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A

# COMPREHENSIVE VIEW

OF THE

LEADING AND MOST IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES

OF

## NATURAL AND REVEALED

## RELIGION:

DIGESTED IN SUCH ORDER AS TO PRESENT TO THE WISE AND REFLECTING  
MIND, A BASIS FOR THE SUPERSTRUCTURE OF THE ENTIRE  
SYSTEM OF THE DOCTRINES OF THE GOSPEL.

BY THE REV. SAMUEL STANHOPE SMITH, D.D. LL.D.

LATE PRESIDENT OF THE COLLEGE OF NEW-JERSEY

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*District of New-Jersey, ss.*

BE IT REMEMBERED, that on the twenty-fourth day of August, in the fortieth year of the Independence of the United States of America, Deare & Myer, of the said district have deposited in this office, the title of a book the right whereof they claim as proprietors, in the words following, to wit:

“A Comprehensive View of the leading and most important principles of Natural and Revealed Religion, digested in such order as to present to the pious and reflecting mind, a basis for the superstructure of the entire system of the doctrines of the Gospel. By the Rev. Samuel Stanhope Smith, D.D. L.L.D. late President of the College of New-Jersey.”

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*Clerk of the District of New-Jersey.*

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## PRELIMINARY NOTICES

AND

### REFLECTIONS.



NO doubt can exist in the mind of a judicious christian, but that the Sacred Scriptures comprise the most complete development of the entire system of our holy religion. But the extent and variety of information which they embrace, the loose and narrative style in which a great portion of them is written, and the picturesque and poetic imagery in which others are clothed, have presented an occasion both to ingenious and to feeble minded men, to build upon them a multitude of contending opinions, each supported by detached expressions collected from these divine oracles, or by interpretations, either plausible or forced, imposed upon their language. Divines, in order to correct or restrain this ambiguous diversity of sentiment, have endeavoured to reduce the whole of the doctrines of the sacred writings to certain definite principles, arranged in scientific order, so as mutually to illustrate and support one another. This would have been a scheme sufficiently rational, if system writers had confined their object to digesting the diffusive and expanded phraseology of the scriptures into a few simple and connected propositions, intended to present the substance of the whole to the mind, under one view. But their design has become so mingled with the discordant theories of different writers, that their extended discussions on each topic have often destroyed the simplicity of the gospel, and led their readers, as well as disposed the writers

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themselves, to substitute human reason for the word of God. Instead of presenting a brief analysis of the doctrines contained in the Bible, they have too frequently attempted to make their respective explanations of the system of divine truth an entire library of theological science:—It has occurred to the author that it would be desirable to students in that sphere of knowledge, to have its principal subjects distinctly pointed out, and clearly illustrated, in a short compass, in order to direct their future inquiries, and so to guard their future addresses from the pulpit, from blending discordant opinions; that they should, in no point, err against the general system of evangelic truth. He further hoped that such a compendious view might usefully aid the private christian, in examining the sacred scriptures, and pursuing throughout the whole the connected thread of christian doctrine.

These are the objects to which his attention has been chiefly directed in the following discourses, designed to embrace a very compendious scheme of the leading principles of Natural and Revealed Theology. When these leading principles are fixed they become centers in which all the doctrines in that branch of the science naturally inhere, and diverging from which, they are easily traced by the judicious reader. This design very early occupied his mind, while pursuing his own studies under the superintendance of that eminent and learned divine, the late Rev. Dr. Witherspoon. At the request of a number of young men, in the year 1772, graduates of the college, at that time residing in the institution for the prosecution of their theological studies, of whom the author was one, the doctor was prevailed on to commence a course of lectures on this subject, which he continued once a week till the Autumn of 1773, when different objects of pursuit in life attracting the greater portion of the class, it was of course dissolved. The doctor had

proceeded in his course, intermixing his lectures with much extempore illustration, as far as to the Covenant of Grace. The clear *method* which he pursued is, on many subjects, particularly the *Trinity* and the *Covenants*, in many of its outlines adopted. The author acknowledges with pride, the assistance derived from notes, taken at that time from the mouth of the speaker. Of these lectures the most copious abridgment, which was, or probably could be made by any gentlemen not acquainted with the art of stenography, has been published by the editor of Dr. Witherspoon's works, though with much imperfection, as was naturally to be expected. And, if the venerable man had lived, he would, probably, have been little pleased in seeing this, and several other mutilated productions of his pen, accompanying his more perfect works.\* It is greatly to be lamented, that many circumstances, after the design was commenced, concurred to prevent its execution. The judicious reader who is best acquainted with Dr. Witherspoon's manner, will probably find little affinity in these discourses, with his writings; yet the author is not conscious that they contain opinions, on any principles of religion, materially varying from those which that great man was known to adopt. Any coincidences of sentiment in the subjects treated by us in common, may easily be traced, if any person have the curiosity, by comparing these discourses with that abridgment. Diversity in the manner of proposing them to the world, ought to be expected, even in a pupil who admires his mas-

\* During his life a printer in New-Jersey was commencing an edition of his *Moral Philosophy* in its present imperfect state. He was arrested in its progress, by being threatened with a legal prosecution. This event caused the doctor a year or two before his death, to direct the burning of a very large number of his manuscripts by his late wife, he himself being blind. His *Moral Philosophy*, and *Lectures on Criticism*, would probably have shared the same fate if many copies of both had not been preserved by his students. They were used merely as texts.

ter. The principles which they contain have long been the basis of religious instructions communicated first to the students at Hampden-Sidney, in Virginia, and since to a theological class in the college of New-Jersey. And lately, the author has employed many of the leisure moments afforded him, by the goodness of providence, in the course of a tedious disorder, in reviewing, correcting, and arranging them in their present form, for the press.

It is his earnest prayer that the following pages may contribute in any degree to elucidate the doctrines of the holy scriptures, not to the learned only, but to the humblest christian, for which, being freed, as much as possible, from all metaphysical discussion, he hopes they will be found to be usefully adapted.



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#### ERRATA.

Page 234 line 2 from bottom, for  $\chi\upsilon\kappa\eta$  read  $\Psi\upsilon\chi\eta$ .

- |     |   |
|-----|---|
| 235 | 5 for <i>Heno</i> Nous read <i>Hev</i> 'o' Nous.    |
| 340 | 5 for <i>moral</i> read <i>natural</i> .            |
| 381 | 9 for <i>as</i> read <i>no</i> .                    |
| 495 | 1 for <i>ecquen</i> read <i>ecquem</i> .            |
| 533 | 3 from bottom, for <i>other</i> read <i>one</i> .   |
| 539 | 10 for <i>yielding</i> read <i>wielding</i> .       |
| 543 | 11 for <i>insiduously</i> read <i>insidiously</i> . |

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A COMPENDIOUS SYSTEM  
OF  
NATURAL AND REVEALED  
THEOLOGY ;

EMBRACING, IN THE SECOND PART, A CONCISE VIEW OF  
THE EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

PART I.  
OF NATURAL RELIGION :

CONTAINING,

- 1st. THE EVIDENCES OF THE BEING OF GOD.
  - 2d. THE PERFECTIONS OF GOD.
  - 3d. THE PRINCIPLES OF HUMAN DUTY.
  - 4th. THE PROBABLE EVIDENCES OF A FUTURE STATE.
-



# LECTURES,

&c.

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## OF NATURAL THEOLOGY.

OF THE BEING OF GOD.

NATURAL Theology consists in the knowledge of those truths concerning the being and attributes of God ; the principles of human duty, and the probable expectations of a future state of existence to give efficacy to those principles, which are discoverable by reason alone. It commences with the investigation of the evidences of the existence of God, Almighty, and Eternal ; which are usually derived from two sources—the necessary nature of our ideas—and the obvious structure of the universe. Both these modes of proof, which have been distinguished in the schools by scientific terms of discrimination, rest on one common principle, or necessary idea—that every thing which begins to be, must have a cause of its existence. Admitting this truth, which cannot well be controverted by reason, it results as a necessary consequence, either that the universe consists of an eternal succession of causes, dependent one upon another ; or we must look for its existence in some first principle, eternal, unproduced, the source of all motion and power in the operations of nature,

the cause of whose being is to be found only in itself, and the necessity of its own nature. The idea of an eternal succession of events, each frail and imperfect, and all dependent, one upon another, involves too evident an absurdity to be admitted by the rational mind. We are obliged therefore to adopt the only alternative—the existence of an original and independent source of being, from which all things else have been derived. Whence, then, exists this first cause? Original and underived we can find no reason of its existence but in the necessity of its own nature. A being existing by the necessity of its own nature, can never begin to be; it must be eternal. On the same principle, it must be unchangeable. If any change could take place, it would involve some constituent of its nature which was not necessary. Infinity must be equally predicable of the original cause: for how should it be limited when nothing previous exists to bound it? or how should necessary existence be confined to a circumscribed space? The unity of the divine essence is no less a certain consequence of this original principle. Two equally necessary and infinite beings could serve no useful purpose, which could not be equally fulfilled by one. There being no reason, therefore, for the existence of a second, the idea, on all the rules of sound reasoning in science ought to be rejected. Two essences, equally infinite, must necessarily occupy the same place; being equally the cause of all things which exist, they must possess the same perfection; they must be, to every purpose of existence,

the same being. This first, and sole cause of all things in the universe, must also be Almighty ; for whatever can exist, can exist only by him. And finally, he must be all-wise, as knowing the natures and powers of all things possible ; for nothing is possible, but by him, and every thing is possible that he wills.

This is a very brief and partial sketch of the scientific mode of reasoning, or reasoning a priori, as the schoolmen call it on this subject. The most profound and masterly example of it, which exists, perhaps in any language, is to be found in the *demonstration of the being and attributes of God*, by Dr. Samuel Clarke, of England. But, I confess, these subtle arguments of a very refined speculation, are little calculated to produce any deep and permanent conviction on the mind. The extreme abstraction of the ideas, although they do great credit to the ingenuity of that celebrated author, can be comprehended only by a few reflecting men ; and the most speculative philosopher finds the effort to grasp them, exhaust the sensibility of the heart, and weaken upon it the practical impressions of virtue and piety.

The second, or popular mode of reasoning, is infinitely more simple and obvious. And consists of a species of argument which naturally offers itself to every man, as soon as he opens his eyes with intelligence upon the world. A kind of evidence here suggests itself which reaches the simplest

understanding, and becomes more luminous and interesting in proportion as we extend our observation and inquiries into the system of nature. When we behold its order, variety, and beauty, the proportion, and correspondence of all its parts, the manifest demonstrations of wisdom and design, especially, in the animal and vegetable worlds, in the structure of the earth, in the planetary system, and, as far as we can judge, throughout the universe, can we forbear to acknowledge a wise and intelligent cause, which has planned and arranged the whole? an omnipotent cause, which has given existence to this immense, and various structure? and an infinite providence, which every where presides over its operations? The details of this argument are too extensive to be here minutely pursued. They are not necessary to convince judicious readers of that first of truths, of which all, who have not speculated the heart into scepticism, are already deeply persuaded, and which meets our understanding at every glance that we cast over the face of nature. Yet I cannot too strongly recommend to those, who have the means of cultivating the studies of polite literature, diligently to pursue their researches into the natural history of the universe, expressly with this view, to assemble before the mind the multiplied evidence which it contains, in every part, of the existence, and universal operation of a most wise, and beneficent, and almighty power which pervades, and presides over the whole. It is with this design that I would recommend to every disciple of science a careful study of natural



history, as the surest basis, when prudently investigated, of natural theology, and an excellent introduction and support to revelation. I recommend it, likewise, as a study, which contributes peculiarly to purify, exalt and delight the mind; and, along with the charming enthusiasm of piety, to strengthen the most solid foundations of virtue, while, to use an expression of Malebranche, "it sees all things in God, and God in all things."

This argument we may see admirably illustrated by the famous Genevan philosopher, Bonnet, and by those very respectable English writers, Derham, and Ray. But perhaps no writer has treated it with more closeness, perspicuity, and irresistible evidence, than Dr. Paley, in his treatise on natural theology. In those works may be seen that mechanical contrivance, that correspondence of parts, that adaptation of means to their respective ends, through all the productions of nature, which are the most unequivocal indications of wisdom and design, as well as of power and goodness, in its author. "*Final causes*, says a very judicious writer, may be considered as the language in which the existence of God is revealed to man. In this language, the sign is natural, and the interpretation instinctive." Ferg. ins. p. 3. ch. 1. s. 2.

Another argument to the same end has justly been derived from the universal concurrence of mankind in the assertion

and belief of this important principle. The general sentiments of human nature are always found to point to truth. They are intuitive perceptions resulting immediately from the bare inspection of their objects; or conclusions which force their evidence upon the mind, like the *first truths* of science, necessarily springing out of the comparison of our own ideas. The concurrence of all nations, in the belief of the being of God, is a decisive proof, either, that it is a native sentiment of the human heart arising naturally from original structure of constitution, and entitled to the same implicit credit as our other moral principles; or it is an induction so clearly and necessarily flowing from the phenomena of nature as to be obvious equally to the wisest, and the most uncultivated mind; the rapidity of the conclusion giving it the appearance and effect of an instinctive principle.

To this argument it is not a sufficient objection, that many nations have acknowledged a multiplicity of Gods; and that, in all nations, the multitude have entertained unworthy conceptions of the divine nature. The natural sentiments of the human mind may be corrupted; or, being left in their original and uncultivated state, may be liable, through ignorance, to many errors. The principles of taste, may, in like manner, notwithstanding their acknowledged foundation in human nature, be rendered defective, or be grossly perverted, by erroneous culture; yet their error, or corruption, instead of demonstrating that there are no such principles, on

the other hand, a proof of their existence. Many nations, misled by the analogy of the divine, to human governments, conceiving that the administration of the Deity might, more honourably, be conducted by subordinate agents, elevated each local and imaginary divinity to the throne of divine worship. But all mankind have ever acknowledged one Supreme God: and the multitude of subordinate officers, if they may be called such, which error had attached to him in his government, does not destroy the evidence of the principal and original sentiment that God exists. Our object, at present, is to establish this single truth. And this truth is not destroyed by diversity of opinion, with regard to the mode of his administration, or the nature of his perfections. These ideas requiring greater precision of thought, and a wider compass of reasoning, one man, or one nation, according to the advances which they have respectively made in the cultivation of science, may reasonably be supposed to have formed more just, or more inadequate conceptions of them than another.\*

\* A native, which perhaps may be justly deemed an instinctive sentiment of Deity, or of that universal power which presides over all things, occupies and takes deep possession of the human heart, in the earliest periods of society and the most uncultivated states of human existence. Hence has originated that multitude of objects which called forth the respect or veneration, or amused the fancy of mankind in the heathen world; and that vast assemblage of supernatural or fantastic beings, which peopled the groves and the forests, the hills and the fountains of antiquity. Men, unable to grasp the grand comprehensive idea of the Supreme Being, who fills the universe with his presence, yet conscious of God in every place, invested all the interesting objects of nature with some attributes of divinity. And every situation which tended to fill the mind, on the one hand,

The truth of the divine existence is confirmed, if such primary and palpable truths can receive additional confirmation, by the absurdity of the causes to which atheists have been obliged to resort in order to account for the origin of things. One of their first principles is, that matter is eternal, and, though senseless and inert, contains the essence of all order and motion. Another, that the intelligence, which evidently reigns in the universe, is the result of material organization necessarily arising from its original and essential principles. And another still, not less extraordinary than either of the preceding, that, from the accidental collision of atoms, have been formed globes, which, from some interior, and inexplicable impulse, have thrown themselves into orbits constructed with the most perfect mathematical exactness, and governed by laws which ensure undeviating constancy in their movements. From the same accidental collision, roots and seeds have been generated, whence the whole vegetable world has been evolved, and yearly reproduced. At this age of philosophy, one would think that

with pensive, or with gloomy thoughtfulness, or, on the other, with pleasing fancies, gave scope to the creative powers of imagination, and replenished each district of the earth with wild imaginary forms, congenial with the present state of its fancies, or its fears. Sages and philosophers themselves contributed to augment the mass of superstition, while they studied to add respectability and splendor to their temples, by personifying the principal attributes of the divine mind, his wisdom, his truth and his justice; and the principal operations of a benignant providence, in imparting its vegetative powers to the earth, or exalting the genius of mankind by resplendent fictions, and embodying every idea that was supposed useful to human society, or ornamental to the arts.

such principles must carry their own refutation in the very terms of their statement. Observe any mass, or congeries of matter, and let the plainest, or the most improved understanding decide, if any arrangement of atoms, according to any known laws of material action, could sublimate it, so as to produce sensation and reason. Or is it possible, that, if one lucky cast, or collision among infinite millions, should have formed an animal or vegetable, it should have been so framed as to be capable of throwing from itself continually a similar assemblage of organized atoms, while not another cast, of the same kind, should ever succeed in forming a new species of being.

If an atheist ask us, why, since we admit the existence of a wise intelligent cause, only to exclude the ideas of disorder and chance from the world, do we see so many unseemly examples of both, in the structure of things, and in the revolutions of what we call providence? It is, I conceive, a sufficient answer, to deny the existence of either, and to challenge an antagonist to produce that instance.—For, what is chance?—Only a name to cover our ignorance of the cause of an event. Nothing can happen by accident in the government of an infinitely wise, and powerful being. All events depend upon a certain concatenation of causes. The cast of a die is as certainly governed by the laws of matter and motion, as the greater movements of the planets. Disorder in the works of nature exists only in the imperfection

of our own understanding. This is certain, with regard to all the arrangements of nature, that, in proportion as her laws have been more clearly developed, and her operations more distinctly understood, those phenomena, which formerly were esteemed to be irregularities, are now discovered to be directed by the most wise, certain, and permanent laws.—One conclusion will obtrude itself on every reflecting mind; that, since nature, as far as we can discern her operations, contains, even to our imperfect reason, the most obvious indications of intelligence, design, and goodness, if there be any parts of it, which we are unable to interpret, in perfect coincidence with the general system, this ought to be ascribed solely to the narrow sphere to which our intellectual vision is circumscribed. We cannot doubt, but that the same wisdom, which we perceive in that portion which we do comprehend, prevades all the works of the same author.

It has been frequently and justly remarked, that the universe is governed by general laws, which never change their operation according to the desires of men, or the convenience of particular parts of the system, and, therefore, they sometimes appear to be productive of partial and accidental ills. A tempest here, a drought there, a contagion, or an earthquake, may involve individuals in distress;—but the fixed and invariable laws of the physical world are among the greatest blessings to mankind. Among other benefits,

they lay a foundation for the existence of the most useful sciences and arts, which could have no principles, on which to rest, in a providence of expedients, and accommodations to individual convenience. They serve to awaken inquiry, to exercise ingenuity, to encourage industry, to afford principles on which to ground a prudent foresight and precaution, and to promote the exercise of all the virtues which are assisted by the stability of nature. For a clear and luminous illustration of the utility of general laws, and for a judicious explanation, and justification of the apparent and partial ills which result from them, you will again have peculiar satisfaction in consulting Dr. Paley's work on natural theology.

## II. OF THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE DEITY.

The divine attributes, as discoverable by the powers of natural reason, will not require an extensive illustration; for, when once the existence of God is acknowledged, they recommend themselves so obviously to the common sense of mankind, as to admit of little controversy, except with regard to those natural events which, in their first aspect, seem contrary to our apprehensions of his infinite goodness.

The attributes, then, of the Divine Mind may be arranged under two heads—the natural, and the moral.—Under the former, are comprehended his spirituality, unity, eterni-

ty, omnipresence, power and wisdom ;—under the latter, his holiness, justice, and goodness.

The spirituality of the divine nature is a property opposed to every form, or refinement of matter ; and may be regarded as distinguishing the essence of the Supreme Mind, from that fine, but powerful influence, the result of the material organization of the universe, which some philosophers have substituted in the room of the Deity, and made the immediate cause of a universal necessity, or fate. It is opposed, likewise, to the opinion of those, who hold the Deity to be the soul of the world ; that is, a certain power which, though intelligent, is still only a refinement of matter—a kind of spirit, or gas thrown off from the infinite system of its motions, or its original fermentations.

All just philosophy has considered matter as essentially inert, and incapable of beginning motion. Spirit, as we learn from our own experience, possesses a self-motive power, and the power of giving motion to other things. The existence and the movements of the universe, therefore, are proofs of an original Spirit, who formed it, and gave it that impulse, and that system of combined motion by which its order is still preserved.

The only knowledge, which we have of spirit, is derived from reflection on our own minds, the essence of which we



conceive to lie in thought and volition. But it would be impious to imagine, that we can thence frame any adequate conception of the Divine and Infinite Spirit from whom all things proceed. By this term, therefore, applied to the Deity, we can mean only to express a substance wholly different from matter, simple, un compounded, essentially active and intelligent.

The Unity of the divine nature is deducible from this reflection, that we see evident proofs of the existence of one God, and we see no evidence of more than one. And it is contrary to every principle of just reasoning, in that case, to admit a plurality. This conclusion is strengthened by that unity of design apparent in all the parts of nature. It indicates one author, one purpose, one end. How far he may commit the government of particular districts of the universe to subordinate agents, in order to employ their activity, and exercise their virtues, we have no grounds on which we can form a rational judgment. Even conjecture, therefore, ought to be silent concerning it, lest we should unawares awaken a degrading spirit of superstition. On subjects so remote from the sphere of human intellect and observation, in no department of science, has conjecture or hypothesis ever led philosophy one step nearer to truth. It is even doubtful if the erring lights of false science do not lead the mind farther astray from the true principles of nature, than the torpid dullness of absolute ignorance.

Of the almighty power, and infinite wisdom of the Deity, there can exist no doubt in the minds of those who acknowledge his being. No more can we doubt of his eternal existence, and universal presence, although we are not able to form distinct and definite ideas concerning his relations to infinite duration and space. I shall, therefore, not consume your time in attempting to solve the many abstruse and probably useless, and, to human intellect, inexplicable questions, which have been raised on these subjects by ingenious men;—but proceed to consider his moral attributes, holiness, goodness, and justice.

Holiness is a term used chiefly by divines, and borrowed from the sacred scriptures, to express the purity of the divine nature, and its infinite distance from all moral imperfection. It is, perhaps, the best and strongest word in our language to convey the idea of his unchangeable love of the eternal and essential rectitude of the moral law, which he has prescribed to his rational creatures, the outlines of which he has traced upon the human conscience, but its perfect rule, is to be found only in his revealed word. And it seems further to carry in its meaning, not only a pure and immutable love of rectitude, but an infinite abhorrence of vice; that is, of the omission, or the violation of the duties of the moral law. But, besides this peculiar meaning of the term, as expressing a single attribute of the divine mind, it is often used in a more comprehensive sense, to express the

aggregate, and the most complete idea of all his moral perfections.—Perhaps the philosophy of Paganism may never have perfectly reached these just conceptions of the divine character, but, certainly, they are the dictates of enlightened reason. And whatever absurdities are discoverable in the vulgar superstition, concerning the inferior deities of the heathen; yet, among their wiser sages, their supreme God was invested with all the moral virtues and perfections indicated by natural conscience.

By the attribute of goodness is meant to be expressed the disposition or tendency of the Divine Nature to impart happiness to the creatures he has formed, in a way accommodated to their respective states of being. This attribute we ascribe to the Deity from the tendencies to benevolent affection, which he has implanted in the human breast; and from that order, harmony, and beauty, which exist in the whole structure of the universe, and which, so naturally and strongly, associate themselves with the ideas of beneficence in their author. It is farther confirmed by the existence of so many tribes of creatures capable in a high degree of pleasurable sensation, and actually enjoying it in different ways. All these facts contribute to impress on the mind an irresistible conviction of the benevolence of the Creator. When we contemplate an individual animal, what an immense complexity of parts do we observe combined in one system, all contributing to the preservation and enjoyment

of the creature, which manifestly indicate the will and intention of the author; and show the pains and contrivance, if these terms may be applied to the Deity, which he has used to render that creature comfortable and happy. But, when we behold creation filled with innumerable species of being, and, under each species, innumerable individuals, down to the meanest insect tribes, in which we discern the same multiplicity of organs, and the same systematic combination and subserviency to the purposes of enjoyment, how does the evidence of the divine benignity and goodness rise in our view? The air, the earth, the sea, are full of animated and happy being. Men often overlook these examples of benevolent design, sometimes, from not perceiving the immediate utility of the creatures in the system of creation, and sometimes, from their extreme minuteness. But the minutest insect, is, equally with the largest or most rational animal, susceptible of the most exquisite sensations of happy existence. And, in the eye of the infinite being, there is much less difference between an insect and a man, than our vanity inclines us to conceive. Every creature, in its respective sphere, is destined to some useful purpose in the universal system.

It is well remarked by natural historians, that the benignity of the Deity is visible, not only in the structure of animal nature, subserving so admirably the purposes of preservation, comfort, and defence; but in annexing such agreeable

and pleasant sensations, beyond what mere necessity required for subsistence, to the gratification of all the appetites, and even the exercise of all the powers of animal nature. Hunger alone would have been sufficient to prompt men to eat, an operation requisite for the sustenance of life. But the Creator has added to our food a relish, which seems to have had no other purpose, but to increase the pleasure of existence. The objects around us, in the structure of the world, might have been applied to all the purposes of utility: although they had not possessed that beauty, fragrance, or harmony, which affords such charms to the senses and the imagination. There, certainly, never could have existed such exquisite adaptations of objects to the senses, and of the senses to their objects, if the Creator had not intended them for the ends of animal, and especially of human felicity. Not to mention in man his superior powers of moral, intellectual, and social enjoyment, which open a much wider and nobler field of happiness to human nature.

But it is scarcely requisite to spend your time in proving the reality of the divine goodness, which is borne in so many examples on the whole face of nature, as to account for some appearances, and to remove some objections, which have been thought to contradict it in the order of divine providence. These consist in the numerous evils evidently mingled with good in the economy of the world.

The preponderance of good over evil, in the general order of things, is acknowledged to be manifest and great. But the objectors reply, that if God were perfectly benevolent, and, at the same time, omnipotent, he would not have permitted the existence of partial evil. This is pronouncing on an infinite system from our contracted views.—Can we say, that, in a universe benevolently constructed, there ought to be no gradation of being? Or, if gradation be admitted in perfect consistency with the infinite benignity of the Creator, is it not conceivable that a creature of superior powers, of intelligence and enjoyment, may, by a certain admixture of pain, be brought, in the scale of happiness, to the grade of one of inferior powers, but exempt from suffering, and who shall have no complaint to prefer against the benevolence of providence? The reflection may apply to a nation, to a species of being, to a world. How far superior, then, may this world be, with all its sufferings, to other systems—which have no such evils to allay a happiness, which, however, may be constituted on an inferior standard of sensibility, or of intellect? Would a man of high sensibilities, or of high intellectual powers, though they may often be the occasion of many errors, or of keen anguish, be willing to forego their pleasures, in order that he might be reduced to an apathy that would render him insensible to suffering? Let us balance our goods against our evils, our sufferings against our enjoyments, and consider ourselves as completely happy in that grade of felicity, which is marked

by the surplus of the one above the other. By such a calculation, how might mankind extinguish every complaint of the evils of life, and justify perfectly the benignity of the Creator. The conclusion, therefore, which each individual ought, in this way, to frame with respect to himself, a true philosopher may justly infer for the whole species; unless any man should be so foolish as to imagine, that existence alone gives him a claim on the beneficence of his Maker for the highest grade of felicity.

But, why, it may be asked, should we be left to estimate our grade in the scale of happy being by the surplusage of pleasure above pain? or why should pain exist at all in the system of a purely benevolent being?—Satisfactorily to answer these, and a thousand other inquiries, which might be instituted on this subject, would, probably, require a knowledge of the nature, and the infinite relations of the universe, which none but the Deity himself can possess. We can, therefore, expect only from revelation the information which we desire, as far as he is pleased to impart it. But while we are compelled to resort to the feeble lights of our own reason alone, for a solution of the difficulties which spring out of the combinations of an infinite system, we must be contented with such probabilities only as it can yield us.\* If, in the scale

\* Rejoicing, however, that when we have explored reason to the utmost, we, as christians, still enjoy the superior illumination of the sacred scriptures, whence, if we cannot derive such lights as will satisfy every inquiry of an ambitious curi-

of existence, then, there be a place for such a being as man, with just such a measure of intellect, and sensibility, and with just such principles of action, continually requiring excitement, and correction; and, especially, if it be conceived that he is placed in the present world, in a state of discipline, and probation, for a future period, and a higher condition of existence, a supposition which, to philosophy, is as probable, as, to religion, it is certain, may not all the pains which enter into the moral culture of this life, be regarded as the discipline of a wise and gracious parent, and, therefore, as essential parts of a most benevolent system? Let us contemplate the relation which the pains necessarily incident to human nature, as it is now constituted, have to the improvement of its powers, and, consequently, to its happiness. The wants of man contribute to rouse the industry, and habitual exertion of all his faculties of body, and mind, on which their vigor, and perfection principally depend. A paradise, in which all his wants should be spontaneously supplied from the abundance of the soil, and all his senses gratified by its fragrance, its beauty, and luxuriant sweets, would deteriorate the human character, and sink the noblest creature in the world into a lazy, torpid, and vicious animal. The happiness, no less than the improvement of our nature,

osity, we may, at least, draw competent satisfaction for an humble and rational piety; particularly, with regard to this question, why human nature exists in its present state of imperfection, requiring the corrections and discipline of the pains and sufferings, which in this state are attached to it?



lies chiefly in constant, and useful employment, stimulated by these necessary wants. Enjoyment seldom yields pleasures equal to those, which arise out of the activity requisite to procure it. The very efforts excited by pain, or want, in all ordinary cases, or by the apprehension of them, often produce a satisfaction, or diversion to the mind, which far overbalance their evils. Want whets ingenuity; danger and suffering call into operation the virtues of courage and fortitude, which communicate a character of grandeur, and nobleness to the mind, which often raise it superior to the ills of life. And labour, however it might be the curse of man fallen from the perfection of a superior nature, is, beyond a doubt, the blessing of his present existence. Reflections of a similar nature might arise from an attentive consideration of every particular evil to which human life is exposed. And, in a moral point of view, how much more justly may we regard them as a part of the benevolent discipline of our heavenly Father? They are the correctors of the passions—they assist the habits of reflection—and often recall the mind from pursuits injurious to its virtue, and its true interests.

But, instead of examining the various evils of life, and shewing how the goodness of God is affected in permitting their existence, I shall select only a few; believing that, if, in these, the benevolence of the divine administration can be justified, even to our limited understanding, a hint may be

suggested, or a clue given, by which its vindication may be pursued in other cases.—For example, take the circumstances attending our entrance into the world, and our departure from it, which have been thought to involve serious objections against the benignity of the Creator. With regard to the former, it may be fairly maintained, that the pains of bearing, nursing, and educating children, with the diseases and dangers of infancy, which seem, at first view, to be peculiar afflictions on the human race, will be found, on examining their connexions, and all their relations, to be among the chief causes of the existence of society, and the felicity of social life. If children, like the young of other animals, were able to run as soon as born, and procure their own subsistence, with almost no dependence on the care of a parent, the powerful ties, and sweet endearments of parental affection, and of filial duty, would be, in a great measure, unknown. The union and happiness of domestic society would be dissolved; and civil society, of which domestic is the germ, and the principal support, could not exist. Man would be a solitary and ferocious savage. The facility of rearing children, and their early independence on a parent's care, would give the strongest encouragement to a vagrant, and licentious concubinage, destructive of all the virtues, and of the dearest interests of human nature. Besides, the diseases of pregnancy, as human nature is now constituted, and the pains and dangers of child-birth, serve to endear the parents to each other, by the weakness, tenderness, and

dependence, of the mother ; by the honor, generosity, and sympathy, of the father ; and, a hundred fold, to endear the child to the parent. And it is an acknowledged principle in human nature, that the troubles and continual solitudes of nursing, and of education, together with the necessary diseases, and hazards of infancy, greatly augment the strength of parental attachments, and lay the most firm, and lasting foundation of the unions, subordinations, and harmonious affections, first, of domestic, and afterwards, of civil society. In these pains, then, which have been selected as specious objections against the benignity of the divine administration of the government of the world, we find some of the principal sources of human happiness.

As to the manner of terminating the present state of existence by death, the necessity of this order arises out of the structure of our nature. Death is only the way of giving to successive generations, the opportunity and the means of existence. If this part of the plan of divine providence must be changed, the whole order of life must be changed with it. There could be no such creature as man in the scale of being. The institution of the sexes must be destroyed ; the multiplication of the species must cease. The modes of subsistence, on the products of the earth, which can sustain only a definite number, must be done away. And, with these, as the whole state of human life, is connected together by a close unbroken chain, must cease the

operations of agriculture, and the entire system of the present occupations and pursuits of men. Man, himself, would be the first to object to such a new order of things.—If death, then, be a necessary part of the human economy, and, to man himself, it would be undesirable to change it, if it must be accompanied with so many other changes, still more unfriendly to the comfort, and wishes of mankind, the only question which remains is, in what manner it may be best accomplished, so as to attain the most useful ends of its institution?—If even the whole of human existence were to be terminated by death, this last act of our being, so justly formidable to our frailty and imperfection, is but a momentary pang, which has been far overpaid by the pleasures of life; but if, as religion assures us, and philosophy renders probable, this life is only a period of discipline and probation for another state of being, and death is the avenue through which we must pass to it, certainly no method of approaching that decisive crisis could be imagined more beneficial, than that which exists, of attaining every good moral end connected with it:—that is, of making the descent to the grave easy to the virtuous—of impressing a salutary, but not oppressive fear on all, as a useful restraint from vice—of preserving the mind, by its extreme uncertainty, always vigilant and attentive to the discharge of every duty, which is the best preparation for a tranquil exit from life—and finally, of inducing it to hold its present pleasures in a continual state of obedient resignation to the will of God, in the

hope of exchanging them for such as are higher and more perfect.

To pursue the vindication of the divine goodness in the introduction of other physical evils into the general administration of the government of this world, would, to the reflecting reader, I trust, be wholly unnecessary.\* Of the moral evils which afflict the world, their origin, and their cure; and how they are made to illustrate the benignity, and mercy of God to mankind, the only true and satisfactory account is to be derived from revelation. They arise from an abuse of the passions, and the moral liberty of man; but reason, would be deplorably at a loss to find her way, in the maze of doubts, and perplexities, which attend their existence, in the economy of a benevolent Deity, if revelation did not put a filament in her hand, or extend a taper before her footsteps, to conduct her through the labyrinth. The elucidation of this subject belongs to the second part of this treatise, and will receive all the lights, which we can shed upon it from the holy scriptures, under the heads of the covenant of works, and the covenant of grace.

The only attribute which remains to be considered is that of justice. It is an invariable determination in the Divine

\* On the physical evils incident to the animal creation, and particularly on that order of nature, which has destined the weaker part as the prey of the more powerful, see many judicious reflections in Dr. Paley's natural theology, near the conclusion.

Mind, to render to all his creatures according to their works—to the virtuous, reward—to the vicious, punishment. This attribute we ascribe to God from the dictates of conscience, and the sentiments of justice in our own breasts.—As philosophy delights to trace the most complicated causes and effects to the simplest principles, justice may, perhaps, be considered as only one expression of infinite benevolence, in which, by proper correctives, restraints, and examples, the injurious consequences of the passions may be prevented, and individuals deterred from seeking their own enjoyments, by the sacrifice of a greater good, in violating the general laws of order and happiness.

Justice has, by divines, been distinguished into two kinds—distributive, and vindictive. The former has been already defined, and may be applied for the reformation, as well as punishment of the offender; the latter is conceived to be the infliction of punishment on vice, simply for its own intrinsic demerit, without any respect to the reformation of the individual, or any ulterior regard to a farther good end, except the general good of the universe. Conscience, in the nature of its reprehensions, makes us perceive that guilt deserves such infliction; and in its anticipations, in consequence of some atrocious acts of iniquity, often leads the criminal despairingly to fear it. These facts appear to indicate, that the distinction has a real foundation in nature.—And in these apprehensions, probably, we discern the

source of those bloody rites of superstition, which, on so many pagan altars, have dishonoured the name of religion.

On this subject, a theological question has been raised of great importance to religion—whether, in consistency with the justice and holiness of the Divine Nature, the violation of the moral law, by any creature, be pardonable without a complete atonement, or a full execution of its penalty? If justice be an essential attribute of God, and its claims, in consequence be as necessary as his existence, the forgiveness of an offender, can never be a gratuitous exercise of mere mercy. From this principle, results an inference, which is deeply laid at the foundation of the christian religion;—the necessity of complete atonement to the violated law, and vindication of the perfections of God, in the person of a mediator, perfectly adequate to render this satisfaction, in order to the exercise of mercy and forgiveness to the human sinner. The discussion of this question also, belongs to the second branch of this treatise, and will find its place under the head of the covenant of grace.

### III. OF THE PRINCIPLES OF HUMAN DUTY.

In the science of Natural Religion, the first subject of investigation is the existence and perfections of Almighty God the Creator; whence we may learn the duties of human nature, as they relate to the various beings with whom we

are connected. Virtue is the subject of supreme concern to mankind. It is the performance of all our duties from proper principles, and with right affections. The detail of these duties and affections, as far as nature simply is our guide, is beautifully pursued in the two celebrated treatises of the Roman orator, concerning the divine nature and human duty.\* They would be too tedious to be detailed in the present system. All I shall aim at, in this place, therefore will be to reduce them under proper classes, in such a manner as to exhibit a distinct and systematic view of their general principles, and very briefly to present the ground and reasons of each.

The duties of morality may be divided in different ways, either, according to the principles from which they spring, and which govern their exercise, or according to the objects on which they terminate. The former division was generally adopted by the ancient philosophers, who classed them under the heads of justice, prudence, temperance, and fortitude. The latter is more commonly employed by christian writers, who arrange them under the heads of the duties which we owe to God, to our fellow men, and to ourselves. Under the distribution of the virtues made by the ancients, all the practical duties of life were embraced with all the speculative questions, which philosophers have raised on the

\*M. T. Cicero de natura deorum,—et de officiis.



subject of duty. But the more modern division, introduced chiefly by christian writers, containing a more obvious, and convenient distribution, I shall follow in our present disquisition.

#### OF OUR DUTIES TO GOD.

The duties which we owe to God, and which ought to occupy our first attention, may be distributed into those which are external, and those which are internal: or into those which are general and those which are particular. Our general duties embrace the whole compass of piety and virtue; and because they constitute the moral law of the universe, prescribed by God himself, in the very structure of human nature, conformity to their dictates is justly regarded as obedience to *him*. The particular duties terminate immediately on God as their object, and include both the devout affections of the heart, and all the natural and external expressions of those affections.—The devout affections from which, as from their natural source, flow all the streams of pious obedience to our Creator in this life, are love, reverence, and resignation. And, of such profound and universal obedience, the active spring is love; which, to be sincere, ought to be supreme. It is, perhaps, better expressed in the sacred scriptures than in any other writings; *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength, and with all thy mind.* This

affection in the pious mind, has respect to all the attributes of the Deity ; but chiefly to his moral perfections, and especially, to that infinite goodness on which we, and all things do constantly depend.

*Reverence* is less an active, than a restraining principle, and is calculated to impose a salutary check on the passions of mankind, surrounded and stimulated, as they constantly are, by powerful temptations to vice. This affection respects, principally, the infinite greatness, wisdom, power, and holiness of God. It is a principle essential to the existence of piety and virtue, in creatures so imperfect and prone to evil as mankind. From the profound degree in which it prevails in the pious mind, and ought ever to prevail in the human soul, it is justly in the sacred scriptures, styled *the fear of God*. This virtue was held in peculiar honour in the early ages of the Roman commonwealth, by that wise people. And their most distinguished writers inform us, that they regarded the fear of the gods, and reverence for the sacred offices of religion, as the basis of the public virtue, and of the prosperity of the republic. How much more truth and importance should be attached to this principle in an enlightened christian country !

Absolute resignation to the will of God, and the wise arrangements of his providence, I have mentioned, in the last place, as belonging to our internal duties. It implies entire

confidence in the wisdom, justice, and goodness, of the infinite Mind ; and a deep conviction of the narrowness of our own understanding, and the imperfection of our own views, as to what is good or ill for us. Resignation, resting on these principles, begets not only a grateful acknowledgment of the manifold blessings of divine providence, but a submissive acquiescence in the will of Heaven under its most afflictive dispensations ; believing, that, although we may not be able to discern their ultimate relations to any beneficent end, either to ourselves, or others, yet are they all reasonable and just, and good ; and necessarily springing out of the all-wise arrangements of the universal system under the government of God. This disposition of mind is equally opposed to all discontent and repining at the course of providence, and to all vain reliance upon its aids, while we presumptuously neglect our own duties. It tends to produce that placid serenity of soul, so becoming the character of resigned piety, and to awaken the active and prudent exertions, which virtue requires of every good man, in dependence on God, to improve the felicity of his condition, and his honourable standing in life.

