" 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 honor of God, and the practice of righteousness, is from God; it cannot be 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 when they would ask, whether there be any other way to distinguish them, but from their nature and tendency; for they cannot but conclude, that those which evidently tend to promote the honor of God, and the practice of righteousness, are plain and moral duties, and perpetually oblige. And,

"If no miracles," as the doctor owns, "can prove a doctrine that is vicious in its tendency and consequences, to be from God; must not, say they, that doctrine, which has the contrary tendency and consequen-

ces, be from God; though ever so many miracles are done in opposition to it? And,

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 impressed on it; and therefore cannot agree with the doctor, “that neither can any degree 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 honor of God, and the practice of righteousness, are plain, moral duties, as the doctor 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 doctor 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 favor of revelation, upon the obscurity of the law of nature; and would not have declared, that “the reason of all men, every where, as naturally 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 though “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 preserved 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 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 absolute 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 has left all mankind for four thousand 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 power to do this, and it was not their fault, that they at first were in, and after remained in what he calls a state of universal degeneracy and corruption; this must then be the state God designed they should be in: and it would seem not only to be in vain, but a crime in them, to endeavor 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, could 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.

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 though this was not enough, he adds, “that the light of nature no where appeared.” Which sentences seem inconsistent, since the first supposes a light, though insufficient, appearing to the minds of men; 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.”

B. May not the law of nature be very clear, though 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, “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 together 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 men of the philosophers, who did sincerely endeavor to reform mankind, were themselves intirely ignorant of some doctrines, absolutely necessary 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 whether 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 unchangable law of nature; he calls those philosophers, who thus wandered in the wide sea, “wise, brave, and good men, who made it their business to study, and practice the duties of natural religion themselves, and to teach and exhort others to do the like;” nay, one would imagine he thought them, notwithstanding their unavoidable ignorance, inspired; since he says, “there never was a great man, but who was inspired; *nemo unquam magnus vir sine divino afflatu fuit* :” And for this he quotes the authority of Cicero, who, if the doctor’s reasoning is just, was certainly inspired.

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 involved in a most depraved, corrupted, and impious state.

The doctor justly says, “let none on pretence of maintaining natural religion, revile and blaspheme the christian; lest they be found liars unto God:” and for the same reason, may not I say, let none blaspheme natural religion? Though if natural and revealed 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,

Though I pay a due deference to the doctor’s deep penetration in matters of religion, I dare not say there is the least difference between the law of nature and the gospel; for that would 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 called 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 designed by God, which was to be a competent guide to men, in relation to their present and future happiness; there could be no deficiency: if no, then there must have been an undeniable defect, in the

giver of it, in appointing means not sufficient to answer their designed ends ; though both means and ends were entirely in his power. Nor dare I say, “ there are several necessary truths, not possible to be discovered 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 obliged 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 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 the heathen world had certain means of knowing God ; for, that which may be known of God, 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 in all ages ; what advantage can one age in this grand point have above another ? And, therefore, I must conclude,

It cannot be imputed to any defect in the light of nature that the pagan world ran into idolatry ; but to their being entirely governed by priests, who pretended communication with their Gods ; and to have thence their revelations, which they imposed 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 allowed 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 are some duties, which nature hints at only in general ;” but, if we cannot, 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 dictate of his own mind ; I mean, as far as it is 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-

Though 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 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 could 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 the hearts of men only ; and that all men, by the judgment they pass on their own actions, are conscious of this law. And,

The apostle Paul, though quoted by the doctor, is so far from favoring 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 punished, was their sinning against light and knowledge : That which may be known of God was manifest in them, and when they knew God, they glorified him not as God : † And they were likewise guilty of abominable corruptions, not ignorantly.

* Rom. ii. 14. † i. 21. 22. 23. 28.

but knowing the judgment of God, that they who do such things are worthy of death. Had the doctor but considered 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 endeavoring to prove, that till the Gospel dispensation, mankind were entirely, 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, though the doctor designed it as the highest ; to say, it prevailed, 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 supplied the insufficiency, and undeniable defects of the light of nature, refers us to Phil. iv. 8. which he introduces after this pompous manner ; " let any man of an honest and sincere mind consider, whether that practical doctrine has not, even in itself, the greatest marks of 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 anything praiseworthy ; all these and these only, are the things earnestly recommended to men's practice."

