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A  
COLLECTION  
OF  
ESSAYS AND TRACTS  
IN  
THEOLOGY.

BY JARED SPARKS.

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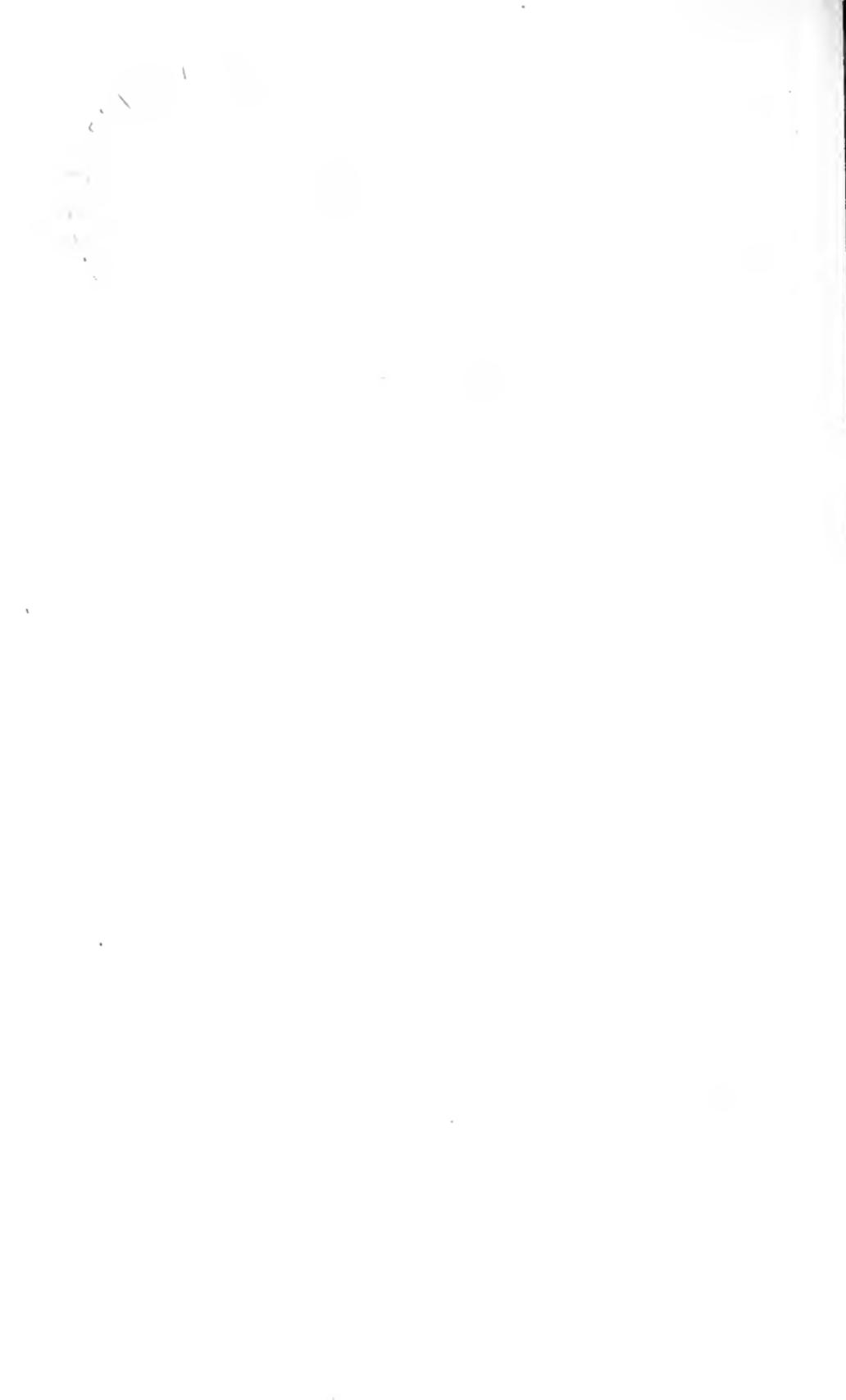
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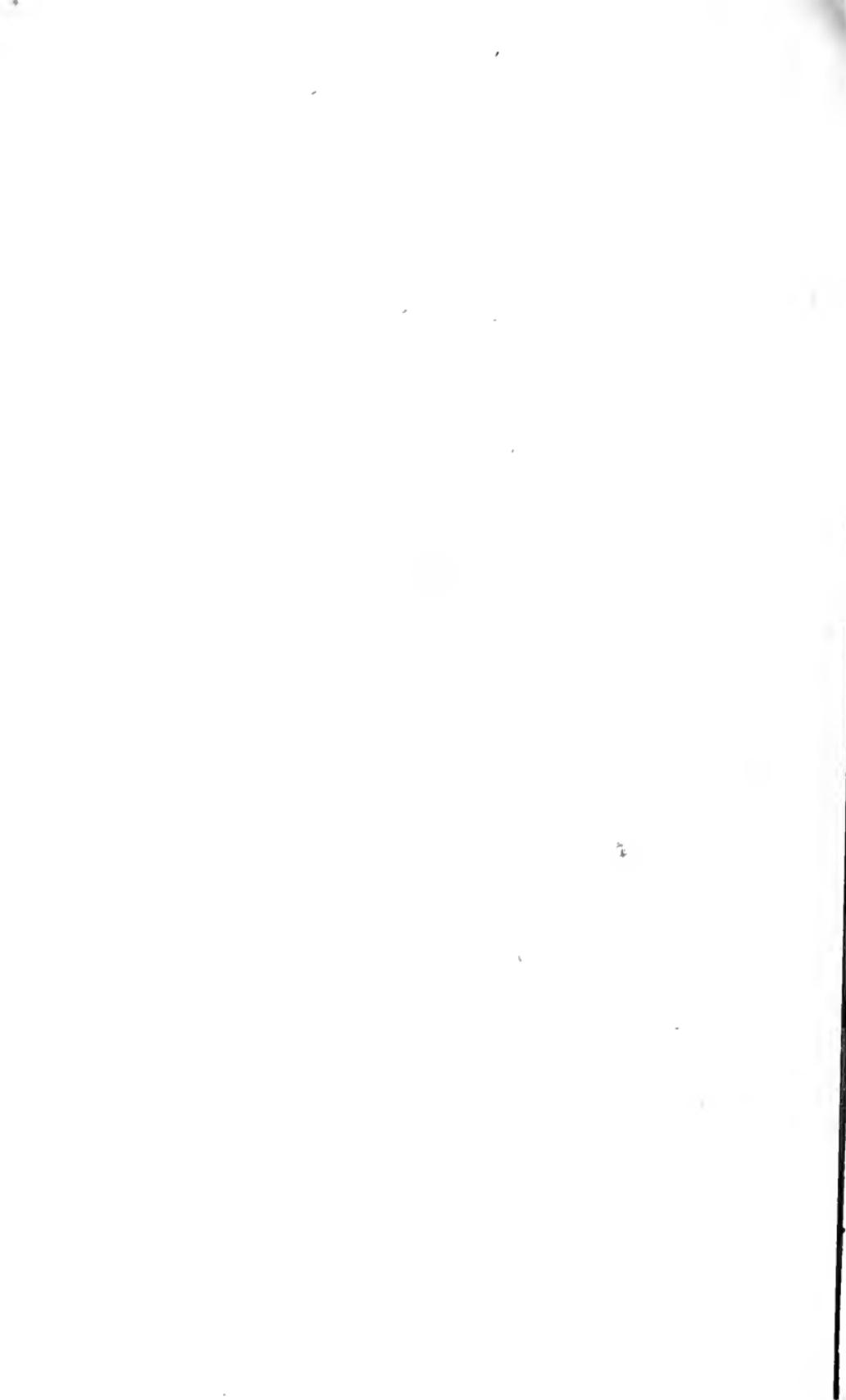
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**SELECTION**

**FROM**

**ROBERT ROBINSON'S**

**WORKS.**



## ROBERT ROBINSON.

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AMONG the uses of biography, none is more valuable, than that which inspires good purposes, awakens energy, and incites to exertion. The events of a person's life, who has risen to eminence by the force of his own genius and enterprise, are always interesting, because they are rare; they are always instructive, because they serve as a light and a guide to others, whose early fortunes may be equally unpropitious.

That one should go out triumphantly on the tide of life, who is blessed with all the advantages of family, wealth, powerful friends, facilities of education, and incitements to employ them, is no cause of wonder. It would, indeed, be strange if it were otherwise. But when the sons of obscurity and indigence break from the cloud which surrounds, and the weight which oppresses them; when they enter on the world's wide ocean, without a parent's voice to counsel, or a parent's hand to protect; when each returning day brings them into a new conflict with want and anxiety; when the allurements of vice besiege them on the one side, and the spectres of desponden-

cy assault them on the other, without shaking their firmness, or turning them from the steady purpose of uprightiness and perseverance ; and when, in defiance of every other obstacle, they ascend to a proud station among the wise, the learned, and the good ; it is then that they may justly claim the respect and admiration of their fellow-men, and call on them to behold an example worthy to be praised and emulated. Among the few, who are to be revered for self-acquired eminence, the subject of the present memoir stands in an honourable place.

ROBERT ROBINSON was born at Swaffham, county of Norfolk, on the eighth of October, 1735. His father was a native of Scotland, and an exciseman, of whom little needs be said, except that his humble sphere in life received no dignity from his understanding, and no brightness from his virtues. Mary Wilkin, the mother of Robert Robinson, was descended from a respectable family, and to the advantages of a good education she added the charms of a beautiful person, an amiable temper, and gentleness of manners. She was the daughter of a second marriage, and, as unnatural as it may seem, the affections of her father were centred in the children of his wife by a former husband. Mary was doomed to experience from him less of the tenderness of a parent, than of the austerity and unfeelingness of a severe master. He delighted to thwart her purposes ; and on several occasions, through mere caprice, he rejected the

overtures of worthy and respectable persons, who solicited his daughter's hand.

Disheartened by the severity of her father's treatment, and impatient to escape from it, she imprudently resolved on marrying without his consent. This step was a prelude to untried evils. She united herself to a man in all respects unworthy of her, possessing neither the qualifications for making her happy, nor the disposition to soften and conciliate her father.

They had three children, of whom Robert was the youngest. The elder son was apprenticed to a painter, and the daughter to a mantuamaker. Robert was put to school when six years old, and soon drew the attention of his teacher, as exhibiting more than usual promise. In the mean time, his father removed from Swaffham, and settled at Scaring. He soon after died, and left the destitute mother to provide for herself, and three children. At Scaring was a grammar school, where Lord Thurlow, and some other distinguished persons, received the rudiments of their education. Desirous of encouraging her son's predilection for learning, Mrs Robinson made an effort to maintain him at this school, but her resources proved inadequate to the expense. So favourable an impression had he made, however, on his teacher, the Rev. Joseph Brett, and so much did this gentleman respect the motives and virtues of the mother,

that he kindly offered to instruct his pupil without compensation.

On these terms he continued at school till he was fourteen years old, studied the French and Latin, and made rapid proficiency in most of the branches commonly pursued at such institutions. The time had now come when it was necessary to decide on his future destination. So many discouragements were in the way of his being a scholar, and so many difficulties to be encountered, that his mother resigned this hope, which she had suffered to rise and brighten for a time, and was only concerned to place him beyond the reach of want by providing for him an honest calling. His benevolent instructor, Mr Brett, made interest to procure a situation suited to his capacity and inclination, but without success. He was finally bound as an apprentice to a hairdresser in London.

To this new employment he at first devoted himself with commendable industry, received the approbation of his master, and was able to boast of a due proficiency in the mysteries of his trade. But his thoughts were not to be chained, nor could nature be forced. His mind was too active to rest in vacuity, and his love of books too strong to be conquered by the routine of a barber's shop. It was his custom to rise at four in the morning, and from that hour till called to his master's service, he was busy in reading such books as he could collect from the cheap stalls or borrow from his friends.

His thoughts early took a religious bias, and after going to London a constant attendance on public worship was among his greatest pleasures. Gill, Guise, Romaine, and Whitfield were his favourite preachers. His diary at this time indicates no small degree of religious enthusiasm, and proves him to have gradually attached himself to the methodists. Whitfield, in short, was his adviser and friend, to whom he applied in all cases of spiritual difficulty, and with whom he familiarly corresponded. On one occasion Whitfield read to his congregation at the Tabernacle two of Robinson's letters, while the writer was present. Encouraged by the favourable opinion of so distinguished a man, and moved by the advice of his friends, it is not a matter of surprise that he should begin to think himself destined to walk in a broader sphere, than the one on which he was entered.

So great, indeed, was the esteem and respect which he gained by his genius and good character, that his master was not reluctant to comply with the general voice, and give up his indentures. At the age of nineteen he commenced preaching among the methodists. His youth, his amiable manners, his vivacity and native eloquence drew around him many hearers, and gave a charm to his preaching, which could not fail to please. His voice was clear and melodious, his elocution easy and distinct, his language flowing, and all his external accomplishments

engaging. These advantages, heightened by a liberal degree of youthful enthusiasm, crowned his first efforts with success, and animated his future exertions. He spared no pains to cultivate the powers which nature had bestowed on him, and frequently declaimed by the hour in private, that he might acquire the habit of a ready delivery, and a free use of language. In this practice the foundation was laid of his subsequent eminence as a public speaker. He thought no time mispent, which prepared him for winning the ear and gaining the hearts of his audience, and thus more effectually discharging the duties of his sacred office.

Among the methodists Mr Robinson preached chiefly in Norwich, and different parts of Norfolk and Cambridgeshire. While thus employed he resisted a temptation, which deserves to be recorded as a proof of his early integrity and strength of principle. He had been educated in the established church, and had not joined himself to the dissenters without examining the causes and nature of their dissent. When his talents and virtues had gained him a name in the world, some of his relations, who seem to have forgotten him before, made an attempt to bring him back to the episcopal church. The following incident is mentioned by Dr Rees, the learned editor of the Cyclopædia, in his sermon preached on the occasion of Mr Robinson's death. "A rich relation, who had promised to provide liberally for him, and who

had bequeathed him a considerable sum in his will, threatened to deprive him of every advantage which he had been encouraged to expect, unless he quitted his connexion with the dissenters ; but the rights of conscience, and the approbation of God were superior, in his regard, to every worldly consideration ; he preserved his integrity, steadily maintained his principles, and persevered in his connexion with the dissenters, but forfeited the favour of his relation, and every advantage, which, living or dying, he had in his power to bestow."\* This conduct was consistent with his character through life. A high-minded independence, conscientious regard for truth and liberty, and unyielding adherence to his religious impressions, were among the shining virtues, which never forsook him.

The causes leading to his separation from the methodists are not distinctly known, but he had not preached with them more than two years, when, at the head of a few persons associated for the purpose, he formed an independent society in Norwich. At this time he was a Calvinist, and constructed the confession of faith for his new society on Calvinistic principles. He adopted the rules and discipline common to other independent churches, and administered the ordinances after the same manner.

\* Dr Rees' Sermon on the Death of Mr Robert Robinson, p. 59.

In the year 1759, not long after this society was organized, Mr Robinson was invited to take charge of a Baptist congregation at Cambridge. He was already convinced, that adults only were the proper subjects of baptism, and he had himself been baptized by immersion. The Cambridge society was small, and the pecuniary circumstances of its members such, as to afford him no more than a very scanty support. When he commenced preaching in Cambridge he was twenty-three years of age, and two years afterwards he was ordained according to the usual mode of the dissenters. He had been married a little before to a young lady of Norwich.

Mr Robinson's own account of his settlement, written at a later period of his life, will show his prospects to have been not the most flattering. In reference to this subject he observes; "The settlement of Robinson seems rather a romantic, than rational undertaking, for this pastor was to be maintained. He had not received above ten guineas from his own family for some years; he had no future prospect of receiving any; his grandfather had cut him off with a legacy of half a guinea. He had received only a hundred pounds with his wife, and this he had diminished among the methodists. He had never inquired what his congregation would allow him, nor had any body proposed any thing. They had paid him for the first half-year, three pounds twelve shillings and five pence; they had increased

since, but not enough to maintain him frugally ; there was no prospect of so poor a people supplying him long, especially should his family increase, which it was likely to do. Besides, the congregation, through the libertinism of many of its former members, had acquired a bad character. These would have been insurmountable difficulties to an older and wiser man ; but he was a boy, and the love of his flock was a million to him. His settlement, therefore, on this article, should be no precedent for future settlements.”

The situation here described could have few charms for a man who had set his heart on the things of this world, or whose fancy was quickened by the kindling visions of power and fame. But Robinson was not such a man. He loved his profession, and every motive of self-aggrandizement was absorbed in the deeper and purer desire of witnessing the growth of piety, good order, and happiness among his people. His congregation grew larger, and the time came when his annual income was increased to more than ninety pounds. At first he lived at Fulbourn, five miles from the place of his sabbath duties, where he contracted an acquaintance with Mr Graves, a gentleman of property and benevolence, from whom he received many substantial tokens of friendship.

He next removed to Hauxton, about the same distance from Cambridge, where he resided for several years, the tenant of an humble cottage, devoted

assiduously to his professional labours, and providing for the support of a numerous family, and an aged mother. His disinterested ardour, his kindness to the poor, his love of doing good, and his unwearied activity in making himself useful, attracted to him the notice of all the respectable part of the community, and quickened the generosity of some worthy and opulent persons. On the sabbath he often preached three times, and during the week several times in the neighbouring villages. He was intimate with all the surrounding clergy among the dissenters, and had for his early companions Roland Hill and Charles de Coetlogon. His congregation increased so much, that a more commodious place of worship was found necessary, and the pastor was highly gratified with the promptness and unanimity with which it was erected.

In the midst of his professional labours he was a diligent student in theology and literature. Free access to the libraries of the University of Cambridge, and conversation with the learned men residing there, enabled him to pursue his studies with advantage. He was an admirer of Saurin, and in 1770 translated and published two of his sermons. These were sent out as specimens, which, if approved, he promised should be the forerunners of others. The success of his project was quite equal to his expectation, and he afterwards translated at different times five volumes of sermons selected from Saurin. These have gone through several editions, and to-

gether with a sixth volume by Hunter, and a seventh by Sutcliffe, they constitute the works of Saurin, as they now appear in the English dress.

While residing in the cottage at Hauxton he also published his *Arcana, or the Principles of the late Petitioners to Parliament for Relief in Matter of Subscription, in eight Letters to a Friend*. These letters were adapted to the times, and attracted a lively attention. The dissenters were making all possible exertions to have the law repealed, which required from them subscription to the articles. Presbyterians and Baptists, orthodox and heterodox, united their forces to abolish a law, which operated with equal severity on them all, and which was in itself so flagrant an encroachment on justice, liberty, the rights of conscience, and the claims of humanity. All rallied under the same banner, and cried out with one voice against the oppression which weighed them down, till, after many unsuccessful struggles, their voice was heard, their petitions heeded, and dissenting ministers and schoolmasters were allowed the privilege of prosecuting their peaceful avocations without violating their conscience by subscribing the Thirty-nine Articles, or subjecting themselves to a civil penalty by resisting so unholy a requisition. During the struggle for christian freedom the above letters were written. Clothed in a language always sprightly, sometimes adorned with glowing imagery, sometimes rising with the majesty of argument, and at others

pungent with satire, they were well calculated for popular effect. They enter largely into the chief points of the controversy, and bating some defects of style, and perhaps occasional faults of sentiment, it will be rare to find a more ingenious vindication of the rights and privileges of christian liberty.

Robinson left Hauxton in 1773, and settled at Chesterton within two miles of Cambridge. This brought him nearer to the centre of his parochial charge, and the facilities for his literary pursuits were multiplied by his proximity to the university. But his income was not yet adequate to support a family of nine children, and he was compelled to look around him for other sources of emolument. He turned his attention to agriculture. By rigid economy, personal inspection of his affairs, judicious investments, and a spirit of enterprise that never slumbered, he found himself in a few years a thriving farmer, and had the joy to feel, that by the blessing of Providence his numerous family was beyond the grasp of want, and the caprice of fortune. Mr Dyer thus speaks of his character as a farmer and economist. "It would be no less agreeable than instructive to survey his rural economy, and domestic arrangements in his new situation; the versatility of his genius was uncommon; and whether he was making a bargain, repairing a house, stocking a farm, giving directions to workmen, or assisting their labours, he was the same invariable man, displaying no less

vigour in the execution of his plans, than ingenuity in their contrivance. The readiness with which he passed from literary pursuits to rural occupations, from rural occupations to domestic engagements, from domestic engagements to the forming of plans for dissenting ministers, to the settling of churches, to the solving of cases of conscience, to the removing of the difficulties of ignorant, or softening the asperities of quarrelsome brethren, was surprising.\* This is the language of one who lived near him, for many years, and saw him often.

His professional duties were numerous. Those pertaining to his own parish made but a part. He was invited to attend ordinations in all the counties around him ; his judgment was respected and his advice sought in cases of differences between churches ; he was the counsellor of his parishioners in their temporal as well as spiritual concerns ; the watchful guardian of the unprotected and distressed ; the patron and benevolent friend of the poor. These calls of duty did not relax his literary ardour. He went on with his translations of Saurin, printed now and then an occasional sermon of his own, and, at the request of two or three eminent gentlemen, wrote a

\* Dyer's *Life of Robinson*, p. 98. This work was published in 1796, by a person well acquainted with Robinson ; but it is a work singularly defective in arrangement, wanting in interest, and barren of incidents, considering the opportunities and materials with which the author was favoured.

treatise on affinities in marriage, which was highly commended by jurists, as marked by an acute discrimination and force of argument.

About the year 1776, Robinson published his *Plea for the Divinity of Christ*. This topic was now much agitated by reason of the late resignation of Lindsey and Jebb for scruples of conscience concerning the trinity. Robinson's Plea is drawn up with ingenuity, in a popular style, and winning manner. The arguments are less sound than specious; they take names for things, and rest on deductions which go not beneath the surface of the Scriptures; in the balance with just criticism they lose their weight and their substance. In the eyes of a certain class of trinitarians they were masterly, because with more than common skill they defended an old ground, which it was thought difficult to maintain much longer, and which, in truth, has since been nearly abandoned. But even this popular treatise did not please all parties. None withheld from the author the merit of ingenuity; some professed to admire the force and accuracy of his reasoning; while others were troubled with a kind of indefinable suspicion, that he had stopped short of the desired object. These latter seem to have been alarmed, that the author was so sparing of the fire and rage of controversy. Robinson observes in writing to a friend, "The temper of the Plea has procured me a deal of blame from the good folks, who inhabit the torrid zone." These

zealous partisans were not satisfied, that he should win the day, unless he carried war with flames and sword into the conquered enemy's camp.

Others, however, were of a different mind, and the author received a profusion of complementary letters from dignitaries in the established church. It was whispered, and more than once proclaimed aloud, as a thing to be lamented, that such a man should be a dissenter, and waste his days in strolling with a bewildered flock beyond the enclosures of the true faith. Gilded offers were made to him, if he would have the conscience to slide out of his errors, go up from the unseemly vale of poverty, and take his rest on the commanding eminence of church preferment. To these overtures he was deaf; from his principles he could not be moved. When Dr Ogden said to him, in trying to unsettle his purpose, "Do the dissenters know the worth of the man?" he replied, "The man knows the worth of the dissenters." This reply he verified by his warm devotedness to their interests through life. He received many letters approving his work from persons not belonging to the episcopal church, especially his Baptist associates in the ministry.

The Plea was answered by Lindsey, but Robinson never replied; nor did he write any more in defence of the divinity of Christ. Whether influenced by Lindsey's arguments, or whether his own examination of the subject had supplied him weaker grounds

than he expected, or whether his mind received a bias from any other quarter, it is certain that his sentiments about that time underwent a change. During the latter years of his life he rejected the trinity, and believed in the subordinate nature of Christ.

The year after the Plea, Robinson published a curious tract, entitled the *History and Mystery of Good Friday*. In this pamphlet he traces back the church holidays to their origin, and proves them for the most part to have arisen out of heathen, or Jewish practices, and to derive no authority from the christian religion. It contains a severe, and somewhat rough philippic against the church of England, which boasts of being reformed, and having cast off the abuses of the Romish church, while yet many are cherished, as unwarrantable and pernicious as those severed from the old stock. This tract was exceedingly popular, and ran speedily through several editions.

But the work, which produced greater excitement than any of our author's writings, was a *Plan of Lectures on the Principles of Nonconformity*, published in 1778. Within a moderate compass, it embraces all the points of controversy between the established church and the dissenters. Its manner is original and striking. The time of its appearance was favourable to its currency and interest, for the dissenters' bill was then pending in parliament. In the House of Lords this Plan of Lectures was honourably

mentioned by Lord Shelburne, and in the House of Commons, Burke read passages from it, which he attempted to turn to the disadvantage of the petitioners. Fox repelled his attack, and foiled his attempt. Many articles were written against it, and, among others, strictures by Mr Burgess, prebendary of Winchester. Robinson replied to none, except the latter, on which he bestowed a few remarks in his preface to the fifth edition.