#### OF OUR EXTERNAL DUTIES.

The external duties, which we owe to God, comprise every decent outward expression of the pious sentiments of the heart. They are all embraced under the general name

of *divine worship*, for which, however, natural reason has not prescribed any precise and definite form.

Different nations, and different sects of religion, have each adopted a peculiar ceremonial. No sanctity ought to be ascribed to rites, exclusively of the affections which they are designed to assist; or any further than they are proper expressions of the devout dispositions of the soul. But all rites deserve to be regarded with respect, which custom has sanctified by their sacred use, among any people, or so associated with their religious ideas, as to be to *them* the most serious, and affecting expression of their devotional exercises. In considering the general question, of the utility of rites and forms in religion, and how they may be applied in the most effectual manner to answer the design of impressing the heart in divine worship, and aiding its pious emotions, reason will decide, that the ceremonial ought to be, neither too simple, nor too multifarious and splendid. The mass of mankind are so much governed by sensible impressions, as seldom to be able to support, with proper fervency, a religion which aims to be wholly intellectual, and scorns any alliance with the senses; on the other hand, the senses are apt to be so much amused with a ceremonial too splendid, or multifarious, as, in time, to exclude the heart and understanding from divine worship, and to substitute, in its room, only a frivolous superstition.

The essential parts of a rational worship, in whatever ceremonies it is clothed, are adoration, thanksgiving, confession, and prayer. Adoration, relates to the infinite perfections of the Deity, for which we ought, in our devotions, to feel, and express the highest veneration. Thanksgiving, is employed in giving utterance to our grateful acknowledgments, of those innumerable mercies, which we continually receive from him. Confession, respects our manifold offences and omissions of duty. And finally, prayer regards those mercies of which we have need, and which we ought humbly and submissively to ask of him, either for ourselves, or for others.

These duties, being continually explained and inculcated in the public institutions of religion, will not require any further illustration in this place. Two objections, however, have been so plausibly urged against the duty of divine worship in general, that they ought not, perhaps, to pass without a particular answer.

It is said, in the first place, to convey an unworthy idea of the Supreme Deity, to suppose that he derives pleasure from hearing his perfections repeated, or his praises extolled by mortals, in acts of adoration, as if, by such adulatory addresses, his displeasure could be averted, or his mercy bribed.—It is equally unworthy the Divine Majesty, it is alleged, to believe that humiliating confessions from such imperfect beings can be acceptable to him who already knows and

pities all their errors ; or that he can require of them formal acknowledgments for the acts of beneficence, which it is agreeable to his nature to bestow, and for which no acknowledgments can make any requital.

To these unfair representations, it may be replied with justice, that it is an essential law of our nature, that all high sentiments, or strong affections, naturally seek for some means by which to express themselves. If therefore, we feel, as virtuous, and pious men ought to feel, towards the Author of our being, to check this dutiful expression of our emotions, would be to stifle the most reasonable impulses of the heart ; and not to feel them, would be the proof of a cold and corrupted soul.

I add, that the most natural, and laudable affections, when they are suppressed, and entirely locked up within the heart, necessarily languish, and, at length, cease to be perceived. The strong, and ingenuous emotions of unfeigned piety will ever seek for some mode of external expression, and the repeated expression of them in the acts of a visible worship, will reciprocally, give strength to the inward temper from which they flow. An external worship, then, is founded on principles of the soundest reason, and most conformable to the laws of our moral nature. It cannot, by any person, who thinks wisely of the Deity, be supposed to be enjoined for any gratification which he receives from the praises, or pros-

trations of a being so imperfect as man. It can be demanded only from that infinite wisdom and benevolence which requires our worship for its own essential rectitude, and for its beneficial influence in cultivating the affections and habits of piety, for which it is so admirably fitted. For adoration of the divine perfections, while it impresses the pious mind with an awful reverence of the Deity, tends to elevate the tone of its moral feelings, and to assimilate them to the purity of the object of its worship.—The grateful recollection of the divine mercies, in the immediate presence of God, serves to confirm the affectionate purposes of duty, and obedience to him.—On the contrary, the penitent confession of the sins and errors of life, helps to arm the soul against its own weakness, and its impure passions. And finally, the supplications which we address to the Father of mercies for the blessings which we need, either for the present life, or in the hope of a future and higher existence, remind us, continually, of our dependence on him for all things; and awaken, by that remembrance, the profoundest sentiments of piety. Can there be more proper means of cultivating in human nature the best and noblest affections of the heart?

The second objection, which perhaps, is more plausible, and seems supported on stronger metaphysical ground, is directed against the efficacy, and consequently the utility of prayer, employed as a mean of obtaining the divine favour, either in our public, or private devotions.—The order of

the universe, and the eternal train of causes and effects, have, from the beginning, been fixed by infinite wisdom. And the laws which have been established by divine wisdom are as unchangeable as those which have been ascribed to necessity, or fate.—Why, then, it is demanded, should we pray? If pre-established causes naturally co-operate to the production of the event, it must take place independently of our prayers. If otherwise, we pray in vain. The breath of mortals cannot change the eternal order of things.—This is the objection placed in the strongest point of light.—To obviate it, let it be observed that prayer can have only two ends in view; either to cultivate the moral qualities of the heart, and thereby obtain those spiritual blessings which, in the order of providence are connected with them, or to procure those external, and temporal goods which we solicit in prayer. To obtain the former, we have seen that prayer, with every other part of divine worship, possesses an obvious and acknowledged influence. The stress of the objection, therefore, presses on the latter; but admits of this simple and unconstrained solution.—From the superiority of intellect to matter, and of the moral to the physical order of things, there is the highest probability that the latter has been created wholly in subserviency to the former. If this principle be admitted, will it not result as a natural consequence that the Creator may have so adjusted the physical to the moral order of things, that, foreseeing the sincere, and reasonable desires of good men, who are his children,



the disposition of causes, and the train of events shall be such as, at the proper time, and in the way most agreeable to his infinite wisdom, to correspond with their prayers, if it be his will to bestow the blessing? For so perfect is his foreknowledge, that, with regard to his infinite view, no event may be considered as future, but all things are immediately present.

If this be regarded as an hypothetical answer to the objection, there are, at least, innumerable occasions on which the same answer, derived from the relation of the two worlds, appears to be founded on the plain and obvious course of nature. How often do the events of the world manifestly depend upon moral springs? How often do we see the fortunes of individuals greatly influenced by their moral character? And the universal voice of history, has almost raised it into a maxim, that the prosperity of nations is intimately linked with their virtue, and their decline as certainly associated with the corruption of morals, and the disorder of the public manners. When we reflect, therefore, how much public and individual manners are affected by the healthful state of religion, and how much this is connected with the purity of the public worship, and the sincerity of private devotion, we can hardly avoid the conclusion, that on many events, prayers offered up to almighty God, with humility, fervency and perseverance, have an influence not less powerful, and often, much more successful than any other second cause. So that

whether we regard the wise and eternal arrangements of providence, or the known and fixed order of natural and moral events, the result still recurs that prayer, far from being an unreasonable and hopeless service, not only has a natural and important influence on human events, but may have, as revelation assures us it has, a positive and divine efficacy. And, indeed, can any institution be more just and equitable in itself, than that God should make the conferring of the blessings which we ask in prayer, to depend upon the existence and growth of those pious dispositions which are best cultivated by these devotional exercises ?

#### OF OUR DUTIES TO OUR FELLOW-MEN.

These duties include a greater compass and variety than those which terminate immediately upon God. They respect the infinitely various relations which subsist among mankind, and necessarily occupy much the largest portion of life. There is scarcely one of our actions which does not affect some of these relations. From the general information which prevails in a country like ours, continually enlightened by the pulpit, on the practical duties of society, it would be wholly unnecessary to go into an extensive detail of our social offices. Sufficient, I presume, it will be to suggest a few subdivisions under which they may all be classed.

The first and most general division of our duties may be into those which are negative, consisting merely in abstinence from injury, or the infliction of unnecessary pain—and such as are positive, being employed chiefly in doing actual good. Many subordinate classes of practical duty may admit of a similar division. But when we speak of duty in general, it seems peculiarly requisite, on account of the many and strong passions in human nature, which so often impel men to mutual injury.

The positive duties which we owe to our fellow-men may all be comprised under the heads of justice and beneficence. But though so simple in their principles, they are in practice, almost infinitely diversified in their details, according to the relations which we sustain to our country—to our family—to our vicinity—to our friends—to the objects of our charity—to those who are invested with authority over us—or who are subjected to our controul—or, finally, according to our philanthropic relations to mankind. On these duties volumes have been written; libraries have been filled; and still they are subjects which constantly demand our attention, and on which we can never cease to be active and to learn.

## OF OUR DUTIES TO OURSELVES.

This class of duties is as real, and in many respects, as important, as those which we owe to God, or to our neighbour. On these, as on the last, I shall content myself with simply enumerating the sub-divisions, under which all the particular details may be embraced. They relate to self-preservation—to self-enjoyment—to self-interest—and to the general cultivation and improvement of our nature.

Self-preservation includes the care of health, of liberty, and life. He is culpable who neglects his health, which ought to be diligently preserved only for the useful and virtuous purposes of living. He is, perhaps, more culpable, who barter his liberty for any pretended convenience, or compensation, or who does not strenuously defend, when it is attacked, this most noble, and precious prerogative of our nature. And voluntarily to sacrifice life, or unnecessarily to hazard it, in a cause that is not worthy the rational and moral nature of man, if it does not flow from insanity, is an evidence of a mind precipitate, and foolish, and utterly void of virtuous fortitude.

A rational self-enjoyment, in the next place, every good man is not only permitted, but required, to cultivate, in order that he may be rendered more grateful to his Creator, and

correspond more effectually with his beneficent design in our creation, by prudently and temperately using the blessings of his providence. This is evidently conformable to the purpose of our Creator, and harmonizes with the apparent structure and order of our nature. But in using this privilege, peculiar caution is requisite, lest the force of self-love should urge indulgence beyond that restricted and frugal boundary, at which prudence and virtue should arrest it.

Self-interest, the cultivation of which belongs to this class of our duties, relates to necessary provision, and comfortable accommodation, which no good man, under any pretended idea of benevolence, or public spirit, ought to neglect; and, in a more extended view, it relates to the favour of God, and the felicity which reason teaches us to hope for in a future world, which should be the first concern to every truly wise man in the present.

The general cultivation and improvement of our nature, which I enumerated last among the duties, that we owe to ourselves, has for its objects, our bodily powers, the faculties of the mind, and the affections of the heart. The most important trust, which our Almighty Creator has committed to man as a moral and accountable being, is himself. And the first obligation, which such a gift imposes, is to carry his nature to the ultimate perfection of which it is susceptible, in our circumstances.

Such is a very brief analysis of the general system of our duties, but sufficient, perhaps, to present, to a reflecting mind, a key to its minute and particular details.

I do not say that all men have been able to deduce the system of their duties in a regular and scientific train of reasoning; nor that they are not much more clearly discerned, under the bright illumination of the gospel, than they were, by the wisest men, under the dim twilight of paganism; but such they appear to be, when faithfully and dispassionately traced out, under the guidance simply of a purified reason.

OF NATURAL RELIGION, AS IT RESPECTS, IN THE FOURTH  
PLACE, THE MOTIVES OF DUTY, DRAWN FROM THE  
PROBABLE HOPES OF A FUTURE EXISTENCE.

After stating the general principles of human duty, as it is prescribed by the religion of nature, it is proper, in the last place to turn our attention to the motives, from the same source, by which it is enforced. Those drawn from a rational consideration of our interests, pleasure, and happiness, in the present life, will be the same in natural, as in revealed religion. Revelation presents us with the highest possible inducements, which can be derived from the hopes and fears of futurity, exhibited in the clearest and the strongest light. Natural reason, likewise, presents to mankind its motives drawn from the same source, and, though far from being so

clear and powerful as those which address us from the revealed word of God, yet well deserving our consideration, as those alone to which the great majority of mankind can have recourse ; and which shew us how far human reason, in its most cultivated state, may lead us, in the investigation of this most important doctrine, unaided by any direct and immediate light from Heaven. For this purpose, I shall propose to you the chief of those general arguments, on which the philosopher professes to found his belief, or rather his hope of the immortality of the soul. The authority of the law of virtue would be very feebly felt by the greater part of mankind, if the expectations, or the apprehensions of existing after this life, were not shewn to rest on, at least, probable foundations. We must confess, however, that probability is the utmost which reason, paying all due deference to its powers, has been able to attain on this interesting subject. We must look for that clear and full persuasion, on which the soul can repose with assurance in the midst of affliction, and at the approach of death, only in the sacred scriptures. But the human mind, in its anxious longings after immortality, is inclined to make the most of those feeble lights, which reason holds out to encourage its hopes. And Cicero could only say, but he says it with the enthusiasm natural to a virtuous mind, that “if he were deceived in cherishing the hope of an immortal existence, he wished not to be awakened from so agreeable a delusion.” And Socrates, in his last conversation with his friends, just before drinking the fatal hemlock,

thus took his leave of them,—“ You go to your ordinary occupations, I to my fate ; which of us shall enjoy the happier lot is known only to the Gods.”

The Christian religion has produced such a deep and general persuasion of this doctrine, in the minds of its disciples, as has induced a common belief, that the evidence which reason yields in its support, is much more direct and clear, than, on the most fair and candid examination, it will be found to be. There are, however, such strong and rational probabilities, drawn both from the physical and moral order of things, as merit the most serious attention of the philosopher. Some of the principal moral reasons, which claim the assent of an enlightened pagan to this truth, I proceed shortly to lay before you.

In the first place, then, if the present were the only state of human existence, the designs of the Creator, in the formation of man, would seem to be in a great measure frustrated ; at least, they would not be conformable to the usual operations of his wisdom. We would behold the noblest being with which we are acquainted, just begin to evolve faculties, which are never permitted to arrive at their full vigor, or to display their full beauty. Man is evidently possessed of talents, which are progressive to an indefinite degree of improvement. Yet no individual has ever carried any one talent, and much less, the whole system of his natural powers,



to the highest perfection of which they are susceptible: and less still, has the whole race approached near to that ultimate point in the scale of being, to which they are manifestly capable of arriving, and appear, in some period of their progress, to be destined. To arrest them, then, in the midst, or rather in the commencement of their career, when they are only beginning to display those capacities, which they shall never fully unfold, seems hardly conformable to our most reasonable ideas of divine benevolence and wisdom. All other things, which come under our cognizance in this world, have a point of maturity that is the highest of which their natures are susceptible. Arriving at this, they begin gradually to decay. Other animals increase to a certain degree of strength, and sagacity, which is, evidently, the ultimate limit within which their natures are bounded. Their several species appear to be equal in all ages. There is a point, below which, they hardly ever fall, and above which they cannot rise. Far otherwise is it with man. The greatest portion of his powers would be lost, and he would seem to have been made in vain, if there were not another state of being, in which they may unfold themselves, and attain that perfection of which they are capable. Hardly can we conceive it to be consistent with the wisdom and goodness of God, to bestow on man so many incipient talents, only to be checked, or cut off, in the very commencement of their progress—germs which are never suffered to come to their maturity. Moral and religious sentiments, in particular, do not

seem to have any reasonable object, if we are to regard ourselves, as being only particles of animated dust, destined to perish almost as soon as we begin to exist ; and have not beyond this life, the hope of some nearer approach to the deity, and the expectation of some reward from him, which shall depend on the purity of our pious affections, and the integrity of our virtuous conduct in this life. The sacrifices of virtue, would be without remuneration ; and the noblest dispositions of the heart, cultivated with the most devout care, would be like incense burnt and scattered by the winds, before a being who regards it not.

Another argument of no inconsiderable weight, in the estimation of the rational philosopher, for the doctrine of immortality, is derived from the general belief of mankind. Such a universal concurrence of opinion, indicates some original principle of nature on which it rests ; and which can be only the operation of God himself in the human heart. It has formed an article of belief in all religions. It has been laid at the foundation of all the political institutions of antiquity, as well as of modern ages. And no nation has been discovered so rude, and savage, who has not, along with the idea of God, united that also, of the future existence of the soul.—Some philosophers ascribe this interesting phenomenon to imitation, and the influence of education. Where principles have already a foundation in nature, education and imitation readily concur to strengthen their influence. But

when they are entirely arbitrary, although one principle may take root, and be propagated in one nation, and a different one in another, yet, when have we seen such uniformity in education, among all the inhabitants of the globe, if it has not been employed to cultivate some natural principle?

It has been boldly asserted, but I conceive with little plausibility, that the doctrine has been introduced, and obtained credit in the world, by the artifice of priests, in order to establish their authority over the multitude, by the all subduing charm of superstition; or, by the craft of politicians, and legislators, who found no better way to render their subjects obedient, and to confirm the authority of their laws, than by the power of religious fear.—In answer to insinuations of this kind, we may well ask, when had a few priests or politicians more cunning than all the rest of mankind? But, if it be true, that the order of human society cannot be perfectly maintained without the belief of a state of future retribution, and that, therefore, the whole force of political power and intrigue has been employed to establish this sentiment among the people, this is surely an argument of no inconsiderable weight for the truth of the doctrine. Otherwise, man must have been formed under the hard necessity of being continually deceived, in order to promote his best interests; a consequence which we ought not to impute to the infinite wisdom and goodness of the Creator.

The universality of this belief, therefore, I presume, to be ascribed to an original sentiment of our nature; or, at least, to a conclusion that so necessarily obtrudes itself upon the mind, from the united reflections of reason and sentiments of conscience, that it may justly be classed along with our instinctive feelings.

It is certainly no proper or sufficient objection against the universality of this opinion, and consequently, the truth of this principle connected with it, that there have existed philosophers who have denied it; or whole nations who have blended it with many superstitious notions.—A minute philosophy, attempting to plunge too far into the subtleties of speculation, is, often much less to be depended on as a guide to truth, than the simplest dictates of the uncultivated understanding. It is not surprising then, if a few philosophers, in the pride of speculation, or the vanity of affected singularity, should have added to their other contradictions of the common opinions of mankind, the denial of a future existence and the immortality of the soul.

The certainty of truth ought not to be questioned, or denied on account of the errors which either speculation or superstition has mingled with it. Nature, on many subjects, particularly on those relating to morals and duty, points to the general principle, or gives the general impression of the truth, but leaves it to reason, experience and reflection, to

give it its perfect shape and form. This each man will do, with more or less accuracy and precision of idea, according to the strength of his intellectual faculties, united with his virtue, or the prepossessions of his education.—The argument, therefore, for the immortality of the soul, drawn from the natural feelings and expectations of mankind, remains strong, notwithstanding the gloomy speculations of sceptical philosophers, and the absurd admixtures of superstitious nations.

Another of the moral causes on which natural reason founds its hope and belief of this doctrine, is the strong desire of good men, and the apprehensions of the vicious; which are commonly found to increase in proportion as they appear to be approaching to the period of their earthly existence. The natural desire of immortality is, certainly, one of the strongest affections of the human heart, at least, till the dominion of vicious passions have made it the interest of the guilty to fear it. It is the most powerful motive of virtue, and the greatest consolation of good men, under the various trials of life. And on the violent and criminal passions of the vicious there is hardly any restraint so effectual, as the apprehension of a future existence, and of the retribution with which conscience always accompanies that fear. The hopes and fears of human nature, therefore, both concur to strengthen the probability of a renewed existence after this life. If this lively anticipation of a future being, in a happier state, be implanted in the hearts of good men, by God

himself, can we believe that his infinite benignity hath created in them desires only to disappoint them, and inspire them with hopes only to tantalize them?

The same conclusion is confirmed by the apprehensions of wicked men, especially under the stroke of any great calamity, or at the approach of death. The conscience of guilt anticipates a retribution far exceeding any sufferings to which it can be subjected in the present life. And very few are the cases in which this salutary fear can be entirely extinguished by the hardihood of vice, or the perversion of a misguided education. And, certainly, it would not be serving the interests of society, or of human nature, to attempt to remove from the minds of men, those useful restraints which the wisdom of divine providence hath thought proper to impose upon the passions, which would, otherwise, be dangerous to the peace of society, and to the best interests of virtue.—This argument is not a little strengthened by the acknowledged effect which the disbelief of the immortality of the soul, and the doctrine of a future life would have upon the state of public morals. The good could hardly find in the general order, and distribution of providence, in the present state, sufficient motives to sustain them in the continual conflicts; or to encourage the incessant efforts of virtue, which are often painful and laborious, and not rarely exposed to extraordinary hazards. If the passions of men were freed from the salutary restraints of religious fear, and

secrecy were, as it then would be, the effectual protection of crimes, the greatest infelicity and disorder would reign in society. Some of the most eminent of the Roman writers ascribe the extreme corruption of the Roman manners, towards the period of the republic, and under the empire in its first ages, to the introduction and prevalence of the epicurean philosophy, of which the final extinction of the soul at death was one of the leading principles. If these reflections be well founded, and the doctrine of immortality, and religious reverence, which generally accompanies it, be necessary to the peace and order of human society, and the prosperity of nations, the truth of the principle is strongly implied in this salutary effect. It is unreasonable to believe that God has formed human nature in such a manner as to require that it should be governed by falsehood. We ought to presume, on the contrary, that all the plans of infinite wisdom do so correspond, that virtue, and happiness, which appear to be the end of the whole, must be established by truth alone.

There appears, in the next place, such a promiscuous and unequal distribution of good and evil in the present state, as gives strong ground to expect, in some future period of our existence, a partition of the blessings and inflictions of divine providence more conformable to our ideas of the goodness and equity of the Supreme Ruler of the universe. If this world were designed to exhibit the ultimate plan of his moral government, it would be a most natural expectation to find

virtue placed in such favourable circumstances, that tranquillity, comfort, and honour, should, at least, be within the compass of its reasonable efforts ; and vice be subjected to deprivations, and inflictions, that should bear some proportion to the disorders and enormities occasioned by it. Contrary, however, to that order of things which all our ideas of reason, and of the goodness and equity of the Deity would suggest, we often behold virtue suffering under deep and unavoidable afflictions ; and those afflictions, not unfrequently, induced immediately by a firm and steady adherence to truth and duty ; while vice triumphs in the rewards of fraud and treachery. Many writers, professing to put external circumstances wholly out of the question, have maintained, that happiness, depending entirely upon the internal state of the mind, is more equally distributed, according to the virtue and wisdom of individuals, than appears to be implied in the objection : and Diogenes, in his tub, it is said, was really no less happy than Alexander on his throne. This vindication of the perfect equity of the present arrangements of providence, supposing them to be final, is rather plausible than just. A few men by religious enthusiasm, or philosophic speculation, may reduce, or exalt their feelings to almost any standard. But, when we speak generally of the happiness of human nature, it is so much connected with the sensibilities of the body, and so much with the relations of society, and with ideas resulting from its customs, habits, and opinions, which necessarily incorporate themselves with all our feelings, that the



external state, and visible condition of men must afford us a more accurate criterion by which to judge of the equalities, or inequalities of divine providence, than any interior and invisible standard of mental feeling. And by this scale, surely, we do not perceive the rewards of virtue, or the chastisements of vice bestowed, or inflicted in any equitable degree according to the respective characters of men. They fall, rather according to the ingenuity, vigilance, and perseverance of individuals, in their various pursuits, or the defect of those talents; or, according to some fortunate accident, rather than according to merit.

This mixed and unequal distribution of good and evil, is probably better adapted to a state of probation, where virtue is exercised and tried, by being thrown into various circumstances of adversity and prosperity, than one which should indicate a more exact discrimination of character would be. But it is contrary to all our ideas of the divine beneficence and wisdom to believe that these probationary sufferings are to be the final reward of virtue; or that this mixture of pleasure and pain, in which the pleasure evidently predominates, is to be the final infliction of divine justice on vice which disarranges the whole order and harmony of the moral world.

From these considerations, we have the justest reason to conclude, that this mixed condition of human life, and promiscuous distribution of divine providence, indicates, only a

preparatory state of moral discipline, which has a reference to another and higher condition of being.—

And this hope we have seen to be confirmed by the analogy of nature, which seems inclined not to leave any of her works imperfect, and will, therefore, not crush in the germ, or arrest in their incipient state, so many noble faculties of the human mind, which are evidently capable of attaining a degree of perfection which they never arrive at, and of evolving powers which they never display in the present life.—We have seen it confirmed by the general suffrage of human nature, resting, it would seem, on an instinctive impression, or intuitive conviction of the mind, expressed in the religious opinions of all nations.—It is further confirmed by the hopes of virtue, and the fears of guilt, especially at the approach of death.—And it is confirmed, finally, by the unequal distributions of good, and evil, according to the moral qualities of men in the present life.—

These moral reasons when taken separately, may not be calculated to produce entire conviction in a mind disposed to weigh every argument with scrupulous distrust; yet, when assembled together under one view, they present such a group of probabilities, as can hardly fail to carry with them every candid and ingenuous mind; and must make even the cold scepticism of infidelity relent. But, I must repeat, that full, unwavering conviction, on this most interesting sub-

ject, can be obtained only from revelation, which, at the same time, that it assures us of the fact of a future, and immortal state of being, discloses to us, in some measure, wherein it consists.

On the nature of our future existence, admitting what reason I think demonstrates, that it is, in the highest degree probable, we can form no precise and certain ideas; that state being too far removed beyond the range of our present experience. We can speak of it only in the most general terms. But, from the analogy of what actually comes under our observation of the process of nature, we have just ground to conclude, that the condition of human life, will be greatly improved above its actual state in the present world, both in personal form, if, according to the ideas of religion, we look for a re-union of the body with the soul, and in the powers of the mind. In those transmutations which pass under our immediate review in the insect tribes, we never see them pass from one state, to resume the same appearance in another, but, in each gradation in their progress, they acquire augmented powers, and are invested with new, and more beautiful forms. It cannot, therefore, be unreasonable to expect a vast augmentation in the active powers of our nature, both corporeal, and mental; in the quickness and vivacity of the senses, in the beauty and excursive force of the imagination, and the penetration and energies of the understanding. And the same analogies incline us to expect the addition or de-

velopment of many new faculties, of which, in the present state, the imperfection of our reason cannot form any conception.

Nor is it improbable that, in an immortal existence, the renovated faculties of our nature will advance forward in an endless progression of improvements, whether reason incline us more to the idea of one continued but improving form of existence, or to the pythagorean principle of successive transmutations. And in the system of the universe, there is, undoubtedly, an ample theatre for an interminable progress both in knowledge and in virtue. Nor can we doubt but that there, the wisdom, the power, the goodness, and equity of the divine perfections will be more conspicuously, and illustriously displayed, than in the present introductory state of being.

Such, without giving any unwarranted license to the excursions of imagination, and judging only from actual analogies presented to our senses, and reason, may we presume to be a just, as far as it is extended, though most imperfect outline of that future existence to which virtue ardently aspires, and to the hope of which the most cool, and dispassionate examination of reason deliberately affixes its seal.

That these doctrines, which have been proposed as principles of the *religion of nature*, concerning the existence,

and perfections of the Supreme Creator, and the duties of human nature resulting from them, may not be rejected from the natural code, as partaking too much, of ideas which are exclusively Christian, I will appeal, for their verification, as dictates simply of reason, by a few references, to some of the best writers of heathen antiquity. They exhibit, indeed, the results of reason in its most cultivated state; still, however, they are deduced solely from natural principles. The same conclusion, likewise, is strongly affirmed by the great apostle of the Gentiles. For, according to his unquestioned testimony, "The invisible things of God, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even his eternal power and godhead. When the Gentiles who have not the law, do, by nature, the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves; which shew the work of the law written in their hearts." Accordingly all men possess from nature many just notions concerning the existence of the Supreme and Original mind. And those sages of paganism who have cultivated these primary instincts and ideas, by a refined and enlightened reason have been able to advance far in framing adequate conceptions of the glorious attributes of the Deity. With numerous principles and maxims, in proof of this assertion, extracted from the writings of these authors, I might easily fill the volume; but, perhaps, it is eligible to restrict my appeal to a few examples; sufficient, however, to furnish a general idea of the state of human science upon this sub-

ject, in those great nations.—Cicero pronounces with assurance, that there is no tribe of the human race so barbarous, and savage, as not to acknowledge the being of God. And this wonderful consent of all people, he adds, is to be esteemed the voice of nature, and an undoubted argument of truth. Cic. de leg. Do. de nat. Deor. Senec. epist. 117. The same celebrated author exclaims, where is the man so void of reason, who, when he casts his eyes over the heavens, does not perceive the evidence of a Deity? Tusc. quest. 70. de arusp. resp. 19. And, in his book de divin. and in that de nat. Deor. 148. 15. 90. he adds; The beauty of the universe, the order of the heavens, the revolutions of the sun, the moon, and all the celestial bodies, sufficiently display, at the first glance of the eye, that they are not the effect of chance; but that there exists a superior, and eternal being who claims the homage, and admiration of mankind.—The better part of human nature, say both Cicero and Seneca, is the soul; but God is all soul; he is reason simply. He escapes from our view, and is to be seen only in our thoughts.—Wherever you turn your view, says the latter of these great writers, there you have God meeting you; no place is void of the divine presence; he fills all his own works.

The great orator and philosopher of Rome, in his treatise concerning laws, lays it down as an incontrovertible maxim, that religion is the very basis of a wise legislation. The first principle of social order, says he, is the persuasion that the

Gods are the lords, and governors of all things; and that whatever does take place in the universe, exists by their deity and wisdom. They direct human affairs, not only by general laws, but by laws which reach to every individual person, and to every particular event. *De divin.* 117. Valerius informs us, that Thales, when asked, whether the actions of men could ever be concealed from the gods? replied, no, not even their thoughts. *Lib. 7. c. 2.*

The duties which we owe to God, as taught by the religion of nature, we learn from the same great masters of reason. The noblest worship of the gods, says Seneca, ap. *Lactan. L. 6.* is to worship them with a pure, upright, and uncorrupted mind, for God hath no place upon earth more acceptable to him than a pure soul. Cicero in his book of duties, pronounces this decision; Let men ever approach the gods with chaste, and pure spirits; for piety and sanctity alone render them propitious to mortals. *L. 2. 11.* Sextus, in his sentences, has this remarkable sentiment; Love God above your own soul. For if you are void of supreme love to God, to him you will never go; and love him, as you ought, you never will, unless you have within you somewhat that resembles him.—Let it be our first study, says Plato, to resemble God, as far as is competent to human nature; but man becomes like to God only by wisdom, justice, and sanctity: in *Theat.* A sentiment of the same author approximates his opinion, in no small degree, to the principles of revelation.

Virtue, he affirms, does not come from nature, nor from education, but solely from the divine Numen, or Deity. And, in the same spirit, Bias, who was one of the seven wise men of Greece, pronounces, whatever good you have done, be assured it has been received only from God. Diogen. Laer. in Biam. And Marcus Antoninus, under the conviction that all things depend on God alone, renders thanks to him, in the history of his life, that he had frequently given him many excellent suggestions, and useful assistances towards forming his mind, and his conduct aright, and that, both in youth and in advancing life, he had frequently rescued him from many occasions of transgressing the laws of virtue. He is further grateful for his having bestowed on him good parents, good preceptors, and excellent friends.—The great orator of Rome, in his treatise *de natura deorum*, asks, if reason, faith, virtue, concord, exist in human nature, whence could they have descended to the earth unless from the gods above ?

The religion of nature, not less than that of revelation, though unacquainted with the infinite mercy of the Saviour, equally requires from us, feeble and dependent creatures, continual acknowledgments of the goodness and beneficence of the Infinite, and Divine, Mind. No attribute is so universally felt and acknowledged by mankind as his goodness. We find in the eloquent oration for Roscius this fine passage :—The blessings which we use, the light which we enjoy, the air which we breathe are granted, and bestowed by the Supreme



Deity. The gods pour forth their gifts without intermission, by night and by day. Their beneficence is sometimes offered gratuitously; sometimes it is conferred in consequence of our prayers. There is no one who has not experienced these celestial blessings; not one to whom something has not flowed from this most benignant fountain.

These few principles of natural religion have been drawn from the first masters of eloquence and reason, who derived all their moral and religious maxims simply from the lights of their own minds; which course I have pursued that I may not be charged with the vain and theoretical ambition of ascribing more to the powers of nature than christian piety ought to concede to them. On the subject of our holy religion, most certainly, we are indebted to revelation exclusively for the peculiar, and distinguishing doctrines of the Christian system. But the powers of reason which God hath bestowed on human nature, are competent to enlighten the mind on the general and practical duties of morality and virtue. The spirit of inspiration does, unquestionably, illustrate them more clearly, and confer additional evidence and authority on the prescriptions of conscience, and on all the motives of duty. But, it is useful, explicitly to understand by such unquestioned examples, how far we are entitled to do honour to the feeble lights of our natural reason.



EVIDENCES  
OF THE  
CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

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INTRODUCTION. THE NECESSITY OF REVELATION.

BEFORE proceeding to the consideration of the *doctrines* of our holy religion, it is necessary in the first place to display its *evidences*, that our faith may not be merely an enthusiastic and visionary confidence, but a rational offering to truth and reason.

And if I should propose little, or even nothing that is *new* on this subject, I hope to be able to comprise the general argument in favour of Christianity, in such a narrow compass, and exhibit it in such an easy and perspicuous order, as not only to afford conviction, but furnish a concise and ready answer to those popular objections which are most frequently urged against the holy scriptures.

But before proceeding directly to exhibit the proofs on which our faith in the Christian system may rationally rest, I shall, in the first place, offer to you several considerations which afford a strong presumption of the necessity of some

divine communication from heaven to instruct mankind in the knowledge of their duty, and of the hopes they may lawfully entertain from the divine mercy. For, if revelation be not necessary, and reason alone be sufficient to lead man to his Creator, and to furnish him with all the principles, the motives, and aids of duty which are requisite in his present state, any examination into the truth of Christianity, is manifestly superfluous. But, if we see evils reigning over the moral world, which reason and philosophy are unable to cure, our confidence in the benignity of our heavenly Father will naturally lead us to expect his interposition, in some extraordinary way, in behalf of his erring, and afflicted, though disobedient children.

The necessity of a revelation may be inferred from the extreme ignorance, and even the monstrous errors with regard to the being of God, and to the nature of the worship which he requires, as well as with regard to a future existence, which prevailed almost universally among mankind at the period of the birth of Christ; it may be inferred from the extreme and universal depravation of morals, which the lights of nature and the aids of reason had become utterly impotent to remedy: And, finally, it may be inferred from the incapacity of the unaided powers of the human mind, satisfactorily to determine, if mercy will, or can, in consistency with the justice of God, and the purity of the divine nature, be extended to the guilty.

At the period when Christianity first appeared in the world, the principles even of natural religion had nearly perished from among men. Instead of those pure and sublime conceptions which every reasonable and dependent creature ought to entertain of the supreme and infinite Creator, mankind had degraded the objects of their worship below even the vilest and most profligate of their worshippers. “*The glory of the incorruptible God they had changed into an image made like, not only to corruptible man, but to four-footed beasts and creeping things.*” They deified all the passions, and served them with all the vices. What were Saturn and Moloch, and Venus and Bacchus, but cruelty, and lust, and intemperance personified? And what were their altars, their temples, and their groves, but scenes of the grossest pollution, and often of the most horrid crimes? In many countries, and especially in India, in Egypt, and Syria, they deified the obscenest parts of the human body, and served these detestable idols with a correspondent worship.

The ideas which they framed, and the hopes which they conceived of a future state of existence, were so uncertain and obscure; and were at best, so gloomy and uncomfortable, as to afford little encouragement and support to the heart in those painful self-denials, and those arduous conflicts which it must often undergo in aspiring to an elevated pitch of virtue. As little were they calculated to console it at

the approach of death, which, to them, was the loss of every enjoyment, and of every hope; and still less to elevate it above the mere pleasures of sense, and to prepare it hereafter for a spiritual and celestial state of being. Reason, indeed, in its highest improvements, however it may accumulate probabilities, can afford no secure expectation, of the immortality of the soul. But, in the hand of vice, it is used rather as a weapon to destroy this precious hope; for, immortality can be desirable only to virtue. And when this expectation is destroyed, the broadest encouragement is laid open to every sensual and criminal excess. For, if no higher and happier condition of being awaits the virtuous; if the vicious have no future retribution to apprehend, why should they impose any restraint upon their present pleasures? Can any maxim be more natural to the misjudging mass of mankind, the children of appetite and passion, than that of the degenerate disciples of Epicurus: *Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die?*

From these, and other causes connected with them, the depravation of morals had become extreme throughout all the nations of antiquity before the advent of the Messiah. They had long abandoned that simplicity of manners which reigned in the primitive ages; and which was, in part at least, to be ascribed to those just and noble sentiments of the deity which appear to have been entertained by the patriarchs of the old world. Sentiments which were probably the re-

mains of an original revelation imparted by God to the father of the human race, and repeated to the second progenitor of mankind after the deluge, and by him communicated to the nations immediately springing from him. For, in proportion as men descended farther from this source, and the traces of this primitive tradition became obscure, and mixed with the errors and fables which time incorporated with it, we find the deepest ignorance and the grossest idolatry prevailing, together with a correspondent corruption of morals, which, in a course of ages, arrived, at length, to bid defiance to all restraint and all decency. The apostle Paul, in the first chapter of his epistle to the Romans,\* has drawn a dark and melancholy picture of the moral state of the heathen world; and, addressing converted Romans and Greeks, he implicitly appeals for its verification to their own observation and experience. And some, even of their own writers, have given to us the same picture in colours hardly less dark. No where, perhaps, can we find a portrait of the moral state of men given in deeper shades than that which Juvenal has drawn of the manners of Rome in his age. And though some allowance is to be made for the colourings of poetry, and especially of satire; yet satire must be drawn from real life, and present to us a strong resemblance of character, otherwise, it loses all its effect.

\* Rom. chap. 1. v. 24--31.

It may be asked, perhaps, if reason, prudently and diligently applied, might not have produced a reform of this general corruption? I answer without hesitation that this was an effect beyond its power. It cannot promulge its laws with sufficient *clearness and certainty*; and these laws are destitute of adequate *sanctions*. That it wants *certainly* is evident from the eternal doubts, disputes, and contradictions of its pretended lawgivers, the philosophers. It may be still more evident to those observers of human nature who have seen with what facility the heart is able to bias or tincture every moral dictate of the understanding when opposed to our self-love. But, in the next place, its laws are destitute of adequate *sanctions*. The sanctions of the law of reason and nature consist only in that *self-approbation* which springs from the *love of truth* and the *performance of our duty*, and those inward reproaches of conscience which follow an action that we feel and acknowledge to be wrong. But what is the love of truth or duty in a heart that is already corrupted? And how feeble are the *reproaches of conscience*, when not enforced by the belief that we are accountable to a supreme Judge, and by the expectation of a future state of retribution! Its faltering remonstrances are easily appeased by the flatteries of self-love, or stifled in the tumults of pleasure. No: a corrupt age, a degenerate world never can be reformed by the influence of reason alone. Its lights are too dubious and uncertain; its sanctions are too feeble. The mass of mankind are not capable of com-



prehending the one, nor of being rationally governed by the force of the other.

The masters of science among the Greeks, fully persuaded of this truth, never pretended to impart to *the people* any of their moral or theological systems; believing them incompetent to comprehend their first principles, and still more incapable of pursuing these principles, in a train of regular, but often complicated deductions, to their legitimate conclusions. Hopeless therefore of their reformation, they abandoned them to the powers of superstition, to practise its absurd, and often licentious rites, without attempting to instruct them. This it was that made Socrates say, as Plato has recorded the conversation, "You may resign all hope of reforming the manners of men, unless it please God to send some person to instruct you." And made Plato himself say, "Whatever is set right, in the present ill state of the world, can be done only by the interposition of God."\* These maxims of these great philosophers imply that, though the people may be capable of receiving the most wise and excellent principles of theology, or of morals, from *authority* which is supposed to be divine; yet, if they were set to work them out by the efforts of their own understanding, or by the aid of merely human teachers, the moral state of the world must be irremediable. Blind and arrogant, or scepti-

\* Plato's treatise concerning a republic; book vi.

cal, must be the teachers ; dull, and incapable of learning, or bewildered in the doubts of their masters, must be the scholars.

