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A
COLLECTION
OF
ESSAYS AND TRACTS
IN
THEOLOGY,

BY JARED SPARKS.

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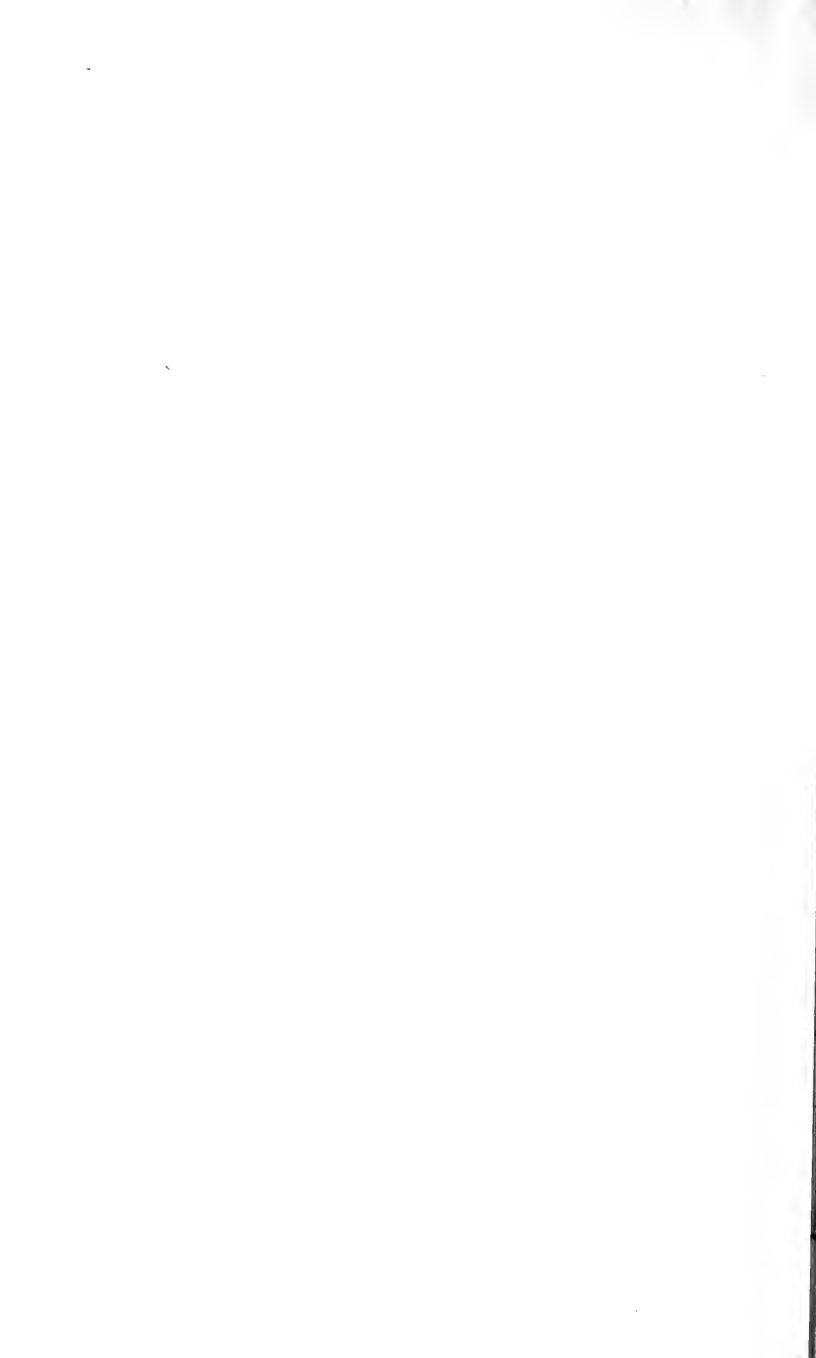


SELECTION

FROM THE WORKS

OF

JOHN LOCKE.



AN ESSAY

FOR THE UNDERSTANDING.

OF

ST PAUL'S EPISTLES.

To go about to explain any of St Paul's Epistles, after so great a train of expositors and commentators, might seem an attempt of vanity, censurable for its needlessness, did not the daily and approved examples of pious and learned men justify it. This may be some excuse for me to the public, if ever these following papers should chance to come abroad; but to myself, for whose use this work was undertaken, I need make no apology. Though I had been conversant in these Epistles, as well as in other parts of sacred Scripture, yet I found that I understood them not; I mean, the doctrinal and discursive parts of them; though the practical directions, which are usually dropped in the latter part of each Epistle, appeared to me very plain, intelligible, and instructive.

I did not, when I reflected on it, very much wonder that this part of sacred Scripture had difficulties in it;

many causes of obscurity did really occur to me. The nature of epistolary writings, in general, disposes the writer to pass by the mentioning of many things, as well known to him to whom his letter is addressed, which are necessary to be laid open to a stranger, to make him comprehend what is said ; and it not seldom falls out, that a well penned letter, which is very easy and intelligible to the receiver, is very obscure to a stranger, who hardly knows what to make of it. The matters that St Paul writ about, were certainly things well known to those he writ to, and which they had some peculiar concern in ; which made them easily apprehend his meaning, and see the tendency and force of his discourse. But we having now, at this distance, no information of the occasion of his writing, little or no knowledge of the temper and circumstances of those he writ to were in, but what is to be gathered out of the Epistles themselves, it is not strange that many things in them lie concealed to us, which, no doubt, they who were concerned in the letter, understood at first sight. Add to this, that in many places, it is manifest, he answers letters sent, and questions proposed to him ; which, if we had, would much better clear those passages that relate to them, than all the learned notes of critics and commentators, who in aftertimes fill us with their conjectures ; for very often, as to the matter in hand, they are nothing else.

The language wherein these Epistles are writ, is another, and that no small occasion of their obscurity

to us now. The words are Greek, a language dead many ages since; a language of a very witty, volatile people, seekers after novelty, and abounding with a variety of notions and sects, to which they applied the terms of their common tongue with great liberty and variety; and yet this makes but one small part of the difficulty in the language of these Epistles; there is a peculiarity in it, that much more obscures and perplexes the meaning of these writings, than what can be occasioned by the looseness and variety of the Greek tongue. The terms are Greek, but the idiom or turn of the phrases may be truly said to be Hebrew, or Syriac; the custom and familiarity of which tongues do sometimes so far influence the expressions in these Epistles, that one may observe the force of the Hebrew conjugations, particularly that of Hiplil, given to Greek verbs, in a way unknown to the Grecians themselves. Nor is this all; the subject treated of in these Epistles is so wholly new, and the doctrines contained in them so perfectly remote from the notions that mankind were acquainted with, that most of the important terms in it have quite another signification from what they have in other discourses; so that putting all together, we may truly say, that the New Testament is a book, written in a language peculiar to itself.

To these causes of obscurity, common to St Paul, with most of the other penmen of the several books of the New Testament, we may add those that are peculiarly his, and owing to his style and temper. He was,

as it is visible, a man of quick thought, warm temper, mighty well versed in the writings of the Old Testament, and full of the doctrine of the New. All this put together suggested matter to him in abundance, on those subjects which came in his way ; so that one may consider him, when he was writing, as beset with a crowd of thoughts, all striving for utterance. In this posture of mind it was almost impossible for him to keep that slow pace, and observe minutely that order and method of arranging all he said, from which results an easy and obvious perspicuity. To this plenty and vehemence of his, may be imputed those many large parentheses, which a careful reader may observe in his Epistles. Upon this account also it is, that he often breaks off in the middle of an argument, to let in some new thought suggested by his own words ; which having pursued and explained, as far as conduced to his present purpose, he reassumes again the thread of his discourse, and goes on with it, without taking any notice that he returns again to what he had been before saying ; though sometimes it be so far off, that it may well have slipt out of his mind, and requires a very attentive reader to observe, and so bring the disjointed members together, as to make up the connexion, and see how the scattered parts of the discourse hang together in a coherent, well agreeing sense, that makes it all of a piece.

Besides the disturbance in perusing St Paul's Epistles, from the plenty and vivacity of his thoughts,

which may obscure his method, and often hide his sense from an unwary, or over hasty reader ; the frequent changing of the personage he speaks in, renders the sense very uncertain, and is apt to mislead one that has not some clue to guide him ; sometimes by the pronoun I, he means himself, sometimes any Christian ; sometimes a Jew, and sometimes any man, &c. If speaking of himself, in the first person singular, has so various meanings, his use of the first person plural is with a far greater latitude ; sometimes designing himself alone ; sometimes those with himself whom he makes partners to the Epistle ; sometimes with himself comprehending the other Apostles, or preachers of the Gospel, or Christians ; nay, sometimes he in that way speaks of the converted Jews, other times of the converted Gentiles, and sometimes of others, in a more or less extended sense ; every one of which varies the meaning of the place, and makes it to be differently understood. I have forborne to trouble the reader with examples of them here. If his own observation hath not already furnished him with them, the following paraphrase and notes, I suppose, will satisfy him in the point.

In the current also of his discourse, he sometimes drops in the objections of others, and his answers to them, without any change in the scheme of his language, that might give notice of any other speaking besides himself. This requires great attention to observe ; and yet, if it be neglected or overlooked, will

make the reader very much mistake, and misunderstand his meaning, and render the sense very perplexed.

These are intrinsic difficulties arising from the text itself, whereof there might be a great many other named; as the uncertainty, sometimes, who are the persons he speaks to, or the opinions or practices which he has in his eye; sometimes in alluding to them, sometimes in his exhortations and reproofs. But those abovementioned being the chief, it may suffice to have opened our eyes a little upon them; which, well examined, may contribute towards our discovery of the rest.

To these we may subjoin two external causes, that have made no small increase of the native and original difficulties, that keep us from an easy and assured discovery of St Paul's sense, in many parts of his Epistles; and those are,

First, The dividing of them into chapters and verses, as we have done; whereby they are so chopped and minced, and as they are now printed, stand so broken and divided, that not only the common people take the verses usually for distinct aphorisms, but even men of more advanced knowledge, in reading them, lose very much of the strength and force of the coherence, and the light that depends upon it. Our minds are so weak and narrow, that they have need of all the helps and assistances that can be procured, to lay before them undisturbedly the thread and coherence of

any discourse ; by which alone they are truly improved, and led into the genuine sense of the author. When the eye is constantly disturbed with loose sentences, that by their standing and separation appear as so many distinct fragments, the mind will have much ado to take in, and carry on in its memory, a uniform discourse of dependant reasonings ; especially, having from the cradle been used to wrong impressions concerning them, and constantly accustomed to hear them quoted as distinct sentences, without any limitation or explication of their precise meaning from the place they stand in, and the relation they bear to what goes before, or follows. These divisions also have given occasion to the reading these Epistles by parcels, and in scraps, which has farther confirmed the evil arising from such partitions. And, I doubt not, but every one will confess it to be a very unlikely way to come to the understanding of any other letters, to read them piecemeal, a bit today, and another scrap tomorrow, and so on by broken intervals ; especially if the pause and cessation should be made, as the chapters the Apostle's Epistles are divided into, to end sometimes in the middle of a discourse, and sometimes in the middle of a sentence. It cannot therefore but be wondered at, that that should be permitted to be done to Holy Writ, which would visibly disturb the sense, and hinder the understanding of any other book whatsoever. If Tully's epistles were so printed, and so used, I ask whether they would not be much harder to be under-

stood, less easy and less pleasant to be read, by much, than now they are ?

How plain soever this abuse is, and what prejudice soever it does to the understanding of the sacred Scripture ; yet, if a Bible was printed as it should be, and as the several parts of it were writ, in continued discourses, where the argument is continued, I doubt not but the several parties would complain of it, as an innovation, and a dangerous change in the publishing those holy books. And, indeed, those who are for maintaining their opinions, and the systems of parties, by sound of words, with a neglect of the true sense of Scripture, would have reason to make and foment the outcry ; they would most of them be immediately disarmed of their great magazine of artillery wherewith they defend themselves, and fall upon others.

If the Holy Scripture were but laid before the eyes of Christians in its due connexion and consistency, it would not then be so easy to snatch out a few words, as if they were separate from the rest, to serve a purpose, to which they do not at all belong, and with which they have nothing to do. But as the matter now stands, he that has a mind to it, may at a cheap rate, be a notable champion for the truth ; that is, for the doctrines of the sect, that chance or interest has cast him into. He need but be furnished with verses of sacred Scripture, containing words and expressions that are but flexible, (as all general, obscure, and doubtful ones are,) and his system, that has appropri-

ted them to the orthodoxy of his church, makes them immediately strong and irrefragable arguments for his opinion. This is the benefit of loose sentences, and Scripture crumbled into verses, which quickly turn into independent aphorisms. But if the quotation in the verse produced, were considered as a part of a continued, coherent discourse, and so its sense were limited by the tenor of the context, most of these forward and warm disputants would be quite stripped of those, which they doubt not now to call spiritual weapons; and they would have often nothing to say that would not show their weakness, and manifestly fly in their faces. I crave leave to set down a saying of the learned and judicious Mr Selden. "In interpreting the Scripture," says he, "many do as if a man should see one have ten pounds, which he reckoned by 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, meaning four was but four units, and five, five units, &c. and that he had in all but ten pounds; the other that sees him, takes not the figures together, as he doth, but picks here and there; and thereupon reports, that he had five pounds in one bag, and six pounds in another bag, and nine pounds in another bag, &c. when as, in truth, he has but ten pounds in all. So we pick out a text, here and there, to make it serve our turn; whereas, if we take it altogether, and consider what went before, and what followed after, we should find it meant no such thing."

I have heard sober Christians very much admire, why ordinary, illiterate people, who were professors,

that showed a concern for religion, seemed much more conversant in St Paul's Epistles, than in the plainer, and, as it seemed to them, much more intelligible parts of the New Testament; they confessed, that though they read St Paul's Epistles with their best attention, yet they generally found them too hard to be mastered; and they laboured in vain so far to reach the Apostle's meaning all along in the train of what he said, as to read them with that satisfaction that arises from a feeling, that we understand and fully comprehend the force and reasoning of an author; and therefore they could not imagine what those saw in them, whose eyes they thought not much better than their own. But the case was plain; these sober, inquisitive readers, had a mind to see nothing in St Paul's Epistles but just what he meant; whereas, those others, of a quicker and gayer sight, could see in them what they pleased. Nothing is more acceptable to fancy than pliant terms and expressions, that are not obstinate; in such it can find its account with delight, and with them be illuminated, orthodox, infallible, at pleasure, and in its own way. But where the sense of the author goes visibly in its own train, and the words, receiving a determined sense from their companions and adjacents, will not consent to give countenance and colour to what is agreed to be right, and must be supported at any rate, there men of established orthodoxy do not so well find their satisfaction. And perhaps, if it were well examined, it would be no very extravagant paradox to say, that there are

fewer that bring their opinions to the sacred Scripture, to be tried by that infallible rule, than bring the sacred Scripture to their opinions, to bend it to them, to make it, as they can, a cover and guard of them. And to this purpose, its being divided into verses, and brought as much as may be into loose and general aphorisms, makes it most useful and serviceable. And in this lies the other great cause of obscurity and perplexedness, which has been cast upon St Paul's Epistles from without.

St Paul's Epistles, as they stand translated in our English Bibles, are now, by long and constant use, become a part of the English language, and common phraseology, especially in matters of religion; this every one uses familiarly, and thinks he understands; but it must be observed, that if he has a distinct meaning when he uses those words and phrases, and knows himself what he intends by them, it is always according to the sense of his own system, and the articles or interpretations of the society he is engaged in. So that all this knowledge and understanding, which he has in the use of these passages of sacred Scripture, reaches no farther than this, that he knows, (and that is very well,) what he himself says, but thereby knows nothing at all what St Paul said in them. The Apostle writ not by that man's system, and so his meaning cannot be known by it. This being the ordinary way of understanding the Epistles, and every sect being perfectly orthodox in its own judgment, what a great and invin-

cible darkness must this cast upon St Paul's meaning to all those of that way, in all those places where his thoughts and sense run counter to what any party has espoused for orthodox ; as it must unavoidably to all but one of the different systems, in all those passages that any way relate to the points in controversy between them.

This is a mischief, which, however frequent, and almost natural, reaches so far, that it would justly make all those who depend upon them wholly diffident of commentators ; and let them see how little help was to be expected from them, in relying on them for the true sense of the sacred Scripture, did they not take care to help to cozen themselves, by choosing to use, and pin their faith on, such expositors as explain the sacred Scripture in favour of those opinions, that they beforehand have voted orthodox, and bring to the sacred Scripture, not for trial, but confirmation. Nobody can think that any text of St Paul's Epistles has two contrary meanings ; and yet so it must have to two different men, who taking two commentators of different sects, for their respective guides into the sense of any one of the Epistles, shall build upon their respective expositions. We need go no farther for a proof of it, than the notes of the two celebrated commentators on the New Testament, Dr Hammond and Beza, both men of parts and learning, and both thought by their followers, men mighty in the sacred Scriptures.

So that here we see the hopes of great benefit and light, from expositors and commentators, is in a great part abated ; and those, who have most need of their help, can receive but little from them, and can have very little assurance of reaching the Apostle's sense by what they find in them, whilst matters remain in the same state they are in at present. For those who find they need help, and would borrow light from expositors, either consult only those who have the good luck to be thought sound and orthodox, avoiding those of different sentiments from themselves, in the great and approved points of their systems, as dangerous, and not fit to be meddled with ; or else, with indifferency, look into the notes of all commentators promiscuously. The first of these take pains only to confirm themselves in the opinions and tenets they have already ; which, whether it be the way to get the true meaning of what St Paul delivered, is easy to determine. The others, with much more fairness to themselves, though with reaping little more advantage, (unless they have something else to guide them into the Apostle's meaning than the comments themselves,) seek help on all hands, and refuse not to be taught by any one, who offers to enlighten them in any of the dark passages. But here, though they avoid the mischief which the others fall into, of being confined in their sense, and seeing nothing but that in St Paul's writings, be it right or wrong : yet they run into as great on the other side, and instead of being confirmed in the meaning, that they thought

they saw in the text, are distracted with an hundred, suggested by those they advised with; and so, instead of that one sense of the Scripture, which they carried with them to their commentators, return from them with none at all.

This, indeed, seems to make the case desperate; for if the comments and expositions of pious and learned men cannot be depended on, whither shall we go for help? To which, I answer, I would not be mistaken, as if I thought the labours of the learned in this case wholly lost, and fruitless. There is great use and benefit to be made of them, when we have once got a rule to know which of their expositions, in the great variety there is of them, explains the words and phrases according to the Apostle's meaning. 'Till then, it is evident, from what is above said, they serve for the most part to no other use, but either to make us find our own sense, and not his, in St Paul's words; or else to find in them no settled sense at all.

Here it will be asked, how shall we come by this rule you mention? Where is that touchstone to be had, that will show us whether the meaning we ourselves put, or take as put by others upon St Paul's words, in his Epistles, be truly his meaning or no? I will not say the way which I propose, and have in the following paraphrase followed, will make us infallible in our interpretations of the Apostle's text; but this I will own, that till I took this way, St Paul's Epistles to me, in the ordinary way of reading and studying them, were very

obscure parts of Scripture, that left me almost every where at a loss; and I was at a great uncertainty in which of the contrary senses, that were to be found in his commentators, he was to be taken. Whether what I have done has made it any clearer and more visible now, I must leave others to judge. This I beg leave to say for myself, that if some very sober, judicious Christians, no strangers to the sacred Scriptures, nay, learned Divines of the Church of England, had not professed, that by the perusal of these following papers, they understood the Epistles much better than they did before, and had not, with repeated instances, pressed me to publish them, I should not have consented they should have gone beyond my own private use, for which they were at first designed, and where they made me not repent my pains.

If any one be so far pleased with my endeavours, as to think it worth while to be informed what was the clue I guided myself by, through all the dark passages of these Epistles, I shall minutely tell him the steps by which I was brought into this way, that he may judge whether I proceeded rationally, upon right grounds or no, if so be anything in so mean an example as mine may be worth his notice.

After I had found, by long experience, that the reading of the text and comments in the ordinary way, provèd not so successful as I wished to the end proposed, I began to suspect, that in reading a chapter as was usual, and thereupon sometimes consulting exposi-

tors upon some hard places of it, which at that time most affected me, as relating to points then under consideration in my own mind, or in debate amongst others, was not a right method to get into the true sense of these Epistles. I saw plainly, after I began once to reflect on it, that if any one now should write me a letter, as long as St Paul's to the Romans, concerning such a matter as that is, in a style as foreign, and expressions as dubious as his seem to be ; if I should divide it into fifteen or sixteen chapters, and read of them, one today, and another tomorrow, &c. it was ten to one, I should never come to a full and clear comprehension of it. The way to understand the mind of him that writ it, every one would agree, was to read the whole letter through, from one end to the other, all at once, to see what was the main subject and tendency of it ; or if it had several views and purposes in it, not dependent one of another, nor in a subordination to one chief aim and end, to discover what those different matters were, and where the author concluded one, and began another ; and if there were any necessity of dividing the Epistle into parts, to make the boundaries of them.

In prosecution of this thought, I concluded it necessary, for the understanding of any one of St Paul's Epistles, to read it all through at one sitting, and to observe, as well as I could, the drift and design of his writing it. If the first reading gave me some light, the second gave me more ; and so I persisted on reading

constantly the whole Epistle over at once, till I came to have a good general view of the Apostle's main purpose in writing the Epistle, the chief branches of his discourse wherein he prosecuted it, the arguments he used, and disposition of the whole.

This, I confess, is not to be obtained by one or two hasty readings; it must be repeated again and again, with a close attention to the tenor of the discourse, and a perfect neglect of the divisions into chapters and verses. On the contrary, the safest way is to suppose, that the Epistle has but one business, and one aim, till by a frequent perusal of it, you are forced to see there are distinct, independent matters in it, which will forwardly enough show themselves.

It requires so much more pains, judgment, and application, to find the coherence of obscure and abstruse writings, and makes them so much the more unfit to serve prejudice and pre-occupation when found, that it is not to be wondered that St Paul's Epistles have, with many, passed rather for disjointed, loose, pious discourses, full of warmth and zeal, and overflows of light, rather than for calm, strong, coherent reasonings, that carried a thread of argument and consistency all through them.