The next literary enterprise of Robinson was his translation of *Claude's Essay on the Composition of a Sermon*. To this essay the translator added a life of the author, remarks on the history of preaching, and a vast body of notes, making together two thick volumes. The notes are written in the author's peculiar manner, full of spirit and vivacity, and discover a prodigious extent of reading. Some of them are valuable, many are highly entertaining, but they seem to have been hastily thrown together, and collected with too little discrimination. They occasionally descend to trifling incidents, anecdotes, and inapposite reflections, equally offensive to good taste, and barren of instruction. But with all these defects, Robinson's original edition is vastly preferable to those coming after, in which the editors took the liberty to abridge the notes, and add others of their own. In the Rev. Charles Simeon's edition, the notes are chiefly omitted, and their place supplied by skeletons of his own sermons.

Mr Robinson's celebrated volume of *Village Sermons* was published in 1786. We have already observed, that it was his custom to preach in the neighbouring villages, and frequently he tarried at a place over night, and held religious service early in the morning, before the labourers were gone to their work. In summer these exercises were conducted in the open air, and fully attended. The above volume is composed of discourses delivered on these occasions, and written out afterwards as dictated by the author to an amanuensis. They had evidently been prepared with care in his own mind, and they contain a copiousness of language, a felicity of illustration, and a readiness in quoting and applying appropriate passages of scripture, rarely to be witnessed. They were framed for a particular purpose, that of enlightening and improving the less informed classes of society ; and whoever reads them will not wonder, that this purpose was attained, and that even those for whom the things of the world had attractions should resign for an hour the labour of gain, and listen with delight, to the persuasive accents of the preacher. They may be read with profit by all, who love to contemplate the workings of a powerful mind in recommending and enforcing the principles of a holy religion, who are captivated with the inventions of genius, the current of a natural eloquence, sound words uttered in the spirit of christian philanthropy, and sentiments breathing the influence of a rational, fervent piety.

The last works in which our author was engaged were the *History of Baptism*, and his *Ecclesiastical Researches*. These were also his largest works, each making a closely printed quarto volume. It had long been a source of regret among the Baptists, that no full and authentic history of their brethren existed, and that their opinions, character, and progress had never been represented to the world in the light they deserved. It was at length resolved by some of the leading members of this denomination to supply the deficiency, and appoint a suitable person to write a copious and accurate history. The general voice fixed on Robinson, and in 1781 he was invited by an authorized committee to undertake the task. He complied with the request, and immediately set himself about the gigantic labour of wading through the ecclesiastical records of ancient and modern times, appalled neither by the lumber of antiquity, nor the mountains of volumes, which have been raised by the prolific industry of later ages.

That he might have a more ready access to scarce books, it was a part of his plan to reside a few days in every month in London. This design, however, was soon given up as impracticable, for so much was he sought after as a preacher, that he found his attention perpetually diverted from his studies. Appointments were made by his friends for preaching every day in the week, and so slowly did his history advance in the midst of these interruptions that he

was glad to escape from them to his farm, his family, and his people, in the country. Here he was kindly favoured with books from the university, and occasionally from London, and here he completed the *History of Baptism*.

This volume was chiefly printed before the author's death, but not published till after that event. It contains a vast fund of historical knowledge on the subject which he professes to treat, and indicates an uncommonly deep and patient examination. The *Ecclesiastical Researches* was a posthumous work, and having been left in an unfinished state, is in many respects imperfect. It contains some curious facts relating to the history of the existence and progress of the principles of religious liberty and a rational faith during the early periods of christianity, and throughout the dark ages. It proves, that these principles were never extinct in the gloomiest times, but that they were cherished in the hearts of a few sincere, secluded worshippers, who were either too remote from the public eye to be observed, or too insignificant to draw down upon themselves the wrath of bigotry, or the rod of persecution. In this respect the *Ecclesiastical Researches* supplies a valuable link in the history of the church. But on the whole, neither this nor the *History of Baptism*, is equal to the author's other performances. While preparing them it is evident his mind had lost much of its former vigour, and was approaching that state

of inefficiency, which it was the melancholy lot of his friends to contemplate in the latter days of his life. However much the cause of truth may have gained by these works, they have added little to the author's fame.

During the last year of Robinson's life, his health and his intellect gave symptoms of a rapid decline. Of this he appeared to be fully aware, for to a friend, who visited him not long before his death, he said, "You are come to see only the shadow of Robert Robinson." In the spring of 1790 he engaged to preach the charity sermons for the benefit of the dissenting schools at Birmingham. He left home on the second day of June in a languid frame of body and mind, but so well did he bear the fatigue of the journey, that he preached twice on the following sabbath. On Monday evening he was taken ill, and his friends were alarmed ; but he gained strength the next day. He retired to rest late in the evening, after eating his supper with a good appetite, and by the ease and cheerfulness of his conversation relieving those around him from all apprehensions of immediate danger. But how frail are the foundations of human confidence, how deceitful the visions of human hope ! When the morning came he was found lifeless in his bed. His features were tranquil, and his spirit seemed to have deserted without a struggle its mortal tenement. His body was interred at Birmingham, and on the sabbath following a discourse adapted to the occasion was preached by Dr Priestley.

In the year 1807, Mr Flower published the *Miscellaneous Works of Robert Robinson*, in four volumes, to which he prefixed a brief memoir of the author's life and writings. This edition comprises all his works, except the History of Baptism, Ecclesiastical Researches, Village Sermons, and Notes to Claude. Among his best writings are the prefaces to the several volumes of Saurin, especially the one on Christian Liberty. The Life of Claude is well written, but a dissertation on public preaching, prefixed to the second volume of Claude's Essay, although it contains some novel thoughts, and valuable facts, is imperfect, and obviously put together from ill digested materials. This remark, indeed, applies to several of his minor pieces, where a broader plan seems to have been laid, than his leisure and opportunities allowed him to fill up.

In selecting articles for the present publication, a range has been taken through the whole of the author's works, nor has any scruple been felt in omitting occasionally such paragraphs, as have no more than a remote bearing on the main object of the piece chosen. The author's desultory mode of writing, and the local topics sometimes introduced, have rendered this latitude necessary.

Among the numerous excellencies of Robinson's style, there are some glaring faults. His imagination is brilliant and active, but it rambles without license, and luxuriates without moderation. He never wants

an apposite figure to illustrate any position, but his choice is frequently ill-judged, and rests on low images unworthy of his subject. This may be accounted for, perhaps, from the circumstances of his education, and from his invariable habit of bringing down his language to the plain country people to whom he preached. Another fault is want of method, and looseness of reasoning. This fault is not perpetual, but it occurs too often. Logic was not his strongest point; he loved not that his fancy should be clogged and hampered by the trammels of the schools; he chose a path of his own, and in his passion for freedom was impatient of the restraints which others have thought so wholesome a branch of discipline, and so useful in checking the exuberance of a prurient imagination, and maturing the decisions of a wayward judgment. It needs hardly be added, that his taste partook of these defects; it is sometimes bad, and often not to be commended.

But these are small imperfections compared with the predominant features of Robinson's mind. The comprehensive views which he took of every subject, the richness and abundance of his thoughts, the power of intellect which weighs in his sentences, the point of his expressions, the varied and playful although erratic excursions of his imagination; and, above all, his sincerity and ardour, the justness of his sentiments, his undisguised manner, his benevolence, charity, and christian temper, his independence and

love of freedom, his unconquerable hostility to all religious domination under whatever name or character, his aversion to bigotry and narrowness, his adherence to the simple truths of the Gospel ; these give a charm and a value to his writings, by which none can fail to be instructed and improved. Whoever would look for pleasure or benefit from the productions of a writer with traits like these, will find his labour well rewarded in perusing the works of Robert Robinson.

ON  
UNIFORMITY IN RELIGION.

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FROM THE ARCANA.

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LEGISLATION is doubtless a sacred thing ; it is a divine imitation of the government of mankind, and is deservedly assigned to the first in birth, property, and skill ; but, the history of all nations will prove, that in parliaments, as in paradise, the serpent has found a way to corrupt and deprave. Ignorance or interest, negligence or pride, have too often prevailed over the generous principles which ought to influence these gods of mankind ; and one age has been driven to repeal the laws of a former ; so that perhaps legislation would furnish a large history of the extravagancies of the human mind, among which an Act of Uniformity would appear one of the greatest. Britons boast of their laws, and in general with great reason ; but some of them blush for their country when they read a law entitled an Act of Uniformity.

It would be foreign from the present purpose to inquire the origin of this law ; it may be more proper

to show that religious uniformity is an impossibility, and that a law of this kind can neither be argued from the light of nature, nor from the holy Scriptures. The idea of uniformity is neither the idea of a philosopher, nor of a christian. The fabrication of this law therefore by men who had a just right to both these titles, implies a moment's absence.

Sound policy requires a legislature to preserve its dignity ; but the dignity of a legislature is never more prostituted than when impracticable edicts are issued. The dignity of legislation depends more on enforcing, than on inventing a law ; the latter may be done by a pedant in his study, but the first must have power, property, magistracy, penalty, in a word, authority to support it ; and this energy is its dignity. Where a tax is levied which the people cannot pay ; where a kind of obedience is required which the people cannot yield ; the legislators are forced to dispense with the obedience required. And what follows ? the people despise a folly which could not foresee, a narrowness of capacity which could not comprehend, a timidity which dares not, or a weakness which cannot enforce its decrees. Did not all Europe deride the absurdity of those magistrates, who, in the reign of Mary, cited to their commissioners, Fagius and Bucer, who were both dead and buried, to appear and give an account of their faith ? and, as if that was not quite ridiculous enough, caused their bones to be dug up out of their graves and burnt for non-appearance !

*Aut nunquam tentes, aut perfice*, is an excellent motto, and nowhere more rationally applied than in the matter of law-making. Had this been attended to, (but who that attends to the transactions of the year 1559, can wonder that it was not?) an *act of uniformity* could never have been passed. The impossibility of enforcing it might have been foreseen; nor ought it to be wondered at if five years after, “her Majesty was informed, that some received the communion kneeling, others standing, others sitting. Some baptized in a font, some in a bason; some signed with the sign of the cross, others not.” In vain the queen attempted to enforce the act by penalties; in vain have succeeding princes endeavoured to enforce it; in vain were the formidable forces of oaths, subscriptions, fines, and prisons brought into the field; cruelty and lenity, madness and moderation, the gentleness of the eighteenth, and the rage of the seventeenth century have been employed in vain; the act stands disobeyed and unrepealed to this day.

Make religion what you will; let it be speculation, let it be practice; make it faith, make it fancy; let it be reason, let it be passion; let it be what you will; *uniformity* in it is not to be expected. Philosophy is a stranger to it, and christianity disowns it.

A philosopher holds that the system of the universe is perfect; that the duty and glory of man is to follow, not force nature; that moral philosophy is nothing but a harmony of the world of spirit with the

world of matter ; that all the fine descriptions of virtue are nothing but essays on this conformity ; thus he proves that moral evil is the production of natural evil, moral good the production of natural good. A philosopher would say to a legislator, as the poet to a man of taste :

To build, to plant, whatever you intend,  
 To rear the column, or the arch to bend,  
 To swell the terrace, or to sink the grot,  
 In all, let NATURE never be forgot.

Give a philosopher a farm, and enjoin him to cultivate it *en philosophe*, he will study the soil, the situation, the seasons, and so on ; and, having comprehended what his farm is capable of, he will improve it accordingly. In the same manner he directs his garden, and every plant in it, never expecting to *gather grapes of thorns, nor figs of thistles*. What would he, yea, what would the unphilosophized farmers say of an *act for the uniformity of husbandry*? An act of *uniformity*, say the honest rustics, what's that? What's that! Why, you must grow nothing but wheat. How! say they, some of our lands are too light, they will produce none ; we can grow rye there indeed ; we have some even not worth ploughing for rye ; however they will serve for a sheep-walk, or at worst for a rabbit-warren. Thus NATURE teaches men to reason and thus they reason right.

Go a step farther. Make this philosopher a tutor, and commit to his tuition a company of youths ; he

will no more think of *uniforming* these young gentlemen, than of teaching his horse to fly, or his parrot to swim. Their geniuses differ, says he, and I must diversify their educations; NATURE has formed this for elocution, and that for action. And, should the blind fondness of parents complain, his answer is ready, *what was I, that I could withstand God?* In short, place such a man in what disinterested sphere you will, and his principles guide his practice; except indeed he should be chosen to represent a county; then probably, not having the fear of philosophy before his eyes, he might vote for an *act of uniformity*.

A law that requires uniformity, either requires men to be of *the same sentiments*, or to practise *the same ceremonies*. Now if it should appear that the first is impossible, the last will fall of itself. For then the question will be, ought two men, who confessedly differ in sentiment, to profess that they agree? Ought an honest man to *be* one thing, and *appear* another? Heaven forbid that any should maintain so dangerous a thesis!

You are a man of extensive knowledge; you know the ancient and modern creeds; you remember that Harry the Eighth enjoined "*all preachers to instruct the people to believe the WHOLE bible, THE THREE CREEDS, the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian, and to interpret all things according to them.*" You know that in Edward the Sixth's reign, TWO-AND-FORTY ARTICLES, drawn up by Cranmer and Ridley.

were thought necessary to be published, *for the avoiding diversity of opinions, and establishing consent touching true religion.* In the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, you know, ELEVEN articles were "set out by order of both archbishops, metropolitans, and the rest of the bishops, for the UNITY of doctrine to be taught and holden of ALL persons, vicars and curates; as well in testification of their COMMON CONSENT in the said doctrine, to the stopping of the mouths of them that go about to slander the ministers of the church for DIVERSITY of judgment, &c." Two years after, all the former were reviewed, and THE WHOLE BIBLE, the THREE creeds, the TWO-AND-FORTY articles, and the ELEVEN articles, were collected into one aggregate sum, and made THIRTY-NINE. Subscription to these has been essential ever since, which subscription is an argument (as his Majesty's declaration says) that ALL clergymen AGREE in the TRUE, usual, literal meaning of the said articles.

Whatever be the *true* meaning of these articles, it is not only certain that clergymen explain, and consequently believe them in different and even contrary senses; but it is also credible that no thirty-nine articles can be invented by the wit of man, which thirty-nine men can exactly agree in. It is not obstinacy, it is necessity.

Suppose the thirty-nine articles to contain a given number of ideas, and, for argument's sake, suppose that number to be fifty; suppose the capacities

of men to differ, as they undoubtedly do, and one man's intelligence to be able to comprehend fifty, a second's five hundred, and a third's but five-and-twenty. The first may subscribe these fifty points of doctrine, but who can confine the genius of the second? Or who can expand the capacity of the last? In minds capable of different operations, no number of points of doctrine can possibly be fixed on as a standard for all; for fix on what number soever you will, there will always be too many for the capacities of some, and for others too few. If this be the case who can establish an uniformity of sentiment? What earthly power can say, "*we will not endure any varying or departing in the least degree?*"

Moreover, it may be asked whether all these points of doctrine be capable of an *equal* degree of evidence; and if not, whether it be possible to enforce an *uniform* degree of belief. Take for example two propositions. "*The Bishop of Rome hath no jurisdiction in this realm of England.*"—"Athanasius's *creed—may be proved by most certain warrants of holy scripture.*"

The first of these propositions is capable of demonstration, but the last is very doubtful; and if the degree of assent ought to be exactly proportional to the degree of evidence, a magistrate, who would establish uniformity, must either give falsehood the evidence of truth, or oblige men to believe a probable as fully as a certain proposition. But if neither of

these can be done, what becomes of uniformity? An uniform assent to fifty propositions, some of which are probable, others certain, and others (*pace tantis talibusque viris*) false!

It is the easiest thing in the world to retire, sit down, invent, and publish a system on any subject. Imagination, always prolific, contributes largely; and it is not difficult to erect an ideal world with Berkeley; an ideal republic with Plato; or in short a philosophical romance of any kind. All sorts of men, poets, philosophers, orators, divines, some of each class have erred on this head; the most ingenious wandering the farthest. But when these romantic machines are applied to real life, to the tillage of a field, the government of a state, the forming of a church, they appear only elaborate trifles; amusive, but not useful. If such ingenious inventors are great men, there is another class greater still, a class whose motto is *DUCE NATURA SEQUAMUR*.

After all, what is uniformity good for? Is it essential to salvation? Is it essential to real piety in this life? Does it make a subject more loyal to his prince? A husband more faithful, or a parent more tender? Cannot a man be honest and just in his dealings without knowing any thing about St Athanasius? Nay, has not this act produced more sophistry and cruelty than any other act of parliament from the reformation to this day? Not secular, but spiritual se-

verity ; not the sophistry of the bar, but the sophistry of the church.

Did the great Supreme govern his empire by an act of uniformity, men might be damned for believing too little, seraphs degraded for believing too much. The creed of the inhabitants of Saturn might be established, and theirs that dwelt in the moon only tolerated. In such a case, what a fine field of controversial glory would open to the divines of these two provinces of the kingdom *de origine mali*. Almighty Father, can a blind belief please thee ? Can thy creatures believe what they cannot perceive the evidence of ? Can all understand the evidence of the same number of truths ? Formed with different organs, educated in different prejudices, dost thou require the same services ? Art thou indeed the *hard master who reapest where thou hast not sowed* ? Far from all thy subjects be such a thought !

Conclude then, that if *God be a rock, and his work perfect*, if VARIETY be the characteristic of all his works, an attempt to establish UNIFORMITY is reversing and destroying all the Creator's glory. To attempt an uniformity of colour, sound, taste, smell, would be a fine undertaking ; but what, pray, will you call an attempt to establish an UNIFORMITY OF THOUGHT ?

You will say, christianity is not the religion of nature, but the religion of revelation ; what therefore may seem absurd to philosophy, may be explained

by christianity. Perhaps the Founder of our holy religion may have established uniformity. If he has, uniformity may be a christian though not a philosophical idea. Well, this shall be inquired in the next letter.

ON THE  
RIGHT OF PRIVATE JUDGMENT.

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FROM THE ARCANA.

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You have often admired that Dedication to the Pope which is prefixed to a piece of Sir Richard Steele's, entitled *An Account of the State of the Roman Catholic Religion throughout the World*.—"Your Holiness," says the writer, "is not perhaps aware, how near the churches of us protestants have at length come to those privileges and perfections, which you boast of as peculiar to your own.—The most sagacious persons have not been able to discover any other difference between us, as to the main *principle* of all doctrine, government, worship, and discipline, but this one, that you *cannot* err in any thing you determine, and we never *do*. That is, in other words, that you are *infallible*, and we *always in the right*. We cannot but esteem the advantage to be exceedingly on our side, in this case, because we have *all the benefits of infallibility, without the absurdity of pretending to it*, and without the uneasy

task of maintaining a point so shocking to the understanding of mankind.”\* This is not a libel ; this is a satire ; the worst is, this satirical stroke is true. The church of Rome refuses the Scriptures to the people ; some protestant churches grant the sight of the book, but retain the meaning. Can you see any difference ? Search or not search, read or not read, the sense is fixed, it is at the peril of your preference to vary.

Whence church governors pretend to derive this right does not signify. It can neither be derived from the nature of christianity, the doctrine or practice of Christ or his Apostles, the condition of man in a state of nature, his condition as a member of society subject to magistracy, nor indeed in England from any thing but *the act of supremacy* ; an act which transferred a power over men’s consciences from the pope to the king. His Majesty Henry the VIIIth, by a master stroke in politics, preferred an indictment against the whole body of the clergy in Westminster Hall, and obtained judgment upon the statute of præmunire, whereby they were all declared to be out of the king’s protection, and to have forfeited all their goods and chattels ; and then pardoned them on two conditions ; first, that they should pay into the exchequer £118,840. Secondly, that they

\* [The curious Dedication, from which these words are quoted, was written by Hoadly. See the whole article in the present Collection, Vol. i. p. 255. ED.]

should yield his Majesty the title of *sole and supreme head of the church of England*; a title which by subsequent declarations was so explained, as to annihilate the right of private judgment, and yet private judgment gave birth to this very act.

Suppose his Majesty Harry the VIIIth, exercising the authority allowed by the act of supremacy, and among other things forming a creed for his subjects; suppose him a man of shallow capacity; would not his creed have been too lean and poor for many of his subjects? And on the contrary, suppose him a man of an exalted genius, of a prodigious stretch of thought; would not his creed have been too rich and full for many more? But the impossibility of exercising such a power was discussed in the last letter; this is to canvass the legality of it.

No mean can be lawful in itself which destroys the end for which it is appointed. Now the end to be obtained is the establishment of christianity. But how can the depriving men of the right of private judgment be a lawful mean of obtaining that end, seeing christianity is a personal obedience to the laws of Christ arising from a conviction of their excellency, and their connexion with certain facts of whose certainty evidence is given, which evidence to be received must be examined? Christianity proposes truths of speculation and truths of practice; if men can examine and ascertain the first by proxy, why not obey the last in the same manner? But who can love or fear, believe or hope, by substitution?

If to deny the right of private judgment be destructive of the nature of christianity in general, it is more remarkably so of the christianity of the reformed churches. The right of private judgment is the very foundation of the Reformation, and without establishing the former in the fullest sense, the latter can be nothing but a faction in the state, a schism in the church. The language of the reformers must be something like this when they proposed subscription. "Gentlemen, the right of private judgment allowed of God, and supported by all kinds of argument, hath been challenged and exercised by men for upwards of five thousand five hundred years; we ourselves have recovered it from the pope, who had unlawfully usurped this right, and *as God, sat in the temple of God*. In virtue of this right, we have examined the holy Scriptures, fixed their meaning, and engaged the king to support a creed, which by delegation we have composed for his Majesty, and for all his subjects. In us the right of private judgment ceases, and should England continue five thousand five hundred years longer, no man shall exercise this right without suffering all the penalties we can inflict. Indeed all Europe is but just emerging from barbarity, learning is but in its infancy, and England is torn and rent with civil dissensions. In all probability, peace may succeed war, learning may diffuse itself, and invigorate to maturity; and a hundred years hence men may arise infinitely more capable than we

are ; but let succeeding ages improve as they will, all men shall *leave the minster where they find it.*" How say you, Sir ? Cranmer stained his archiepiscopal hands with blood ; but could even Cranmer have opened the convocation with such a speech as this ? Yet speak it or no, it is all fact.

The reformers were not to blame for exercising the right of private judgment themselves ; their fault was a denial of the same right to others. They had the highest authority for what they did, deriving it from the doctrine and example of Christ and his Apostles.

Take one, two, or more of our Saviour's doctrines, and ask what magic can there be in subscribing them without examination ? Himself never proposed such a thing, but on the contrary, exhorted his hearers to *search the Scriptures* ; a strange impertinence, unless the right of private judgment be allowed ! Nor did he only exhort the people to judge for themselves, but he also warned his disciples not to usurp that right. *CALL no man your father upon the earth, neither BE YE CALLED masters.* Neither impose your opinions upon others, nor suffer them to impose theirs upon you.

Had Jesus Christ considered the right of private judgment in an unlawful light, he would first have instructed Herod, or Caiaphas, or some of the principal rabbies, and by them he would have converted the nation. But instead of that, he condemns the

doctrines of the church governors, addresses his sermons *ad populum*, gives it as a proof of his mission that *the gospel was preached to the poor*, and constantly protects his followers in the exercise of the right of private judgment. When the disciples plucked and ate the ears of corn, they broke two canons of the established church. It was on a sabbath day; and probably before morning service was over; and the church had determined the illegality of what they did. Used to judge for themselves, they thought the church mistaken in this case, ventured to think for themselves, and acted accordingly. Did not Jesus Christ protect them in their claim?

The Apostles, worthy followers of such a master, went into all nations, preaching a doctrine which no church governors upon earth believed. Did they deny the right of private judgment? If they had, their expeditions would have been in the Quixotic style. Did St Paul write to Corinth? *I speak as to wise men; JUDGE YE what I say*. Did he write to Rome? *Let EVERY MAN be fully persuaded in his OWN mind*. Every body understood this. The populace at Berea, men and women, *searched the Scriptures daily whether these things were so*. The students at Athens desired to *know what the new doctrine* was, of which the Apostle spake; for the purpose of search, no doubt. The magistrates, as Gallio, declared themselves **NO JUDGES IN SUCH MATTERS**. And hence the amazing success of his preaching;

for what himself calls *preaching with demonstration of the spirit, and power*, St Luke calls *reasoning in the synagogue every sabbath day*. Compare Acts xviii. 4. with 1 Cor. ii. 4, 5. Who can account for all this without the right of private judgment ?

Consider the condition of man in a state of nature ; and you will readily grant either that a right of determining for himself is no man's, or every man's right. Vindicate the right to one, and you do it to two, to two hundred, to two thousand, to the whole world ; for all in a state of nature are on a level. There is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, prince nor subject ; the right of one argued from his nature, is the right of all. Whether men forfeit this right in a state of society is another question.

A christian not only cannot, but if he could he ought not to dispose of this right, because not only he cannot be a christian without its exercise, but all the purposes of civil government may be answered without it. The power of the magistrate is an article of importance enough to demand a particular discussion ; let the remaining space of this letter be filled up with inquiring, whether, if this advantage of private judging had been denied to other classes of men, the world would not have sustained infinite damage ?