Such was the necessity, felt and acknowledged by the wisest men in the heathen world, of some revelation from heaven to instruct mankind in the knowledge of the truth, and to give it effectual operation on their hearts and lives. If the great body, even of the populace, seem now to be more susceptible of rational ideas on the subject of religion ; if they entertain sublimer and purer apprehensions of the divine nature, and of that spiritual worship which should be paid to the supreme Creator ; and if we see the tone of public morals raised to a higher pitch, and regulated by a higher standard ; if every where we behold that very populace, who were denounced by the philosophers as incapable of a rational system of religion, thinking more wisely and more justly on the transcendent subjects of the *divine nature*, of *human duty*, and the *immortality of the soul*, than those philosophers themselves, are we not fairly entitled to ascribe these effects to the influence of our holy religion ; since reason had before tried, in vain, her full force upon the human mind and the human character ?

But, the impotence of reason to instruct and reform mankind, is not to be seen only, or even chiefly, in the ignorance and vices of the people. It is, perhaps, not less discernible

in the errors, the follies, and corruptions of the philosophers themselves, who cultivated it with the greatest assiduity, and who boasted having carried it to its highest improvement. What do we find among them but eternal doubts and contradictions : opinions ever varying, and settled on no certain basis of truth ; which were, therefore, found utterly incompetent to control the passions, or to regulate the conduct even of the professed disciples of reason ? The lives of the philosophers, with few exceptions, were not less dissolute than those of the people whom they despised. And, on the real nature of religion, and the true principles of duty, the sage, as will be seen hereafter, was scarcely better informed than the peasant.

But, lest these reproaches should seem to be the result merely of the prejudices of religion, let me appeal to Cicero, the greatest of philosophers, as well as of orators, who denounces them in still stronger language : “ Do you think, says he, that these precepts of morality had any influence, except in a very few instances, upon the men who speculated, wrote, and disputed concerning them ? No : who is there of all the philosophers whose mind, life, and manners were conformed to the dictates of right reason ? Which of them ever made his philosophy the law and rule of his life, and not merely an occasion of displaying his own ingenuity ? Which of them has conformed himself to his own doctrines, or lived in obedience to his own precepts ? On the contrary,

many of them have been slaves to the vilest lusts, to pride, to avarice, and to other similar vices.”\*

Nor is this surprising to those who consider that the extreme refinements of reason, which arise from the natural ambition of human pride, to extend its authority beyond its proper sphere, always tend to dogmatical error in bold and ardent minds, or to the cold indifference of scepticism, in minds of an opposite character. What is really within the reach of human reason lies near the surface, and is obvious to a sincere and impartial love of truth. But when we would penetrate deeper into the causes and the nature of things, attempting to pass the limits prescribed to human intellect, we are immediately bewildered in error and doubt. Hence the existence of a Supreme and Intelligent Cause of the universe, which to a plain and honest mind seems an intuitive dictate of the understanding, has become doubtful, as soon as ingenious men have made it a subject of speculation. They have pretended to doubt of their own existence, of the existence of the universe, and the reality of their own sensations. At best, the most important principles of religion and morals are thrown out merely as subjects of ingenious disquisition, intended to exercise and display their wit. There existed accordingly, in the various schools of Greece, such diversity and contradiction of sentiment, such subtlety

\* Tusculan Questions; book ii.

and refinement, and often such systematic scepticism, that their theological and moral principles, thrown into the general mass of the subtleties of science, about which they were accustomed to dispute, lost all authority over human conduct. In a short period after the introduction of philosophy, the greater part of its professors became both vicious in their lives, and atheistical in their opinions. And these masters of science, instead of proving the reformers of the world, only hastened its corruption; and, by weakening or destroying the ideas of a Supreme Judge, and a future retribution, opened a wider door to the licentious indulgence of all the passions.

PROOF OF AN ORIGINAL REVELATION TO MAN. IMPOTENCE OF REASON. NECESSITY OF A NEW REVELATION.

The impotence of reason alone to accomplish the reformation of the world, in the midst of the darkness and corruption into which it was sunk, is manifest from this additional fact, that the longer men relied upon it, and committed themselves to the guidance solely of its lights; that is, the farther we descend in history from the beginning of time, the more absurd do we find the superstitions of the people, the more atheistical and impious the systems of the philosophers, and the more degenerate the morals of both.

Inasmuch, as mankind, at the coming of Christ, had nearly lost the knowledge of the true God, and his worship; and, as their moral depravity had kept pace with their religious errors, and none of the ordinary powers of human reason were found competent to remedy evils so extreme, it seems consistent with all just ideas of the perfections of God, and conformable to our reasonable hopes in his wisdom, goodness, and compassion, that he should interpose, by some extraordinary communication of himself, to save religion from utterly perishing, and to recal men to virtue and order by the knowledge of divine truth. The lights of tradition which had been gradually growing more dim for ages, were now nearly extinguished under a mass of the most corrupt and shameful superstitions that ever oppressed the world, and degraded human nature. And the wisest sages, bewildered in eternal doubt, and beholding around them vices in the habits of mankind which they knew not how to amend, and mysteries in the order of nature and of providence which they knew not how to unravel, began to despair of the cause of truth, and of the reformation of the world. What the simple and unaided powers of human understanding could not discern any adequate and certain means of effecting, has been accomplished by the luminous evidence, and the powerful influence of divine revelation. Doctrines, at least claiming to be derived from this source, have banished from the greater portion of the earth the gross idolatry in which the ancient nations were sunk; and raised the general mor-

als of the world to a much higher and purer standard. No where do we now behold altars or consecrated groves, reared to such divinities as Moloch or Saturn, as Astarte, or the Cyprian Venus. Every where we find purer and sublimer ideas of the divine nature, and of that worship of the heart which ought to be paid to God. Christianity has extended a salutary influence even among many tribes of the human race who have not yet embraced her holy doctrines, and shed some rays of a divine light into the darkness which still rests upon the pagan nations, which we trust, will gradually increase, till at length the Sun of Righteousness shall illuminate the whole earth.

The insufficiency of reason to correct the moral depravity of the world will appear with irresistible evidence to those who duly consider its defect of *certainty*, its defect of *authority*, and its defect of *motives*. Its defect of *certainty*. Reason can proceed but a small distance with any certainty, in investigating moral and divine truth, beyond those obvious, simple, and almost intuitive dictates of the mind which are common to all mankind. And, in a corrupted state of manners, experience demonstrates that even these plain and natural dictates may easily be brought into doubt by the *sophistry* of the heart, when they oppose its inclinations and pleasures. But if the principles and laws of duty, and of divine truth, were much more clear and precise than they are, still reason is wanting in the necessary authority to en-

force them on the hearts of men, and give them effect in practice. This authority, in order to overcome the powerful temptations to sinful indulgence which are every moment acting with a dangerous influence on a heart already yielding to them, should be nothing less than the acknowledged command of the supreme Legislator and Judge of the universe which would preclude cavil and doubt, sanctioned by a power to which no resistance can be opposed, and directed by a justice which cannot be turned aside from its sure and awful course. When a man is accountable only to himself, feeble indeed is the voice of conscience, or of reason on one side, when his self-love, or his passions plead on the other. And finally, the motives to virtue which reason has it in her power to propose, the rewards for its self-denials, the encouragements in its conflicts, the supports under its various trials and temptations, are weak and inefficient. Does she propose the pure pleasures of virtue? But in order to relish them, you must be already virtuous. Can their calm and innocent delights be set against the ardent and turbulent enjoyments of vice? Can reason demonstrate that virtue would be eventually its own reward even in this world? Yet you arrive at this conclusion by such a tedious circuit, and it is incumbered by so many modifications and exceptions, that seldom can this refined speculation combat the force of a present and importunate passion. But if virtue is unfortunate, as it often is, if it must often forego interest, power, favour, in its adherence to duty; what reward



is there to indemnify it for its sacrifices? What authority to overawe, and restrain it from yielding to the profitable temptation? No: the awful majesty of God, the apprehensions of his supreme judgment, the eternal retributions of virtue and of vice in a future state of existence, which religion sets before the mind, will ever be found necessary, and are no more than sufficient to combat the corrupt influence of the heart, and of the world. The impotence of reason, therefore, to cure the infinite errors of the human mind, the idolatries, the superstitions, the vices of mankind, appears from every aspect in which the subject presents itself to our view, and justifies the conclusion we have inferred from it: the necessity of a new revelation to restore to the earth the truth which it had lost, and to redeem it from evils which the ordinary powers of human reason had become unable to correct.

This conclusion is justified by another most important and interesting fact. Man is evidently a guilty being; he has violated the moral law of his nature, and incurred the righteous displeasure of his Creator, and the infliction of all the dreadful penalties with which the supreme lawgiver has thought it necessary to guard his law. These penalties, which are not arbitrary in their nature, but are the decrees of infinite wisdom and justice, do not depend merely on the will of the legislator, probably they do not depend even on infinite goodness, to inflict or dispense with them at its plea-

sure. Every attribute of the deity is as necessary in its nature and its claims as the divine existence. Eternal justice, therefore, cannot as far we can judge, forego the punishment of guilt. This is the ardent and terrible dictate of a convinced conscience, not less than the calm and deliberate conclusion of reason. But, how shall the claims of infinite justice be reconciled with the claims of infinite mercy? How shall the inviolable justice of the law of eternal truth and holiness be satisfied, in consistency with the forgiveness and salvation of the sinner? In what way may a sinful mortal reasonably hope to approach his offended Maker? How shall the heirs of death regain eternal life? These are inquiries to which the weakness of human understanding can return no satisfactory answer; and the dying sinner, under the guidance of reason only, must be overwhelmed with the most distressing perplexities and doubts, or abandoned to the most horrible despair. These are doubts which God only can resolve; fears which the spirit of inspiration only can calm, by drawing aside the deep veil which conceals eternity from our view, and exhibiting to our faith a complete oblation for the sins of the world. Here we behold new proofs of the necessity of a divine revelation, new causes to invite, and justify the interposition of our heavenly Father, in behalf of his miserable, though offending children.

And is not the gospel such a remedy as we needed, such a revelation as is calculated to solve all the doubts, and tran-

quillize all the apprehensions of penitent guilt? In it you behold the divine justice, and the divine mercy harmoniously combined. In it you behold the divine law *magnified and made honourable*, by an all-availing atonement for the offences of the whole world. In it you behold *life and immortality brought to light*, and a glorious channel opened in which the boundless current of divine mercy can freely flow to mankind. Where reason and philosophy were silent, or constrained to confess their impotence, we behold revelation announcing her glad tidings, and triumphing in the happiness of her children, and of the world.

EVIDENCES OF REVELATION. NECESSITY OF MIRACLES.

MR. HUME'S CELEBRATED OBJECTION TO MIRACLES.

If the necessity of some interposition by heaven, in order to recal mankind from the monstrous errors of idolatry, to make known to them the perfect law of their duty, and to enforce it by adequate sanctions, is so evident, as has been shown in the preceding reflections, this necessity affords a presumption in favour of revelation. And if any revelation be admitted to be either necessary or probable, no doubt can be entertained of the superior claims of christianity above every pretence which has ever been set in opposition to it. This is admitted by its enemies themselves; and must be admitted by every candid and reflecting inquirer who considers the purity of its doctrines, the spirituality of its wor-

ship, the simplicity and excellence of the principle which it lays at the foundation of its moral system,\* its tendency to universal happiness, the grandeur of the prospects which it opens into the eternal world, and the sublime conceptions which it every where imparts of the divine nature.

But the truth of christianity does not rest on the *absolute perfection* of its doctrines, of which the frailty of human reason is very incompetent to judge; nor on our conclusions concerning what ought reasonably to be expected of the infinite benignity and goodness of our heavenly Father, in behalf of his erring and miserable creatures: conclusions in which we often depart widely from the actual rule of the divine government; but it rests on such evidences as every man of a sound mind who honestly applies his understanding to the subject, is capable to judge of; evidences which propose themselves directly to the senses, or arise out of the known and immutable laws of human nature.

Accordingly they may be arranged under two heads: the positive and direct, which are addressed immediately to the senses; and the collateral, or presumptive, which arise out of a just consideration of the laws of human nature relatively to this subject. Of the former kind are miracles and the fulfilment of prophecy. Of the latter, are those conclusions

\* The love of God and the love of man.

which are justly drawn from the excellence and peculiarity of character of the author of christianity, from the humility of the instruments employed to promulgate the gospel to mankind, compared with the sublimity and perfection of the doctrines which they preached ; from its rapid and extensive progress, and the important moral changes which it has produced in the world ; and from many other similar facts which cannot be satisfactorily accounted for on the ordinary principles of human nature, or of human action ; and which, therefore, imply a divine agency and direction. The former, when fairly attended to, do, in each particular case, carry with them entire conviction of the immediate interposition of God ; for none but God can operate a miracle, or foretell with minute accuracy, future and distant events. The latter though, singly taken, they do not amount to absolute proof, yet collectively, produce the highest degree of probability.

By certain writers every pretence to miracles becomes immediately suspected, and is deemed a sufficient reason for not entering farther into an examination of the evidences of revelation. This is, in effect, declaring it to be impossible for God to communicate himself by any revelation of his will to mankind. For if he ever deigns to make such communication, it can only be made immediately by himself, or by inspired men, who speak as the organs of his Holy Spirit. If it be made immediately by himself, either by means of a divine voice from heaven, or by any supernatural im-

pression on the senses, such a revelation must be itself one of the greatest of miracles. If holy men speak as they are inspired by the Holy Ghost, can their testimony be received with a rational faith, unless it be accompanied by such works, or such clear predictions of future events, above the power, and beyond the foresight of man, as will demonstrate that it is God who speaks by them? In no other way can a divine mission be authenticated. I repeat it then, if it is reasonable to expect a revelation from God in any circumstances of the world; if a revelation is not impossible, or in the highest degree, improbable; miracles are not only not incredible, but necessary. No revelation can found any just claim to the belief of mankind, on any other ground in the first instance, than such supernatural and miraculous operations as the power of God only can effect; or such clear predictions, as none but an omniscient spirit, who foresees the end from the beginning, and has laid the whole train of causes and events in the universe, could impart to the human mind. If then, the christian system contains a real communication to mankind from the infinite fountain of truth, it must have been announced under the seal of great and numerous miracles, for prophecy itself is a species of miracle. On the other hand, if we possess satisfactory evidence that such miracles were wrought at the promulgation of the gospel, we ought to entertain no doubt of its being the word of God; since it comes to us vouched by the seal of God. For what is a miracle? A proper understanding of this term

should lie at the foundation of our present inquiry. It is such an inversion, or suspension of the ordinary laws of nature as can be reasonably ascribed only to him by whom those laws were originally ordained. And whenever he condescends to work a miracle, the operation of his almighty power must be regarded, by every rational mind, as the sanction and seal of truth.

In exhibiting the direct and positive evidence of christianity, I shall, in the first place, treat of the evidence of miracles; and afterwards of that derived from prophecy.

To the apostles, the miracles of our blessed Lord were immediate objects of sense: to us, they come through the medium of human testimony; but testimony of such a kind, and confirmed by so many, and such extraordinary circumstances accompanying, or following the miracles themselves, and dependent upon them, that no facts, perhaps, in the history of the world have ever descended to posterity vouched by such a weight of moral evidence. They are attested by numerous witnesses of the soundest judgment, and the most unsuspected integrity: by men whose writings evidently demonstrate that they were at the greatest distance from that weakness of mind on the one hand, which would render them liable to be deceived themselves; and, on the other, from that ardent enthusiasm, or that knavery of character, which would incline them to pass a deception upon others for the

wake of obtaining credit to their own visions: by men who without any motives of interest or of honour, and even in the certain prospect of disgrace and poverty, of arduous and incessant labours, of continual dangers and persecutions, and at length of death itself in the most formidable shapes, devoted themselves to announce this miraculous history to the world: by men, I add, whose original prepossessions were all opposed to the character which their Master assumed, and the doctrines which he taught, and who, after a long time, yielded those prejudices only to the force of conviction operated by repeated miracles; and, finally, by men who, in the end, conquered the world, and overturned all its ancient ideas, manners, institutions, all the pride of its philosophy, and all the self-sufficiency of human reason, by the power with which they themselves were endowed of operating miracles similar to those which had subdued their own assent. These facts, afford, it seems to me, the strongest confirmation of the miraculous history of the gospel, and of the wisdom, the integrity, and credibility of those holy and chosen witnesses by whom God has been pleased to convey it down to us.

But we are met at our very entrance upon this subject with a formidable objection, which it is necessary in the first place to remove, before the most credible testimony in favour of the reality of the miracles of our Saviour, will be admitted by those who have undertaken to deny the authori-



ty of revelation. The objection may be considered in a speculative, and in a practical view. In the former, the sum of it is : that the plans of infinite wisdom are immutable ; for otherwise, they would not be perfect. God himself, therefore, cannot change the order of nature, still less can he allow a feeble mortal, for any purposes whatever, to change it, inasmuch as it has been established by his own most perfect wisdom. I answer, that the plans of divine intelligence must be immutable, as long as the reasons on which they were originally arranged remain the same. But if those reasons are changed, may they not induce a proportionable change in the order of providence ? Inasmuch then, as the existence and the whole system of this world, bear a relation to the moral state of man, if man has criminally changed his original state, and although created in innocence, has fallen into sin, although created immortal has become liable to death, can we pronounce it unworthy the goodness, or the wisdom of God, to afford his creature, humbled and conscious of guilt, the hope of mercy, and to confirm that precious hope by such visible interpositions of divine power as leave the penitent sinner no room to doubt but that it is God himself who is the author of his consolation ?

The second view in which this objection has been presented is less speculative. It is the celebrated argument ascribed to the ingenuity of Mr. Hume, although, it is probable of much earlier origin, and which has exercised the talents of

several able and judicious writers to refute its sophistry.\* I think I shall weaken nothing of its force by the following statement; *All our knowledge of natural things we derive solely from experience. And the only rational ground of our belief of what has ever happened, or what can happen in the world, is our own experience of the regular and constant course of nature. Men may impose upon us by false testimony, or they may be deceived themselves; but nature never changes. Inasmuch then, as we have had no experience of any miraculous changes in the order of the world, it is unreasonable to believe that any such have ever taken place, whatever may be the number, or the character of the witnesses by whom they have been attested. If the principle of this objection is found to be false, the whole objection must fall to the ground with it. If it will not hold in its application universally to other subjects, it is contrary to all just reasoning to admit its validity only against the miracles of the gospel. Let us then try its application in other cases; let us follow it to its ultimate consequences; these will be found sufficient to destroy it. It leads to atheism; acted upon in its full extent it would resist all improvements in science; it will be found, in opposing the moral to the physical phenomena of nature, to refute itself. At least the*

\* Particularly Dr. Campbell in his treatise on miracles. Bishop Watson in his third letter to Mr. Gibbon, having introduced the subject, appears to me to have, in a few sentences, effectually overturned the principle on which the whole objection rests.

moral phenomena will conclude as strongly in favour of the miracles of the gospel as the physical, admitting the justness of the principle, would seem to contradict them.

I return back on these ideas. And in the first place, it leads to atheism. For, if our own experience is the sole and exclusive ground of judging of whatever is credible in the physical history of the world, it is unreasonable to believe that this globe ever had a beginning, or that it will ever perish. It must always have existed, and must always continue to exist in the same state in which we now behold it. There can be no future condition of existence for human nature, no future judgment, no future retribution to the righteous and the wicked. For each of these states implies a condition of things, such as has never come under our observation, or been the subject of our experience. There is, on this supposition, no foundation for religion. The order of the world must be eternal, immutable, necessary; and can have no dependence on a creating and intelligent cause. We must embrace the philosophical absurdity of an eternal succession of mutable and perishing beings; and are driven to the impious alternative of believing that there is no God; or, that the universe itself is God.\*

\* This tenet of the Aristotelian philosophy has always been regarded by christians as only a modification of atheism.

These consequences are deduced so obviously from the principle of Mr. Hume, that it is not a little surprising that they have not been more frequently remarked. Scarcely, indeed, have they been observed by any writer who has fallen in my way, except the learned and ingenious Dr. Allix, in his *reflections on the books of the sacred scriptures*.\* Yet if they are fairly and legitimately drawn, they must be decisive against the principle in the opinion of every pious and virtuous man.

Another consequence of this doctrine, though not chargeable with impiety like the former, equally demonstrates its absurdity. It would arrest all great improvements in science. When the effects of the electric or magnetic influence, for example, were first discovered, how ought all philosophers, according to this principle, to have treated the history of their phenomena? Precisely as infidels have treated the miraculous history of the gospel; rejected it without examination, as absurd and impossible, because contrary to their *experience*. Do you say, they have it their power to repeat the experiments by which those new properties in nature were originally discovered. But if the principle which we combat is just, what motive could a philosopher

\* This work of Dr. Allix, a celebrated French refugee, was published in London in the year 1688, which sufficiently demonstrates that the objection of Mr. Hume to the miracles of the gospel is not novel; but has only been set in a new light, and urged with more plausibility by that ingenious writer.

have for repeating these experiments, since his own past experience of the course of nature is the sole criterion of whatever is credible. And whence should the greater portion of mankind derive their knowledge who possess neither the skill, nor the means requisite to make the necessary experiments, if they are not to rely for the truth of new facts in science, and facts the most remote from the analogy of their own experience, upon the testimony of others? Must not the progress of science be arrested almost at its commencement?

Let us take another example in which no experiment can possibly be applied to verify the testimony of the narrators with regard to facts the most certain in nature. The inhabitants of a torrid climate never can have the effects of frost presented to their senses. Congelation is as great a mystery to them, as any mystery or miracle of the christian religion. According to this favourite maxim of infidelity, then, they ought to refuse all credit to the fact: and the king of Siam acted according to the principles of sound wisdom in punishing the Dutch navigator for insulting his understanding by incredible stories, who assured him, that, in Holland, water had become so hard during part of the year, that it bore horses and carriages upon its surface. If testimony were, under no circumstances, sufficient to vouch to us facts which not only are not conformable, but which, in many instances, are contrary, to all our past experience, science must be

circumscribed within a very narrow sphere. This consequence was certainly not adverted to by the ingenious author who invented, or who gave its present form to the principle against which we contend. It was aimed solely against the miracles of the sacred scriptures. But when we are testing the merit of a *principle*, if it is not found to hold universally, or coextensively with the latitude of its terms, it cannot furnish the ground of any certain conclusions. For, by what rule shall we apply it only to the facts of religion, when it is false in its application to the facts of science? Miracles then, as well as other extraordinary facts in nature, are susceptible of proof from testimony. The only subject of inquiry is, the competence and integrity of the witnesses: the soundness of their judgment, the accuracy of their observation, the fidelity of their narration. In all these respects the disciples of our blessed Saviour, the witnesses of his miracles will be found to possess a decided superiority over the witnesses of any other facts recorded in history. Their writings demonstrate their wisdom; their long intimacy with their Master is sufficient to give us confidence in the accuracy of their observation; their labours, their sacrifices, their deaths, attest their sincerity, and the fidelity of their narration.\*

I maintain, in the last place, that this celebrated argument, drawn from our experience of the uniformity of nature

\* These topics will hereafter be more amply illustrated.

refutes itself. For, if the physical course of nature, on which the argument rests, is found to be stable and uniform, the moral order of things appears to be not less steady and regular. If the former of these facts opposes, upon Mr. Hume's principle, our reception of the miraculous history of the gospel; the latter, upon the same ground, forbids the rejection of that history, if, by rejecting it, we must contradict all the moral phenomena of human nature. Admitting then, what can hardly be denied by the bitterest enemies of christianity, that the apostles and evangelists were men of the soundest understandings,\* and the most upright hearts, it is contrary to all that we know of the motives of human conduct, that, for the sake of propagating a most improbable, and to them, unprofitable imposture, they should voluntarily submit to incessant toils and extreme sufferings; they should abandon all that is usually accounted most dear to the human heart, and march with intrepidity through perpetual persecutions to certain death inflicted in the most excruciating and dreadful forms. Their writings, which are always rational in their doctrines, simple in their style, and calm and judicious in their manner of address, exempt them from every charge of enthusiasm; yet, renouncing all the early prejudices of their nation, in which they had been educated

\* The perfection of that system of piety and morals published by these humble fishermen, so far excelling the philosophy of their age, demonstrates that if they were not inspired from above, they must have possessed a degree of wisdom and understanding far surpassing whatever antiquity has produced besides.

and all the hopes which they had originally conceived from a royal and triumphant Messiah, which might have inflamed the zeal of enthusiastic minds, do we not see them, for a suffering Master, encounter every actual evil, and every possible hazard? If then, we should suppose, according to the spirit of this objection, that the apostles, who expected no recompense in this world, could have acted from any other motive than a deep conviction of the miraculous power, and the divine mission of Jesus Christ, would we not be involved in contradictions to the moral order of things; that is, to all the ordinary principles of conduct among men which have ever occurred to our *experience*, not less wonderful, and out of the course of nature, than were the miracles themselves in the attestation of which these wise and pious men, the companions and witnesses of his life, made such astonishing and almost incredible sacrifices?

Thus does this so much vaunted objection against the miracles of the gospel refute itself; inasmuch as, in its application to the moral order of things, it contradicts the conclusion which the enemies of religion have drawn from their physical order. And this consequence ought to be admitted by those especially who have most earnestly urged this objection against the evangelic history, since, according to their philosophic system, they subject the natural and the moral world equally to the laws of necessity. I repeat, then, that it is not by the nature of the works



ascribed to Christ as being conformable, or contrary to our experience, but by the character and competence of the witnesses, together with all the preparatory and attending circumstances of these miracles, and their consequences upon the world, that the question of their truth is to be decided.

THE CREDIBILITY OF THE WITNESSES OF THE MIRACLES  
AND RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

Let us then enter a little more particularly into the character of the witnesses of the gospel, the circumstances under which its miraculous history was published to the world, and has been transmitted to us, and the wonderful consequences which followed its publication. A brief review of these topics, while it will confirm the answer which has been given to the objection of Mr. Hume, particularly in the last view which we have taken of it, will serve, at the same time, to strengthen our faith in the evangelic history, both by the support which we will find it possesses in the clearest and most unequivocal laws of moral evidence, and by the extraordinary effects which have resulted from it, which plainly required the power of a divine cause to produce them.

As it has been shewn that there is no insuperable objection, arising from the nature of miracles, against their existence, when alleged in favour of a divine revelation; and as they have been demonstrated even to be necessary proofs

of a divine mission, if God should ever deign to reveal his will in any extraordinary manner to the world, the credit of the miracles which are said to have been wrought in confirmation of the gospel must depend primarily on the credibility of the witnesses who have attested them. And, when this subject is fairly and candidly examined, not only will these witnesses be found entitled to the highest credit, but their testimony will appear calculated almost irresistibly to command our assent; with so many circumstances of authority and certainty is it attended, which place it far before the evidence by which any other facts in the compass of universal history have been vouched.

The witnesses of extraordinary facts ought to be men of unblemished integrity, and of clear and penetrating discernment; unbiassed by any motives of interest which might be liable to blind them to the truth, or to corrupt the purity of their testimony. And certainly the apostles and evangelists of our blessed Lord have left us, in their writings, their discourses, and their conduct, the most indubitable proofs of the soundest understanding, of the sincerest piety, and the most disinterested devotedness to the best interests of mankind, which would render it impossible, in a long course of intimacy with their Master, to be deceived by any fictitious demonstrations of a divine power, and should free them from every suspicion of fabricating a history to impose upon the world.

They were, indeed, plain, unlettered men, called from some of the humblest occupations in life to follow Christ, and to be the heralds of his grace to mankind. But this circumstance, instead of detracting from their merit as witnesses of the miracles of our Lord, will, when rightly considered, give additional weight to their testimony. For, when we take into view that admirable and profound wisdom, that perfect moral code, and that pure and sublime theology, which their writings contain, so far superior to what was to be expected from their education and rank in life, and excelling whatever has appeared on these subjects in the systems of the most venerated sages of the pagan world; may we not well ask, as the astonished fellow citizens of Jesus did with respect to him, *whence had these men this wisdom*, unless it were given them from above? If we admit that this wisdom was imparted to them immediately by God, it decides the question of their divine mission. If we say it was simply the effect of native genius, it decides their competency, in point of understanding and judgment, to be the witnesses of the wonderful history of our Lord, and their perfect title to our fullest credit, as far as depends on accuracy of observation, and the judicious discrimination of truth from all false pretences to miraculous powers.

But in the next place, their writings exhibit also the strongest characters of sincerity and integrity. We discern in them no appearance of that art which is necessary to

cover the pretences of imposture, but an undesigning simplicity which speaks powerfully to the heart. Hardly ever can impostors effectually conceal the faults of their own character behind the disguises of hypocrisy. But in the New-Testament, we discern only the purest precepts of morality, and the noblest sentiments of a genuine and rational piety. If the apostles speak from their hearts, as there is every appearance that they do, the purity of their doctrines, as well as the simplicity of the manner in which they are conveyed to us, are calculated to impress us with a deep conviction of their integrity and uprightness, not less than of their wisdom.

Piety and sincerity have a language peculiar to themselves; simple and unaffected, equally distant from the tortuous art of imposture, and the extravagances of enthusiasm. There is a *naivete'* which runs through the whole narration of the evangelists, and bears all the impressions of truth, infinitely remote from the style of an artificial tale made up by cunning and designing men.

This conviction will be greatly strengthened when we take into our view the circumstances under which the followers of our blessed Lord published the gospel, and its miraculous history to the world. Their disinterested labours, sufferings, and sacrifices, demonstrate in the strongest manner their sincerity, and their profound persuasion of the truth

and the importance of those holy doctrines which they taught, and those astonishing facts which they published to the universe. And the perfect sincerity and persuasion of men, at once so pious and so wise, who were so capable of discriminating reality from pretence, and who had so many opportunities of intimately observing the works which they attest, afford to the candid and serious inquirer, the most satisfactory grounds of belief.

Let us contemplate the disinterestedness and sufferings of the first ministers of christianity, and witnesses of the miracles of our Saviour. They speak a powerful language to the heart, and leave us no room to question the sincerity and the perfect veracity of these faithful men. It is true that men, impelled by a bold and ardent ambition, or inflamed by the hope of fortune, or of glory, may sometimes endure with fortitude the greatest sufferings, or encounter with firmness the most formidable dangers. But without the prospects of honour or emolument, and in the face of poverty and disgrace, of universal obloquy and hatred, of the fiercest persecutions and the most cruel deaths, voluntarily to undertake to propagate a known and deliberate imposture, merely for the glory of a Master who had already perished by an ignominious death, and from whom, of consequence, no farther expectations could be entertained; and, with a patience and heroism worthy only of the highest virtue and the noblest ends, to consent to be the ministers of falsehood, deceit and

villany, is contrary to all the known principles of human action, and, in such men as the apostles, is utterly incredible. Jesus Christ promised to his disciples no rewards in the execution of their arduous mission but such as should take place in a future state of existence ; of which they could have no other assurance than his own miracles. If then they made such astonishing sacrifices, as it is known they did make, from no rational motive, with no prospect of recompense, it was a solitary phenomenon, altogether inexplicable on any of the ordinary principles of conduct among men. On the other hand, if they were governed by the hope of future and celestial rewards, their belief of which could rest only on their perfect conviction of the truth of the miracles and resurrection of the Saviour, what stronger evidence could we demand of the reality of these facts ?

Their Master not only promised them no rewards, but forewarned them that they should suffer in his cause every evil that could be inflicted by the hatred, the malice, and the power of men. And they were accordingly exposed to every form of contumely, pain and death. They were loaded with chains, thrust into dungeons, lacerated with scourging, crucified, sawn asunder, clothed with the skins of wild beasts and exposed to be hunted by dogs, burnt at the stake, invested with pitched shirts, to which when fire was applied, they were used as torches in the night to light the barbarous

sports of the populace.\* These terrors were sufficient, one would think, to shake the constancy of integrity itself; but certainly, more than sufficient to appal hypocrisy and falsehood, or even the least doubtfulness of the cause in which they were embarked. But by no fear of suffering, nor by any hope of reprieve could these good men be moved to retract, or to mutilate or disguise, any part of the history of a Master who was dearer to them than their own lives. If they would only have denied the resurrection of Christ, they could have delivered themselves out of the most cruel sufferings, which were often such that we can hardly conceive how human nature could support them. Yet their dying breath, their last accents were still used to confirm their unwavering testimony. And among such numbers, not one was found to falter. What can mark in the minds of men a deeper conviction of truth?

A consideration which gives no small additional weight to the argument is, that all the original prejudices of their education, and of national pride and glory, were strongly op-

\* A variety of passages in the epistles of the apostles, and in the history of their acts by Saint Luke, give us this representation of their extreme sufferings, which is confirmed by almost all the Roman writers of that period who have come down to us; particularly by Suetonius, Pliny, Juvenal, Martial, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, and Tacitus. "Their sufferings at their execution, says Tacitus, were aggravated by insult and mockery; for some were disguised in the skins of wild beasts, and worried to death by dogs; some were crucified, and others were wrapt in pitched shirts, and set on fire when the day was closed, that they might serve as lights to illuminate the night."

posed to the character in which their Master appeared, and to the doctrines which they were afterwards constrained to preach. They, with the whole nation of Israel, expected in the Messiah a mighty temporal prince, invested with the splendours of empire, who was to restore the kingdom of David, and extend its dominion over all the kingdoms of the world, in which his followers and disciples were to arrive at the highest honours and distinctions. When, therefore, they found all the pre-possessions, in which they had been nursed, and which had been cherished by their country for ages, overthrown; when Jesus informed them that his kingdom was not of this world, a doctrine which they could hardly be made to understand, and thus disappointed all their most flattering hopes; when, instead of the magnificent prospects which they had pictured to themselves, he set before them only his own humble fortunes, and his approaching death; only the persecutions to which they should be exposed in preaching in the name of a despised Master; what could have continued to attach them to a cause so different in every respect from what they had conceived, and one apparently so desperate, but the manifest proofs of divinity which attended him, but those wonderful facts before their eyes, which conquered their prejudices, and compelled their conviction? They could not believe that he was to die till they saw him expire; they neither believed, nor understood the resurrection of the dead till they saw him restored from the tomb. Even then, it was long, through the astonish-



ment of their minds, before they could give full credit to their own senses. They conversed with him, they touched him, they thrust their hands into his wounded side. They could yield such powerful prejudices, supported by all the strongest passions of human nature, only to the most sensible demonstrations. But when their conviction was once conquered by the illustrious displays of a divine power, and nothing but the most illustrious displays of such a power could have conquered it, in opposition to every interest and every prejudice hitherto cherished by them with the greatest fondness, then they, who had before been so reluctant, so unbelieving, so timid in the cause of a suffering Master, were ready to encounter every form of danger, of suffering, and of death, in proclaiming the resurrection, and the miraculous history of their Lord. Such a revolution in their ideas and their conduct must have proceeded, as they declared it did, only from the irresistible manifestations of a divine power with which he confirmed his doctrine, and demonstrated his title to a spiritual and heavenly kingdom.

It may be said that fortitude and patience in enduring sufferings, is no certain proof of the truth of any system of principles ; because an enthusiastic mind may be so wound up, as to dare any danger, or to support any pain, in defence of its favourite opinions. I confess that voluntary suffering in any cause, is not an infallible test of *truth*, but it is a test of *sincerity*. It demonstrates the full persuasion of the soul of

the truth of the facts for which it suffers. This is all that is necessary to command our assent in the present case. The disciples of our Lord have demonstrated, by this infallible criterion, their full conviction of the reality of his resurrection, and of his miraculous operations. These were objects of the senses in which they could not be mistaken. They were men, as appears from their writings, of the soundest understandings, who could not, therefore, be imposed upon in cases so palpable. No tincture of enthusiasm, which could warp their imagination, appears in their conduct, or in that history which they have left us of the life and actions of Christ. Men as they were, of sound understandings and of rational piety, a conviction in our minds of the sincerity of their declarations is all that is necessary to gain for them full credence to the miraculous facts which they relate. There is a wide difference between dying in attestation of a fact, and to prove our adherence to an opinion. In our opinions we may err, and an enthusiastic mind may maintain its errors at the stake with no less ardour than it would adhere to truth. But in facts, such as those related by the apostles and disciples of our Lord, subjected as they were to the examination of all the senses, and for so long a time, it was impossible for men so judicious, so honest, and so faithful, to be deceived. Their sincerity is all that we need to assure us of the miracles contained in the evangelic history. And their constant readiness to seal their testimony with their blood affords the strongest proof that not the smallest doubt

mingled itself with their perfect knowledge and belief of the resurrection, and of all the miraculous works of their Saviour, on which their faith of his divine mission, and of the doctrine of salvation which they proclaimed to the world, was founded.

If the preceding reflections are just, the miracles of Christ are confirmed to us by an evidence which ought to command our fullest assent. And if his miracles are established, the divinity of his mission and of his gospel, follows as a necessary consequence.\*

Having then, in the first place, demonstrated this principle, that our experience of the uniformity of nature does not afford any solid objection against miracles performed in a cause worthy of God; we have seen, in the next place, that if any supernatural event is capable of being confirmed by human testimony, there can exist no reasonable doubt with regard to the reality of the miracles of the gospel. And I must again repeat, that no facts in the compass of universal history have come down to us confirmed by such variety, and such strength of evidence.

\* Celsus, the most ingenious and perhaps the bitterest enemy of the christians among the philosophers of that age, does not pretend to deny the miracles ascribed to Jesus Christ, but seems disposed to impute them to the powers of magic. The science of modern times will never admit such a solution of miraculous phenomena.

This conclusion will be strengthened when we proceed to consider the rapid extension of the gospel over the most enlightened nations of the world, who were, from their pride, their prejudices, their learning, their civil and religious institutions, and from all their ideas and habits, most hostile to the spirit of our holy religion. It will be farther confirmed hereafter, when we proceed to explain the excellence of the gospel itself, and to show how worthy it is of the origin which it claims, and how far superior its doctrines are to any powers of invention which can reasonably be ascribed to men, of the education and rank in life of Christ and the apostles, supposing them not to be inspired, and illuminated by a divine spirit.

THE RAPID EXTENSION OF THE GOSPEL AN INFALLIBLE  
PROOF OF THE REALITY OF ITS MIRACLES.

The sudden and wide diffusion of the christian religion throughout the principal nations of the world, although it is usually placed among the collateral and presumptive evidences of the truth of the gospel history, may reasonably be considered as furnishing a strong and direct proof of the reality of the miracles of our Saviour, and of the miraculous powers with which the apostles themselves were endued. This astonishing, and, indeed, this unparalleled effect was accomplished by publishing the miraculous history of Christ, by a few fishermen of Judea, and by pretences, at least, to

the same miraculous powers imparted to them by their Master. And can it reasonably be believed that the story of miracles performed in Judea, a remote and despised corner of the world, should have been received by the greatest as well as the most barbarous nations, in the circumstances in which it was received, and followed by the mighty consequences which actually resulted from it, unless the heralds who published it had been able to confirm their testimony by the most palpable demonstrations of a divine power accompanying their preaching? On no other ground do I think we can propose any rational solution of this great moral phenomenon.

Let us then examine the greatness of the effect, and compare it with the circumstances of the world at that period, and with the apparent impotence of the instruments by which it was produced, and, I doubt not, this conviction will meet us with almost irresistible force.