But this muttering of lazy, or ill disposed readers, hindered me not from persisting in the course I had began; I continued to read the same Epistle over and over, and over again, till I came to discover, as appeared to me, what was the drift and aim of it, and by

what steps and arguments St Paul prosecuted his purpose. I remembered that St Paul was miraculously called to the ministry of the Gospel, and declared to be a chosen vessel; that he had the whole doctrine of the Gospel from God, by immediate revelation, and was appointed to be the Apostle of the Gentiles, for the propagating of it in the heathen world. This was enough to persuade me, that he was not a man of loose and shattered parts, uncapable to argue, and unfit to convince those he had to deal with. God knows how to choose fit instruments for the business he employs them in. A large stock of Jewish learning he had taken in, at the feet of Gamaliel; and for his information in Christian knowledge, and the mysteries and depths of the dispensation of grace by Jesus Christ, God himself had condescended to be his instructor and teacher.

The light of the Gospel he had received from the fountain and Father of light himself, who, I concluded, had not furnished him in this extraordinary manner, if all this plentiful stock of learning and illumination had been in danger to have been lost, or proved us less in a jumbled and confused head; nor have laid up such a store of admirable and useful knowledge in a man, who, for want of method and order, clearness of conception, of pertinency in discourse, could not draw it out into use with the greatest advantages of force and coherence. That he knew how to prosecute his purpose with strength of argument, and close reasoning,

without incoherent sallies, or the intermixing of things foreign to his business, was evident to me from several speeches of his recorded in the Acts; and it was hard to think that a man that could talk with so much consistency, and clearness of conviction, should not be able to write without confusion, inextricable obscurity, and perpetual rambling. The force, order, and perspicuity of those discourses, could not be denied to be very visible; how then came it, that the light was thought much wanting in his Epistles; and of this there appeared to me this plain reason; the particularities of the history, in which these speeches are inserted, show St Paul's end in speaking; which being seen, casts a light on the whole, and shows the pertinency of all that he says. But his Epistles not being so circumstantiated; there being no concurring history that plainly declares the disposition St Paul was in; what the actions, expectations, or demands of those to whom he writ, required him to speak to, we are nowhere told. All this, and a great deal more, necessary to guide us into the true meaning of the Epistles, is to be had only from the Epistles themselves, and to be gathered from thence with stubborn attention, and more than common application.

This being the only safe guide, (under the Spirit of God, that dictated these sacred writings,) that can be relied on, I hope I may be excused, if I venture to say that the utmost ought to be done, to observe and trace out St Paul's reasonings; to follow the thread of his dis-

course in each of his Epistles ; to show how it goes on, still directed with the same view, and pertinently drawing the several incidents towards the same point. To understand him right, his inferences should be strictly observed ; and it should be carefully examined from what they are drawn, and what they tend to. He is certainly a coherent, argumentative, pertinent writer ; and care, I think, should be taken in expounding of him, to show that he is so. But though I say he has weighty aims in his Epistles, which he steadily keeps in his eye, and drives at in all that he says ; yet I do not say, that he puts his discourses into an artificial method, or leads his reader into a distinction of his arguments, or gives them notice of new matter, by rhetorical, or studied transitions. He has no ornaments borrowed from the Greek eloquence ; no notions of their philosophy mixed with his doctrine, to set it off. *The enticing words of man's wisdom*, whereby he means all the studied rules of the Grecian schools, which made them such masters in the art of speaking, he, as he says himself, 1 Cor, ii, 4, wholly neglected ; the reason whereof he gives us in the next verse, and in other places. But the politeness of language, delicacy of style, fineness of expression, laboured periods, artificial transitions, and a very methodical ranging of the parts, with such other embellishments as make a discourse enter the mind smoothly, and strike the fancy at first hearing, have little or no place in his style ; yet coherence of discourse, and direct tendency of all the

parts of it to the argument in hand, are most eminently to be found in him. This I take to be his character, and doubt not but he will be found to be so upon diligent examination. And in this, if it be so, we have a clue, if we will take the pains to find it, that will conduct us with surety through those seemingly dark places, and imagined intricacies in which Christians have wandered so far one from another, as to find quite contrary senses.

Whether a superficial reading, accompanied with the common opinion of his invincible obscurity, has kept off some from seeking in him the coherence of a discourse, tending with close, strong reasoning to a point; or a seemingly more honourable opinion of one, that had been wrapped up into the third heaven, as if from a man so warmed and illuminated as he had been, nothing could be expected but flashes of light, and raptures of zeal, hindered others to look for a train of reasoning, proceeding on regular and cogent argumentation, from a man raised above the ordinary pitch of humanity to a higher and brighter way of illumination; or else, whether others were loth to beat their heads above the tenor and coherence in St Paul's discourses, which, if found out, possibly might set him at a manifest and irreconcilable difference with their systems; it is certain, that whatever hath been the cause, this way of getting the true sense of St Paul's Epistles seems not to have been much made use of, or at least so thoroughly pursued as I am apt to think it deserves.

For, granting that he was full stored with knowledge of the things he treated of, for he had light from heaven, it was God himself furnished him, and he could not want ; allowing also that he had ability to make use of the knowledge that had been given him, for the end for which it was given him, viz. the information, conviction, and conversion of others ; and, accordingly, that he knew how to direct his discourse to the point in hand, we cannot widely mistake the parts of his discourse employed about it, when we have anywhere found out the point he drives at ; wherever we have got a view of his design, and the aim he proposed to himself in writing, we may be sure that such or such an interpretation does not give us his genuine sense, it being nothing at all to his present purpose. Nay, among various meanings given a text, it fails not to direct us to the best, and very often to assure us of the true ; for it is no presumption, when one sees a man arguing for this or that proposition, if he be a sober man, master of reason or common sense, and takes any care of what he says, to pronounce, with confidence in several cases, that he could not talk thus or thus.

I do not yet so magnify this method of studying St Paul's Epistles, as well as other parts of sacred Scripture, as to think it will perfectly clear every hard place, and leave no doubt unresolved. I know expressions now out of use, opinions of those times not heard of in our days, allusions to customs lost to us, and various circumstances and particularities of the parties, which

we cannot come at, &c, must needs continue several passages in the dark now to us at this distance, which shone with full light to those they were directed to. But for all that, the studying of St Paul's Epistles in the way I have proposed, will, I humbly conceive, carry us a great length in the right understanding of them, and make us rejoice in the light we receive from those most useful parts of divine revelation, by furnishing us with visible grounds that we are not mistaken, whilst the consistency of the discourse, and the pertinency of it to the design he is upon, vouches it worthy of our great Apostle. At least, I hope, it may be my excuse, for having endeavoured to make St Paul an interpreter to me of his own Epistles.

To this may be added another help, which St Paul himself affords us, towards the attaining the true meaning contained in his Epistles. He that reads him with the attention I propose, will easily observe, that as he was full of the doctrine of the Gospel; so it lay all clear, and in order, open to his view. When he gave his thoughts utterance upon any point, the matter flowed like a torrent; but, it is plain, it was a matter he was perfectly master of; he fully possessed the entire revelation he had received from God; had thoroughly digested it; all the parts were formed together in his mind into one well contracted, harmonious body; so that he was no way at uncertainty, nor ever in the least at a loss concerning any branch of it. One may see his thoughts were all of a piece in all his Epistles; his no-

tions were at all times uniform, and constantly the same, though his expressions very various ; in them he seems to take great liberty. This, at least, is certain, that no one seems less tied up to a form of words. If then, having, by the method before proposed, got into the sense of the several Epistles, we will but compare what he says, in the places where he treats of the same subject, we can hardly be mistaken in his sense, nor doubt what it was, that he believed and taught concerning those points of the Christian religion.

I know it is not unusual to find a multitude of texts heaped up for the maintaining of an espoused proposition, but in a sense often so remote from their true meaning, that one can hardly avoid thinking that those who so used them, either sought not, or valued not the sense ; and were satisfied with the sound, where they could but get that to favour them. But a verbal concordance leads not always to texts of the same meaning ; trusting too much thereto will furnish us but with slight proofs in many cases ; and any one may observe, how apt that is to jumble together passages of Scripture, not relating to the same matter, and thereby to disturb and unsettle the true meaning of Holy Scripture. I have therefore said, that we should compare together places of Scripture treating upon the same point. Thus, indeed, one part of the sacred text could not fail to give light unto another. And since the providence of God hath so ordered it, that St Paul has writ a great number of Epistles, which, though upon

different occasions, and to several purposes, yet are all confined within the business of his Apostleship, and so contain nothing but points of Christian instruction, amongst which he seldom fails to drop in, and often to enlarge on the great and distinguishing doctrines of our holy religion ; which, if quitting our own infallibility in that analogy of faith which we have made to ourselves, or have implicitly adopted from some other, we would carefully lay together, and diligently compare and study, I am apt to think would give us St Paul's system in a clear and indisputable sense, which every one must acknowledge to be a better standard to interpret his meaning by, in any obscure and doubtful parts of his Epistles, if any such should still remain, than the system, confession, or articles of any church or society of Christians yet known ; which, however, pretended to be founded on Scripture, are visibly the contrivances of men, fallible both in their opinions and interpretations ; and, as is visible in most of them, made with partial views, and adapted to what the occasions of that time, and the present circumstances they were then in, were thought to require for the support or justification of themselves. Their philosophy, also, has its part in misleading men from the true sense of the sacred Scripture.

He that shall attentively read the Christian writers after the age of the Apostles, will easily find how much the philosophy they were tinctured with, influenced them in their understanding of the books of the Old

and New Testament. In the ages wherein Platonism prevailed, the converts to Christianity of that school, on all occasions, interpreted Holy Writ according to the notions they had imbibed from that philosophy. Aristotle's doctrine had the same effect in its turn ; and when it degenerated into the Peripateticism of the schools, that too brought its notions and distinctions into divinity, and affixed them to the terms of the Sacred Scripture. And we may still see how, at this day, every one's philosophy regulates every one's interpretation of the word of God. Those, who are possessed with the doctrine of aerial and ætherial vehicles, have thence borrowed an interpretation of the four first verses of 2 Cor. v. without having any ground to think that St Paul had the least notion of any such vehicles.

It is plain, that the teaching of men philosophy was no part of the design of divine revelation ; but that the expressions of Scripture are commonly suited, in those matters, to the vulgar apprehensions and conceptions of the place and people where they were delivered. And, as to the doctrine therein directly taught by the Apostles, that tends wholly to the setting up the kingdom of Jesus Christ in this world, and the salvation of men's souls ; and in this, it is plain, their expressions were conformed to the ideas and notions which they had received from revelation, or were consequent from it. We shall, therefore, in vain go about to interpret their words by the notions of our philosophy, and the doctrines of men delivered in our schools. This is to

explain the Apostles' meaning by what they never thought of whilst they were writing ; which is not the way to find their sense in what they delivered, but our own, and to take up from their writings, not what they left there for us, but what we bring along with us in ourselves. He that would understand St Paul right, must understand his terms in the sense he uses them ; and not as they are appropriated, by each man's particular philosophy, to conceptions that never entered the mind of the Apostle. For example ; he that shall bring the philosophy, now taught and received, to the explaining of *spirit*, *soul*, and *body*, mentioned I Thess. v, 23, will, I fear, hardly reach St Paul's sense, or represent to himself the notions St Paul then had in his mind. That is what we should aim at in reading him, or any other author ; and till we, from his words, paint his very ideas and thoughts in our minds, we do not understand him.

In the divisions I have made, I have endeavoured, the best I could, to govern myself by the diversity of matter. But, in a writer like St Paul, it is not so easy always to find precisely where one subject ends, and another begins. He is full of the matter he treats, and writes with warmth ; which usually neglects method, and those partitions and pauses, which men educated in the schools of rhetoricians usually observe. Those arts of writing St Paul, as well out of design as temper, wholly laid by ; the subject he had in hand. and the grounds upon which it stood firm, and by which he

enforced it, were what alone he minded ; and, without solemnly winding up one argument, and intimating any way that he began another, let his thoughts, which were fully possessed of the matter, run in one continued train, wherein the parts of his discourse were woven one into another. So that it is seldom that the scheme of his discourse makes any gap ; and therefore, without breaking in upon the connexion of his language, it is hardly possible to separate his discourse, and give a distinct view of his several arguments in distinct sections.

I am far from pretending infallibility, in the sense I have any where given in my paraphrase or notes ; that would be to erect myself into an Apostle, a presumption of the highest nature in any one, that cannot confirm what he says by miracles. I have, for my own information, sought the true meaning, as far as my poor abilities would reach ; and I have unbiassedly embraced what, upon a fair inquiry, appeared so to me. This I thought my duty and interest, in a matter of so great concernment to me. If I must believe for myself, it is unavoidable that I must understand for myself ; for if I blindly, and with an implicit faith, take the Pope's interpretation of the Sacred Scripture, without examining whether it be Christ's meaning, it is the Pope I believe in, and not in Christ ; it is his authority I rest upon ; it is what he says I embrace ; for what it is Christ says, I neither know, nor concern myself. It is the same thing when I set up any other man in Christ's place,

and make him the authentic interpreter of Sacred Scripture to myself. He may possibly understand the Sacred Scripture as right as any man, but I shall do well to examine myself, whether that which I do not know, nay which (in the way I take) I can never know, can justify me in making myself his disciple, instead of Jesus Christ's, who of right is alone, and ought to be, my only Lord and Master ; and it will be no less sacrilege in me to substitute to myself any other in his room, to be a prophet to me, than to be my king, or priest.

The same reasons that put me upon doing what I have in these papers done, will exempt me from all suspicion of imposing my interpretation on others. The reasons that led me into the meaning, which prevailed on my mind, are set down with it ; as far as they carry light and conviction to any other man's understanding, so far I hope my labour may be of some use to him ; beyond the evidence it carries with it, I advise him not to follow mine, nor any man's interpretation. We are all men liable to errors, and infected with them ; but have this sure way to preserve ourselves, every one, from danger by them, if, laying aside sloth, carelessness, prejudice, party, and a reverence of men, we betake ourselves in earnest to the study of the way to salvation, in those holy writings wherein God has revealed it from heaven, and proposed it to the world ; seeking our religion where we are sure it is in truth to be found, comparing spiritual things with spiritual things.

ON
ENTHUSIASM.

FROM LOCKE'S ESSAY ON HUMAN UNDERSTANDING.

HE that would seriously set upon the search of truth, ought in the first place to prepare his mind with a love of it. For he that loves it not, will not take much pains to get it, nor be much concerned when he misses it. There is nobody in the commonwealth of learning, who does not profess himself a lover of truth; and there is not a rational creature that would not take it amiss to be thought otherwise of. And yet for all this, one may truly say, that there are very few lovers of truth for truth's sake, even amongst those who persuade themselves that they are so. How a man may know whether he be so in earnest is worth inquiry; and I think there is one unerring mark of it, viz. the not entertaining any proposition with greater assurance, than the proofs it is built upon will warrant. Whoever goes beyond this measure of assent, it is plain, receives not truth in the love of it; loves not truth for truth's sake, but for some other by end.

For the evidence that any proposition is true, except such as are selfevident, lying only in the proofs a man has of it, whatsoever degrees of assent he affords it beyond the degrees of that evidence, it is plain that all the surplusage of assurance is owing to some other affection, and not to the love of truth ; it being as impossible, that the love of truth should carry my assent above the evidence there is to me that it is true, as that the love of truth should make me assent to any proposition for the sake of that evidence, which it has not, that it is true ; which is in effect to love it as a truth, because it is possible or probable that it may not be true. In any truth, that gets not possession of our minds by the irresistible light of self evidence, or by the force of demonstration, the arguments that gain it assent, are the vouchers and gage of its probability to us ; and we can receive it for no other, than such as they deliver it to our understandings. Whatsoever credit or authority we give to any proposition, more than it receives from the principles and proofs it supports itself upon, is owing to our inclinations that way, and is so far a derogation from the love of truth as such ; which, as it can receive no evidence from our passions or interests, so it should receive no tincture from them.

The assuming an authority of dictating to others, and a forwardness to prescribe to their opinions, is a constant concomitant of this bias and corruption of our judgments. For how almost can it be otherwise, but

that he should be ready to impose on another's belief, who has already imposed on his own? Who can reasonably expect arguments and conviction from him, in dealing with others, whose understanding is not accustomed to them in his dealing with himself? Who does violence to his own faculties, tyrannizes over his own mind, and usurps the prerogative that belongs to truth alone, which is to command assent by only its own authority, that is, by and in proportion to that evidence which it carries with it.

Upon this occasion I shall take the liberty to consider a third ground of assent, which with some men has the same authority, and is as confidently relied on, as either faith or reason; I mean *enthusiasm*; which, laying by reason, would set up revelation without it. Whereby in effect it takes away both reason and revelation, and substitutes in the room of it, the ungrounded fancies of a man's own brain, and assumes them for a foundation both of opinion and conduct.

Reason is natural revelation, whereby the eternal Father of light, and fountain of all knowledge, communicates to mankind that portion of truth, which he has laid within the reach of their natural faculties; revelation is natural reason, enlarged by a new set of discoveries communicated by God immediately, which reason vouches the truth of, by the testimony and proofs it gives, that they come from God. So that he that takes away reason, to make way for revelation, puts out the light of both, and does much what the same, as

if he would persuade a man to put out his eyes, the better to receive the remote light of an invisible star by a telescope.

Immediate revelation being a much easier way for men to establish their opinions, and regulate their conduct, than the tedious and not always successful labour of strict reasoning, it is no wonder that some have been very apt to pretend to revelation, and to persuade themselves that they are under the peculiar guidance of heaven in their actions and opinions, especially in those of them, which they cannot account for by the ordinary methods of knowledge, and principles of reason. Hence we see that in all ages, men, in whom melancholy has mixed with devotion, or whose conceit of themselves has raised them into an opinion of a greater familiarity with God, and a nearer admittance to his favour than is afforded to others, have often flattered themselves with a persuasion of an immediate intercourse with the Deity, and frequent communications from the divine Spirit. God, I own, cannot be denied to be able to enlighten the understanding, by a ray darted into the mind immediately from the fountain of light; this they understand he has promised to do, and who then has so good a title to expect it, as those who are his peculiar people, chosen by him, and depending on him?

Their minds being thus prepared, whatever groundless opinion comes to settle itself strongly upon their fancies, is an illumination from the spirit of God, and

presently of divine authority ; and whatsoever odd action they find in themselves a strong inclination to do, that impulse is concluded to be a call or direction from heaven, and must be obeyed ; it is a commission from above, and they cannot err in executing it.

This I take to be properly enthusiasm, which, though founded neither on reason nor divine revelation, but rising from the conceits of a warmed or overweening brain, works yet, where it once gets footing, more powerfully on the persuasions and actions of men, than either of those two, or both together ; men being most forwardly obedient to the impulses they receive from themselves ; and the whole man is sure to act more vigorously, where the whole man is carried by a natural motion. For strong conceit, like a new principle, carries all easily with it, when got above common sense, and freed from all restraint of reason, and check of reflection, it is heightened into a divine authority, in concurrence with our own temper and inclination.

Though the odd opinions and extravagant actions enthusiasm has run men into, were enough to warn them against this wrong principle, so apt to misguide them both in their belief and conduct ; yet the love of something extraordinary, the ease and glory it is to be inspired, and be above the common and natural ways of knowledge, so flatters many men's laziness, ignorance and vanity, that when once they are got into this way of immediate revelation, of illumination without search, and of certainty without proof, and without

examination ; it is a hard matter to get them out of it. Reason is lost upon them, they are above it ; they see the light infused into their understandings, and cannot be mistaken ; it is clear and visible there, like the light of bright sunshine ; shows itself, and needs no other proof but its own evidence ; they feel the hand of God moving them within, and the impulses of the spirit, and cannot be mistaken in what they feel. Thus they support themselves, and are sure reason hath nothing to do with what they see and feel in themselves ; what they have a sensible experience of admits no doubt, needs no probation. Would he not be ridiculous, who should require to have it proved to him that the light shines, and that he sees it ? It is its own proof, and can have no other. When the spirit brings light into our minds, it dispels darkness. We see it, as we do that of the sun at noon, and need not the twilight of reason to show it us. This light from heaven is strong, clear, and pure, carries its own demonstration with it ; and we may as naturally take a glow worm to assist us to discover the sun, as to examine the celestial ray by our dim candle, reason.

This is the way of talking of these men ; they are sure, because they are sure ; and their persuasions are right, because they are strong in them. For, when what they say is stripped of the metaphor of seeing and feeling, this is all it amounts to ; and yet these similes so impose on them, that they serve them for certainty in themselves, and demonstration to others,

But to examine a little soberly this internal light, and this feeling on which they build so much. These men have, they say, clear light, and they see; they have awakened sense, and they feel; this cannot, they are sure, be disputed them. For when a man says he sees or feels, nobody can deny it him that he does so. But here let me ask,—this seeing, is it the perception of the truth of the proposition, or of this, that it is a revelation from God? This feeling, is it a perception of an inclination or fancy to do something, or of the spirit of God moving that inclination? These are two very different perceptions, and must be carefully distinguished, if we would not impose upon ourselves. I may perceive the truth of a proposition, and yet not perceive that it is an immediate revelation from God. I may perceive the truth of a proposition in Euclid, without its being or my perceiving it to be a revelation; nay, I may perceive I came not by this knowledge in a natural way, and so may conclude it revealed, without perceiving that it is a revelation from God; because there be spirits, which, without being divinely commissioned, may excite those ideas in me, and lay them in such order before my mind, that I may perceive their connexion. So that the knowledge of any proposition coming into my mind, I know not how, is not a perception that it is from God. Much less is a strong persuasion, that it is true, a perception that it is from God, or so much as true. But, however it be called light and seeing, I suppose it is at most but belief and

assurance ; and the proposition taken for a revelation, is not such as they know to be true, but take to be true. For where a proposition is known to be true, revelation is needless ; and it is hard to conceive how there can be a revelation to any one of what he knows already. If therefore it be a proposition which they are persuaded, but do not know to be true, whatever they may call it, it is not seeing, but believing. For these are two ways, whereby truth comes into the mind, wholly distinct, so that one is not the other. What I see I know to be so by the evidence of the thing itself ; what I believe I take to be so upon the testimony of another ; but this testimony I must know to be given, or else what ground have I of believing ? I must see that it is God that reveals this to me, or else I see nothing. The question then here is, how do I know that God is the revealer of this to me ; that this impression is made upon my mind by his Holy Spirit, and that therefore I ought to obey it ? If I know not this, how great soever the assurance is, that I am possessed with, it is groundless ; whatever light I pretend to, it is but enthusiasm. For whether the proposition supposed to be revealed, be in itself evidently true, or visibly probable, or by the natural ways of knowledge uncertain, the proposition that must be well grounded, and manifested to be true, is this, that God is the revealer of it, and that what I take to be a revelation is certainly put into my mind by him, and is not an illusion dropped in by some other spirit, or raised by my own fancy. For if I mistake not, these men re-

ceive it for true, because they presume God revealed it. Does it not then stand them upon, to examine on what grounds they presume it to be a revelation from God? or else all their confidence is mere presumption; and this light, they are so dazzled with, is nothing but an ignis fatuus that leads them constantly round in this circle; it is a revelation, because they firmly believe it, and they believe it, because it is a revelation.