I would 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 mark 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 concerned, and grieved to see a man, who had so great a share of the light of nature, employing 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 ushered it in after this solemn manner : “ When men have put themselves into this temper and frame of mind, let them try if they can any longer reject the evidence of 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, though he asserts there are undeniable defects, yet he owns, that God governs all his own actions by it, and expects that all men should so govern their's. But,

I find the doctor's own brother, the dean of Saum, is intirely of my mind, as to those two texts the doctor quotes ; viz. Rom. ii. 14. and Phil. iv. 8. As to the first, Rom. ii. 14. he says, “ The apostle supposes, that the moral law is founded in the nature and reason of things ; that every man is endued 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

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* John vii. 17.

the second. viz. Phil. iv. 8. where the same apostle recommends the practice of virtue, upon the forementioned principles of comeliness and reputation: "These principles," says he, "if duly attended to, were sufficient to instruct men in the whole of their duty towards themselves, and towards each other; and they would also have taught them their duty towards God, their creator and governor, if they had diligently pursued them: For according as the apostle expresses it, Rom. i. 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 the regular behavior of men towards each other, appears also in their behavior towards 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 obligation 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 comprehends every thing that is not arbitrary; and withal, is so deeply impressed on the minds of men, that they cannot violate its precepts without self-condemnation: I cannot apprehend how these philosophers, who made it their business to study, and practice natural religion, could be intirely ignorant of any doctrines absolutely necessary for the reformation of mankind: Nay, that "the whole attempt to discover the truth of things, was like wandering in the wide sea, without any guide:" and therefore, I should be glad to know, what are these absolutely necessary doctrines, they were thus intirely ignorant of.

A. "These philosophers," the doctor says, "had no knowledge of the whole scheme, order, and state of things." This, I think, may be allowed; since I believe there is none at present, who have, or pretend

to have so extensive a knowledge. "But they had no knowledge of the method of God's governing the world." Then they must be blind; if living in the world, they did not see how the things of this world were governed by Providence. "Then they did not know the ground and circumstances of the present corrupt condition of men." 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 owned, 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, placed by God in a most depraved, degenerate state; without possibility of recovering from it. "But they had, it seems, no knowledge of the design of God 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 could have no motive to create things at first, but only that he might communicate to them his goodness and happiness."

"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, it is 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 would have confirmed them in their sentiments. The most they could perceive by it would be, that the first pair came into the world in every sense naked, destitute of all that knowledge, 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 could 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 would have been at a loss to conceive, how Eve could entertain a conference with a serpent (incapable of human voice) even before consent had given any meaning to sounds. And they would be apt to ask, why, though custom had made it shameful to go without clothes in those places where clothes are worn; the first pair should nevertheless, though they knew not what clothes were, be ashamed to be seen unclothed by one another, and by God himself? so that, when they heard the voice of God walking in the Garden, in the cool of the evening, (a strange representation these philosophers would 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) sewed together, not being sufficient to hide their shame, make them coats of the skins of beasts, newly created in pairs. And they would, likewise, desire to be informed, how Eve, before her eyes were opened, saw that the tree was good for food; and that it was pleasant to the eye, and a tree to be desired to make one wife.*

Upon the whole, I grant, that these philosophers would be so far from finding out this original dignity in the first pair, that they would 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 could occasion the precepts of men's being bid to be as wise as serpents, it must allude

* Gen. iii. 8. 6.

to this transaction between the woman and the serpent; though they could never come into the belief of the ophitæ, (with whom the marcionites may be joined) who thought, that wisdom herself was the serpent, which they preferred to Christ, as teaching them to know good and evil; and designing for them immortality and deity; and foretelling that Adam, though threatened with certain death on the day he eat the forbidden fruit, should not then die; who accordingly lived after that sentence about 900 years: And that Moses erecting the brazen, healing serpent, was in honor of this serpent; who designed so much good to mankind.

B. These philosophers, would 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, would see, that the christians are now ashamed of the literal interpretation of this story; though St. Paul was of another mind, who expressly says, the serpent deceived eve through subtlety. And they, perhaps, would 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 shalt thou go, and the 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 countries, where serpents are numerous, and man's

* Gen. iii. p. 3. 12. 13.

heels bare? Why shall thy seed, not signify thy seed; but the seed of a being not mentioned in all this story; and who has no seed, but metaphorical seed: which, since the woman's seed is taken literally, would 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 would say, be sure of its meaning in any one place? Besides, would they not ask, why the whole race of serpents should be cursed for the crime of a fallen angel?

B. They might as well ask, why all other animals should bring forth in pain, for the fault of Eve? For had nature formed all females at first, as they have been ever since Eve eat the forbidden fruit, none of them, except by miracles, could be delivered without pain; no more than serpents, had they at first been formed, as at present, creep otherwise than they do. ♣.

A. Those philosophers, perhaps, would not think the matter a jot mended, by substituting (did the story afford room for it) a devil, instead of a serpent; since they could not see, how an infinitely good God could permit a most malicious cunning spirit to work on the weakness of a woman, just placed in a new world; without interposing in this unequal conflict, or giving notice of any such wicked spirit; Angels, neither good, or bad, being mentioned in the history of the creation: and yet after the fact was committed, God should thus revenge it on all their innocent posterity forever; by cursing the ground, &c.