We learn from the history of the acts of the apostles, which contains, however, but a very brief and partial narration of their transactions, and from various intimations either more direct or incidental, given in the epistles, especially of Saint Paul, that the gospel had spread, within a very few years after the death of the Saviour, to all the regions of the known world, and in every country had made numerous converts. This representation is confirmed by the Roman wri-

ters when any occasion leads them to mention the numbers of Christians in particular districts of the empire.\* Tacitus, speaking of the cruelties exercised by Nero upon the Christians, under the pretence of their having set fire to the city, says, "at first, those only were apprehended who *confessed* themselves to be of that sect, but, through their means, a *vast multitude* were afterwards discovered." This imperial villany took place about the thirtieth year of the crucifixion; in which short period the gospel had extended from the extremities to the heart of the Roman empire, and a *vast multitude* of its disciples were already found in the capital.—About forty years posterior to this event, Pliny, writing to the emperor Trajan for instructions in what manner to treat the Christians, who had, in time past, been mercilessly dragged before the tribunals, and cruelly punished, represents to him that so prevalent had Christianity become in his province, which consisted of Pontus and Bithynia in the Lesser Asia, that the *superstition*, as he calls it, had seized not only the cities, but the smaller towns, and the open country. The temples, he adds, were for a time, almost deserted, the sacred solemnities intermitted, and victims had nearly ceased

\* It is true that the early Roman writers do not make frequent or very particular mention of the affairs of the christians. For christianity springing up in Judea, it was natural for foreigners to regard them as a sect of the Jews, on which account their history, in its origin, would be little understood, and attract small attention at Rome. But wherever their external circumstances are noticed by Roman authors, they are found to correspond with the accounts given of them in christian records.

being purchased.\* Justin Martyr, who wrote only a few years after Pliny, declares, “there is not a nation either of Greek, or Barbarian, or any other name, even of those who wander in tribes and live in tents, among whom prayers and thanksgivings are not offered to the Father and Creator of the universe in the name of the crucified Jesus.” And Tertullian, who flourished half a century later, after appealing to the rulers of the Roman empire for the diffusion of the christian religion at that epoch throughout its immense extent, enumerates many nations beyond its limits, as the Moors, the Getulians, the Sarmatians, the Dacians, the Germans, and the Scythians, who had become converts to the truth. “And, saith he, although we are so great a multitude that, in almost every city, we form the majority of the inhabitants, we pass our time modestly and in silence.” To these nations St. Jerom adds the Indians, the Persians, the Goths and the Egyptians. But, not to multiply quotations, it is well known that, in less than three centuries, the whole Roman world had become christian.

Having, in this cursory manner, presented to your view the wide and rapid extension of the christian doctrine in the first age, let us, in the next place, compare it with the feeble instruments employed in this great work, and with the difficulties which they had to encounter, and, I persuade myself,

\* C. Plin. Traj. imp. lib. 10. epist. 97.

it will appear to you to be an effect altogether out of the ordinary laws, and beyond the ordinary powers of human nature.

Our blessed Saviour, in order more clearly to demonstrate his own immediate agency, and almighty power, in the spiritual conquests achieved by the doctrines of the cross, as well as to manifest his infinite grace in proclaiming the glad tidings of salvation to the poor, chose for the instruments of so great a work twelve humble fishermen. Circumscribed by their occupation in the sphere of their ideas, little acquainted with human nature, ignorant of the arts and manners of cultivated society, and destitute of the learning and talents necessary to command the attention and respect of mankind, in an age so polished and enlightened as that in which they lived, they seemed the most incompetent of all men to effect such an extraordinary revolution in the whole moral state of the world. Exposed to contempt on account of their original employment, this was not a little increased by the hatred in which their country was held. For the Jews were regarded with extreme aversion by the rest of mankind, chiefly for the abhorrence which they manifested of the customs, religions, and gods of all other nations. And of all parts of Judea, the district of Galilee from which they sprung, and the town of Nazareth esteemed the native place of their Master, were viewed with the greatest disdain. A Galilean and a Nazarene were names of reproach even at Jerusalem. Yet,



with such feeble instruments, and in so short a period of time, did the ascended Saviour, just after he had exhibited before the view of mankind the most discouraging proofs of his own assumed weakness in the death to which he submitted, subdue the world to the obedience of the gospel, overturn the altars and the temples of paganism, banish from their shrines the idols with their priests, change the moral and religious systems of the universe ; in one word, overthrow, and utterly eradicate from the hearts of men, whatever the revolution of ages had rendered most venerable and sacred in their esteem ; whatever had been most firmly incorporated with their interests and their pleasures, or most deeply entrenched among their prejudices. This astonishing revolution, which not all the wisdom of their sages, combined with all the power of their princes, could have effected, was the work of a few Galilean fishermen, aided only by one man of eloquence and cultivated talents. And how was it effected ? By the most improbable of all means : preaching the miraculous history of a crucified man, together with the doctrines of repentance and self-denial so revolting to the corrupted tastes of human nature. May I not, then confidently demand if the rapid extension of the religion of Christ under the agency of such instruments, by the preaching of such doctrines, through countries so various and distant, and so opposite in manners, in language, in political interests, in religious customs and ideas, and in all those distinctive peculiarities which divide and alienate nations from one another,

does not contain, in the greatness and the extraordinary nature of the effect, a demonstration of the reality of the miracles by which it was accomplished? Could obscure and despised strangers have carried the triumphs of the humble cross to the ends of the earth, and fixed the hopes of the world on a dying Saviour, unless they had borne in their hands the credentials of Heaven, and displayed to the senses, and the inmost convictions of mankind, the seal of their heavenly mission in the constant operations of a divine and omnipotent power attending their ministry? Their success could not have flowed from their powers of persuasion, nor the force of their reasonings; for they were not themselves masters of eloquence or of science. But if they had been instructed in all the wisdom of the schools, the sages of the pagan world had long since found that the mass of mankind are incapable of entering into the speculations of philosophy. By philosophic reasoning they had never been able to do any thing effectual for the reformation of the world. The apostles simply propounded the moral maxims, and divine dogmas of their great Teacher, confirming them by the supernatural evidence of the works which he enabled them to perform. Thus their doctrines rested on the same proofs with those principles of natural religion, which the Creator has inscribed with his own hand, and impressed by his own power on the face of nature, I mean the characters which it bears of his omnipotence. No other even plausible account can be given of a phenomenon unpar-

alleled in the annals of the world. For, however reluctant reason may be to admit miracles, no miracle was ever so great as such a revolution would be, effected by twelve illiterate fishermen, without the immediate co-operation and aids of the Holy Spirit.

If we consider the difficulties and the apparently insurmountable obstacles which opposed the success of the apostles, they will furnish strong additional proofs that these humble ministers of the Redeemer must have been endued with miraculous powers.

I will not repeat here those impediments which naturally arose out of the obscurity of their own station; the hatred or contempt with which their nation was viewed; and their utter destitution of all those talents of learning and eloquence which are calculated to command the respect and admiration of the world. Under all these disadvantages, which were more than sufficient to ruin the success of men who were not inspired from Heaven, without patronage, without friends, without respect for their personal attributes, or influence from the character of their nation, were they obliged to pass with the gospel in their hands into the remotest countries, among unknown people, ever prone to receive strangers with jealousy, or to look down upon them with contemptuous disdain. In this case, their contempt of these poor and foreign fishermen would be very greatly increased by their bringing to them what, to their apprehension, would be only

a miraculous story of a crucified man. And their indignation would be raised to the highest pitch, when they found themselves required, at the recital of such a story, to abandon their religion and their gods, all the principles of their education and their habits of living; and whatever the usage of their ancestors, for so many ages, had rendered sacred to them, and incorporated with their domestic manners, their religious institutions, and their national customs.

What nation ever willingly changes its gods? However contemptible the idols of paganism appear to us, the vulgar mind which seldom reasons, but usually takes all its impressions from education, or from its natural sympathy with public opinion, then regarded them with that reverence, and embraced them with that full belief with which we always see the ignorant receive the traditionary fables of their country. Perhaps the objects of superstition, making their impression in the tenderest period of life, and being therefore, more perfectly mingled with the earliest habits of feeling, take a deeper hold upon the minds of the common mass of mankind, than the principles of a more pure and rational piety. But if the prejudices of the populace presented almost insuperable difficulties to the apostles, the interest of the rulers presented others, perhaps, still more formidable. The religion of all those nations was incorporated with the policy of the state. Their magistrates were their priests. Its ceremonies were blended with all the offices of the civil go-

vernment. So that the gospel was obliged to combat, at the same time, with the blind superstition and furious bigotry of the multitude, with the wealth and power of the temples, and with the pride and jealousy of tyrannical rulers armed with the sword, who were afraid of nothing so much as of innovation. We may safely appeal to the common sense of mankind if obstacles like these must not have been utterly insuperable to such men as the apostles, going out to the world solely in their own powers of reasoning and persuasion, without the supernatural aid and the accompanying testimony of the Holy Spirit of Truth.

The natural difficulties of this great undertaking were almost incalculably increased by the fate of their Master, whose miraculous history, whose life, death, and resurrection they were commanded to publish, and in whose name they were commissioned to preach. Crucifixion was the most ignominious punishment among the Romans, reserved only for the most detested criminals. Nothing could shock the ideas of such a people more than to elevate to the rank of a divinity a *crucified man*, the native of a remote, dependent, and despised province, who had suffered like a malefactor and slave for alleged crimes against the dominant state. This circumstance alone was sufficient, according to the common apprehensions of the world, to blast entirely their hopes of success. Of the magnitude of this difficulty we may frame some conception by putting an analogous case.

Suppose that a man of the lowest extraction, and the obscurest country of Europe, had, for imputed treasons, been suspended on a gibbet, or hung in chains: and that his accomplices, ignorant men, without talents, and without character, should presume to defy the government by declaring that he was risen from the dead, and that they were come in his name, and in contradiction to the civil authority, to overturn all the religious institutions, and all the objects of worship and veneration in the christian world, and such is the light in which the disciples must have appeared to those proud nations, and that polished age, with what reception would they now meet?

Combining together then, all these reflections, and computing the result, may I not confidently demand of all reasonable and candid men, who will fairly estimate the magnitude and difficulty of the work of converting a world in the name of a crucified man, who will consider the weakness, and unpromising character of the instruments by which it was effected, and unite with both the astonishing rapidity of their success, if the apostles must not have been aided by a power infinitely superior to their own? If they must not have carried to the hearts and senses of their hearers the strongest conviction of the truth of the miracles of Jesus Christ? and if they must not have supported the wonderful history of their Master by miracles which they were themselves enabled to perform: miracles of no doubtful aspect, but obvi-

ous and palpable, capable of standing the most rigorous scrutiny of envy, of hatred, of interest, of every wounded prejudice, and of all the ingenuity which a learned and enlightened age could bring to the investigation. Nothing less can account for the vast and surprising effect which the simplicity of the christian doctrine, and of the primitive ministers of christianity, has been seen to produce. As miracles appear to be the only power which could have given such a rapid extension to the religion of Christ, in that enlightened and inquisitive period, throughout such various, proud, and hostile nations; so the rapidity of its extension in the face of infinite difficulties, furnishes one of the most irresistible evidences of the reality of the miracles.

In order to account for the rapid propagation of the christian religion without having recourse to the assistance of miracles, some writers have supposed that the superior reasonableness of the moral system of the gospel above that of any of the popular institutions of paganism facilitated the success of the apostles. For, with all their objections against the mysteries of christianity, they are obliged to acknowledge the excellence of its moral code. On the other hand, I have no hesitancy in pronouncing that merely the reasonableness of a religion, or of any moral system, never procured it, in the first instance, an easy and general reception among the mass of mankind. If it has not been incorporated by education with their earliest habits of thinking, it must claim their

obedience and belief on some higher authority than merely the conclusions of their own reason, in which they can repose little confidence. Of this all the ancient legislators and reformers of nations were so deeply convinced, that, where they had not visible and real miracles on which to establish the public religion, or to found those civil institutions by which they attempted to reduce a barbarous people to order, they were obliged to have recourse to a pretended intercourse with heaven. If reason alone were a competent instructor of the people, why had not the genuine principles of natural religion a more extensive diffusion among the populace of Greece? Why did the philosophers pronounce the people incapable of reasoning? And why were not the doctrines of their schools able to extirpate idolatry, or even to throw a plausible and decent veil over its absurdities and indecencies? If christianity prevailed in the first age by the force of its own reasonableness, why do we not see the same effects produced by it since miracles have ceased? Does it not still possess the same superiority over the dismal idolatry of Greenland, and the indecent rites of India, which it did over the gay and licentious superstitions of Greece and Rome?

Other writers have thought that they have found a reason of this extraordinary phenomenon in the general discredit into which the objects, and the rites of the pagan worship had fallen in that age. Their auguries, their oracles, their shameful and immoral deities, it is said, were despised by their men



of learning, and had begun to be a subject of ridicule to the common people ; and christianity only came in to occupy the room which they had left vacant. A less happy conjecture, perhaps, could hardly have been framed. Incredulity, surely, is not a favourable soil for the reception and growth of a new religion. On the contrary, when men, in the progress of a sceptical philosophy, and of the dissolution of the public morals, come to disbelieve, and hold in contempt the religion in which they have been educated, they are then prone to confound all religions, and, along with their country's gods, to reject, even without examination, every new doctrine which pretends to be derived from heaven.

There are authors who think they have made a shrewd observation on human nature, and the liberal genius of ancient manners, were they ascribe the easy introduction of christianity into the Roman empire, to what has been, quaintly enough, called the *sociable spirit* of paganism.

The Greeks and Romans believing in the existence of local deities who presided over particular districts and regions of the earth, easily granted to foreigners the privilege of introducing their country gods into Athens and Rome, and performing towards them their country's rites, because it was imagined they would not be pleased with any other. It was never intended that these stranger gods should supplant the native deities of Greece and Italy. It was never

conceived that the one could interfere with the other. This, however, could not be the ground of any favour shown to christianity. Its worship was exclusive. It could make no compromise with idolatry. The doctrine of Christ, wherever it came, soon overthrew all the altars and temples of paganism, and expelled from their shrines all the shameful objects of an impure and monstrous worship. This, which is the natural genius, and the necessary tendency of the gospel, far from opening the way for its reception in those idolatrous nations, would at once arm against it all the power of the magistrates, all the interest of the priests, and all the fury of a bigoted and deluded people.

The causes, therefore, which have been assembled with so much pains in order to account, on natural principles, for the superior success of the apostles and first ministers of christianity above its modern missionaries, are evidently not sufficient to support the conclusions which have been attempted to be built upon them. The true cause of their astonishing success is, that, while the missionaries can appeal only to the testimony of history, and the reasonableness and excellence of the doctrines which they preach, the apostles could appeal also to their own miracles, to the heavenly powers with which they were invested, and which spoke so strongly to the senses of mankind. These are the weapons with which the disciples of the Saviour subdued the earth to the dominion of the faith. Although destitute of the advantages of science, and

of that high and commanding eloquence which attracts the admiration of the world. Although inferior in these respects to the nations among whom they travelled preaching the gospel; and although they derived no influence from the splendour or power of their country, yet every thing yielded before them. How far superior to them in every human advantage are the present missionaries of our holy religion. Do they not possess incomparably higher degrees of science than the people to whom they are sent? And do they not go under the patronage of nations regarded in those distant countries with the greatest veneration for their vast ascendancy over the rest of mankind in arts, and in arms? But they are comparatively unsuccessful, because they do not carry with them, like the apostles, the ensigns of heaven, that is, *the demonstration of the Spirit in his miraculous power.\**

Experience then, and reason, both concur to demonstrate that, without the co-operation of miracles, the christian doctrine could not have made such rapid and extensive progress, as we have seen it do, through nations so various, so distant, and so opposite in their characters: and this astonishing progress, as has been before asserted, affords a strong confirmation of the reality of the miracles on which Christ founded his claim to be acknowledged as the Son of God, and the

\* 1 Cor. ii. 4, 5. For my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

apostles to be received as messengers from heaven. *Believe me*, saith the Saviour, *for the works' sake*. Many of the most wise and judicious men esteem the argument drawn from this fact absolutely decisive of the question concerning the truth of christianity ; and the most incredulous must confess that it creates a very powerful presumption in favour of the gospel history.

The writers, who suppose that the progress of christianity in the first age may be accounted for from natural causes alone, affect to compare it with the rapid extension of the Mahometan imposture. But if we enter into a fair and candid comparison of the two cases, the apparent parallelism between them will be found no longer to exist. We have already seen the mild and pacific means by which christianity extended her gentle sway over the world. The establishment of Mahometanism was effected entirely by the power of the sword ; and its rapid extension and its furious course is no more surprising than the conquests of Zenghis, or of Timur, or than any of those sudden and violent revolutions which have so often changed the face of Asia, in different ages. The progress of christianity has no parallel in universal history ; that of the koran has, unfortunately, too many examples. For it is as easy to carry a new religion among an ignorant people on the point of the sword, as a new code of civil and political legislation.

THE PRETENCE OF CREDULITY ALLEGED AGAINST THOSE  
 WHO EMBRACED THE GOSPEL. EMBRACED BY  
 THE LEARNED AS WELL AS THE VULGAR.  
 IMPOSTORS AMONG THE HEATHEN.

It is often alleged by those who are unfriendly to the christian revelation, that the credulity of mankind, and their love of the marvellous, is sufficient to account for the progress of the gospel, and the general belief of its miracles. "The weakness of illiterate followers, they say, would greedily swallow the pretended wonders of their Master. They could easily raise the wonder-loving spirit of their hearers, who would be ready, without inquiry, either to admit their own pretences to a miraculous power, or to believe the fabled miracles of Christ." By a few such general sneers they save themselves the trouble of examining the evidences of the christian revelation, and cast off from their consciences the irksome authority of the christian law.

It is true the ignorant in all countries are credulous; and, in consequence of this tendency of mind, they abound in narrations of silly wonders. But is there, therefore, nothing really wonderful in the providence of God over the world, or in the dispensation of his mercy to mankind? Certainly, every candid reader will confess that the miracles of the gospel ought not to be compared with those ridiculous and local prodigies recited in every district of every country by

the vulgar ; and which are evidently the effect of superstitious weakness, or an enthusiastic fervour of mind. The writings of the evangelists and apostles exhibit no marks of that imbecility in their mental powers which would render them liable to be easily imposed upon by lying wonders, and false appearances. If we do not admit that they were enlightened by the Spirit of God, in which case no deception could be suspected, the excellence of their moral system, the sublimity of their theological doctrines, so superior to the philosophy of their age, and the grandeur of the views which they have opened on the universe, so far above whatever had been before conceived by the human mind in any age, demonstrate that they must have been men of the soundest judgments, and the strongest intellectual faculties, on which no fraud could have been practised, no attempted imposition could have succeeded.

That they were not parties to any scheme of imposture, their wisdom, their piety, their self-denials, their arduous labours, their continual sufferings, and, finally, their painful, various, and voluntary deaths in the cause of Christ, declare with a conviction which, I think, must be irresistible to a mind that considers the subject with fairness and impartiality.

I observe, in the next place, that their writings exhibit as few characters of enthusiasm as of weakness. Their histor-

ical narrations are given with a dignified simplicity, their moral instructions, in a clear and judicious train of reasoning enforced with temperate warmth. We find in them none of those wild fervours, and ridiculous extravagancies which seem inseparable from the spirit of enthusiasm. They exhibit all the proofs, which writing and conduct can manifest, of the most undesigning sincerity ; and speak of the most astonishing displays of divine power in the miracles of their Master, and their own, in a strain of calm and temperate narration which surprises us not less than the actions themselves. They speak like men who were not only *witnesses* of the miracles of Jesus, but were *conscious* of the same powers in themselves, and were *familiar with the works of omnipotence*. Neither enthusiasm, then, which deceives itself, nor imposture, which endeavours to deceive others, nor a weak facility of believing without evidence, can justly be imputed to the apostles. Can we then find a more satisfactory reason of the universal belief of the miracles of the gospel in the credulity of the *world* ?

The populace are prone to listen with a certain idle curiosity, and to circulate with eagerness among themselves marvellous tales when they produce no other effect than agitating, and giving play to their natural love of wonder. But, when they are to affect any great interest ; when the belief of them is conjoined with the sacrifice of their passions, their pleasures, their national customs, their honour,

or their fortune, the case is entirely reversed ; then they are received with distrust, and scrutinized with rigour. If, in dark and ignorant ages, the people are disposed to listen to fables which seem to spring out of the genius of their religion, and are intended only to strengthen their favourite superstition, they would not surely lend the same easy faith to prodigies, real or pretended, which should be alleged only to overturn whatever was held most sacred among them. Besides, wherever the gospel came, the native superstitions of the people had pre-occupied their minds. All their credulity was already enlisted in opposition to the doctrine, the history, and the miracles of Christ. And in proportion to their ignorance, was the violence with which they were attached to silly and incongruous fables, which were more adapted to the grossness of their minds than the pure and spiritual theology and morality of the gospel.

But, whatever declamations men may think proper to make on the credulity of the vulgar, the belief of the christian revelation was not confined to this class of society. It early numbered among its disciples magistrates, senators, orators, and philosophers of the highest distinction for learning and eloquence ; men who examined the claims of the religion with the most painful diligence, and the most accurate scrutiny ; men who reluctantly yielded the haughtiness of office, the vanity of national superiority, the pride of talents and of learning, to the force of truth, and the demonstrations



of a divine power accompanying Christ and his apostles. Not to speak of Joseph of Arimathea, one of the sanhedrim of the Jews, on whose history some obscurity rests, it is certain that Dionysius, a member of the celebrated Areopagus of Athens, and Flavius Clemens, a senator of Rome, suffered martyrdom for Christ in the very first age. Arnobius, an early historian of the church, assures us that men of the finest talents and the greatest learning, orators, grammarians, rhetoricians, lawyers, physicians, philosophers, abandoning their former opinions, and the systems to which they had been attached by education, and the habits of a philosophical life, now reposed their minds only on the truth of the gospel. The writings, and even the names of great numbers of men of letters have not come down to us. A few only, out of multitudes, who, we are assured, were no way inferior to them, and not inferior to the wisest men of the period in which they lived, have survived to our age.\* And if we were to select a philosopher of that time, most distinguished for the splendour of his talents, the acuteness of his genius, and the vast extent of his erudition, it would be Origen, with

\* It will be sufficient to name the two Dionysii, one of Athens, the other of Alexandria, Quadratus, Aristides, Athenagoras, Clemens, Anatolius, without mentioning the crowd of the fathers who, redeemed from paganism and the errors of the heathen philosophy, embraced the doctrine of Christ with zeal, and the repose and hope of their souls. Having the strongest motives to examine into the foundations of that new and divine philosophy, their nearness to the events recorded in the sacred history afforded them the amplest means of ascertaining their truth.

whom none of the learned men of his time deserves to be named as a rival.

Is it to be presumed, then, that men of their character, and attainments in science, enjoying, as they did, the means of the most minute and accurate inquiry, would receive on slight evidence, or, indeed, would embrace, without the most rigorous examination, a new religion which overturned, and treated as folly all their ancient principles of philosophy? Is there a shadow of probability that such men would enlist themselves as disciples, and champions of this religion, without the most satisfactory evidence of the divine authority, on which it rested, and the deepest conviction of its infinite importance to mankind, when its first effect was to humble the pride of human science, on which they had promised themselves to build their glory; when instead of being the proud teachers of a proud philosophy, it turned them back to be the self-denied pupils of unlearned Jews, and a crucified Saviour; and above all, when it exposed them to such extreme sufferings as no partial conviction, no doubtful faith, and no hasty and immature opinions, could ever have enabled them to endure? Not credulity, surely, but conviction established upon the most solid basis could have sustained them under the operation of those severe and fiery tests of their faith to which it was constantly subjected. That I may place this point in as strong a light as possible, let me

quote here a passage from the pious and elegant Addison, in which it is presented to us with equal force of thought and beauty of expression : “ I cannot help regarding as a standing miracle, says he, that amazing, and supernatural courage, or patience, shown by innumerable multitudes of martyrs in those slow and painful torments that were inflicted on them. I cannot conceive a man placed in the burning chair at Lyons, amid the insults and mockeries of a crowded amphitheatre, and still keeping his seat ; or stretched upon a grate of iron over coals of fire, and breathing out his soul among the exquisite sufferings of such a tedious execution, rather than renounce his religion, or blaspheme his Saviour. Such trials seem to me above the strength of human nature, and able to overbear duty, reason, faith, conviction, nay, and the most absolute certainty of a future state. Humanity, unassisted in an extraordinary manner, must have shaken off the present pressure, and delivered itself out of such a dreadful distress by any means which could have been suggested to it. We can easily imagine that many persons, in so good a cause might have laid down their lives at the gibbet, the stake, or the block : but, to expire leisurely among the most exquisite tortures, when they might come out of them even by a mental reservation, or a hypocrisy which was not without the possibility of being followed by repentance and forgiveness, has something in it so far beyond the force and natural strength of mortals, that one cannot but

think there was some miraculous power to support the sufferer." Although we should not think with Mr. Addison, that any divine aid which might be strictly called *miraculous*, was communicated to these pious sufferers, yet must we admit that nothing short of the clearest and strongest conviction of the truth of the gospel and its miracles ; nothing but the firmest persuasion that Christ alone had *the words of eternal life*, could have induced them to expose themselves to such dangers, or supported them in enduring such excruciating torments. Is it possible that philosophic men, whatever may be supposed of the vulgar class of martyrs, could have voluntarily gone to death surrounded with so many terrors, if their minds had not been encouraged, animated, and supported by the most complete conviction, founded on the strongest and most rational evidence, that the doctrines which they had embraced, and the miracles which they beheld, were *the wisdom of God, and the power of God* ? The least doubtfulness, the smallest apprehension that they had not thoroughly examined the proofs of that holy religion, to which they were about to offer up their lives amidst such a complication of horrors, must have shaken the constancy of their souls. But, when we see that no dangers can move them, and that, in the midst of their sufferings, they preserve their serenity and firmness unaltered, except when it rises to exultation and triumph, such matchless and divine heroism can, surely, never be the result of a weak credulity. In

such tremendous conflicts, integrity and truth alone can sustain the heart.

One important consideration in the change of those learned men, who embraced christianity in the primitive age, deserves to be particularly remarked: they declare that it was not merely the purity and perfection of the christian faith, which originally produced their conversion from paganism and philosophy, but the miracles which they saw performed by the apostles and apostolic men, which carried with them unequivocal demonstrations of a divine power attending their doctrine, and without which they would probably never have turned their minds to an examination of its excellence.

Some writers have unaccountably pretended that the testimony of the christian fathers to the miracles of the gospel ought not to be regarded as possessing any weight in the scale of evidence by which we estimate its truth, because it is the testimony of friends in favour of their own system. But what made them christians? What created their attachment to the christian doctrine? Was it not the miracles they beheld? They were before ignorant of its true nature; they were hostile to its spirit, to the name of its Author, and to his nation. But they sacrificed their prejudices, but they became disciples of a religion they had hated and despised, and for the profession of it they exposed themselves to the

most terrible deaths. Their conversion, then, is precisely that which gives the greatest force to their testimony.

To support the objection against the reality of miracles, which is founded on the credulity of mankind, we are referred to various impostures which, at different periods, have obtained a temporary credit and success in the world. On a few of those which have been most confidently opposed to the *mighty works* performed by our Saviour and his apostles, I shall, after offering to your consideration two preliminary remarks, make several observations with the view of discriminating them from the real operations of a divine power. The first remark which I offer is, that, if pretences to a peculiar intercourse with Heaven have been attempted to be maintained by the additional pretence to miraculous powers, it is, at least, a proof of the general persuasion of mankind, that miracles form the proper evidence of a divine mission. If, therefore, a real messenger from Heaven should ever appear in the world, it is a most natural and reasonable expectation that he should be invested with an extraordinary control over the common operations of nature as the seal of his prophetic character. But because there have been religious impostors, are there, therefore, no true prophets? Because there are empirics in every liberal profession, are there no certain principles of science? This can be the conclusion only of ignorance or prejudice. Empiricism in

religion, or in art, should not make us deny the existence of truth in both, but only render us more careful and scrupulous in examining the pretensions of those who come to us as instructors in either.

I remark, in the next place, that, between the miracles of the holy scriptures, and those mysterious incantations, and ambiguous wonders, performed by the priests, and magicians of paganism, which certain writers have affected to bring into competition with them, there are strong and marked distinctions which ought to be particularly observed, and which are sufficient to demonstrate the one to be from Heaven, the other to be only the spurious growth of human artifice and corruption.

These pretended prodigies were commonly exhibited in some sequestered place where the operators had the opportunity of preparing whatever means of deception were necessary for imposing on the senses. Often they were exhibited in the recesses of their temples in the midst of glooms rendered awful by superstition, and of fearful images presented to an imagination already almost crazed by terror, which deprived the miserable subject of their art of all power of judging rationally of the scenes before him. Nothing was done openly and in public, and exposed to the fair and dispassionate examination of the senses of all men. Their pro-

digies were works of darkness, secluded from the observation of the world, performed only on rare occasions, and after much artful preparation.\* The miracles of our blessed Saviour, on the other hand, were the ordinary and familiar actions of his life. Nothing, as he says himself, was *done in secret*. But all his wonderful works were performed on such subjects as no slight of hand, no apparatus for deceiving the senses could reach: such as healing the sick, opening the eyes of the blind, restoring the paralytic to their natural powers, assuaging the winds and the waves, and raising the dead. Their wonders were employed to amuse the popular credulity, and to confirm among the ignorant an old superstition by the strange narrations which the dupes of the imposture afterwards disseminated among the people. They were followed by no other consequence. But the works of Jesus Christ, by powerfully seizing on the human mind, have been followed by the most important revolution which has ever taken place in the moral world.

#### OF SUPPOSITITIOUS SUPERNATURAL POWERS.

The pretended powers which, in various countries, have been exhibited by magicians, and sorcerers, and other men

\* This was the case in several places in Greece, but particularly in the temple and cave of Trophonius. An interesting account of some of the scenes of imposture exhibited in that celebrated cavern of superstition will be found in the travels of Anacharsis the younger through Greece, by the Abbè Barthelemy, Chap. 34th.



of that class, have, by the enemies of the christian revelation, been set in opposition to the miracles of our Saviour, as being entitled to equal authority. By this artifice, placing imposture and truth on the same ground, they endeavour to weaken, and, at length, to destroy the influence of the latter over the human mind. The scriptures, they say, place them on an equal footing, by ascribing the works of both to supernatural causes; or making both equally the effects of some secret art. If they are derived from supernatural influence, by what criterion, let me ask, shall we distinguish the demoniacal from the divine? A just subject of regret it is, that many christian writers have given too much countenance to this species of objection, by attributing to demons, and malignant spirits, occasionally, certain miraculous powers, and the prescient faculty of predicting future events. In order to remove the foundation of this objection in which unbelievers have triumphed, I would lay it down as a maxim necessary, to the support of true religion, that miracles are exclusively reserved to be the proofs of divine revelation, and can never be performed by any but the best of beings, and for the most wise, and beneficent ends. The ascription of supernatural powers over the established order of the universe, to infernal or demoniacal agents is equally contrary to reason, to experience, and to the sacred scriptures, which last, however, have been unhappily misinterpreted to support this dangerous error.

This subject I have already treated in another work\* to which I beg leave to refer the reader who may think the question worthy their further investigation. The decision of our Saviour upon it appears to me definitive when he thus appeals to the evidence of his own divine mission.—*The works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me. If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not.*

The next source of the *direct* evidence for our holy religion is that derived from the fulfilment of prophecy. But, as I have omitted a discussion concerning demoniacal powers, and the false miracles supposed to be drawn from that principle, that I might avoid swelling this volume to too large a size, I shall, for the same reason, omitting the extensive details which would naturally arise out of the accomplishment of all the predictions of the sacred scriptures, confine myself only to two subjects, *the destruction of the Jewish nation*,—and *the appearance and character of the Messiah*, the predictions concerning which are so astonishing, and their accomplishment so particular and complete, that they may reasonably be esteemed in the room of all for producing entire conviction in the inquisitive, candid, and pious mind.

\* Lectures on the evidences of religion to the Senior Class in the College of New-Jersey.

Suffer me, then, to direct the attention of the reader, in the first place, to that most wonderful prediction concerning the fate and destinies of the nation of Israel, uttered by Moses, their divine legislator, near the close of his life.

THE PROPHECY OF MOSES CONCERNING THE FINAL DESTRUCTION OF THE JEWISH NATION.

At that period when the devout and pious mind often becomes prophetic, the illapse of the divine Spirit on him appears to have been unusually clear and strong. After proposing to this people the highest motives to duty, and multiplying to them the most gracious promises of prosperity if they should continue obedient to the laws which God had given them by him, he carries his view far forward into future ages, and, foreseeing the general defection of the nation from the true spirit of their religion, he denounces the most fearful judgments of heaven upon their disobedience and impiety. And then, tracing their destinies to the end of time, he delineates them with such clearness and circumstantial exactness, that, if we may judge of the future by the past for more than three thousand years, he seems to present a history rather than a prophecy. So terrible are these denunciations that nothing but the strongest sense of duty, and the most submissive obedience to the command of God, could have extorted them from the legislator, and father of his people : and so peculiar are these destinies that nothing but that

infinite prescience, which embraces all things, from the beginning to the end, under one view, could have declared them so many ages before they existed.

The prophecy to which I refer is contained in the twenty-eighth and thirtieth chapters of the book of Deuteronomy. I shall recite only such portions of it as are necessary to the object of the present lecture, which is to point out the final extinction of the civil government, and national existence of the Jews; the miseries which accompanied their political death; and their consequent, and continued dispersion among all the nations of the world. “The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from afar, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle that flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand; a nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor show favour to the young.\* And he shall besiege thee in all thy gates, until thy high and fenced walls come down wherein thou trustedst, throughout all thy land. And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons, and of thy daughters in the siege, and in the straitness wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee; so that the man who is tender among you, and very delicate, his eye shall be evil toward his brother, and toward the wife of his bosom, and toward the remnant of the children that he shall leave; so that he shall not give to any of

\* &c. Ch. 23. v. 52.

them of the flesh of his children which he shall eat ; because he shall have nothing left him in the siege, and in the straitness wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee in all thy gates. The tender and delicate woman among you, who would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness, her eye shall be evil toward the husband of her bosom, and toward her son, and toward her daughter, and toward her young infant, even toward her children which she shall bear : for she shall eat them for want of all things, secretly, in the siege and straitness wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee in all thy gates.\* And it shall come to pass that ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it. And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people from one end of the earth, even to the other. And among these nations shalt thou find no ease ; neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest.† And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing, and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations whither the Lord thy God hath driven thee, and shalt return unto the Lord thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul ; that then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have

\* Ch. 28. v. 63. &c.

† Ch. 30. v. 1—3.

compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee.”

Every thing in this prophecy is astonishing; and if we seriously and attentively consider it in all its parts, it carries with it irrefragable evidence of its having been dictated by the omniscient Spirit of God. The minuteness and accuracy of the detail is hardly exceeded by the history of the events. The events themselves are so singular and unexampled, that a pretended prophet, vending only probable conjectures, or ambiguous oracles, for prophecy, never would have conceived, or ventured to utter them. And if he had been so bold, there are infinite chances against one that words thrown out in random guesses should never coincide with the current of future history. That a nation, in a course of time, should degenerate from her primitive manners, and, at length, be subjugated by some powerful conqueror, is an event so much in the order of nature, that it requires no great portion of political sagacity to predict it in general terms. But who could foresee at so great a distance, that the Jews would perish precisely in such a manner; that their sieges would be so dreadful; that the remnant, who should escape the famine and the sword, should be dispersed through all nations, where, renewing their numbers, they should still continue, a distinct people, and capable, on their repentance, of being again restored to a national

and independent state in their own land? This is surely the foresight of inspiration.

The people of Israel were under a peculiar providence. While they continued obedient to the law of God given them by Moses, they enjoyed distinguished temporal happiness and prosperity. But their departures from the law of their God, their idolatries, and their general defection to immorality and impiety were always punished with marked and severe chastisements. And it was announced to them that, when these temporary inflictions should fail to produce the effectual correction and reformation of their manners, the judgments of heaven should fall upon them with more dreadful severity; that, after suffering all the most grievous calamities of war, the miserable remnants of the sword should be exiled from their desolated country, and scattered as vagabonds over the whole earth, being subjected to every privation and indignity, till the appointed period, for the expiation of their sins, should bring them to repentance, and open the way for their restoration to their own land.

Let us now see how literally these denunciations have been verified; especially, at two great epochas, the Babylonish captivity; and the destruction of Jerusalem, and dispersion of the Jews, under the Roman emperor Vespasian. In the siege which preceded both the one captivity, and the other, this people suffered almost unheard of calamities. As their

privileges had been greater than those of other nations, their iniquities seem to have risen in the same proportion. Having rejected with scorn the warnings of those divine messengers sent to them by God, they appear to have been abandoned by him to an infatuated mind, agitated by the most ferocious passions. Their miseries, instead of humbling their pride, or calming their madness, rendered them only more furious; and their enemies themselves, in the midst of fire and slaughter, sometimes looked on them with commiseration and astonishment as a people marked out for the peculiar vengeance of heaven. And the recital of their sufferings, particularly in the destruction of their city by the Romans,\* which seems to have been chiefly in the view of their prophetic legislator, is perhaps without a parallel in the history of human misery.

*And he shall besiege thee in all thy gates, continues the prophecy, until thy high and fenced walls come down wherein thou trustedst, throughout all thy land.* And it deserves to be remarked of the Jewish nation, more, perhaps, than of any other, that their calamities have been the conse-

\* The description of the conquering nation carries in it a striking application to the Romans. *The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from AFAR, from the END OF THE EARTH, as swift as an eagle that flieth; a nation whose TONGUE thou shalt NOT UNDERSTAND, &c.* The language of Chaldea was not so unintelligible to the Hebrews as that of the Romans; nor was Babylon so distant from Jerusalem as Rome.



quence, not so much of unfortunate conflicts in the open field, as of desperate and disastrous sieges, in which the greater portion of the people, being shut up within their walls, suffered whatever famine and civil discord, inflamed by the most furious and fanatical passions, not less than the sword of the enemy, could inflict upon the most miserable of mankind. The history of the miseries which they suffered in the respective sieges is calculated to inspire us with horror, and perfectly accords with the strong painting of the prophecy. Passing over the destruction of their city, and the captivity of their nation by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, I shall only present you with a brief sketch of their last overthrow, the most fearful scene of their calamities, in the famous siege of Jerusalem by Titus, the son, and lieutenant of Vespasian. The materials of this representation I draw entirely from Josephus, himself a Jew, and cotemporary with the transactions which he relates, who could have no motive to exaggerate the madness, and the atrocious passions of his own countrymen.

In the various towns of Judea besieged and taken by the Romans during this desolating and exterminating war, their furious and exasperated soldiers cut off the whole population without respecting either age or sex. They showed themselves, in the words of Moses, to be *a nation of a fierce countenance*, rendered more ferocious by the fury with which they were opposed, *who regarded not the person of*

*the old, nor shomed favour to the young.* But it was in the siege of Jerusalem itself that the measure of the calamities of the Jews became full. Pressed from without by all the arts of war, and cut off entirely from supplies of provisions, it was difficult to say whether hunger, or the sword destroyed the greater numbers. Their distresses were doubly aggravated by their own internal dissensions. Divided into most violent factions by ambitious or enthusiastic leaders, they often filled the streets of Jerusalem with mutual slaughter. Often they only suspended their own conflicts for a short season to run to their walls to resist the assaults of the common enemy; and returned from repulsing them to butcher one another. It seemed as if heaven had smitten the murderers of the Saviour of the world with a desperate phrenzy, and given them up to the dominion of the most diabolical passions. In the midst of all these horrors, famine presents us with a spectacle still more horrible, when we see them, driven by the rage of hunger, with cannibal appetite, to devour one another, and the living feeding on those who had died of disease, or of wounds. Even mothers, quenching all the sentiments of nature, devoured their own children, and grudging to their husbands, and their other children a share in this dreadful repast, they endeavoured, after having satisfied the present cravings of their own hunger, to conceal the remaining fragments from the voracious rapacity of the rest of the family, reserving them as a precious morsel against another time. With what fearful accuracy has the prediction of Moses been

fulfilled! "And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons, and thy daughters, in the siege, and in the straitness wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee; so that the man who is tender among you and very delicate,\* his eye shall be evil toward his brother, and toward the wife of his bosom, and toward the remnant of the children that he shall leave, so that he shall not give to any of them of the flesh of his children which he shall eat. The tender and delicate woman among you, who would not venture to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness, and tenderness, her eye shall be evil toward the husband of her bosom, and toward her son, and toward her daughter, and toward her young infant, even toward her children that she shall bear; for she shall eat them for want of all things, secretly, in the siege."

One example, out of many of the same kind, let me produce to show the frantic despair with which this devoted people hastened their own destruction. After the storming of Jerusalem, a wretched remnant of the citizens sought refuge in the castle of Massada: but being pressed by the Romans, they, at the instigation of one of their leaders, first murdered their wives and children: they then chose by lot

\* That is, who has been most softly and luxuriously bred, and accustomed to the choicest viands, he shall now be reduced to these wretched and horrible meals. And even of these he shall grudge the smallest share to those who were once most dear to him, when the furious rage of hunger had not perverted all his affections.

ten who should murder all the rest ; after which one of the ten was chosen to murder the other nine ; who, when he had executed this dreadful office, stabbed himself. In this manner perished nine hundred and sixty persons in this single fortress.\* And, in the whole war there were destroyed by the Romans, by famine, and by their own hands, upwards of twelve hundred thousand persons, besides nearly one hundred thousand who were taken prisoners and sold for slaves.† Of these prisoners so little care was taken, that eleven thousand was literally starved to death ; and, of the remainder, the greater portion were sent as slaves to Egypt, agreeably to another part of the same prophecy : “ And the Lord shall bring thee into Egypt with ships, and there ye shall be sold to your enemies for bond men, and bond women ; and no man shall buy you.”‡ In such numbers shall you be brought to the market, that purchasers, at length, will no longer be found.