In all that is of divine revelation, there is need of no other proof but that it is an inspiration from God; for he can neither deceive nor be deceived. But how shall it be known that any proposition in our minds is a truth infused by God; a truth that is revealed to us by him, which he declares to us, and therefore we ought to believe? Here it is that enthusiasm fails of the evidence it pretends to. For men thus possessed boast of a light whereby they say they are enlightened, and brought into the knowledge of this or that truth. But if they know it to be a truth, they must know it to be so, either by its own selfevidence to natural reason, or by the rational proofs that make it out to be so. If they see and know it to be a truth, either of these two ways, they in vain suppose it to be a revelation. For they know it to be true the same way, that any other man naturally may know that it is so without the help of revelation.

For thus all the truths, of what kind soever, that men uninspired are enlightened with, came into their minds, and are established there. If they say they

know it to be true, because it is a revelation from God, the reason is good ; but then it will be demanded how they know it to be a revelation from God. If they say, by the light it brings with it, which shines bright in their minds, and they cannot resist ; I beseech them to consider whether this be any more than what we have taken notice of already, viz. that it is a revelation, because they strongly believe it to be true. For all the light they speak of is but a strong, though ungrounded persuasion of their own minds, that it is a truth. For rational grounds from proofs that it is a truth, they must acknowledge to have none ; for then it is not received as a revelation, but upon the ordinary grounds that other truths are received ; and if they believe it to be true, because it is a revelation, and have no other reason for its being a revelation, but because they are fully persuaded without any other reason that it is true ; they believe it to be a revelation, only because they strongly believe it to be a revelation ; which is a very unsafe ground to proceed on, either in our tenets or actions.

And what readier way can there be to run ourselves into the most extravagant errors and miscarriages, than thus to set up fancy for our supreme and sole guide, and to believe any proposition to be true, any action to be right, only because we believe it to be so ? The strength of our persuasions is no evidence at all of their own rectitude ; crooked things may be as stiff and inflexible as straight ; and men may be as positive and

peremptory in error as in truth. How come else the untractable zealots in different and opposite parties? For if the light, which every one thinks he has in his mind, which in this case is nothing but the strength of his own persuasion, be an evidence that it is from God, contrary opinions have the same title to inspirations; and God will be not only the Father of lights, but of opposite and contradictory lights, leading men contrary ways; and contradictory propositions will be divine truths, if an ungrounded strength of assurance be an evidence, that any proposition is a divine revelation.

This cannot be otherwise, whilst firmness of persuasion is made the cause of believing, and confidence of being in the right is made an argument of truth. St Paul himself believed he did well, and that he had a call to it when he persecuted the Christians, whom he confidently thought in the wrong; but yet it was he, and not they, who were mistaken. Good men are men still, liable to mistakes; and are sometimes warmly engaged in errors, which they take for divine truths, shining in their minds with the clearest light.

Light, true light, in the mind is, or can be nothing else but the evidence of the truth of any proposition; and if it be not a selfevident proposition, all the light it has, or can have, is from the clearness and validity of those proofs, upon which it is received. To talk of any other light in the understanding is to put ourselves in the dark, or in the power of the prince of darkness, and by our own consent to give ourselves up to delusion

to believe a lie. For if strength of persuasion be the light, which must guide us ; I ask how shall any one distinguish between the delusions of Satan, and the inspirations of the Holy Ghost ? He can transform himself into an angel of light. And they who are led by this son of the morning, are as fully satisfied of the illumination, that is, are as strongly persuaded, that they are enlightened by the spirit of God, as any one who is so ; they acquiesce and rejoice in it, are acted by it ; and nobody can be more sure, nor more in the right, if their own strong belief may be judge, than they.

He therefore that will not give himself up to all the extravagancies of delusion and error, must bring this guide of his light within to the trial. God, when he makes the prophet, does not unmake the man. He leaves all his faculties in the natural state, to enable him to judge of his inspirations, whether they be of divine original or not. When he illuminates the mind with supernatural light, he does not extinguish that which is natural. If he would have us assent to the truth of any proposition, he either evidences that truth by the usual methods of natural reason, or else makes it known to be a truth which he would have us assent to, by his authority ; and convinces us that it is from him, by some marks which reason cannot be mistaken in. Reason must be our last judge and guide in everything. I do not mean that we must consult reason, and examine whether a proposition revealed from God can be made out by natural principles, and if it cannot, that then we

may reject it ; but consult it we must, and by it examine, whether it be a revelation from God or not. And if reason finds it to be revealed from God, reason then declares for it, as much as for any other truth, and makes it one of her dictates. Every conceit that thoroughly warms our fancies must pass for an inspiration, if there be nothing but the strength of our persuasions, whereby to judge of our persuasions ; if reason must not examine their truth by something extrinsical to the persuasions themselves, inspirations and delusions, truth and falsehood, will have the same measure, and will not be possible to be distinguished.

If this internal light, or any proposition, which under that title we take for inspired, be conformable to the principles of reason, or to the word of God, which is attested revelation, reason warrants it, and we may safely receive it for true, and be guided by it in our belief and actions ; if it receive no testimony nor evidence from either of these rules, we cannot take it for a revelation, or so much as for true, till we have some other mark that it is a revelation, besides our believing that it is so. Thus we see the holy men of old, who had revelations from God, had something else besides that internal light of assurance in their own minds, to testify to them that it was from God. They were not left to their own persuasions alone, that those persuasions were from God ; but had outward signs to convince them of the author of those revelations. And when they were to convince others, they had a power

given them to justify the truth of their commission from heaven, and by visible signs to assert the divine authority of a message they were sent with.

Moses saw the bush burn without being consumed, and heard a voice out of it. This was something besides finding an impulse upon his mind to go to Pharaoh, that he might bring his brethren out of Egypt; and yet he thought not this enough to authorise him to go with that message, till God, by another miracle of his rod turned into a serpent, had assured him of a power to testify his mission, by the same miracle repeated before them, whom he was sent to. Gideon was sent by an angel to deliver Israel from the Midianites, and yet he desired a sign to convince him that this commission was from God. These, and several the like instances to be found among the prophets of old, are enough to show that they thought not an inward seeing or persuasion of their own minds, without any other proof, a sufficient evidence that it was from God; though the Scripture does not everywhere mention their demanding or having such proofs.

In what I have said I am far from denying that God can, or doth sometimes enlighten men's minds in the apprehending of certain truths, or excite them to good actions by the immediate influence and assistance of the holy spirit, without any extraordinary signs accompanying it. But in such cases too we have reason and Scripture, unerring rules to know whether it be from God or not. Where the truth embraced is consonant to

the revelation in the written word of God, or the action conformable to the dictates of right reason or holy writ, we may be assured that we run no risk in entertaining it as such; because, though perhaps it be not an immediate revelation from God, extraordinarily operating on our minds, yet we are sure it is warranted by that revelation, which he has given us of truth. But it is not the strength of our private persuasion within ourselves, that can warrant it to be a light or motion from heaven; nothing can do that but the written word of God without us, or that standard of reason, which is common to us with all men. Where reason or Scripture is express for any opinion or action, we may receive it as of divine authority; but it is not the strength of our own persuasions, which can by itself give it that stamp. The bent of our own minds may favour it as much as we please; that may show it to be a fondling of our own, but will by no means prove it to be an offspring of heaven, and of divine original.

ADVANTAGES
OF THE
APPEARANCE OF OUR SAVIOUR
AMONG MEN.

FROM THE REASONABLENESS OF CHRISTIANITY.

THE great and many advantages we receive, by the coming of Jesus the Messiah, will show, that it was not without need that he was sent into the world.

1. The evidence of our Saviour's mission from heaven is so great, in the multitude of miracles he did before all sorts of people, that what he delivered cannot but be received as the oracles of God, and unquestionable verity. For the miracles he did were so ordered by the divine providence and wisdom, that they never were, nor could be denied by any of the enemies, or opposers of Christianity.

Though the works of nature, in every part of them, sufficiently evidence a Deity; yet the world made so little use of their reason, that they saw him not, where, even by the impressions of himself, he was easy to be found. Sense and lust blinded their minds in some,

and a careless inadvertency in others, and fearful apprehensions in most, (who either believed there were, or could not but suspect there might be, superior unknown beings,) gave them up into the hands of their priests, to fill their heads with false notions of the Deity, and their worship with foolish rites, as they pleased ; and what dread or craft once began, devotion soon made sacred, and religion immutable.

In this state of darkness and ignorance of the true God, vice and superstition held the world. Nor could any help be had, or hoped for, from reason ; which could not be heard, and was judged to have nothing to do in the case ; the priests, everywhere, to secure their empire, having excluded reason from having anything to do in religion. And in the crowd of wrong notions, and invented rites, the world had almost lost the sight of the one only true God. The rational and thinking part of mankind, it is true, when they sought after him, they found the one supreme, invisible God ; but if they acknowledged and worshipped him, it was only in their own minds. They kept this truth locked up in their own breasts as a secret, nor ever durst venture it amongst the people ; much less amongst the priests, those wary guardians of their own creeds and profitable inventions. Hence we see, that reason, speaking ever so clearly to the wise and virtuous, had never authority enough to prevail on the multitude ; and to persuade the societies of men, that there was but one God, that alone was to be owned and worshipped. The belief and worship of

one God was the national religion of the Israelites alone ; and if we will consider it, it was introduced and supported amongst the people by revelation. They were in Goshen, and had light, whilst the rest of the world were in almost Egyptian darkness, "without God in the world." There was no part of mankind, who had quicker parts, or improved them more ; that had a greater light of reason, or followed it farther in all sorts of speculations, than the Athenians ; and yet we find but one Socrates amongst them, that opposed and laughed at their polytheism, and wrong opinions of the Deity ; and we see how they rewarded him for it.

Whatsoever Plato, and the soberest of the philosophers, thought of the nature and being of the one God, they were fain, in their outward professions and worship, to go with the herd, and keep to the religion established by law ; which what it was, and how it had disposed the minds of these knowing and quick sighted Grecians, St Paul tells us, Acts xvii, 22—29, "Ye men of Athens," says he, "I perceive, that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. God that made the world, and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands ; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing that he giveth unto all life, and breath, and all things ; and

hath made of one blood all the nations of men, for to dwell on the face of the earth ; and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitations ; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel him out and find him, though he be not far from every one of us." Here he tells the Athenians, that they, and the rest of the world, given up to superstition, whatever light there was in the works of creation and providence, to lead them to the true God ; yet few of them found him. He was everywhere near them ; yet they were but like people groping and feeling for something in the dark, and did not see him with a full and clear daylight ; " but thought the Godhead like to gold and silver, and stone, graven by art and man's device."

In this state of darkness and error, in reference to the " true God," our Saviour found the world. But the clear revelation he brought with him, dissipated this darkness ; made the " one invisible true God" known to the world ; and that with such evidence and energy, that polytheism and idolatry have nowhere been able to withstand it ; but wherever the preaching of the truth he delivered, and the light of the Gospel hath come, those mists have been dispelled. And, in effect, we see, that since our Saviour's time, the " belief of one God" has prevailed and spread itself over the face of the earth. For even to the light that the Messiah brought into the world with him, we must ascribe the owning and profession of one God, which the Mahometan re-

ligion hath derived and borrowed from it. So that in this sense it is certainly and manifestly true of our Saviour, what St John says of him, 1 John iii, 8, "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." This light the world needed, and this light it received from him; that there is but "one God," and he "eternal, invisible;" not like to any visible objects, nor to be represented by them.

If it be asked, whether the revelation to the patriarchs by Moses did not teach this, and why that was not enough? The answer is obvious; that however clearly the knowledge of one invisible God, Maker of heaven and earth, was revealed to them; yet that revelation was shut up in a little corner of the world; amongst a people, by that very law, which they received with it, excluded from a commerce and communication with the rest of mankind. The Gentile world, in our Saviour's time, and several ages before, could have no attestation of the miracles on which the Hebrews built their faith, but from the Jews themselves, a people not known to the greatest part of mankind; contemned and thought vilely of, by those nations that did know them; and therefore very unfit and unable to propagate the doctrine of one God in the world, and diffuse it through the nations of the earth, by the strength and force of that ancient revelation, upon which they had received it.

But our Saviour, when he came, threw down this wall of partition; and did not confine his miracles or message to the land of Canaan, or the worshippers at Jerusalem. But he himself preached at Samaria, and did miracles in the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and before multitudes of people gathered from all quarters. And after his resurrection, sent his Apostles amongst the nations, accompanied with miracles; which were done in all parts so frequently, and before so many witnesses of all sorts, in broad daylight, that, as I have before observed, the enemies of Christianity have never dared to deny them; no, not Julian himself; who neither wanted skill nor power to inquire into the truth; nor would have failed to have proclaimed and exposed it, if he could have detected any falsehood in the history of the Gospel; or found the least ground to question the matter of fact published by Christ and his Apostles. The number and evidence of the miracles done by our Saviour and his followers, by the power and force of truth, bore down this mighty and accomplished emperor, and all his parts, in his own dominions. He durst not deny so plain a matter of fact, which being granted, the truth of our Saviour's doctrine and mission unavoidably follows; notwithstanding whatsoever artful suggestions his wit could invent, or malice should offer to the contrary.

2. Next to the knowledge of one God, Maker of all things; "a clear knowledge of their duty was wanting to mankind." This part of knowledge, though cul-

tivated with some care by some of the heathen philosophers, yet got little footing among the people. All men, indeed, under pain of displeasing the gods, were to frequent the temples ; every one went to their sacrifices and services ; but the priests made it not their business to teach them virtue. If they were diligent in their observations and ceremonies ; punctual in their feasts and solemnities, and the tricks of religion ; the holy tribe assured them the gods were pleased, and they looked no farther. Few went to the schools of the philosophers to be instructed in their duties, and to know what was good and evil in their actions. The priests sold the better pennyworths, and therefore had all the custom. Lustrations and processions were much easier than a clean conscience, and a steady course of virtue ; and an expiatory sacrifice, that atoned for the want of it, was much more convenient than a strict and holy life. No wonder then, that religion was everywhere distinguished from, and preferred to virtue ; and that it was dangerous heresy and profaneness to think the contrary.

So much virtue as was necessary to hold societies together, and to contribute to the quiet of governments, the civil laws of commonwealths taught, and forced upon men that lived under magistrates. But these laws being for the most part made by such, who had no other aims but their own power, reached no farther than those things that would serve to tie men together in subjection ; or at most were directly to conduce to the pros-

perity and temporal happiness of any people. But natural religion, in its full extent, was nowhere, that I know, taken care of, by the force of natural reason. It should seem, by the little that has hitherto been done in it, that it is too hard a task for unassisted reason to establish morality in all its parts, upon its true foundation, with a clear and convincing light. And it is at least a surer and shorter way, to the apprehensions of the vulgar, and mass of mankind, that one manifestly sent from God, and coming with visible authority from him, should, as a king and law maker, tell them their duties; and require their obedience; than leave it to the long and sometimes intricate deductions of reason, to be made out to them.

Such trains of reasoning the greatest part of mankind have neither leisure to weigh; nor, for want of education and use, skill to judge of. We see how unsuccessful in this the attempts of philosophers were before our Saviour's time. How short their several systems came of the perfection of a true and complete morality, is very visible. And if, since that, the christian philosophers have much outdone them; yet we may observe, that the first knowledge of the truths they have added, is owing to revelation; though as soon as they are heard and considered, they are found to be agreeable to reason; and such as can by no means be contradicted. Every one may observe a great many truths, which he receives at first from others, and readily assents to, as consonant to reason, which he would have found it hard,

and perhaps beyond his strength, to have discovered himself. Native and original truth is not so easily wrought out of the mine, as we, who have it delivered already dug and fashioned into our hands, are apt to imagine. And how often at fifty or threescore years old, are thinking men told what they wonder how they could miss thinking of? Which yet their own contemplations did not, and possibly never would have helped them to.

Experience shows, that the knowledge of morality, by mere natural light, how agreeable soever it be, to it, makes but a slow progress, and little advance in the world. And the reason of it is not hard to be found in men's necessities, passions, vices, and mistaken interests; which turn their thoughts another way; and the designing leaders, as well as following herd, find it not to their purpose to employ much of their meditations this way. Or whatever else was the cause, it is plain, in fact, that human reason unassisted, failed men in its great and proper business of morality. It never from unquestionable principles, by clear deductions, made out an entire body of the "law of nature." And he that shall collect all the moral rules of the philosophers, and compare them with those contained in the New Testament, will find them to come short of the morality delivered by our Saviour, and taught by his Apostles; a college made up, for the most part, of ignorant, but inspired fishermen.

Though yet, if any one should think, that out of the sayings of the wise heathens before our Saviour's time, there might be a collection made of all those rules of morality, which are to be found in the Christian religion ; yet this would not at all hinder, but that the world, nevertheless, stood as much in need of our Saviour, and the morality delivered by him. Let it be granted, though not true, that all the moral precepts of the Gospel were known by somebody or other, amongst mankind before. But where, or how, or of what use, is not considered. Suppose they may be picked up here and there ; some from Solon and Bias in Greece, others from Tully in Italy ; and to complete the work, let Confucius, as far as China, be consulted ; and Anacharsis, the Scythian, contribute his share. What will all this do, to give the world a complete morality, that may be to mankind the unquestionable rule of life and manners ? I will not here urge the impossibility of collecting from men, so far distant from one another, in time and place, and languages.

I will suppose there was a Stobeus in those times, who had gathered the moral sayings from all the sages of the world. What would this amount to, towards being a steady rule ; a certain transcript of a law that we are under ? Did the saying of Aristippus, or Confucius, give it an authority ? Was Zeno a lawgiver to mankind ? If not, what he or any other philosopher delivered, was but a saying of his. Mankind might hearken to it, or reject it, as they pleased ; or as it suited

their interest, passions, principles or humours. They were under no obligation; the opinion of this or that philosopher was of no authority. And if it were, you must take all he said under the same character. All his dictates must go for law, certain and true; or none of them. And then, if you will take any of the moral sayings of Epicurus, (many whereof Seneca quotes with esteem and approbation,) for precepts of the law of nature, you must take all the rest of his doctrine for such too; or else his authority ceases; and so no more is to be received from him, or any of the sages of old, for parts of the law of nature, as carrying with it an obligation to be obeyed, but what they prove to be so. But such a body of ethics, proved to be the law of nature, from principles of reason, and teaching all the duties of life; I think nobody will say the world had before our Saviour's time.

It is not enough, that there were up and down scattered sayings of wise men, conformable to right reason. The law of nature, is the law of convenience too; and it is no wonder that those men of parts, and studious of virtue, (who had occasion to think on any particular part of it,) should, by meditation, light on the right even from the observable convenience and beauty of it; without making out its obligation from the true principles of the law of nature, and foundations of morality. But these incoherent apothegms of philosophers, and wise men, however excellent in themselves, and well intended by them; could never make a morality, where-

of the world could be convinced ; could never rise to the force of a law, that mankind could with certainty depend upon. Whatsoever should thus be universally useful, as a standard to which men should conform their manners, must have its authority, either from reason or revelation. It is not every writer of morality, or compiler of it from others, that can thereby be erected into a lawgiver to mankind ; and a dictator of rules, which are therefore valid, because they are to be found in his books ; under the authority of this or that philosopher. He, that any one will pretend to set up in this kind, and have his rules pass for authentic directions, must show, that either he builds his doctrine upon principles of reason, selfevident in themselves ; and that he deduces all the parts of it from thence, by clear and evident demonstration ; or must show his commission from heaven, that he comes with authority from God, to deliver his will and commands to the world. In the former way, nobody that I know, before our Saviour's time, ever did, or went about to give us a morality.

It is true, there is a law of nature ; but who is there that ever did, or undertook to give it us all entire, as a law ; no more, nor no less, than what was contained in, and had the obligation of that law ? Who ever made out all the parts of it, put them together, and showed the world their obligation ? Where was there any such code, that mankind might have recourse to, as their unerring rule, before our Saviour's time ? If there was not, it is plain there was need of one to give us such a

morality ; such a law, which might be the sure guide of those who had a desire to go right ; and, if they had a mind, need not mistake their duty, but might be certain when they had performed, when failed in it. Such a law of morality Jesus Christ hath given us in the New Testament ; but by the latter of these ways, by revelation. We have from him a full and sufficient rule for our direction, and conformable to that of reason. But the truth and obligation of its precepts have their force and are put past doubt to us, by the evidence of his mission. He was sent by God ; his miracles show it ; and the authority of God in his precepts cannot be questioned. Here morality has a sure standard, that revelation vouches, and reason cannot gainsay, nor question ; but both together witness to come from God the great lawmaker. And such a one as this, out of the New Testament, I think the world never had, nor can any one say, is anywhere else to be found.

Let me ask any one, who is forward to think that the doctrine of morality was full and clear in the world, at our Saviour's birth ; whither would he have directed Brutus and Cassius, (both men of parts and virtue, the one whereof believed, and the other disbelieved a future being,) to be satisfied in the rules and obligations of all the parts of their duties ; if they should have asked him, where they might find the law they were to live by, and by which they should be charged, or acquitted, as guilty or innocent ? If to the sayings of the wise, and the declarations of philosophers, he sends them into a wild

wood of uncertainty, to an endless maze, from which they should never get out ; if to the religions of the world, yet worse ; and if to their own reason, he refers them to that which had some light and certainty ; but yet had hitherto failed all mankind in a perfect rule ; and, we see, resolved not the doubts that had risen amongst the studious and thinking philosophers ; nor had yet been able to convince the civilized parts of the world, that they had not given, nor could, without a crime, take away the lives of their children, by exposing them.

If any one shall think to excuse human nature, by laying blame on men's negligence, that they did not carry morality to a higher pitch ; and make it out entire in every part, with that clearness of demonstration which some think it capable of ; he helps not the matter. Be the cause what it will, our Saviour found mankind under a corruption of manners and principles, which ages after ages had prevailed, and must be confessed, was not in a way or tendency to be mended. The rules of morality were in different countries and sects different. And natural reason nowhere had cured, nor was like to cure the defects and errors in them. Those just measures of right and wrong, which necessity had anywhere introduced, the civil laws prescribed, or philosophy recommended, stood on their true foundations. They were looked on as bonds of society, and conveniences of common life, and laudable practices. But where was it that their obligation was thoroughly known

and allowed, and they received as precepts of a law ; of the highest law, the law of nature ? That could not be, without a clear knowledge, and acknowledgment of the law maker, and the great rewards and punishments for those that would, or would not obey him. But the religion of the heathens, as was before observed, little concerned itself in their morals.