What would seem to them most unaccountable, is, that God, should continue to suffer this subtle, and malignant spirit, endowed with an universal knowledge of what is past, and a deep penetration into futurity; to range about, deceiving, and circumventing mankind; who, having a capacity vastly superior to them, is continually sowing the seeds of mischief, and scattering the

poison of univerfal discord; making ufe of thofe very men as his instruments, whofe professed bufinefs it is, to promote univerfal concord.

The poor Indians, you know, when our miffionaries give fuch an account of the devil, fay, “Is not your God a good God, and loves all mankind? Why does he then permit this devil, to be continually doing them fuch infinite hurt? Why is he not put under confinement, if not deprived of a being, of which he has made himfelf unworthy? With us, one, who does not hinder a mischief, when it is in his power, is thought not much better than he who does it.”

But to return to the doctor: Where is the difference in relation to the goodnefs of God, and the happinefs of mankind, between God’s creating them in a ftate, as he calls it, of univerfal degeneracy and corruption; or caufing them by the folly of Adam, which infinite wifdom could not but forefee, to fall unavoidably into this bad ftate; what dignity, what perfeftion could Adam’s nature have, that the nature of his pofterity has not? Are they not as much framed after the image of their maker? Are not their fouls as much immediately from God as Adam’s? And are not their bodies exactly made after the fame manner? Were not all other animals at firft created by God as well as men? Had thefe any dignity, or perfeftion in their animal nature, which the fame creatures fince have not? Befides, is not this fupposed high ftate of perfeftion in Adam, giving the lye to the hiftory? fince this very perfeft man, notwithstanding all the original dignity of his nature, had no better excufe for his yielding to the firft temptation, than that the woman, whom thou gavelt to be with me, gave me of the tree, and I did eat.

How can we fuppose his understanding was in the leaft impaired by this crime, fince God himfelf fays (though to whom, it does not appear) behold, the man is become like one of us, to know good and evil,* and

* Gen. iii. 12. iii. 22

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.* Would it not be very strange, that his posterity (while his understanding received no hurt) should suffer so greatly in theirs, as the doctor would have it thought? Indeed, St. Austin supposes, that Adam before the fall could 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 four thousand 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 endeavors 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 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 favor." And here he concludes, that there arises from nature no sufficient comfort to sinners, but an anxious and endless solicitude, about the means of appeasing the deity."

To answer the doctor I need only to quote another able divine writing on the same subject of natural and

* Gen. v. 24.

revealed religion, say, “ I affirm it as 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 will be 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 grieved for it, is desirous to make amends, even by suffering for the honor of the person injured: How much more shall God forgive all persons thus disposed, and reformed; since there is no generosity in man, but what is, with his nature, infused into him by God?

“ Not only mercy, but wisdom will effectually dispose to God to forgive the penitent, because the creature reformed 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. It is 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 discerned by sense; since no sensible thing is more certain than the attributes of God.”

Mr. Locke has the same sentiments, and says, “ God had, by the light of reason, revealed to all mankind, who would 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, when he had transgressed the law. He that made use of this candle of the Lord, so far as to find what was his duty; could not miss to find also the way of reconciliation and forgiveness, when he had failed of his duty.—

“ The law is the eternal, immutable standard of right. And a part of that law is, that a man should forgive, not only his children, but his enemies, upon their re-

repentance, asking pardon, and amendment. And therefore, the author of this law, and God of patience and consolation, who is rich in mercy, would forgive his frail off-spring; if they acknowledged their faults, disapproved the iniquity of their transgressions, begged his pardon, and resolved in earnest for the future, to conform their actions to this rule, which they owned 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 cannot know from the light of nature, that There is more joy in Heaven over one sinner that repents, than over ninety and 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 should 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 of, 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 saved? 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; would not that design have obliged 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 assigned, why he

should not, from the beginning, have discovered such things, as make for their good; but defer the doing of it till the time of Tiberious? since the sooner this was done, the greater would his goodness appear to be: Nay, is it consistent with infinite benevolence, to hide that for many ages, which he knew, was as usual at first to prevent, as afterwards it could be, to put a stop to any thing he disliked?

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 prescribed 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 obliged him to discover any thing that is for the good of mankind, have obliged them 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 favorite nation only, under the veil of types, allegories, &c. And at last, though he discovered 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 though it is evident from this light, that God ought to be worshipped, yet “the manner, in which he might be acceptably worshipped, the wisest and best of the philosophers were intirely, and unavoidably ignorant of.”