\* Jos. de. bell. Jud. lib. 7. cap. 8, 9.

† Accurately, according to Josephus, the dead were 1,240,490 ; and the prisoners 99,200.

‡ Ch. 23. v. 63. *The Lord shall bring thee into Egypt with ships.* The people of Israel came out of Egypt by the isthmus of Suez, and the desert. And by that route they usually travelled and traded to that country. But it was more convenient for the Romans to put their numerous slaves on board the ships belonging to their fleet, or on board Phœnician merchant vessels, to transport them into Egypt. As this was a mode of communication not practised in the time of Moses, and commerce was in a great measure interdicted to the Israelites by their institutions, this circumstance renders this part of the prophecy the more surprising, and worthy our attention: *that they should come into Egypt in ships.*

So conformable was this disastrous termination of the Jewish state, and destruction of the holy city, to the predictions both of Moses, and of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: *For, then, there shall be great tribulation*, saith Christ, “such as was not from the beginning of the world to this time, no nor ever shall be; and except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved.”\*

Let us pursue the prophecy farther: “And it shall come to pass that ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it. And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from one end of the earth even to the other. And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest. Here is a new series of wonders. That a nation should be conquered, that it should be reduced to subjection, that it should be wholly exterminated by some barbarous conqueror, would not be so extraordinary; because the history of the world affords numerous examples of similar events. But, that a whole people should be *plucked from off their land*, should be dispersed in broken fragments through all the nations of the world, and yet neither be blended with those nations, nor become extinct, is a catastrophe so singular, a state so unprecedented, that a prophet who was not uttering a pre-

\* Mat. xxiv. 21, 22. See the prediction of our Saviour beautifully illustrated by Bishop Porteus in his lecture upon this chapter.

diction dictated by the divine Spirit, an historian who should have been only hazarding a conjecture or a random oracle, never would have thought of one which no fact in history ever could have suggested, which no experience of the revolutions of nations ever could have warranted. If, in the infinite combinations of the operations of providence, an oracle, in a long course of time, might accidentally hit upon one corresponding event, is it within the compass of possibility that either random conjecture, or the most sagacious human foresight, should be able to foretel, and accurately to point out, such a united series of facts, continued down through such a long succession of ages? The man, who can receive this as either probable or possible, must have a great facility of believing indeed. Do we not, then, see the Jewish nation *plucked from off their own land*? Do we not see them *scattered among all people from one end of the earth even unto the other*? And is it not true that, *among all these nations they find no ease; neither is there rest for the sole of their foot*? Perpetually they have been persecuted, insulted, pillaged, and refused all the common privileges of citizenship. In every country we have seen them alternately banished and recalled; and recalled only to be pillaged, or banished again. The whole history of that afflicted people since their dispersion confirms the words of their great prophet: that they should *become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword among all nations*.\* *That their*

\* Deut xxviii. 37.

*plagues should be wonderful, even great plagues and of long continuance.\**

A circumstance not a little singular, which has contributed more than all others both to their dispersion, and to the injuries which they have suffered, is that, in almost all countries, they have been denied the privilege of holding landed property. This has induced a necessity, contrary to the original habits of the nation, to turn their attention to commerce, and to the discount, and exchange of money in different forms. Hence has resulted the further necessity of distributing them as traders, and brokers or bankers, into various nations. Their wealth, accumulated by these means, excited both the envy of the people, and the avarice of their rulers, and pointed them out as an easy prey to violent and arbitrary princes, whenever the public coffers were empty. The extreme uncertainty of their state tempted them to demand usurious interest in their contracts for money lending. Hence the public hatred, in every country was inflamed against them, and justified, in the public esteem, the rapacity and violence of the princes who oppressed them. A thousand wicked and malicious tales were fabricated against them. A thousand crimes were imputed to them; and they were often given up to the fanatical rage of the populace. Thus has their character been in a great measure formed by their state, and their persecutions have often sprung

\* Deut. v. 59.

out of their character. This, together with the barbarous superstitions and the barbarous forms of civil government which, for many ages disgraced Europe, completed their misery.

On a review of this history, may I not justly demand again, who could have foreseen national characteristics, and situations so uncommon, so singular: circumstances so various and complicated, destined to take place in such remote ages, but the Spirit of God alone? In order to evade the almost irresistible evidence of this conclusion, we have seen infidel writers resort to the ridiculous subterfuge of saying that the verification of the prediction is to be ascribed to the christians who have ingeniously contrived to give authenticity to their own scriptures, by promoting the fulfilment of their prophecies. But have not these prophecies been fulfilled under the dominion of pagan and mahometan nations, as well as of the christian? If the allegation, however, were well founded, whence could Moses have foreseen the existence of the christian religion, and the interest which the christians, as a sect, would have in giving effect to his own prophecy? Whence could he have foreseen those commercial, political, moral, and religious institutions, which, by their influence on the character of the nations who should embrace christianity, would thus cruelly affect the condition of the Jews? Surely, if men were not blinded by their prejudices, they would see that the wonder here, is not in the least diminished by this absurd supposition.



With equal folly and ignorance it has been alleged that this prediction was composed by Ezra, or some of his countrymen, after the return of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity; that it has a relation solely to that event; and that hence alone we must account for the very circumstantial narration of several particulars during the siege, and the exact delineation of the consequent state of the action.

Men who undertake to write and pronounce upon the subject of religion, without the trouble of candidly inquiring into its truth, seem to think themselves entitled to make, without shame or compunction, the most extravagant and improbable assertions. This allegation is demonstrated to be utterly impossible by reference only to the Samaritan copy of the pentateuch.\* This ancient book, which contains the whole

\* Ten tribes of the people of Israel withdrew themselves from the government of the house of Solomon under the reign of Rehoboam. In their separation they still professed to adhere to the law of Moses, which had been common to the whole nation. The five books, therefore, which were written by him, and which contained his whole law, they preserved with no less veneration than did the Jews. When the ten tribes were led into captivity by the kings of Babylon, they were replaced by a new and mixed race called Samaritans, from the name of their capital city Samaria. These people residing in the land of Israel, and mixing with the remnant of its former inhabitants, still received the law of Moses as their civil and religious code; but admitted none of the writings of the Jewish prophets. Perpetual hatreds, and a most hostile spirit, always existed between the revolted tribes first, and afterwards the Samaritans, and the people of the Jews. Both nations preserved the law of Moses with the same sacredness. The language is the same. But the Jewish copy of the law is written in the Chaldee character, which became familiar to the Jews during their captivity at Babylon; the Samaritan is written in the old Hebrew, or Phœnician letter, which was common to the

law of Moses, was continually read in the religious assemblies of that people, so hostile to the Jews, during a period of four hundred years anterior to the capture of Jerusalem by the king of Babylon, and still longer before the age of Ezra, and the copy of the scriptures collected by that eminent scribe. Here, then, is a copy of the Mosaic Law, retained in the hands of rivals and of enemies, which renders it of the more unsuspected credit, that demonstrates the existence of the prophecy several centuries before the era of the Babylonish captivity. But the prophecy contains the evidence within itself that its principal reference is to the Roman conquest, and to the state of the Jews since that period. It is a miracle, then, continually presented to your eyes : it is a prophecy every day fulfilling in your sight after a lapse of more than three thousand years.

#### PROPHECIES CONCERNING THE MESSIAH.

No evidence for the truth of the Christian revelation, derived from the predictions of the holy scriptures, appears to me more clear and strong than that which results from that stream of prophecy concerning a future Messiah ; which,

whole nation before the captivity. This is that which is called the Samaritan pentateuch. And this old letter, in which the law is preserved by them, is another proof of the antiquity of the Samaritan copy. It is doubtless the letter which Moses himself used, and communicated to the people of Israel. And the Jews changed it, in their copies of the law after the captivity, for the Chaldee, only because the latter, by a long residence in Babylon, had become more familiar to them.

commencing with the earliest periods of time, terminates, at length, in Jesus Christ. We trace it from Adam, in that mystical promise, *the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head*, down through the line of patriarchs and prophets to the time of Christ himself, in whom all the prophecies, and types of the ancient dispensations have been completed, and the expectations of the whole world fulfilled. For, it is a circumstance particularly deserving your attention, that there was no civilized nation of antiquity, in which were not found traditions concerning a divine personage who should appear upon earth to teach men the true knowledge of God, their duties, and their hopes, and to restore the reign of righteousness and peace to the world afflicted with miseries and crimes. This was a natural consequence of the piety and prophetic character of the father of the race after the deluge. Instructing his children, who were destined to be the founders of the future nations of the world, in the principles of piety and virtue, he would be especially solicitous to instil into their minds this sublime and blessed hope, which was given by God as the consolation of man in the depth of his affliction after the fall. If the Mosaic history of the world be true, if Adam, after his fall, received this consolatory promise; and if Noah were a good man, and a prophet;\*

\* From the pious and prophetic character ascribed to Noah in the sacred writings, we ought to expect among his near descendants, the founders of the various nations of the world, many good men, well instructed in the principles of religion as far as they were known to him, and in those traditionary predictions which

then ought we to expect to find this original prediction and promise, with more or less clearness, among the traditions of all the primitive nations of mankind; and, finding it among all nations, as we do, it may justly be considered as an absolute verification of the account of Moses, and of the existence of this prophecy from the beginning; for we can hardly conceive of any other mode in which it could have been so universally diffused. It received further elucidation and extension, in the progress of time, by succeeding patriarchs and prophets. The knowledge of it became more definite by the dispersion of the Jewish nation, who carried their sacred writings with them in all their wanderings. At length the precise period, at which the Messiah should appear, became fixed and settled in prophecy. And, at the moment that his birth was announced, the world was waiting for the event with anxious and universal expectation. The harmonious

had been imparted either to himself, or to antecedent patriarchs and prophets. These, of course, would be transmitted to their posterity, and, for several generations, perhaps, in a considerable degree of purity. But, at length, becoming corrupted, and blended with many fables, and having descended so far from their source that their true origin was in a great measure forgotten, or in danger of being so, it is reasonable to believe that some good men, in different nations, in order to prevent them from utterly falling into oblivion; or some cunning and ambitious men, that they might themselves pass for prophets, or be acknowledged as lawgivers divinely instructed, would commit them to writing, mixing with them other matter connected with civil policy, or religion, and giving them a form according to the genius and views of the authors. Hence, perhaps, the origin of the sibylline verses, or oracles at Rome, and of other similar works to which a sacred veneration was paid in various countries of antiquity. And hence the resemblance of these traditions in many respects to one another, and to the sacred scriptures. It is not improbable that these traditions might have afterwards received greater clearness and precision from the sacred writings, which were dispersed, along with

muse of Virgil has presented to us the character of the expected Prince and Saviour, drawn from tradition, and has exhibited the general hope and solicitude of the nations for his appearance at that time,\* in an exquisite poem, and almost in prophetic numbers.† “The last age, says he, is at length arrived, predicted by the prophetess of Cumæ. The mighty order of ages begins to circle anew. Justice returns to the earth, and the happy reign of Saturn; and from heaven descends a new, and divine offspring. Soon shall the great months begin to revolve; and every vestige of our former crimes shall be effaced: thus shall the earth be redeemed from the distressing causes of perpetual fear. He shall par-

the people of Israel and Judea, after their respective captivities, through all the nations of the East. To the holy records the name of Daniel would naturally give great authority, who, during many years, directed all the principal operations of the vast empires of Babylon, and Persia, which extended over the greater part of the Asiatic continent.

\* The time at which this great poet wrote was but a few years before the birth of Christ.

† *Ultima Cumæi venit jam carminis ætas;  
Magnus ab integro seclorum nascitur ordo.  
Jam redit et Virgo; redeunt Saturnia regna;  
Jam nova progenies cælo dimittitur alto.  
——— Incipient magni procedere menses,  
Te duce, si qua manent sceleris vestigia nostri,  
Irrita perpetua solvent formidine terras.  
Ille deum vitam accipiet,———  
Pacatumque reget patriis virtutibus orbem.  
Aggredere O magnos, aderit jam tempus honores,  
Cara deum soboles! magnum Jovis incrementum!*

The whole eclogue is well known to have been intended as a compliment to Pollio's son, but it is equally well known to be borrowed from a prevalent opinion or tradition.

take of the life of gods. And he shall rule the peaceful world with his Father's virtues. The time is now at hand. Enter on thy mighty honours, dear offspring of the gods! O son of supreme Jove!" What a resemblance do we perceive in these strains of the Roman poet, to those of a Hebrew prophet! In the same spirit proceeds the whole of this admirable poem, which might be esteemed an almost literal translation of many of the most beautiful passages in the prophet Isaiah. And it is, indeed, far from being improbable that Virgil was acquainted with the prophetic scriptures, as they had, long before this period, been translated into the polite and universal language of the Greeks. Thus much, at least, appears to be certain, that an acquaintance with the writings of the Jews, seems to have excited, or renewed the attention of mankind to this great event as being near at hand, a vague expectation of which had been long nourished by the ancient traditions of their respective countries. Suetonius and Tacitus, whose historical accuracy and judgment have placed them in the very first rank of historians, both inform us, "that there prevailed over the whole East, an ancient and fixed opinion, that there should, at that time, arise a person out of Judea, who should obtain the dominion of the world."\* They

\* Neither the Pagans, nor the great body even of the Jewish nation, could easily form just conceptions of the nature of that spiritual kingdom which the Son of God was coming to establish among men; they therefore interpreted the figurative language in which it was described in their traditions, and prophecies, and by their respective poets, of such temporal power, glory, and

say, indeed, that popular flattery, or credulity, applied these traditionary oracles to the Roman emperor Vespasian, who had been raised to the empire by the eastern legions, about the time that he engaged in the Jewish wars. But common sense must convince every thinking man, that expectations so universal, founded on predictions which had been transmitted down through ages, always pointing to the same period, and to a divine personage of the most sublime character, who should appear upon earth for the destruction of vice, and the establishment of righteousness, must have had a different origin from an accidental rumour generated, one knows not how, and passing away with the events of the day; and a very different object from Vespasian, who had nothing to distinguish him from so many other soldiers of fortune who had been raised from the ranks to the imperial purple.

Recent researches into the history and antiquities of most of the eastern nations, and particularly of Persia, India, and China, have proved that similar traditions, to those which Virgil has shown us to have prevailed in the Roman empire, have existed among them from immemorial time.

In these facts we have an extraordinary moral phenomenon presented to our reflections, which carries in itself no

empire, as were adapted to the grossness of their imaginations. The imagery, however, which they employed, ought to have led their minds to purer and sublimer views.

small degree of evidence, that the traditions relative to a future divine teacher, and legislator to come into the world were founded in original prophecy; and that all the prophecies of the holy scriptures relating to this object were actual inspirations from Heaven, and had their full completion in our Lord Jesus Christ. For before the birth of Christ all nations had their traditions, and their predictions concerning such a divine messenger as the scriptures have described, and held out to the hopes of mankind, through all the line of their patriarchs and prophets, from the beginning of the world. These prophecies, and these traditions all pointed nearly to the same country, and to the same period. Accordingly at that period, and in that country, when expectation, nursed by the belief of ages, was all alive, arose a man claiming his birth from Heaven, who united in himself all the characters ascribed in ancient prophecy to the future Messiah. He has taught mankind the purest, and sublimest notions of God; he has established among his disciples the most holy and rational worship of the Supreme Being, instead of those grovelling and corrupted superstitions which had before enslaved the greater portion of the world; he has proclaimed to the universe the most perfect law of morals; he has brought life and immortality to light, confirming it by his own resurrection, after having submitted to death, as he declared, for the sins of the world: and, certainly, his doctrines have produced the greatest and happiest revolution which has ever taken place in the moral ideas, and the manners of man-



kind. And, since his appearance, we see that those expectations, which before were so ardent and so universal, have every where ceased; for, to believers, they have been completely realized, and, to all others, if Jesus Christ is not the divine messenger and prince who was to come, there is no longer any foundation on which they could be supported. Here then is a mighty stream of prophecy commencing with the history of the world itself, and continued down through successive ages to the era of Christ, which carries in its commencement, its extent, its progress, and its termination, shall I not say, infallible signatures of divine truth. Here we behold an emanation of prophetic light darting its distant rays upon this glorious object from the beginning of time. At first, indeed, it appears faint and feeble like the dawn when it begins to break upon the darkness of the night; but, as the sun of righteousness approaches to his rising, we see it continually becoming more luminous and distinct. At length, we behold this spiritual sun appearing in all his glory in the heavens, and divine truth beaming in its full lustre on the nations.

The holy prophets have not only announced a future Messiah to the world, who should derive his birth immediately from Heaven, but, in the progress of that illumination which gradually arose with increasing brightness upon the ancient church, they were enabled at last to delineate his character, as well as to foretel the time of his appearance upon the

earth, with such exactness, and with such distinguishing traits, as necessarily to add great, not to say invincible authority to their predictions. It is not my design to trace out the progressive stages of prophetic light, under the ancient dispensations of grace, in the figurative promise given to Adam ; in the symbolic and practical revelation made to Abraham in the command to sacrifice his son on Mount Moriah ; or in the analogy by which Moses instructed the church of Israel : *A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up to you, like unto me ; him shall ye hear.* These, and a thousand other gradual developments of his character, and offices, I shall pass over, to come at once to that ultimate degree of illumination which God was pleased to afford the ancient church, when the Mosaic dispensation was approaching towards a close. Then we find, especially in the prophet Isaiah, such striking delineations of the mediatorial character of Christ, so extraordinary, and yet so accurate and just, as must affect with mingled wonder and devotion, every reflecting, and candid inquirer after truth. In the Messiah, as he appears exhibited by the Spirit which animated the prophets, are united such opposite extremes of grandeur and humility, of omnipotence and weakness, of celestial perfection and human infirmity, as men, writing from the impulse merely of their own minds, whether we suppose them inflamed with enthusiasm, or acting under the direction of the cold and calculating genius of imposture, would never have brought together. A heavenly messenger sent on the most important er-

rand to mortals, a prince claiming his descent from Heaven who was to extend the empire of peace, and righteousness, over the universe, to compose its disorders, and put an end to its crimes, if the picture were drawn merely from the imagination of the writer, would be invested only with those noble and divine attributes which would become his relation to God. It never would have entered into a reasonable mind, judging on the common principles of human nature, to combine with these celestial properties and powers, poverty and weakness, insult and disgrace, humiliation and suffering. But God, who was preparing, at once, an instructor and a sacrifice, a king and a victim, for a fallen, and redeemed race, and who, for this end, united in the same person the most distant extremes of heavenly glory and of human infirmity, so overruled the minds of the prophets that they have drawn a character which they themselves could not comprehend, or explain; which, left to themselves, they never would have conceived, and which could be understood only by the coming of the great Archetype himself.

Let us contemplate the various, and apparently contradictory lights in which he is represented to us by the spirit of prophecy. *Unto us saith the prophet Isaiah, a child is born; unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulders; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. And of the increase of his gov-*

*ernment and peace there shall be no end.\** And in other parts of that sublime and wonderful book, he is exhibited in such circumstances of humiliation and affliction that it would be difficult, without the guidance of that divine Spirit who inspired the prophet, to conceive how they should be applied to the same person. "He is despised," says he, "and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Surely, he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; and the Lord hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter; and, as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. 'He was taken off by an oppressive judgment: '† and who shall declare his generation? It pleased the Lord to bruise him: he hath put him to grief. When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days; and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands.'"‡ The actual coming of the Saviour alone has been able to reconcile all these apparent prophetic contradictions, and to vindicate the inspiration of the holy prophets. In his birth announced by angels, and his death among malefactors; in the miraculous and omnipotent pow-

\* Isaiah ix. 6th, 7th.

† Bishop Lowth's translation, v. 8.

‡ Isaiah liii. 3d—10th.

ers by which he attested his Heavenly mission, and the weakness which subjected him to the power of sinful men ; in his yielding to death in its most ignominious form, and his resurrection and triumph over it ; in his descent from Heaven to invest himself with the infirmities of human nature, and again, in his ascension to his primitive glory which he had with his Father before the world was, we see extremes which God only could unite ; we behold a character which the Spirit of God alone could have suggested to the minds of the prophets ; we discern the justification of the prophets, and their truth triumphantly confirmed : and, in the confirmation of their truth, we see the infallible verification of our holy religion. For the Messiah, as he appears in the strains of the prophets, and Jesus Christ, as he appears in the gospel, are characters so entirely out of nature, so utterly beyond human conception and contrivance, that the correspondence of the prophecy to the history, and of the history, to the prophecy, ought to be regarded as an irrefragable demonstration of the truth of both.

Having pointed out to you the early prophecy of a Messiah in the first promise made to man after his fall ; the gradual and increasing light which was shed on this primary prediction, in the progressive dispensations of divine providence ; the universal expectation which was entertained of the appearance of such a divine personage upon earth, founded probably on an original revelation made to the father of

the race, and revived, and rendered more definite and clear by the dispersion of the Jewish nation, and the Jewish scriptures, into the various regions of the East.

The patriarch Jacob, just before his death, taking, under the influence of the Spirit of God, a prospective view of the destinies of his respective children, and their posterity, delivers to Judah, his oldest son, this remarkable prediction, with regard to the permanence of his dominion, and the descent of the Messiah from him. “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and to him shall the gathering of the people be.\*

The most accurate and learned criticism applied to the terms in this passage translated *sceptre* and *lawgiver* leaves little room to doubt but that they imply the powers of civil government in the Jewish nation. And the interpretation universally given by the ancient Jewish church, and by the whole nation of Israel, to the name of *Shiloh*, (for they constantly interpreted it of the Messiah who was to come) is a proof that our application of it to the ever blessed Saviour,

\* Deut. xxviii. 57th. The term *Shiloh*, according to the root from which it is derived, may signify either the *prepared*, the *sent*, or the *giver of peace*, any or all of which, evidently referring to the character and office of the expected Messiah. Till his coming, the tribe of Judah should enjoy hereditary and sovereign power within itself; the phrase *from between his feet*, being a modest Hebraism, for a natural descendant of his family.

our Lord Jesus Christ, is not, according to the assertions, or insinuations of many infidels, merely a recent, and convenient adaptation of a dubious term by christian writers to the purposes of their faith. No term has had a more precise, and less doubtful signification given to it by the uniform voice of all antiquity.

The import of this prediction, therefore, is, that the tribe of Judah should preserve a national existence, and continue to exercise the essential powers of civil government, till the advent of that great *deliverer* expected from the beginning of the world. This peculiar distinction of Judah, arising from the possession and exercise of the powers of government, seems indirectly to imply that this prerogative should be lost by the other tribes before the coming of the Messiah. And has not this prophecy, both in its direct, and its implied meaning, been completely fulfilled? All the tribes of Israel except that of Judah had lost their national existence, and even the distinction of their tribes, long before the birth of Christ; having been either blended with the tribe of Judah, or dispersed and lost among the various nations composing the Babylonian empire.\* Judah retained both the

\* Some colonies of people possessing the law of Moses, and professing to govern themselves by its moral and religious rites and institutions, as far as their present situation will permit, have been discovered in the interior of India, and on the borders of China, who are evidently descendants of the ten tribes who were carried away into captivity by the kings of Babylon, before the destruction of Jerusalem in the reign of Zedekiah, and the captivity of the tribe of Judah.

sceptre of executive power, and the prerogative of interpreting, and administering their own law till the advent of the Saviour. Christ was born in the reign of Herod, the last prince who swayed the sceptre of Judah, and but a few years before the final extinction of the supreme judicial, legislative, and religious authority of the nation; and even of the nation itself as a distinct civil community. For, after Herod, the government of the Jews was for a short time divided among several petty princes, who possessed only the semblance of authority, under the supreme power of the Romans; and, on the destruction of Jerusalem, which followed in a few years, the miserable remnants of that people, whom a foreign sword, and the most frightful civil discord, had spared, were dispersed into all nations under heaven. And in this state of dispersion they remain, the visible monuments of the divine judgments, to this day.

Let me, then, express the spirit of this prophecy in the following reflections. The typical church and kingdom of the Messiah shall exist, till his advent, in the nation of Israel, and particularly in the tribe of Judah; in which tribe shall be vested and continued, for this purpose, all the powers of go-

They possess none of the prophetic writings after the age of David. And their copies of the pentateuch are plainly of the most remote antiquity; as appears from the kind of skins on which they are written, and from the circumstance of the letters, in many places, not being distinguishable, except by traces left in the skins, which have been made by the corrosion of the liquid with which they were originally traced.



vernment both civil and religious. But when the Messiah shall have come, the reasons, for which this people is chosen by God, and separated as a church to himself from all the other nations of the earth, shall cease; and then shall terminate their national, and typical existence. The spiritual empire of the Redeemer shall, after this period, embrace all nations without distinction, or preference; and *to him shall the gathering of the people\* be.* With what wonderful exactness, then, have we seen this venerable patriarch and prophet determine the era of this great event; trace out the destinies of his several sons, and restrict to Judah, the peculiar benediction of Abraham, which consisted in this promise: *in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.*

About the period of the birth of Christ, the visible decline of the Jewish state, and its rapid tendency to dissolution, indicated, by manifest and unequivocal symptoms, to observing and reflecting minds, the approach of the great era fixed for the coming of the Messiah. Therefore Simeon, and many other pious Jews, were *waiting*, at this time, with anxious expectation, *for the hope of Israel.* But the body of that nation, now become worldly, and sensual in their minds, and ambitious in their views, mistook the true character of their deliverer, and the spiritual nature of his kingdom. They, therefore, did not recognize him when he stood in the

\* *The people*, in this place, as in numerous other passages of the sacred writings, evidently refers to the *Gentile nations.*

midst of them ; but, ungratified in their vain hopes, they put him to death in the rage of disappointment, and thereby accomplished another, and not the least glorious part of the prophecies concerning him. While flattering themselves with the illusion of a martial and victorious prince who should extend the empire of Jerusalem over the whole earth, their impatience of foreign domination daily increased, and precipitated them into disorders and revolts, which only hastened their destruction, and gave them the last fatal proof that the Messiah was already *come, and that they had done unto him whatsoever they listed.\**

And now, in the conclusion, let me ask, have we not seen a most extraordinary person appear in Judea according to the predictions of the sacred scriptures? And has he not appeared at the precise time which they had marked out, and when, in consequence, he was expected, not by the Jews only, but by almost all nations? Since his coming, have not expectations, which before were so constant and universal, entirely ceased? Has not the Jewish nation, according to the prophecy, rejected him who came to them as the Messiah? And have not the gentiles gathered themselves under his wings, while the guilty Jews have been exiled from their country and scattered through all nations under heaven? Have we not seen the greatest moral revolution effected by

\* Mat. xvii. 12th.

his doctrines which has ever taken place in the world? And are not all these astonishing events evidently connected as parts of a vast plan which takes its beginning with time itself, which we have seen gradually unfolding in the sacred oracles for a long series of ages, and to the consummation of which when they ceased to speak, they still continue to conduct us by the lights of prophecy?

What, then, is the conclusion to which candid and impartial reason must lead us from all these premises? Is it not, that the prophecies have been inspired by God? that the plan which they develop is the work of God? and that it has been conducted to its wonderful issue by his own immediate hand?

I have here presented to you a very partial review of the evidence for our holy religion which may be derived from prophecy. It is an ample field; I have led you to contemplate only a single angle of it. Yet, I trust, I have opened to you enough to convince every serious and ingenuous mind that is solicitous to obtain full satisfaction on a subject so interesting to the happiness, the duty, and the hopes of man, of the importance of exploring it more extensively. The argument, however, as far as we have pursued it, appears to me satisfactory and conclusive.

COLLATERAL OR PRESUMPTIVE PROOFS OF CHRISTIANITY.  
OF THE SUBLIMITY OF THE SCRIPTURES.

Having presented to you a concise view of the direct evidences of the truth of our holy religion, I proceed to exhibit some collateral and presumptive considerations which will be found of importance in giving strength to the general argument. Of this species of evidence it is the character, that the various presumptions, or probabilities, taken separately, do not carry to the mind that complete conviction on which it can entirely rest independently of other proof; but the whole viewed together forms an accumulation of evidence which is not easy to resist; and they greatly strengthen the impression of those proofs which are more immediate and positive.

These presumptions arise, in the first place, out of the scriptures themselves: their sublimity, their purity, their plainness, their efficacy on the hearts of men, and their consistency with the state of the world, and with themselves, though penned by writers of such various characters, and so far removed from one another in point of time, through a long series of ages: in the next place, out of the character of the Saviour, and of those humble instruments which he employed to promulgate his doctrines; and lastly, out of the consequences which have flowed from the promulgation of the gospel.

One of the first of the internal characters of the scriptures which strikes us, is the grandeur both of sentiment and language which pervades the poetic and prophetic parts of them in general, and especially that astonishing sublimity into which they rise whenever they speak of the Deity, who is, indeed, their principal subject. They frequently present to us very noble views of the actions and sentiments of illustrious men, as well as magnificent descriptions of natural scenes; but whenever they speak of the perfection, or the operations of the Supreme Being, as if full of God, they seem rapt above themselves. They break out into strains to which there is no parallel, the enemies of christianity themselves being judges in the productions of ancient or modern genius. This was to be expected of men writing, or speaking under the influence of genuine inspiration; and the existence of the fact, that they have thus spoken and written, affords a presumption, of no inconsiderable force, that they were truly the subjects of that divine inspiration to which they laid claim. Whence, if not from this cause, was it that a few devout men in an obscure nation, and in a remote age, far beyond the birth of arts in Greece or Rome, formed such sublime, or rather, such divine conceptions of Deity, and have conveyed them in such elevated strains as there is nothing to equal in the noblest works of those celebrated nations even in the most refined periods of their improvement. Let me select only one example of the appearance of the Almighty. *Then the earth shook and trembled. He bowed*

*the heavens also and came down, and darkness was under his feet. And he rode upon a cherub and did fly; yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind. The Lord thundered in the heavens: then were the beds of the ocean laid bare; and the foundations of the world were disclosed.\** But where shall we find an idea so sublime and expressed in such a noble simplicity of language, as that of the creation, as it is represented by Moses: *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth; and God said, let light be, and the light was.†* Perhaps words cannot better express the facility with which omnipotence gave existence to the universe.

Even the name by which the Supreme Being was pleased to reveal himself to Moses, exceeds in grandeur and sublimity whatever the religion or philosophy of paganism ever taught on the subject of God. It comprehends ideas more elevated, and worthy the divine nature than had ever before entered the conception of man. All the pagan nations, even those who had made the greatest advances in science, if they did not adopt an atheistical philosophy, had, too nearly, approximated the divine to the human nature. We find worthy ideas of the Creator only in the sacred scriptures.

\* Psal. 18th.

† Gen. i. 1. This passage has been quoted as a noble example of sublimity and simplicity united, by that illustrious critic Longinus; and the quotation has been repeated after him by almost every critic since his age.

*Jehovah*, which is interpreted *I am* expresses essential life, eternal existence, universal presence. It implies that all things existing in him, and by him, and depending absolutely on his will for the origin of their being, and their continued existence, are to be regarded as nothing in comparison with him, and that he is all in all. He is the only proper being; the universe is full of him alone; the rest are passing shades. Where, then, among all the nations of the ancient world, except in this circumscribed corner of the earth, favoured with the peculiar illapses of the divine Spirit, to keep alive the perpetual fire of truth, till the rising of the sun of righteousness, do we find such exalted and sublime notions of God? When this is fairly considered, may we not justly say, favoured with the peculiar illapses of the divine Spirit, without assuming for granted a principle not yet proved? For whence, but from this source, could arise those transcendent discoveries which illuminated the mind of a Jewish prophet concerning the divine nature? that burst of inspiration, whenever *Jehovah* is their subject, which so far excels the pretended inspiration of all other poets? On any of the ordinary principles or causes which assist to develop, and bring to perfection the genius of nations, or to promote the progress of science among them, this, surely, was not to have been expected in the nation of Israel. In poetry nothing has ever equalled the strains of the Hebrew prophets.\*

\* To be convinced of this, the reader of taste need only consult the translation of Isaiah by bishop Lowth, with his critical notes and explanations, and his dissertation on the Hebrew poetry.

From them Milton has assisted the noblest flights of his muse. When they introduce the majesty of God, the pious mind is overwhelmed by the torrent and grandeur of their thoughts, and struggles to expand itself to conceptions which it can never embrace. This is the true effect of the religious sublime. In theology, Plato obtained the title of the sublime philosopher of Greece, only for approaching those ideas of Deity which every where pervade the holy scriptures. And his principles, he confessed he did not draw from the resources of his own mind, or create by the efforts of his own genius, but acquired by travelling and conversing with the priests and literary men in those countries in which the scriptures were best known, and in which were found the purest remains of that original revelation, which I have before proved to have been transmitted by the second father of the race, after the deluge, to those nations in the East that immediately sprang from him.

To those sublime conceptions of the Deity which distinguish the sacred writings we may add the views which they present to us of the government of divine providence over every part of nature, from the highest sphere in the heavens, to the atom which seems casually to float in the atmosphere; from an angel to an insect; and if we add the doctrines which they teach of the creation and dissolution of the universe, and of the final judgment and everlasting destinies of mankind; where, besides, in all the volumes of human wisdom do



we find ideas so grand, and so worthy of God? We can hardly resist the conclusion, therefore, that they have been inspired by that divine and infinite Spirit whose nature, and whose truth they profess to reveal to men.

It has been made a question whether or not the style of the sacred scriptures be proportionably elevated with the sentiments; or whether, in the structure and composition of their language, they are supported throughout according to the principles and rules of true taste. Eminent writers have appeared on both sides of this question; some contending for the affirmative, and endeavouring to maintain their opinion by a minute comparison of the diction of the *scriptur* with that of the classic writers of Greece and Rome; \* others asserting that there is no standard of taste which can be fairly applied to the writings of all ages, and of all countries. † Human nature, they say, undergoes very material changes, not only in external form and appearance, but in the faculties of the mind, and the habits of thinking, from climate, from the state of society, from the form of government, from the physical character of the country, from the progress of arts, and from various other causes, which contribute, at the same time, to create a correspondent variety in the ideas of beauty

\* A remarkable example of this mode of conducting the argument we have in *Blackwell's Sacred Classics*.

† Of this opinion the celebrated Warburton is the principal defender in his *Divine Legation of Moses*.

and taste which prevail in different nations. Hence, in all ages, a lofty and enigmatical manner of writing has obtained in Asia, which, in Europe, is considered as swoln and bombastic; and, on the other hand, the correct precision of the Attic style, which is admired in Europe, is regarded in Asia as low and frigid. We are not, therefore, to look, say these critics, for any standard of excellence and perfection in writing, which is invariably to govern the decisions of mankind with regard to the merit of works of genius and taste.

Such contrariety of opinion between men of perhaps nearly equal claims to learning and critical judgment, is one proof, among many others, that the question is not of great importance. The object of divine revelation is to teach men *divine truth*, under the inspiration of the holy Spirit, leaving the expression of it to each writer, according to his own genius and taste, formed and modelled, as it will be in some degree, by the genius and taste of the age in which he lives. If these should not always be exactly conformed to the reigning taste of the period in which we live, this will not form any reasonable objection to the style of the holy scriptures, as not properly expressing the majesty and sublimity which ought to be expected in the word of God.

Every man of true taste feels and acknowledges the sublimity of Shakespeare's genius, although we perceive in his strains many harsh and unharmonious numbers, and some de-

partures from the rigorous exactness of critical rules. These are in some instances to be ascribed to the character of the age in which he lived. But frequently the noble flights of his muse bear him above all rule, and give him a complete empire over the mind, and over the critic's art. So the sublimity of inspiration may sometimes disdain to be measured by the little niceties of artificial rules. But I make no apology for the prophets. Elevated and transported with the grandeur of their subject, whenever they speak of God, or his works, or rapt with the fervour of their own devout feelings beyond the ordinary limits of human nature, they always express themselves nobly, and often with a transcendent glow and majesty of diction.

But in treating of the sublimity of the holy scriptures, and applying to them the rules of a just criticism, it is necessary to use the same fairness and candour in judging of them, as of all other works of genius. The design of the writer should be kept in view as well as the nature of his subject, that we may not look for the high ornaments of style in simple chronicles, nor for the sublime of poetry or eloquence in didactic precepts. Every part even of holy writ is not to be judged by the same rule.

Besides, as inspiration was designed only, or principally, to discover *truth*, but does not seem in any other way to have controled the faculties of the human mind, except by the ar-

dour with which it seized them and the strong impressions which it made upon them, a variety of style is to be expected among the sacred writers, arising from diversity of natural talents, and acquired improvements, or from the manners and genius of the respective ages in which they lived.

In estimating the true character of the scripture style we ought to be able to have recourse to the original. Great allowances ought to be made for the imperfections of a literal translation in prose, such as ours is, of compositions, many of them written in the highest spirit of poetry. Take the finest passages of the most admired classics of Greece or Rome, and render them in a translation equally simple and literal; take, for example, the translation of Virgil by Watson, and compare it with our English version of the scriptures, and you must be forcibly struck with the superior majesty of the prophets and psalmists of Israel, above that of the prince of Roman poets, when exhibited before you in the same dress. The scriptures of the Old Testament, then, read with these views, and under these precautions, will, I doubt not, fully support their claim to a divine original, not only by the sublimity of their sentiments, but by the nobleness of their diction.

The New Testament, indeed, is written with the utmost simplicity of the narrative and epistolary style; but it contains the sublimest system of theology and of morals ever of-

ferred to the faith, or the reason of mankind. Here we behold the threefold existence of the Deity without destroying the perfect simplicity of the divine essence. Here we behold the astonishing assumption of the human nature into an intimate union with the divine. Here all the types and ceremonies of the ancient dispensation are seen to terminate in the Messiah; all its altars are extinguished, and their innumerable victims are comprised, and forever end, in one divine oblation for the sins of the whole world. Here we are taught to look forward to the dissolution of the universe, and the resurrection of the dead; and all nations of men from the beginning to the end of time are presented to our view assembled before the tribunal of God. Here are decided the eternal destinies of men and angels. And after the great catastrophe of nature, we are taught to expect new heavens and a new earth, with the introduction of a new and everlasting order of ages. Whether the truth of christianity be admitted to be demonstrated or not, surely infidelity itself must be constrained to confess, that these are the most grand and sublime ideas which have ever entered the human mind. And most worthy they appear to be of that infinite wisdom, and holiness, and benignity, and power, to which they are ascribed.

OF THE MORALITY, AND EFFICACY OF THE SCRIPTURES  
 AS A PRINCIPLE OF VIRTUE AND A HOLY LIFE. OF  
 ITS PRINCIPLE, ITS EXTENT, AND ITS AIDS.