Choose of the mechanical arts, or of the sciences, which you please, place it in the state in which it was seven hundred, five hundred, or two hundred

years ago ; let its then present state be defined, its *ne plus ultra* determined ; let all future search be prohibited, and what an innumerable multitude of useful discoveries are men deprived of ?

When Columbus first imparted his designs relative to the discovery of America to Ferdinand, king of Spain, his Majesty thought proper to advise with his ecclesiastical counsellors about it. All were against the project, and quoted St Austin, who, in his book *de civitate Dei*, had declared it impossible to pass out of one hemisphere into another ; and had denied that there could be any Antipodes. Seneca, Seneca the heathen, had declared long before, that future ages would discover new worlds, and that Thule would not be the farthest region upon earth. In this case it must be owned that St Austin was an heretic, and Seneca a sound believer. The king and Columbus ventured to dissent, judged for themselves, and found ample reward for so doing, notwithstanding clerical decisions. Indeed, St Austin was not the only person who denied the possibility of Antipodes ; the church denied it, that is, the head, Pope Zachary, denied it for all the members. And this is the order that he sent to his legate Boniface, Archbishop of Mentz, who had accused Virgil, bishop of Saltzburg, of holding the dangerous error of the Antipodes. “ If,” says the head of the church, “ he should be convicted of maintaining that perverse doctrine, which he hath uttered against the

Lord, and against his own soul, that is, that there is another world, other men under the earth, another sun and another moon, call a consistory, degrade him from the honour of the priesthood, *et ab ecclesiâ pelle.*" A fine story for a man to be excommunicated for !

Has not all Europe pitied the fate of Copernicus and Galileo, the fathers of modern astronomy ? The first kept his work near forty years before he dared to publish it, and died immediately after it was presented to him ; the persecution he dreaded being the supposed cause. As to Galileo, he was charged with heresy, first, for affirming that the sun was in the centre ; secondly, that the earth was not in the centre, but had a diurnal motion. His works were burnt, himself imprisoned, and being released was enjoined a penance of repeating once a week for three years the seven penitential psalms. As if the penitential psalms said any thing about Galileo's crime ! But these are some of the fruits of denying the right of private judgment. The pope, the sole judge, was pleased to think that these discoveries in geography and astronomy clashed with certain doctrines established in the church.

What a condition would all Christendom have been in by this time, had not this extravagant claim been denied, and the right of private judgment established in arts and sciences ? All the received systems of music, astronomy, physic, and of all other

arts and sciences, were originally private opinions; probably they would have been so still, had the inventors been prohibited publishing, or the public examining and receiving them. But now, mankind form into societies, impart their own discoveries, offer rewards to other inventors or improvers of arts and sciences; and what follows? What might be expected; the perfection of science. Thus Cicero accounts for that literary pre-eminence which Greece had over Rome; and thus in all nations and in all ages will the same effects follow the same causes; in England as in Rome the maxim is true, *honos alit artes*.

Numerous are the objections made to this doctrine; there are, however, but two that are worth answering. The first is, that christianity is perfect and entire in the holy Scriptures, that herein it differs from human arts and sciences, that therefore the inquisitiveness necessary for the latter would be highly injurious to the former. To which it may be justly answered, that many people doubt this, as the church of Rome, whose notion is too fully expressed by Cardinal Hosius, who said that the Scriptures were of no more authority than Æsop's fables, were it not for the authority of the church; as the people called Quakers, who consider the holy Scriptures as a secondary rule subordinate to the spirit; and many others wholly deny their divinity. Now ought not all these people to be allowed the liberty of examining the proofs of the divinity and perfection of the

Bible? For private judgment which is their malady is also their only medicine. But let the perfection of the holy canon be granted. It will amount to no more than granting the perfection of the works of nature. In both, *invisible things, even the eternal power and Godhead* are to be *seen and UNDERSTOOD by the things that are made*. The word of revelation, like the works of nature, presents objects to view, but objects to be examined and understood; and how can this be without the right of private judgment?

You say the Scriptures give a perfect account of the nature of God, the nature of man, the vanity of the life that now is, the certainty of the life that is to come; but how is another man to know this, unless you allow him to examine and determine for himself? It may be a perfect rule, it may be a subordinate rule, it may be a false rule, it may be no rule at all, for any thing he knows who must not examine, or if he examines must not determine; for to retain the meaning is to retain the book; and there is no real difference between denying the examination and denying the conclusion. You know the story of father Fulgentio, preaching at Venice on Pilate's question, *What is truth?* He told his hearers that at last after many searches he had found it out, and held out a New Testament, and said, that there it was in his hand; but then he put it in his pocket, and coldly said; *But the book is prohibited*. Now what great difference would there have been, if he

had said, *You may read the book, but its true meaning is prohibited?* Yet this is what all the Arminian clergy in England must say, if they speak consistently with themselves; for in the opinion of all impartial judges the established religion is Calvinism.

The other objection is, that this will open a door to all sorts of heresies, and the truth will be oppressed and disappear. Indeed! And is truth such a timorous, cowardly thing? What idle fears are these! Should an honest man be taxed with dissoluteness and impiety, and should any propose to him a fair trial before impartial judges, would he be frightened at it, think you? Christianity is not to be loaded with calumnies, she is so already, her only hope is a fair trial.

But to abridge the matter. Do not facts contradict this? Is not the church of Rome full of heresy? Have not the Gospel and the right of private judgment gone hand in hand in the reformation? Are the power and promise of God nothing? Has he not engaged to support his church? Does not every thing proposed to men relate to some operation of their minds? Does not a rational fancy protect the truth of imagery in poetry, and an honest conscience religion? Strange errors have been proposed which the penetration of church governors could neither foresee, nor provide against; and it has happened to them as to monstrous images in poems; they are dead, and buried, and exploded, and the public taste not injured thereby.

ON THE  
NATURE AND OBJECTS  
OF  
**BAPTISM,**  
AS REGARDING CHURCH FELLOWSHIP.

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[THE article here selected makes a part only of an essay entitled, *The General Doctrine of Toleration applied to the particular Case of Free Communion*. It has a direct reference to that portion of the Baptist denomination, who hold to what is called close communion, or the doctrine, that no persons are qualified to be members of a christian church, who have not been baptized by immersion. The author pleads for a mixed communion, by which persons baptized in infancy are received into Baptist churches, provided such persons are satisfied with the validity of their own baptism, as having in their opinion been performed according to the spirit and intention of the Gospel.

Robinson argues, that this kind of fellowship is allowable, because the New Testament nowhere enjoins any particular mode of baptism, as an absolutely essential qualification for being a member of the true church of Christ. He goes farther, and

proves, that there is no positive command requiring baptism in any form, as a prerequisite for church communion. This is left to the conscience and judgment of every christian. Any one sincerely believing the Gospel, and thinking it his duty to approach the Lord's table, cannot be rightfully denied this privilege, although he may not be convinced that the law of Christ demands his submission to the ordinance of baptism. The author considers both of the ordinances as of divine institution, and as designed for every christian; but at the same time he does not suppose there is any immediate connexion between them, nor that any christian minister or church has a right to refuse one to a brother, who may desire it, because he cannot see his way clear to participate of both. There is as much impropriety in withholding the Lord's supper till baptism be performed, as there would be in refusing baptism till the person had become a communicant. Neither the Saviour nor the Apostles have declared, that either of these shall precede the other, nor that one shall be denied, if the other have not been complied with.

Such are the views of the author as expressed at large in this essay, where they are unfolded with his usual freedom and perspicuity, and with more than his usual method, closeness of thought, and sound argument. This may be ranked among his best specimens of composition, and has almost none of his peculiar defects. He has succeeded in checking the busy meddlings of his fancy, which, on other occasions, is too apt to lead him astray, and prove a treacherous guide to his taste and judgment. He thought the subject of high importance, as it truly is, in its bearing on the principles and practice of christian fellowship. If his views are correct, and he

brings scripture and reason to prove them so, many of the formidable barriers, which have been raised to keep christians asunder, to frighten the timid and harden the obstinate, to scatter the brands of discord and heat the fire of persecution, may be pulled down, and the ground left open and free where all the sincere disciples of Jesus may meet in love and peace, in fellowship and kind feeling.

One head of the essay relating to the history of the controversy concerning free communion, among the Baptists, and also a few closing reflections, are omitted, as not immediately connected with the subject of baptism, to which the parts of the essay here given are confined.]

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THE most diligent and upright disciples of Jesus Christ have always entertained, and do yet entertain various sentiments concerning articles of faith and modes of divine worship, and there are but *two* ways of acting among christians in this case.

The first, which the far greater part profess to pursue, is that of obtaining, some way or other, unity of faith, and uniformity of practice. In the papal corporation, and in some reformed communities, riches and power contend with weakness and want to silence scruples, and to force a real or professed uniformity. In some of our nonconformist churches, learning, argument, and beneficence are employed to produce the same effect. At length, however, unquestionable facts prove, that, how upright soever the attempt may be, the end is unattainable. The mind of man, uncontrolled in its operations, and for

ever diversifying its modes of thinking, refuses to submit to restraint, and it is the virtue of such a mind to avow its refusal.

If uniformity cannot be obtained, say the other, and the smaller part of christians, there remains only one thing for us to do ; we must so constitute our churches as to *allow* variety of sentiment and practice, and by so doing acknowledge the force of nature for the voice of God. Let us put, say they, *toleration* in the place of uniformity ; *this* can never be produced ; but *that* lies within the reach of every society.

The English nonconformists have, of all mankind, best understood, and most practised christian liberty ; but there have arisen in many of their churches, as may naturally be supposed of men zealous for their religious principles, doubts and debates concerning the *extent* of that toleration, which christian liberty implies, but which, however, ought not to run into licentiousness, as it would if it went so far as to hazard the purity of gospel worship and order.

Under this consideration comes the well known controversy among our Baptist congregations, whether churches consisting of members all baptized by immersion on a profession of faith and repentance, ought to admit into their fellowship such persons as profess faith and repentance, and desire communion with them, but refuse to be baptized by immersion, because they account they have been rightly bap-

tized by sprinkling in their infancy. To this question, and to this only, we shall confine our attention.

This whole debate, I should suppose, may be divided into a case of *fact* and a case of *right*.

**CASE OF FACT.** On the one hand, it is a matter of fact, that many sincere disciples of Christ declare, that, having renounced all authority except that of the holy Scriptures to decide in all matters of faith and practice, and having searched the Scriptures with all the diligence and rectitude, of which they are capable, they think infant baptism of divine appointment, and rightly performed by sprinkling water on the face.

It is a matter of fact, that many baptist churches do conscientiously admit such persons into their fellowship.

It is also a fact, that these churches affirm, and they are best capable of giving evidence in this case, that no inconvenience has arisen to them from the mixture of their communion. The writer of this has been a member of such a church more than twenty years, but has never heard of the least disadvantage arising to the community from it, and he has received a like attestation from the ministers of several other mixed churches.

Further, it is a fact, that these members perform all the duties of church fellowship, glorify God in their lives and conversations, and support the charac-

ter of christians as honourably as the baptist brethren do.

Moreover, it is a matter of fact, that some churches have been mixed from before the time of the civil war in the reign of Charles I. when the baptists first made their public appearance in England.

In fine, it is an undeniable fact, that, during the time of the great papal apostacy, while churches were congregated in private for fear of prelatical persecution, believers, who held infant baptism, and believers, who disowned it, were united in the same community, as ancient manuscripts and authentic records abundantly prove.

On the other hand, it is certain, that, from the first public appearance of baptist churches in England, many have refused, and to this day continue to refuse to admit into their fellowship all manner of persons, however qualified in other respects, who have not been baptized by immersion on their own profession of faith and repentance.

It is equally true, that all these baptists allow the piety and virtue of unbaptized believers, account them members of the mystical body of Christ, and some of them possessors of knowledge and piety far superior to their own, and they hold themselves bound to discharge every kind office to them, except this one of admitting them to church fellowship.

It is a fact, that these churches do not believe baptism a saving ordinance, nor do they think it a test of

true religion, nor do they hold that unbaptized believers ought not to be tolerated in a state, nor do they deny any intelligent being the right of private judgment; they only refuse to tolerate infant baptism in their own churches.

It is also a clear fact, that these baptists affirm, their refusal does not proceed from wilful ignorance, obstinacy, spirit of party, bigotry, or any other illiberal disposition; but from a fear of offending God by acting without a sufficient warrant from his written word, the rule of all religious conduct. Their testimony ought to be admitted, because they are the best judges of their own motives, because the general conduct of their lives confirms their testimony, and because (of some of them it must be allowed) they extend candour and compliments and polite professions of liberality of sentiment far, very far indeed, beyond what some of their brethren, who hold free communion, pretend to do.

Moreover, it is a fact unquestionable, that, as some independent churches practising free communion have admitted so many baptists members, that the latter have in time formed a great majority, who have chosen a baptist minister, through whose influence the church has become a baptist church; so, on the contrary, some baptist churches holding free communion have admitted so many unbaptized members, that the churches have in time chosen ministers, who held infant baptism, and lost the ordinance of baptism by immersion.

Lastly, it is matter of fact, that the primitive churches, those in Greece, that at Rome, and all others, were originally constituted baptist churches, and that they lost the ordinance of baptism, along with the doctrines of the Gospel, and the very nature and essence of christian churches, not by practising a wise toleration towards men of allowed piety, but by setting up certain external qualifications of church members, which in time became tests of orthodoxy, to which wicked men could and did conform, under pretence of authority from Christ to establish uniformity.

All these are *facts*, but none of these constitute *christian law*, and, if we would ascertain what is right, we must distinguish what *is* from what *ought to be*.

**CASE OF RIGHT.** The question before us is, **RIGHT** to church fellowship, and our inquiry must necessarily be, What makes it just and right for churches to admit of mixed communion? The proper answer to this inquiry, on the allowed principles of all disputants, is, **THE REVEALED WILL OF JESUS CHRIST**, the original projector of church fellowship, and the sole legislator in all the assemblies of his saints.

In strict adherence to this truly protestant ground of action, and in order to try out the question as fairly and clearly as we can, we will ascertain *the judge* of the controversy, and *the law* of the case; and in

order to this we will turn the subject on both sides, and first show negatively what does *not* make the law of the case, and then positively what *does*.

FIRST, then, nothing can be determined concerning the right in question from the *universal consent*, real or pretended, *of men out of our own community*.

We divide these into *four* classes, and, although we have all due regard for them, yet we reject each apart, and all together, as judges pronouncing law in this case.

1. The *fathers* are incompetent, for, if any thing in their writings looks like the case before us, it is the case of heretical baptism; but the amount of all our inquiries on this article would be, that one says yea, and another says nay, and both refer us to Jesus Christ, and so we leave off where we began.

2. *Roman Catholics*, both in council and out of it, are incompetent; for their proper work is not investigation of truth, much less determining protestant controversies; but submission to infallible papal authority.

3. *Polemical divines, and pious ones too, in established reformed churches*, utter no law here. The case in hand never came, never could come seriously before them, and, if it had, having previously resigned the right of judging for themselves by subscribing a religious test, they could not prudently, or even uprightly, give an opinion in direct contradiction to it. All baptists judge, that these divines are mistaken in

every part of baptism, in the nature, the subject, the mode, and the end of it, and this is one reason of their dissent from them; they cannot therefore consistently allow their opinions on baptism and church government the force of law.

4. *Learned critics*, foreign or domestic, have no occasion to interfere in this case, nor can they be offended at our affirming, that the christian church stands in no need of their assistance in this point now before them, for this plain reason, it is not a learned question. It would be a great misfortune to a company of plain, homely christians in church fellowship, if any case pertaining to life and godliness must cost fifteen hundred pounds worth of Latin and Greek to make it evident and clear.

Should all these four classes of writers agree to make baptism necessary to salvation, necessary to a civil office, necessary to receiving the Lord's supper, necessary to the honour of being enrolled in the parish register while we live, and necessary to that of putrifying among our neighbours after we are dead, and should any baptist so far forget himself as to urge this universal consent as argument why *we* should not admit the persons in question to the Lord's table; I will venture to say, it would be an unfair appeal to the sheepishness of some, and the modesty of others, in a case of conscience, where only scripture is law, and Christ alone is judge.

SECONDLY, nothing can be argued for or against this right from the *great names in our own churches* employed in this controversy. Gale and Foster, Bunyan and Kiffin, along with all the moderns, before whom the case actually came, and who had personal interest in deciding it, are respectable as counsel pleading on different sides of the question, and we calmly attend to what they say ; but none of their opinions constitute the *law* of the case.

THIRDLY, nothing can be determined for it from *general notions* of benevolence and usefulness, nor against it from zealous and upright intentions of preserving purity of doctrine and order ; for in a case that comes under written revealed law, as the constitution of christian churches evidently does, general dispositions must be regulated by particular directions.

FOURTHLY, neither can one side infer the right in question from *any particular case* mentioned in the New Testament, nor can the other support their plea against it by the silence of the New Testament ; for the truth is, infant baptism was not then known, and consequently the case of admitting to fellowship persons baptized in infancy does not occur there.

FIFTHLY, *no accidental circumstances* can determine this matter. There have fallen into this controversy, as into all others, a collection of what I call accidental circumstances, and which have been

argued upon, and have led off the attention of the inquirer from the case in hand. For example ;

1. *Cases* have been supposed and urged, as that of admitting Jesuits, and Quakers, and others ; but these suppositions prove nothing. Lawyers say truly, there is nothing so hard to find, as a case in point. These cases are not in point, for they never did happen, they never can happen, and were they to happen they would not be *this* case, and they must be investigated on other principles, and rejected for other reasons. Neither supposed cases urged on one side, nor real cases allowed on the other, constitute the law of this case.

2. *The motives, tempers, and views* of the disputants decide nothing. A sour, surly man may growl and grumble truth, a well bred man may warble melodious nonsense, a sincere disputant may be a very silly fellow, and a man right in his principles may be wrong in his motives of defending them.

3. *Mistakes and self-contradictions* in writers yield no argument against the general truth, which they are defending. If upright men sometimes in the heat of controversy forget themselves, we should do worse than they, were we to magnify their frailty into a crime, and their crime into a rule of action. On the other hand, an argument may be uniform, and free from self-contradiction, and yet it may not hit the case.

4. *Frightful consequences*, affixed by one writer to the arguments of another, ought not to be urged as decisive reasoning constituting the law of a case.

In short, the right or wrong of this case is determinable only by the written revealed will of God, a test of truth, which all the parties will allow.

Having thus cleared the court of a bustling, noisy crowd, that do no good because they give no evidence, and do a deal of harm because they perplex the question by throwing in a quantity of foreign matter, let us proceed to investigate what is the law of *Christ* in this case.

We affirm, then, that it is JUST, and RIGHT, and agreeable to the revealed will of Christ, that Baptist churches should admit into their fellowship such persons as desire admission on profession of faith and repentance, although they refuse to be baptized by immersion, because they sincerely believe they have been rightly baptized by sprinkling in their infancy.

By way of explanation, I beg leave to distinguish what our divines call the *esse*, or the *being* of a church, from the *melius esse*, or *best being* of one; for, although I affirm such a mixt church to be a rightly constituted church, yet I do not say its constitution is so perfect as that of the primitive churches. A church that tolerates is a good church; but a church that has no errors to tolerate is a better. We do not, therefore, blame those churches, which

were never required to admit unbaptized believers, for maintaining strict communion; we only say, where the requisition is made, a compliance with it is just and right.

In support of this sentiment, we beg leave to offer *two sorts* of arguments, the first taken from those *general principles of analogy*, on which, the Scriptures declare, the christian church is founded; and the second from the *express laws of Jesus Christ* recorded in scripture for the regulation of our conduct.

God is an intelligent being. An intelligent being exercises his intelligence when he constructs any exterior work, and the work will resemble the intelligence of its maker. A wise and beneficent being will naturally and necessarily form a work full of beneficence and wisdom. Should a perfect being create a world, it would be a world expressive of his invisible perfections; should he form a church in this world, it would be a church constituted on similar principles; and, if skill and compassion were excellencies of his nature, compassion and skill might be expected in the construction of his church. There would be an analogy, or resemblance, between the ties of nature and the social bonds of grace.

We find, on reading the New Testament, that God is the author of christianity, the creator of the christian church, that he hath displayed the eminence of his perfections in the construction of it, and that

he hath inviolably preserved an analogy between the natural and preternatural worlds. This is the true ground of all the parables, in which Christ taught his heavenly doctrine, and of all the discourses, by which he displayed the conduct of God to men under resemblances of a father and his sons, a shepherd and his flock, a husbandman and his lands, and so on. For the same reasons, we are expressly told of the aboundings, or abundance, of the wisdom and prudence, the power and pity, the forbearance and patience, love and compassion of God toward his church. He exercises the same attributes in the church as in the world, with this only difference, the display is brightest in the first. This is what we call analogy, and from this general source we derive many particular arguments from the nature and fitness of things in defence of our proposition.

*First* ; It is just, and right, and agreeable to the nature and fitness of things, that we should *diminish evils and difficulties, which we are not able wholly to remove*. There are in nature a thousand obstacles in the way of every just pursuit. Agriculture, commerce, navigation, literature, government, civil and domestic, are all attended with difficulties, some of which threaten the subversion of the whole. It should seem better, at first sight, that no obstacles should exist to discourage such just and laudable pursuits ; but they do exist, and we cannot help their existence, yea, perhaps their existence may be neces-

sary to give being and exercise to some of the finest abilities and virtues of mankind.

Our skill, and our duty too, consist neither in wholly removing these evils, for that is not in our power, nor in remaining plaintive and inactive, doing nothing where much may be done, though not all we wish ; but in diminishing these ills, and in making the most and best of such materials as providence hath actually put into our hands. Every projector of a great design exercises his penetration in foreseeing what obstacles may obstruct the execution of it, and much of his skill lies in providing against them.

We apply this to the case in hand. Christianity is highly fitted, and admirably adapted to the actual state and condition of men and things in this world. It was excellently said by Jesus Christ, *The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath*, implying that positive religion was so contrived as to yield in certain cases to natural and necessary contingencies. The man, who uses all diligence to obtain evidence of believers' baptism, and cannot obtain it, and yet desires admission to the Lord's table, throws a difficulty in the way of the church, a difficulty too, which they cannot remove ; but the question is, can they not diminish it ? It hath pleased God to give this man faith in Christ and moral obedience ; but it does not please him to give him light into adult baptism. He does not belong to the world, he does not desire to trouble the church, he only

wishes for a peaceable admission to fellowship; we cannot give him knowledge, we cannot baptize him without it; but we can admit him to the Lord's table, and so build God's house with the best materials we have. It is a case of insurmountable difficulty; it cannot be wholly removed; but it may be diminished. This argument is taken from that *analogy* which there evidently is between the economy of nature and that of christianity; and, if it be a less evil for an unbaptized believer to be incorporated in the church than to lie exposed in the world, the reasoning is valid.

*Secondly*; It is fit, and right, and agreeable to the nature of things, that there should be *no disqualification where there is no crime*. On this principle we argue against a sacramental test in the episcopal church. Christian churches are free states, and full fellowship is the new birthright of every regenerate man. The candidate for fellowship, who has examined believers' baptism by immersion, and cannot obtain evidence of the truth of it, is indeed in a state in which his knowledge is imperfect; but his imperfection is innocent, because he hath exercised all the ability and virtue he has, and his ignorance is involuntary, yea, perhaps he may have exercised ten times more industry and application, though without success, than many others, who have obtained evidence. To deny church fellowship to persons of genuine virtue, and of, it may be, superior virtue too, is to affix a disgrace and inflict a punishment both without

an offence, and in violation of a right. This is a case of involuntary error, and there is, there can be no moral turpitude in it. Where there is allowed virtue in the general course of a man's actions, and no moral evil in one particular imperfection, it is not imaginable that any punishment should be inflicted, or any benefit of society denied. Now as we all agree, that Christ hath constituted his church on principles of equity, it should seem, this argument is valid and of force.

*Thirdly* ; It is just, and right, and agreeable to the nature of things, that *all men should be placed in that condition, in which they can do most good.* By this rule we determine what is usually denominated a *call in providence*, and an all-sufficient rule it is. Now, by excluding the persons in question from church fellowship, we deprive the church of many wise and worthy members, who might become extremely useful, and we deny them the liberty of exercising such abilities as God gave them for the public edification. If Christ constituted his church on a principle of promoting the greatest *social* good, it should seem, this argument also ought to have its weight.

*Fourthly* ; It is just and right in virtuous communities, that *a visible difference should be put between the righteous and the wicked.* If hatred of sin and love of holiness were principles of constructing the christian church, as they certainly were, this argument too is good. The candidate in question is not

rejected on account of any thing in common with the rest of exempt; he is neither an infidel, nor an immoral man, yet he is as really excluded as they are. This is a confounding of characters essentially different, which should seem unwarrantable in a society professedly incorporated for the purpose of separating and distinguishing them. Shall *he that sweareth*, and *he that feareth an oath*, be held at equal distance from the Lord's table, and all the other benefits of church fellowship?