A. Who can forbear pitying these unhappy philosophers, indispensably obliged to worship God acceptably; and yet, hard fate! unavoidably ignorant how to perform this acceptable worship? But,

If God could not will to be worshipped, without willing some way, or other, of being worshipped; and if he left it to the light of nature to discover how he would be worshipped, could that be for any other reason, but

because it was acceptable to him, to be worshipped as that light directed? Is it not a contradiction, to suppose God would be acceptably worshipped, 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 infinite wisdom and goodness; and that all his natural faculties are directed by these two attributes, to serve the purposes of benevolence? How then can we be ignorant, what worship, what service, we are to render him? Can we doubt, if we endeavor to have the same frame of mind, and govern our actions by the same law of benevolence; whether we shall obtain his favor? since to imitate him, is to pay him the highest adoration; and to keep his commandments, shews the highest veneration. It is for such reasons as these, that Dr. Scott intirely differs from this learned author, and says, “If we truly understand what God is, we cannot 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.”

B. Mr. Clarke owns, that “obedience to the obligations of nature, and imitation of the moral attributes of God; the wisest philosophers easily knew, was, undoubtedly, the most acceptable service to God;” and what he insists upon as necessary, is only some external adoration.

A. But since external adoration cannot be performed, but by external signs, these must be different in different places; because what are marks of respect in one country, are marks of disrespect in another; or, at least, look ridiculous.

B. The reason that the doctor gives, why the wisest men were intirely, and unavoidably ignorant, how God would be acceptably worshipped with external adoration, is, because they fell lamentably into the practice of the most foolish idolatry.

A. Never any before, called the worshipping of i-

dols, the worshipping of the true God, though unacceptably. But however, since you lay such stress on this discourse, I shall consider, what the doctor says, to prove this paradox.

“Plato,” says he, “after having delivered almost divine truths, concerning the nature, and attributes, of the supreme God, weakly advises men to worship likewise inferior Gods; nor dare to condemn the worshipping even of statues.—And so he spoiled the best philosophy in the world, by adding idolatry to that worship, which he had wisely, and bravely before proved to be due to the creator of all things.” But could he be intirely, and unavoidably ignorant of what he has bravely, and wisely proved?

“Socrates,” he says, “superstitiously offered a cock to Esculapius, unless it was done in mockery to him, looking on death to be his greatest deliverance:” But since he doubted what Socrates intended, why does he instance in him, as one intirely, and unavoidably ignorant, how God was to be acceptably worshipped?

“Cicero,” he says, “allowed men to continue the idolatry of their ancestors, advised them to conform themselves to the superstitious religion of their country.—In which he fondly contradicts 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 unavoidable 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; though as a priest, he thought fit to dissemble: Perhaps, he supposed it not prudent, without some such, softening expressions, so plainly to attack the reigning superstition. But.

Since the reasoning of the ancient philosophers fully shewed their sense, these reflections might have been spared; were it but for the sake of some modern philosophers; whose philosophical faith is as little reconcilable

with the creeds and litanies, they, as priests, solemnly repeat; and the articles they as solemnly subscribe; as any thing Cicero, the priest, could say in opposition to Cicero, the philosopher; who describes our moral obligations after so beautiful a manner; and by such plain, and irresistable arguments, shews the necessary connexion between virtue and happiness; vice and misery; as cannot but make 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 expose the light, and law of nature, as well as those great men; to whom we are infinitely obliged, for writing under these disadvantages so freely as they have done; especially Cicero, from whom the fathers have borrowed 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 used ever since, by all who feared the testimony of truth, to the loss of an immense treasure of learning; but they have improved it too, and been for burning of men, as well as books: and thereby introduced 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 entire liberty of conscience; and even the priests of the national church, provided they comply with its ceremonies, had no speculative creeds, or articles to subscribe; but were intirely free to maintain what opinions they pleased. 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 filled : and he, though a priest himself, every where treats his brethen with great freedom ; and in his address to them, speaking of an ambitious, intriguing priest, who would 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 pestilential, and deadly ministry by the sacred name of divine religion, when it is impossible for him to do it by human equity : it is high time to look for other ceremonies, other ministers of the immortal Gods, and other interpreters of religion.” But to return,

The doctor having thus exposed the light of nature, and, as he thinks, shewn its undeniable defects in the persons of these philosophers ; demands what grounds our modern deists have to imagine, that if they themselves had lived without the light of the gospel, they should have been wiser than Plato, Socrates, and Cicero. But sure no great wisdom is required 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 contained in the law, could be ignorant of. And,

I am surprized to find the doctor arguing as if that law, “ which is a most perfect rule to the most perfect being, is not perfect enough for his imperfect creatures ;” though their whole perfection consists in imitating him, and governing their actions by the same rule : a rule, which it cannot be denied, had mankind governed their actions by it, would have rendered them as perfect as their nature was capable of. I should be glad to know, why this rule has lost its virtue, and will not now render man as acceptable to God as ever ? but could 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, and in a deplorable state of corruption: I would ask whether God did this knowingly, or ignorantly, not foreseeing the consequences? to support 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 supplied as soon as discovered? or were they not discovered by infinite wisdom till these latter times; and then revealed to a small number, though 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 which are supposed 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, would not promulgate them to all his people? or, what parent would 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.