The priests, that delivered the oracles of heaven, and pretended to speak from the gods, spoke little of virtue and a good life. And, on the other side, the philosophers, who spoke from reason, made not much mention of the Deity in their ethics. They depended on reason and her oracles, which contain nothing but truth ; but yet some parts of that truth lie too deep for our natural powers easily to reach, and make plain and visible to mankind, without some light from above to direct them. When truths are once known to us, though by tradition, we are apt to be favourable to our own parts ; and ascribe to our own understandings the discovery of what, in reality, we borrowed from others ; or, at least, finding we can prove what at first we learn from others, we are forward to conclude it an obvious truth, which, if we had sought, we could not have missed.

Nothing seems hard to our understandings that is once known ; and because what we see, we see with our own eyes, we are apt to overlook, or forget the help we had from others who showed it us, and first made us see it ; as if we were not all beholden to them,

for those truths they opened the way to, and led us into. For knowledge being only of truths that are perceived to be so, we are favourable enough to our own faculties, to conclude, that they of their own strength would have attained those discoveries, without any foreign assistance ; and that we know those truths, by the strength and native light of our own minds, as they did from whom we received them by theirs, only they had the luck to be before us. Thus the whole stock of human knowledge is claimed by every one, as his private possession, as soon as he, (profiting by others' discoveries,) has got it into his own mind ; and so it is ; but not properly by his own single industry, nor of his own acquisition. He studies, it is true, and takes pains to make a progress in what others have delivered ; but their pains were of another sort, who first brought those truths to light, which he afterwards derives from them. He that travels the roads now, applauds his own strength and legs that have carried him so far in such a scantling of time ; and ascribes all to his own vigour ; little considering how much he owes to their pains, who cleared the woods, drained the bogs, built the bridges, and made the ways passable ; without which he might have toiled much with little progress.

A great many things which we have been bred up in the belief of, from our cradles, (and are notions grown familiar, and, as it were, natural to us, under the Gospel,) we take for unquestionable, obvious truths, and

easily demonstrable ; without considering how long we might have been in doubt or ignorance of them, had revelation been silent. And many are beholden to revelation, who do not acknowledge it. It is no diminishing to revelation, that reason gives its suffrage too, to the truths revelation has discovered. But it is our mistake to think, that because reason confirms them to us, we had the first certain knowledge of them from thence ; and in that clear evidence we now possess them. The contrary is manifest, in the defective morality of the Gentiles, before our Saviour's time ; and the want of reformation in the principles and measures of it, as well as practice. Philosophy seemed to have spent its strength, and done its utmost ; or if it should have gone farther, as we see it did not, and from undeniable principles given us ethics in a science like mathematics, in every part demonstrable ; this yet would not have been so effectual to man in this imperfect state, nor proper for the cure.

The greatest part of mankind want leisure or capacity for demonstration ; nor can carry a train of proofs, which in that way they must always depend upon for conviction, and cannot be required to assent to, until they see the demonstration. Wherever they stick, the teachers are always put upon proof, and must clear the doubt by a thread of coherent deductions from the first principle, how long, or how intricate soever that be. And you may as soon hope to have all the day labourers and tradesmen, the spinsters and dairy maids, per-

fect mathematicians, as to have them perfect in ethics this way. Hearing plain commands is the sure and only course to bring them to obedience and practice. The greatest part cannot know, and therefore they must believe. And I ask, whether one coming from heaven in the power of God, in full and clear evidence and demonstration of miracles, giving plain and direct rules of morality and obedience, be not likelier to enlighten the bulk of mankind, and set them right in their duties, and bring them to do them, than by reasoning with them from general notions and principles of human reason? And were all the duties of human life clearly demonstrated, yet I conclude, when well considered, that method of teaching men their duties would be thought proper only for a few, who had much leisure, improved understandings, and were used to abstract reasonings. But the instruction of the people were best still to be left to the precepts and principles of the Gospel.

The healing of the sick, the restoring sight to the blind, by a word, the raising and being raised from the dead, are matters of fact, which they can without difficulty conceive; and that he who does such things, must do them by the assistance of a divine power. These things lie level to the ordinarist apprehension; he that can distinguish between sick and well, lame and sound, dead and alive, is capable of this doctrine. To one, who is once persuaded that Jesus Christ was sent by God to be a King, and a Saviour of those who do believe in him, all his commands become principles; there

needs no other proof for the truth of what he says, but that he said it. And then there needs no more, but to read the inspired books, to be instructed; all the duties of morality lie there clear, and plain, and easy to be understood. And here I appeal, whether this be not the surest, the safest, and most effectual way of teaching; especially if we add this farther consideration, that as it suits the lowest capacities of reasonable creatures, so it reaches and satisfies, nay, enlightens the highest. The most elevated understandings cannot but submit to the authority of this doctrine as divine; which coming from the mouths of a company of illiterate men, hath not only the attestation of miracles, but reason to confirm it; since they delivered no precepts but such, as though reason of itself had not clearly made out, yet it could not but assent to, when thus discovered, and think itself indebted for the discovery.

The credit and authority our Saviour and his Apostles had over the minds of men, by the miracles they did, tempted them not to mix, as we find in that of all the sects and philosophers, and other religions, any conceits, any wrong rules, anything tending to their own by-interest, or that of a party, in their morality. No taint of prepossession, or fancy; no footsteps of pride, or vanity; no touch of ostentation, or ambition, appears to have a hand in it. It is all pure, all sincere; nothing too much, nothing wanting; but such a complete rule of life, as the wisest men must acknowledge tends en-

tirely to the good of mankind, and that all would be happy, if all would practise it.

3. The outward forms of worshipping the Deity wanted a reformation. Stately buildings, costly ornaments, peculiar and uncouth habits, and a numerous huddle of pompous, fantastical, cumbersome ceremonies, everywhere attended divine worship. This, as it had the peculiar name, so it was thought the principal part, if not the whole of religion. Nor could this, possibly, be amended, whilst the Jewish ritual stood, and there was so much of it mixed with the worship of the true God. To this also our Saviour, with the knowledge of the infinite, invisible, supreme Spirit, brought a remedy, in a plain, spiritual, and suitable worship. Jesus says to the woman of Samaria, "The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. But the true worshippers shall worship the Father, both in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him." To be worshipped in spirit and truth, with application of mind, and sincerity of heart, was what God henceforth only required. Magnificent temples, and confinement to certain places, were now no longer necessary for his worship, which by a pure heart might be performed anywhere. The splendour and distinction of habits, and pomp of ceremonies, and all outside performances, might now be spared. God, who was a spirit, and made known to be so, required none of those, but the spirit only; and that in public assemblies, where some actions

must lie open to the view of the world, all that could appear and be seen, should be done decently, and in order, and to edification. Decency, order, and edification, were to regulate all their public acts of worship, and beyond what these required, the outward appearance, which was of little value in the eyes of God, was not to go. Having shut indecency and confusion out of their assemblies, they need not be solicitous about useless ceremonies. Praises and prayer, humbly offered up to the Deity, were the worship he now demanded; and in these every one was to look after his own heart, and to know that it was that alone which God had regard to, and accepted.

4. Another great advantage received by our Saviour, is the great encouragement he brought to a virtuous and pious life; great enough to surmount the difficulties and obstacles that lie in the way to it, and reward the pains and hardships of those, who stuck firm to their duties, and suffered for the testimony of a good conscience. The portion of the righteous has been in all ages taken notice of, to be pretty scanty in this world. Virtue and prosperity do not often accompany one another; and therefore virtue seldom had many followers. And it is no wonder she prevailed not much in a state, where the inconveniences that attended her were visible, and at hand; and the rewards doubtful, and at a distance. Mankind, who are and must be allowed to pursue their happiness, nay, cannot be hindered, could not but think themselves excused from a strict observa-

tion of rules, which appeared so little to consist with their chief end, happiness ; whilst they kept them from the enjoyments of this life, and they had little evidence and security of another.

It is true they might have argued the other way, and concluded, that because the good were most of them ill treated here, there was another place where they should meet with better usage ; but it is plain they did not ; their thoughts of another life were at best obscure, and their expectations uncertain. Of manes, and ghosts, and the shades of departed men, there was some talk ; but little certain, and less minded. They had the names of Styx and Acheron, of Elysian fields and seats of the blessed ; but they had them generally from their poets, mixed with their fables. And so they looked more like the inventions of wit, and ornaments of poetry, than the serious persuasions of the grave and the sober. They came to them bundled up among their tales, and for tales they took them. And that which rendered them more suspected, and less useful to virtue, was, that the philosophers seldom set their rules on men's minds and practices, by consideration of another life. The chief of their arguments were from the excellency of virtue ; and the highest they generally went, was the exalting of human nature, whose perfection lay in virtue. And if the priest at any time talked of the ghosts below, and a life after this, it was only to keep men to their superstitious and idolatrous rites ; whereby the use of this doctrine was lost to the credulous multitude, and its

belief to the quicker sighted, who suspected it presently of priestcraft.

Before our Saviour's time the doctrine of a future state, though it were not wholly hid, yet it was not clearly known in the world. It was an imperfect view of reason, or, perhaps, the decayed remains of an ancient tradition, which seemed rather to float on men's fancies, than sink deep into their hearts. It was something, they knew not what, between being and not being. Something in man they imagined might escape the grave; but a perfect complete life, of an eternal duration, after this, was what entered little into their thoughts and less into their persuasions. And they were so far from being clear herein, that we see no nation of the world publicly professed it, and built upon it; no religion taught it; and it was nowhere made an article of faith, and principle of religion, until Jesus Christ came; of whom it is truly said, that he, at his appearing, "brought life and immortality to light." And that not only in the clear revelation of it, and in instances shown of men raised from the dead; but he has given us an unquestionable assurance and pledge of it, in his own resurrection and ascension into heaven. How has this one truth changed the nature of things in the world, and given the advantage to piety over all that could tempt or deter men from it!

The philosophers, indeed, showed the beauty of virtue; they set her off so, as drew men's eyes and approbation to her; but leaving her unendowed, very few

were willing to espouse her. The generality could not refuse her their esteem and commendation ; but still turned their backs on her, and forsook her, as a match not for their turn. But now there being put into the scales on her side, “ an exceeding and immortal weight of glory ;” interest is come about to her, and virtue now is visibly the most enriching purchase, and by much the best bargain. That she is the perfection and excellency of our nature, that she is herself a reward, and will recommend our names to future ages, is not all that can now be said of her. It is not strange that the learned heathens satisfied not many with such airy commendations. It has another relish and efficacy to persuade men, that if they live well here, they shall be happy hereafter. Open their eyes upon the endless, unspeakable joys of another life, and their hearts will find something solid and powerful to move them. The view of heaven and hell will cast a slight upon the short pleasures and pains of this present state, and give attractions and encouragements to virtue, which reason and interest, and the care of ourselves, cannot but allow and prefer. Upon this foundation, and upon this only, morality stands firm, and may defy all competition. This makes it more than a name ; a substantial good, worth all our aims and endeavours ; and thus the Gospel of Jesus Christ has delivered it to us.

5. To these I must add one advantage more by Jesus Christ, and that is the promise of assistance. If we do what we can, he will give us his spirit to help us to do

what, and how we should. It will be idle for us, who know not how our own spirits move and act us, to ask in what manner the Spirit of God shall work upon us. The wisdom that accompanies that Spirit knows better than we, how we are made, and how to work upon us. If a wise man knows how to prevail on his child, to bring him to what he desires, can we suspect that the spirit and wisdom of God should fail in it, though we perceive or comprehend not the ways of his operation? Christ has promised it, who is faithful and just; and we cannot doubt of the performance. It is not requisite on this occasion, for the enhancing of this benefit, to enlarge on the frailty of our minds, and weakness of our constitutions; how liable to mistakes, how apt to go astray, and how easily to be turned out of the paths of virtue. If any one needs go beyond himself, and the testimony of his own conscience in this point; if he feels not his own errors and passions always tempting, and often prevailing, against the strict rules of his duty; he needs but look abroad into any age of the world, to be convinced. To a man under the difficulties of his nature, beset with temptations, and hedged in with prevailing custom; it is no small encouragement to set himself seriously on the courses of virtue, and practice of true religion, that he is, from a sure hand and an Almighty arm, promised assistance to support and carry him through.



SPEECH
OF
ROBERT CLAYTON,
BISHOP OF CLOGHER,
BEFORE THE IRISH HOUSE OF LORDS,
ON
SUBSCRIPTION TO ARTICLES AND CREEDS,
FEBRUARY 2, 1756.



ROBERT CLAYTON.

THIS eminent prelate was born in Dublin, 1695, where his father was a clergyman of the Church of England. After his primary education at Westminster school, he was transferred to Trinity College, Dublin, in which institution he resided many years. He was made fellow of his College, studied theology, and, in 1729, was advanced to the degree of Doctor of Divinity. About this time we find him in London, enjoying the acquaintance of Dr Samuel Clarke, by whom he was introduced to Queen Caroline. So much was the Queen impressed with his talents and learning, and pleased with his manners, that she caused him to be advanced to the Bishopric of Killala. He was afterward made Bishop of Cork, and then of Clogher.

Bishop Clayton was more than forty years old, when he presented himself to the world as an author, and his first work was a learned Introduction to the History of the Jews. This was followed by a treatise on the Chronology of the Hebrew Bible, published in 1747. From this period he wrote much on theological subjects, and took an active part in polemical controversy. In 1751 a small work appeared, entitled an *Essay on*

Spirit, of which Clayton was universally considered the author, and which was the foundation of a very animated, and long sustained war of pamphlets. Dr Kippis, in his *Life of Clayton*, speaks as follows with reference to this curious treatise.

“It is a remarkable fact, and hitherto not known in the world, that the *Essay on Spirit* was not actually written by the Bishop of Clogher. The real author of it was a young Clergyman in our prelate’s diocess, who showed the manuscript to his Lordship, and for reasons, which may easily be conceived, expressed his fear of venturing to print it in his own name. The Bishop, with that romantic generosity, which marked his character, readily took the matter upon himself, and determined to sustain all the obloquy that might arise from the publication. He did not, indeed, absolutely avow the work, nor could he do it with truth; but by letting it pass from his hands to the press, and covering it with the *Dedication*, which was his own writing, he managed the affair in such a manner, that the treatise was universally ascribed to him; and it was openly considered as his in all the attacks to which it was exposed. Few persons, except Dr Barnard, the present Dean of Derry, knew the fact to be otherwise; and he hath authorized Mr Thomas Campbell to assure the public, that the Bishop of Clogher was only the adopted father of the *Essay on Spirit*. One effect of our prelate’s conduct in this matter was, his being prevented from rising to a higher seat in the church. In

1752, upon the death of Dr Hart, he was recommended by the Duke of Dorset, then Viceroy of Ireland, to the vacant Archbishopric of Tuam. But a negative was put upon him in England, solely on account of his being regarded as the writer of the *Essay*.*

Clayton's pen was actively employed. He wrote a *Vindication of the History of the Old and New Testaments*, in which he replied to Bolingbroke and others, and discussed with deep research, and in an able manner, many points of heathen and christian antiquity. He also held a correspondence with William Penn on Baptism. But the most remarkable circumstance in his life, was the delivery of the *Speech*, selected for the present work. On this subject the words of Dr Kippis may again be quoted.

“ He had been long dissatisfied with the Athanasian Creed, nor did he approve the Nicene Creed in every particular ; on which accounts he was not a little disturbed, that they continued to be a part of the liturgy of the Church. These sentiments he had declared in his writings ; but this, upon mature deliberation, did not appear to him a sufficient discharge of his christian duty. He determined, therefore, to avow the same sentiments in his legislative capacity, and accordingly on Monday, the 2d of February, 1756, he proposed, in the Irish House of Lords, that the Nicene and Athanasian creeds should, for the future, be left out of the

* Kippis' Edition of the *Biographia Brit. Art.* Clayton.

liturgy of the church of Ireland. The speech, which this prelate delivered upon this interesting occasion, being taken down in short hand, was afterwards published and hath gone through several editions. When the Bishop returned from the House of Peers, he expressed to a gentleman, who accompanied him in his coach, his entire satisfaction with what he had done. He said, that his mind was eased of a load, which had long lain upon it; and that he now enjoyed a heartfelt pleasure, to which he had been a stranger for above twenty years before."

But whatever satisfaction the Bishop of Clogher might enjoy, in the conviction of having obeyed the dictates of conscience, and discharged a duty, his biographer subjoins, that "he had not the additional felicity of obtaining the approbation of his auditors." In short, he was never afterward regarded with a friendly eye by his brethren of the church; and when, two years from that time, the Third Part of his Vindication came out, in which he renewed his attacks on the Trinity, and spoke with warmth in favour of freedom of opinion and latitude of research, those in authority resolved to issue a process against him. A day was appointed for his examination and trial, but before it arrived he was seized with a fever, and died on the 26th of February, 1758. His death was supposed to have been hastened, if not caused, by the anxiety and agitation into which he was thrown, on account of these hostile and persecuting acts of his enemies

Clayton was distinguished for an amiable temper, catholic spirit, and charitable deeds. The following anecdote illustrates his character, and is equally creditable to all the parties concerned.

“While on a visit to London, a person of respectable appearance called on him to ask charity. Suspecting imposition he at first declined, but when the name of Dr Clarke was incidentally mentioned by the person, Clayton told him, if he would obtain a certificate from Dr Clarke, respecting the necessity of his circumstances, he would afford him aid. A certificate was produced, and without further inquiry, he gave him three hundred pounds, which sum was abundantly sufficient to relieve him from all his embarrassments. Hearing of this noble act of benevolence, Dr Clarke sought the acquaintance of Clayton, and introduced him to the Queen, who was so much delighted with the simplicity of his manners, the gentleness of his disposition, his benevolent and charitable spirit, that she immediately provided for his being appointed to the first vacant Bishopric in Ireland.” He inherited a large patrimony from his father, part of which he generously bestowed in doubling the portion of each of his sisters. Nearly the whole of his revenues from the church is said to have been distributed among the worthy and necessitous, in acts of munificence.

SPEECH
OF
BISHOP CLAYTON,
BEFORE THE IRISH HOUSE OF LORDS,
ON
SUBSCRIPTION TO ARTICLES AND CREEDS.

MY LORDS,

It has been long wished, that there could be a method found out, for more effectually uniting his Majesty's Protestant subjects, and for making the terms of their conformity to the established church more easy and agreeable to them.

I have, therefore, ventured to prepare a few short heads of a bill for that purpose, as I mentioned to your Lordships at our last meeting; which, though they may not be sufficient to complete the work, may, at least, contribute to prepare and pave the way towards it. But, before I present your Lordships with these heads of a bill, which I have now in my hands, I believe it will be expected, that I should say something to open, and explain the purport and design of them, which consists of two parts.

The first of which is designed to rectify a mistake in the act of uniformity, passed in the 17th and 18th of King Charles the Second. In part of which there is an omission, which seems to defeat and contradict the very intent of the act. But, as I apprehend, that if that part of the act was now read, your lordships would immediately perceive where the error lies; I therefore, humbly move that, that part of the act may now be read. Which was read as follows.

“Be it further enacted, by the authority aforesaid, that every parson, vicar, or other minister whatsoever, who now hath, and enjoyeth, any ecclesiastical benefice or promotion, within this realm of Ireland, shall in the church, chapel, or place of public worship, belonging to his said benefice, or promotion, upon some Lord's day, before the first day of the annunciation of the blessed virgin Mary, which shall be in the year of our Lord 1667, openly, publicly, and solemnly read the morning and evening prayer appointed by this act to be read, by and according to the said book of common prayer, at the times thereby appointed; and after such reading thereof, shall openly and publicly, before the congregation there assembled, declare his unfeigned assent and consent to the use of all things in the said book contained and prescribed, in these words and no other.

“I, A. B. do hereby declare my unfeigned assent and consent to all and every thing contained and prescribed in, and by the book, entitled, *The Book of*

Common Prayer, and Administration of the Sacraments, and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church, according to the use of the Church of Ireland, together with the Psalter, or Psalms of David, appointed as they are to be sung or said in Churches, and the Form and Manner of making, ordaining, and consecrating of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons.'

"And be it enacted by the authority aforesaid, that every person who shall hereafter be presented, or collated, or put into any ecclesiastical benefice, or promotion, within this his Majesty's realm of Ireland, shall in the church, chapel, or place of public worship, belonging to his said benefice or promotion, within two months next after that he shall be in the actual possession of the said ecclesiastical benefice or promotion, upon some Lord's day, openly, publicly, and solemnly read the morning and evening prayers, appointed to be read by and according to the said Book of Common Prayer, at the times thereby appointed; and after such reading thereof, shall openly and publicly, before the congregation there assembled, declare his unfeigned assent and consent to the use of all things therein contained and prescribed."

I now apprehend it appears to your lordships, that the intent of this part of the act was, to oblige every minister possessed of any ecclesiastical benefice, only to give his assent and consent to the use of *all and every thing* contained in the Book of Common Prayer. Whereas the form of declaration prescribed by the act,

in which, and no other, such minister is obliged to give his assent and consent, is so worded, as seemingly to make him give his assent and consent, not barely to the *use* of all and every thing contained in the Book of Common Prayer, but to the *things* themselves; which is a very different affair, both with regard to the Dissenters and ourselves. With regard to the Dissenters, as it prevents those who do not approve of all and every thing contained in the Book of Common Prayer from joining in communion with us; and with regard to ourselves, as there is a wide distance between being certain of the truth, and being certain of the falsehood of some propositions; it is no way inconsistent with the strictest honesty, for persons to give their assent and consent, for peace and uniformity sake, to the use of some particular forms of worship, either in doctrine or discipline, though they may not thoroughly approve of the things themselves, and to try to get them amended. While the public Declaration of our assent and consent to the things themselves, ties down the mind from any further inquiry, and by discouraging all doubts, and inquisitive industry, puts a stop to all improvement in knowledge, or any further reformation in religion.

Whereas, at the time of the Reformation, which was made in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, there were so many things to be amended, that it was not consistent with the common rules of prudence to make too great an alteration all at once. The most glaring and notorious offences were, therefore, first to be removed, while com-

mon sense directed, that those which were more latent, and less visible, should be referred to a further day.