The purity and excellence of the moral doctrines of the holy scriptures, and especially of those immediately taught by our Saviour himself, and the blessed apostles, afford a presumptive argument, of no inconsiderable weight, for their divine authority. The principles of morals, and the rules of virtue, have always been subjects of the most diligent and curious inquiry among the sages of the ancient world, ever since civil society was first established under the influence of regular laws, or philosophy began to be cultivated. But no where else do we find such a pure, and excellent, and perfect system of morals as in the sacred writings. And this has been acknowledged by many of the most ingenious and candid enemies of the christian religion, while they ascribe it, however, to a cause which we can by no means admit; the natural progress of science, and the gradual advances which have been made in the improvement of the human mind by adding the experience of following ages, to the wisdom of the past. No such superior improvements in moral science were found, at the commencement of the christian era, in the doctrines of the schools;\* and it is inconceivable

\* Of this every classic reader may easily be convinced by consulting Cicero *de natura deorum*.

that they should have first taken their origin among the fishermen and mechanics of Judea. The argument would have had more plausibility applied to the learned men of modern ages, if we had not the most certain evidence that the superiority of their moral and theological doctrines to those of the ancient schools, ought to be ascribed solely to the illumination shed by the scriptures on the christian world.\*

True it is, that any pretence to revelation must come recommended by some general system of good morals, otherwise it will soon fall to the ground. But when an impostor has set up a fictitious claim to inspiration, we may ever expect to find some traits of human weakness and depravity mingled with his religious doctrines. It is almost impossible that an impious, or immoral man should not transfuse, in some degree, the colour of his own character into his work. Hence, amidst the general precepts of justice, temperance, and chastity, without which civil society cannot exist, and which enter into all the religions of the world, still we find, in the temples of paganism, free permission given to the indulgence of the most licentious passions of the heart. It is in the koran itself, in the vicious license which it grants its disciples, and the sensual paradise which it confers on its military saints, that we might learn the lust, and violence of

\* Whatever is excellent in the theological and moral principles of the koran of Mahomet, we have likewise reason to believe was drawn from the knowledge which that impostor had both of the writings of the Old and the New Testament.

its author if we were not acquainted with the history of his life. But, in the holy scriptures, you not only discern a general system of good morals, many excellent precepts of piety and virtue, but you have presented to you a perfect body of doctrine in which the most faithful and candid scrutiny can find nothing of an opposite character or tendency. In them you perceive the principles and examples of the purest devotion, equally removed from the injudicious fervors of enthusiasm, and the cold and burdensome ceremonial of superstition: in them you see personal purity carried to the highest degree of perfection; and those virtues which most effectually promote the harmony, and the happiness of society placed on their only true and stable foundation; charity which loves our neighbour as ourselves; meekness which is not prompt to revenge an injury; forgiveness which is ready to forget it; the whole animated by the love of God, and guarded against the disorders of the injurious passions by the holy influence of his fear.

On this subject the following considerations particularly merit your attention: the spirit of the morality of the gospel: its extent: the principles which it lays down as the summary, and the only true and efficient spring of all our duties: and finally, the discriminating test which it proposes of the sincerity of our obedience.



It has been justly remarked by Dr. Paley, after the celebrated Soame Jennyns, that the spirit of the morality taught by our blessed Saviour is entirely opposed to those splendid and ostentatious qualities which too generally pass in the world for virtues of a superior order, and which history so often ambitiously displays to decorate her style, and to captivate the unthinking admiration of mankind for her principal heroes. The gospel gives no praise to that pride which exalts itself over our fellow men, and is easily provoked at injuries real or imaginary ; it has no indulgence for that jealous honour which is ever ready to suspect, and revenge insults, or that lofty ambition of power and command, which the mistake of the world is apt to extol as a proof of elevation and nobleness of mind. On the other hand, next to the love and fear of God, it bestows all its approbation on meekness of spirit, on candour, on humility, on charity and kindness of heart, in a word, on those mild, innocent, unassuming, and benevolent dispositions, which give birth to the sweetest intercourse among mankind, and form the strongest and happiest cement of society. This is a morality entirely different in its genius from that which would be dictated by the spirit of the world. It is peculiar to the gospel. And although, at the first view, it may seem, to those who have received their education in the world, to be tame and pusillanimous, it will be found, on a fair and just examination, to discover a more profound estimate of moral worth than was ever before

made ; either in the schools of philosophy, or in that of the world.

It is judiciously observed by both the distinguished writers to whom I have referred, that the heroic virtues, as they are called, are calculated only to disturb the peace and happiness of human society, and have, indeed, been the chief sources of the disorders, the wars, and revolutions which, in every period of time, have afflicted all nations. On the contrary, if all men were governed by the christian virtues of humility, of meekness, of candour, of forgiveness, of charity, the earth, which has hitherto been the theatre of violent, conflicting, and cruel passions, would become the residence of tranquillity and peace.

Do you ask if the general prevalence of these meek and pacific principles in a nation would not expose it to insults and injustice from its powerful neighbours, and render it, at length, an easy prey to their ambition? I answer that the maxims of the gospel do not oppose the natural duties which every citizen owes to his country for its defence. It is among the primary obligations which the gospel imposes on its disciples, *to honour and obey the magistrate*, as well as *to fear God*. And the supreme magistracy of a state owes duties to the nation under its protection very different from those which subsist between man and man in society. It is the latter, chiefly, which the evangelic rules of meekness,

humility, charity, and forgiveness are intended to regulate. And they promote peace and union by cultivating the spirit of mutual love ; they prevent discords, by extinguishing, or correcting the passions which are the principles of contention and division. The civil laws of most countries aim at the same end ; but feebly, because they impose their restraints only on the outward actions ; whereas the gospel enters into the heart to correct the evil in its source. It is folly therefore to accuse of tameness and pusillanimity, that spirit which, by changing the dispositions of the heart, promotes the peace of society in the most perfect manner ; an object which it is the supreme end of a wise legislation even imperfectly to attain, by operating with its compulsory power on the external conduct. It is the error of the world to bestow its admiration on that bold and ardent character of mind which is quick in its sensibilities to injury, violent in its resentments, jealous of its honour, proud of its darings, and ever ready, in order to avenge itself of real or imaginary wrongs, to break through both the prescriptions of law, and the dictates of justice. Such is commonly the heroic character whose achievements blazon the pages of history. Far different are the virtues of the gospel. Silent, yielding, and benevolent, they contribute to promote and secure the happiness of mankind, which the former tend to destroy.

When we consider, then, the perfect and unmix'd purity of the morality of the gospel, and the indications which it

exhibits of a most holy and spotless mind in its author; when we consider with what admirable wisdom he rejects the false and imposing virtues which have chiefly commanded the applause of the world, and even the approbation of the sage, and placed virtue, which is the mean of promoting human happiness, upon its true and only solid basis; when we reflect, further, how peculiar these excellencies are to the gospel of Christ, and how far they are above the wisdom, how contrary to the spirit of the world, we might well be surprised if any of the sages of Greece, rising above the genius and improvements of their age, had been the authors of such a system; but when we take into view the country, the education, and rank in life, of Christ, and his apostles, we must be astonished at the wisdom with which they have spoken. Considering them as mere men, bred up amidst the tools of the mechanic, or the nets of the fishermen, it must be utterly incredible. *Surely, exclaims Dr. Paley, Jesus must have been like no other carpenter, the apostles like no other fishermen!* Read the discourses, the parables, the history of the transactions of our blessed Saviour; read the moral precepts with which the epistles of the apostles every where abound, and I confess they appear to me to bear the evident and deep inscriptions of divine wisdom. The mission of the Saviour, and the doctrines of the gospel were confirmed by great and numerous miracles; but, in my esteem, the greatest of all miracles would be the gospel itself, if we could suppose such a transcendent system of theology and morals, so sublime,

so pure, so superior to the wisdom of the age, to have been the uninspired work of the unlettered fishermen of Judea.

The excellence of the christian morality may be estimated, in the next place, from its extent. The gospel does not limit its views to regulating the external conduct and intercourse of mankind with one another, to which civil laws are obliged to bound their influence. It goes to rectify the thoughts and desires of the heart, and thereby to purify the fountains of conduct: it places its restraints upon the first movements and springs of action. This is a point of the utmost importance in considering the true value of the morality of the gospel, which sets it far above the influence of civil laws, or the discipline of the schools. For, however regular the exterior deportment may be, if the imagination, and the affections remain impure, the soul must be unfit to appear in the immediate presence of God most holy, or to be joined to the society of perfect spirits in heaven; and there is no security for the rectitude of the conduct whenever temptation invites, and opportunity favours indulgence. Fancy, if it is permitted without restraint to amuse itself with the plans, or to enjoy the pleasures of avarice, revenge, or lust; if it is allowed to present images of impurity to the mind, and range at will through ideal scenes of voluptuous enjoyment, taints the purity, while it inflames the passions, of the heart, and corrupts it no less effectually in its principles of action, than could be done by grosser gratifica-

tions.\* The great Teacher, who shows in all his precepts how perfectly he understands human nature, as well as the eternal principles of right and wrong, lays the check of every sinful propensity, and every vicious action on the only spring on which it can be laid with effect: on the thoughts, on the fancy, on the heart. *Out of the heart, saith he, proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, &c. and these are the things which defile a man.*† And he who sees the end and consummation of the act in the principle from which it springs, and regards as already done whatever is completed in the desire, purpose, and determination of the soul, condemns every one who even *looks on the sex with a lustful eye.*‡ What impostor, conscious of his own imperfections, would be willing to create so high and severe a standard of morals by which he must be judged himself? What crafty founder of a sect would not be more complaisant to the tastes, or the frailties of those whom he wished to allure to the party of his followers ?||

\* This is a remark founded on the strictest principles of reason, as well as of the gospel, which strongly condemns the readers, as well as writers of licentious poetry; and universally, all those who encourage, by their presence, any licentious exhibitions, or by purchasing any licentious productions of the arts.

† Mat. xv. 19.

‡ Mat. v. 23.

|| I am aware that retreat from the world, abstemiousness and rigid penances often have an air of sanctity in the eyes of a superstitious people; and these mortifications have been introduced, as among the pharisees, the Roman Catholics, and the Mahometans, to gain a certain degree of *popular* respect for their respective systems. But in such impostures you always find, at the same time, some facilities permitted to the wealthy and the powerful to evade the rigors of penance; or some indulgences granted in other articles to compensate these privations.

The summary of duty, in the next place laid down in the holy scriptures, as comprehending the whole spirit and substance of the morality of the gospel, serves to demonstrate its excellence and perfection.

All our duties may be divided into two great classes: those which we owe immediately to God: those which terminate directly on our fellow men. And of both these classes our blessed Saviour has, after Moses, who received it from God himself to be prefixed to the tables of the ten commandments, given the most admirable and perfect epitome: "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; this is the first and great commandment; and the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."\* By this concise view of the great and commanding principles of morals, we see that the gospel, which places the restraint of all vicious and sinful actions in a renewed heart, the only efficient point in which it can be fixed, places there also the true spring of all duty. And, is it not evident that the worship of God in spirit and in truth, veneration for his holy name, resignation to the dispositions of his providence, and universal obedience to whatever bears the stamp of his authority, will flow from supreme love to him as from its native fountain? And, on the other hand, is it not equally evident that justice, bene-

\* Mat. xvii. 35, 40.

volence, candour, sincerity, meekness, forgiveness, and all those virtues which fulfil the multiplied relations which we bear to our fellow men, will be the natural and necessary consequence of sincere and undissembled love? But do you ask, if these principles are peculiar to the gospel? If we do not also find them inculcated by heathen moralists? We find reverence, and thankfulness to the gods frequently recommended by some of the philosophers; but in none of their writings do we see the supreme love of God stated as the fundamental principle of virtue and duty. In none, is the will of God stated as the sole, creating, preserving, and regulating power of the universe, to which, therefore, our most profound veneration and submission, our most constant and fervent gratitude are due. Indeed, they had extremely imperfect, or rather no just views at all either of creation or of providence. And in the catalogue of virtues which connect us with mankind, although some of their schools require justice, truth, chastity, and recommend friendship, gratitude, and beneficence; yet we find not in any of them, the love of enemies, the forgiveness of injuries, nor any thing which may properly be called charity, as it is understood by christians, and inculcated in the gospel.

I am warranted, then, by the concurrent sentiments of the wisest, most candid, and pious christian writers, in pronouncing that never has a basis of duty, equally clear, comprehensive, and complete, been laid in the works of any of the



sages of paganism, as that which has been laid in the gospel of Christ ; and never has such a moral superstructure been reared on any basis ; so admirable, for its purity, for its simplicity, for its adaptation to every grade of human understanding, for its fulness, and its application to every case which can arise to a fair and candid mind in the conduct of life. If, then, these principles, and this system which appear so perfect, would have been wonderful, proceeding from the genius and the pen of a Plato, or a Marcus Antoninus ; if, indeed, we see nothing parallel in the schools of Greece or Rome ; how much more wonderful are they if we consider them merely as the productions of unlettered peasants belonging to a country which Greek and Roman pride regarded as barbarian ?

Having been nursed and educated amidst that light which the gospel diffuses wherever it is received, we are apt to regard its moral doctrines as containing only the simple and obvious dictates of natural reason ; because they have entered into our earliest education, they have mingled with our first ideas, and been incorporated from infancy with all our habits of thinking. But to be justly impressed with the full force of the claim which it possesses to a divine original, we should return back to the periods which preceded the christian era, and to those countries which did not enjoy the light of revelation, and see what the wisdom of the wisest men has discovered upon the subject of duty and morals. This will af-

ford an argument founded on fact and experience, the only ground on which we can rest a just and satisfactory conclusion on this subject. And when we see what the sages of the most enlightened nations have not done, and, on the other hand, what has been done by the simple fishermen of Judea, under the instructions of a master as little indebted as themselves to human science, will it not afford a strong, and almost irresistible presumption of the reality of that divine inspiration from which they professed to have derived this extraordinary wisdom? We know not how men in that age, in that country, and in their station of life could have attained to such superior knowledge on these sublime subjects, unless they had been divinely assisted. And, surely, if inspiration has ever spoken to the world, we cannot conceive of any thing more pure, more excellent, more perfect, which could have been dictated by heaven itself.

Another characteristic of the evangetic morality is the un-mixed purity of the principle which it requires in order to constitute any action good, and acceptable to God. *Take heed*, says our blessed Saviour, "that ye do not your alms before men to be seen of them. When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret. When thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doth."\* Of

\* Mat. vi. 3

which precepts the evident import is, that we ought to offer our devotions to our heavenly Father, not as a mere form, not through ostentation, but purely for the love of God; and that we should fulfil every office of benevolence and charity to our fellow men simply from the love of doing good. No regard merely to our own credit and reputation among men, and no considerations of honour or interest arising from the publicity of our good deeds, ought exclusively to influence us in their performance: they ought ever to be the natural and spontaneous effusions of the pious and virtuous dispositions of the heart.

Many very amiable and benevolent persons have greatly mistaken the meaning of these precepts, as if they implied that the chief merit of charitable deeds consists in their being entirely withdrawn from the knowledge and observation of the world. So far is this from being true that, not unfrequently, their publicity may form part of their good desert, by the encouragement which it will afford to the alms of others. It is not the mode of doing a benevolent action that our Saviour designed to regulate, but the principles from which it should spring. In this view, what an amiable proof do these precepts contain of the excellence of the evangelic doctrine, and the celestial purity of its spirit!

Another character of the sacred scriptures which has generally been relied on as affording a presumptive indication of

their being derived from God is their simplicity and plainness, notwithstanding the sublimity of the subjects of which they treat, and the extent of the system of truth and morals which they embrace. Any religion, which comes from God, must, from its very design, be adapted for the instruction of the mass of mankind. And it was the glory of *the gospel*, in its commencement, that *it was preached to the poor*. In fulfilling this great and necessary end of popular edification, therefore, nothing would have been more preposterous than to propose to them abstruse and speculative principles of science, or to discuss before them such abstract questions as were agitated by the philosophers in the presence of their disciples. It was requisite that religion should propound the objects, the laws, and the motives of duty, in the most plain and intelligible form, that they might be easily comprehended by the most unimproved understanding, while they should afford high matter to employ the sublimest, and most cultivated reason. Most remarkably do we see these characters meet in the gospel. And perhaps no fact can better demonstrate how admirably it is fitted to be the instructor of *the people*, than the clear and general knowledge which we now find among all ranks of men, on the subjects of our moral duties, and our religious hopes. A common labourer, instructed, as the church requires for the poorest of her sons, would have been esteemed a philosopher among philosophers themselves, judging only from the reasonableness and excellence of his moral and theological doctrines. But, if they

were to enter with him into such disquisitions on the principles of these doctrines as were common in their schools ; if they were to endeavour to trace them to their primary elements, and again to pursue them through regular deductions to their ultimate conclusions, guarding against objections and doubts at every step, and parrying, or solving a thousand knotty questions in their progress, would not this plain man be confounded ? He would be lost in the intricacy of their speculations, and would not be able at last to recognise his own principles. Such reflections add no small value to the plainness of the gospel ; and may, perhaps, justly be said to afford a presumption of the divinity of that system which has thus been able to bring down the sublimest subjects to the level of ordinary minds.

I subjoin here, that *the efficacy* of the holy scriptures, by which is meant their tendency, and powerful influence to produce holiness of life in those who truly believe them, is often adduced by pious writers as an internal character, and presumptive argument of their divine original. This argument is supported partly from reason and partly from experience. In the former view, we should consider the motives and assistances of duty afforded by the gospel, and the awful and commanding authority by which it is enjoined. The motives presented to the view, and urged upon the conscience of a believer in the gospel, are of so transcendent and interesting a nature, as evidently to give it an operation, and ef-

fect upon the heart, which can never be perceived from any system of mere reason and philosophy. Feeble are the motives of reason alone to combat the force of the passions. But the gospel, by *bringing life and immortality to light*, by proposing to mankind the glorious and awful retributions of eternity, by the doctrine of a divine providence, of a universal witness and judge of human actions, and even of the thoughts of the heart, has given a force and effect to the laws of duty and holiness, which could not be derived from any representations of the present convenience and satisfactions of a virtuous life, however eloquently they might be depicted in the discourses of the learned, but which the heart is so often able to set aside, or to render doubtful in the moments of temptation and of action.

Consider, in the next place, the authority with which the gospel speaks to the heart of a true believer, who receives it as the immediate and infallible word of God. Reason, when it would prescribe a law of duty to mankind, must often speak in the breast with a very faint and doubtful voice amidst the prejudices and prepossessions of self-love, and the importunities of appetite and passion, and amidst the dubious and circuitous deductions by which it is obliged to arrive at its conclusions. And it can never prescribe to *the people* a rule which, in this uncertainty, can clearly reach to every case in the practice of life. But the authority of God gives to his law a clearness which cannot be mistaken, and a power

and control which come home to every thought and purpose of the soul. Before the majesty of his authority, the turbulence of appetite, and the deceitfulness of the heart are overawed, and brought to submission. And the authority of God is exhibited in the gospel as possessing claims to our obedience, and a power to command it, which reason alone cannot exert. He enforces his law by all the rights of creation; by all the obligations of his love in the redemption of the world; and by all the terrors of his justice, which shall, at last, decide, by this law, the eternal destinies of mankind.

Among the most effectual means of holiness, pious writers have ever considered the promised aids of the Holy Spirit: they are, therefore, to be classed under that head of presumptive proof of which I am now treating: *the efficacy of the scriptures.*

To a nature corrupted as ours is, the difficulty of conquering its sinful tendencies and habits, and turning its whole force and activity into an habitual love of virtue, of holiness, and of God, that is, of regenerating and new creating it, might justly be regarded as insuperable without supernatural, and divine assistance. At least, convinced sinners who feel only the difficulties of religion, and who, in repeated efforts perfectly to obey the law of God, and to overcome the power of sin in their hearts, must be sensible only of their own weakness, would be ready to sink into despondency, or re-

lapse into their natural indolence, and love of indulgence, unless they could find some hope in the promised aid of the holy Spirit. If, then, in maintaining the efficacy of the gospel, to promote holiness of life, against unbelievers, we should not be at liberty to assume the reality of the influence of the Spirit, which would completely decide the question; yet the promise, and hope of his gracious and effectual assistance is calculated to encourage the perseverance, and reanimate the diligent and faithful endeavours of every believer, and may, therefore, be justly reckoned among the efficient means which the gospel possesses of promoting true holiness, and reproducing on the heart of man the image of his Creator.

Finally, this argument is supported by experience. I might here mention, in the first place, the great and manifest effect which the gospel has ever had in producing holiness of life wherever it has been received with a sincere faith — But I have chiefly in view that proof of its divinity which it carries to the heart of every real christian by his own experience of its sanctifying influence. This is a proof indeed that is entirely personal, and does not belong to the general evidences of the truth of christianity. Yet, to a sincere believer, who has experienced this holy and renovating power, and thus may be said to have the testimony in himself, and this is the principal view in which the pious writers I have mentioned propose this argument, there is, perhaps, no other proof which comes home with such life, and force, and per-



passion to his heart. The argument, however, which I take to be in its nature very solid and just, is calculated, and intended rather for the confirmation of the faith of the believer, than the conviction of the unbeliever.

OF THE CONSISTENCY OF THE SCRIPTURES WITH THEMSELVES, AND WITH THE STATE OF THE WORLD.

Another internal character of the sacred scriptures, which affords a presumptive argument of their truth, is their *consistency*. This may be considered under two views: their consistency with themselves, and their consistency with the state of the world.

That any work, the production of one author, and embracing a code of legislation, or system of morals, how extensive soever, founded on his peculiar opinions, should be regularly deduced from definite principles, should aim at one end, and be found coherent in all its parts, would have in it nothing surprising. It would be a natural consequence of genius, and sound judgment in the writer. But, in the scriptures we perceive, not the work of one author, nor of one age, but the gradual development of a grand scheme of providence, and of divine grace towards mankind, commencing with the origin, and carried on through the whole series of time, till the close of the canon of the New Testament, in the accomplishment and illustration of which an immense number of persons

must have co-operated throughout successive ages, not connected with one another, and not acting, as far as appears to human view, under any common direction. One dispensation follows and is built upon another. The same spirit, the same principles of theology, of piety, and morals pervade the whole ; the same spiritual promises and hopes are gradually unfolded through thousands of years, and conducted to their ultimate accomplishment. Here is a vast concatenation of events intimately linked together, and depending upon one another ; here is a unity of plan in this great system continued down through different dispensations of the mercy of God to the world, tending to fulfil one great design, the salvation of mankind through a Redeemer ; of the astonishing development of which design, continued through such a long period, no reasonable account can be given, unless we suppose the whole to be under the immediate guidance and direction of heaven. Plans laid by human contrivance are not so permanent, and, if I may use the term so continuous. There is no example, in human affairs, of successive generations taking up one design, unfolding it by degrees in a long course of ages, and carrying it, at length, to its ultimate completion. From the character and state of human nature, its limited, and discordant views, this is perhaps impossible. We do not perceive the various schools of philosophy concurring long in the same systems of physics, or of morals. One leader of a sect differs from another ; the disciple differs from his master ; the principles on which their respective theories are

built are continually changing. But in the holy scriptures we find one uniform consistent design pursued from generation to generation. Amidst all the variations which in a long succession of ages must have occurred in the state of society, in the manners of men, in their habits of thinking, and in the external forms and usages of the church itself, we still perceive the same doctrines concerning the nature of God, and the duties of man; we still discern the same principles of morals, the same worship of the heart required in true religion, the same high and eternal motives of duty urged upon the conscience, the same promised Saviour exhibited to our faith, the same plan of divine grace, distinguished only by the additional lights from time to time thrown upon it as it approached its final accomplishment. In this consistency, then, we behold a moral phenomenon so different from whatever takes place, in the plans and designs of men, as to afford no slight presumption that the whole, from its commencement to its consummation, has been under the wise and gracious direction of the Spirit of God. The same Spirit seems to have inspired the holy patriarchs, the great legislator of Israel, the long succession of the Hebrew prophets, and the evangelists and apostles of our blessed Lord.

There is another light in which the consistency of the scriptures may be considered, which merits a more extended illustration: it is their conformity with the actual state of the world. Truth is always consistent with itself, and with all

other truths. Error, though it may be disguised, and to superficial observation, may seem to bear a semblance of truth ; yet in such a wide field of moral, historical, and natural science, as is embraced in the holy scriptures, it is extremely improbable that any scheme of falsehood and imposture, fabricated especially in such an early age, should not contain many discrepancies with the actual system, moral or physical, of the world, which would be made more and more manifest by the improvements of science. But improvements in genuine science have hitherto only more clearly elucidated and confirmed the doctrines of the scriptures, and especially the facts of the sacred history. Here we see the depravity of human nature, the existence of which is demonstrated by a most melancholy experience, not only asserted, but accounted for, and referred to a most natural source. Here we see a remedy provided for this universal corruption, conformable to the hopes of virtue, adequate to the fears of guilt, agreeing with the soundest principles of reason, yet such as reason could never have discovered. Here you trace the origin of nations in the immediate descendants of the great postdiluvian father of the race ; and here the different mythologies of so many people, and their varying traditions, receive a reasonable interpretation, and are reunited as in a common centre.

THE CHARACTER OF THE AUTHOR OF OUR RELIGION: THE  
 INSTRUMENTS HE EMPLOYED TO PROMOTE IT: THE  
 BENEFICIAL CONSEQUENCES WHICH HAVE RE-  
 SULTED FROM ITS PUBLICATION AND  
 RECEPTION IN THE WORLD.

Among the presumptive evidences of the truth of the christian religion, none perhaps, are stronger than that which arises from the character of its blessed Author. No other man has ever existed, who, in his intercourse with the world, was so blameless, so amiable, and, in every attribute which deserves the esteem of mankind, so worthy our veneration and love. Such a character would very ill accord with the duplicity and hypocrisy of imposture. As the union of the divine with the human nature in the person of the Redeemer is a doctrine purely of revelation, we are not at liberty, while only establishing the proofs of the gospel, to assume that principle in order to exalt the virtues and perfections of Jesus Christ. We must consider him merely as he appeared to the view of men, claiming to be the founder of a new religion derived immediately from God, that we may judge how far his character corresponded with his high pretensions, and how far these pretensions were supported by such eminent virtues, and such freedom from error and imperfection in conduct, as ought to be expected in a messenger of heaven, the example and instructor of mankind. That he appeared, in

the eyes of his disciples, after their long and intimate intercourse with him, and their daily observation of his life and manners, worthy of their highest love and veneration, and worthy of the heavenly original which he claimed, is strongly expressed in the following declaration of Saint John: *And the Word was made flesh, and dwell among us; and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*\* This whole passage, I presume, refers, not to his transfiguration, nor to any of those appearances in which he exhibited himself to his disciples immediately before his ascension, but to that *beauty of holiness*, that *glorious* display of virtue and perfection which shone through his whole life, and which, in every part of it, was *full of grace and truth*: that is, conspicuously distinguished by the most amiable condescension, and benignity of disposition and manners,† and by the most undissembled and inviolable sincerity.

Among the most distinguishing, as well as the most venerable characteristics of Jesus Christ, was his piety towards God. The universal government of divine providence he devoutly acknowledged in every event of his life. And, in the immediate prospect of his most painful death, and, afterwards in the midst of those excruciating sufferings, so studi-

\* John i. 14.

† This is frequently the meaning of the original term *καρπικ*, and, perhaps, always when applied, as it is here, in the description of character.

ously aggravated by the ingenuity and malice of wicked men, you perceive no other emotions but those of compassion, and forgiveness to his enemies, but the most perfect meekness, submission, and resignation to the will of God. Often you see him retire apart from the admiration, or the curiosity of the multitude, and the company of his disciples, for the purposes of secret devotion, and, on the sabbath day, he is careful to exhibit an instructive example of devout attendance on the public institutions of religion in the assemblies of the synagogue. Ever warm, humble, and affectionate in his devotional exercises, you perceive in them, however, nothing of those ecstasies, nor of those bold familiarities with heaven, which distinguish the spirit of enthusiasm. And in that model of prayer which he gave his disciples, which, for comprehension of thought, for a just selection of the objects of prayer, and for the true spirit of devotion has never been equalled, you find the genuine fervours of piety united with the most calm, dignified, and rational expression of the devout feelings of the heart.

When we descend to that part of his character, which was exhibited in his intercourse with mankind, it is, in the highest degree amiable and interesting, and worthy our admiration and imitation. The spirit of meekness and humility breathed through his whole life and manners; and his benevolence and charity knew no bounds. Always engaged in instructing the ignorant and comforting the afflicted, you

behold him continually surrounded with multitudes of poor, of maimed, of blind, of diseased, listening to his instructions and consolations, and seeking relief from that benevolent power which he was ever ready to exercise in their behalf. His love of sincerity and truth would never suffer him to disguise his designs, even when he knew that his enemies were only waiting for his declaration to wreak upon him their most cruel and murderous rage. Yet, it was in the midst of the sufferings inflicted by their cruelty and rage that the united virtues of his character shone with the brightest lustre; submission to the will of God; zeal for the happiness and salvation of mankind, the great object for which he laboured upon earth; the unruffled meekness of his nature under the injuries and indignities of his persecutors; compassion and forgiveness towards his enemies in the midst of the tortures which he endured from their hands; the dutiful affection and care of a son towards a destitute and afflicted mother standing at the foot of his cross, which no bodily torment could suspend in his heart for a moment; the whole crowned by that last fervent act of benevolence and devotion, in which he expired; *Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.* How unlike an impostor! How far superior to the life, and the death of heroes, or philosophers! Rousseau in one of those moments of warm and generous admiration of virtue which he sometimes felt, comparing the death of Jesus Christ with that of Socrates, gives to the founder of christianity an infinite preference to the Athenian sage.



This character of Jesus Christ, indeed, is drawn from the memoirs of his life written by disciples, who may be supposed to have coloured it with a pencil tinged by their partiality for a beloved master. But let it be remembered that the gospels, were evidently not written with any direct view of making the *eulogy* of Christ, but merely to present to us a narrative of his actions and discourses, which is done with the most undesigning simplicity. The character we derive from the facts as they have presented them.

To draw a uniform, consistent, and noble character, from imagination, which shall be entirely new in its principal features, is one of the most difficult works of genius, and not to be expected from men in that sphere of life in which the disciples moved. But it is still more difficult to invent a consistent, yet diversified series of actions from which the character, strongly and distinctly marked, shall naturally arise to the view of the reader. Besides, we have four separate memoirs, evidently written without any concert of their authors, which still, however, present to us the same picture of life and manners.\* A biographical picture, thus

\* *Written without any concert of their authors*; - for although they present to us nearly the same transactions, and discourses, yet it is not done with that identity either in the substance of the narration, or the order of time which would indicate preconcert, or design. On the other hand, we perceive such differences as would naturally occur in the narratives of intelligent and honest men giving, after a certain interval of time, the history of the same events, without any knowledge of each other's testimony, or any study to make them accord; and yet with

depicted simply by actions, drawn by men whose plain and sound understandings enabled them only to exhibit without embellishment what they actually saw and heard, but who were utterly incapable of dramatic fiction, carries in itself the strongest claims to be received as genuine. It is, besides, so peculiar, so utterly unlike whatever had before been exhibited among men either in the history of real life, or in fiction, that it can never be conceived to be the mere creation of writers who were wholly incompetent to such essays of genius and fancy. In every view, it bears the irresistible impressions of truth and nature. A character, how worthy the messenger of peace, and salvation to mankind, who claimed the high and holy relation of being the Son of God!

One peculiarity in the life of Jesus Christ especially merits our most serious consideration, as it demonstrates that he could not have acted on any suggestions of human policy or wisdom. In order to place it in its just light, it is necessary again to carry back our view to the state of public opinion in the Jewish nation at that period. The belief that the coming of the Messiah was just at hand was then strong and universal. The Jews, proud of their exclusive relation to God as

such uniformity, and such consistency in the whole character, even when one introduces new facts, of which the others have not spoken, as clearly demonstrates that they are drawing from life, and that they all have the same original before them.

his chosen people, and impatient of the yoke which had lately been imposed upon them by the Romans, expected in their Messiah a martial prince and a conqueror, who should deliver them from the power of their enemies, and enable them to conquer in their turn. In such a state of the public sentiment and feeling, impatient, agitated, anxious, momentarily waiting for the appearance of some great deliverer, many daring spirits would naturally arise to offer themselves as leaders in the honourable and popular enterprise of rescuing the nation from its abject humiliation, and raising it to that splendor and glory so eagerly anticipated by every Jew. Minds of a fanatical and enthusiastic turn, inflamed to a degree of insanity by sympathy with the general fervor, would imagine *themselves* to be the instruments destined by heaven to accomplish this glorious purpose. Whereas others, of a cold impiety, but of a bold and resolute temper, calculating on the possibility of turning the national ardor to their own aggrandizement, would cherish the daring ambition of usurping the government by force of arms, and placing themselves on the throne of Judea. But, whether actuated by a spirit of fanaticism, or imposture, and under one or other of these classes all pretenders must be ranged, they would equally move under the impulse of the public sentiment, and be directed by it in their choice of the means to accomplish their end. They would, therefore, always appear at the head of armed bands. And such was the fact, according to the testimony of the cotemporary historian Josephus. For, of all

the numerous impostors, who sprung up in Judea pretending to be Messiah, a little before the ministry of our Saviour, and, from that period, till the final destruction of Jerusalem, there was not one who did not attempt to support his claim by arms. Not so the Lord Jesus Christ. He deviated entirely from this course, which nature and human policy would have pointed out to him, and chose one in every respect opposite. The vain and proud expectations of the Jews he refused to gratify. He openly declared that his kingdom is not of this world. Instead of affecting the splendour of royalty, or the authority of command, he renounced all worldly pomp and grandeur. Instead of the weapons of force and compulsion, he employed only the meekness of instruction and persuasion. Instead of conciliating the favour of the Jewish nation by courting their prejudices, he boldly and openly declared to them that their national policy, and even their national existence as the peculiar people of God, should soon come to a period. He did not allure his disciples to his party by the prospects of honour, emolument, or command, but by inculcating humility and self-denial, and proposing to them, in his service, only arduous trials, incessant persecutions, and unrewarded labours. This is a course which not only nature, and human wisdom would not have pointed out, in the circumstances in which he chose it, but which judging on all the acknowledged principles of probability, could only have tended to ruin his hopes. The humble, peaceful, patient, and self-denied character which he as-

sumed, so widely different from that to which the spirit of that age and nation would have urged him, affords ample proof that he was not governed by any maxims of worldly policy. And his success, notwithstanding the entire defect of all the measures, or precautions which human wisdom would have prescribed, and in opposition to the contempt, the indignation, and power of a whole nation, whose wounded pride, and disappointed hopes, had inflamed their passions to a degree of fury which threatened to crush him, and all his designs in an instant, supplies the strongest presumption that *the work was not of men but of God*, who, with a silent, but irresistible operation, often confounds the counsels of the wise, and defeats the power of the mighty, and conducts the designs of his own providence, by secret, and inscrutable springs, to the most wonderful and unexpected issues.

Conformable to the character which the Saviour assumed were the instruments which he employed to propagate his religion. He chose men from the humblest walks of life, without power, without influence, without science, without eloquence; and yet, strictly forbidding every attempt to extend his doctrines by compulsion and force, he commanded them to rely for success in their mission simply on their plain unvarnished exposition of the truth, under the guidance of that divine Spirit which he promised them to co-operate with their preaching. What could be expected, on every ground of human calculation, from the choice of such instruments for

a work of this peculiar nature, and of such infinite magnitude and difficulty, but failure and disgrace? Could men in their rank of life, and possessing only their talents, have raised their minds to such a mighty enterprise as that of changing the moral state of the whole world? If they had been bold enough to admit the thought, was there any example in the history of human events which could have encouraged the smallest hope of success? Yet, we have seen them, in obedience to the command of their master, although with reluctance at first, under the consciousness of their impotence, enter on this astonishing enterprise; and we have seen it, contrary to every principle of probable reasoning, gloriously accomplished in their hands. Well may we ask, then, if the choice of such instruments is not a new proof that our blessed Saviour did not take counsel of human wisdom, nor act on any plan that the cunning spirit of imposture would have dictated? And, when we contemplate the wonderful revolution which they have effected, does not the conclusion, almost irresistibly, force itself upon the mind, that they must have acted under a divine direction?

But, omitting all other arguments of the presumptive class, I shall only further offer to your consideration that strong presumption which arises from the effects which the christian religion has had on the interests, and happiness, the religious opinions, morals and manners of society. That the publication of the gospel has produced an important revolution in

the moral and religious state of the world, is obvious to all who have sufficient acquaintance with the history of nations, and of human nature, to be able to compare the past with the present: and that this revolution has, upon the whole, been salutary, and has contributed, in no small degree, to the happiness of mankind, can hardly be denied by any well informed, and candid unbeliever.

The beneficial effects of the christian revelation may be considered under two views; the great and visible improvement of the world in religious and divine knowledge in consequence of the prevalence of christianity; and the practical improvement, especially of the christian nations, in morals and manners.

Much has been said already, on the great superiority of the theological and moral system of the sacred scriptures, above all that philosophy ever taught among the disciples of human wisdom, or superstition ever substituted for religion among the vulgar. But the beneficial influence of the gospel is not to be looked for chiefly among men of science, who form but a small portion of any nation, nor to be measured principally by the excellence of its doctrines compared with the institutions of philosophy, but by the illumination which it has shed through the great mass of the people. In this class, who were once thought to be incapable of any rational consideration of those sublime subjects, do we not now find

truer notions of God, purer conceptions of the worship due to him, juster principles of duty, a more perfect system of the rules of moral conduct, and higher and nobler motives to enforce those rules in practice, than were ever known even to the few sages who appeared here and there like stars in the dark night of paganism? This is certainly the greatest and sublimest effect which has ever been produced by moral instruction. No where do we now behold such objects of worship as Jupiter or Juno, as Mars or Apollo, whose vices would have been an additional stain on the reputation of the most immoral of their worshippers. Still less do we see temples erected to such deities as Bacchus or Venus; or such ridiculous, lewd, and beastly sprites as Fauns and Satyrs, as Priapus and Pan. We no longer witness the revels of a holiday substituted for the pure worship of Almighty God, which should consist in solemn acts of homage and veneration: in penitent acknowledgments of our sins, in devout meditations on the works and perfections of the Creator, in grateful recollections of his innumerable mercies, and in the pious anticipation of those heavenly and immortal hopes which offer the most powerful motives to the true believer to live virtuously, and form his best preparation to die peacefully. The offices of religion, that were performed in the pagan temples did not, in any country, embrace the moral instruction of the people. The functions of the priesthood were all fulfilled in the regular discharge of a ritual of unmeaning, or fantastic ceremonies. Piety or good morals were not es-



teemed requisite even to the sacerdotal character. How different are those pious offices which are performed in our christian temples ! What a school are they become to the people of that knowledge most important to the interests and happiness of mankind ! With what advantages in the church, that is, under the immediate inspection and authority of Almighty God, are they initiated in that most perfect discipline which embraces the whole compass of their duties to God and man, and provides most certainly for the happiness both of their present, and their future being ! Idolatry, with its impious and immoral train, has been banished from all its ancient seats in the civilized world. For christianity has in this, and in many other respects, extended a salutary influence far beyond the nations embraced within its actual pale.

If christianity has introduced into the great mass of society a more perfect knowledge, than they enjoyed before, of those moral and divine principles most useful and important to the practical understanding and discharge of all their duties, it has, in the same proportion, opened the true sources of enjoyment to all who sincerely embrace and believe its doctrines. Their happy influence will be perceived by a good man in every situation wherein he can be placed, in the composure of his spirit, in the sense of the continual presence, favour, and protection of Almighty God, in that filial affection and trust with which he confides in the divine mercy, and that security with which the spirit of faith reposes on

the true foundation of our eternal hopes. But the gracious and beneficent power of the gospel, and the preciousness of its consolations, will be peculiarly felt under the various afflictions which God hath found it necessary or useful to introduce into the discipline of our present state of probation. There are comforts in religion which can enable the pious heart to throw off the pressure of all its sorrows. But, that I may not enter too far into disquisitions which would better become the pulpit, I will confine myself briefly to point out the consolation and support it affords the soul at the approach of death. The weakness of human nature, if it is not supported by religious hope, commonly meets this awful term of our earthly existence with extreme solicitude. And the consciousness of guilt, which is apt to be awakened in the heart when we are approaching the presence of the Supreme Judge, and when all the illusions of the passions and the world, which had diverted reflection, are passed away, greatly aggravates to most men the distress of dying. Their utter ignorance of all that is beyond this life, and the fearful apprehensions natural to weakness and guilt, of what may take place hereafter, must often agitate with terror, or hang with peculiar heaviness, on the departing spirit which is not enlightened by revelation. The polite and learned nations of antiquity, although they had some notions of the existence of the soul after the dissolution of the body, and some apprehensions of a future retribution to virtue, and to vice, yet had framed no clear and satisfactory ideas on these subjects or

which reason could rely: all their representations of the state of departed souls, therefore, were melancholy and gloomy in the extreme. What ineffable consolation, then, has the gospel brought to countless millions of the human race? What comfort has it shed upon the hour of death? what illumination on the darkness of the tomb, by *bringing life and immortality to light!* It has pointed out, through Jesus Christ, the way, at once, to a happy death, and to the certain hope of a blessed and eternal existence. To the real christian, who believes its promises, and confides in its hopes, the comforts which it sheds on this most interesting crisis of our being are beyond every estimate which can be formed of their value, and must greatly strengthen in his heart that faith which has been created and nourished there by its holy doctrines.