*Fifthly*; It would argue *great unfitness in any scheme of religion for this world, if it made no provision for human imperfections*. If a plan of religion provided for the wilful perpetration of vice, it would be a scheme fit for infernal spirits. If it provided only for perfect knowledge and virtue, it would be a plan fit for only angels to realize; but if, while it provided for eminent attainments of knowledge and goodness, it provided also for imperfections, that is, for small and inferior degrees of science and moral excellence; if it provided for increase of knowledge and virtue, though accompanied with much ignorance and weakness, then would it commend itself for a divine system fitted by perfect wisdom and goodness for frail, imperfect men. The candidates, for whom we plead, are allowed to possess that general excellence, a supreme love to truth and virtue, from which all knowledge and all good actions proceed; but they have not yet attained those peculiar exercises of it,

which produce some particular parts of obedience ; however, it seems fit and right, that they should be permitted to perform all they do know, and patiently borne with till they are able to make further progress. If Jesus Christ constituted his church on principles of *patience* and forbearance, condescension and long-suffering, it should seem, this argument also ought to have some authority over us.

From arguments of this sort, and we omit many which might be adduced, there arises a high probability, that it is just and right for christian churches to admit of free communion.

Were these reasonings on the nature of things alone, and were they unconnected with revelation, and unsupported by it, they would come under the description of general dispositions not regulated by particular directions, and consequently they ought not to be urged in this controversy as decisive in point of right or law ; but when we examine the Scriptures, and find, that christianity is actually constituted on these principles, that these are adopted as grounds of the divine conduct to us and rules of our actions to one another, we have a right to conclude, that these arguments are fair, valid, and conclusive.

We have not hesitated to affirm, that God was the original projector of those associated bodies of men for divine worship, which we call christian churches. We have made no scruple of affirming that the original projector formed these churches on principles of

wisdom, equity, compassion, love of holiness, and so on. We have not quoted passages of scripture to prove this ; for the point is beyond contradiction, and the quotations would be endless. If these should be accounted only probable arguments, we trust the next will produce demonstration.

Our second class of arguments we take from EXPRESS LAWS OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP, contained in the written revealed will of our excellent legislator.

*First ;* We argue from his *law of exclusion*. There are in the New Testament many lists of persons, who may not be admitted into the christian church in this world, and who will be denied an entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Some of these lists are general, others descend to particulars ; but there is no mention of the persons now before us in any of them. Had the law of exclusion been made by a legislator who could not pry into futurity, it might be imagined he did not foresee the case, he did not know that such persons would ever appear ; but there is no room to urge this ; for our lawgiver was a prophet, and a tender prophet, who foresaw all future periods and persons, and forewarned his church of every thing that would endanger the constitution of it.

The natural tendency of every good man is to associate with other good men, and to go with them into the enjoyment of every immunity, that belongs to

their society ; and his apparent right to enjoy all the comforts, as well as to suffer all the crosses of his condition is so highly probable, that nothing less than a clear, positive, express law of exclusion seems necessary to empower any church to refuse his claim. If there be no such law, and none such there is, we cannot help saying to the candidate before us,—*Come in, thou blessed of the Lord ; wherefore standest thou without ?*

*Secondly ;* We argue from his *law of toleration*. The particular case of the persons in question, we allow, is not mentioned in the New Testament ; but a general law including this, and many more such cases, is published, and answers the end better than the insertion of any particular case could have done. This law is, that all christians should enjoy unmolested IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH the right of private judgment. In a multitude of passages in the New Testament, the disciples of Christ are exhorted to judge for themselves in all matters of religion and conscience, and this right of self-determination is vindicated not only against magistrates, philosophers, and rabbies, but against fellow members, as in the xivth of romans ; and even against inspired Apostles, as in the 8th and 10th verses of the xxiiid of Matthew. By this law we are bound to allow a universal toleration in all matters, that do not destroy the essence of gospel worship.

Before we proceed it will be necessary to explain our meaning, and an answer to three plain questions will sufficiently do so. First, *What* do we plead for? We answer, A free toleration of the right of private judgment. There is in our churches, strictly speaking, no such thing as public faith; our standard of faith is the holy Scripture, and whatever we publish beside are the private sentiments of different men, and different communities; and it is questionable whether any two churches so exactly agree as *bonâ fide* to constitute an uniformity. Now we plead for the allowance of this right to unbaptized believers. What one of our churches allows to another of our churches, that, we suppose, each church ought to allow to all its own members, and to all good men. Secondly, *Where* do we plead for the free exercise of this right to be tolerated? We answer, not in the state, that our civil governors allow, but in the church. We do not only affirm, that unbaptized believers have a natural right to freedom in Britain, so that they may congregate, and form churches of their own faith and order; but we affirm, that they have a scriptural right to their own faith and order in our churches. It will be objected, this would destroy our own faith and order. In answer to this, we propose a third question,—*How far* is this toleration to extend, and where shall we draw the line? We answer, in general, toleration ought to extend as far as is consis-

tent with purity of faith and order ; and of this each church ought to judge for itself.

If we descend to particulars, we must observe, that the objects of toleration are two, errors of faith, and irregularities of practice. In regard to faith, we must distinguish between the *facts* recorded in scripture, such as the birth, life, miracles, death, resurrection, ascension, second coming, judgment, and universal dominion of Christ, from *reasonings* upon these facts ; they are the latter that are the proper objects of toleration. He who denies the facts is an infidel, he does not believe the record God has given of his Son, and consequently he is not a disciple of Christ, and so can have no claim to sit at his table. A man, who does believe the facts, but who reasons obliquely upon them, is a believer, and he ought to be tolerated though he is an inconclusive reasoner. The other object of toleration is irregularity of practice. Christian obedience is submission to two sorts of precepts, the one moral, the other positive. The object of toleration in moral obedience is that sort of improper action, which proceeds not from malice, but from infirmity. The object of toleration in positive obedience is that sort of irregularity, which proceeds from innocent mental error. Now this kind of toleration, while it provides for the peace and prosperity of the church, and for the ease of tender consciences, neither destroys the essence of christianity nor the purity of gospel worship.

In effect, we do tolerate in all our churches each of these imperfections.

1. In regard to *faith*. A church believing the mediation of Jesus Christ, which is a fact, admits a believer of this fact to fellowship, although he thinks it was necessary in order to this mediation that the human soul of Christ should pre-exist his incarnation. In such a case the church distinguishes between the fact, that Christ is a mediator, which the member believes, and his false reasoning upon the fact, that it was necessary the human soul of Christ should be first created, and that it should exist in heaven before his incarnation, in order to mediate between God and man in behalf of the Old Testament saints. The same may be said of many other cases. We repeat it again, the clear facts recorded in scripture are not objects of toleration, and a denier of them is an infidel; but errors in reasoning concerning these facts, such as the time and mode of their existence, and so on, are objects of toleration, and of a toleration every way safe to the facts themselves.

2. In regard to the toleration of *moral* irregularities, it is certain we are obliged to make, and do actually make the distinction above mentioned. We exclude members for such immoral actions as proceed from malice, and hatred of virtue; but we never think of expelling any for such immoral actions as proceed from infirmity. For example. *Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.*

is a moral law, founded in the nature and fitness of things ; and should any member of our churches, with malicious motives, and on purpose to injure another, violate this law, we should expel him as a hater of morality, an enemy to the rights of all mankind, whom he attacked in the one injured person ; but if another, without any apparent malice, and merely to gratify a silly infirmity, a love of tattling and chattering, take up a false report rashly, and tell it carelessly to the injury of his brother, we should not expel this man. We should pity him, and pray for him, and exhort him to exercise more caution for the future ; and, though we knew he had not such an absolute government of his tongue as the law required, yet we should tolerate him, and such a toleration would not in the least endanger the law.

3. In respect to irregularities in *obedience to positive precepts*, we all exercise a toleration of these in an ample manner, except in the one article before us, to which some of us object. Our churches have never yet agreed on the number of positive institutes. All hold two, Baptism and the Lord's supper ; some add a third, the Sunday sabbath ; others several more, as worshipping God by singing, anointing the sick with oil, abstaining from things strangled and from blood, and so on. We tolerate irregularities in all these cases, and we have instances of pastors, who observe the Jewish sabbath, exercising the pastoral office with the highest honour both to the church

and themselves, in congregations that profane the Jewish sabbath, and hold the Sunday sabbath to be a positive divine institute. Now as all positive institutes proceed from the same legislator, and ought all to be treated with equal reverence, and as we tolerate irregularities in some of them without any danger to the general law of obedience to positive religion, what imaginable good reason can be produced for making an exception in the case of unbaptized believers ?

This kind of toleration is professedly treated of in the xivth chapter of Romans, and the inspired Apostle defends it on the principles which we have laid down. There is, he affirms, no moral turpitude in mental errors, and the toleration of them is perfectly consistent with the safety of the church, the purity of the faith, and the order of divine worship.

The believer who was baptized in his infancy, claims a right to church fellowship ; the church judges he has not been baptized, but he judges he has been baptized in his infancy by sprinkling according to Christ's institution. Now this is his own case ; it is a case of innocent irregularity in obeying a positive institute, and he ought to be allowed to judge for himself. Here the fort of those who refuse admission to such members, falls to the ground. They reason thus. All churches require persons to be baptized before they admit them to the Lord's supper ; now we deny that infant sprinkling is bap-

tism ; we therefore require persons, who have been sprinkled in infancy, to be baptized by immersion. When people reason thus for themselves they reason rightly ; but when they reason thus for another person they claim a right of judging for him, and consequently deny him that liberty of self-judging, which they themselves exercise under a law, which the common legislator ordained alike for both. We do not then plead for the admission of such a person because we think he hath been baptized, for in our opinion he hath not ; but because he judges he has been baptized ; and we have no authority to deprive him of the right of private judgment, but on the contrary we are expressly commanded to allow him the liberty of determining for himself.

If any reply, we allow his right of private judgment, and he may join a church of his own sentiments ; we answer, that does not alter the case ; you are required to allow the exercise of private judgment *in* your own community, not out of it, where your allowance and disallowance operate nothing.

Agreeably to this principle, when I have had the honour to assist in forming a christian church intending to hold mixed communion, I have first embodied the baptists, and they have afterwards admitted believers, who were satisfied with their infant baptism, on the footing of toleration. The whole christian church, in my opinion, was thus *planted in this likeness of Christ's death*, and at the same time the laws

of christian liberty and toleration were delivered to them to be made use of as the exigencies of the times should require.

We will conclude this head with two remarks.

1. When an unbaptized believer appears before the brethren at a church meeting, and, professing faith and repentance, requires admission into church fellowship, the true question before the church is not whether he have been baptized, but whether he may judge for himself. 2. No instance can be produced of any Apostle presuming to judge for any primitive christian, and making his opinion the ground of that christian's conduct. On the contrary, instances may be produced of an inspired Apostle's declaring himself of one opinion on positive institutes, and pleading for the liberty of christians to embrace another. *I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him that esteemeth any thing unclean, to him it is unclean. Let every man be persuaded in his own mind.*

*Thirdly;* Let us attend to *the law of baptism itself* in its original institution. While we pay all due reverence to a divine institute, we ought not to make more of it than the instructor made; neither ought we to remove it from that place in which his wisdom set it. Baptism has been called an *initiating* ordinance, that is, an ordinance by which we enter into something. Let us remember this is not a scriptural definition of baptism, nor is it admissible except in a

qualified sense. It certainly was not an ordinance by which the first baptists entered into church fellowship ; for into what church did the disciples of John enter by baptism ? Was Jesus Christ admitted a member of a christian church by baptism ? Or into what church did the Eunuch enter, when Philip alone baptized him in the desert. Believers indeed entered on a public profession of christianity in general by baptism, and that was all. If some were added to the church immediately after baptism, it may not be amiss to recollect, that it was immediately after a sermon too, and if this connexion of events afforded any argument for the nature and place of baptism, it might as well be applied to the nature and place of a sermon, and preaching might be denominated an initiating ordinance. The truth is, preaching produced conversion, conversion baptism, baptism acquaintance and conversation with church members, and conversation church fellowship. When we receive and use an ordinance for all the ends for which it was instituted, we have done all that is required of us ; but when we employ it to other ends, the least that can be said of us is, we are wise above what is written. Zeal may animate us ; but even zeal, when it does not follow knowledge, will misguide us.

General and vague as this description of the law of baptism is, it is sufficient for all the ends, for which we produce it ; however, it may serve to elucidate our meaning, if we be more explicit.

We affirm, then, that baptism is not a *church* ordinance, that it is not naturally, necessarily, and actually connected with church fellowship, and consequently that the doctrine of *initiating* into the christian church by baptism is a confused association of ideas, derived from masters whose disciples it is no honour to be.

Baptism, we allow, is a positive institute of the New Testament, and ought to be practised till the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; but, that it is not a New Testament *church* ordinance is clear, for it was administered several years before the Jewish economy was dissolved, and consequently before there were any such congregated societies in the world as we call christian churches. When John the Baptist came first preaching and baptizing, Jesus, who afterward founded the christian church, lived a private life at Nazareth; he did not enter on his ministry till the death of John, and he did not dissolve the Jewish ecclesiastical state till his own death. People were baptized all this time on a general profession of faith in the Messiah, and repentance towards God. This notion of baptism was preserved after the resurrection of Christ, and after christian churches had been congregated by his order, as appears by the baptism of the Eunuch, who indeed made a profession of faith, but was not associated to any particular christian church.

Much has been said, in pretended proof of the place of baptism, concerning the order of Christ's words in that commission to baptize, which he gave his Apostles; it is recorded in the last chapter of Matthew; but, if this trite method of reasoning amounted to argument, we might form one thus. Christ instituted the Lord's supper before his death. Christ made baptism a positive christian institute after his resurrection. Therefore the Lord's supper ought to be received before we are baptized.

In a word, the law of christian baptism is, that believers in Christ should publicly avow their faith in him, and their resolution to obey him, by being baptized; and the proper time for this is after believing and before admission to fellowship; however, as there was no original and actual, so there is no natural and necessary connexion between baptism and fellowship. Baptism was an initiation into the profession of christianity at large, not into the practice of it in any particular church.

This is the law, and, we think, the whole law of baptism, and we plead this law in favour of the right of unbaptized believers to the Lord's supper, for two plain and obvious reasons. 1. A command to perform one duty is not a prohibition of another duty. *Keep the sabbath day holy* is one command, and *honour thy father* is another; but as there is no necessary connexion between the two, a breach of the first does not release from an obligation to the last.

Baptism and the Lord's supper are both commanded; but a law to perform one does not prohibit the observance of the other; the unbaptized believer's way to the Lord's table is therefore clear. 2. It is remarkable, that this positive law of baptism is not enforced by any penalties, and herein it differs from all other positive institutes. By what right then do we affix to the breach of it such a severe penalty as exclusion from church fellowship? After all, our candidates neither deny the right of Christ to give laws, nor that he hath given the law of baptism, nor that they are bound to obey it; their error lies in an innocent mistake concerning the proper subject, and the right mode of administering it. There is no penalty affixed to this mistake, and one law is not a prohibition, or repeal of another law.

*Fourthly*; We argue for the right of our candidates *from the law of gifts*. When Jesus Christ ascended to heaven, he gave gifts unto men for the work of the ministry, and for the edifying of the general body of christians. To one he gave a discerning of spirits, to another divers kinds of tongues, one had a gift of psalmody, another a doctrine, and another an interpretation; and when the whole church came together into one place, all these gifts were directed to the public edification.

It is the opinion of some, that all these spiritual gifts have been continued in the church in some degree ever since; and it is the thankful acknowl-

edgment of all, that a part of them have been perpetuated to this day. Whatever general gifts men receive from God, they receive under a natural obligation of employing and improving them, of improving them for themselves, and employing them for the benefit of others; and whatever special ecclesiastical abilities good men receive from Christ, the Lord of the church, they receive both under a general obligation to use them, and under a special scriptural law to employ them in the church for the edification of the body.

Some unbaptized believers have received out of the fulness of Christ spiritual abilities; one hath a gift of psalmody; another a comprehensive knowledge of christian theology, and an aptitude to teach it to others; a third excels in spiritual discernment, and so on; and we have four remarks to make on their case.

1. The want of baptism does not incapacitate these men. The vigour of mental operations is not impaired by this defect. Neither fancy, judgment, memory, penetration, freedom of speech, courage, nor any other excellence that goes into the composition of a spiritual gift, is annihilated or debilitated on that account; so that they are sufficient to the work of edifying the body of Christ.

2. There is no express law in the New Testament, no prohibition against the use of these abilities on account of the imperfection of baptism, no pre-

cedent of exclusion, no trace or distant hint of any such thing.

3. There is an express law given to persons who have spiritual gifts, to make use of them. They are not only *given to every man to profit withal*, but a positive command is issued, that they should employ them in the church for general advantage. Call all these abilities of unbaptized believers *one talent*, if you please, and suppose the baptist brother to have two; it will yet follow, that the one talent should not be hid in a napkin, but put to use, that, when the Lord comes, he may receive his own with improvements.

4. Christian societies cannot regularly employ these gifts among themselves, unless they admit the persons, who have them, to fellowship. An unbaptized believer, having spiritual abilities, would not proceed regularly, if he were to begin by demanding of the church a right to exercise his gifts among them for the public benefit, according to Christ's command. He should first demand fellowship. In such a case a people would reason justly if they allowed, that such a man had a right to exercise his abilities in the church; that the church was obliged by law to allow and direct the exercise; that they had no jurisdiction except over their own members, and consequently that right to exercise spiritual gifts included in itself right to church fellowship. The law, that obliges the candidate to exercise his gifts in

the church, and the law, that commands the church to employ him and to direct the exercise, both include in themselves an obligation to fellowship; they oblige a candidate to join a church, and they oblige a church to admit him.

All our churches allow and employ neighbouring independent ministers to preach to them, and daily express a high and just regard for their useful labours; yet, in their opinion, these men are unbaptized; now we only ask such a toleration for members of their own congregations, as they daily exercise toward ministers of other congregations; and we urge this for the former, because by their conduct to the latter they prove, that they do not hold the want of baptism to be either a natural or a legal incapacity.

*Fifthly*; Let us advert to the *law of constitution*.

When the compassion of Christ induced him to descend into Judea to recover a profligate world to order, he brought along with him three sorts of excellencies; a body of perfect wisdom, an assortment of holy affections, and a set of upright actions. Some degree of each of these he imparted to his disciples, and they to others, as assisted by his divine influence. All believers, therefore, have a threefold union to Christ; an union of sentiment, for they believe what he believed and taught; an union of affection, for they love and hate what he loved and hated; what gave him pleasure gives them pleasure.

and what grieved him gives them pain ; and an union of practice, for they form their lives on his example. Hence arises an union to one another, as well as an union of all to Christ the head.

It is not imaginable, that any of the disciples of Christ possess these excellencies in such perfection as he possessed them ; nor is it to be supposed, that all possess them in such eminent degrees as some do ; however, there is a general excellence, a supreme love to truth and virtue, *religious principle*, if you will, in all believers, on which the christian church is constituted.

All the laws of constituting New Testament churches are formed on this just notion of sacred social union, and our argument turns on the sufficiency of this *general excellence*, which is common to all believers, for all the ends and purposes of church fellowship.

The kingdom of Christ is an empire of truth and virtue, and it is not necessary to a residence in this kingdom that men should be perfect in either. A supreme love to truth as far as we know it, and a conscientious attachment to virtue as far as we have discovered it, are high qualifications, and all-sufficient for the duties and enjoyments of church communion. Now these are always found in the persons, for whose right we are pleading. They are partakers of God's promise in Christ by the Gospel ; they have heard the word of truth, the Gospel of their salva-

tion; the eyes of their understanding are enlightened; they know the hope of his calling, and the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints; they have been quickened together with Christ; and are made nigh by his blood; they have access by one spirit unto the Father, and therefore they ought not to be accounted any more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God, and to be built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone.

Persons thus qualified are equal to every duty of church fellowship, to singing, prayer, hearing, and even preaching the word, receiving the Lord's supper, visiting the sick, relieving the poor, in a word, to all the duties men owe as church members to themselves, to one another, and to God.

They, who answer such descriptions, are so very like the primitive christians, that, it must be allowed, the inducement to receive them into church fellowship is exceedingly strong, so strong, that nothing short of an express prohibition seems sufficient to their exclusion.

Here is one article, it will be said, in which these believers do not answer the description of the primitive christians; they have not been baptized by immersion; but, let it be observed, that baptism strictly speaking is neither repentance towards God, nor faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; it is only a *profession* of

these graces, and church fellowship seems in the very nature of the thing to be connected with the *graces*, and neither with this, nor with any other peculiar mode of professing them. We are sure, the church triumphant is formed on a connexion between grace and glory, a profession of grace sometimes accompanying the connexion, and sometimes not; and we are taught to pray, *thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

Right to church fellowship either lies in grace alone, or in baptism alone, or in both united, or in something beyond them all. If it lie in grace alone, then faith in Christ and moral obedience have a merit in them, and church fellowship is a reward due to such merit. An humble christian will not allow this. If it lie in baptism alone, then an irreligious person may get himself baptized, and claim his right to church communion. If it lie in grace and baptism united, then a worse idea of merit than the former will return; for then it will follow, that baptism gives grace its value; but this is inadmissible. The truth is, right to church communion lies in that royal charter, which the clemency of God hath granted to mankind, and by which persons of certain descriptions, though imperfect in knowledge, defective in obedience, and encompassed with many infirmities, are allowed the favour of approaching him through the merit of Jesus Christ. Title to fellowship lies

in the divine charter, meetness for it in personal qualification.

This qualification, which I call *grace, general excellence, religious principle, supreme love to truth and virtue*, perfect in kind, imperfect in degree, is essential to church fellowship; and the law of Christ is, that his churches should be constituted, of only such persons as actually possess this real, sterling goodness, which, being sufficient to answer all the ends for which churches are constituted, ought always to be considered as a clear warrant to admit to fellowship. Of such persons the primitive churches were constituted, and nothing can be clearer, than the divine testimony, that against such as these, who bring forth the spiritual fruits of *love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, against such there is no law*.

*Finally*; We urge in behalf of our candidates, the law of *release and deprivation*. We put these two together, because release from duty includes in it a deprivation of benefits. Jesus Christ found mankind in slavery; his Gospel finds a sinner in that condition still; but he both manumits and enfranchises this slave, he frees him from bondage, and invests him with privileges and immunities. This is done in the moment of regeneration, and henceforward this man ceaseth to be a servant of men in religious matters. He ceaseth to be his own, he becomes a subject of him, who died and rose again,

that he might be Lord both of the dead and the living. The highest authority binds him to duty, and endows him with privilege; and none but the highest authority can deprive him of one, or release him from the other. This undeniable fact is full to our purpose.

This argument is taken from that obligation, under which the legislator hath laid every good man, to perform the *moral* as well as the positive duties of church fellowship, and from which obligation neither their own imperfections, nor any church acts of ours, can or ought to discharge them. If we refuse to admit the believers in question into church fellowship, they owe us none of the *moral* duties, which belong to *that* condition, and it would be unreasonable in us to require them. When they build places of worship, support ministers, use hospitality, provide utensils for the celebration of ordinances, contribute toward maintaining the poor and relieving the sick members of the church, they do nothing but their duty, if they themselves be members; but, if they be denied the benefit of membership, all these are works of supererogation. Now we argue, that God hath connected in the holy Scriptures duty with benefit, and that, having enjoined the duties on all believers, he intended all believers should reap the benefit of performing them. The Lord's supper is both a duty and a benefit; Christ requires all his disciples to partake of the Lord's supper; but, if we deny them the benefit,

we discharge them from the duty ; and the same may be said of all other church duties and benefits. Now, as we pretend to no authority to release from duty, how is it possible we should claim an authority to deprive of benefit ?

Many of these duties are moral duties, of natural and immutable obligation ; and such is the absolute necessity of obedience to them, that, when a man is so circumstanced as to be obliged either to omit a moral duty or a positive precept, the latter is in all cases to give way to the former. If obedience to positive precepts must subside to make room for obedience to moral precepts, how is it possible to conceive, that innocent ignorance of a *positive* precept should become a release from *moral* obligations ; and such are many of the duties of church fellowship.

Waiving for the present a multitude of arguments fairly and honestly deducible from scripture source, such as *the law of positive institutes*, and others, the sum of what we have said from the oracles of God is this. God, a being possessed of all possible perfections, is the author of christianity, the founder and friend of the christian church. He displayed the magnificence of his perfections in framing the whole, and continues to display it in governing every part. The same attributes, that pervade and direct all his natural empire, constitute and guide his moral dominion in the church. His wisdom leaves difficulties and obstacles, to us as immoveable as the decrees of

fate ; but he leaves them to excite and improve our mental abilities and moral excellencies, which he intends we should employ in diminishing them. His perfect justice never disqualifies without a crime. His benevolence produces the greatest social good. His love of holiness distinguishes the righteous from the wicked, and his patience and compassion bear with imperfections, both of knowledge and virtue ; hence we have inferred, that the admitting of an unbaptized believer to church fellowship is, ON THE PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIANITY, a wise, a just, a benevolent, a holy, a humane action.