But, my Lords, I think I ought to have mentioned to your Lordships, that this part of the Act of Uniformity, which has been now read, together with the little oath (as it has been called) by which non-resistance, and an unlimited passive obedience were established by law, were added in, immediately after the restoration of King Charles the Second, to the Act of Uniformity that was passed in the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

However, it is not my design, or desire, to cast any reflections upon those persons, who thought it necessary to have these additions then made ; though the private history of that transaction does not speak much to their advantage ; and, indeed, what appears upon the face of the act itself seems to confirm the report. For, though that part of the act in general, seems plainly calculated to oblige the clergy, only to give their assent and consent *to the use of* everything contained in the Book of Common Prayer, yet the words, *to the use of*, are omitted out of the declaration of assent, which is prescribed to be read in churches. Which piece of fallacy, when it was first detected in England, was attempted to be rectified there, by a clause brought into the House of Lords for that very purpose. But, the then duke of York, who was afterwards King James the Second, though he could not prevent its passing that House, yet had influence sufficient to have it rejected by the Com-

mons, and did not even let it pass the House of Lords without a protest.

Immediately after the Revolution, another scheme, to the same purpose, together with some further concessions in favour of the Dissenters, was projected by Archbishop Tillotson and others, but which was also defeated by the bigotted zeal of the high church party. I am very sensible that it was then, and is now, urged by some, that there was no need of such a clause, because the intent of the act is sufficiently plain; and that to any one who will but consult and consider the act itself, it must appear, that the declaration of assent and consent should only be understood, as requiring our assent and consent *to the use of* all things contained in the Book of Common Prayer, and that all penal statutes are to be interpreted in their fullest latitude in favour of the offender.

But, my Lords, if you are pleased to consider, that the act itself is not appointed to be read in church, but only the form of declaration, out of which the words *to the use of* are omitted; then it is not to be wondered at, if they who are ignorant of the act, whether laity or clergy, should be deceived thereby; and should not imagine that the form of declaration, which they hear read by virtue of the act, was inconsistent with the intent of the act.

To prevent, therefore, all mistakes of this kind for the future, the alteration, which is proposed to be made on this head, is only to insert the words, *to the use of*, in

the form of the declaration, after the same manner as they now stand in the body of the act. Which, as it is doing no more than what common honesty, and common justice seem to require, I therefore think will not be disagreeable to your lordships.

The second thing proposed in these heads of a bill, is *to lessen the number of our Creeds*. I believe it will be allowed, that the creed, commonly called the Apostles' Creed, contains all the fundamental articles of the christian faith, which are generally necessary to salvation. I believe it will be likewise acknowledged, as a piece of political prudence, that all the articles in every established national creed, in order to prevent unnecessary schisms and divisions in the church, ought to be as few, short, plain, and fundamental as possible. I believe it will also be allowed, by all protestants, that nothing ought to be inserted in our creed as a rule of faith, but what is plainly and clearly revealed in the holy Scriptures; as that is the basis on which the reformation of our religion from popery is founded.

And now, my Lords, if these propositions, which I have here advanced, be true, and in my opinion they are, indisputably, I desire to know, what we protestants have to do with the Nicene Creed?

The Nicene Creed, as far as it differs from the Apostles' Creed, is nothing else but the determination of a number of bishops in the fourth century, on a dispute started in the church of Alexandria, concerning a metaphysical point of theology, not plainly revealed in

the Scriptures ; which the Nicene fathers themselves thought of so little consequence to the generality of Christians, that it was not ordered to be taught the catechumens, nor even so much as to be read in the churches, till it was, some centuries afterwards, appointed by the church of Rome, to be read at the communion service.

In which church, where the Pope, in council, is acknowledged to be infallible, there is some pretence for binding the consciences of men to the belief of articles, that are of human invention. But, in the protestant church of Ireland, which acknowledges no infallibility in any decisions, except those of the Old and New Testament, it seems to be an absurdity to have any doctrine established as a rule of faith, which is not plainly and clearly revealed in those sacred writings.

Whereas, the strongest abettors of the Nicene Creed do not so much as pretend, that the doctrine of the consubstantiality of the Father and Son, is to be found in the Scriptures, but only in the writings of some of the primitive fathers. And, I beseech your lordships then to consider, whether it is not absolutely contradictory to the fundamental principles, on which the reformation of the protestant religion from popery is built, to have any doctrine established as a rule of faith, which is founded barely on tradition, and is not plainly, and clearly revealed in the Scriptures ?

I am very unwilling to say anything to the prejudice of the Nicene fathers, or of their cotemporary historians ;

but as the present is undoubtedly a more enlightened age, than that in which the Nicene Council was assembled ; and as it is the inseparable property of time, ever more and more to discover truth, to which the invention of the art of printing, as well as the reformation and revolution, has of late years greatly contributed ; I think I may safely say, it seems unreasonable, that we, at this distance of time, should be tied down to their determinations.

And, as to the ecclesiastical historians of that, and the following century, this much I think myself in honour obliged to inform your Lordships of, that all those books have been since destroyed, which were then published in opposition to the decrees of the Council of Nice, so that all our information comes only from one side of the question. And of those histories upon this head, which have been suffered to come down to our hands, I do not know one, unless you will except Eusebius of Cæsarea, who saith but little on this subject, but what is so filled, either with falsehoods, forgeries, or contradictions, that their veracity is not to be depended on.

But, my Lords, suppose we should allow the Nicene Fathers, and their historians, to be much more honest, and much more able men than they really were ; I cannot think that the determinations of any set of men whatsoever, since the time of the Apostles, on a metaphysical subject of theology, not clearly revealed in the Scriptures, is the proper subject for the creed of a Christian.

The great Lord Bacon, in his excellent treatise on the *Advancement of Learning*, a work that cannot sufficiently be praised, and to which Mr Boyie, Mr Locke, and the great Sir Isaac Newton, owe the first rudiments of the several systems, which they have since carried to so great perfection; in this wonderful treatise, wherein Lord Bacon is showing the deficiency of each species of learning, and is pointing out the errors which have prevented the progress and advancement of it; the science of theology comes, among others, under his consideration, upon which he has this remark, which for fear of being mistaken in the quotation, I have written down, and shall beg leave to read to your Lordships. "Here, therefore, I note this deficiency, that there hath not been, to my understanding, sufficiently inquired and handled, the true limits and use of reason in spiritual things, as a kind of divine dialectic; which for that it is not done, it seemeth to me a thing usual, by pretext of true conceiving that which is revealed, to search and mine into that, which is not revealed."

You have now heard, my Lords, the sentiment of this great man, which is, that the searching and mining into things not revealed, under pretence of their being contained in that which is revealed, is the error, which he notes in the *advancement of theology*. Accordingly, if we inquire into the event and consequence of the aforementioned determination in the council of Nice, we shall find, that the course of religion was thereby diverted into a wrong channel, and that Christianity from thence

forward, instead of being considered as a practical obligation, was changed into a speculative science ; men's minds were irritated against one another, on account of niceties, that were of no consequence to religion ; and the doctrine of faith, or of belief in punctilios of this kind, was so magnified and extolled, as being necessary to salvation, that the righteousness of works was entirely neglected. Polemical divinity was introduced into religion, whereby the church was rendered, if I may be allowed the expression, literally militant ; and the divine precept of universal love, which our Saviour recommended to his disciples, as his command. was changed into that of hatred to all who would not subscribe.

Whereas, had the Nicene fathers determined nothing but in scriptural terms ; and had declared, that a difference of opinion, concerning things not plainly and clearly revealed, was not a sufficient foundation for a breach of communion, it is more than probable, that most of those disturbances, which have since infested the christian church, might have been prevented.

As to the Athanasian Creed, as that is a superstructure built upon the foundation of the Nicene Creed, it is not only liable to all the objections, which can be made against that, but has also many blemishes of its own to answer for ; since it has not so much as the authority of a council to support it, but is now a known forgery, detected by the criticisms of the learned Vossius, and cannot be traced within two hundred years of the time of Athanasius. But, then it may probably be asked,

how comes it to bear the name of Athanasius? The answer to which is, because it agrees perfectly with the Athanasian doctrine, and had the name of Athanasius affixed to it by the church of Rome, because he was a person much esteemed by that church; and whose principles, as well political as religious, the members of that church have long laboured to propagate among mankind. But, as the true character of this Athanasius is not commonly known; and, therefore, some of your lordships may possibly be unacquainted with it, I shall beg leave to inform you who, and what he was.

Athanasius was a young, forward, petulant deacon in the church of Alexandria, of an ambitious spirit, with a talent fitted for disputation. And as he could have no hopes of getting into that bishopric, unless he could drive Arius out of Alexandria, who was the principal presbyter in that church next to the bishop; this he effected, by fomenting this dispute about the trinity, between Arius and the bishop; on which account, having got Arius excommunicated, he had him then banished out of Alexandria. Which, when done, no sooner was the old bishop Alexander dead, but Athanasius, though then only a young man, of about twenty seven or twenty eight years of age, by the assistance of a set of murdering ascetics, forced himself at once into that high archbishopric, without ever passing through any of the intermediate degrees. And, having gotten himself illegally consecrated, contrary to all the rules and canons of the church, he prevailed on the Emperor Con-

stantine to confirm him therein, by the power of bribes, that were given to one of the Emperor's favorites. And no sooner was he thoroughly established in it, but he immediately flew in the Emperor's face; and when the Emperor Constantine the Great was dead, treated his son and successor Constantius, with more contempt and insolence, than could have been borne from an equal. And when he was dispossessed of his bishopric for other irregularities, by a numerous council of bishops, regularly summoned and assembled, he forced his way into that see again, more than once or twice, over the murdered corpses of his antagonists; and waded into his cathedral, through seas of blood.

But it may, perhaps, be further asked, why should this recommend him to the see of Rome? The reason of which is, because this was all done by the connivance, and with the concurrence of that see; Athanasius, while he treated all the rest of mankind, and even his own royal master, with the utmost insolence, having paid a servile court to the papal chair. Insomuch, that in the books of the canon law, the first precedent that is, or can be produced, in support of the Papal supremacy, is this instance of the servile submission that was paid by Athanasius to Pope Julius. And, therefore, I should apprehend, that all protestants, who have renounced the supremacy of the Pope, and the independency of the church upon the state, ought to be for obliterating the name of Athanasius out of their liturgy, into which it was probably inserted, only with a view of

recommending his political principles, under the shelter and influence of his religious doctrines.

But, my Lords, suppose we should allow this creed to be no forgery, and that it hath the sanction of a council to support it, there are still more objections against it, than are to be urged against the Nicene Creed. For, as it searches and mines further into that which is not revealed, than even the Nicene Creed does, it is so much the more faulty as a creed, which ought to contain nothing that is not plainly and clearly revealed in the scriptures.

My Lords, I desire you will be so good as to observe, that I do not take upon me to say, that the doctrine contained in the Athanasian Creed is false; I only say, it is not plainly and clearly revealed. Nor, do I presume to condemn those, who think they have evidence sufficient to justify their being peremptory, and positive, in the support of it. I judge no man; and only say, it contains a doctrine of so nice, so disputable, and metaphysical a nature, as is hardly fit to be treated on in the schools; but is, I am certain, by no means sufficiently revealed to be made the subject of a creed, which is commanded by public authority to be read by the minister, and repeated by the people, in the public service of the church; where the low, as well as the high, are ordered to assemble themselves, and which should be, according to St Paul, not to doubtful disputations, but that they may with one mind, and one

mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And suppose, my Lords, we should further allow, that the doctrine contained in the Athanasian Creed may be true; can any one, nevertheless, justify those damnatory clauses, which, in a point of so disputable a nature, and of so difficult a determination, so positively assert, that every one that does not "keep this faith whole and undefiled, shall, without doubt, perish everlastingly?" And again, that "he that will be saved, must thus think of the Trinity." And concludes with declaring, that "this is the Catholic faith, which, except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved." Hard words! and seemingly unfit for the mouth of a Christian, and a protestant.

But, my Lords, let us now, on the contrary, only for argument' sake, suppose, that the doctrine contained in the Athanasian Creed is wrong; and, unless the author of it was infallible, there is a possibility that it may be so; and then let us consider what would be the consequence—I dread to name it; as it would be no less than blasphemy—for, if the Father, and the Son, have not from all eternity been consubstantial, and coequal, the assertion of that proposition would be blasphemy.

My Lords, I will own freely to your lordships, that it is the dread and terror of a wrong determination, in a point of so delicate a nature, that makes me solicitous for having this creed removed out of our liturgy. And in a matter of such great consequence,

and where the honour of God the Father is so nearly concern'd, I own, that I am fearful how I put any other being, or person, upon a level with him.

The most zealous advocates for the Athanasian doctrine have, when hard pressed, been forced to allow, that there is a priority of order and dignity between the Father and the Son. Because the Father is unbegotten, though the Son is not; and the Son is said to be commanded and sent, though the Father is not. Now, if this priority of order and dignity does not consist in words only, but is founded in nature, and it be allowed, that there is such a real difference between the Father and the Son, as to be a foundation in the nature and reason of things, for this priority of order and dignity, I wonder how the same persons, who allow that, can possibly assert, that, "in this Trinity none is afore, or after other; none is greater or less than another."

The distinction is at best so exceeding nice between a priority of order, and a subordination; or rather, between a priority of order and dignity, founded on the nature and reason of things, and a priority in existence and power, that I own it is too subtile for my comprehension. And then, I beseech your lordships to consider, whether this is a fit subject for the public service of the church.

My Lords, I fear I have already trespassed on your patience too long; but, before I sit down, I think it my duty to mention one objection to your lordships, and, indeed, the only one of any force, that I have ever yet

heard, to these alterations, which is proposed to be made in favour of the Dissenters; and that is, the fear and danger of innovations, which, when once begun, no body knows where they will end.

In answer to which, I shall beg leave to observe, that if your lordships are pleased to pass these heads of a bill, let them go where they will, or let them receive what alterations they may, your lordships, upon their return, will be still masters of them, and if you do not approve of them, you may them quash them, if you please.

But I own, my Lords, that I am under no apprehension of their receiving any disagreeable alterations, as I do not think the church is in any manner of danger under the present administration. And I am persuaded, that if my Lords the Bishops will but shew themselves inclined to amend, what they cannot but acknowledge is amiss, they will find the laity ready to assist and support them, rather than otherwise.

We see alterations and innovations frequently made in the temporal constitution of the state, and no ill consequences following from thence; and as we have the promises of God, that he will take such care of his church, as that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it, if we do not put our confidence in him, or his word, surely there is less reason to be under apprehension for the church than for the state.

I cannot, therefore, but join with the great Lord Bacon in an observation, which he makes in his treatise

on *Church Controversies*, where, addressing himself to the Bishops, he has these words, which I shall beg leave to read to your lordships. "Again, to my Lords the Bishops I say, that it is hard for them to avoid blame (in the opinion of an indifferent person) in standing so precisely upon altering nothing. Laws not refreshed with new laws wax sour. Without a change of ill, a man cannot continue the good. To take away many abuses supplanteth not good orders, but establisheth them. A contentious retaining of custom, is a turbulent thing, as well as innovation. A good husbandman is ever pruning in his vineyard or field; not unseasonably, indeed, nor unskilfully, but lightly; he findeth something ever to do. We have heard of no offers of the bishops, of bills in parliament; which, no doubt, proceeding from them, to whom it properly belongeth, would have ever received acceptance."

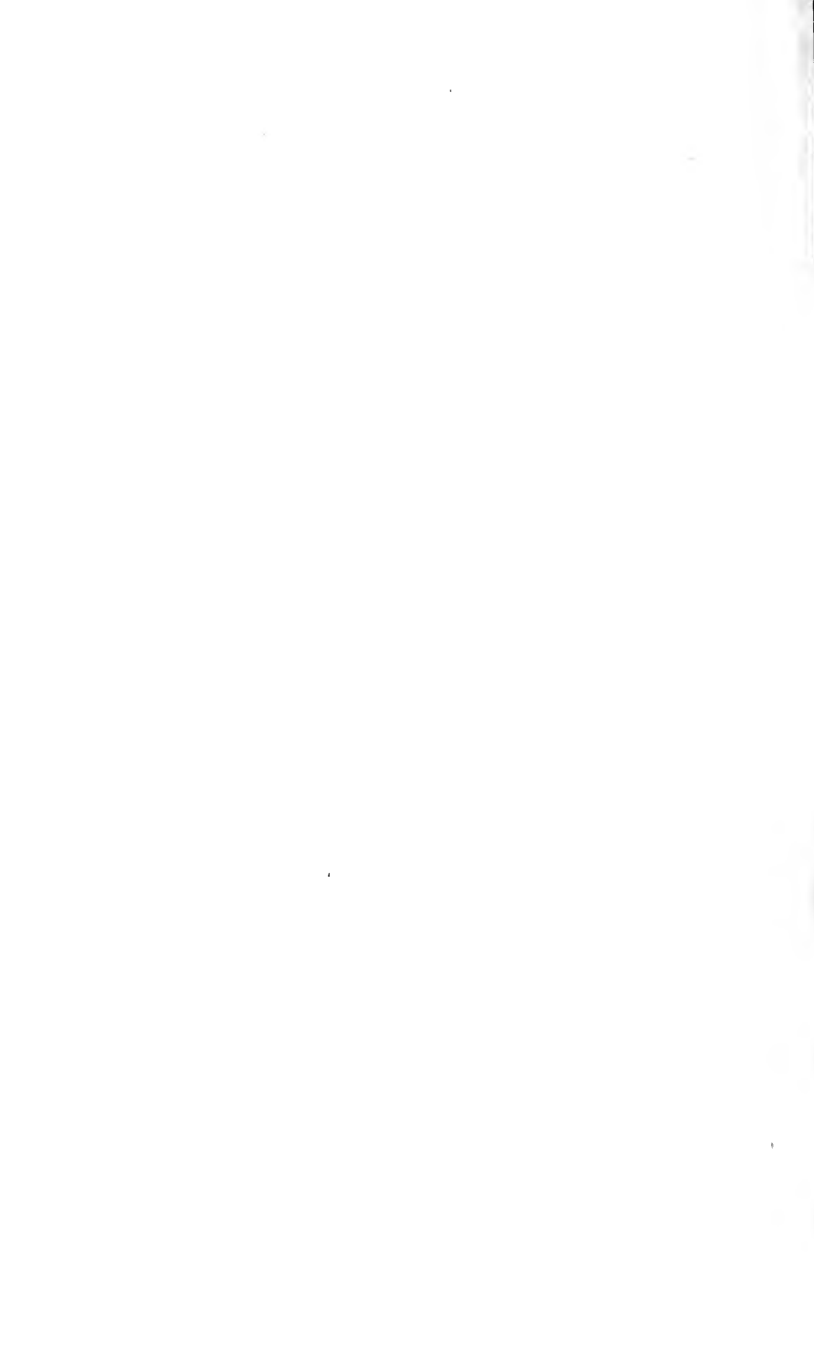
And, therefore, my Lords, that this objection may no longer lie against the whole bench of bishops, I take the liberty of presenting these heads of a bill. And, humbly move, that they may be now received.

"Heads of a bill for more effectually uniting His Majesty's Protestant subjects, and for explaining an act, entitled, an act for the uniformity of public prayers, &c.

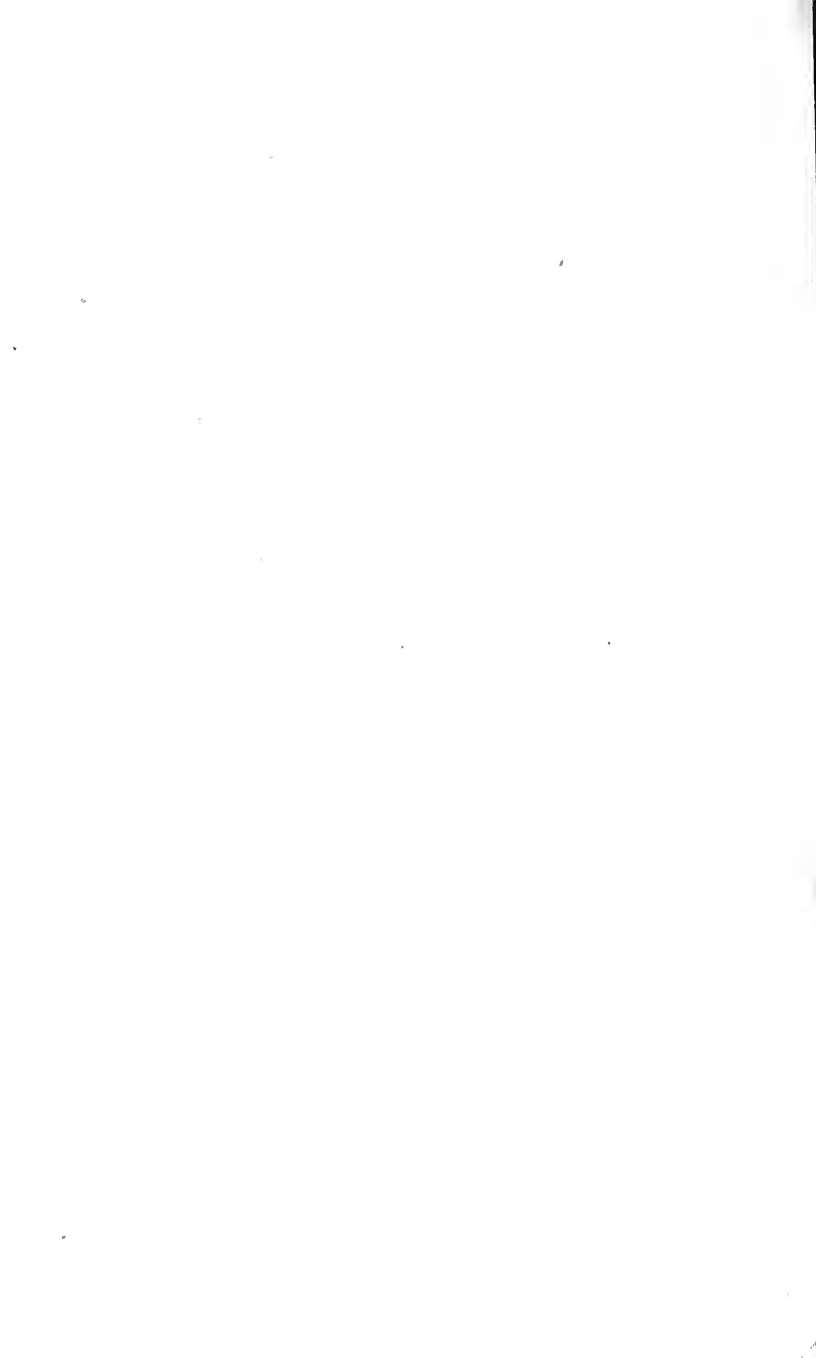
"Whereas, it appears from the words of the aforesaid act, for the uniformity of public prayers, &c. that the design of the declaration of assent and consent, required

“ ‘ I, A. B. do hereby give my unfeigned assent and consent to the use of all, and everything contained and prescribed, in and by the book entitled, the **Book of Common Prayer**, and administration of the Sacraments, and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church of Ireland; together with the Psalter, or Psalms of David, pointed as they are to be said, or sung in churches; and the form or manner of making, ordaining, and consecrating of bishops, priests and deacons.’ ”

“ And, whereas, a great variety of creeds do but contribute to confound the minds of weak persons, and to disunite protestants among themselves; we pray it may be enacted, that in such places in the aforementioned **Book of Common Prayer**, where the rubric directs the creed, commonly called the Nicene Creed, or the creed commonly called the Athanasian Creed, to be read; the officiating minister, shall read the creed commonly called the Apostles' Creed, instead thereof, and not the Nicene Creed, or the creed, commonly called the Athanasian Creed.”