The doctor very rightly observes, that "even among men, there is no earthly father, but, in those things he esteems his own excellencies, desires and expects to be imitated by the 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 advanced, 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 of their nature.” And that “it was agreeable to the dictates of nature, and right reason, to hope for such a divine revelation ; that it is agreeable to the natural hopes and expectations of men, that is, of right reason duly improved, to suppose God making some particular 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 obliged to make such a revelation : but, with submission, what other reason have we to say, God is obliged to do any one thing whatever ; but that it is 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 always been as great, and the goodness of God always the same ; would not these oblige him to have prescribed an immediate remedy to the disease, and not deferred it four thousand years together ; and then applied it but to a few, though all had equal need of it ? And a need occasioned (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 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 unmerciful to the rest ? and certainly all the arguments of a 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, should be universal; as that it should be at all. But,

If revelation was absolutely necessary to recover mankind, out of their universal degenerate, 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 could possibly be in, when under times of unavoidable corruption? And yet,

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: “It is impossible to err, as long as we follow the guidance of nature.—There is 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 could any men, except they had a very absurd hypothesis to serve, assert, that any

thing could be the duty of men, which they were unavoidably ignorant of? Yet,

The doctor, to prove this invincible ignorance in the Gentile world, has frequent recourse to the 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 making 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 catu abhorret; quoniam, si sapientia homini data est, sine ullo discrimine, omnibus data est; ut nemo sit prorsus, qui eam capere non possit. At illi [Philosophi] virtutem humano generi datam sic amplectantur, ut soli omnium publico bono frui velle videantur; tam invidi, quam si velint deligare oculos, aut esodere cæteris. ne solem videant.—Quod si natura hominis sapientiæ capax est; oportuit opifices, & rusticos, & mulieres, et omnes denique qui humanam formam gerunt, doceri, sapiant; populumque ex omni lingua, & conditione, & sexu, & ætate conflare.* Then follows what the doctor quoted.

This has been a full answer to all the doctor had 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 designed 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 would 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 owned, 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 favorable to them in the ways ; and meeteth them in every thought. And,

What impartial man, who has compared the former, and present condition of mankind, can think the world much mended since the times of Tiberius ; or though ever so well versed in church history, can, from the conduct of Christians find, that they are arrived to any higher state of perfection, than the rest of mankind ; who are supposed 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, *Si resurgerunt philosophi & gentilium sapientes, & per-lustrato orbe a nobis quærerent quid profuerit humano ge-neri religio Christiana, quoad mores et vitæ probitatem ? quoad pacem et bonum publicum ? nos utique appellatis barbaros per opprobrium : sed nobis barbaris quid præf-tatis vos Christiani ?*

Monſieur Leibnitz, a great statesmen as well as philo-sopher, 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, ordinemque hominum inter se ut quam minimum sibi ipsi incommodent, supra ali-arum gentium leges apud sinenses sint ordinata.* He adds, *Certe talis nostrarum rerum mihi videtur esse conditio, gliscentibus in immensum corruptelis, ut propemodum ne-cessarium, videatur missionarios sinensem ad nos mitti, qui theologiæ naturalis usum, praxinque nos doceant quemad-modum nos illis mittimus qui theologiam eos doceant revelata-tam.* And the learned Huetius tells us, that “there is such a constant agreement between the Chinese them-selves, and their neighbors, that they seem to be all but one family.”

Navarette, a Chinese missionary, agrees with Leib-nitz, and says, that “It is the special providence of God, that the Chinese did not know what is done in Christen-dom ; for if they did, there would be never a man among them, but would spit in our faces.” And he adds, with respect to the 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 Europeans; and when it happens that any are converted, they prove so bad, it were better they had never been baptized." And I am afraid, it is 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 compared the lives of believers and unbelievers, does not say the same thing?

And Dr. Clark himself, in the discourse we are now considering, has sufficiently proved, 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, 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." Though there is 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 transformed 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 designed him the least injury, as could not have entered into the hearts of men to conceive, even though 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. though held with the utmost sincerity, are damnable sins; it wants not much skill to persuade them to hate those 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 ef-

fectual methods to root out all such damnable opinions. It is upon this common principle, that the inquisition is established; and the papists, to do them justice, act up to it; though perhaps, even among them, there are some lay-men, where nature is too hard for principles.