We have gone further ; we have examined many EXPRESS LAWS, given in writing by Jesus Christ to his church for the more easy administration of justice in it. There are laws of exclusion ; but unbaptized believers are not in the list. There are laws of toleration, which actually include their case. There is a law of baptism ; but this does not repeal any other law, nor prohibit the observance of any other positive institute. There is a law for the exercise of gifts, in which the incorporation of some is included ; and there is the law of constitution, which authorizes the incorporation of all good men. We have examined, finally, the law of release and deprivation, and we have thence inferred that the interests of morality, and the pleasures of christianity, if not diminished by excluding these persons, would, however, be greatly promoted by admitting them. We do not presume

to have exhausted the subject; there remain many more reasons for the practice, which we have been defending; but these are satisfactory to us, and, we think, they deserve consideration by our brethren; however, the writer of this does not mean to lengthen out the controversy; and, he hopes, should any think proper to deny all he has affirmed, no offence will be taken at his future silence. He would not seem to slight the admonitions of any good man; but, on this article, his judgment is settled; he has only to add, *Grace be with all them, that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity!*

REFLECTIONS  
ON  
CHRISTIAN LIBERTY,  
CIVIL ESTABLISHMENTS IN RELIGION,  
AND  
TOLERATION.

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FROM THE PREFACE TO THE THIRD VOLUME OF SAURIN.

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VERY early in life I was prepossessed in favour of the following positions.

Christianity is a religion of divine original.

A religion of divine original must needs be a perfect religion, and answer all the ends, for which it was revealed, without human additions.

The christian religion hath undergone considerable alterations since the times of Jesus Christ, and his Apostles; and yet, *Jesus Christ* was then accounted *the finisher* as well as *the author of faith*.

The doctrines of revelation, as they lie in the inspired writings, differ very much from the same doctrines, as they lie in creeds of human composition.

The moral precepts, the positive institutes, and the religious affections, which constitute the devotion of most modern christians, form a melancholy contrast

to those, which are described by the guides, whom they profess to follow.

The light of nature, and that of revelation ; the operations of right reason, the spirit of the first, and the influence of the Holy Ghost, the soul of the last ; both proceeding from the same uniform Supreme Being, cannot be supposed to be destructive of each other, or even in the least degree to clash together.

The finest idea, that can be formed of the Supreme Being, is that of an infinite intelligence always in harmony with itself ; and, accordingly, the best way of proving the truth of revelation is that of showing the analogy of the plan of redemption to that of creation and providence. Simplicity and majesty characterize both nature and scripture ; simplicity reduces those benefits, which are essential to the real happiness of man, to the size of all mankind ; majesty makes a rich provision for the employment and superadded felicity of a few superior geniuses, who first improve themselves, and then felicitate their inferior brethren, by simplifying their own ideas, by refining and elevating those of their fellow creatures, by establishing a social intercourse, consolidating fraternal love, and along with it all the reciprocal ties, that unite mankind.

Men's ideas of objects essential to their happiness are neither so dissimilar, nor so numerous, as inattentive spectators are apt to suppose.

Variety of sentiment, which is the life of society, cannot be destructive of real religion.

Mere mental errors, if they be not entirely innocent in the account of the supreme Governour of mankind, cannot be, however, objects of blame and punishment among men.

Christianity could never be intended to destroy the just natural rights, or even to diminish the natural privileges of mankind. That religion, which allows the just claims, and secures the social happiness of all mankind, must needs be a better religion than that, which provides for only a part at the expense of the rest. God is more glorified by the good actions of his creatures, expressive of homage to him, and productive of universal social good, than he is by uncertain conjectures, or even accurate notions, which originate in self-possession, and terminate in social disunion.

How clear soever all these maxims may be, a certain degree of ambition or avarice, ignorance or malice, presumption or diffidence, or any other irregular passion, will render a man blind to the clearest demonstration, and insensible to the most rational and affecting persuasion. These positions, mere opinions and prepossessions before examination, become demonstrative truths after a course of diligent search.

But, previous to all inquiries concerning the doctrines of christianity, it is absolutely necessary to establish that of **CHRISTIAN LIBERTY**; for, say we

what we will, if this preliminary doctrine of right be disallowed, voluntary piety is the dream of an enthusiast ; the oracles of God in the christian world, like those of the Sibyls in pagan Rome, are sounds convertible to senatorial sense ; and the whole christian mission, from the first prophet down to the last minister, is one long muster-roll of statesmen's tools, a disgrace to their species, a contradiction to their profession, a dishonour to their God.

Christian liberty in Italy is liberty to be a Roman catholic, that is, liberty to believe what the bishop of Rome affirms to be true, and liberty to perform what he commands to be done. Christian liberty in some reformed churches is liberty to renounce what the reformers renounced, to believe what they affirmed, and to practise what they required. But we, who *have not so learned Christ*, define christian liberty otherwise ; and, if we be asked, What is christian liberty ? we answer, it is liberty to be a christian. One part of christianity consists of propositions to be believed. Liberty to be a christian believer is liberty to examine these propositions, to form a judgment of them, and to come to a self-determination, according to our own best abilities. Another part of christianity consists of duties to be performed. Liberty to be a practical christian is liberty to perform these duties, either as they regard God, our neighbour, or ourselves. Liberty to be a christian implies liberty not to be a christian, as liberty to examine a

proposition implies liberty to reject the arguments brought to support it, if they appear inconclusive, as well as liberty to admit them, if they appear demonstrative. To pretend to examine christianity, before we have established our right to do so, is to pretend to cultivate an estate, before we have made out our title to it.

The object of christian liberty, that, with which a man, who would examine christianity, has to do, is a system of christian doctrine ; but, having established the doctrine of right, before we proceed to exercise this right by examining the religion proposed to mankind by Jesus Christ, it is absolutely necessary to inquire what we ought, on sound principles of just and fair reasoning, to expect to find in it. I know some truths without revelation. I have a full demonstration in nature that there is one God, that it is impossible there should be more than one, that he is an intelligent Spirit, and that he is a wise and bountiful Being. Should any religion, which pretends to be divine, affirm, there is a plurality of gods—God is not an intelligent spirit—God is an unwise and an unkind being—I should have a right to reject this pretended revelation. Indeed, should a revealed religion allow my demonstrations, and afterwards explain them in a manner quite subversive of my former explications of them ; should it affirm, God is, as you say, a wise and bountiful Being, but he displays his wisdom and goodness not in governing his

intelligent creatures as you have imagined ; such a moral government, I will prove to you, would show a defect of wisdom and goodness ; but he displays the supreme perfection of both by providing for such and such interests, and by bestowing such and such benefits, as have either escaped your notice, or were beyond your comprehension ;—in this case, I ought not to reject revelation ; for, although I can demonstrate without inspiration the wisdom and goodness of God, yet I cannot pretend by the light of nature to know all the directions, and to ascertain all the limits of these perfections.

Lay christianity before me who will, I expect to find three things in it, which I call *analogy*, *proportion*, and *perfection*. Each of these articles opens a wide field of not incurious speculation, and each fully explained and applied would serve to guide any man in his choice of a religion, yea, in his choice of a party among the various divisions of christians. But alas ! we are not employed now-a-days in examining and choosing religious principles for ourselves, but in subscribing, and defending those of our ancestors. A few hints then shall serve.

By ANALOGY I mean resemblance ; and when I say a revealed religion must bring along with it analogical evidence, I mean, it must resemble the just dictates of nature. The reason is plain. The same Supreme Being is the author of both. The God of nature has formed man for observing objects, comparing them

together, laying down principles, inferring consequences, reasoning and self-determining. He has not only empowered all mankind to exercise these abilities, but he has even constrained them by a necessity of nature to do so; he has not only rendered it impossible for men to excel without this exercise, but he has even rendered it impossible for them to exist safely in society without it. In a word, the God of nature has made man in his own image, a self-determining being, and, to say nothing of the nature of virtue, he has rendered free consent essential to every man's felicity and peace. With his own consent, subjection makes him happy; without it, dominion over the universe would make him miserable.

The religion of nature, (I mean by this expression here, the objects which display the nature of the Deity, and thereby discover the obligations of mankind,) is in perfect harmony with the natural constitution of man. All natural objects offer evidence to all; but force is on none. A man may examine it, and he may not examine it; he may admit it, and he may reject it; and, if his rejection of the evidence of natural religion be not expressed in such overt acts as are injurious to the peace of civil society, no man is empowered to force him, or to punish him; the supreme moral Governour of the world himself does not distinguish him here by any exterior punishments; at most he expresses his displeasure by marks attached to the person of the culprit, and concealed from all

the rest of his fellow creatures ; and the glory of civil society is not to encroach on the moral government of God.

Christianity comes, pretends to come from the God of nature ; I look for analogy, and I find it ; but I find it in the holy Scriptures, the first teachers, and the primitive churches.

In all these I am considered as a rational creature ; objects are proposed, evidence is offered ; if I admit it, I am not entitled thereby to any temporal emoluments ; if I refuse it, I am not subjected to any temporal punishments ; the whole is an affair of conscience, and lies between each individual and his God. I choose to be a christian on this very account. This freedom, which I call a perfection of my nature ; this self-determination, the dignity of my species, the essence of my natural virtue, this I do not forfeit by becoming a christian ; this I retain, explained, confirmed, directed, assisted by the regal grant of the Son of God. Thus the prerogatives of Christ, the laws of his religion, and the natural rights of mankind being analogous, evidence arises of the divinity of the religion of Jesus.

I believe, it would be very easy to prove, that the christianity of the church of Rome, and that of every other establishment, because they are *establishments*, are totally destitute of this analogy. The religion of nature is not capable of establishment ; the religion of Jesus Christ is not capable of establishment ; if the

religion of any church be capable of establishment, it is not analogous to that of Scripture, or that of nature. A very simple example may explain our meaning. Natural religion requires man to pay a mental homage to the Deity, to venerate his perfections, by adoring and confiding in them. By what possible means can these pious operations of the mind be *established*? Could they be forced, their nature would be destroyed, and they would cease to be piety, which is an exercise of judgment and will. Revealed religion requires man to pay a mental homage to the Deity through Jesus Christ; to venerate his perfections by adoring and confiding in them as christianity directs; by repentance, by faith, by hope, and so on. How is it possible to *establish* those spiritual acts? A human establishment requires man to pay this christian mental homage to the Deity by performing some external ceremony, suppose bowing to the east. The ceremony, we grant, may be established; but, the voluntary exercise of the soul in the performance, which is essential to the christianity of the action,—who in the world can establish this? If the religion of Jesus be considered as consisting of external rites and internal dispositions, the former may be established; but, be it remembered, the establishment of the exterior not only does not establish the interior, but the destruction of the last is previously essential to the establishment of the first.

No religion can be established without penal sanc-

tions, and all penal sanctions in cases of religion are persecutions. Before a man can persecute, he must renounce the generous, tolerant dispositions of a christian. No religion can be established without human creeds; and subscription to all human creeds implies two dispositions contrary to true religion, and both expressly forbidden by the author of it. These two dispositions are, love of dominion over conscience in the imposer, and an abject preference of slavery in the subscriber. The first usurps the rights of Christ; the last swears allegiance to a pretender. The first domineers, and gives laws like a tyrant; the last truckles like a vassal. The first assumes a dominion incompatible with his frailty, impossible even to his dignity, yea, denied to the dignity of angels; the last yields a low submission, inconsistent with his own dignity, and ruinous to that very religion, which he pretends by this means to support. Jesus Christ does not require, he does not allow, yea, he expressly forbids both these dispositions, well knowing, that an allowance of these would be a suppression of the finest dispositions of the human soul, and a degrading of revelation beneath the religion of nature. If human inventions have formerly secularized christianity, and rendered such bad dispositions necessary in times of ignorance, they ought to be exploded now, as all christians now allow this theory. The Son of God did not come to redeem one part of mankind to serve the secular views and unworthy passions of the other;

but he obtained freedom for both, that both *might serve him, without fear, in holiness and righteousness all the days of their lives.* When churches reduce this theory to practice, they realize in actual life, what otherwise makes only a fine idea decyphered in books ; and by so doing they adorn their christianity with the glorious evidence of analogy.

Suppose the God of nature should think proper to reveal a simple system of astronomy, and to require all mankind to examine and believe this revelation on pain of his displeasure. Suppose one civil government, having examined this revelation, and explained the sense in which they understood it, should endeavour to establish their explication by temporal rewards and punishments. Suppose they should require all their subjects to carry their infants in their arms to a public school, to answer certain astronomical interrogations, to be put by a professor of astronomy ; as in general,—Wilt thou, infant of eight days old, wilt thou be an astronomer ? Dost thou renounce all erroneous systems of astronomy ? In particular, dost thou admit the true Copernican system ? Dost thou believe the revealed explication of this system ? And dost thou also believe that explication of this revelation, which certain of our own predecessors in the profession believed, which explication the government has adopted, and which we, your masters and parents, in due obedience, receive ? Suppose a proxy required to answer for this infant ; All this, I,

proxy for this child, do steadfastly believe ; and suppose, from this hour the child became a reputed astronomer. Suppose yet further, this child should grow to manhood, and in junior life should be pressed, on account of the obligation contracted in his infant state, to subscribe a certain paper, called an astronomical creed, containing mathematical definitions, astronomical propositions, and so on ; and should be required for certain rewards to examine and approve, to teach and defend this creed, and no other, without incurring the penalty of expulsion from all public schools, a deprivation of all honours, which he might be supposed on other accounts to merit, an exclusion from all offices of trust, credit, and profit, in some cases a loss of property, in others imprisonment, in others death.

In this supposed case, I ask, would not the establishment of this system be an open violation of the doctrine of analogy, and should I not have a right to reason thus?—The revelation itself is infallible, and the author of it has given it me to examine ; but the establishment of *a given meaning* of it renders examination needless, and perhaps dangerous. The God of nature has given me eyes, instruments, powers, and inclinations to use them ; eyes, faculties, and dispositions as good as those of my ancestors, and instruments better ; but all these advantages, which may be beneficial to me, if they confirm the truth of the explication, may be fatal to me, if they lag be-

hind, or ken beyond the bound of the creed. Nature says, a constellation is a collection of stars, which in the heavens appear near to one another. This is a plain, simple truth; I open my eyes, and admit the evidence. Revelation says, each fixed star is a sun, the centre of a system, consisting of planets inhabited by intelligent beings, who possess one sense and two faculties more than the inhabitants of this globe, and who worship the most high God in spirit and in truth. I cannot comprehend this whole proposition; but there is nothing in it contrary to the nature of things; and I believe the truth of it on the testimony of the revealer. The established explication of this proposition is that of Ptolemy. He numbered the stars in the constellation Boötes, and found them, or supposed he found them, twenty-three; and this number I am to examine and approve, teach and defend, against all opponents. What shall I say to Tycho, who affirms, Boötes contains only eighteen? Must I execrate Hevelius, who makes them fifty-two? After all, perhaps Flamstead may be right; he says there are fifty-four. Does not this method of teaching astronomy suppose an hundred absurdities? Does it not imply the imperfection of the revealed system, the infallibility of Ptolemy, the erroneousness of the other astronomers, the folly of examination, or the still greater madness of allowing a conclusion after a denial of the premises from which it pretends to be drawn? When I was an infant, I am told, I was

treated like a man ; now I am a man, I am treated like an infant. I am an astronomer by proxy. The plan of God requires faculties, and the exercise of them ; that of my country exchanges both for quiet submission. I am, and I am not, a believer of astronomy.

Were it affirmed, that a revelation from heaven *established* such a method of maintaining a science of speculation, reasoning, and practice, every rational creature would have a right to doubt the truth of such a revelation ; for it would violate the doctrine of analogy, by making the Deity inconsistent with himself. But we will pursue this track no further ; we hope nothing said will be deemed illiberal ; we distinguish between a constitution of things, and many wise and good men, who submit to it ; and we only venture to guess, if they be wise and good men under such inconveniences, they would be wiser and better men without them. At all adventures, if we owe much respect to men, we owe more to truth, to incontrovertible, unchangeable truth.

A second character of a divine revelation is PROPORTION. By proportion I mean relative fitness ; and, when I affirm, a divine revelation must bring along with it proportional evidence, I mean to say, it must appear to be exactly fitted to those intelligent creatures, for whose benefit it is intended. In the former article we required a *similarity* between the requisitions of God and the faculties of men ; in this

we require an exact *quantity* of requisition commensurate with those faculties. The former regards the nature of a revelation ; this has for its object the limits of it. Were it possible for God, having formed a man only for walking, by a messenger from heaven to require him to fly, the doctrine of analogy would be violated by this requisition ; and were he to determine a prodigious space, through which he required him to pass in a given time ; were he to describe an immense distance, and to enjoin him to move through it with a degree of velocity impossible to him, the doctrine of proportion, would be violated ; and the God of revelation would in both cases be made contradictory to the God of nature.

The christian revelation, we presume, answers all our just expectations on these articles ; for all the truths revealed by it are analogous to the nature of things, and every article in it bears an exact proportion to the abilities of all those, for whose benefit it is given. Our Saviour treats of the doctrine of proportion in the parable of the talents, and supposes the Lord to apportion the number of talents, when he bestows them, and the rewards and punishments, which he distributes for the use and abuse of them, to the *several ability* of each servant. St Paul depicts the primitive church in all the beauty of this proportional economy ; *the same God worketh all diversities of operations in all differences of administrations, dividing to every man severally as he will.*

This economy, he says, assimilates the christian church to the human body, and gives to the one, as to the other, strength, symmetry, and beauty, evidently proving that the author of creation is the author of redemption, framing both by one uniform rule of analogy and proportion.

Full of these just notions, we examine that description of revelation, which human creeds exhibit, and we perceive at once, they are all destitute of proportional evidence. They all consist of multifarious propositions, each of which is considered as essential to the whole, and the belief of all essential to an enjoyment of the benefits of christianity, yea, to those of civil society, in this life, and to a participation of eternal life in the world to come. In this case the free gifts of God to all are monopolized by a few, and sold out to the many at a price, far greater than nine tenths of them can pay, and at a price, which the remaining part ought not to pay, because the donor has not empowered these salesmen to exact any price, because by his original grant all are made joint proprietors, and because the payment would be at once a renunciation of their right to hold by the original grant, and of their Lord's prerogative to bestow.

What can a declaimer mean, when he repeats a number of propositions, and declares the belief of them all essential to the salvation of *man*? Or what could he reply to one, who should ask him, which man do you mean, the man in the stall? It is Sir

Isaac Newton. Or the man in the aisle? It is Tom Long, the carrier. God Almighty, the Creator of both, has formed these two men with different organs of body, and different faculties of mind; he has given them different advantages and different opportunities of improving them; he has placed them in different relations, and empowered the one to teach what the other, depend on his belief what will, is not capable of learning. Ten thousand Tom Longs go to make up one Newtonian soul. Is it credible, the God who made these two men, who thoroughly knows them, who is the common parent, the just governor, and the kind benefactor of both, should require of men so different, equal belief and practice? Were such a thing supposable, how unequal and disproportional, how inadequate and unlike himself, must such a Deity be! To grasp the terraqueous globe with a human hand, to make a tulip cup contain the ocean, to gather all the light of the universe into one human eye, to hide the sun in a snuffbox, are the mighty projects of children's fancies. Is it possible, requisitions similar to these should proceed from *the only wise God*?

There is, we have reason to believe, a certain portion of spirit, if I may be allowed to speak so, that constitutes a human soul; there are infinitely different degrees of capability imparted by the Creator to the souls of mankind; and there is a certain ratio, by necessity of nature, between each degree of

intelligence and a given number of ideas, as there is between a cup capable of containing a given quantity, and a quantity of matter capable of being contained in it. In certain cases it might serve my interest, could the palm of my hand contain a hogshead ; but in general my interest is better served by an inability to contain so much. We apply these certain principles to revelation, and we say, God hath given in the christian religion an infinite multitude of ideas ; as in nature he hath created an infinite multitude of objects. These objects are diversified without end, they are of various sizes, colours, and shapes, and they are capable of innumerable motions, productive of multifarious effects, and all placed in various degrees of perspicuity. Objects of thought in the christian religion are exactly similar ; there is no end of their variety ; God and all his perfections, man and all his operations, the being and employment of superior holy spirits, the existence and dispositions of fallen spirits, the creation and government of the whole world of matter and that of spirit, the influences of God and the obligations of men, the dissolution of the universe, a resurrection, a judgment, a heaven, and a hell, all these, placed in various degrees of perspicuity, are exhibited in religion to the contemplation of intelligent creatures.

The creatures who are required to contemplate these objects, have various degrees of contemplative ability ; and their duty, and consequently their virtue,

which is nothing else but a performance of duty, consists in applying all their ability to understand as many of these objects, that is, to form as many ideas of them, as are apportioned to their own degree. So many objects they are capable of seeing, so many objects it is their duty to see. So much of each object they are capable of comprehending, so much of each object it is their duty to comprehend. So many emotions they are capable of exercising, so many emotions it is their duty to exercise. So many acts of devotion they can perform, so many Almighty God will reward them for performing, or punish them for neglecting. This I call the doctrine of religious proportion. This I have a right to expect to find in a divine revelation, and this I find in the most splendid manner in christianity, as it lies in the Bible, as it was in the first churches, and as it is in some modern communities. I wish I could change the word *some* for *all*.

This doctrine of proportion would destroy every human creed in the world, at least it would annihilate the imposition of any. Instead of making one creed for a whole nation, which by the way provides for only one nation, and consigns over the rest of the world to the destroyer of mankind; instead of doing so, there should be as many creeds as creatures; and instead of affirming, the belief of three hundred propositions is essential to the felicity of every man in both worlds, we ought to affirm, the belief of half

a proposition is essential to the salvation of Mary, and the belief of a whole one to that of John, the belief of six propositions, or, more properly, the examination of six propositions, is essential to the salvation of the reverend Edward, and the examination of sixty to that of the right reverend Richard ; for, if I can prove, one has sixty degrees of capacity, another six, and another one, I can easily prove, it would be unjust to require the same exercises of all ; and a champion ascribing such injustice to God would be no formidable adversary for the pompousness of his challenge, or the caparisons of his horse ; his very sword could not conquer, though it might affright from the field.

The world and revelation, both the work of the same God, are both constructed on the same principles ; and were the book of Scripture, like that of nature, laid open to universal inspection, were all ideas of temporal rewards and punishments removed from the study of it, that would come to pass in the moral world, which has actually happened in the world of human science ; each capacity would find its own object, and take its own quantum. Newtons will find stars without penalties, Miltons will be poets, and Lardners christians without rewards. Calvins will contemplate the decrees of God, and Baxters will try to assort them with the spontaneous volitions of men ; all, like the celestial bodies, will roll on in the quiet majesty of simple proportion, each in his

porper sphere shining to the glory of God the Creator. But alas ; *We have not so learned Christ.*

Were this doctrine of proportion allowed, three consequences would follow. First ; Subscription to human creeds, with all their appendages, both penal and pompous, would roll back into the turbulent ocean, the *See* I mean, from whence they came ; the Bible would remain a placid emanation of wisdom from God ; and the belief of it a sufficient test of the obedience of his people. Secondly ; Christians would be freed from the inhuman necessity of execrating one another ; and by placing christianity in believing in Christ, and not in believing in one another, they would rid revelation of those intolerable abuses, which are fountains of sorrow to christians, and sources of arguments to infidels. Thirdly ; Opportunity would be given to believers in Christ to exercise those dispositions, which the present disproportional division of this common benefit obliges them to suppress, or conceal. O cruel theology, that makes it a crime to do what I have neither a right nor a power to leave undone !

I call PERFECTION a third necessary character of a divine revelation. Every production of an intelligent being bears the characters of the intelligence, that produceth it, *for as the man is, so is his strength.* A weak genius produces a work imperfect and weak like itself. A wise, good being produces a work wise and good ; and, if his power be equal to his wisdom

and goodness, his work will resemble himself; and such a degree of wisdom, animated by an equal degree of goodness, and assisted by an equal degree of power, will produce a work equally wise, equally beneficial, equally effectual. The same degrees of goodness and power accompanied with only half the degree of wisdom will produce a work as remarkable for a deficiency of skill as for a redundancy of efficiency and benevolence. Thus the flexibility of the hand may be known by the writing; the power of penetrating, and combining in the mind of the physician, may be known by the feelings of the patient, who has taken his prescription; and, by parity of reason, the uniform perfections of an invisible God may be known by the uniform perfection of his productions.

I perceive, I must not launch into the wide ocean of the doctrine of perfection, and I will confine myself to three characters of imperfection, which may serve to explain my meaning. Proposing to obtain a great end without the use of proper means—the employing of great means to obtain no valuable end—and the destroying of the end by the use of the means employed to obtain it, are three characters of imperfection rarely found in frail intelligent agents; and certainly they can never be attributed to the great Supreme. A violation of the doctrine of analogy would argue God an unjust being; a violation of that of proportion would prove him an unkind be-

ing; and a violation of this of perfection would argue him a being void of wisdom. Were we to suppose him capable of proposing plans impossible to be executed, and then punishing his creatures for not executing them, we should attribute to the best of beings the most odious dispositions of the most infamous of mankind. Heaven forbid the thought!