SELECTION
FROM THE WRITINGS
OF
ISAAC WATTS.



ESSAY
ON THE
CAUSES OF UNCHARITABLENESS.

FROM DR WATTS' *ORTHODOXY AND CHARITY UNITED.*

AN uncharitable humour springs generally from some of these following causes.

I. *First, From a malicious constitution of nature, an acrimonious or a choleric temper of blood.* There are some animal engines of human flesh, that have their juices all soured in their very formation; and there is an ill ferment raised in such persons at the perception of every object, that is not just suited to their present fancy and inclination. And by the hard laws of union between soul and body in this our fallen state, the spirit too often complies with the fretful distempers of the flesh. There are but few that attempt to suppress the ferment, and to resist the angry motions of the animal; and of those few that attempt it, scarce one in ten is very successful. For it is a work of toil, and difficulty, perpetual watchfulness and unceasing prayer.

This ill humour mixes itself with religion, as well as with civil affairs. It diffuses its malignity through all the studies and the manners of the man, and gives a visible tincture to his notions and his practices. Furio can never converse about the calmest and most speculative points of divinity; but his indignation kindles against every different opinion, his fiery temper breaks out and blazes, and he bestows on his own deportment the honourable names of shining light and burning zeal. His peevish and angry passions are so blended with his understanding, that hard names are his best arguments; most convincing to himself, though they are the just scorn of the wise. He stabs his brethren that differ from him to the heart, with pointed railing; and from an aversion to an opinion rises to an immortal hatred of the person. If our great Creator has united any of our souls to bodies, that are less infected with this vicious juice, we have reason to adore his sovereign goodness.

II. *Selſlove, and pride, and a vain conceit of our own opinions*, is another spring of uncharitable carriages. Did you ever see a weak and humble soul sensible of its own poverty and ignorance, and ready to esteem others above himself, easily indulge this uncharitable humour? Alas! poor foolish mankind is very prone to esteem itself wise and knowing. Little Laudillus, who is almost always in the wrong, has much ado to persuade himself, that he was ever capable of mistaking. He secretly thinks all his opinions to be divine truths, and therefore he is very lavish in pronouncing error and heresy

upon every notion and practice, that differs from his own. He takes the freedom to choose a religion for himself, but he allows no man besides the same liberty. He is sure that he has reason to dissent from others, but no man has reason to dissent from him. He sets up for infallibility without a triple crown, and fixes a see of ecclesiastical sovereignty on this side the water. He awes some slavish spirits into submission, and they become treacherous to their own souls, and to the rights of human nature, by delivering up their faith and consciences to his imperious dictates. Then the man grows haughty, surly, and severe, especially if he be advanced to any degree of honour and authority in the church. Then, in his inflexible justice, he delivers up the humble and inquisitive christian unto Satan, because he cannot *assent and consent to all and everything contained* in his scheme; and he teaches perhaps his elder brethren the doctrines and discipline of the Gospel, as Gideon did the elders of Succoth, with the briars and thorns of the wilderness.

III. This hateful vice may be derived from a third original; and that is a *constant and friendly acquaintance with the men and books of our own opinion, and an avoidance of all the writers and persons that differ from us.* This has a mighty influence to beget and maintain uncharitable notions; yet this is the constant practice, not only of the unlearned, but of too many of the learned world. Hermes sits all the year in his own cell, and never looks abroad beyond the clan of his own

fraternity. Hermes reads the controversies as they are described only by one party, and disputes them over only in the books that are written on one side. He finds a great appearance of argument and Scripture there, and then proclaims it impossible, that the adverse party should shew equal reason or revelation; and thus he proceeds to censure them as *men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith, and twisting the Scriptures to their own damnation*. Cicero in his treatise, *De natura Deorum*, marks this humour, and brands it, *Vestra solum legitis, vestra amatis, cæteros causa incognita condemnatis*.*

But let you and I, my friend, who delight in charity, let us converse a little with authors that differ from our present opinions, and we shall see their sentiments drest up so plausibly, and set in so fair a light, that might easily persuade men of sincere consciences to embrace them; and this will prevent us from censorious thoughts concerning our candid adversaries, and their disciples. There is scarce anything that enlarges the mind more, and more disengages it from narrow and selfish principles, than a free converse with the virtuous and ingenious of all parties.

There is a memorable story to this purpose, concerning two neighbours in an unsociable town, who were always quarrelling about the private meeting and the

* You read only your own books. you love only your own, and you condemn others before you know any sufficient reason, for want of knowing their opinions.

parish church. Both places of worship in that town were well supplied with preachers of good sense and serious religion; but each of them was the subject of unmerciful reproach between these two neighbours, whensoever they met, and their different methods of worship were mutually reviled; the one as formal and spiritless, the other as enthusiastical and indecent. At last Pacifico, their common friend, persuaded them to hear each other's minister, and accompanied them both one day to their different assemblies; and they were both surprised to hear the Gospel preached with a due degree of decency and fervour, both at meeting and at church. And though they continued still to adhere to their own party, as judging it, in some respects, suited best to their edification; yet they maintained hearty friendship with each other, and delightful society in religious conference. Thus the quarrelsome mistake was rectified by better acquaintance. They lived many years together in peace; they composed the animosities of different parties, that dwelt in the town; they died in perfect charity, and left a sweet influence behind them, and an honourable example.

IV. A fourth spring of uncharitableness is, *our reading the word of God with a whole set of notions established beforehand.* And yet how common a method, and how constant is this? Diæcion has long ago determined, that bishops must be superior to presbyters; he has received ordination from Episcopal hands; and hopes one day himself to be capable of ordaining others.

Thus while he is growing up towards the mitre, he reads the Scriptures only to confirm his own determined opinions. He stretches and torments many an unwilling text, to make it speak the language of his own thoughts. He neglects the passages that favour other forms of government and methods of ministration; or else he constrains them to mean Episcopacy too. Every word that he reads, hath a Diocesan aspect; and the first verse of Genesis can prove prelacy, for aught I know, as it has been able heretofore to demonstrate papacy, when *in principio creavit Deus cælum et terram*, decided the controversy, and set the pope above the emperor. For God made all things from one beginning and not from two.

Synodias reads the Bible with a Presbyterian glass, and Fratris with a Congregational optic. They can find nothing there but their own opinions, and both of them wonder that Diæcion should not see them too. Fratris turns over the Scriptures with great diligence and meditation, and as often as he finds the word *church* there, he thinks of nothing but a congregation of faithful men; as the church of Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch are so many single congregations. When Synodias meets the same word in his Bible, he is often in the midst of an assembly of divines; and especially when any power is attributed to the church, he is sure it must intend a classis of presbyters, or consistory of elders. When the same word falls under the eye of Diæcion, in his course of reading the New Testament,

he cannot imagine anything is meant short of a diocess. All his churches are or should be as big as counties or shires. And I might add, that when poor Parochianus the mason, finds leisure to read a chapter, and lights upon the mention of a church in it, he thinks immediately of a tall stone building with a steeple upon it, a bell or two, and a weathercock.

I might give the like instances of many other terms and expressions in Scripture, to which men have unalterably fixed their several different ideas, and raised consequences from them, and interpret the word of God by them, without inquiring whether their ideas are conformable to the sense in which the Scripture uses those expressions. And then it is no wonder, that their schemes of ecclesiastical government are so different. And yet each of these prepossessed opiniators think their own exposition of the text so evident, that they chide the perverseness of all other men, as though they were resolved to wink against the light. It is like a person of a fretful constitution, whose eyes are also tinged with the jaundice, he quarrels with every man that he meets, because he will not consent to call all things yellow. Thus by the false light of affection in which they behold some beloved texts, and their negligence of all others, or at least by the colours of prejudice that they throw upon them, each triumphs in his own sentiments, and pronounces the Apostles and Prophets of his side. Then he lets fly many a sharp invective against all the men that presume to oppose him ;

for in his sense they oppose the Apostles themselves and fight against the authority of God.

But when a man takes a Bible into his hand, without a preconceived scheme in his head, and though he may make use of systems to secure himself from inconsistencies, yet he puts them not in the place of the holy Scriptures, but resolves to form his body of divinity by the New Testament, and derive all his opinions and practices thence ; he will then find so many expressions, that seem to favour the several contending parties of Christians, that in some points he will perhaps be tempted to doubt of all opinions, and sometimes have much ado to secure himself from the danger of eternal scepticism. When in any doubtful point his judgment is led to a determination, it is always with great caution, and by slow degrees. He is not carried by violence to any dogmatical conclusion ; he is modest in his assertions, and gentle towards all, whose judgment and conscience have determined them another way, because he met with so many probable arguments on their side, in the time of his dubitation and inquiry, that had almost fixed his opinion the same way too.

If I may be permitted to speak of myself, I might acquaint the world with my own experience. After some years spent in the perusal of controversial authors, and finding them insufficient to settle my judgment and conscience in some great points of religion, I resolved to seek a determination of my thoughts from the Epistles of St Paul, and especially in that weighty doctrine of justi-

fication ; I perused his letter to the Romans in the original, with the most fixed meditation, laborious study, and importunate requests to God, for several months together ; first without consulting any commentator, and afterwards called in the assistance of the best critics and interpreters. I very narrowly observed the daily motions of my own mind. I found it very hard to root out old prejudices, and to escape the danger of new ones, I met with some expressions of the Apostle that swayed me towards one opinion, and others that inclined the balance of my thoughts another way ; and it was no easy matter to maintain my judgment in an equal poise, till some just and weighty argument gave the determination ; so many crossing notions, perplexing difficulties, and seeming repugnancies lay in my way, that I most heartily bless the divine goodness, that enabled me at last to surmount them all, and established my judgment and conscience in that glorious and forsaken doctrine of the justification of a sinner in the sight of God, by the imputation of a perfect righteousness which is not originally his own.

From my own experiment I can easily guess, what confounding intricacies of thought others pass through in their honest searches after truth. These conflicts did exceedingly enlarge my soul, and stretched my charity to a vast extent. I see, I feel, and am assured that several men may be very sincere, and yet entertain notions in divinity all widely different. I confess now and then some opinions, or some unhappy occurrences are

ready to narrow and confine my affections again, if I am not watchful over myself; but I pray God to preserve upon my heart a strong and lasting remembrance of those days and those studies, whereby he laid within me the foundation of so broad a charity.

V. Fifthly, another cause of uncharitableness is a *want of reflection on the grounds of our own opinions*. We should be more just to ourselves, and more gentle to others, if we did but impartially review the reasons why we first embraced our several principles and practices.

Perhaps it was education determined most of them, then let us chide ourselves severely for building upon so careless and slight a bottom. Or let us be civil to the greatest part of mankind, who came by all their principles the same way. Perhaps we were led into particular notions by the authority of persons whom we reverence or love; then we should not upbraid our neighbours, that have been influenced into different sentiments by the same springs. Perhaps we have felt interest sometimes ready to bias our thoughts, and give us a secret inclination or aversion to a party; let us then pity the frailty of human nature, and have compassion upon men whose judgments are exposed to so mean a bribery, and sometimes have been warped aside from the truth. Or finally, perhaps it was deep meditation, a daily search into Scripture, and fervent prayer were the methods by which we pursued knowledge, and established our principles upon solid reason. Let us

then be so charitable to those whom we contend with, as to suppose they sought after truth the same way, and then our contentions will have less fire and spleen in them, less of clamour and indignation against those that differ from us.

The true reason why we kindle our anger against our christian brethren, that are not entirely of our party is, because we not only have the vanity to fancy ourselves always in the right, and them in the wrong; but we judge their consciences and their sincerity too, that they did not come honestly and fairly by their principles, while we never consider how we ourselves came by our own.

VI. But there are still more ways to arrive at this uncharitable temper. I must proceed to sixthly; which is a common method, and thus to be performed. If we will but *trace the principles of those that dissent from us, through all the length of remote and feeble consequences, and be sure to find some terrible absurdity at the end of them*, we shall not easily maintain our charity. O how often do we put their opinions upon the rack! We torture every joint and article of them, until we have forced them to confess some formidable errors, which their authors never knew or dreamed of. Thus the original notions appear with a frightful aspect, and the sectators of them grow to be the object of our abhorrence, and have forfeited their right to every grain of our charity.

Evangelillo believes that Christ Jesus has completely answered the demands of the law in order to our justification, and that in the room and stead of all believers. Nomineus hears this doctrine, and thus begins his chain of severe and false deductions; then, saith he, the law has no power to demand obedience of us; then we are not to be charged with sin, though we break the law hourly and profanely; then we may contemn all the commands, sport with the threatenings, and defy God the lawgiver and the avenger. He proceeds then to pronounce Evangelillo a wicked Antinomian, and in the name of the Lord "*delivers him up to Satan, that he may learn not to blaspheme.*" Evangelillo, on the other hand, (who has been well instructed in the way of salvation, and has learned the duties of faith and hope, but is not yet so well improved in the charity of the Gospel,) hears Nomineus preaching up repentance and sincere obedience, as the conditions of our justification and acceptance with God to eternal life. He smites his breast with his hand, and cries, surely this man knows no use of Christ in our religion, he makes void his righteousness and his death, he is a mere Legalist, a Papist, a rank Socinian, he "preaches another Gospel, and though he were an angel from heaven let him be accursed." Thus when men dress up their neighbours in all the strained consequences of their opinions, with a malicious pleasure they pursue this thread of argument, they impose horrid conclusions, which can never be drawn from their doctrines, and never leave the pursuit

till they have pushed each other to blasphemy and damnation.

Whereas if the doctrines and the persons now mentioned were put into the balances of truth and charity, perhaps the principles of *Evangelio* would be found to have most weight of Scripture on their side, and *Nomineus* more of the fair shows of reasoning. But neither the one would be found to throw Christ out of his religion, nor the other to make void the law. And both of their lives would appear shining in holiness, but that they want the bright garments of charity.

VII. Let me name a seventh spring of this uncharitable humour; and that is, *when we magnify circumstantial differences into substantial ones, and make every punctilio of our own scheme a fundamental point*, as though all the law and the Prophets hung upon it, as though it were the ground and pillar of all the truth in the Gospel. *Crucius* will not allow his dissenting neighbour to be a member of the christian church, because he separates from the modes of worship in the Church of England; he cannot believe him to be a friend to Christ crucified, because he refuses to have his child baptized with the airy sign of the cross. Again, the dissenting neighbour pronounces *Crucius* to be a mere formalist, and to have nothing of the spirit of God in him, because he seeks not much to obtain the gifts of the spirit, and scarce ever addresses himself to God in prayer without the assistance of a form.

Sabbaptes, that lives within two doors of them, will not believe either of his neighbours to be a Christian, because they have never been plunged under water, that is, in his sense they were never baptised. And both of them in requital agree to call Sabbaptes a Jew, because he worships only on a Saturday. Whereas the all knowing God looks down into all their hearts, beholds the graces that his spirit hath wrought there, owns them all for his children and the disciples of his son, though they are not yet perfect in love. They have all one common God and Father, one Lord Jesus, one faith, one spirit of prayer, one baptism, though they quarrel so bitterly about times, and modes, and forms.

It is a very uncharitable practice to think, that a man can never journey safely to heaven unless his hat and shoes be of the same colour with ours, unless he tread the very track of our feet, and his footsteps too be of the same size. It is a censorious and perverse fancy to pronounce a man no Christian, because every thought of his soul, and all the atoms of his brain are not just ranged in the same posture with mine. How ridiculously unreasonable is it for a man of brown hair, to shut his brother out from the rank and species of men, and call him an ox or a lion, because his locks are black or yellow. I am persuaded there is a breadth in the narrow road to heaven, and persons may travel more than seven abreast in it. And though they do not trace precisely the same track, yet all look to the same Saviour Jesus, and all arrive at the same common salvation.

And though their names may be crossed out of the records of a particular church on earth, where charity fails, yet they will be found written in the Lamb's book of life, which is a record of eternal love, and shall forever be joined to the fellowship of the catholic church in heaven.

VIII. This iniquity of uncharitableness has more springs, than there are streams or branches belonging to the great river of Egypt; and it is as fruitful of serpents and monsters too. Itself is a Hydra of many heads; I have drawn seven of them out at length into open light, that they may be cut off forever. But there are others still remaining as full of fire and infection. Shall I mention an eighth here, the *applause of a party, and the advance of selfinterest*? Have we never observed what a mighty prevalence this has over the hearts and tongues of men, and inflames them with malice against their neighbours? They assault every different opinion with rage and clamour. They rail at the persons of all other parties, to ingratiate themselves with their own; and when they find their account in it, their tongues are sharpened as drawn swords; they fight for honour like young volunteers, or like the Switzers for pay. When they tear away men from their habitations, cast them into noisome prisons, and put to death the ministers of the Gospel, they boast, like Jehu when he slew the priests of Baal, *come and see my zeal for the Lord*. And as he designed hereby to establish the kingdom in his own hands, so they to maintain the preferments and

possessions, as well as the reputation they had acquired among their own sect. But ah! how little do they think of the wounds, that Jesus the Lord receives by every bitter reproach they cast on his followers! Nor will it be found a sufficient reason for the persecution of them one day, that they did not conform to human inventions.

The Jansenists in France have made some reformation in the doctrines of popery, and they have been sometimes traduced for approaching the tenets of Calvin. They have been in danger of being degraded and losing their spiritual dignities, and they are pushed on by this fear and ambition, to write at every turn some severe invectives against the Calvinists, to show that themselves are true sons of that uncharitable church of Rome.

Sicco has lately departed from a Baptist society, and he hardly thinks himself sufficiently come out of the water, till he is kindled into a flame against all those that baptise by immersion; he rails at his former brethren, to make the Presbyterian and Independent churches believe that he is a true convert. How art thou mistaken, poor Sicco, to attempt this method of caressing thy new acquaintance? For they had rather receive a Baptist into their fellowship, whose faith and holiness are conspicuous in his life, than open their doors to an uncharitable wretch, that proves his conversion only by the change of an opinion, and placing his religion in railing.

Acerbion has left the communion of his father, and is become an ecclesiastic of high note in a more powerful and splendid church. He seldom puts a volume into the press without sourness and hard words in it, against the society which he has forsaken. His pen is dipt in gall daily, and he grows old in malice and censure. It is pity he should so far expose the church to which he now belongs, as to think that she will esteem him a more dutiful son, by how much the less charity he has for his dissenting brethren.

And I am sorry also, that there should be a church in Great Britain, which has devoted Christians to the devil for little differences, and has exposed them to tedious and sharp sufferings for refusing to submit to particular gestures in worship and airy signs, for wearing a short garment in prayer in the place of a long one, or black instead of white; and some of her sons have delighted to execute these censures, when they have found much gain arising from this severe godliness. I could wish she had always exercised the same charity to weak consciences, that she does to slender purses; for she allows a christian liberty to "poor beneficed men and curates, not being able to provide themselves long gowns, that they may go in short ones."

IX. A ninth spring of this uncharitable practice is, *fixing upon some necessary and special point in Christianity, and setting it up in opposition to the rest, or at best in opposition to some one of the rest.*

“I have long observed,” says an ingenious writer, “that christians of different parties have been eagerly laying hold on particular parts of the system of divine truths, and have been contending about them as if *each* had been *all*; or as if the separation of the members from each other, and from the head, were the preservation of the body, instead of its destruction. They have been zealous to espouse the defence, and to maintain the honour and usefulness of each apart; whereas their honour, as well as usefulness, seems to me to lie much in their connexion. And suspicions have often arisen betwixt the respective defenders of each, which have appeared as unreasonable and absurd, as if all the preparations for securing one part of a ship in a storm were to be censured, as a contrivance to sink the rest.” Thus far Dr Doddridge in a late preface.

And I think we may as well borrow the similitude expressly from the Scripture itself, 1 Cor. xii. 14. “The body is not one member but many. If the foot shall say, because I am not the hand, is it therefore not of the body?” And how ridiculous would it be if we should suppose the “ear shall say, because I am not the eye, I am not of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? And if they were all one member, where were the body? The eye cannot say unto the head, I have no need of thee; nor again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.”

In the same manner, *repentance, faith, and love* are three necessary graces or virtues that go to make up a Christian; and I might cite several texts of Scripture, where each of these three are made necessary to Christianity. Is it not therefore a most unreasonable thing to set up either repentance, faith or love so high, as though the whole of Christianity was contained in it, when it is evident that nothing else can make a Christian but such a faith as brings with it repentance and good works, or holiness of life, or such a love as produces obedience and good works, which must be the effect of this faith?

In Christianity "nothing avails but such a faith as works by love" unto all holiness, Gal. v. 6. "Repent and believe the Gospel," was the first preaching of Christ and his Apostles, Mark i. 15. And in other places, faith is indispensably coupled with repentance, Acts iii. 19. xx. 21. Without repentance our sins will not be forgiven us. Without faith in Jesus Christ we have no interest in his salvation. True faith must be such as "purifies the heart," Acts xv. 9; and produces good works as the necessary evidences to prove our faith true, James ii. 17, 18.