If once pernicious opinions are believed to be contained 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 been really contained in scripture? And if they, who maintain these, and other as vile maxims, have got possession of the minds of men, 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 proved 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 continued to give the best part of their honey to such haranguing drones, who, for the most part, employed 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 with mankind; but that there will always be too much room for such arguments, as the doctor urges from the corruption of mankind, for new revelations. Have not impostors always 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 looked on as the infancy; and the gospel, as it were, the youth; but that there was no

complete 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 it is owned by Christian as well as Arabic writers, which prepared the way for that success which Mahomet met with; whose religion, as it gained 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 alchoran, gives this odd reason: *Habet nimirum hæc superstitiono (Mahumedana) quicquid plausibile, ac probabile in Christiana religione reperitur, et quæ Naturæ legi ac lumini consentanea videntur. Mystera illa fidei nostræ, quæ primo aspectu, incredibilia, et impossibilia, apparent; et 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 though he had before laid it down as a most evident truth, that God does nothing by mere 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 obliged 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. But how comes this to be shifting the scene, and introducing a new hypothesis?

A. Because his former supposes men living and dying in a depraved, corrupted, degenerate, and impious state, incapable of reformation, whereas in this all men are allowed 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 his higher degree, and kind of happiness.

Though 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-formed system of the world, and the due subordination of things, all contrived 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.

Can God, who equally beholds all the dwellers on earth, free from partiality and prejudice, make some people his favorites, 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 favor ; not upon the account of their demerits, but because destined 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 respecter 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 the state of men 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 is 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 favor 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 the favor of God for impossibilities; or not observing such rules as he never gave them; where shall we stop? Could I think God so partial and prejudiced, as most sects, for their own sakes, represent him; how could I admire, love, and adore him, as I ought? Nay, how can any, who have such unworthy notions of God, be certain, the prejudice and partiality of God will be in their favor? If you admit any one imperfection in God; how can you be sure of his veracity, immutability, or any other perfection whatever?

Though 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 will give you the following quotations.

“God’s goodness and mercy” (says Mr. Whorton) “were, from all ages, equal and uniform; his justice always impartial and universal, in excluding none from his favor, but for reasons common to them with all mankind.—The universality, and impartiality of the divine justice and favor, is founded on the excellency of the divine nature; which cannot be supposed 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 are equally created by God; and if we respect that alone, all have an equal title to his favor.—Otherwise we could not but conceive injustice in God; nor were it possible to reconcile such a partiality with his infinite excellency. The reason why God is no respecter 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 would 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 fixed most impartial laws of government; which universally 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 seduced the Jews.—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 derived down to all his creatures?"

That celebrated preacher, Dr. Ibbott, affirms, that "It is not our being of any nation, or any sect, members of any particular church, or society; that will intitle us to the favor of God; 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 obliged to."—Again, "Wherever men fear God, and love one another, 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 acceptance with him."

The contrary is a notion, which lays a foundation for everlasting persecution; for if men flatter themselves, that they, upon the account of their particular systems, are the favorites 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, neighbors and relations; to use any means, come into ~~any persecuting measures~~, to prevent such opinions from spreading, as they imagine, ^{delusion - by} would deprive them of that degree of happiness, which otherwise they might ever enjoy: And is it not chiefly ^{how true to} 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 could be no pretence for the least partiality, much less for persecution, either positive, or negative: Nor could any man love another the less, for the widest difference in opinions: And then of course, men's indignation would 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, would 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 would 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 or their own churches, even the most able, though 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 the loss of preferment, or some other political reasons, that keep up any sort of verbal agreement among them, even in things owned to be of the highest consequence; and which, as such, are placed 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 joined 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 cannot 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 satisfied 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 the favor of God, and a man of another religion not have the same title; when that sincerity, on which the title depends,

is common to both? "If the favor 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 favored with God? who is the only infallible judge of their sincerity, in the use of those talents, whether great, or small, he has endowed 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 would be to impute to God the strange tyranny of requiring bricks, where he has given no straw; of expecting to gather, where he has not sowed; to reap, where he sowed not; of being offended with us for not doing, what he knew we could not do." And,

The Romanists themselves, though 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 endeavor 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 idolized: I mean the famous Mr. Lesley, who says, "In the beginning God created man, and left him in the hands of his own counsel (Eccles. xv. 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 the intentions of any man, and what endeavors he has used towards the right informing his judgment?"

In a word, this is so evident a truth, that there is none, but who, with the bishop of London, say, "Christianity requires no further favor, than a fair and

impartial inquiry into the grounds and doctrines of it;” even while they are designing the further favors of fines, pillories, and imprisonment, &c. But to return to the doctor.