The first character of imperfection is *proposing to obtain a great end without the use of proper means*. To propose a noble end, argues a fund of goodness; but not to propose proper means to obtain it, argues a defect of wisdom. Christianity proposes the noble end of assimilating man to God, and it employs proper means of obtaining this end. God is an intelligent being, happy in a perfection of wisdom; the Gospel assimilates the felicity of human intelligences to that of the Deity by communicating the ideas of God on certain articles to men. God is a bountiful being, happy in a perfection of goodness; the Gospel assimilates the felicity of man to that of God by communicating certain benevolent dispositions to its disciples, similar to the communicative excellencies of God. God is an operative being, happy in the display of exterior works, beneficent to his creatures; the Gospel felicitates man by directing and enabling him to perform certain works beneficent to his fellow creatures. God condescends to propose this noble end, of assimilating man to himself, to the nature of mankind, and not to certain distinctions, foreign from

the nature of man, and appendant on exterior circumstances. The boy, who feeds the farmer's meanest animals ; the sailor, who spends his days on the ocean ; the miner, who, secluded from the light of the day and the society of his fellow creatures, spends his life in a subterraneous cavern, as well as the renowned heroes of mankind, are all included in this condescending, benevolent design of God. The Gospel proposes to assimilate all to God ; but it proposes such an assimilation, or, may I say, such a degree of moral excellence, as the nature of each can bear ; and it directs to means so proper to obtain this end, and renders these directions so extremely plain, that the perfection of the designer shines with the utmost glory.

I have sometimes imagined a Pagan ship's crew in a vessel under sail in the wide ocean ; I have supposed not one soul aboard ever to have heard one word of christianity ; I have imagined a bird dropping a New Testament, written in the language of the mariners on the upper deck ; I have imagined a fund of uneducated, unsophisticated good sense in this company, and I have required of this little world answers to two questions ; first, What end does this book propose ? The answer is, *This book was written, that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing we might have life through his name.* I ask, secondly, What means doth this book authorize a foremast man, who believes, to em-

ploy to the rest of the crew to induce them to believe, that Jesus is the Son of God, and that believing, they also, with the foremast man, may have eternal felicity through his name? I dare not answer this question; but I dare venture to guess, should this foremast man conceal the book from any of the crew, he would be unlike the God, who gave it to all; or should he oblige the cabin-boy to admit his explication of the book, he would be unlike the God, who requires the boy to explain it to himself; and should he require the captain to enforce his explication by penalties, the captain ought to reprove his folly for counteracting the end of the book, the felicity of all the mariners; for turning a message of peace into an engine of faction; for employing means inadequate to the end; and so for erasing that character of perfection, which the heavenly donor gave it.

A second character of imperfection is—*the employing of great means to obtain no valuable end.* Whatever end the author of christianity had in view, it is beyond a doubt, he hath employed great means to effect it. To use the language of a prophet, he hath *shaken the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land.* When *the desire of all nations* came, universal nature felt his approach, and preternatural displays of wisdom, power, and goodness, have ever attended his steps. The most valuable ends were answered by his coming. Conviction followed his preaching; and truths, till then shut up in

the counsels of God, were actually put into the possession of finite minds. A general manumission followed his meritorious death, and the earth resounded with the praises of a spiritual deliverer, who had set the sons of bondage free. The laws of his empire were published, and all his subjects were happy in obeying them. *In his days the righteous flourished*, and on his plan, *abundance of peace* would have continued *as long as the moon endured*. Plenty of instruction, liberty to examine it, and peace in obeying it. These were ends worthy of the great means used to obtain them.

Let us for a moment suppose a subversion of the lxxii psalm, from whence I have borrowed these ideas; let us imagine *the kings of Tarshish and of the isles bringing presents*, not to express their homage to Christ, but to purchase that dominion over the consciences of mankind, which belongs to Jesus Christ; let us suppose the boundless wisdom of the Gospel, and the innumerable ideas of inspired men concerning it, shrivelled up into the narrow compass of one human creed; let us suppose liberty of thought taken away; and the peace of the world interrupted by the introduction and support of bold usurpations, dry ceremonies, cant phrases, and puerile inventions. In this supposed case, the history of great means remains, the worthy ends to be answered by them are taken away, and they who should thus deprive mankind of the end of the sacred code, would charge

themselves with the necessary obligation of accounting for this character of imperfection. Ye prophets and apostles ! ye ambassadors of Christ ! *How do ye say, we are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us ? Lo ! certainly in vain made he it, the pen of the scribes is in vain !* Precarious wisdom, that must not be questioned ! useless books, which must not be examined ! vain legislation, that either cannot be obeyed, or ruins him who obeys it !

All the ends that can be obtained by human modifications of divine revelation, can never compensate for the loss of that dignity, which the perfection of the system, as God gave it, acquires to him ; nor can it indemnify man for the loss of that spontaneity, which is the essence of every effort that merits the name of human, and without which virtue itself is nothing but a name. Must we destroy the *man* to make the *christian* ? What is there in a scholastic honour, what in an ecclesiastical emolument, what in an archiepiscopal throne, to indemnify for these losses ? Jesus Christ gave his life a ransom for men, not to empower them to enjoy these momentary distinctions ; these are far inferior to the noble ends of his coming ;—the honour of God, and the Gospel at large ; the disinterested exercise of mental abilities, assimilating the freeborn soul to its benevolent God ; a copartnership with Christ in promoting the universal felicity of all mankind ; these, these are ends of religion worthy of the blood of Jesus, and deserving the sacrifice of whatever is called great among men.

Thirdly ; *The destruction of the end by the use of the means employed to obtain it*, is another character of imperfection. St Paul calls christianity, *unity*. He denominates it *the unity of the Spirit*, on account of its author, object, and end. God, the Supreme Spirit, is the author of it ; the spirits, or souls of men are the object ; and the spirituality of human souls, that is, the perfection of which finite spirits are capable, is the end of it. The Gospel proposes the reunion of men divided by sin, first to God, and then to one another ; and, in order to effect it, reveals a religion, which teaches *one God, one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus ; one rule of faith, one object of hope ;* and, lest we should imagine this revelation to admit of no variety, we are told, *grace is given to every one according to the proportional measure of the gift of christianity*. Each believer is therefore exhorted to *speak the truth in love, to walk with all lowliness, meekness, and longsuffering*, and to *forbear another in love*. Here is a character of perfection ; for these means employed to unite mankind are productive of union, the end of the means.

Should men take up the Gospel in this simplicity, and, accommodating it to their own imaginary, superior wisdom, or to their own secular purposes, should they explain this union so as to suit their designs, and employ means to produce it ; and should they denominate their system, christianity, it would certainly

be, in spite of its name, a christianity marked with the imperfection of its authors ; for in the christian religion, in the thing itself, and not in its appellation, shines the glorious character of perfection.

The christian religion unites mankind. By what common *bond* does it propose to do so ? By *love*. This is a *bond of perfectness*, a most perfect bond. This is practicable, and productive of every desirable end ; and the more we study human nature, the more fully shall we be convinced, that we cannot imagine any religion to do more ; nor need we desire more, for this answers every end of being religious. Had Jesus Christ formed his church on a *sentimental* plan, he must have employed many means which he has not employed, and he must have omitted many directions which he has given. One of his means of uniting mankind is contained in this direction, *Search the Scriptures, and call no man your master upon earth* ; that is to say, exercise your very different abilities, assisted by very different degrees of aid, in periods of very different duration, and form your own notions of the doctrines contained in the Scriptures. Is not this injunction destructive to a sentimental union ? Place ten thousand spectators in several circles around a statue erected on a spacious plain, bid some look at it through magnifying glasses, others through common spectacles, some with keen naked eyes, others with weak diseased eyes, each on a point of each circle different from that where another stands, and

all receiving the picture of the object in the eye by different reflections and refractions of the rays of light ; and say, will not a command to look destroy the idea of sentimental union ; and, if the establishment of an exact union of sentiment be the end, will not looking, the mean appointed to obtain it, actually destroy it, and would not such a projector of uniformity mark his system with imperfection ?

Had Jesus Christ formed his church on the plan of a *ceremonial* union, or on that of a *professional* union, it is easy to see, the same reasoning might be applied ; the laws of such a legislature would counteract and destroy one another, and a system so unconnected would discover the imperfection of its author, and provide for the ruin of itself.

These principles being allowed, we proceed to examine the doctrines of christianity, as they are presented to an inquisitive man, entirely at liberty to choose his religion, by our different churches in their several creeds. The church of Rome lays before me the decisions of the council of Trent. The Lutheran church the confession of Augsburg. One nation gives me one account of christianity, another a different account of it, a third contradicts the other two, and no two creeds agree. The difference of these systems obliges me to allow, they could not all proceed from any one person, much less could they all proceed from such a person, as all christians affirm Jesus Christ to be. I am driven, then, to examine

his account of his own religion contained in the allowed standard book, to which they all appeal; and here I find, or think I find, a right of reduction, that removes all those suspicions, which variety in human creeds had excited in my mind concerning the truth of christianity.

The doctrines of christianity, I presume to guess, according to the usual sense of the phrase, are divisible into two classes. The first contains the principal truths, the pure genuine theology of Jesus Christ, essential to the system, and in which all christians in our various communities agree. The other class consists of those less important propositions, which are meant to serve as explications of the principal truths. The first is the matter of our holy religion, the last is our conception of the manner of its operation. In the first we all agree; in the last our benevolent religion, constructed on principles of analogy, proportion, and perfection, both enjoins and empowers us to agree to differ. The first is the light of the world, the last our sentiments on its nature, or our distribution of its effects.

In general each church calls its own creed a system of christianity, a body of christian doctrine, and perhaps not improperly; but then each divine ought to distinguish that part of his system, which is pure revelation, and so stands confessedly the doctrine of Jesus Christ, from that other part, which is human explication, and so may be either true or false, clear

or obscure, presumptive or demonstrative, according to the abilities of the explainer who compiled the creed. Without this distinction, we may incorporate all our opinions with the infallible revelations of heaven, we may imagine each article of our belief essential to christianity itself, we may subjoin a human codicil to a divine testament, and attribute equal authenticity to both ; we may account a proposition confirmed by a synodical seal as fully authenticated, as a truth confirmed by an apostolic miracle ; and so we may bring ourselves to rank a conscientious disciple of Christ, who denies the necessity of episcopal ordination, with a brazen disciple of the devil, who denies the truth of revelation, and pretends to doubt the being of a God.

But here, I feel again the force of that observation, with which this article begins. How few, comparatively, will allow, that such a reduction of a large system to a very small number of clear, indisputable, essential first principles, will serve the cause of christianity ! How many will pretend to think such a reduction dangerous to thirty-five out of thirty-nine articles of faith ! How many will confound a denial of the essentiality (so to speak) of a proposition, with a denial of the truth of it ! How many will go farther still, and execrate the latitudinarian, who presumes in this manner to subvert christianity itself ! I rejoice in prospect of that *day, when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to his Gospel* ; when we shall stand, not at the tribunal of

human prejudices and passions, but at the just bar of a clement God.

Here, were I only concerned, I would rest, and my answer to all complainants should be a respectful silence before their oracles of reason and religion; but, alas! I have nine children, and my ambition is (if it be not an unpardonable presumption to compare insects with angels) my ambition is to engage them to treat a spirit of intolerance, as Hamilcar taught Hannibal to treat the old Roman spirit of universal dominion. The enthusiastic Carthaginian parent, going to offer a sacrifice to Jupiter for the success of an intended war, took with him his little son Hannibal, then only nine years of age, and eager to accompany his father, led him to the altar, made him lay his little hand on the sacrifice, and swear that he would never be in friendship with the Romans. We may sanctify this thought by transferring it to other objects, and, while we sing in the church, glory to God in the highest, vow perpetual peace with all mankind, and reject all weapons except those which are spiritual, we may, we must declare war against a spirit of intolerance from generation to generation. Thus Moses wrote a memorial in a book, rehearsed it in the ears of Joshua, built an altar, called the name of it *Jehovah my banner*, and said, *the Lord hath sworn, that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.*

We are neither going to contrast human creeds with one another, nor with the Bible ; we are not going to affirm or deny any propositions contained in them ; we only design to prove, that all consist of human explications as well as divine revelations ; and consequently, that all are not of equal importance, nor ought any to be imposed on the disciples of Christ, either by those who are not disciples of the Son of God, or by those who are. The subject is delicate and difficult, not through any intricacy in itself, but through a certain infelicity of the times. An error on the one side would be fatal to revelation, by alluring us to sacrifice the pure doctrines of religion to a blind benevolence ; and on the other, an error may be fatal to religion itself, by inducing us to make it a patron of intolerance. We repeat it again, a system of christian doctrine is the object of christian liberty ; the articles, which compose a human system of christian doctrine, are divisible into the two classes of *doctrines* and *explications* ; the first we attribute to *Christ*, and call *Christian* doctrines, the last to some of his *disciples*, and these we call *human* explications ; the first *are* true, the last *may be* so ; the first execrate intolerance, the last cannot be supported without the spirit of it. I will endeavour to explain my meaning by an example.

Every believer of revelation allows the authenticity of this passage of holy Scripture ; *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that*

*whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* If we cast this into propositional form, it will afford as many propositions as it contains ideas. Each idea clearly contained in the text, I call an idea of Jesus Christ, a christian sentiment, a truth of revelation, in a word, a *christian doctrine*. Each of these ideas of the text, in forming itself into a proposition, will naturally associate with itself a few other ideas of the expletive kind; these I call secondary ideas in distinction from the first, which I call primary; or, in plainer style, ideas clearly of the *text*, I name christian doctrines, or doctrines of Christ, and *all the rest* I call human explications of these doctrines; they may be christian, they may not; for I am not sure, that the next idea, which always follows a first in my mind, was the next idea to the first in the mind of Jesus Christ; the first is certainly his, he declares it; the second might be his, but as he is silent, I can say nothing certain; where he stops, my infallibility ends, and my uncertain reason begins.

The following propositions are evidently in the text, and consequently they are christian doctrines, emanating from the author of christianity, and pausing to be examined before the intelligent powers of his creatures.—There is an *everlasting life*, a future state of eternal happiness—the mediation of *the only begotten Son of God* is necessary to men's enjoyment of eternal happiness—*believing* in Christ is essential to a participation of eternal felicity—every believer in

Christ *shall have everlasting life*—unbelievers shall *perish*—all the blessings of christianity originate in *God*, display his *love*, and are *given* to the *world*. These, methinks, we may venture to call primary ideas of christianity, genuine truths of revelation; but each doctrine will give occasion to many questions, and although different expositors will agree in the matter of each proposition, they will conjecture very differently concerning the manner of its operation.

One disciple of Christ, whom we call Richard, having read this text, having exercised his thoughts on the meaning of it, and having arranged them in the propositional form now mentioned, if he would convince another disciple, whom we name Robert, of the truth of any one of his propositions, would be obliged to unfold his own train of thinking, which consists of an associated concatenation of ideas, some of which are primary ideas of Jesus Christ, and others secondary notions of his own; additions, perhaps of his wisdom, perhaps of his folly, perhaps of both; but all, however, intended to *explicate* his notion of the text, and to facilitate the evidence of his notion to his brother. Robert admits the proposition; but not exactly in Richard's sense. In this case, we assort ideas, we take what both allow to be the original ideas of our common Lord, and we reckon thus;—Here are nine ideas in this proposition, numbers one, three, six, nine, genuine, primary ideas of Christ; numbers

two, four, five, secondary ideas of Richard ; numbers seven, eight, secondary ideas of Robert ; the first constitute a divine doctrine, the last a human explication ; the first forms one divine object, the last two human notions of its mode of existence, manner of operation, or something similar ; but, be each what it may, it is human explication, and neither synod nor senate can make it more.

No divine will dispute the truth of this proposition, *God gave Jesus Christ to believers* ; for it is demonstrably in the text. To this, therefore, Beza and Zanchy, Malancthon and Luther, Calvin and Arminius, Baxter and Crisp agree, all allowing it a christian doctrine ; but each associating with the idea of gift, other ideas of time, place, relation, condition, and so on, explains the doctrine, so as to contain all his own additional ideas.

One class of expositors take the idea of *time*, and by it explain the proposition. God and believers, says one, are to be considered contemplatively *before the creation* in the light of Creator and creatures, abstracted from all moral considerations whatever ; then God united Christ to his church in the pure mass of creatureship, without the contemplation of Adam's fall. Another affirms, God gave a Saviour to men in *design*, *before* the existence of creatures ; but in full contemplation, however, of the misery induced by the fall. A third says, God gave Christ to believers, not in purpose before the fall ; but in *prom-*

ise immediately *after* it. A fourth adds, God gives Christ to believers *on their believing*, by putting them in possession of the benefits of christianity. In all these systems, the ideas of God, Christ, believers, and gift, remain, the pure, genuine ideas of the text ; and the association of *time* distinguisheth and varieth the systems.

A second class of expositors take the idea of *relation*, and one affirms, God and believers are to be considered in the relative light of *governour and subjects* ; the characters of a perfect government are discernible in the giving of a Saviour, justice vindicates the honour of government by punishing some, mercy displays the benefit of government by pardoning others, and royal prerogative both disculpates and elevates the guilty. However, as the governour is a God, he retains and displays his absolute right of dispensing his favours as he pleases. A second says, God and believers are to be considered in the light of *parent and children*, and Christ is not given to believers according to mere maxims of exact government ; but he is bestowed by God, the common Father, impartially on all his children. A third says, God and believers are to be considered in the light of *master and servants*, and God rewards the imperfect services of his creatures with the rich benefits of christianity. A fourth considers God and believers in the relation of *king and consort*, and says, God gave christianity as an inalienable dowry to his chosen

associate. In all these systems, God, Christ, believers, and gift, remain the pure, genuine ideas of the text ; and the association of the idea of *relation* distinguishes and varies the systems.

In general, we form ideas of the Supreme Being, and we think such a being ought to act so and so, and therefore we conclude he does act so and so. God gives Christ to believers conditionally, says one ; for so it becomes a holy being to bestow all his gifts. God gives Christ unconditionally, says another ; for so it becomes a merciful being to bestow his gifts on the miserable. I repeat it again, opposite as these may appear, they both retain the notions of the same God, the same Jesus, the same believers, the same giving ; but an idea concerning *the fittest way of bestowing* the gift distinguishes and varies the systems. I call it the same giving, because all divines, even they, who go most into a scheme of conditional salvation, allow, that Christ is a blessing, infinitely beyond all that is due to the conditions, which they perform in order to their enjoyment of him.

Let us for a moment suppose, that this proposition, *God gives Christ to believers*, is the whole of revelation on this subject. A divine, who should affirm, that his ideas of time, relation, and condition, were necessarily contained in this scripture ; that his whole thesis was a doctrine of christianity ; and that the belief of it was essential to salvation, would affirm the most palpable absurdities ; for, although the proposi-

tion does say, Christ is God's gift to believers, yet it does neither say, *when* God bestowed this gift, nor *why* he bestowed it, nor that a precise knowledge of the *mode* of donation is essentially requisite to salvation. That God gave the world a Saviour in the person of Jesus, is a fact affirmed by Christ in this proposition, and therefore a christian doctrine. That he made the donation absolutely or conditionally, before the fall or after it, reversibly or irrevocably, the proposition doth not affirm; and therefore every proposition including any of these ideas is an article of belief containing a christian doctrine and a human explication, and consequently it lies before an examiner in different degrees of evidence and importance.

Suppose a man were required to believe this proposition, God gave Jesus to believers absolutely; or this, God gave Jesus to believers conditionally; it is not impossible, the whole proposition might be proved original, genuine, primary doctrine of Jesus Christ. Our proposition in this text could not prove it, and were this the whole of our information on this article, conditionality and unconditionality would be human explications; but, if Christ have given us in any other part of revelation, more instruction on the subject; if he any where affirm, either that he was given on certain conditions to be performed by believers, or that he was not given so, then indeed we might associate the ideas of one text with those of another, and so form of the whole a genuine christian doctrine.

When we have thus selected the instructions of our divine Master from the opinions of our fellow-pupils, we should suppose, these questions would naturally arise;—Is a belief of all the doctrines of Christ essential to salvation? If not, which are the essential truths? If the parable of the talents be allowed a part of his doctrine, and if the doctrine of proportion taught in that parable be true, it should seem, the belief of christian doctrines must be proportioned to exterior evidence and interior ability; and, on these principles, should a congregation of five hundred christians put these questions, they must receive five hundred different answers. *Who is sufficient for these things?* Let us renounce our inclination to damn our fellow-creatures. Let us excite all to faith and repentance, and let us leave the decision of their destiny to Almighty God. *When Christ cometh, he will tell us all things.* Till then let us wait, lest we should scatter *firebrands, arrows, and death, and make the hearts of the righteous sad, whom the Lord hath not made sad.* How many doctrines are essential to salvation, seems to me exactly such a question, as—how much food is essential to animal life?

We will venture to go a step further. Were we as capable of determining the exact ratio between any particular mind and a given number of ideas, as we are of determining how many feet of water a vessel of a given burden must draw; and were we able so to

determine how much faith in how many doctrines was essential to the holiness, and so to the happiness of such a soul ; we should not then entertain a vain notion of exacting by force these rights of God of his creature. For, first, the same proportion, which renders a certain number of ideas essential to the happiness of an intelligent mind, renders this number of ideas so clear, that they establish themselves and need no imposition. Secondly ; the nature of faith does not admit of imposition ; it signifies nothing to say, kings command it ; if angels commanded it, they would require an impossibility, and exact that of me, which they themselves could not perform. Thirdly ; God has appointed no means to enforce belief ; he has nominated no vicegerents to do this ; he has expressly forbidden the attempt. Fourthly ; the means, that one man must employ to impose his creed on another, are all nefarious, and damn a sinner to make a saint. Fifthly ; imposition of human creeds has produced so much mischief in the world, so many divisions among christians, and so many execrable actions, attended with no one good end to religion, that the repetition of this crime would argue a soul infested with the grossest ignorance, or the most stubborn obstinacy imaginable. Sixthly ; dominion over conscience is that part of God's empire of which he is most jealous. The imposition of a human creed is a third action, and before any man can perform it, he must do two other exploits ; he must usurp the throne, and claim the slave. How many more rea-

sons might be added ! From a cool examination of the nature of God, the nature of man, the nature of christianity, the nature of all powers within the compass of human thought to employ, the history of past times, the state of the present, in a word, of every idea, that belongs to the imposition of a human creed, we venture to affirm, the attempt is irrational, unscriptural, impracticable, impossible. Creed is belief, and the production of belief by penal sanctions neither is, nor was, nor is to come. The project never entered the mind of a professor of any science, except that of theology. It is high time, theologians should explode it. The glorious pretence of establishing by force implicit belief, should be left to the little tyrant of a country school ; let him lay down dry documents, gird false rules close about other men's sons, lash docility into vanity, stupidity, or madness, and justify his violence by spluttering, *Sic volo, sic jubeo, stat pro ratione voluntas.*

Were christians sincere in their professions of moderation, candour, and love, they would settle this preliminary article of IMPOSITION ; and, this given up, there would be nothing else to dispute. Our objections lie neither against surplice nor service-book ; but against the imposition of them. Let one party of christians worship God as their consciences direct ; but let other parties forfeit nothing for doing the same. It may appear conjectural, but it is sincerely true, theological war is the most futile and expensive contest, theological peace the cheapest acquisition in the world.

Although the distinction of a divine revelation from a human explication is just and necessary ; although the principles of analogy, proportion, and perfection are undeniable ; and although, considered as a theory, the nature and necessity of universal toleration will be allowed to be as clear and demonstrative as possible, yet we are well aware, the allowance of these articles in all their fair, just, necessary consequences would be so inimical to many dispositions, and so effectually subversive of so many selfish, interested systems, that we entertain no hopes of ever seeing the theory generally reduced to practice. Heaven may exhibit a scene of universal love, and it is glorious to christianity to propose it ; it is an idea replete with extatic joy, and, thanks be to God, it is more than an idea, it is a law in many christian churches, alas ! little known, and less imitated by the rest of their brethren. *There is a remnant of Jacob in the midst of many people, as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men.* These may cheerfully adopt the Prophet's exultation, *Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy ! If I fall, I shall arise ; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me ; he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness.* *In the day that my walls are to be built, in that day shall human decrees concerning conscience be far removed.*

HINTS  
CONCERNING THE  
INSTITUTION AND DISCIPLINE  
OF THE  
PRIMITIVE CHURCH.

—  
FROM AN ORDINATION SERMON.  
—

MUCH hath been written on the discipline of the primitive church ; but it is highly credible, it originated in some very plain fact, some very simple cause suited to the character of Jesus, and the condition of his disciples. If a cause adequate to all the effects be assigned, more would be redundant and ostentatious. Consider what I shall say on the subject, not as an investigation of it, nor as a reflection on others, nor as an oracle to you, but merely as a sketch of the first principles of a subject, which would fill many volumes ; principles, not now to be disputed, but merely stated ; principles, however, of real action, and tending to nothing but peace and virtue.