What a strange sort of monstrous Christian would this be, who pretended to much faith, but had no love nor repentance? And as monstrous would that pretender be, who had love or repentance without faith. As "God hath set the members of the body, every one of them as it hath pleased him," so has he appointed *faith, repentance, and love* to fulfil their several offices in the christian

life. What a piece of madness therefore is it, and high inconsistency to separate those things, which God hath joined in his Gospel? Or to preach or paraphrase very long, and talk very much upon either one of these, so as to hinder that due respect that is to be paid to the other two? There is no man is or can be a true believer in Christ, if he has not *repentance* and *love*, producing good works, as well as that *faith*, which is necessary to make a Christian. Let us take heed therefore, lest we give occasion, by any of our discourses, to exalt one of these virtues or graces to the prejudice of the rest, for the utter loss of either of them will destroy all our pretences to Christianity.

When Solfido has formed one of his Christians exactly agreeable to the shape and humour of his own imagination, and dressed him up in all the feathers of strict orthodoxy, that he can find in the severest writers, and by a motto written upon his forehead has called him the *man of faith*, I am at a loss to know what christian church would receive him into their communion, when he neither professes *repentance*, nor *holiness*, nor true *love* to God or man. It has indeed some of the appearances of a *christian* stature, but it is a man without feet or hands for walking or moving, a man without life or activity to run the christian race, or to do anything for God in the world. What glory can our Lord Jesus Christ receive from such a useless figure? What honour can such an imperfect image possibly bring to the Gospel; or what service can he be of in the world or in the church?

X. The most common cause of uncharitableness, and the last I shall mention, is, that *a great part of the professors of our holy religion, make their heads the chief seat of it, and scarce ever suffer it to descend and warm their hearts.* Jesus the Saviour has been discovered to them in a good degree of outward light, but has never been revealed in them with power, nor their souls changed by divine grace into the image of the Gospel. While they boast of their orthodox faith they forget their christian love.

Stellino has stuck his brain all over with notions; and fancies his higher sphere sufficiently illuminated for the conduct of mankind, that is round about him, and beneath him. But this set of notions is like a winter night overhung with stars; bright and shining, but very cold. Natural affections have no room in his soul; it is too much spiritualized with opinions and doctrines. His divinity lies all in his understanding, and the common duties of humanity scarce ever employ his tongue or his hands.

If a man does but profess every tittle of his creed, and believe just as Stellino believes, he is declared fit for holy communion; and if he will but dispute warmly for the hard words that distinguish his scheme, and can pronounce Shibboleth well, he shall not be adjudged to death or damnation, but joined heartily to the fellowship of the saints, though his flaming immoralities proclaim him a son of Satan. Satan himself has perhaps a more accurate and nice skill of the controversies of divinity;

than the best of our professors and doctors have arrived at ; but his pride and malice are chains of darkness, and make a devil of him in spite of all his knowledge ; yet Stellino affects too near a resemblance to Lucifer, that fallen son of the morning.

Vices that are odious to humannature, and wild licentiousness of a bitter tongue, which destroy all civil society, are very little faults in his opinion, when put into the balance with orthodoxy and zeal. If my conversation among men be blameless and honourable ; if my practice consist of virtue and piety ; if I profess a solemn faith in Christ the eternal word, the only begotten Son of God, who came into the flesh, who died to make a true atonement for the sins of men, and testify my unfeigned subjection to him, and declare the grounds of my hope ; yet I must not be admitted to the special parts of worship where Stellino presides, because I am not arrived at his degree of light, and differ from his expressions a little, when I explain the words *justification* and the *covenant* of grace. His lips are ever full of declamation and controversy, and he harangues copiously upon the most affecting points of our religion ; he talks much of the amazing condescensions of divine mercy, and of the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards man ; but it has not yet taught him love to his fellow creatures, nor kindness towards his brethren.

Such another Christian is Misander ; he reverses the duties of Christianity, which St Paul describes, *he speaks evil* of all *men* but his own party, he is a *brawler*, and

ungenteel, shewing meekness unto none ; and while he pretends, “that the grace of God which brings salvation has appeared” unto him, he *lives still in malice and envy*, and wears the visible characters of the men of heathenism, “*hateful and hating one another*,” Tit. ii. 11, 12. Tit. iii. 2, 3, 4. He flourishes and enlarges upon the gracious qualities of our Redeemer, our great *High Priest*, who is, “touched with the feeling of our infirmities ;” yet himself has not learnt from so glorious an example to “have compassion of them, that are ignorant and out of the way ;” but rather being exalted in his own knowledge, he condemns “his weak brother to perish, for whom Christ died.” Take thy Bible, O vain man, and read a few lines in the 8th chapter of St Paul’s first Epistle to Corinth. “Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth ; and if any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know ; but if any man love God, the same is known of him.” And St John will assure thee, “that he that loveth not his brother knoweth not God, and if any man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar,” 1 John iv. 8, 20.

Yet let not any think that I advance charity so high, as to place it in the room of knowledge and faith, or to make it a selfsufficient ground for our admittance into heaven at last ; nor can I suppose it alone to be a sufficient plea for a reception into any visible church of Christ on earth. A confession of the name of Jesus, with the most important and most necessary articles of his bless-

ed religion, a declaration of my personal faith or trust in him, together with a solemn dedication of myself unto the Lord, may be justly required of me by that christian society into which I desire admittance. In default of these the biggest instances of charity will never constitute me a Christian. "Except ye believe that I am he," saith our Saviour, "ye shall die in your sins," John viii. 24. "If a man strive for a prize, yet is he not crowned unless he strive lawfully;" that is, according to the methods prescribed in the Gospel, the knowledge and the faith of the Son of God, 2 Tim. ii. 5, and the sentence of our Lord is dreadful and peremptory. "He that beliveth not shall be damned," Mark xvi. 16. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation," Rom. x. 10. But without charity my faith can never be true, for it must be such "a faith as worketh by love," and discovers itself by the "fruits of the spirit, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, temperance," Gal. v. 6. 22.

Thus far have we traced the vice of uncharitableness in many of the properties that belong to it, and the cause of it, and many instances in which it discovers itself in the world, and in the church; and it appears a very shameful vice, and opposite to the religion of the blessed Jesus.

ON THE CHOICE
OF
OUR RELIGIOUS OPINIONS.
BY
JOHN LE CLERC.



ON THE CHOICE

OF OUR

RELIGIOUS OPINIONS.

BEING THE FIRST TEN SECTIONS OF LE CLERC'S TREATISE
SUBJOINED TO HIS EDITION OF GROTIUS'S "TRUTH OF THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION."

SECTION I.

*We must inquire, amongst what Christians the true
Doctrine of Christ flourisheth most at this Time.*

WHOEVER reads over the Books of the New Testament, with a desire to come at the knowledge of the truth, and does not want judgment, will not be able to deny, but that every one of the marks of truth, alleged by Hugo Grotius, in his second and third Books, are to be found there. Wherefore, if he has any concern for a blessed immortality, he will apprehend it to be his duty, to embrace what is proposed to him in those books as matter of belief; to do what is commanded, and to expect what he is there taught to hope for. Otherwise, if any one should deny that he doubts of the truth of the Christian religion, and at the same time thinks the doctrines, precepts, and promises of it are not fit to be believed or obeyed in every particular; such an one

would be inconsistent with himself, and manifestly shew that he is not a sincere Christian. Now this is one of the precepts of Christ and his Apostles, that we should profess ourselves the disciples of Christ before men, if we would have him own us for his, when he shall pass sentence on the quick and dead at the last day ; and if we do not, as we have denied him to be our master before men, so he also, in that last assembly of mankind, will deny us to be his disciples before God. For Christ would not have those that believe on him to be his disciples privately ; as if they were ashamed of his doctrine, or as if they valued the kindnesses, threats, or punishments of men, more than his precepts, and the promises of eternal life ; but be-Christians openly and before all the world, that they may invite other men to embrace the true religion, and render back to God that life, which they received from him, in the most exquisite torments, if it so seem good to him ; whilst they openly profess that they prefer his precepts above all things. And thus St Paul teaches us, that if we confess with our mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in our heart that God hath raised him from the dead, we shall be saved ; *For, says he, with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with thy mouth confession is made unto salvation ; for the Scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.* Which being thus, it is his duty, who thinks the Christian religion to be true, to discover and profess boldly and without fear, this his sincere opinion, upon all occasions that offer themselves.

And it is further necessary for him to inquire, if there be any of the same opinion with himself, and to maintain a particular peace and friendship with them ; for Christ tells us, this is one mark his disciples are to be known by, if they love one another, and perform all acts of love and kindness towards each other. Moreover, he exhorts them to have congregations *in his name*, that is, such as should be called Christian ; and promises that he would be present there, where two or three are met together upon that account ; by this means, besides the mutual love, and strict friendship of Christians united into one society, there is also a provision made for preserving their doctrines ; which can hardly continue, if every one has a private opinion to himself, and does not declare the sense of his mind to another, unless for his own advantage ; for those things that are concealed, are by degrees forgotten, and come in time to be quite extinguished ; but Christ would have his doctrine, and the churches which profess it, be perpetual, that it may not cease to be beneficial to mankind.

Wherefore, whoever derives his knowledge of the Christian religion from the New Testament, and thinks it true ; such an one ought to make profession of it, and to join himself with those of the like profession. But because there is not at this time, neither was there formerly, one sort of men only, or one congregation of such as are gathered together *in the name of Christ* ; we are not therefore presently to believe that he is a true Christian, who desires to be called by that holy

name ; neither ought we to join ourselves, without examination, to any assembly who style themselves Christians. We must consider, above all things, whether their doctrines agree with that form of sound words, which we have entertained in our mind, from an attentive reading of the New Testament ; otherwise it may happen that we may esteem that a Christian congregation, which is no further Christian than in name. It is therefore the part of a prudent man, not to enter himself into any congregation, at least for a continuance ; unless it be such, in which he perceives that doctrine established, which he truly thinks to be the Christian doctrine ; lest he should put himself under a necessity of saying or doing something contrary, to what he thinks delivered and commanded by Christ.

SECTION II.

We are to join ourselves with those, who are most worthy the Name of Christians.

Amongst Christians that differ from each other, and not only differ, but (to their shame !) condemn one another, and with cruel hatred banish them their society ; to agree to any of them without examination, or, according to their order, to condemn others without consideration ; shews a man not only to be imprudent, but very rash and unjust. That congregation which rejects, though but in part, the true religion, (a representation of which he has formed in his mind,) and

condemns him that believes it ; cannot be thought by such an one, a truly Christian congregation in all things ; nor can it prevail with him, to condemn every man which that church shall esteem worthy to be condemned, and cast out of the society of Christians. Wherefore a wise and honest man, ought above all things to examine, in these dissensions amongst Christians, who are they, which best deserve the holy name of disciples of Christ, and to adhere to them. If any one should ask, what we are required to do by the Christian religion, supposing there were no such Christian society at all, amongst whom the true doctrine of Christ seems to be taught, and amongst whom there is not a necessity laid upon us of condemning some doctrine, which we judge to be true. In this case, he who apprehends these errors, ought to endeavour to withdraw others from them ; in doing of which, he must use the greatest candour, joined with the highest prudence and constancy ; lest he offend men without doing them an advantage, or lest any hopes of bringing them to truth and moderation, be too suddenly cast off. In the mean time, we are to speak modestly and prudently, what we think to be the truth ; nor should any one be condemned by the judgment of another, as infected with error, who seems to think right. God has never forsaken, nor never will forsake the Christian name, so far, as that there shall remain no true Christians ; or at least none such as cannot be brought back into the true way ; with whom we may maintain a stricter society, if others will not

return to a more sound opinion ; and openly withdraw ourselves from the obstinate, (which yet we ought not to do, without having tried all other means to no purpose ;) if it be not allowed you to speak your opinion fairly and modestly among them, and to forbear condemning those whom you think are not to be condemned. The Christian religion forbids us speaking contrary to our mind, and falsifying and condemning the innocent ; nor can he be unacceptable to God, who, out of respect and admiration of those divine precepts, can endure anything rather than that they should be broke. Such a disposition of mind, arising from a sense of our duty, and a most ardent love of God, cannot but be highly well-pleasing to him.

Wherefore amongst Christians, who differ from each other, we are to examine which of them all think the most right ; nor are we ever to condemn any but such as seem to us worthy to be condemned, after a full examination of the matter ; and we are to adhere to those who do not require any doctrines to be believed, which are esteemed by us to be false, nor any to be condemned which we think to be true. If we cannot obtain this of any Christian society, we, together with those who are of the same opinion with ourselves, ought to separate from them all, that we betray not the truth, and utter a falsity.

SECTION III.

They are most worthy the Name of Christians, who in the purest Manner of all, profess the doctrine, the truth of which hath been proved by Grotius.

But it is a question of no small importance, and not easily to be resolved, who of all the societies of the present Christians, have the truest opinions, and are most worthy of that name by which they are called. All the Christian churches, as well as those who have long since separated from the Romish church, as the Romish church itself, do every one of them claim this to themselves; and if we lay aside all the reasons, we ought no more to give credit to the one than to the other; for it were a very foolish thing, to suffer such a choice to be determined by chance, and to decide all controversies, as it were, by the cast of a die.

Now since Grotius has not proved the truth of the particular opinions of any present sect of Christians, but only of that religion which was taught mankind by Christ and his Apostles; it follows, that that sect of Christians is to be preferred before all others, which does most of all defend those things, which Christ and his Apostles taught. In a word, that is in every particular truly the Christian religion, which, without any mixture of human invention, may be wholly ascribed to Christ as the author. To this agree all those arguments of truth, which are laid down in the second book of *The Truth of the Christian Religion*; nor do they agree to any other, any further than it agrees with that.

If any one adds to, or diminishes from, the doctrine delivered by Christ; the more he adds or diminishes, so much the farther he goes from the truth. Now when I speak of the *doctrine of Christ*, I mean by it, the doctrine which all Christians are clearly agreed upon to be the doctrine of Christ; that is, which according to the judgment of all Christians, is either expressly to be found in the books of the New Testament, or is by necessary consequence, to be deduced from them only. As to those opinions, which as some Christians think, were delivered by word of mouth, by Christ and his Apostles, and derived to posterity in a different method, namely, either by tradition; which was done by speaking only; or which were preserved by some rite, as they imagine, and not set down in writing till a great while after; I shall pass no other judgment upon them here, but only this, that all Christians are not agreed upon them, as they are upon the books of the New Testament. I will not say they are false, unless they are repugnant to right reason and revelation; but only that they are not agreed about the original of them, and therefore they are controverted amongst Christians, who in other respects agree in those opinions, the truth of which Grotius has demonstrated; for no wise man will allow us to depend upon a thing as certain, so long as it appears uncertain to us; especially if it be a matter of great moment.

SECTION IV.

Concerning the Agreement and Disagreement of Christians.

Though the controversies amongst Christians be very sharp, and managed with great heat and animosity, so that we may hear complaints made on all sides, of very obvious things being denied by some of the contending parties; yet notwithstanding this, there are some things so evident, that they are all agreed in them. And it is no mean argument of the truth of such, that they are allowed of by the common consent of those who are most set upon contention, and most blinded by passion. I do not mean by this, that all other things about which there is any contention, are doubtful or obscure, because all Christians are not agreed in them. It may easily happen that that may be obscure to some, which would be very plain, if they were not hindered by passion; but it is hardly possible that the fiercest adversaries, who are most eager in disputing, should agree about an obscure point.

First then, all Christians now alive, are agreed concerning the number and truth of the books of the New Testament; and though there be some small controversies among learned men about some Epistles of the Apostles, this is no great matter; and they all acknowledge, that there is nothing but truth contained in them, and that the Christian doctrine is not at all altered, either by keeping or rejecting them. And this consent

is of no small moment in a discourse about the undoubted original of a divine revelation under the new covenant. For all other records or footsteps of ancient revelation, that have been preserved according to the opinions of some, are called in question by others.

Further, Christians are agreed in many articles of faith, which they embrace, as things to be believed, practised, and hoped for. For instance, all who have any understanding, believe, (I shall mention only the principal heads here,) 1. That there is one God, eternal, all powerful, infinitely good and holy, in a word, endowed with all the most excellent attributes, without the least mixture of imperfection; that the world and all things contained in it, and consequently mankind, were created by this same God; and that by him all things are governed and directed with the highest wisdom. 2. That Jesus Christ is the only Son of the same God; that he was born at Bethlehem, of the Virgin Mary, without the knowledge of a man, in the latter part of the life of Herod the great, in the reign of Augustus Cæsar; that he was afterwards crucified, and died in the reign of Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea; that his life is truly related in the history of the Gospel; that he was therefore sent from the Father, that he might teach men the way to salvation, redeem them from their sins, and reconcile them to God by his death; and that this his mission was confirmed by innumerable miracles; that he died, as I before said, and rose again, and, after he had been very often seen by many who had discoursed with him, and handled him, he was

taken up into heaven, where he now reigns, and from whence he will one day return, to pass a final judgment according to the laws of the Gospel, upon those who were then alive, and upon all them that are dead, when they shall be raised out of their graves; that all the things that he taught, are to be believed, and all that he commanded are to be obeyed, whether they relate to the worship of God, or to temperance in restraining our passions, or to charity to be exercised towards others; that nothing could be appointed more holy, more excellent, more advantageous, and more agreeable to human nature than these precepts; however, that all men, (Jesus only excepted,) violate them, and cannot arrive at salvation, but through the mercy of God. 3. That there is a Holy Ghost, who inspired the Apostles of Jesus Christ, worked miracles to recommend them, and inclines the minds of pious men constantly to obey God, and supports them in the afflictions of life; that we are to give the same credit, and in all things to obey this spirit speaking by the Apostles, as we do the Father and the Son. 4. That the Christian church owes its original and preservation, from the days of Christ to this time, to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; that all they who believe these things, and observe the precepts of the Gospel, shall obtain mercy of God, whereby they shall be made partakers of the resurrection, (if they be dead when Christ shall come,) and of a happy life to eternity; on the contrary, all they who have diminished from the faith of the Gospel, and have not observed its

precepts, shall rise, (if they be dead,) to be punished, and their punishment shall be eternal death. 5. Lastly, That Christians ought to profess all these things, both at their baptism, in which we declare that we will lead a life free from the filthiness of iniquity, according to the direction of the Gospel; and also at the Lord's Supper, in which we celebrate the death of Christ, according to his command, till he comes; and shew that we are willing to be esteemed his disciples, and the brethren of those who celebrate it in like manner; moreover, that those rites, if they are observed by us, as is reasonable, and are celebrated with a religious mind, convey heavenly grace and the divine spirit to us.

These things, and others that are necessarily connected with them, (for it is not to our present purpose to mention them all particularly,) all Christians believe; nor is there any other difference but only this, that some add many other things to these, whereby they think the foregoing doctrines ought to be explained or enlarged with additions; and those such, as they imagine were delivered to posterity, not by the writings of the Apostles, but by the tradition and custom of the church, or by the writings of latter ages. Concerning these additions, I shall say nothing more than what I before advised; that Christians are not agreed upon them, as they are upon the doctrines now explained, which are put beyond all manner of doubt by their own plainness, if we allow but the authority of the Holy Scripture, which no Christian in his senses can refuse.

If any one weighs the arguments, by which the truth of the Christian religion is proved, with these doctrines in his view; he will observe, (and if it be well observed, it will be of great use,) that all the force of the argument is employed about these things, and not about those points which divide the Christian world, as was before hinted.

SECTION V.

Whence every one ought to learn the Knowledge of the Christian Religion.

In this agreement and disagreement amongst Christians, prudent men will judge it most safe, to take their knowledge of the Christian religion from the fountain, which is not in the least suspected, and whose streams all confess to be pure and undefiled. And this fountain is not the creed or the confession of faith of any particular church, but only the books of the New Testament, which all acknowledge to be genuine. I confess some Christians do sometimes say, that those books cannot be understood but by the doctrine of their church; but others again deny it; and, to mention but this one thing, that opinion is very suspicious, which depends only on the testimony of those that affirm it; and they such, whose chief interest it is, that it should seem true. Others say, that there is need of the extraordinary assistance of the Holy Spirit, not only in order to the belief of the Scripture, which may without any

great difficulty be allowed, but also in order to understand the meaning of the words contained in it ; which I do not see how it can be proved ; but we will grant this also, provided they will acknowledge that all men, who read the books of the New Testament with a religious mind, intent upon the truth, are afforded this Spirit by the goodness of God ; there is no need of contending for anything more than this. Every one, therefore, may wisely and safely gather his knowledge of the Christian religion from these books ; yet making use of those helps, that are necessary or profitable for the understanding of such books ; which we will not now inquire after.

Whoever therefore believes, that the revelation of the will of God made by Christ, is faithfully related in the books of the New Testament, such an one must of necessity embrace all things which he there meets with, according as he understands them, as matters of faith, practice and hope ; for whoever believes in Christ, ought to receive with a religious mind everything which he thinks comes from him ; he cannot defend himself with any excuse, whereby to admit some and reject others, of those things which he acknowledges to come from Christ. And such are those doctrines I before explained, and concerning which all Christians, as I said, are agreed.

As to the rest, about which they contest, since they are not so very plain, a religious and pious man may and ought to deliberate concerning them, and withhold

his judgment till they appear more evident to him. For it is very imprudent to admit or reject anything, before it sufficiently appears to be either true or false. Nor is eternal salvation, in the books of the New Testament, promised to any one, who embraces this or that controverted opinion ; but to him who heartily receives in his mind, and expresses in his actions, the sum of the Christian religion, as we have described it.

SECTION VI.

Nothing else ought to be imposed upon Christians, but what they can gather from the New Testament.

This therefore is the only thing that can justly be imposed upon all Christians, viz. that they embrace whatever they think is contained in the books of the New Testament, and obey those things which they find there commanded, and abstain from those things which are there forbidden ; if anything further be required of them as necessary, it is without any authority. For would any fair judge require a Christian to believe a doctrine came from Christ which he does not find in the only faithful and undoubted records, in which all are agreed the revelation of Christ is derived down to us ? Let other doctrines be true ; let us take this for granted a little while ; they cannot however be esteemed as true by him, who, amongst the different sorts of Christians, follows the middle way, and allows of no certain record

of the revelation of Christ, but the books of the New Testament. Whilst he believes this, nothing else can justly be required of him ; and he will believe this, till it shall be made appear to him by plain arguments, that the knowledge of Christianity is safely to be had somewhere else, which I believe will never be done.

If any one, therefore, attempts to take away from Christians the books of the New Testament, or to add to them such things as do not appear to be true, we are by no means to hearken to such an one ; because he requires that of us, which no prudent man will allow, viz. that we should believe that which we are not certain of, or neglect that which all own to be the sure record of the revelation of the Gospel. There is no need of examining all controversies singly, and one by one ; which would be an endless thing, and cannot be done but by very learned men, who have abundance of leisure. Whoever imposes anything upon us, as necessary to be believed, which we cannot believe, he drives us from himself ; because belief cannot be extorted by force ; nor will any one who fears God, and is a lover of truth, suffer himself to profess what he does not believe, for the sake of another.