I would be glad to know, whether the greater degree of happiness, from which Dr. Clark would 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, though ever so much mistaken, sincerely endeavor to find out the will of God? If the doctor says the latter, he cannot think this favor 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 punished 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 punished 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 favor; if not, where is the difference?

B. But does not the doctor raise an argument, from men’s different capacities and abilities in this life, for their having different degrees of happiness hereafter?

A. Though 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 denied, but that the benefit of Christ's death extended backward, to those who lived before his appearance in the world; so no one can prove, but the same benefit may extend itself forward to those, who never heard of his appearance; though they lived after it. If both these, though 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 owned, 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 saved without repentance and amendment; and sinners, at all times, were to be saved on these terms, or else could not be saved 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 the displeasure of God; 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 the resentment of God; 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, cannot be denied, except you suppose, Christ, who came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance; proposed 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.

Though the doctor says no more than our articles affirm, viz. that "the obligation 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, could gain by his death.

B. The doctor says, that “ Christ died, to shew the irreconcilable hatred of God to sin ; and to vindicate the honor of his laws.”

A. These reasons, sure, could never influence those, who never heard of Christ ; or, if they had, perhaps, would have been so perverse, as not to imagine, that pardoning the guilty, and punishing the innocent, could either shew irreconcilable enmity to guilt, or love for innocence ; and perhaps, governed by prejudices, might think very oddly of a king, who, though he freely pardoned his repenting rebels ; yet should cause his most loyal, and only son to be put to death, to shew his hatred to rebellion ; and to vindicate the honor 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. Could these philosophers, who did not imagine any virtue in sacrificing of beasts, to wash away the sins of men ; easily conceive a human sacrifice, which they believed human nature abhorred, to be an expiation for sins ? Or, that sins freely pardoned, could want no 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 should receive satisfaction from, and give satisfaction to the same God : and that the same God, who thus receives, and gives satisfaction, should 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.

A. Though I have omitted several things, which well deserve to be criticised ; 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 at-

tempts to destroy the all-sufficiency, absolute perfection, plainness, and perspicuity of the law of nature; which he had before so fully demonstrated. Who could 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 obliged to govern themselves in all theirs, by the same eternal rule: A rule too, owned 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, could imagine, that all this should be unsaid, and the utmost art employed, 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 *eternal* 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 involved? And then, after he had made the most of this strange hypothesis, to quit it for the sake of another, no less strange? And, though he had declared, 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 quit too, even this hypothesis; by

supposing all men, though they never heard of Christ's death, to be upon a level, in relation to any benefits received from it? And, I may add,

When men consider, how often this discourse has been reprinted, and reviewed by a man owned to be as great a master of reason, as ever appeared in print; and withal, both a subtle metaphysician, and excellent mathematician; and 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 pergamam dextra, &c.

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 attacked, they usually cry, Why will you pull down, except you build up? When in reality, error must be removed, in order to make way for truth: You must pull down one, before you can build up the other. But here, I hope, there is no room for that objection; because, as nothing but rubbish is removed, nothing but what is either consistent with, or, at least, takes off from, the full exercise of piety, and virtue; so every thing is advanced, which tends to promote the honor 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 would 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 have brought into religion, come to an happy agreement.

For my part, I think, there is 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,

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 caused 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 which, is a religion, as I hope is here fully proved, founded upon such demonstrable principles, as are obvious to the meanest capacity; and most essentially prevents the growth, both of scepticism and enthusiasm.

I entirely agree with this right reverend father, that “Christianity in itself, stripped 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 would not vend under the name of evangelical truths, the ab-

furd, and contradictory schemes of ignorant, or wicked men? That they would 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, "have been much embarrassed, through fear of speaking against local truths; and its adversaries have so successfully attacked those weaknesses, that christianity itself has been deemed 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 priest-craft.

B. There is one objection which will always stick, you will be represented as an affecter of novelty; and that it is pride and vain-glory, which makes you go out of the common road.

A. That is a reflection all must expect, who endeavor 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 despised 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 doctrines; 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 circumstances 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 cannot 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, delivered in general, undetermined, 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 allowed, are the best interpreters, who most recede from the killing letter. And is not this, in effect, saying with the present bishop of Bangor, "That the gospel is a republication of the law of nature; and its precepts declarative of that original religion, which was as old as the creation. And, "It would be 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 habitudes, 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 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 changed? 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, could have any motives 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 damned; or, which is the same, made such things necessary to their salvation, as they were incapable of knowing? And in my asserting, that God is a rewarder of such as diligently seek him;* though 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,

In believing with St. Peter, that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him:† And with St. Paul, that the Gentiles do by nature the things con-

* Heb. xi. 6.