The discipline of the primitive churches was not taken from the *economy of Moses*. That economy was fastened to a place, confined within a given

period of time, and exhibited sensible objects to the worshippers. The late learned prelate, Bishop Warburton, in his life of the emperor Julian, hath clearly proved that the total subversion of the Mosaical dispensation was essential to the very being of the christian economy. As a theory, this is granted by all. In practice the case differs. Some christians in early times lost sight of this sound original maxim, and, unhappily, incorporated the discipline of the *temple* into the religion of Jesus, and on this mistake the Roman church is built. Hence the return of christians back into the bondage of infancy, regulated by meats, and days, and first elements of erudition. Hence a ritual, a pontiff, and a priesthood. Hence holy wars, and the defence of the faith by the sword of civil government. Hence a thousand institutes, all alien from the spirit of him, who said, *Behold, I create new heavens, and a new earth. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain.*

The primitive discipline was not taken from the *synagogue*. Synagogues were a sort of oratories resembling our meeting-houses, chapels, or parish-churches, erected not for sacrifice, which was confined to the temple, but merely for purposes of devotion, and its appendage, instruction. It should seem, for reasons not now necessary to be mentioned, these houses were first erected at the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity, when the condition of the people made such places necessary.

In Babylon they had lost the language in which their Scriptures were written, and it was necessary to remedy this inconvenience by glossing the text when it was read to the people, that they might not lose the sense in a confusion of terms. Here, on Sabbath days, the people assembled to pray, and to give and receive instruction by reading the holy Scriptures and expounding the sense. Order rendered rules necessary, and rules ripened into laws. In time these laws formed a system of parochial government ; so I think I may venture to call the jurisprudence of the synagogue. Many learned men have supposed that primitive christians adopted this discipline, and regulated their social worship by it. Probably some did so ; but it should seem they were Jews influenced by prejudices of education, and who, having only a slight knowledge of christianity, incorporated with it maxims of a polity not adapted to the views of their divine master ; for it would be easy to prove that the discipline of the synagogue was penal, practicable only in an assembly of rulers and subjects, and of course not fitted to a society of equals, which was the condition of the primitive church, as will be observed presently. Some have supposed, the Lord Jesus intended to recommend this discipline by his advice in case of trespass, recorded in the xviii of Matthew ; but that learned foreign lawyer, Professor Boehmer (let it not offend if we add, the best modern writer on this subject) hath elucidated the

text, and proved beyond contradiction, that the religion of Jesus did not, in its primitive institution, admit of any civil coercion, and consequently that its discipline was not that of the synagogue, which did.

The primitive discipline was not formally instituted by *Jesus Christ*. In vain we search for it in any of his public discourses, or private conversations. The Jews differed in speculations, but their rites were uniform, because their legislator had with precision adjusted every thing. But what chapter of the life of Jesus can any church produce, and say, here is our ritual ; this is our order ; these are the institutes of our discipline ; this verse tells us how to admit a member ; that how to elect an elder, a deacon, or a teacher ; here we are told how to form a society ; there how to preserve it ; and in case of dissolution, this instructs us how to separate, or how to reassemble ? On these subjects the wise master of our assemblies said nothing.

Finally, the discipline of the christian church was not expressly appointed by the *Apostles*. In the present view, the apostolical writings may be conveniently classed under four heads. Some are prophetic ; as the Revelation of John, some paragraphs in the writings of Paul, and some detached verses of others. A second class are historical ; as the Acts of the Apostles, and in the Epistles many incidental names, dates, places, persons, and events. Prophecy affords no rules of discipline ; history furnishes prece-

dents, but precedents however, which are law only to such as are in circumstances similar to those of the persons mentioned by the historians. The third class may be called expository of the christian doctrine, as the Epistle to the Hebrews written for the Jews, and the Epistles to the Romans, Ephesians, Galatians, and others, written for the Gentiles, or, to speak more properly, for societies composed of both Jews and Gentiles. Discipline here is an occasional subject, and it is chiefly applicable to the then state of the societies. In a similar state christians may adopt these prudential maxims, the end of all which is *peace, peace*. The last class consists of moral precepts adapted to the conditions of individuals. Is Timothy an overseer? He must be blameless. Is Paul aged? His advice ought to be respected. Are you a husband? Be kind. Are you a master? Be just and humane. Are you a servant? Be content with providence, diligent in business, and reverence your master. Are you a member of the christian body of believers? Imitate Jesus your pattern, and love your brethren. Nothing of all this can be called a christian ritual; and advice to a church, like advice to a wife, presupposes a state regulated by rules not mentioned by the adviser; and indeed the Apostles no more drew up a discipline, than they did a ritual for the hiring of servants, or the celebration of marriage.

What then ! Did Jesus leave this important article unsettled ? No. On the contrary, he finished it by an effort of wisdom truly divine. The Christian discipline rose of itself out of that *condition of equality*, into which Jesus put his disciples. He took twelve men of even rank, and perhaps with little dissimilitude of age and ability, and constituted them a family of love, or, if you will, a circle of friends. They were his whole church. Here was no master, no servant ; no priest, no people ; no prince, no subject ; no father, no son. It was not the union of a literal family like that of the temple ; or of a district like that of the synagogue ; or of a vague multitude like that which attended the preaching of Christ ; or of an universal body under the direction of universal itinerants, immediately inspired, as the churches were after his decease in the times of the Apostles ; but it was a state of the perfect equality of minds united by mutual benevolence.

What is discipline ? Order. What was primitive discipline ? Order without government, and above the want of it. In this exuberant soil of peace and freedom the human understanding unfolds itself in free inquiry, free from the frost of nipping penalties. The heart mellows into ripeness. Fear of God and love of his creatures, reverence for the first great cause and attachment to his image, meekness, gentleness, goodness, and devotion, form a fragrant compound of delicious taste ; or, to use the language of

Solomon, it is the *sweetness* of friendship, which, *like ointment and perfume, rejoices the heart*. It is not the fabric, however ornamented, it is this moral excellence, that excites the exclamations of christians; and this in many a mean place hath impelled them to look upward and sing; *Lord, I love the habitation of thine house, the place where thine honour dwelleth*.

Jesus left civil society untouched, and there rank and government are necessary; but it is a fact that primitive christian societies were small, independent bodies of equals. Many ecclesiastical historians have observed this, and have remarked that the first christians never elected officers because they had no right to teach or to baptize, but because they had not all either ability or opportunity to officiate. Even women taught and baptized, but order required them to officiate only to their own sex, and therefore the first churches appointed them deaconesses. In large churches they were numerous; they sat in public in a seat by themselves, and they were distinguished in the middle age by a small, grave ornament on the neck. The form of ordaining these female officers may be seen in the menologies of the Greek church. In the primitive church, order required a society of friends to visit and relieve each other, and, expedition being necessary in many cases, it was found advisable to elect a few to receive and distribute relief, to comfort the sick, to inspect the condition of prisoners, to try to procure their enlargement, and, in

brief, to manage their secular affairs, as well as to wait on the rest at the administration of the Lord's supper and baptism. In our small societies deacons execute these friendly offices without neglect to their worldly employments; but in large primitive churches, as the office took up the whole time of a deacon, justice required an indemnity, not to say a reward, and the church wholly supported their deacons.

Hence in time, in declining churches, when the teachers had risen into a priesthood, they associated deacons into their order. In the middle of the third century, it should seem, by comparing a letter of Cyprian with another of Cornelius of Rome, and a passage in Optatus, there were in Rome at that time forty-four christian congregations in the Catholic connexion; and in these churches there were on the list no less than fifteen hundred widows, sick, poor, and other objects of charity, wholly dependant on the liberality of the church. To the honour of the church, they were all supported; and deacons, who had so much employment, were honourably maintained as justice required. Such equity ought to prevail in all our modern offices; and a church that requires the whole time of an officer, deacon, or teacher, ought to support him; and an election to such an office, not including an election to a maintenance, is not just.

THE  
SPIRIT OF GOD  
THE GUIDE OF GOOD MEN.

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FROM THE VILLAGE DISCOURSES.

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[To understand the force and appropriateness of many parts of Robinson's *Village Discourses* and *Morning Exercises*, it is necessary to keep in mind, that they were delivered in different places, sometimes in a private dwelling, an open field, or an orchard ; and, also, at different times of the day, sometimes early in the morning, and at others in the evening. It seems to have been the speaker's chief purpose to render his discourses simple and perspicuous, and adapted to the uncultivated minds of his hearers, who were labourers, living at a distance from the stated place of worship, and indifferently instructed in religion. Occasional omissions in the articles selected from the Discourses and Exercises are indicated by asterisks.]

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*As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.* Romans, viii. 14.

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THE old prophets had a spirit of prophecy, and a spirit of holiness ; that is, they had the Spirit of God ; they knew a little of those future events, which God

perfectly understood, and which little he imparted to them ; and they possessed a little degree of such justice and goodness as God possesses in infinite perfection. Jesus Christ is a new character, having the Spirit of God without measure, possessing wisdom, justice, goodness, and every excellence in unlimited variety, and in absolute perfection. What did Jesus Christ with this fulness of the Spirit of God ? He communicated it to his disciples, *and so sent them even as his Father sent him*, saying, *receive ye the Holy Ghost*. Christ did not communicate to them, for they were not capable of receiving it, all the Spirit of God that dwelt in him ; but he communicated it in part, therefore they *knew in part, and prophesied in part*. When they were children, they thought and spoke as children ; but when they became men, they *put away childish things*. The question is, what did Jesus communicate to his Apostles for the Holy Ghost ? This question is properly answered by distinguishing extraordinary powers, peculiar to themselves, and necessary to obtain a hearing of their doctrine in the world, from ordinary communications common to them and to all other good men to the end of the world.

When Christ came into the world, and condescended to ask a distracted race of men to give him a hearing, what glorious reasons did he stoop to bestow ! He healed the sick, he raised the dead, he fed the multitude, he empowered his Apostles to

speaking with divers tongues, and to perform many miracles, all for the good of society, all to *convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment*. During the life of Christ he communicated to his Apostles his own ideas of things, what notion he had of God, what of scripture, what of a future state; and his wisdom made them wise. He imparted to them his own just and gentle tempers, and through his goodness they became good. He communicated to them proper actions, and by seeing how he conducted himself, they learned how to behave themselves. These communications, ordinary and extraordinary, are what one of them calls, a *receiving out of his fulness grace for grace*.

Before Jesus Christ left the world, he promised the Apostles to supply his absence, after he should have left them, by *another Comforter, even the spirit of truth*, which, saith he, *ye know, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you*; that is, the truths you know now shall be increased and multiplied, and you shall know them better, and more to your comfort, after my death than you have done before. After his resurrection, as he had promised, he *saw them again*; and while he was eating with them, he commanded them that they should not go out of town, but wait at *Jerusalem for the promise of the Father, which, said he, ye have heard of me; for ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence*. Accordingly about forty days after his death, and a

few days after his ascension, they received the Holy Ghost in a rich abundance both of ordinary and extraordinary powers, the first in a very high degree of excellence, and the last in a manner peculiar to themselves. The Apostles had these powers in trust to communicate to others, and they executed the trust faithfully by imparting their extraordinary knowledge how to heal the sick, and how to speak with tongues, to some others, and this knowledge ceased when these extraordinary men died; but such ideas as were necessary for the salvation of ordinary Christians to the end of the world they left in writing, and so bequeathed as it were to posterity that Holy Spirit, which they had received of their divine Master for the use of all mankind.

Thus the history of the Holy Ghost stands in Scripture divided into three periods; the first, from Adam to Christ, was a Holy Spirit of prophecy; the second, in the life of Christ, was a Holy Spirit of prophecy, information, and promise, accompanied with wisdom to know how to work miracles, and power to give it effect; the third, from Pentecost to the moment in which the apostle John wrote the last line of his gospel, was a holy dispensation of wisdom, goodness, and power, partly proper to that age and ceasing with it, and partly containing intelligence to inform and direct religion to the end of time. \* \* \*

Having thus seen the rise and the accomplishment of the promise of an universal religion under the ad-

ministration of Jesus Christ, and having got possession of the book that contains the whole of that religion, let us proceed to examine the book, and particularly with a view to the Holy Spirit, and his influence in religion ; for *as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God*. To give you at once my notion of the subject, I think our Apostle took his idea of the christian church being *led* by the Spirit, from that favourite part of the history of his country so often mentioned in the writings of the prophets, and so faithfully recorded by their first historian Moses, I mean God's *leading* the Israelites through the wilderness into the land of promise. Sometimes it is said simply, *God led them* through the wilderness. Sometimes it is said, the Holy Spirit led them *by the right hand of Moses*. Sometimes they are said to be led *with a cloud, and with a light of fire* ; and in this manner the wise men of the east were led by a star to Jesus Christ. God in all these cases made use of means, and the work was no less his for using means to effect his purpose. In this manner I suppose the Holy Spirit by the Scriptures guides all good men. The cloud was not in the Israelites, nor was the star in the wise men ; but there was in them a knowledge of the use and intent of these appearances, and a conformity of action to their own ideas.

Here then two things rise to view in our subject ; a guide without us, and a disposition within us ; and

the last seems to me to be an effect of the first, and both the work of one and the same spirit. Suppose a world without a Bible, and you have no idea of any Spirit of God as a spirit of religion in the inhabitants of it. Suppose, on the other hand, a Bible in a world without an inhabitant, and you have no notion of influence ; the *Spirit of God* is there, but nothing knows or worships him ; *the earth is without form and void, and darkness is upon the face of the deep*. If God calls for light, it will come ; if for land and water, they will appear ; if for the sun and moon, and stars, they will be ; if for fish, and fowl, and beasts, they will appear ; but there will be no religion till man comes, nor then any revealed religion till the book and the man meet, and then the child of God will be *led by the Spirit of God*. My supposition is a fact. The Bible lies about in many parts of the world without readers, and there lies all our holy religion like Jesus dead in the sepulchre. There are, on the contrary, many places where the Bible is read ; but it is not among men, but mere animals, who eat and drink, and marry and give in marriage, and buy and sell, and build and plant, and are so full of these ideas, that they never attend to religious truth, before death comes and destroys them all. *So it was in the days of Noah, so it was also in the days of the Son of Man*, and so it will be to the end of the world. In a word, there is no magic in the Bible to operate without reason and conscience ;

and there is no religion in man without revelation. If we lay aside the Scriptures we have no standard to judge by, and if we have no judgment the standard is of no use.

Let us apply these general observations to particular cases, in order to understand how the Spirit of God *leads* all good men. We have determined, that it is by means of scripture truths, and that it implies the exercise of some dispositions in us. I am aware of the questions you will ask, and I only defer stating the question till it comes properly before us, as it will presently by supposing a case, which is not a mere supposition, because it comes to pass every day. Suppose a man, who had never thought of religion, to lose by death the first of all earthly pleasures, the agreeable partner of his life, or, as a prophet calls his wife, *the desire of his eyes*. O dreadful calamity, sound fit to raise the dead! *Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke! I spake unto the people in the morning, and at even my wife died*. Awhile the man, thunderstruck, can hardly believe it true, and hopes against hope, till time, cruel time, kills his hope, and drives him to despair. The more he thinks, the more occasion he sees for grief. Every thing he sees pierces him to the heart; and in every place a lovely picture of her that was, and the ghastly features of her that is no more, meet his eyes, and melt down all his soul in wo. The sun does not

shine, the stars do not sparkle, the flowers do not scent, the world does not look as it used to do ; the world seems dead, his house is a tomb, and all his domestics dreary ghosts. Now he feels the vanity of the world, takes up his Bible, perhaps to look after the desire of his eyes, and try whether he can find any thing in her present state to assuage his pain. This man hath religion to seek, and it is indifferent which end of the Bible he begins at ; either will *lead* him right. If with the prophets, they will hand him on from one to another, till they conduct him downward to Christ ; if with the Apostles, they will direct him upward to the same person, who is a *light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of the people of Israel.*

This man, thus led to Christ, will be instructed by reading his sermons, by observing his actions, and by examining how his Apostles understood and explained his meaning, by applying it to several cases both of individuals and collective bodies, which fell out after his death, and during their inspiration ; and perceiving the truth and beauty of all this, and finding a satisfaction in it calming his mind and producing in him a pleasure never experienced before, he will become a convert to the christian religion, and choose to make the truths of it the rules of his action, and the ground of his hope. This man is *led* step by step to a moment in life, in which he becomes a new man ; rises, as it were, from the dead into *newness of*

*life.* \* \* \* He hath always been a child asleep in the bosom of his father, and when he woke he found himself in his arms. Call in now all the means used to *lead* this man to the spot where he now is, and examine, which of them made this man a christian? Was it any one of your Prophets or Apostles? We brought indeed *the message which we heard of God, and declared* unto him; but we were not acquainted with him till lately; he had, when we found him, eyes to read, ears to hear, and understanding to judge, a conscience to reprove, and he was in a condition neither melancholy nor mad, but disposed to make use of them. In a word, there is a chain of events, one of which brings on another, and of all which God is the first cause; and if you can suppose the life of the man just now mentioned to consist of a chain of five thousand events, and that three thousand and fifty came to pass before he touched the holy Scriptures, and that his reading them was the three thousand and fifty-first event, I should call three thousand and fifty, acts of God as the God of nature, the three thousand and fifty-first an act of God as the God of grace; and though I should think him *led* all along before by the same God, yet I should from that moment date his being *led by the Spirit of God*, as a spirit of truth and holiness revealing himself in scripture as the Saviour of sinners, and in no other way.

When the Spirit of God *saves a soul from death*, by *converting a sinner from the error of his way*, what

doth he? Doth he create any new senses or faculties, new eyes in the body, or new powers in the soul? Certainly not; for as there is no want of any new powers, so if they were, they would not be what Christ came to redeem, nor would they need sanctification. The whole work of the Spirit seems to me to consist in two things; the one, a proposing of the truths of religion, and this is done in the holy Scriptures; the other, a disposing of the mind to admit the truth, and this is done by means of various sorts, by prosperity, by adversity, by education, by conversation, by sickness, and by a thousand other methods, parts of a whole complicated government, of which God is the first cause. In order to explain the subject, or rather (it becomes me to say of such a subject) my notion of it, I beg your attention to three reflections of reason, scripture, and experience.

I call it *reasonable* to give God as much glory for bringing an event to pass by means, as without them; yea, in some sense more. I will explain myself. It is the opinion of some christians, that the Holy Ghost regenerates a soul immediately, that is suddenly, and without any thing between himself and the soul, and they are zealous to support this idea of regeneration for the very laudable purpose of securing all the honour of this work to God. We praise the motive, for too much care cannot be taken to render to God a glory so justly his due; but we cannot see that the work is less his for his making use of

means to effect it ; for whose are the means but his own ? The more means he thinks proper to use, the more he displays his glorious perfections. In all his other works he makes use of means. He warms us by means of fire, he feeds us by means of bread, he refreshes us in the day by air, and in the night by sleep, he creates us and brings us into being by means of our parents, and he removes us by means of diseases. Name, if it be possible, a single event in the whole world brought to pass without means. If we go from the body to the mind, still the same wise order prevails. Our eyes distinguish colours ; but colours are not God, but rays of light differently disposed. Our ears distinguish sounds, but sounds are only air. Our feelings find out hardness, softness, rough, smooth, and so on. There is not a single thought, in all the multitude we have in our minds, which hath not been brought thither by some means or other. What is more, every thought is connected with another thought, and that with another, and so on till we are lost in the distance or the crowd.

Now, we ask, is that which God doth by means less his doing than if it were performed without means ? Is not the last effect as much his as the first ? Who gave us this year a plentiful harvest ? You say, God. You say right, because God formed six thousand years ago sun and earth, air and water, wheat and barley, and fixed all in such a state that they came to you last harvest exactly in such pro-

portion as he at first appointed them. One great argument for the truth of the christian religion is, that it exactly resembles the world of nature, and so proves itself to be the work of the same God; and if it were not so, if religion were not like other things, which we are sure God made, we should have no certain rules to know, when we received a religion, whether it were a body of truth coming from God to make us happy, or a set of errors contrived by wicked men to make us miserable. Did ever any man conceive that the sun, or the air, or the water, or the trees, or fish, fowl, and cattle were the invention and production of man? Nobody ever thought so. Why? Because they have characters of size, shape, duration, and perfection, above all the skill and power of man to produce. Bring forth ten thousand things to view having the same characters of perfection in their kind, and we instantly know the maker; but produce something with different characters, and the author becomes doubtful, and it is no further probable that he created it than as it resembles his other works. Apply this to our subject. If God regenerates us by means, if he makes us wise by informing us of truth, and good by proposing good reasons to us for being so, then religion resembles his other works; but if we be wise without truth, and good without motive, then a new work appears without the characters of his other works, and consequently without any evidence to persuade us it is his. Thus, reason

seems to plead for the truth of our notion of the work of the Holy Spirit.

The chief objection against this account seems to me a strong reason in favour of it. If this account be true, say some, the work of the Spirit may be explained and described as clearly as any other part of religion, and we shall know what the work of the Spirit is ; whereas we have been taught to believe that the work is a mystery, which no man knoweth, no, not he that receiveth it ; and this notion seems confirmed by this text, *the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth ; so is every one that is born of the Spirit.* In answer to this, and every other objection taken from Scripture, we have proposed to make a second reflection on the language of Scripture concerning this subject, and we shall put the passages into two classes.

In the first, we put such as speak of this work under figures or *similitudes* ; as where the Spirit is said to be like *wind, fire, water.* All Scriptures of this kind are explained by one distinction between the nature and the effects of things. It is one thing to know the nature of fire, and air, and water, and it is another to know the effects they produce. No man fully knows the first ; but the last are as clear as daylight. Is there a man in this assembly, who doth not know, what effect fire will produce in wood or water, and wind in mill work, and so on ? When our Lord said,

Every one that is born of the Spirit is so as you, Nicodemus, are in the wind ; he knows the effects, and that knowledge is sufficient to direct his actions ; my instructions are intended to make men good men, and not philosophers. Observe, it was Nicodemus who said, *how* can these things be ? And the reproof given him by Jesus Christ would have been improper had the subject been a mystery ; art thou a master of Israel and *knowest not* these things. We speak that we do *know* and testify that we have *seen*. The subject of their conversation was not the nature of the Spirit, but his influences in religion. Now, said our Lord, the religion I teach is spiritual, it doth not stand like yours in *meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances imposed until the time of reformation for the purifying of the flesh*, but in effects upon the mind and heart ; you see no temple, no priesthood, no sacrifices in my religion ; let not this offend you ; my religion resembles the wind, which no man ever saw, but the effects of which you and all other men perfectly understand. *The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth ; so is every one that is born of the Spirit.* In this manner expound all the passages that speak of the Spirit's work under similitudes, and you will find no difficulty in them.

In a second class, I put all such Scriptures as *describe* the work of the Spirit. The apostle Peter had

seen a great deal of this work, and one day of his life, such a day as that in which *three thousand souls were added*, produced more and better experiments than ordinary teachers have an opportunity of seeing in their whole life. He saw religion in every form, and examined single conversions, separately and alone, and his whole life was a course of experiments, a part of which are recorded in Acts; and we have reason to believe, though we have no account of the twenty-four last years of his life in Scripture, that he continued to old age in the exercise of instructing and converting mankind, or, as our Lord calls it, *feeding the lambs and the sheep* of Christ. The testimony of such a man is extremely respectable. It is a testimony of inspiration explained and confirmed by experiment. Now he says, that the *strangers scattered throughout Pontus*, and other countries, who were *elect through sanctification of the Spirit*, were *born again of incorruptible seed by the word of God, which word by the Gospel was preached unto them*. This account of regeneration is partly literal, and partly figurative. The Gospel is the word of God; the Gospel was preached unto you. These are literally true. The Gospel containing the word of God which was preached unto you is an *incorruptible seed*, of which you were born again; these are figurative expressions, and must be expounded by the literal terms, and clearly mean a dependence of the three excellencies that constitute a regenerate man

on the three principal parts of religion, in which they had been instructed.

The Gospel proposes a set of clear truths ; Christians examine and believe these truths. The Gospel proposes a set of motives ; Christians feel these motives ; fear hell, desire heaven, love holiness, and so on. The Gospel proposes a set of rules to live by ; Christians reduce these rules to practice. Christians thus are born into a new world, having the *new powers* necessary to live in that world ; they have new objects and new ideas ; they have new motives and new feelings ; they have new laws and a new life. The apostle not only saw all this in others, but he felt all this exemplified in himself. He was in the exercise of his trade, *casting a net into the sea*, when a person walking on the beach called to him, and said, *follow me, and I will make you a fisher of men*. This word of the Lord was like that at the creation, *let there be light* ; and the history of the rest of Peter's existence may be contained in this word, *there was light*. When he afterward fell into a swoon, and returned again to sin and to fishing, he was *begotten again, unto a lively hope*, not without means, but *by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*. Here is the work, the whole ordinary work of the Holy Spirit, but all wrought by means ; these strangers *purified their souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit*, that is, through the knowledge of things *reported unto them, by them that*

*preached the Gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven,* to enable the preachers to speak the divers tongues of these strangers, and of all others to whom they were sent, that so their faith might stand on what they clearly understood. \* \* \* \* \*

This brings us to our last reflection on christian experience. If means have no place in the christian religion till after the production of something in the soul containing the whole new man, then the use of means is only to nourish and cherish this new principle, that is to say, they are to a christian what air and earth and moisture are to an acorn. All christians seem to act as if they thought the means appointed to produce the end, and the fitness of the means is the support of christian action. On this principle we educate our children, because instruction seems to us a proper method of producing in them knowledge. On this principle we read and expound the Scriptures in public; not that the Scriptures want any expounding, to cool and attentive minds, but because the minds of most men are not in such a state, but blinded with prejudice, custom, and passion, and because we know such a mind is not prepared to attend to reason. On this principle we address the Gospel not only to the righteous and well disposed, but also to men of a quite different character.