Suffer me now to conclude these evidences with an observation which is of great importance in order to a just view of the influence of the christian system on the general happiness of the world. Although the knowledge of its divine truths has not been actually communicated to all nations; yet it teaches us to believe that the whole human race do, in a very great degree, participate in its blessings. From the moment of the fall of our original parent, and the merciful promise of that heavenly seed who, from the beginning was destined to repair the evils of his transgression, the world has been placed under an administration of grace *in the hands of the Mediator*.

ior, suited to its degenerate condition. And now, in consequence of the atonement made by the *Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*, and of the assistance of the holy Spirit, which through the one oblation offered on the cross, has been imparted to all men to direct and strengthen the dictates of conscience in their breasts, salvation has been rendered possible to sincere repentance, and regeneration of heart in every age, and in every nation, even where the name of Jesus Christ has not been explicitly revealed.\* For the holy apostle Peter hath taught us, what a heavenly vision revealed to him; that, through the death and mediation of the ever blessed Saviour, *in every nation, he that feareth God,*

\* The pious men in the patriarchal ages, and generally in the ancient world, could have had no definite, and evangelical apprehensions of the character of the Saviour, notwithstanding it was through the efficacy of his atonement that they had access to God, and by his Spirit they were sanctified. The same Spirit is imparted, in a degree, to the heathen world, in every age, who, applying with a divine efficacy the law of nature to the consciences of men, becomes, to many among them a principle of sincere repentance and regeneration of heart.

The Rev. Mr. Brainerd in the journal of his mission among the Indians, relates a striking anecdote, very much to the present point, of an aged man whom he met with, who, in his original state of heathenism, had gained, from his own reflections, and the exercises of his own heart, under the influence of that divine Spirit which he acknowledged, an acquaintance with the most important practical principles of real piety, as far, probably, as, without the explicit knowledge of the Mediator, and the atonement, they were generally attained even by the best men in the ancient and patriarchal world. Mr. Brainerd, after free and repeated conversations with him on the most practical subjects of religion, declares that if he thought it possible for a heathen to be a truly pious man, without the direct knowledge of Jesus Christ, he would have concluded this Indian to be such. In this remark, indeed, we perceive a certain illiberality of opinion, which, considering the powerful effect, on many minds, of the prejudices of education, is, perhaps, rather to be lamented than severely censured. This pious missionary forgot the reasoning of Saint Paul in the third chapter of his epistle to the Romans.

*and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.* This is the foundation of our hope with regard to the pious men of the ancient world: and on the same grounds may we still build a reasonable hope, that those distant corners of the earth, which seem covered with the profoundest darkness, preserve, at all times, many of the chosen vessels of mercy. And, although the sun of righteousness has not yet lifted his beams on all nations, we have reason to believe that he is in his glorious progress; and that as the plans of divine providence are hastening to their full development, the gospel will shortly be extended along with the improvements of civilization and science, over the whole earth, and involve all na-

Will it be asked, what advantages then, if the principle which has been stated above be just, have the christian nations over those who enjoy only the faint glimmerings of the light of nature? I answer, that, although men, who enjoy only the imperfect lights of nature, together with those gleams of original truth which have been preserved by a tradition that is not yet entirely extinct among any people, may, through repentance and sanctification of the Spirit, be saved by a Redeemer whom they have not distinctly known, yet must they be subject, through life, to many, and distressing doubts and anxieties which the native weakness of human reason is unable to resolve. Besides the nations who enjoy the blessed light of the gospel possess much clearer and more ample means of knowledge and of grace, more efficient motives of duty, more consoling hopes, than those who are left to the obscure teachings of reason unenlightened by revelation. And, if such means and motives have in their own nature, and independently on the more abundant influences of the divine Spirit, which accompany them under the christian dispensation, a powerful tendency to promote the spirit, and to advance the interests of piety and virtue, how greatly must the numbers of pious men be multiplied under the full illumination of the Sun of righteousness?

To these reflections it may be added, that if higher degrees of purity, and sanctity of heart and life be the natural result of the clearer lights, and nobler privileges of the gospel, a principle most reasonable in itself, will it not follow likewise, that proportionably richer and more glorious rewards shall crown the obedience of the sincere christian in the everlasting presence of his Redeemer?

tions in the splendour of his rays. When this blessed era shall arrive, shall we not find an abundant compensation for the partial darkness, or the feeble dawn, which has so long overspread the world, not only in the superior duration, but in the superior glory of that period, when, to use the beautiful and expressive figure of the prophet, *the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun; and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days.*

# THE TRINITY

OR

## THREEFOLD EXISTENCE OF THE DEITY.

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IN entering on the investigation of the peculiar doctrines of revelation, the first object which meets our attention is the **Trinity**, or **Threefold Existence of the Deity**.

The existence of God is equally the foundation of natural and revealed Religion. But in the sacred scriptures it assumes an aspect new and peculiar. The Holy Spirit has revealed in them a modification of the divine essence unknown to the lights of nature. Its unity indeed, is not impaired; but we are taught to believe in the coexistence of three infinite, eternal and equal natures or persons in one most holy and undivided Godhead. As this is a doctrine entirely beyond the discoveries of human reason, it is our duty to receive it simply as a revealed *fact*, without attempting too curiously to pry into the inscrutable mode of this divine union, which must transcend the comprehension of our minds. Perhaps, however, it is not farther beyond our intellectual capacities to form distinct conceptions of a **Trinity** in union, than it is clearly to conceive of God himself as pre-

sented to our thoughts by natural religion. Each of his perfections offers to the mind impenetrable difficulties, and, in many of their circumstances, apparent contradictions. The christian system embraces three infinite subsistences, or persons, equally the objects of divine worship ; and all included in one self-existent and eternal essence, only sustaining different relations to mankind. This doctrine justly excites our wonder, and confounds the imbecility of our minds. But we are not without an analogy in our own nature to facilitate our conception of the *possibility* of the *fact*. The understanding, the will, and the affections, often enter equally into the acts of the soul ; yet, so that we do not discern in each operation of the intellect, volition, or affection only a third part of its force ; but we perceive that the whole soul is exerted in the act, and the power of each principle is as the entire energy of the soul. It would, indeed, be impious to imagine that the human mind affords any adequate type of the Supreme and Infinite Spirit, but it certainly yields an analogy by which our conceptions may be aided of three distinct and equal powers in one simple and undivided essence in which the energy of the whole is exerted in the operations of each.

Those who are unfriendly to the evangelic system often reproach believers on this subject, as receiving a doctrine that is unreasonable only because it is above the investigation of reason. This is a distinction which cannot fail to



meet the thinking mind in the contemplation of innumerable subjects in nature. We see the fact, but we cannot understand the manner of its existence, nor free it from inexplicable difficulties which equally embarrass the wise and the ignorant. Who can explain the ubiquity of God, without extension or division of parts? Who can reconcile his immutability, and the steadfastness of nature with the promises of his protection to good men? Or who render free from the most embarrassing perplexities two of the most evident truths, the perfect liberty of human action, and the infallible foreknowledge, and preordination of events, the one, the most obvious dictate of experience, the other, among the most certain principles of science? In any revelation from God concerning himself, have we not the justest grounds to expect many discoveries which would otherwise, have far transcended the discoveries, and, perhaps, the distinct conceptions of our reason. We must judge with infinite imperfection or absurdity of the divine nature, if we receive no revelation concerning it but what we can measure by the feeble powers of the human intellect.—On such transcendent subjects when convinced that God has spoken, it is the first duty of a christian to receive implicitly the declarations of his holy word, without any attempt to bring them down to the level of our own minds.

It is a natural inquiry, which has been often made, whence can arise any moral benefit from the revelation of a Trin-

ity, when it is confessed that human reason is incapable of conceiving the mode of the divine existence? I answer that the utility of this revelation is precisely similar to that which is derived from the knowledge of the being of God. The belief presents to our ideas a Legislator and a Judge, an object of worship and of holy fear, a law of duty, and the most powerful sanction of that law. For, although we cannot distinctly conceive of the divine nature, nor expand the mind to the comprehension of infinite perfection; yet as far as is competent to all the purposes of piety and virtue, we are able to understand the relations of his justice, his power, his wisdom, and his goodness, to us as moral beings. In like manner, although the threefold existence of the Deity is most mysterious and inscrutable, yet the belief of this doctrine, as it is revealed, offers God to the understanding and the heart, in the threefold relation of our Creator, our Saviour, and the Illuminator and Sanctifier of our nature;—in one word, as the Moral Governor of the world in reference to our redemption. These relations can be clearly understood by man, and are infinitely important to him, as an offending creature, to be known. In them lies all his consolation, and the foundation of his hope for eternal life.

VESTIGES OF THIS DOCTRINE HANDED DOWN BY  
TRADITION AMONG ALL THE CIVILIZED  
NATIONS OF ANTIQUITY.

When God had formed the father of our race with rational and moral powers which fitted him to be the instructor and governor of the world, it is a reasonable presumption that he should, at the same time, impart such a knowledge of himself as should be requisite to the discharge of every duty which he owed to Heaven. And certain it is, that, as a pious parent, he would affectionately and zealously communicate the precious treasure to his immediate offspring. For the same reason, information so important to religion, and to society, would be disseminated by the great ancestor of mankind after the deluge among the various nations springing from him; the knowledge, indeed, communicated by tradition, however important it may be to human happiness or duty, loses, in the lapse of time, much of its precision and accuracy, and becomes mixed with fable. Yet in the multiplied changes of mankind, if the principle, which has just been stated, be well founded, we may expect to find many traces of a doctrine so intimately blended with the first principles of piety; especially in those countries whose moral history reaches nearest to the era of the deluge.—And we do accordingly discern, in the records of ancient learning, vestiges of this doctrine which are surprisingly clear, and more uniform among people so remotely

dispersed from each other, than could have been derived from any other source, than the common parent of the race. Orpheus, whose name is apt to be mingled, in our ideas, only with fables, but who was a great legislator, and the oldest of the Grecian poets, as well as the civilizer of all the north of Greece, speaks agreeably to the accurate researches of the Chevalier Ramsay, of the highest of all beings under the denominations of light, understanding, and life, which were said to express the powers of the same Deity, the Maker of all. And Cudworth, quoting Timotheus, informs us, [Intellect. Syst. ch. 4.] that Orpheus denominated the three powers of the divine nature Ouranos, Chronos, and Phanes, the two former names of Greek origin, the latter an Egyptian word signifying Love; and the whole not widely differing in the force of the terms from those already produced from the Chevalier Ramsay. Pythagoras is known by all acquainted with Grecian literature, to have maintained a Trinity of divine persons. His philosophy he derived from Egypt, Chaldea, Persia and India, where similar doctrines prevailed. And we learn from Moderatus, who was a disciple of his school, that a fundamental maxim of his theology was "that God is one, and from him proceed two infinite beings:" which maxim he explains and expands in the following words—"The *first one* is above all beings, the *Second* contains all ideas, the *Third*, which he call- *νομα* or Soul, partaketh of both." Jamblichus, the famous antagonist of the christians says "that, like them, there

were three Gods praised by the Pythagoreans. And one\* of the philosophers of this school denominates the second of these deities "the Heavenly and Sensible God."—The Trinity of Plato is still better known, the different persons of which he styled *'ro Agathon* or *Heno Nous* or *Logos* and *He Psuche* or *Heros*, interpreted, the Good or the One—the Mind or Reason, and the Soul or Love.

From the philosopher, already quoted, we learn that the traditions of the ancient Egyptians acknowledge Emeph as the author of truth, and creator of the world; but before Emeph they place the first Intelligent and Intelligible Being, who can be adored only in silence, denominated Eikton; but after both is Ptha, or that Spirit which animates all things by its vivifying flame. Eusebius remarks, that the hieroglyphic of the Deity in that nation was a winged globe, with a serpent emerging from its orb. Of which symbol Sanchoniatho, in the fragments preserved by that author, gives the following explanation;—"The globe signifies the first self-existent Being, without beginning, and without end;—The serpent is the emblem of divine wisdom and creative power; and the wings, of that active spirit which animates the universe." In corroboration of this tradition, it was the received interpretation of their priests that the triangular obelisks erected at the entrance of all their temples were symbols of the divine nature.

\* Hierocles.

Passing to other nations, Plutarch has preserved a tradition of the Persian theology, that their supreme Deity Oromasdes thrice augmented himself; and he records a celebrated festival of the Magian priests in honor of the threefold Mythras; the names of whom were Oromasdes, Mythras, and Mythra. Since the presidency of Sir William Jones in India the existence of a supreme Trinity in the Mythology of the Brannins is plainly discerned in the midst of their innumerable Gods, and symbols, the belief of which has been preserved among them from the most remote antiquity. And the European missionaries to China have discovered visible traces of the same doctrine existing among that ancient people.—Such a striking coincidence in this important principle of religion among various nations, so remotely situated from each other, certainly points to some common origin, which can hardly be presumed to be any other than that which has already been suggested.

These reflections will be considered, I presume, to derive no inconsiderable countenance and support from similar ones made by that eminent divine and scholar, Dr. Horsley, Bishop of St. Asaph, in a charge to the clergy of the archdeaconry of St. Albans. Speaking of the similitude, in many points, of the Trinity of the platonic school to the christian doctrine: The resemblance, says he, may seem indeed a wonderful fact, which may justly draw the attention of the serious and inquisitive; and it becomes more important,

when it is discovered that these notions were by no means peculiar to the platonick school; that the platonists pretended to be no more than the expositors of a more ancient doctrine, which is traced from Plato to Parmenides; from Parmenides to his masters of the Pythagorean sect; from the Pythagoreans to Orpheus, the earliest of the Grecian Mystagogues; from Orpheus to the secret lore of the Egyptian priests, in which the foundations of the Orphic theology were laid. Similar notions of a triple principle prevailed in the Persian and Chaldean theology; and vestiges even of the worship of a Trinity, were discernible in the Roman superstition in a very late age. This worship the Romans received from their Trojan ancestors; for the Trojans brought it with them into Italy from Phrygia. In Phrygia it was introduced by Dardanus so early as the ninth Century after Noah's flood. Dardanus carried it with him from Samothrace; where the personages that were the objects of it were worshipped under the Hebrew name of *Cabirim*. Who these Cabirim might be, has been matter of unsuccessful inquiry to many learned men. The utmost that is known with certainty is, that they were originally three, and were called by way of eminence *the Great or Mighty ones*; for that is the import of the Hebrew name. And of the like import is their latin appellation *Penates*, &c. Thus the joint worship of Jupiter, Juno and Minerva, the Triad of the Roman Capitol, is traced to that of the *Three Mighty Ones* in Samothrace; which was established in that island, at what precise time it is impossible to determine, but

earlier, if Eusebius is to be credited, than the days of Abraham.

The notion, therefore, of a Trinity more or less removed from the purity of the christian faith, is found to be a leading principle in all the ancient schools of philosophy, and in the religions of almost all nations ; and traces of an early popular belief of it appear even in the abominable rites of idolatrous worship. If reason was insufficient for this great discovery, what could be the means of information, but what the platonists themselves assign, *θειοπαράδοτος θεολογία*—A theology delivered from the Gods, i. e. a revelation. This is the account which the platonists, who were no christians, have given of the origin of their master's doctrine. But from what revelation could they derive their information, who lived before the christian, and had no light from the mosaic ? For, whatever some of the early fathers may have imagined, there is no evidence that Plato or Pythagoras were at all acquainted with the mosaic writings: not to insist, that the worship of a Trinity is traced to an earlier age than that of Plato or Pythagoras, or even of Moses. Their information could only be drawn from traditions founded upon earlier revelations ; from scattered fragments of the ancient patriarchal creed ; that creed which was universal before the defection of the first idolaters ; which the corruptions of idolatry, gross and enormous as they were, could never totally obliterate. Thus the doctrine of the Trinity is rather con-



firmed than discredited by the suffrage of the heathen sages; since the resemblance of the Christian faith, and the Pagan philosophy in this article, when fairly interpreted, appears to be nothing less than the consent of the earliest, and the latest revelations.

An objection has been raised against this presumptive evidence, as it may be called in favour of the doctrine, and not without much appearance of plausibility, arising from the supposed silence of the scriptures of the Old Testament. This silence, however, is more apparent than real, as will easily be discerned by the attentive reader, in the revelations made to the ancient patriarchs. That celebrated and ingenious critic who has been already quoted more than once, but who perhaps has pushed this opinion beyond the truth of fact, thinks he discovers the different persons of the adorable Trinity as distinctly designated in the writings of Moses as in those of the apostles. Of the living and true God this great legislator of Israel speaks under the peculiar appellation of Jehovah; but he exhibits him to that nation under the threefold denominations of Jehovah—Ab,—the self-existent Father; Jehovah—El,—the self-existent Teacher or Illuminator; and Jehovah—Ruach, or the self-existent Spirit. And Elohim, under which denomination the Eternal is so often spoken of, by Moses, is the plural of Eloah, and indicates plurality of existence. You cannot serve Jehovah, says the author of the book of Joshua, for he is the *holy Elohim*; which literally

translated is, *you cannot serve the Self-Existent, for he is the holy Gods.* And this is only one example out of many throughout the sacred writings. Hence the Jews, as appears, by the oldest commentators on their law, seem at all periods to have entertained this principle. And in the time of our Saviour, they were evidently not offended at his doctrine of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; but at the presumption, as they supposed, of his making himself *the Son of God*; thereby, making himself equal with God.

Such have been the doctrines, or traditions concerning the divine existence cherished in the most distinguished nations of the ancient world. And it is far from being an improbable conjecture that they contributed in no small degree, to prepare the minds of mankind for the favourable reception of the true doctrine on this subject, when it was revealed by our blessed Saviour.

But so various is the human mind in the strength of its powers, and the diversity of its fancies, or prepossessions, that it soon became divided into different systems in interpreting the sacred standard transmitted to us by Christ, and his apostles. Many crude notions seemed to rise and fall almost at the same moment, in the primitive church, being only the transient ebullitions of a fanatical fancy, arising from the fermentation of ancient opinions with the new principles imperfectly understood. A multitude of these errors are en-

numerated by all the ecclesiastical historians, who merely record their existence and their extinction. But not having been embraced by any permanent sect in the church, they merit little regard ; and are hardly entitled even to be mentioned in a system like the present. A few only of those whose leaders have been more distinguished by their talents, or have made more extended divisions among the body of christians I will recall to the notice of my readers, merely stating their peculiar and discriminating ideas upon this subject, with such conciseness as the brevity of this work requires.

The Sabellians, who take their denomination from a man respectable for his learning and talents, maintain the unity of God in the strictest sense ; and interpret the titles of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, as expressive only of the different relations of Creator, Redeemer, and Moral Governor, which he sustains to mankind in the economy of their redemption. Considering the extreme obscurity of our ideas upon this infinite subject, their error, acknowledging as they do, the Deity of our Saviour, cannot be regarded as one that deeply affects the system of our holy religion. The Trinitheists, conceiving that they would do greater honour to the respective persons of the Trinity, by adopting a contrary opinion, have assigned to each a separate, equal, and independent existence, making their union in one Supreme Godhead consist, not in any natural and necessary participation

of the same essence, but in a perfect concurrence of will, and co-operation of action in all their designs.—The Arians, on the other hand, borrowing their title from the celebrated presbyter of Alexandria, maintain that Christ is not properly God, but only the first and highest of all creatures, who has been taken into the most intimate union with the Deity, that he might thereby become the Saviour of the world; conjoining the merit arising from the grandeur of this divine relation, with that of the obedient and suffering condition of human nature in him. Out of these, another class has arisen, who most nearly approach the orthodox principle, making Christ, not properly a creature, nor in the high and independent sense of the Father, God. The most noted of the modern Arians appear to have adopted the ideas of the celebrated Samuel Clark, who stands among the first metaphysicians of any age, that the Filial is an eternal, and necessary emanation from the Paternal Deity; which may be illustrated, if such an infinite subject be capable of any illustration from created nature, by the procession of light from the body of the sun, coexistent, and of the same essence with the body from which it proceeds; yet, being derived, though a necessary effect from a necessary cause, it is to be regarded as dependent. Such does this great man suppose to be the dependence of the Son upon the Father.—Opposed to all these forms of Trinitarian existence are the Pelagians or Socinians, who, notwithstanding their rejection of the fundamental principle of the atonement, and its related doctrines, still

claim the title of christians, because they embraced the moral code of Jesus Christ. Their distinguishing tenet is, that Christ is simply a man, and in no other way connected with the Supreme Deity, than as being inspired by him, and sent by him into the world to be the chief of the prophets and instructors of mankind.—This sect is hardly entitled to the honour of the name which they assume.

On this great and essential doctrine of christianity, the opinions which have now been briefly stated are the chief which deserve to be mentioned, exclusive of that which only we conceive to be warranted by a just interpretation of the holy scriptures. This presents to the mind the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as being equal in power and glory ;—equally necessary and independent in their existence ;—perfectly one in their essence, but different in personality ;—The objects of equal, and undivided worship. In the economy of human redemption, however, the Paternal Deity, is to be considered as actually exercising the rights of divine authority.—The Filial Deity as being the immediate minister of the divine mercy by his atonement and intercession ;—and the Holy Spirit as applying the revelation of the divine mercy for the sanctification of the heart, and qualifying the disciples of the faith, by his gracious influence for the possession and enjoyment of eternal life. In all acts of worship it is the principle of christianity, that we address the Father, through the Son, by the agency of the Holy Spirit.

## PROOF OF THE TRINITY.

Having stated, as concisely and distinctly as possible, the christian principle upon this subject, I proceed to establish the evidence of the doctrine solely from the sacred scriptures. And, being, by every party, acknowledged to be a doctrine purely of revelation, I reject every modification of human reason on a subject on which reason is utterly incompetent to judge, and could, therefore, only mislead. I equally reject from this demonstration, every part of the sacred text on which any doubt can be raised of the genuineness of the copy, the scriptures being full and abundant on the subject, after every deduction that the most scrupulous enemy can require. And this concession is made, not from any hesitancy which can justly be entertained concerning the authenticity of those few disputed passages, which have been selected for objection, out of our commonly acknowledged version, but that, in an elementary treatise intended for the youngest divines and for the comfort, instruction, and establishment of the common christian, no proof may be presented to them but what shall be seen to rest only on the most secure foundation. And no discussions introduced concerning the subject, the result merely of human reason, but the naked language of scripture.

These proofs may be arranged into such as are general, relating equally to the whole Godhead, and such as are particular, establishing the Deity of each person. The former are presented to us in the forms of baptism, and of benediction, both which are administered in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and shew us that the object of worship, and of trust to the whole church, can be perfectly exhibited to our faith, only under these three united titles. And they are so united that equal power, honour, blessing, and homage is ascribed to each. To that divine Trinity equally we are consecrated on our entrance into the church; from that Trinity equally all the blessings of the gospel descend to the faithful.

In examining the divinity of the respective persons of the Godhead, it is requisite chiefly to attend to those proofs which establish the proper Deity of the Son; for, when this point is once admitted there is no further objection to the full acknowledgment of the doctrine. The declaration usually quoted from St. Paul in the second chapter of the epistle to the Philippians\* I omit, for the reasons already assigned, and rely, at present, on two positive and explicit attestations contained in the first chapter of the gospel of the apostle John, and the fifth chapter of his first epistle.—“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the

Word was God.—And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, in his Son Jesus Christ,—this is the true God, and eternal life.” If it had been the purpose of our Heavenly Father to teach this doctrine to the world so that no mistake or error could be committed with respect to it, we cannot easily conceive how it could be taught in stronger and more explicit language. Convinced of this, as one would think that every man of candour and fairness must be, we see those who deny the principle obliged to take refuge in the utmost ingenuity, and even sophistry of criticism, to elude the force of the evidence which arises from the obvious construction of the sacred writings. If these terms are explained to a different and more circuitous meaning, all certainty is taken from the scriptures, and human ingenuity may equally bend them to the support of the most opposite opinions.

This argument is, in no small degree, confirmed by the frequent and pointed references made by the apostles to the prophetic and mosaic writings, in which Christ is spoken of as the Angel of the covenant, and addressed as Jehovah, that glorious being to whom the highest characters of divinity belong, and for whom the profoundest worship of mankind is claimed. By comparing the New Testament with the Old, it becomes evident that the Son was God, adored by the patriarchs, and is the Author and Subject of all those divine ap-



pearances exhibited to these eminent Saints recorded in the ancient scriptures. It strengthens the proof already produced of this doctrine being always acknowledged by the Hebrew nation, and the primitive church, from the beginning of the world. It renders probable likewise the opinion of those great men, equally conspicuous for learning and piety, who believe that this world was created principally to illustrate the glory of God in the redemption of man; and that it was, for that purpose, from the beginning, put under the immediate dominion and administration of the Son of God. These ideas must forcibly impress the pious inquirer who candidly studies the sacred writings, and compares the christian era with the most ancient periods of the mosaic economy. The declaration of the apostle in the seventh chapter of the Acts; "This is he who was in the church in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers," most evidently refers to the history of the Exodus in the third chapter. "And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush, and he looked, and behold the bush burned with fire; and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the midst of the bush, and said Moses, Moses. And he said, here am I. And he said, draw not nigh hitherto: put off thy shoes from off thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. Moreover, he said I

am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." Behold then, Jesus Christ presiding as Jehovah in the ancient church, and acknowledged to be the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.—Many passages contribute to shew that Christ was the supreme Ruler and Guide of Israel in their progress through the wilderness to the land of promise. And for the perfect Deity of Jesus Christ acknowledged in both branches of the church, a proof more precise and strong can hardly be adduced, than that of the apostle in the beginning of his epistle to the Hebrews, quoting the forty fifth Psalm, where the prophet under the full spirit of inspiration, saith of *the Son, thy throne O God is forever and ever, a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.* And the evangelist John, in the twelfth chapter of his gospel, applies to Christ one of the most sublime descriptions of Jehovah recorded in the sacred writings; "In the year, that king Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, above it stood the Seraphim; each one had six wings; with twain he covered his feet, with twain he covered his face, and with twain he did fly; and one cried to another and said; holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory," Is. vi. 1. *These things, adds the evangelist, said Esaias, when he saw his glory, that is, the glory of Christ, of whom he was at that time writing, and spake of him.*

Another proof, perhaps not less forcible, of the Deity of the Son, is the frequent ascription to him of all the peculiar and incommunicable attributes of the Godhead; eternity, immutability, omniscience, omnipresence, and creation.—“And thou Bethlehem Ephratah though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet, out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been of old, from everlasting;” saith the very explicit prediction of the prophet Micah. Jesus himself declares,—“before Abraham was, I am.” And by his Spirit he announces to his favourite disciple John,—“I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, which is, which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.” Listen to the strong and unequivocal language of the epistle to the Hebrews.—“To the Son he saith, thou Lord in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands; they shall perish, but thou remainest; they shall wax old as doth a garment; but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.” The same author in the following sentence unites, in the most positive terms, the eternity and immutability of the Saviour, “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, to day, and forever.” And he himself testifies his own omnipresence—“where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them, Mat. 18. And lo! I am with you always to the end of the world,” Mat. 28. I add, in the last place, that all divine attributes are embraced in the work of creation, which is explicitly ascribed to the

Son: "for by him, all things were created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him and for him, and he is before all things; and by him all things consist:" Col. 1. 16. Creation forms the supreme relation between the Creator and the creature. It is the true foundation of worship, and constitutes exclusively that perfect right claimed by the Eternal to our duty and obedience. *All things were made by him*, saith the evangelist John: and therefore *the Father hath committed all judgment*, that is, the entire government of this world, *to the Son, that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father.*

These proofs, although consisting of a very small number selected out of the great mass of the scriptures proportioned to the brevity which I contemplate, afford ample confirmation of the true and proper Deity of the Son; and, in that, they establish beyond reasonable doubt the doctrine of the Trinity. No small degree of strength arises to the argument from the constrained reasonings by which its enemies study to combat the force of this evidence. Some of the highest titles of divinity, it is alleged, are not bestowed on the Son, which are ascribed to the Father, such as the *Almighty*, the *Most-High*. Can any objection more obviously demonstrate the weakness of the cause which is obliged to have recourse to such evasions, when other titles, equally characteristic of

the divine nature, are, with greater frequency, applied to him? Besides, a part of those titles which are supposed to be exclusively appropriated to the Almighty Father, are, most obviously, used, not as marking any superiority of nature, but, along with others, as distinctive characters of the different persons of the Trinity. To give only one example; *There is one God the Father, of whom are all things, and one Lord Jesus Christ by whom are all things.* Will it not require some peculiar depth of understanding to assign the superiority of *of* to *by*, and in the act of creation, to say which is expressive of the greater power, or the greater dignity?

The objectors presume, that the terms expressive of the highest powers of divinity are applied to Christ, as belonging to him only in an inferior degree. And presuming indeed it is, to attempt to graduate the divine perfections, or his creative operations, by our limited standard. What measure have the scriptures given us to fix the import of these phrases except the obvious meaning and connexion of the terms? What gradations can be fixed in the powers of creation, omnipotence, and omnipresence? Such objections never could be suggested but by a fallacious reason which presumes to measure the divine nature by its own narrow views; and under the powerful influence of a prejudice which, having fixed its philosophico theological system independently of that sacred regard to the simple dictates of the

word of God which ought to govern the ideas of every christian, studies to bend the rule of faith to its preconceived opinions.

The force of the argument derived from the powers of creation ascribed to Christ these writers think to weaken by changing in some instances the import of the word translated *worlds*. *By whom also*, saith the apostle to the Hebrews, *he made the worlds*; which phraseology they render; *by whom also he constituted the ages*; meaning the different dispensations of the church, the patriarchal, the mosaic, and the christian. Little advantage, however, can be gained to their cause by this change, when the full import of the terms is fairly considered. Less they cannot imply, if we give them any meaning worthy the solemnity of the divine oracles, than that the whole moral order of the universe has been originally constituted, and, at all times, arranged and governed exclusively by the providence of the Son.—But is this less the property of divine power, or less the work of divine wisdom than is the physical constitution and order of the universe?—The most ingenious evasions, therefore, or colourings of the strong language of scripture, leave entire the evidence of the full and perfect Godhead of the Son.

The particular proofs of the Deity of the Holy Spirit in the next place, demand our attention; in which it is necessa-

ry, first, to establish his distinct personality, and that he is not spoken of merely as a quality, expressive of the holiness of the divine nature. The import of the word *spirit* is understood as far as the term can be explained, only by the action of our own minds. What is most obscure and difficult in our conceptions, when we attempt to apply it to the Eternal Spirit, arises from the infinity of the subject. Here we must rest contented and submissive from the consciousness of our own imperfection. But that the Holy Ghost is spoken of as a distinct person, no less than the Father and the Son, is evident from the forms of benediction and of baptism, as well as from other passages in which the expression admits of no ambiguity.—“I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another comforter, that may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of truth,” John xiv. 16, 17. “When he the Spirit of truth is come, he shall guide you into all truth,” John xvi. 13. “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit,” 1 Cor. 12.

When the personality of the Holy Spirit is established, little is requisite for the proof of his Deity. The evidence of the one is involved in that of the other. We see, in the holy scriptures, the same divine attributes ascribed to him as to the other persons of the ever blessed Trinity. We have, indeed, no further controversy on this important doctrine.

No question now remains, which merits, in any degree, the attention of the student of theology, except that which, for a long time, imprudently agitated the eastern and the western christians, concerning the procession of the Son and Holy Spirit, and that chiefly as a subject of history. A question on this high and in-crutable doctrine it is which is impossible to be clearly and intelligibly decided; nor do we perceive any important moral consequence that could result from the decision. The Greek church maintained that both the Son and the Holy Ghost proceed from the Father only. The Latin church contended that the Son proceeds from the Father, but the Holy Spirit equally from the Father and the Son.—On a controversy of this nature we ought to speak with extreme reserve, and to assert with positiveness nothing but what is clearly warranted by the scriptures themselves; permitting no modification of the language or ideas to our own fancy. When we listened solely to the sacred writers, the evangelist John declares that the Spirit *proceedeth from the Father*;\* but he is also called by the apostle Paul, writing to the *Romans and other churches, the Spirit of the Son*.† When we would conceive or explain this doctrine farther than the strict terms of revelation import, the mind is immediately lost in an attempt entirely beyond the powers of the human intellect. And although the terms of scrip-

\* John xv. 26. † Romans viii. 9. Gal. xiv. 6. Phil. i. 19.



ture, and the opinion of the highest christian antiquity appear to favour the doctrine of the Roman church, yet the violence of the disputes which appear, in the progress of this controversy, between them and their Grecian brethren is a deep reproach to both parties.



OF THE  
**DECREES OF GOD.**

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HAVING treated of the being of God, and of that idea of the divine nature and perfection presented to us in Holy Scripture, the subject which next occurs to our consideration is his immediate agency and control over all the works of his hand, usually styled, in our theological systems, his *Decrees*. By this term is intended the sovereign and holy will of God concerning all things that exist, not only in their being, but in all their changes and actions from the greatest to the most minute. They embrace the entire system of the universe, both physical, and moral, corporeal and spiritual, and, in the language of philosophy, constitute the universal laws both of matter and of mind; which are so ordained, in their original structure, as, by their natural operation, to attain every purpose of the all-wise Creator. But divines with justice, perhaps, entertaining a suspicion of the language of philosophy, as if it kept the immediate agency of God too much out of view, by interposing the natural law between him and the event, and willing to present him always to the mind, in all the changes of the universe, have chosen to employ the terms ordination, and predestination as exhibiting

the ultimate cause of whatever takes place in heaven or on earth. No event can happen but in consequence of the laws which he has established, and established with a full, immediate and present view of every result which should spring from them. And as the whole creation was, at all times, present before him, from the beginning, and nothing, strictly speaking, can be considered as either past, or to come in the view of omniscience, his preordination or decree is justly regarded as embracing every event, and all events are seen as being immediately obvious to his view, and arising naturally out of the train of causes which he has ordained.

This term, as it has been adopted by theologians, is merely technical, and has an appropriate meaning, being used to signify the divine purposes with respect to the whole order of nature, but chiefly with respect to the moral states and destinies of mankind. It is evidently borrowed from an analogy supposed to exist between the divine and human governments, and is consequently employed to express the *will of Almighty God* as the supreme legislator and governor of the universe.

Few words, in the Old Testament, have been translated by this term, and in every place where they are employed they might, with equal propriety, have been rendered by the terms statute, law, or purpose. In the version of the New Testament it is no where found, although the equiva-

lent terms *counsel, purpose, foreknowledge, predestination,* frequently occur; which language, especially when it relates to the moral states, and conditions of men, evidently imply all that is intended by *decree*, as it has been introduced into the systems of theology.

To many, who appear not to have justly reflected on the subject, this term carries in it somewhat gloomy and austere, as implying that all the actions, and the final states of mankind have been fixed by an *arbitrary* will, and that their whole moral government turns on principles of necessity, equally with those which govern the material world. But when we identify his *decrees* with the *laws of universal being*, producing their effects, with certainty, indeed, but freely or necessarily, according to the nature of each subject, this apparent harshness ceases to exist. No reasonable doubt can be entertained by any reflecting man, but that all things, from the beginning have been determined by the Creator in a certain order, which order must arise out of the laws of their respective natures, and the combinations of each subject with all other things. And these all having been framed by their glorious Author with the most perfect foresight, their infinitely various results must have been present from the beginning, to his all comprehensive view. On the most obvious principles of reason, therefore, the divine foreknowledge of events, must have been founded on the divine will in framing the universal structure of things, and impressing upon them respectively

the laws of their action. The results being, in consequence, perfectly foreknown, the whole must have been conceived in one consecutive and consistent plan according to the designs of his infinite wisdom; physical events arising out of the necessary laws of matter and motion, and moral consequences springing from the free laws of motive and volition.

These consequences so clearly deduced from the principles of reason, are conformable to the whole strain of the sacred writings, in which is asserted, in the most explicit and unequivocal terms, the universal preordination of events, however minutely they descend to the most trivial circumstances, or however strongly they imply the merit, or the guilt of individual acts. Let me appeal to a single example which may be in the room of many. *Him, saith the apostle speaking of Christ, being delivered by the determinate counsel, and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands, have crucified and slain.* When we assign to this declaration of the sacred writer its full extent; could the determination of this great event take place, without involving in it the pre-etermination of all the acts by which it was gradually, prepared, and finally accomplished? Yet, was not every purpose so connected with the nature of man, and the freedom of human action, that, in this impious deed, though predetermined, the agents were justly subject to the righteous condemnation of Heaven. But it were unnecessary, I presume, to refer you singly to the multiplied

evidences of this truth which speak in every page of the holy scriptures. Of those who sincerely love God the apostle speaks as being “called according to his purpose; for whom he did foreknow he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.” And the whole of this ninth chapter of his epistle to the Romans appears to have been written with the most palpable intention to remove all ambiguity from this subject. Suffer me to quote only the eleventh verse: “The children, being not yet born, neither having done any good, or evil, that the purpose of God, according to election, might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth, it was said, the greater shall serve the younger; as it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.”

Can words proclaim, with more decisive evidence, the preordination of events, and of those events particularly, I mean the moral states of mankind, which have given rise to the most formidable objections to the truth on this interesting question. Attend to the pointed language of the sacred writer—the election of one to honour is not made of any antecedent view of his good works; *for it is not of works, but of him that calleth*, founded only on reasons in his own infinite and inscrutable wisdom. Not that any one is chosen without, or wholly independent of his good works, but his works are themselves the object of the decree, and are embraced in the same act with the election of the believer; and this without the smallest infringement on the perfect freedom of

the individual agent. For as has before been observed, the laws of the moral world have been so framed as, by their natural and free development, to attain all the purposes of the divine wisdom, in full consistency with human liberty, with as great certainty as can arise from the laws of the physical creation.

It is in vain to attempt to evade the force of this conclusion by the hypothesis, that the election or reprobation of Jacob or of Esau, regarded only the national interests and prerogatives of the people respectively descended from these patriarchs. For in the election of a nation to temporal or to spiritual privileges, are there not innumerable moral results intimately involved in the act? In the preference given to Jacob, was it not the election of the whole ancient church to mercies, privileges, graces, resting only in the gift of Heaven, with all the sanctifying consequences growing out of them to great numbers in that chosen nation?

If then the preordination of events is established by the clearest decisions of the holy scriptures, as it has already been shown to be, by the plainest conclusions of reason, and in that point which has been thought to form the principal objection against the doctrine, we see, in this consequence, one of the strongest arguments for the universality of the divine decrees.



The conclusion, however, has been opposed by some specious reasonings, an explicit answer to which will serve to add strength to the general argument. They arise chiefly from moral considerations. For the government of the natural world is resigned by these writers, without controversy, to the dominion of fixed, necessary, and immutable laws. The doctrine of preordination, they affirm, stands in direct contradiction to the moral liberty of man; and to the essential benignity of the divine nature.—Of each let us take a very brief review.

The former inference evidently springs out of those false metaphysics which confound the voluntary and moral action of the mind, with the physical and mechanical laws of body. A confusion which has been greatly promoted by the common error of recurring, in all our reasonings concerning the one, to analogies and illustrations borrowed from the other; as if the suasion of motive bore a perfect analogy to the impulsive force of matter, which is always followed by a necessary effect, that can be calculated with mathematical precision, when the acting force is known, and the direction given in which it is impressed. For the influence of motive, on the other hand, no sure and general measure can be formed, its power of excitement depending on the nature of the motive as relative to the character and temperament of the individual, varied as it may be by education, custom, the influence of general opinion, and innumerable circumstances

which are reducible to no certain rule. Where necessity acts there is no room for deliberation and choice ; but where the influence of suasion only operates, addressed to the moral principles of our nature, we are conscious of a power within ourselves of voluntarily comparing and balancing motives, and, according to our pleasure, yielding to one or another.

If we attend to the operations of our own minds, uninfluenced by any theory, we perceive a total difference in their nature and action respectively, between matter and mind. In the moral actions of the latter, especially, except when under the control of some pernicious habit, which has become inveterately fixed, we are conscious of perfect liberty. A sensation which may be clearly understood by every person who distinctly reflects upon himself, and analyzes the actions of his mind, but is difficult to be defined on account of the simplicity of the ideas. And on these subjects, let it be borne in mind, our own sensations form the only proper tests of truth and nature.