† Acts x. 34. 35.

tained in the law: And that God will render to every man (whether believer, or unbeliever,) according to his deeds.* And that the grace of God, which bringeth salvation,-----teaching us,-----we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, (which takes in the whole of our duty) has appeared to all men,† and at all times. And,

In believing with our saviour, that the whole need not of 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 put my laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts:—They shall not teach every man his neighbor.—They shall all know me from the least to the greatest.||

In a word, all are forced 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 words, that "to advance natural light, that is, pagan darkness, in opposition to scripture evidence, is setting up human conjectures above divine truths:" And that, since the scripture so frequently imputes human parts, and passions to God, we ought not to doubt of it; only because we cannot reconcile it with that philosophy, with which the bulk of mankind, for whom the scripture was chiefly wrote, are entirely ignorant of.

In our next conference (it being high time to put an end to this) I shall 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 believed, there was an exact agreement between natural and revealed religion; and that the excellency of the latter, did consist in being a republication of the former.

* Rom. ii. 14. 6. † Tit. ii. 11, 12. ‡ Mat. ix. 12.
 John vii. 17. § Heb. viii. 10, 11.

For the present take these few authorities : “ If,” says the renowned Origen, “ we admit the judgment of God to be just, we must acknowledge, that there can be no ground for the punishment of sinners, unless the common conceptions 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 men ; that so every man, having had the intention, and meaning of the law written in his own heart, should be left without excuse before the divine tribunal.” And,

Lactantius, the most eloquent of the fathers seems ravished with the description Cicero gives of the law of nature : and therefore, chooses to express his own sense of it, in the words of that philosopher. “ The law of God,” says he, “ is necessary to be observed, that will lead us into the way of happiness ; that holy and heavenly law, I mean, which Marcus Tullius has, as it were, divinely described 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 eternal.—This law neither needs to be proposed, nor can it ever be, either in whole, or part, repealed ; neither senate, nor people, can discharge us from the obligation of it ; we need not look abroad for an expositor 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 same immutable law continues, and extends itself to all times and nations ; and one God is the common Lord and governor of all things. He it is, that has framed, propounded, and established this law ; and whosoever obeys not him, abandons even himself, renounces his own nature ; and in so doing, suffers actually in himself the greatest punishment, though he escapes all things else which are deemed so.”

St. Austin says, the reason why God has given us a

written law, is not because his law was not already written in our hearts; but because men letting out their appetites after things abroad, became strangers to themselves; and therefore, we have been summoned, and called upon by him, who is every where present, to return into ourselves: For what is that the outward written law calls for, unto those who have forsaken the law written in their hearts; but return, O ye transgressors, to your own hearts?*"

I shall, likewise, shew you, that the law of liberty, that perfect law of liberty, which we are obliged to maintain in all our words and actions, as the law we are to be judged by;† does not consist in a freedom from things of a moral nature, for that would be perfect slavery; but from all those things as are not of such a nature: And that it is evident from the reasoning, which runs through all the epistles, that the placing religion in any indifferent thing, is inconsistent with the nature of christianity; it is introducing Judaism, or what (as christians have found to their cost) is still 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 should 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

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* Isaiah xlvi. 8. † James i. 25. ‡ 1. 24.

he that in these things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God, and approved of man: Let us, therefore, follow after the things which make for peace, and things where-with 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 approved 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, though 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 perfecte 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 Mr. 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 requires things of a different nature: And if it is in these things only we can serve Christ, others cannot be introduced, 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 observed 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 reason; in which we are no ways concerned, than like them, to act according as the cir-

* Rom. xiv. 17, 18, 19.

circumstances we are in require. Without this, christians would 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 œconomy; which in an hundred places, we are told, are to last for ever.

To comprize the matter in few words, what I have been endeavoring to prove, is,

First, That there are things, which, by their internal excellency, shew themselves to be the will of an infinite wise, and good God.

Secondly, There are things which have no worth in themselves; yet because those that have, cannot many times be performed without them, these are to be considered as means to an end; and being of a mutable nature, are left to human discretion, to be varied 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 considered 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, it is time to give you some respite, and to thank you for the favor, which cannot be too much acknowledged; in thus freely communicating your thoughts on this important subject; and doing it after such a manner, as cannot, were this conference to be published, offend persons, though 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 though you plainly saw, that God never intended mankind should be without religion; or could ordain an imperfect religion; and there-

fore, 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 have mentioned at first, am ready to give up my hypothesis, if you can name one attended with few difficulties; and likewise, to assure you, that if I have advanced any notion, which does not naturally, and necessarily shew itself to be the will of God; by tending to promote his honor, and the good of man; I here intirely renounce it: And by not persisting to defend error, give this uncommon mark of an ingenius disposition. *Errare possum, Hæreticus esse malo.*

F I N I S.