One great argument in defence of our holy religion is that it is fitted not only to saints, but also to

sinners, even to such as are in the last and most deplorable stages of vice. If you say, God works in the means; this is what we plead for; if you affirm on the contrary that he works immediately, then there is no more fitness in instructing the ignorant, and reasoning with the wicked, and expecting knowledge and reformation to follow, than there would be in planting and watering flints and pebbles, and expecting them to grow into oaks. Go further, go back to the regeneration of any one christian in this assembly, and divide yourselves into two parts. Some of you do not know the time of your conversion; that is as much as to say, the work of the Spirit was so connected with other events that one thing brought on another till all together issued in your conversion, for you are a sincere convert to the faith of Christ. Others of you resemble the man supposed some time ago, and you know what events fell out when you became christians; but the connexion of an effect with a cause destroys the notion of immediate influence. One says, such a providence set me a thinking; another says, such a discourse set me a repenting; a third says, such a book gave me information that produced comfort. All of us believe, the means of religion are highly fitted to answer their end; and the certainty of obtaining the end in the use of means, is the sun that rules the day, and the moon that rules the night of life.

We cannot conclude this subject without two reflections. First, we perceive a wonderful inclination in christians toward something in religion so sublime as not to be understood ; whereas the true sublimity of religion lies in its plainness, as the true excellence and dignity of man consist in his becoming such a plain man as Jesus Christ was. This inclination is a remnant of the old education given this country by monks and priests, whose majesty stood in the credulousness of their followers. They made creeds, or articles to be believed, and gave them to our forefathers to say over. You do not understand them, said they, but we do ; and, while they were doing that, the creed-makers ran away with their houses and lands. Let us renounce this disposition, and let us believe nothing but what we understand.

Lastly, we observe with great pleasure that all christians allow the Spirit of God is a Holy Spirit ; and even they who think him hidden, think they have no right to conclude he is where they suppose, till the fruits of a holy life declare it. Should a man, who had lived wickedly all his days, be intoxicated with liquor over night and regenerated at six next morning by an immediate work of the Spirit, no christians would believe it that day ; and should he, like Saul, *assay to join himself to the disciples, they would be all afraid of him, and not believe that he was a disciple till some Barnabas should declare two things unto them ; one, how the Lord had spoken to him ;*

and the other, *how he had boldly preached at Damascus* ; till he had given substantial proofs by his conduct that his pretensions were true and real. If an extraordinary conversion was not credible without proof, how much less are ordinary changes? The proof of proofs is laid by the Holy Spirit where it ought to be. *If ye be led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law, for the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance ; against such there is no law. Let not a man think himself to be something when he is nothing ; but let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another man.*

THE  
CHRISTIAN RELIGION

EASY TO BE UNDERSTOOD.

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FROM THE VILLAGE DISCOURSES.

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*When ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the  
mystery of Christ. Ephes. iii. 4.*

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By christianity, I mean that religion which Jesus Christ taught his disciples, and which is all contained in the New Testament. Retain this observation, for it frees the subject from many difficulties. Some misguided christians propose a great number of mysteries, that is, secrets to us; such as that the bread and wine in the Lord's supper cease to be bread and wine, and become the flesh, and bones, and blood of Christ; such as that a wicked man is inspired by the Holy Ghost to lead us to heaven without our knowing the way; and that these wonders are performed by the uttering of certain words by a certain set of men; and these secrets, which nobody so much as pretends to understand, we are required to believe. However, we have one short answer for all mysteries of this kind; that is, they are

*not* taught in the New Testament, and therefore they are no parts of the christian religion.

When I affirm the christian religion is not a secret, observe, I speak of christianity *now*, and not formerly. Thus we free the subject from all the objections which are made against it from many passages in the New Testament. Christianity, say some, is often called a mystery, or a secret; even the text calls it so. True; but the same text says, Paul *knew* this secret, and the Ephesians might *understand* what he knew of it, if they would *read* what he wrote to them. *When ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ.*

Strictly speaking, the text intends only *one part* of christianity, that is, the uniting of heathens and Jews in one religious community; but what is affirmed of this one part is equally true of the whole. True religion had always been hid from the wisest of the heathens; and the christian religion, which was then the only true religion, had not been made known in other ages to the Jews, as it was then to the Apostles; but Paul knew it, and he proposed to make all men see it. *I preach to make all men sec.* We allow, the wisest man could never have known (for his life would have been too short, and his faculties too much confined) the true character of God; but we affirm God revealed, that is, made it known unto the Prophets and Apostles by his Spirit; and these Prophets and Apostles have made it known to us by their writings.

When I affirm, the christian religion hath no mysteries now, I do not mean to say that the truths and the duties of christianity are not *connected* with other truths and other exercises, which surpass all our comprehension; but I affirm, that the knowledge of the incomprehensible parts, and the belief of what people please to conjecture about them, though they may be parts of our amusement, and perhaps improvement, are yet no parts of that religion which God requires of us under pain of his displeasure. Suppose I were to affirm, there is no secret in mowing grass, and in making, stacking, and using hay; all this would be very true; and should any one deny this, and question me about the manner in which one little seed produces clover, another trefoil, a third rye-grass, and concerning the manner how all these convey strength and spirit to horses, and milk to cows, and fat to oxen in the winter; I would reply, all this is philosophy; nothing of this is necessary to mowing, and making, and using hay. I sanctify this thought by applying it to religion. Every good work produces present pleasure and future reward; to perform the work, and to hope for the reward from the known character of the Great Master we serve, is religion; and all before and after is only connected with it.

What part of the christian religion is a mystery? Divide the whole into the three natural parts, of plan, progress, and execution; the first was before this

world began ; the last will be after this world shall end ; the middle part is before us now. There is no secret in either of these parts ; but there are incomprehensible mysteries connected with each of them. In regard to the first, it is impossible to be supposed, by a man who knows any thing of God, that the christian religion came into the world without the Creator's knowing that such an event would take place ; and it is impossible for such a man to imagine that, after the present life, there will be no distinction made between the righteous and the wicked. There is no mystery in these general principles ; but we may render them extremely perplexed by rashly agitating questions connected with them.

In regard to Christianity in this present life, every thing in it is exceeding plain. Is the character of Jesus Christ a secret ? Did ever any body take him for an idle gentleman, a cruel tyrant, a deceitful tradesman, a man of gross ignorance and turbulent passions ? On the contrary, is it not perfectly clear that he was the person foretold by the Prophets of his country, who should come, himself perfectly wise and good, to instruct mankind in the knowledge and worship of God ? Is the character of Scripture a secret ? Is it not perfectly clear, that it is a wise and good book, full of information on all the subjects that concern religion and morality ? Is it a secret that we are mortal and must die ; or that we are depraved, and

apt to live in the omission of duty and the practice of sin ; or that a life of sin is connected with a course of misery, for pursuing which we deserve blame ? Is it a secret whether God takes notice of the actions of men, or whether he will forgive a penitent and punish the impenitent ? In a word, is the character of God a secret in the christian religion ; and is it a mystery whether he be an object worthy of our adoration and imitation ? Were I obliged to give a short account of the christian religion, I would not say it is a revelation of the decrees of God, or a revelation of the resurrection of the dead, or a revelation of the mercy of God to a repenting sinner through the merit of Jesus Christ ; for though each of these be true, yet all these are only *parts of his ways* ; but I would call christianity a revelation, or a making known of the true and real character of God ; and I would affirm of the whole, and of each component part, that it was so made known as to be free from all mystery, in regard to the truth of the facts, and yet so connected as to contain mysteries beyond the comprehension of finite minds. I would affirm further, that our religion is confined to the belief and practice of only what is revealed, and that every thing untold is a matter of conjecture, and no part of piety towards God and benevolence to mankind.

Take heart, then, my good brethren ; you may understand, practise, and enjoy all this rich gift of God to man, just as you enjoy the light of the day,

and refreshment by rest at night. Let no one say, I was born in poverty, I have had no learning, I have no friends, my days are spent in labour, and I have no prospect except that of drawing my last breath where I drew my first. All this may be true ; but all this will not prevent your knowing, and practising, and enjoying the christian religion, the founder of which had not what the *birds of the air have, where to lay his head.*

When I say all may understand it, I mean if their own depravity does not prevent it. Plainly, you cannot know it if you do not attend to it ; nor can you know it, though you do attend, if you do not attend to christianity itself, but to something else put instead of it. Let me explain myself.

One says, I cannot understand the nature and force of religion ; and pray, is there any thing wonderful in your ignorance ? Consider, you never read the Scriptures ; you never ask any body to read them to you ; you hate and persecute good men ; you seldom enter a place of worship ; you keep wicked company like yourself ; you are often seen in the practice of enormous crimes. Are you the man to complain, I cannot understand religion ? It would be a mystery indeed, if a man who never turned his attention to a subject, should know any thing certain about it. We have no such mystery in all the christian religion. Christians do not live like you.

Another says, I am a very sober man, I go constantly to a place of worship, and I cannot comprehend the christian religion. All this is very true; you are a sober, decent character, and regular in your attendance on public worship; but recollect, I am speaking not of your body, but of your mind. Now, it is a fact, abroad or at home, in the church or in the barn, your attention is always taken up with other things, and so taken up as to leave no room *for the things which belong unto your everlasting peace.* Sometimes your corn, sometimes your cattle, sometimes taxes and rates, and sometimes your rent and your servants' wages; but, at all times, to live in this present world, engrosses all your attention. You, you resemble you child fast asleep, without knowing it, in the arms of a parent. *God besets you behind and before, and lays his hand upon you. It is he that watereth the ridges of your corn, and settleth the furrows thereof; he maketh the earth soft with showers; he clothes thy pastures with flocks, and crowns the year with his goodness. It is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, and multiplieth thy herds and thy flocks, and thy silver and thy gold, and all that thou hast.* And you, inattentive man! you cannot comprehend that you are under an obligation to know and do the will of this generous benefactor. What does christianity require of you, but to love and serve this God? If you do not serve him, it is because you do not love him; if you do not love

him, it is because you do not know him ; and if you do not know him, it is not for the want of evidence, but attention.

It is not only to you that I affirm this connexion between attention and knowledge ; for if this barn were filled with statesmen and scholars, generals and kings, I should be allowed to say to one, Sir, you understand intrigue ; to another, Sir, you understand war, to besiege a town, and rout an army ; to a third, Sir, you understand law, and every branch of the office of a conservator of the peace ; to another, Sir, you understand languages and arts and sciences ; and you all understand all these, because you have studied them ; but here are two things which you have not studied, and which therefore you do not know ; the one, how to plough, and sow, and reap, and thresh an acre of wheat ; and the other, how to live holily in this world, so as to live happily in the world to come. Are you not convinced, my good brethren, that the same circumstance, which prevents those gentlemen from knowing how to perform the work that you perform every day with pleasure, prevents you from knowing the practice and the pleasure of true christianity ? In both cases the subject hath not been attended to.

I go further, and venture to affirm, if religion could be understood without attention, it would be a misfortune ; a misfortune depriving us of many advantages and leading us to commit many crimes.

The ease with which we acquired knowledge would sink the value of it, and *darkness would have communion with light.*

As attention is absolutely necessary, so it is equally necessary that attention should be fixed upon the christian religion itself, and nothing else. We hear often of the mysteries of religion; let us not forget that there are *mysteries of iniquity.* Ignorance, covetousness, tyranny, especially tyranny over conscience, all wrap themselves in mystery; but if we incorporate any of these mysteries with the christian religion, and attend to them, instead of distinguishing and attending to pure christianity, we may attend and study, but we shall never know; we shall be *ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.* *The doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions, and deliverances* of the Apostle Paul, were *fully known*, and diligently followed by common christians; but who ever knew the *doctrine* of transubstantiation, or that of the infallibility of a frail, sinful man? Who of us, uninspired men, knows the feelings of a person under the immediate influence of the Holy Ghost? In vain we pursue such mysteries as these; the stronger the attention, the greater the mortification of not being able to succeed. If one place religion in impulses, another in new revelations, a third in a state of perfection, a fourth in discoveries and enjoyments inconsistent

with our present state, and not set before us in the christian religion, they may well be filled with doubts and fears, and spend life in complaining of the crooked and dreary paths of religion. If, on the contrary, we attend only to what is revealed, to believe only what is reported with sufficient evidence, to practise only what is commanded by the undoubted voice of God ; if we seek only such pleasures and distinctions as we are taught in Scripture to expect ; in a word, if we would *acquaint ourselves only with God, and be at peace* one with another, *thereby good should come unto us.*

When I said, all of you might understand christianity, I meant, there was nothing in christianity but what might be understood if it were properly attended to, and nothing in the natural condition of any individual (I do not say his moral state) to prevent his attending to it. There is no capacity so mean, no creature so forlorn, as to be beyond the reach of the benefits conferred upon men by Jesus Christ. You are a babe ; in his Gospel there is *milk for babes* ; truths adapted to nourish and cherish a little, feeble mind. You are poor ; *the poor have the Gospel preached to them* ; the glad tidings of a Redeemer, and all his benefits. You are unlearned ; but the *highway of holiness* is so plain, that *a wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein.* You are so bashful, and so unused to company, that you are necessarily deprived of the pleasure of the company

and conversation of good men ; but you have better company than that of good men ; and you, you poor shepherd, you will behold the *heavens, the work of the fingers of your God* ; you will *consider the moon and the stars*, and the Saviour and the heaven *which he hath ordained*, till you cry out, *What is man, that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him ?* And upon these subjects *the tongue of the stammerer shall be ready to speak eloquently !* The christian religion enlarges and ennobles the mind, purifies and refines the heart, and adorns the life ; and a christian labourer, exercising his own understanding, is a more beautiful sight than an unjust judge in all the pomp of his office.

## THE JEWS.

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FROM THE MORNING EXERCISES.

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*Afterward shall the children of Israel fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days. Hosea, iii. 5.*

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ALWAYS when I see a Jew, I recollect a saying of the Lord by the prophet Isaiah, *thou art the seed of Abraham, my friend*; and I find a thousand thoughts in my mind, impelling me to my duty. I am going this morning just to give you a sketch of a subject, that would fill volumes, and a subject of which we ought not to be ignorant.

First, let us inform ourselves of the general *history* of this people. The father of the family was Abraham. He was born in the East, of an *idolatrous* family, and, at the command of God, he became the first dissenter in the world. He quitted his country, and went and set up the worship of one God in his own family, and *taught* them to practise it. From this man proceeded a family, which increased into tribes, and formed a people as the *stars* in the heaven, or the *sand* on the seashore for multitude. Idolatry and immorality sometimes infected a few; but

the bulk preserved the belief of one God, and the imitation of his perfections, inviolably for ages. They were shepherds, and lived, imbosomed in forests and fastnesses, a plain, frugal, laborious life, unacquainted with the world, and unpractised in the arts and luxuries of polished nations. They assembled to worship God by prayer and sacrifice at every new moon, where the old heads of families taught morality, and inculcated the hope excited by the promise of God, that in one of their family, all the families of the earth should be blessed with the knowledge of their God and their morality. Thus read the book of Genesis, and other scripture histories of the same times, and without forming any romantic ideas of imitation, impossible except in their circumstances, admire the history, approve the prophecy, and copy the inoffensive purity of their lives.

When these people were in slavery in Egypt, they were at a school in which Providence taught them, by their own feelings, the nature and the worth of liberty, both civil and religious. What noble efforts they made to obtain it, and how God crowned their honest endeavours with success under the direction of Moses, Joshua, and the Judges, you will read in the four books of Moses, Joshua, Judges, and Ruth. When they changed their government into an absolute monarchy, they enslaved themselves, and overwhelmed their country with idolatry, immorality, and calamities of every kind. Read the prophecies with

the light of history of times, persons, and places, which is contained in Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, and you will easily discover what religion had to object against a tyrannical government, an idolatrous worship, and dissolute manners; and what it had to do in bearing affliction, reforming worship, and cherishing hope of better times under the direction of the expected Prince of the house of David.

When he came, and addressed himself to the blessing of all nations with an universal religion, some of his countrymen put him to death; but others espoused his cause, wrote his history, and reasoned to establish it, not in the form of a secular kingdom, but in the convictions and consciences of reasonable men. There it hath stood ever since; and, though the bulk of the Jews have been scattered and punished for crucifying Christ, yet by being kept a separate people, they serve to prove the truth of the Gospel; and the text, with many others like it, promises that *they shall reverence the Lord in the latter days*. The Epistle to the Hebrews lies ready for their use at that day. I think nothing can be easier than to apply this historical knowledge to its proper use; and yet some christians have got such an unwise and wayward knack of reasoning, as to quote whatever was among the Jews in proof of what ought to be now; as if the economy that crucified Christ was to restore him his character and dignity!

Remark next the *customs* of this people. They serve, as their history does, to interpret Scripture. Our text is connected with one. A part of this prophecy is a drama. I will try to make you understand me. A drama, in our present view, is a subject both related and represented. Divines call it preaching by signs. These signs were proper to represent to the eye the subject spoken of to the ear. Thus Jeremiah explained slavery with a *yoke* upon his neck; and Jesus simplicity, by setting a *little child* before his disciples. \* \* \* \* \*

Further, let us allow the *merit* of the Jews. They deserve all the reputation, which the inspired writers give them. They exhibit single characters of consummate virtue, as Abraham for faith, Moses for meekness, Nehemiah for love of his country, and so on. As a nation they excelled in some periods in arms, in others in industry, commerce, splendour, and wealth; and in all in good writers; for what historians are equal to Moses and the evangelists, or what ancient poetry breathes such pure and sublime sentiments as that of the Jews? As a church they preserved the oracles of God, and at their fall their remnants became the *riches of the world*. The Apostle of us Gentiles was a Jew, and to say all in one word, the Saviour and the Judge of mankind was a *Jew*. Let us respect the ancient Jews in the persons of their children, and for their sakes let us be friends to universal toleration.

Let us recollect the *sins* and the *calamities* of these people. Their sins were many and enormous ; but it was the *killing* of Jesus Christ, that completed their ruin. Let us examine what sins brought Jesus to the cross, and let us avoid the practice of them. Nor let us forget their calamities. They have been under all the punishments foretold four thousand years ago by Moses, and seem doomed to travel over the world to recommend a Gospel which they reject and despise. Their prophets, we find, did not slander them ; they are the people described, and their punishments prove the divine mission of their prophets. Thus God is glorified, whether man be lost or saved. In some future time he will be glorified in us, either his mercy if we embrace it, or his justice if we reject it ; for to reject the Gospel is to reject both the mercy and the justice of God.

Let us finish by observing the *recall* of the Jews. The prophets foretel it, and a course of events renders it probable. They are preserved a distinct people, though the nations that conquered them are lost. They are more numerous now than they were when a nation. The Gospel is truth and virtue struggling against error and vice ; it is natural to hope that the stronger must in time subdue the weaker. Error and vice are supported by man ; but truth and virtue by God. Let us not despair. The Jews came out of Egypt under the conduct of a shepherd with only a rod in his hand to point out the way.

Providence is at no loss for means to effect its purposes ; *he worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.*

There are four things implied in the text, which the Jews will reverence in the latter days. First, That divine *patience*, which bore with their provocations ; *after* they have rejected Moses and the Prophets, after they have committed crimes of every sort, after they have crucified Christ, persecuted his Apostles, and persevered for ages in approving the crime ; *afterward* shall the children of Israel reverence the Lord for his patience, which outlasted all their perverseness.

Next, they will reverence his *providence*, which, when they were persecuted in one country, always provided them an asylum in another. Providence hath given them skill, and made them useful to many nations. It hath prospered their industry, and crowned it with plenty, so that their riches are almost as proverbial as their infidelity. When Jews from all countries, in their latter days, shall compile their own history of the dispersion, it must needs display a bright scene of providence, which they themselves will reverence in those days.

Will they not always reverence the *grace* of God ? The Lord will both forgive their offences, and restore them to favour. To this we add, the *glory* of God, as another object of reverence. Great and marvellous displays of divine power have been made in

favour of this people formerly, and, it should seem by the prophecies, more such displays will be made in favour of them at their *return to their first husband*. May God hasten it in his time.

What remains? Only this at present. Let us avoid putting stumblingblocks in the way of the Jews. Let us propose Christianity to them as Jesus proposed it to them. Instead of the modern magic of scholastical divinity, let us lay before them their own prophecies. Let us show them their accomplishment in Jesus. Let us applaud their hatred of idolatry. Let us show them the morality of Jesus in our lives and tempers. Let us never abridge their civil liberty, nor ever try to force their consciences. Let us remind them, that as Jews they are bound to make the law of Moses the rule of their actions. Let us try to inspire them with suspicion of rabbinical and received traditions, and a generous love of investigating religious truth for themselves. Let us avoid all rash judging, and leave their future state to God. Read at your leisure the sixty-third chapter of Isaiah, in the beginning of which Jesus Christ is described as the *Judge* of the world, and the passage is explained in that sense in the *Revelation* of John. It is the judge alone, whose habit is stained with blood; the saints, white and clean, only follow him to behold and applaud his justice.

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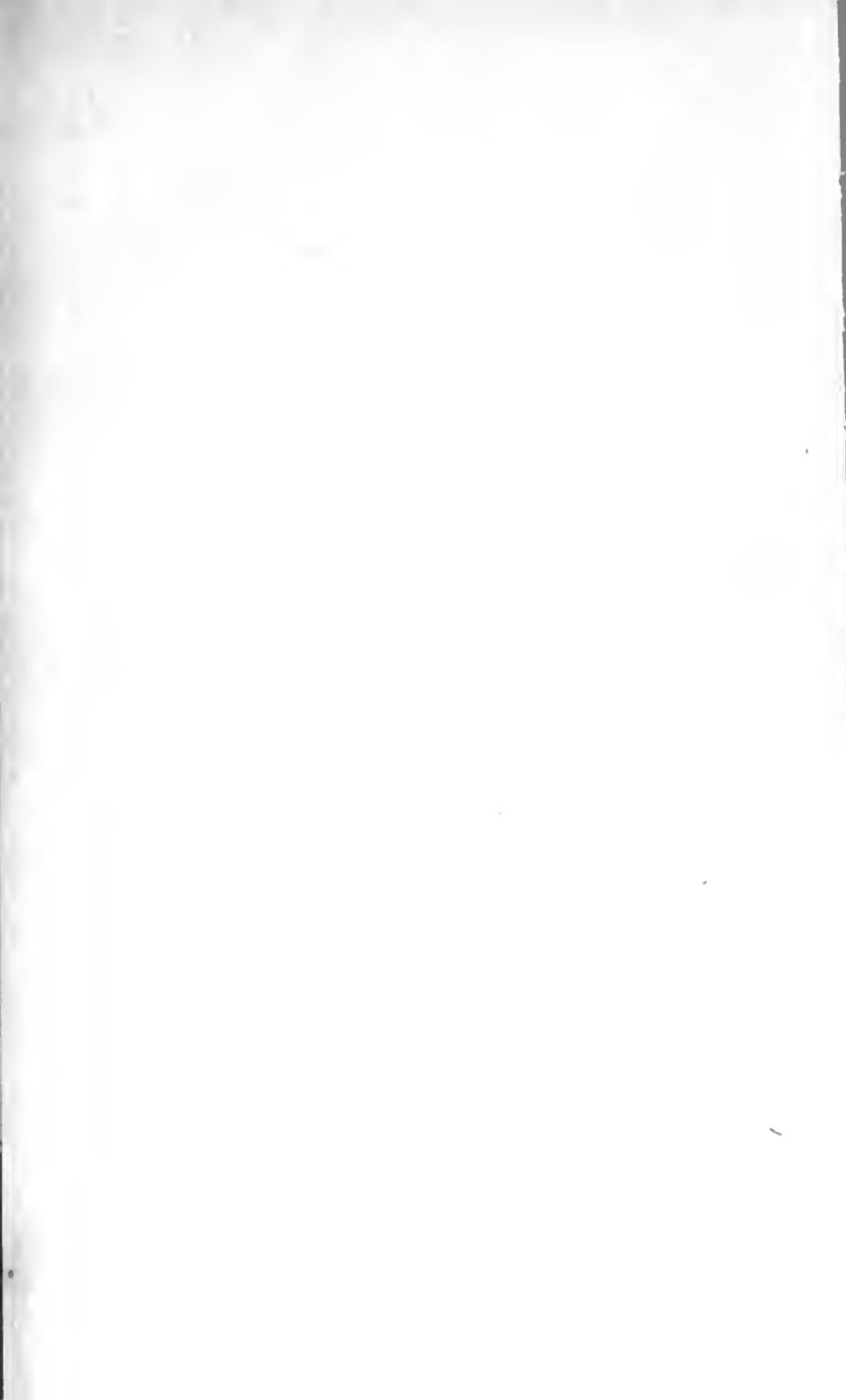
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