But they who differ from this, object, that if every one be left to their own liberty, in judging of the meaning of the books of the New Testament, there will be as many religions as there are men, and truth, which is but one, will immediately be oppressed by a multitude of errors. But I think, that before an opinion,

which is established upon solid arguments, be opposed by objections, the foundation upon which it is built ought to be overthrown ; because so long as that remains firm, the whole superstructure raised upon it cannot be shaken, as we see here. For if any inconvenience should follow from what has been said, it is nevertheless true, till it be made appear not to be fixed on a firm bottom. But to pass by this now ; it is false that the revelation of the New Testament is so obscure, that the sum of the Christian religion cannot be truly learned from it, by any one of a sound mind, who is desirous of truth. It is evident from experience, that it may be truly learned from thence ; for all Christians, as has been already shewn, agree in the principal parts of it ; which was observed by Grotius. We have no regard here, to a few simple or wicked men ; since whole societies of Christians, who in other respects, out of their too great eagerness of contention, are apt to differ from one another, and to run into the contrary extremes, are here agreed.



SECTION VII.

The Providence of God, in preserving the Christian Doctrine, is very wonderful.

In this particular, as in numberless others, which relate to the government of human affairs, the divine providence is very wonderful ; which, notwithstanding

so many differences, as were of old, and are at this day amongst Christians, yet hath preserved the books of the New Testament entire, even to our times; that the Christian doctrine may be recovered out of them, as often as it happens to be corrupted. Nor has it only delivered down to us this treasure entire; but also, in the midst of the hottest differences, has so secured the Christian doctrine itself, that the sum of religion has never been forgotten amongst Christians.

No inconsiderable number of Christians at this day contend, that many errors, in former ages, crept by degrees in amongst the sects of Christians, which, when others denied in the sixteenth century after the birth of Christ, that famous separation in the *west* was made upon that account, by which Christianity was divided into two parts, not very unequal. Yet in those ages, (whose errors are reprov'd by that part of the Christians, which made the separation I now mentioned, and whose faults were highly aggravated by both sides, and that not without grounds,) the sum of the Christian religion, before drawn up by us, was all along maintained. There is no age so thick clouded with ignorance and vice, but the forementioned articles of faith may easily be collected from their writings that remain. It must not indeed be dissembled, that many things, foreign and unknown to the books of the New Testament, have been added and thrust into the Christian Theology; whence it is, that the true wheat of the sower, in the Gospel, hath not brought forth so much fruit as it would

otherwise have done, had the ground been cleared of thorns, and hurtful, and unprofitable weeds. Many vices and faults were not only admitted or borne with, but applauded also. Yet was not sound doctrine ever the less safe, whilst the books of the New Testament remained, and whilst Christians were endued with common sense ; for by this means, very eminent men were often raised up, who corrected the errors and vices of their age, and ventured to oppose the torrent. Thus according to the promise of Christ, God hindered *the gates of death from prevailing against the church* ; that is, did not suffer every society wherein the Christian doctrine was preserved entire, to be extinguished ; though sometimes they were blended and obscured with foreign and contrary opinions, and sometimes were more sincere and pure. Wherefore, (to observe this by the way,) unless this doctrine was really sent to us from God, it could never have escaped out of such a deluge of vices and errors, but would, at length, have been overwhelmed by the changeableness and folly of human nature, and have entirely perished.

SECTION VIII.

An Answer to that Question, Why God permits Differences and Errors to arise amongst Christians?

Perhaps some may here object against what has been said, that the divine providence would have better consulted the preservation of the Christian doctrine, if it

had prevented the errors that are and have been amongst Christians, and maintained truth and constant agreement, which is the companion of it, amongst them, by its omnipotence. But it is not for us to instruct God how he ought to direct himself, in the government of human affairs, that they might be better. On the contrary, it is our duty to think that God had very wise reasons for suffering what he did suffer, though we cannot so much as guess at what they are. But if any probable reasons can be given for the things that are done, we ought to believe that God permits those things, which daily come to pass, to be done for these or more weighty reasons.

To make a conjecture from the reasons of things, we are above all things sure, that the design of God was to create men free, and to suffer them to continue so to the end ; that is, not so good, that they must necessarily continue good always ; nor so bad, as that they must of necessity submit to vice ; but mutable, so as that they might pass from vice to virtue, and again from virtue to vice ; and this with more or less ease, according as they had a longer or shorter time given up themselves to virtue or vice. Such we see the Hebrew people of old were, and such were the Christians afterwards. Neither of them were drawn by an irresistible force either to virtue or vice ; but only restrained by laws, which proposed rewards to the good, and punishment to the bad ; to which were added, by the divine providence, various incitements to virtue and discouragements from vice ;

but yet neither of them deprived man of his native liberty, whereby he had a power of obeying or disobeying God, as is evident from experience; for there were always good and bad, though the divine laws prescribed virtue, and prohibited vice equally to all. That this would be so amongst Christians, Christ has plainly signified in two parables, the one of the tares which the enemy sowed, after the wheat was sown; the other of the net, which took good and bad fish alike; by which he signified, that there would always be in the church a mixture of good and bad Christians; whence it follows, that he very well saw the evils that would always be in the Christian church. Moreover, Paul tells the Christians, *that there must be sects amongst Christians, that they who are approved may be made manifest.* And indeed, unless there had been differences among Christians concerning doctrine, there had been no room left for choice, and for that sort of virtue, by which truth is preferred to all other things. Therefore even in this particular also, the divine wisdom shines bright; which caused an excellent virtue to flourish out of the midst of the vices of men.

If any one should object here, as some do, that it were better there were no such kind of virtue, than that there should be vices contrary to it, from whence so many horrid crimes, so many calamities, and so great miseries should befall mankind, and such heavy punishment attend them after this life; to this we answer, that these evils were not of such a consideration with

God, that upon their account, he should not give an instance of his power in creating free agents. Unless this had been done, no creature would have believed, that it could have been done before. Nay, God himself would not have been thought to be free, unless he himself had planted this opinion of himself by his omnipotence in the minds of men, which otherwise they never could have conceived from his works. Nor could he have been worshipped, if he had been thought to do, or to have done all things, not out of his free goodness, but by a certain fatal necessity ; unless by a fatal worship also, and such an one as is not at all free. The vices and calamities of this or the other life, are not comparable to so great an evil, as the supposing God to be ignorant of anything ; for if we find any difficulty about them, we ought to consider that God is most good, just, powerful, and wise, and will not act otherwise than agreeable to his perfections ; and will easily find a way to go in it, whereby to clear those things which seem to us to be entangled ; and to show to all intelligent creatures, that nothing was done by him, which ought not to have been done. In the mean time, till that day spring, in which all the clouds of our ignorance shall be dispersed, he hath given us such experience of himself, and such instances of his perfections, on the account of which, we may and ought entirely to confide in him, and patiently to wait for what he will have come to pass. More might be said on this matter, but that it would divert us from that end we are tending to, and carry us to what does not belong to this place.

SECTION IX.

They profess and teach the Christian Doctrine in the purest Manner of all, who propose Those things only as necessary to be believed, practised, or hoped for, which Christians are agreed in.

To pass by these things, therefore, and return to the choice of our opinion amongst the different sects of Christians; nothing seems possible to be done more safe and wise, in this state of affairs, than for us to join ourselves with that sect of Christians, which acknowledges the New Testament only for the rule of their faith, without any mixture of human decrees; and who think it sufficient, that every one should learn their from of faith from thence conform their lives to its precepts, and expect the promises which are there made. Which, if it be done sincerely, and without any dissimulation, the end of such a search will be that very form of sound words, which we have made appear to have remained the same, amidst so many and so great storms of errors and dissensions, during the passing of so many ages, and the changes of kingdoms and cities. In it are contained all things, that are necessary to faith and practice; to which, if any one would have any other things added, it may lawfully be done, according to the circumstances of time and place; provided they be not imposed as necessary, which belongs only to the supreme Lawgiver, nor contrary doctrines to those obtruded.

Christians disposed in the manner we have been speaking of, ought not to submit their neck to the yoke of human opinions, nor to profess they believe what they do not believe ; nor to do that which they cannot approve in their own minds, because they think it contrary to the precepts of Christ. Therefore, wherever that Christian liberty, which I have now mentioned, is not allowed, they must of necessity depart thence ; not as if they condemned all that are of a different opinion from themselves, but because every one is absolutely obliged to follow the light of his own mind, and not that of another's ; and to do that which he judges best to be done, and to avoid that which he thinks to be evil.

SECTION X.

All prudent Persons ought to Partake of the Sacrament with those, who require Nothing else of Christians, but what every one finds in the Books of the New Testament.

Since Christ has appointed two signs or symbols of Christianity, Baptism and the Lord's Supper ; it was not indeed in our power to receive baptism, where we judged the Christian religion to be most pure, because we were baptized very young ; but since we do not come to the other sacrament, till we are of riper age, we may distinguish that society of Christians, in which

we are willing to be partakers of it ; which if we have not already done, we ought to do it now.

There are some who make the sacrament, (which, according to Christ's institution, is a token of that peace and love which is between Christians,) a mark of distinction ; and exclude from it all those, who do not think it safe to submit to any yoke, but what Christ has laid upon them ; or to receive any things as necessary to be believed, practised, or hoped for, but those which they are verily persuaded are contained in the books of the New Testament ; and who are therefore very cautious of admitting any other forms of faith, besides that which we have mentioned. It is but just and reasonable indeed, that we should maintain peace with such men as these ; but for receiving the sacrament upon this condition, that we should embrace any other rule of faith and practice, besides the books of the New Testament, and think all those excluded the church, who will not admit them ; this a religious and prudent man will think very wicked. But all they, who are true lovers of the Gospel, safely may and ought to approach the sacramental table of them, who know no other laws of obtaining eternal salvation, but those laid down by Christ and his Apostles in the books of the Gospel covenant, as every one can understand them. For whoever acknowledges the books of the New Testament for the only rule of faith and practice ; who sincerely conform their lives to that rule ; in a word, who allow of no idola-

try, nor treat others ill, that they may profess they believe certain doctrines, which they do not believe ; all such are received by these, and also invited to this table. It is manifest indeed, that communion cannot be maintained with him, who makes use of force to impose his opinions upon others ; who worships other gods, besides the true God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost ; or who, by his conversation, shows that he makes light of the precepts of the Gospel ; or who owns any other laws of salvation, than those wrote in the books of the eternal covenant. But he, who behaves himself the direct contrary, is worthy to have all Christians maintain communion with him, and to be preferred to all the rest who are of a different opinion. No mortal man, nay, no angel can impose any new Gospel upon Christians, to be believed by them. Now, according to this Gospel, he is a true disciple of Christ, who from his heart believes his doctrine, and his only, so as to obey it the best he is able, according to the infirmity of this life ; who worships one God, loves his neighbour as himself, and lives temperately in respect to all other things. If anything be diminished from this, the laws of the covenant, which none but God can abate anything of, are maimed. And if anything be added, it is a useless yoke, which none ought to impose on Christians. Such laws can be received from God only, who alone is the determiner of eternal salvation.

Perhaps some may here ask me, by what name these Christian societies, which I have now described, may

be distinguished? But it signifies nothing what denomination they go under. The reader may conceive all churches to be meant, in which, what I have said, is to be found. Wheresoever that only rule of faith, and that liberty which I have described, is, there they may be assured true Christianity is, and they need not inquire for a name, which makes nothing to the purpose. I believe there are many such societies; and I pray the good and great God, that there may be more and more every day; that at length *his kingdom may come* into all the earth, and that mankind may obey it only.

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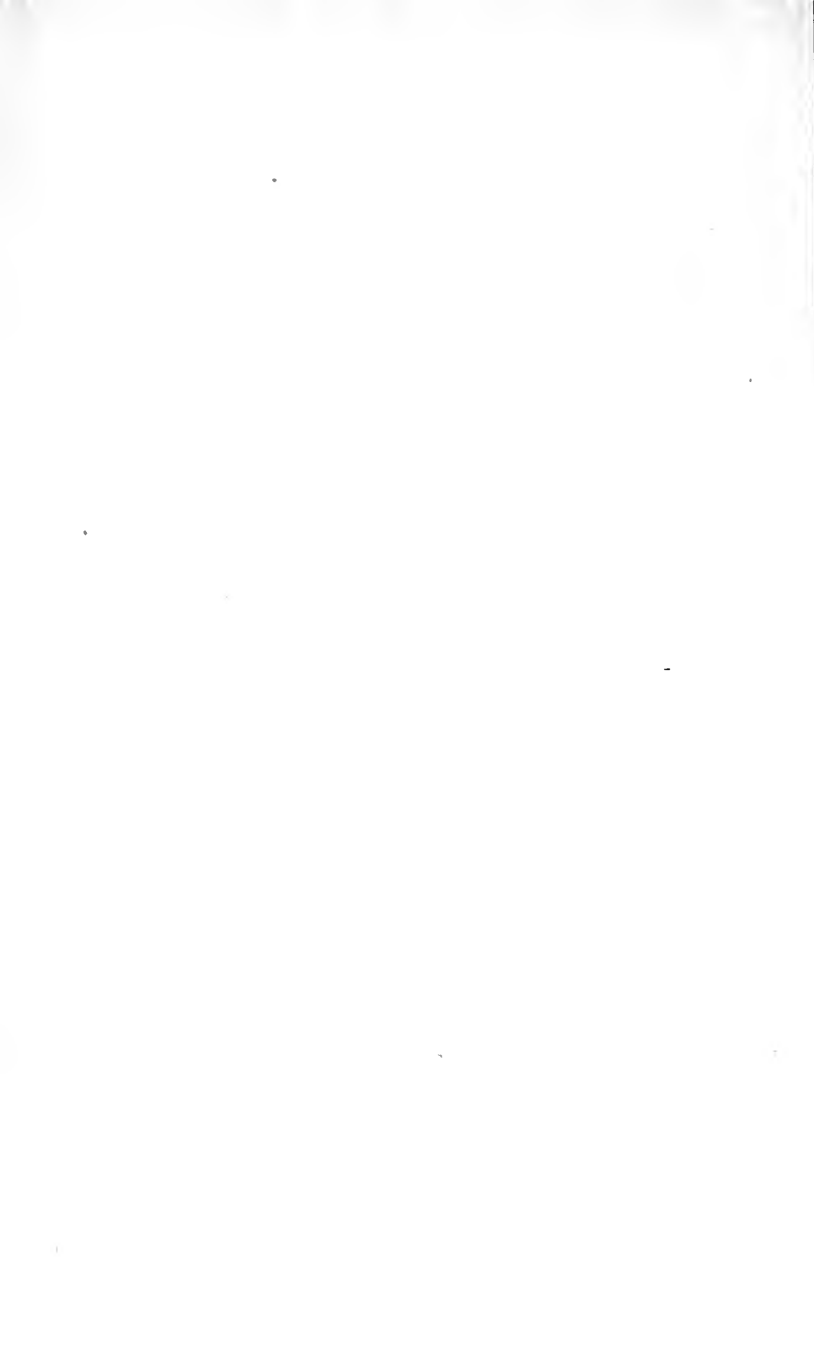
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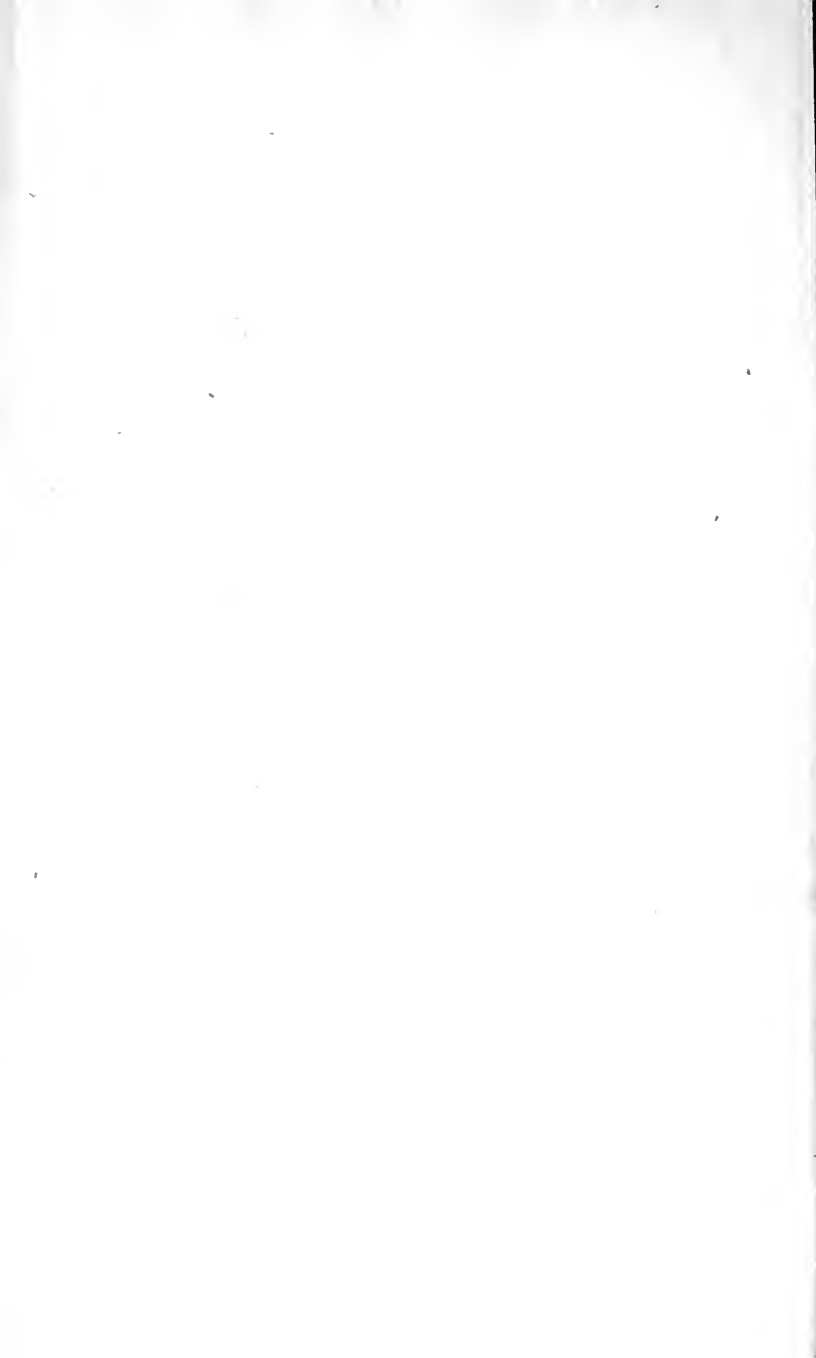
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VOL. VI.



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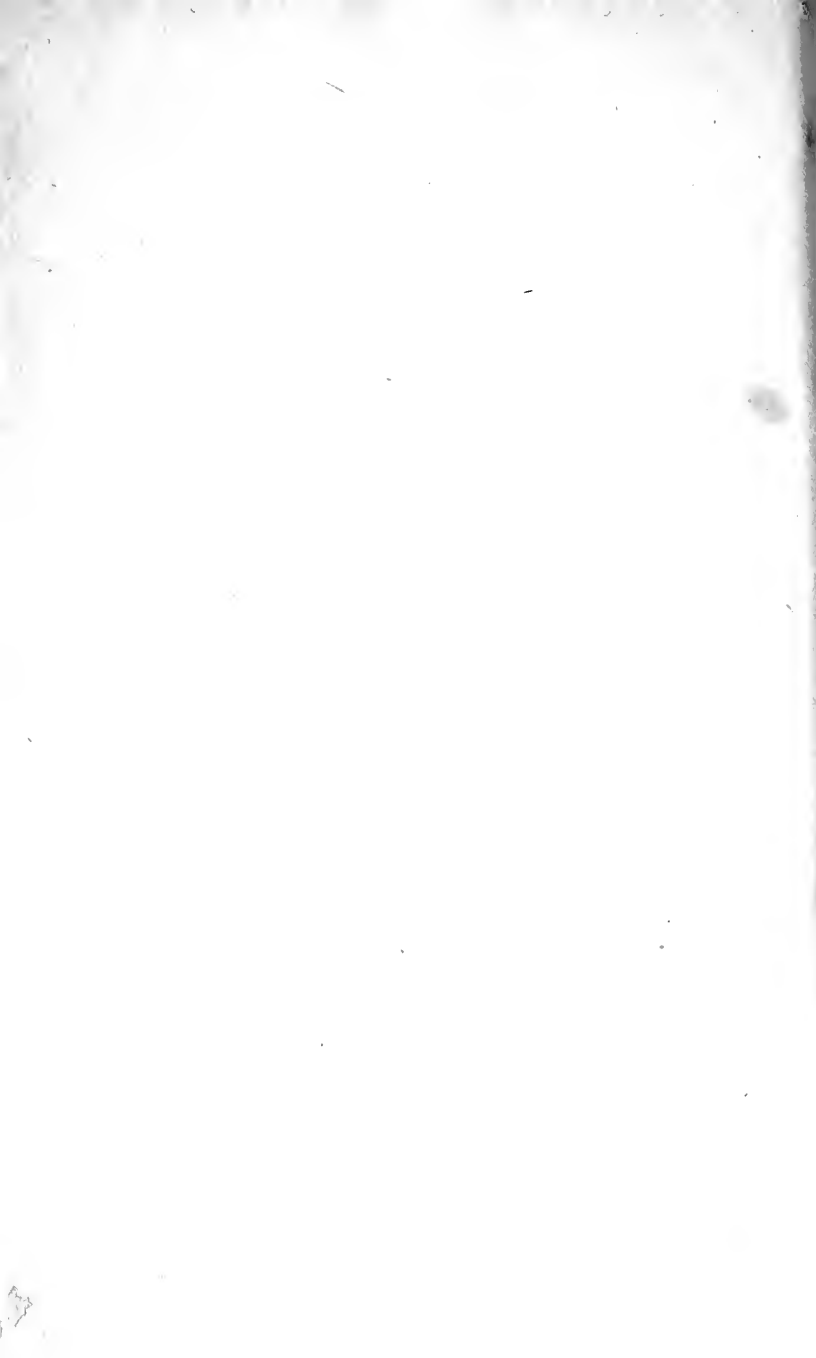
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NOTICE.

THIS Number of the COLLECTION OF ESSAYS AND TRACTS closes the series. A General Index has been furnished, as was promised in the last number.

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