In the strongest excitement to act, for example, we are sensible of the power of resistance, and of being able, at any moment, to arrest the action, though not always, and immediately of a power to act in a contrary direction ; for this may depend on education, and the moral and religious cultivation of the mind. This liberty in acting, however, such are the laws of the spiritual world, is perfectly consistent

with the most absolute *certainty* in the event, which, indeed, is the only foundation of foreknowledge in God himself. And in the Divine Mind, foreknowledge and preordination are the same; for it rests on the certain laws which he has ordained for all being, in both the great departments of the universe. Therefore, are they often promiscuously used in the sacred scriptures. To illustrate these reflections by an humble example drawn from our own experience. Even with our imperfect knowledge of mankind, and of the usual relations which subsist between motive and conduct, how often can we predict with assurance the tenor of a man's actions, in given circumstances, and frame upon them our own plans, without any hazard of mistake? How often may a parent who has long observed the influence of his instructions upon a child, predict, with the utmost assurance, at the same time, without the smallest apprehension of the existence of any necessary influence in the case, the act of his son in any definite situation? If the human intellect can proceed with safety thus far, cannot the all-creating and omniscient Power, who is fully possessed of the characters, temperament, inclinations, habitudes, and the ten thousand minute views and interests which go to influence the actions of individuals, foreknow, and, therefore, if he please ordain and decree the part which each shall bear in the most complicated moral system, and in the whole drama of life, without the smallest infringement on the liberty of the mind in her volitions?

The philosophers and divines of the necessarian school, who confound moral with physical action, see infinite difficulties in reconciling the *certain* influence of motive with the *freedom* of volition: on the other hand, they find equal difficulty in conceiving the *certainly* of events, if, at the same time, those events are to depend on the will of *free agents*. Embarrassed by the contending difficulties, they have determined, against all experience, to maintain that moral causes act with the same kind of absolute and irresistible necessity as physical. Many writers have erred as far on the opposite extreme; and, for the sake of preserving the *liberty* of man, have thought it requisite utterly to deny the *certainly* of events, depending, in any degree, on the purposes of *free minds*. Freedom, in their opinion, implies absolute contingency in its effects. Theologians, as well as philosophers of this class, are absurd enough to deny prescience, as well as preordination. The connexion of motive with certainty, so as, on the one hand, to exclude *necessity*, and, on the other, *contingency*, is a subject of feeling. And, to a man who is capable of observing the motions of his own mind, the perceptions which this feeling affords are as clear as any principles of science. Science rests on no other foundation, for its axioms, than internal feeling or sensation; which are therefore justly denominated its *first truths*.

On this subject we distinctly perceive the following facts, that motives, according to the infinite diversities of human

character, possess a perceptible influence on action—that this influence, in most instances at least, is not irresistible; but that, in acting, we are perfectly free; and this sensation is not a delusive feeling, but carries with it complete conviction of its truth, which ought never to be overthrown by any hypothetical speculation. Yet such connexion between motives and actions exists, according to the states and characters of men, that, where these, in all their relations and circumstances are completely known, certainty accompanies moral as well as natural causes and effects. By the Almighty and Omniscient Creator, then, all the thoughts and purposes of mankind, all the circumstances and motives which can in any way influence their actions, were, from eternity most distinctly known. Yet his foreknowledge does, in no way, necessitate the events connected with it, although it proves his preordination; that is, their certain existence, according to, and resulting from the order of nature, whether physical or moral, established by him.

That the moral liberty of man and the preordination of God, do not militate against one another, is susceptible of demonstration even on the principles of those who most strenuously oppose our doctrine. Let us suppose, for the sake of the argument, the present state of human nature to be a state of moral liberty, as perfect as the greatest enemies of divine preordination can imagine; suppose that there is no preordination in the system of the universe, but that all things

happen without any purpose, on the part of the Creator, yet must these philosophers confess that they take place in a certain train of causes and effects; or if, with Mr. Hume, they expunge from the vocabulary of nature the name of cause, and only say that all things happen in a certain determinate concatenation of preceding and consequent events; suppose, further, this train of causes, or succession of events, accompanied with the existing state of virtue and of vice, and that it could by any means be foreseen by the Infinite Mind, then merely creating those powers of nature, and establishing those relations of things, which in their ordinary course, and by their mutual action, should produce precisely the same moral condition of the world, ought not to be considered as subjecting the whole to the laws of mechanical necessity. And, I add, that creating them with design that this natural succession should take place—that effects, just as we see them exist, should arise out of the established order of the universe, this design, and this order would not surely constitute a system of fatality.

If, then, freedom of moral action can, by any possibility, exist in the rational system—if all things, even the Deity himself, be not subjected to an inflexible fate, it has been rendered evident, I presume, that the most universal preordination may be consistent with the most complete liberty of the mind in all her actions. The objection, therefore, which has been just stated, is futile, in a high degree, and argues an

inconsiderate, or most prejudiced disregard of the genuine structure and operations of our moral nature.

OF MISERY AND VICE, AS OBJECTS OF THE DIVINE DECREES.

The existence of vice and misery in the works of God, is esteemed by those who deny the divine preordination of all events, to form an insuperable objection, equally with the former, against the admission of the doctrine, involving, as they conceive it does, the deepest imputation on his goodness and his holiness. Small reflection, it should seem, would be requisite to demonstrate, that a cavil of this kind could never be resorted to, where the subject had been duly considered. The very existence of these evils forms an irrefutable answer to the objection; or we must embrace a principle most unworthy the divine wisdom and power. I have no hesitation to admit that their existence, by whatever means they were introduced, or for whatever end they were permitted, entered originally into the designs of heaven, for the administration of this world. Their being is as great a mystery to reason as their being ordained. To say that they have been merely *permitted*, without any interference, or concern of Almighty God in the actions of men, is only attempting, by the illusion of a word, to throw the difficulty out of sight, not to solve it. If he has permitted the introduction of evil, has it not arisen out of the constitution of his

own work? or in other words, had its birth in those very laws of our physical and moral nature which he has established in the universal system of things? Let the friends of this phraseology reconcile the event to the divine perfections, and the friends of the doctrine of universal preordination will be able, on the same grounds, to demonstrate the consistency of these perfections, with the decree by which sin freely exists through the perverted will of the creature, and its punishment necessarily follows. That this may be accomplished without any infringement on the rational liberty of the mind, our own experience sufficiently attests. If it be esteemed more difficult to reconcile the misery and guilt of our nature with the benignant perfections of the Deity, this difficulty is at least equal on all systems.

In examining the principles of Natural Religion, I have already endeavoured to vindicate the goodness of God in the existence of the manifold evils of human life, either as correctors of its errors, and assistants towards regaining its original perfection, or laying the foundation, ultimately for its social and intellectual improvement and happiness. Hereafter, I shall contemplate them in the light of revelation, and shew how the infinite benignity and wisdom of the Eternal is justified and illustrated in the sacred writings, in all the miseries which have overwhelmed this his greatest and best work.



OF THE OBJECTS, THE ORDER, AND THE CHARACTERS OF  
THE DIVINE DECREES.

In the elucidation of the general subject of the decrees, several important questions have been offered to our consideration by theological writers of different sects, which merit our attentive reflection. They respect chiefly, the objects of the decrees—the order in which they have been arranged—the characters ascribed to them in the holy scriptures.

1. The objects of the decrees and purposes of God our Creator are strictly the universe of things, with all their conditions and changes; and in moral agents particularly, their thoughts, affections, and their whole conduct; the advantages and disadvantages of their situation, their virtues and their vices. From eternity, these were all in the purview of the Divine Mind, and, in time, embraced within the designs, and subjected to the order of his *providence*, which is only the operation of the Supreme Creator in the execution of his eternal purposes.

2. The greater part of those writers who are friendly to the system of divine decrees, afraid, at the same time, of seeming to detract from the holiness of God, have, in order to avoid this impious consequence, thought it useful to conceive

of the divine purposes in a certain order, which has, therefore, been styled the *order of the decrees*. Every scheme, however, for arranging them, labours under the same essential defect; that of seeming to represent a succession in the Divine Mind, similar to what must necessarily take place in the designs and plans of men. In the purposes of God there can be no succession. The entire system of nature, with all its changes, is at once present to his view, and the purpose of giving them existence is one act, and co eternal with his being. He sees the end in the means, and the means in the end. So that any order applied to his eternal counsels is only an error in our own conceptions. An order, indeed, must be observed in their execution. And this perhaps it is, which has been attempted to be marked in this expression by the authors of the various systems, though by some inaccuracy of language, transferred to the decrees themselves. As this technical phrasology, however, has been adopted by many eminent divines of different sentiments, and modified according to their respective systems, in order to obviate, or evade the difficulties arising out of the introduction of sin into the works of God, I shall briefly state the manner in which the subject has been attempted to be explained, by the three principal sects; the Socinians, the Arminians, and the Calvinists. If we should not perfectly accord with any one of these great parties in religion, and utterly reject many of the principles of others, still it is useful for the theological student, and the judicious christian, to be informed of the peculiar tenets of

each, with as much precision as such a compendious system will admit.

1. The followers of Socinus deny the decrees of God as they imply, ultimately, any eternal purpose of illustrating the glory of his mercy, or his justice, in the salvation, or the condemnation of men. Their general principle upon this subject may be expressed in the following summary.—The Supreme Creator decreeing, from the beginning, to form man a moral agent, capable equally of virtue, or of vice, determined to commit him solely to the direction of his own powers, subject only to those rewards of virtue, or chastisements of vice, which naturally arise out of the regular and fixed course of divine providence. The penalties, or remunerations, of the one or of the other, are, according to their ideas, those only which are caused by the wisdom, or folly, the discretion or improvidence of men themselves. But in this, and in all things else, the ordination and immediate agency of God in giving effect to his own laws in the system of nature, are, in a great measure, overlooked, and left, it is to be feared, equally out of their scheme of doctrine, and the minds of their disciples.

But they object, especially, against considering either the fall or the recovery of mankind, as forming any object of the divine decrees, farther than the general purpose of sending a prophet to enlighten and instruct the world. As men,

however, are free agents, their virtue, or their vice, their pious use, or their unholy rejection of his revelation, cannot properly be regarded, even as subjects of foreknowledge, and still less of any divine decree. The general purpose, therefore, of the Eternal, to punish or reward them, according to their deserts, is suspended solely on the actual existence, in time, of the contingent facts which constitute their merit, or demerit. This system appears in a worse form in many of its recent disciples than it did in the founder of the sect. As it has been embraced by a great portion of them, it can hardly be regarded in any other light than as a modified theory of Natural Religion.

2. The Arminians admitting, in general terms, the decrees of God, study to arrange them in such order as shall be most favourable to their peculiar system, fixing a few principal points of christian doctrine, but omitting, at every step in their progress, some portion of the entire chain which connects the beginning with the end. The outlines of their theory may be traced out in the following propositions.—God, in his wise decrees, originally determined to create man in perfect innocence, but fallible—foreseeing his fall, but without any regard to the mode of its accomplishment in their decree or to that train of seductions which led to the fatal catastrophe.—The next object of the decree, was, considering man as fallen, to send a Saviour into the world as the medium of his restoration and recovery—for this purpose, he

determined to impart to all men sufficient grace, if properly improved, to bring the sinner to repentance, and to assist the penitent to fulfil all righteousness ; but without clearly marking the distinction between, what is called sufficient grace, and that which is effectual ; or rather making no distinction between them, except the superior means, and opportunities enjoyed by one above another—finally, it was decreed, that those who improve their means and opportunities to sincere repentance, shall be brought to eternal salvation, whereas those who wilfully continue in their sins, shall be consigned to just perdition. But here those innumerable open, or secret, and often indiscernible causes which conduce, in different minds, to sincere repentance, are wholly left out of the purview of the decree. And in all the system of these good men, neither the fall of man, nor the repentance of any of his posterity, nor, in one word, any act of a free agent, is admitted to be a proper object of divine decree.

Here we see only a few points fixed in the purposes of Heaven ; and, in the wide intervals between them, which embrace the greater portion of human life, we see not the actions of the mind, and the immense circumference of motives, occasions, and means which are combined for the production of any event, and particularly, for bringing the sinner to repentance, at all contemplated in the decrees of God.

By the language employed by the writers of this class these causes seem to be thrown entirely without the control of his providence.

The creation of man in innocence, is the first point fixed in this system. Afterwards we find nothing in which the state of human nature, and the general plan of redemption is concerned, before the promise of the Saviour. *The Fall*, and all the great events on which the present moral condition of the world depends, enter not, in their view, for any place in the divine counsels; because any decree on those subjects, would involve the voluntary actions of men.—Could then, let me ask; could the loss of human innocence, and the corruption of the whole human race be an event that might, or might not have come to pass, having no foundation of certainty in the constitution of things, but thrown by the principles of these writers, among the mass of doubtful actions, or the caprices of accident? Or could the Omniscient have foreseen the transgression of man, without the foreknowledge of all the means which led to the unhappy event, and by which it was effected? Could those means have existed by chance? or have they not arisen in the natural operation of the laws established by God himself in the moral world? And must not all these events, even to the minutest circumstances attending them, have been in the purview of the Divine Mind, in the original constitution of things.

And what further can be intended in the decrees of God, by the warmest friends of this phraseology ?

Almighty God, in sending a Saviour, has further graciously decreed, according to their system, to impart to all men grace sufficient, if wisely improved, for all the purposes of repentance and new obedience ; but the improvement of that grace, they add, forms no object of the decree, but is resigned simply and entirely to the will of man himself.— But these principles will naturally fall to be more particularly considered, hereafter, in treating of the Covenant of Grace.

3. Calvinists, on this subject, are thrown into two great divisions of Supralapsarians, and Sublapsarians, taking their denominations from that point on which they are found principally to differ. The latter, although they do not hesitate to apply the decrees of God universally to the present states and actions of men, whether good, or bad, yet, like the Arminians, study to exclude the Fall from the counsels, and purposes of Jehovah, and commence their decretal system, only after man has already become mortal, and involved in sin. Before that period, their language, at least, appears to represent the Deity, the benignant parent of the universe, in a kind of inactive state, waiting till man himself, by his own independent and sinful act, fix the unhappy destinies of his race. The cautious timidity with which these writers ap-

proach this subject, betrays their secret apprehension that the decrees of God, to which, on other occasions, they freely appeal, have, in the production of sin, some sinister influence on the moral liberty of man. If these apprehensions were well founded, they ought to abandon their system altogether. They do not appear to reflect that the *freedom* of the moral agent is no more impaired by the fall of the sinner, than by the regeneration of the believer; which last, however, they strenuously maintain to be an object of divine decree. The one is descending from a state of innocence, into a state of sin, the other is precisely the reverse, returning from sin to holiness. The latter easily comports with their general theory; from the former they inconsistently shrink, as revolting their moral feelings. Their view of the decrees applies to mankind only since the Fall; and is confined, almost solely, to those who are chosen, out of the mass of the human race, to eternal life; the rest being left to perish in the corruption of their natural state.—In all other parts of their scheme it coincides with that of their Supralapsarian brethren.

On this subject, which has been rendered difficult, principally by an unguarded, and perhaps by an inadequately defined use of the term decree; for it is merely the will of God operating in the laws of nature to the accomplishment of their proper ends, whether in the natural or moral world, the Su-



pralapsarians hold, at least, the most consistent language. In the order of the decess, they argue that the end proposed to be attained must, as in every wise system, have had the priority in the contemplation of its author. After that the means conducing to its accomplishment will, with propriety follow. These principles may appear more distinctly in the outline of this scheme which is exhibited in the following series of propositions.—Almighty God having purposed in the economy of this world, to illustrate the union of his mercy, and his justice, and in the prosecution of this end, to display the glory of his Son, decreed to create man holy, but free—and in the progress of his ultimate design, he decreed the fall of our first parents ; that is, that the state in which they should be placed, and the whole combination of motives operating on the natural principles of action, should most freely lead to the accomplishment of that event, so distressing in itself, but so necessary to the illustration of the glory of his grace—he decreed in consequence, to send the Saviour, with whom he deposited the whole economy of this merciful dispensation, placing it under his immediate administration. He decreed, moreover, the salvation of a chosen number of the human race, preparing those means which would certainly lead, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, to the fulfilment of his gracious purpose ; leaving in the same act, those who should be disobedient and unholy, to the guilt and infelicity of their natural state. The intention of the divines who employ this language, is simply to assert the universal agency of God, in

both the moral and physical systems of nature ; at the same time, to preserve entire the freedom of the human mind, and to free Almighty God, most holy, just, and good, from the blasphemous imputation of being the author of sin.

Are not the universal laws of nature so ordained as to attain, by their natural operation, every end for which they were evidently designed by the Creator? It is the inquiry of a Supralapsarian—Can any event spring into existence but in exact conformity with those laws, the nature and the ends of which have been designed by God? Admitting this conclusion, what are denominated his decrees can be nothing more than the development of the laws of nature both moral and physical, according to his will, and to the constitution of the agent, and the subject of their action ; free where morals and accountability are concerned ; necessary where the materiality of the subject requires it—and *certain* in all. For to an omniscient Being, who is perfectly acquainted with the nature and influence of every motive, its combination, and co-action, with all other means, and with the peculiar temperament of each individual agent, moral effects are as certain, in their order, as the results of any physical causes whatever. Apply these reflections to the fall ; though it has taken place in conformity with the divine decree, it was as much the free effect of motive on an intelligent being capable of being swayed by his appetites and passions, as any of the ordinary actions of human life. It is true, the agency of the serpent is

represented as the medium through which the fatal choice was produced. But as no miraculous power is alleged in the case, it was entirely effected by the suasion of motives freely addressed to the natural and yet uncorrupted principles of the soul. If, then, we can suppose circumstances to exist, in the correspondence of the dispositions, still innocent of human nature, with the temptations, addressed to them, which, by their free and natural action, would be followed by a dereliction of duty, would the will of God giving existence to these circumstances, in conformity to his ultimate designs, call it *decree*, or by whatever less offensive name you please, impose any fatal necessity upon the act, or render the divine agency in the existence of those circumstances, in the smallest degree more arbitrary or unjust, than their existence by any other cause? This justification of the principles of the Supralapsarian, who takes it as an acknowledged fact, that the decrees of God embrace the whole system of the universe, appears perfectly conformable to the dictates of the soundest reason.

If his antagonists demand, do not these ideas impute the sin of man to his Creator, as being, if not immediately, yet ultimately and indirectly its author? He confidently replies, not more than those of the most strenuous defenders of our moral liberty. For it has formerly been shewn, that we always act with the most perfect consciousness of freedom in every choice, and the most entire control over our own ac-

tions. If again they demand, does not this language exhibit a hard and cruel representation of the Supreme Being? he frankly answers, not more than the principles of those who admit that the Almighty and Omniscient Being, who created all things, must have foreseen, yet permitted the evil which he could have prevented, and formed a system out of which it would, freely indeed, but infallibly spring; nay, which was necessary to accomplish the ultimate designs of his goodness and mercy. If he is farther pressed with the difficulty of accounting for the fact, that a wise and benevolent Deity should give existence to a world subject, by his decree, to sin and its consequent miseries, though intended, ultimately, as a conspicuous theatre of his benignity;—he calmly rests upon the justness of this principle, that, what might or might not have been done by God infinitely powerful and wise, is not within the range of human intellect to decide. With submission therefore, to the Divine Wisdom, he resolves the whole into the *sovereignty*, that is, the *unsearchable counsel* of Heaven; comprising designs, and ends, and means, utterly beyond the comprehension of minds so limited as ours. And this is a solution to which every sect in religion, or philosophy, must ultimately have recourse, in their reasonings concerning the introduction of sin into the works of God.

THE CHARACTERS OF THE DECREES ASCRIBED TO THEM  
IN THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

Some distinguishing characters of the divine decrees, either directly, or by obvious implication, ascribed to them in the holy scriptures, will contribute to elucidate the general subject, and assist in the explanation of many important questions connected with them. Those which chiefly merit the attention of the metaphysician, or the divine, are, their eternity, their freedom, their sovereignty, their wisdom, their holiness, their absoluteness, and immutability.

1. That which primarily merits our consideration is their eternity. Nothing which implies succession, or change, is to be imputed to the Infinite Mind; so that all his purposes are coeternal with himself. Therefore the apostle characterizes his decree, as his *eternal purpose*; and speaking of believers, he says, they have been chosen in Christ *before the foundation of the world*; for all is eternity which is antecedent to the commencement of time.

A metaphysical, and probably improper question, as certainly it is useless, has been raised upon this subject by a vain curiosity—Whether the existence of the Sovereign Mind ought to be considered as antecedent to his decrees? Obvious it is, that, in contemplating, or speaking of them,

there must be a precedence of order in their arrangement ; but in their existence, there can be no priority of time : as, in contemplating the sun, we regard the body, before the light which issues from it, although, in strictness of conception, the effect is simultaneous with the cause. Perhaps we may say of this, as of many other metaphysical questions ; that it is a vain and fruitless effort of the mind, and uselessly wasting its strength, to attempt to frame ideas on subjects that are too fine and subtle to be embraced by the human intellect. Every thing in our ideas, relating to duration, is united with succession. Eternity, in its proper nature, transcends the ingenuity of the mind to conceive. And disquisitions on questions of such extreme subtlety, generally indicate only feeble and unsatisfactory efforts to apply the narrowness of our understanding to subjects which, from their nature must forever baffle its inquiries. Subjects so sublime and so far exalted above our reach, tend, in our endeavours to embrace them, only to humble and overwhelm the soul. But as far as our conceptions can comprehend the subject, we may pronounce, that the decrees of God, which are the purposes and prescriptions of his infinite wisdom, are coeternal with his existence.

2. The next characteristic of the decrees which we have remarked, is their freedom. An obvious consequence of the perfect moral freedom of the Divine Being in all his counsels ; which excludes the idea of any necessity in his acts

resembling that under which the physical world is held. It is declared in all the symbols of the orthodox reformed churches, that *God, from eternity, did most wisely, most justly, and most freely, decree whatsoever comes to pass.*—The only objection which has been plausibly urged against this principle, is that which has been maintained by the famous German philosopher Leibnitz, in his 'Theodice', in so superior a manner, that he may justly be esteemed the father of it. His maxim is, that infinite *perfection* implies *necessity* in all its acts. And the Eternal, being infinitely wise and good, must, from the unchangeable rectitude of his nature, choose on all subjects, only and necessarily that which is best. The conclusion which he infers from this principle is, that the system which God hath created, and the order of things which he hath established in it, *must, of all possible systems be the best*; that is, in its nature, order, and arrangements, be the most perfect. This doctrine, on a transient inspection, is captivating to a speculative mind; yet when closely examined, will be seen to be liable to unanswerable objections. It proceeds on the supposition that there are ideas of good, and of best antecedent, in the order of conception, to the idea of God, and independent of him, out of which he might make a selection, according to his pleasure, in organizing a created system, as an artist may select out of forms already existing, such as may best correspond with his present designs. Whereas nothing can exist without, or independent of God. He formed the ideas of the things, with

the things themselves. Nothing is *better* or *best* in nature but as he hath created it, and fixed its relations. Besides, these are definite terms of comparison among things, of the same kind actually existing. But, with regard to plans possible to infinite wisdom, it is, perhaps, an error in our conceptions, to suppose that there is any one which can be pronounced the *best*. To a finite subject it were absurd to ascribe this superlative quality. And if the subject be infinite, must not the possible combinations in an infinite system, be infinite and endless?\*

I must further observe on the idea of the *best* possible system, and the necessary nature of the divine decrees which, as a natural consequence, has been deduced from it, that it is pressed with two difficulties which have never yet been satisfactorily resolved; in the first place, the unreasonableness of presuming that Almighty God should have exhausted himself in the production of the universe, or should ever have exerted any ultimate effort of omnipotence; in the next place, the proximity of this idea to the fate of the Stoics; to which certainly it is, in language at least, too nearly allied, which was maintained by them, to be antecedent, and superior to the Deity.—The conclusion, therefore, still remains, that the decrees of God are most free, and that they are not either arrested or controled by the laws of *necessity*.

\* Witherspoon's Lectures.



3. Their Wisdom, and their Sovereignty in the next place, are usually joined together, by divines, in order to limit the conclusions on each side, which men are prone rashly to frame concerning them. God, as sovereign of the universe, has the most perfect right to ordain whatever seemeth good to him. And though all his acts are ever most just and equitable, yet, often, wrapped, as they are, in the profound depths of his wisdom, they appear, to our feeble vision, to be covered with clouds and darkness. His rights, as an infinite sovereign, ought, at all times, to command our unmurmuring obedience; and our conviction that all his commands are founded in equity and wisdom, are sufficient to engage our submissive acquiescence, although the reasons on which they move, are often concealed from our view. In the whole order of nature, and of providence, what we cannot explain, we resolve into the sovereignty of God. Not that any order, or arrangement of his may ever be esteemed arbitrary, and without reason; but, when we cannot fathom its wisdom, his authority, which is only another term by which to express his sovereign will, and his rightful dominion, ought ever to be deemed a sufficient reason for the obedience and duty of children to their heavenly Father. Frequently, the febleness of the human mind is called to submission on this ground, arising from innumerable events occurring to our observation and experience, which baffle reason to account for them, which elude conjecture, and in many instances, seem even to contradict our ideas of divine goodness and justice.

In every event, it is a sufficient reason to a pious man that the Lord hath done it. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? There are divines who extend much farther their ideas of the sovereignty of God. Nothing, they say, is either good or wise in *itself*, but only as it is made so by the divine *will*. According to this principle the *will* of God is the sole reason why one action is superior in goodness and excellence, to another, and, in one word, why virtue is preferable to vice. Perhaps these writers have a better meaning than, to us, their terms seem to convey; but, apparently, they destroy the very foundation of the moral attributes of the Deity, and resolve the whole of his perfection into *power* and *will*.

The holy scriptures are full of the most explicit testimonies, both to the wisdom and sovereignty of the divine decrees. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! Even so, Father! for so it seemed good in thy sight!" But, with the most poetic and striking imagery is the sovereignty of the divine government, in the dominion of providence, represented in the close of the book of Job. That sublime composition is acknowledged, by the best writers, to contain a dramatic exhibition of the difficulties arising to reason from the afflictions of good men, and the prosperity of the wicked in the world. After the friends of Job had wearied themselves with vain

discussions on this embarrassing subject ; when the Almighty is introduced, speaking out of the whirlwind to decide the question, instead of reasoning on the wisdom and equity of his proceedings, he simply displays the majesty of his power in the works of nature. The humiliating inference from which was,—your intellects are too feeble to comprehend the wisdom of the principles on which my government moves. Vain it is, to attempt to unfold them to your darkened minds. I display before your senses the majesty of my power, that it may arrest your cavils against my inscrutable purposes, and leave on your hearts the deep conviction, that all the dispensations of the omnipotent Jehovah must be equitable and just.

Submission to the sovereignty of the divine administration, or the habitual acknowledgment of this principle, in all the events that befall ourselves, is deeply humbling to the self-confidence of human vanity. The mind is apt to revolt at a doctrine asserting even divine power in a tone apparently so arbitrary, and at acts the reasons of which lie far above its comprehension. It is only after repeated trials of its own powers in vain reasonings, and abortive conjectures, to explain the ways of God, that, lost in the complication, and depth of its inquiries, it is constrained at length to confess its impotence, and to acquiesce in the appointments of Heaven, simply saying it is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.—In its first struggles with the ideas of the

sovereignty, and the unsearchable counsels of God, it resembles a restive steed chafing and fretting himself with his own spirit, before he has learned to yield to the control of the bit. But when he has been trained to proceed submissively along his prescribed path, he moves with ease and satisfaction to himself, guided by the wisdom of the mind that directs him. So, when the christian, humbled by many fruitless and disappointed efforts, to push his inquiries on these obscure subjects beyond the powers of the human mind, has learned, at length, justly to estimate his own force, he perceives an unspeakable tranquillity of heart, in piously submitting, on all those questions which he cannot explain, to the will and the wisdom of Almighty God. The difficulties, however, which have embarrassed this subject to certain writers, have arisen, chiefly, from the falsity of their own conceptions, and improperly confounding the ideas of *sovereignty*, and of *arbitrary* will. None of the acts of the divine government are ever arbitrary in their principle, or take place without the most perfect reason; but the reasons on which they move are often far removed beyond the ken and elude the penetration of our minds. And this is all that is intended by a wise man in speaking of the sovereignty of the divine counsels.

From a similar error in conception proceeds the offence which some, otherwise worthy and good men, have conceived against the doctrine of divine preordination applied to the

everlasting states of the human race, as if it implied that some sinners are chosen to the inheritance of eternal life, by an unreasonable predilection. This is never the meaning of any writer who thinks respectfully of the divine economy. Let us compare the preordinations of Heaven with regard to the present, and the future world. There is, in many respects, a manifest analogy between them. And the same reasonings which demonstrate the divine decrees with relation to the various conditions of the present life to exist without any infringement on the moral liberty of man, or impeachment of the justice of God, apply equally to the destinations of eternity. The states and conditions of men to which they are severally appointed in this world, are never separated in the decree of God, from the industry, the prudence, the talents, and all the means which, in the order of nature, contribute to the effect. And it is equally true that, wherever those means are properly applied, it is the usual course of providence that they accomplish their end; they gain and fix that state in life for the individual which is the will of God.—Let us transfer this analogy to the future state of each man. This state cannot be presumed to be the object of the divine decree, independent of the moral qualifications which prepare him for its possession, nor those qualifications independent of the means of divine culture which he enjoys, and the pious improvement which he makes of them. And, let it be remembered, that the aids which we possess of enlarging our knowledge in divine truth, and cul-

tivating in the heart a divine taste, are as certain in their operation, and, under the guidance and influence of the Holy Spirit, as effectual to their end, according to their extent, and application, as any train of causes in the natural world. Included in the decree of election, therefore, are all those means of instruction, and motives of holiness essentially connected with salvation,—those opportunities of divine information, those advantages of situation,—of example—of external circumstances—of providential dispensations—and all those infinite, and almost imperceptible aids, and motives which under the influences of that divine teacher, are calculated to enlighten the understanding, to touch, and transform, and mould the heart.—The sovereignty of the decree, therefore, respects not more the end, or the eternal life of the elected sinner, than the various means of moral culture, which have the effect, under the teaching of the Divine Spirit, to prepare the soul for her final destination. For, in the view of God, the means, and the end, are essentially, and most intimately conjoined, and both embraced in the same act.

In this consideration of the subject, individual election is analogous to the elevation of particular nations, as of Israel, to a state of peculiar favour with God: a species of election with which all parties profess to be perfectly reconciled. Analogous I say; for the obvious effect of this preference, is the enjoyment of special privileges, instructions, and re-

ligious ordinances, designed to form the understanding and the heart, to the love and obedience of divine truth, by which we have seen the ancient church cherished in the bosom of that favoured nation, not so much by any direct and miraculous operation on the hearts of the people, as by the excellence of her sacred institutions. So likewise is formed the believer, under the grace of the gospel, by the due improvement of his spiritual and precious privileges, accompanied by the blessing of the Holy Spirit.

Against the sovereignty of the divine decrees, in the election of nations, communities, families, and even individuals to peculiar means of moral cultivation, leading to the ultimate ends of religion, in the sanctification of the heart, the greatest assertors of human liberty, or revilers of divine decrees, find nothing to object; for the fact is before their eyes. And in the formation of a believer into the image of Christ, there is nothing different in the means, or motives employed, from those which operate in the whole church; unless that in particular instances, they may be applied, by the blessed Spirit, with greater energy, or a finer adaptation to the character and state of different minds. For the lights, and instructions, and motives to conversion, given to the church at large, are those only which operate on each individual, and are abundant for all the purposes of piety, in the hands of that omniscient, and all-powerful spirit, who knows how to reach the heart, through them, with the finest insinuation, to move

it by the most affecting touches, and to form it ultimately into the image of his own holiness, by continual, and almost insensible impressions.

We behold here the sovereignty of the divine decrees placed upon an intelligible and liberal footing. We behold likewise the perfect correspondence of human liberty, and the natural relation of means and end, with the powerful will, and all-presiding wisdom of Almighty God.

4. The *holiness* and *justice* of the decrees have created no controversy among those who acknowledge their existence; nor can there remain a doubt concerning them in the minds of any who believe in the being of God most holy and most wise.

5. Much more disputation has been awakened with regard to the attributes of *absoluteness* and *immutability*, ascribed to them by the orthodox. And certainly no subjects seem more to have embarrassed metaphysicians, and divines, or to have excited among them a greater variety of absurd speculations. Some writers you have seen maintaining the position, that there can be no certainty in free actions antecedent to their existence. And, to preserve the consistency of their principles, they are obliged to deny the prescience of God; or, with the ancient Stoics, and a great portion of modern philosophers, to subject the whole universe to the



cheerless laws of necessity. Others, constrained by their reason to admit the universal foreknowledge of God, have, in order to account for the divine prescience, had recourse to an absurd principle of the school-men, called by them *scientia media*, which implies an antecedent apprehension of all things in the Divine Mind, in their proper nature, time, and place, resembling the immediate vision of all objects as in perspective; as if present; but abstracted from all consideration of their mutual relations as cause and effect, whence any rational inference could be formed concerning their existence. It is the contemplation of the universe throughout its whole duration and extent as a present object; it is the knowledge simply of the facts, independent of every other consideration, by a mysterious power in the divine nature, no similitude to which has ever been imparted to any of his creatures. It is, I presume, a mere absurdity in our conceptions.

But the opinion which many pious and worthy men have embraced, of a necessity in our actions, which does not remove their guilt, deserves a more particular consideration.—It is said to be a necessity arising out of the natural inclinations of the mind, and, as the action entirely concurs with our will, it creates a feeling of liberty in pursuing our own pleasure, while governing our conduct with a force not only *certain* in the event, but irresistible in its cause. I am willing to believe that these good men, many of whom are distin-

guished by their pious and excellent writings, mean no more by this phraseology, than I have studied to express by that *certainty* which I have shewn may, and to the Divine Mind, does ever accompany moral, as well as physical causes. But I conceive their language to be exceptionable, and liable to dangerous abuse. Their reasonings in many of their principles, too evidently coincide with the doctrines of the Hobbesian school.

The *certainty* of all the purposes of God, is the chief ground on which these writers maintain the doctrine of *necessity*. The one they presume to be involved in the other. On the contrary, I conceive, that there is a clear and intelligible distinction between the ideas of *necessity* and of *certainty*, which as happens in many other moral and intellectual truths, can be more easily conceived, or understood, by an internal *feeling*, than explained in precise and definite terms, which must convey ideas too fine and simple to be analyzed in language. All men can easily understand the difference between a thing *certainly* done by a free cause, and the same thing accomplished by an internal but unperceived force, so that it could not be otherwise than it is.

Many excellent men who profess to be the patrons of this system of necessity, but whose language, I am persuaded, is more in error than their hearts, lay it down as an axiom in their metaphysics, that the will is irresistibly determined by

the strongest motive at the time before the mind, and cannot act otherwise than it does ; not sufficiently attending to the entire difference between the nature and movements of mind and of matter, of motive, and of physical impulse. How can it be known that it is the strongest motive which, in every instance, governs our choice ? Do you say, as is commonly done, because it does govern ? This circle is obviously begging the principle in question—it governs our choice because it is the strongest motive ; and it is the strongest motive because it governs our choice. In opposition to this pretended maxim, the soundest metaphysicians, and the most accurate observers of the operations of the mind, agree with the learned and profound Dr. Reid of Glasgow, that we often act according to the direction of a weaker motive ; and sometimes act without any perceptible motive at all.

Although the mind seldom acts without motive ; yet it is not motive which exclusively determines its volitions ; or is the sole cause of action. This would be reducing action to a mechanical operation, and justify those material analogies, in explaining its nature, which I have before condemned.—The proper effect of motive is to solicit and excite the mind, and to put it into a state of action. But I have a power within me which *determines* my choice, on a view more deliberate, or more rapid, of the motives before it. If you ask me to explain that power—I feel it—I am sensible that I exercise it—and, in the feeling and exercise I understand the act.

Every man may, in the same manner, feel and understand it by attending to the operations of his own mind. But I am no more capable of explaining it in terms, than I can explain the sensation of *seeing*. The perception is too simple. It is understood by the mind, only *in* the act of perceiving, or exerting its power of volition. This does not lessen the clearness and certainty of the idea. It is, perhaps, the reason why this idea is peculiarly clear. It is among the primary sensations of our nature. And in no other way, than these original sensations, are those ideas that are emphatically and happily called *first truths*, or axioms in science, which are the elements, and clearest materials of all our knowledge, conveyed to the intellect. They are the impressions of the hand of God upon the mind; convictions resulting from the very constitution of our nature. Thus am I conscious of my liberty, or power over my own acts, *in* the acts themselves.

Upon the whole view of this subject, the result is, that I act with the most perfect freedom. Motive, though it influences, does not necessarily determine my choice. Yet such certainty there is in the actions of rational and moral beings, according to their dispositions, education, habits, and the whole atmosphere of motives which encompasses them, as lays as a foundation, among men themselves, in their social relations, for the most useful general knowledge of one another, and in God for the most perfect foreknowledge of all

the actions of life, he having formed the various temperament of individuals, and disposed, in his providence, the whole train of motives, to the most minute, and often imperceptible, which continually operate upon all the springs and principles of action; both which, the temperament of the individual, and the succession and combination of motives he has constituted, and ordained, and governs, in such a manner, in his church, under the all-wise direction of his Holy Spirit, as most effectually, yet most freely, to accomplish all his most wise and holy purposes.

Thus have I unfolded the ideas involved in the technical and systematic phrase—the *Decrees of God*; which, being interpreted by the obvious and philosophic language of the *Laws of Nature*, or its various powers and tendencies of action, from which proceed, under God, as his organs of operation, all events, whether natural or moral in the universe, these decrees, which appear, to certain writers, with such a formidable aspect, stand on plain and intelligible ground, acknowledged, when rightly understood, by all the best friends of science and religion.

From the whole of these reflections it results, that the decrees of God are *eternal*, like his will and purposes in the laws of nature;—they are most *certain* in their consequences, that is, they are *absolutely* ordained, a term equivalent to the former, except that it seems to carry in it more of the *author-*

*ity* on which all depends ; and, finally, like the same laws, they are immutable. This is, obviously, the amount of the proposition in our confession, and catechisms, that the *decrees of God are absolute and unchangeable*, which to some sects of christians, has given great, and, I presume, unnecessary offence.

From the interpretation which has been given to this important proposition, we perceive the coincidence of reason, with religion ; and the support which science, justly explained, may often render to revelation.

OF THE  
**COVENANT OF WORKS**  
AND THE  
FALL OF MAN.

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I PROCEED, in the next place, to the consideration of the Covenant of Works, and the fall of Man. This Covenant, as it is contemplated in our systems, is the transaction represented to have taken place between man and his Creator at his first formation, wherein a law of duty was prescribed to him, under the explicit threatening of death, in case of transgression, and the implied promise of life, on the condition of obedience. His whole duty, however, in this covenant, was collected in a single prohibition as its test. It is proper to observe, that the term *covenant* is not employed in the history of this transaction by the sacred writer. But it is not the object of the holy scriptures to arrange for us systems, with scientific precision and method. They simply express things in a free and narrative order, so as to be most easily conceived, and applied to use by the plainest readers; and this diffusive style has been collected, by divines, into specific propositions, and disposed, according to the order and dependence of ideas, into a scientific form, which, for the con-

venience of arrangement, and conciseness of expression, requires, frequently, a peculiar and technical phraseology. Of this we have an example in this term. In the strictness of meaning usually annexed to it, a *covenant* could not take place between the Supreme Jehovah, and the insect man. For it properly signifies a stipulation between persons who are, in some degree, equal and free. Yet, as far as such an agreement can be supposed to exist between parties of such infinite disparity as the Creator and the creature, it will be found to be contained in this precept to Adam. In it a duty is to be performed—a reward is proposed for obedience—and a penalty denounced in case of transgression. For, although the reward is not explicitly stated in terms, it is manifestly involved in the threatening. If death was the forfeiture for disobedience, the necessary implication was, that life was the alternative for obedience.

Having justified the technical denomination which this transaction has received among divines, it is only necessary, farther, to suggest that it is spoken of, in our systems, under two different appellations, being sometimes styled, from its condition, the *Covenant of Works*, and sometimes, from its implied reward, the *Covenant of Life*.

Various circumstances in the constitution, administration, and appendages of the covenant, demand our most serious inquiries. 1. In the first place, the peculiar selection of a com-



mand or prohibition for the trial of Adam's obedience. 2. In the second place, the full implication of the promise and the threatening. 3. Thirdly, the representative character of our first father in this transaction. 4. And lastly, the signification of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and of the tree of life.

1. ON THE SELECTION OF AN OBJECT FOR THE TRIAL OF  
MAN'S OBEDIENCE.

When we consider the natural imbecility of the human mind, and the limited sphere to which the range of its ideas is confined, it cannot be surprising, if, in the revelation of the divine will, in the holy scriptures, as well as in that natural revelation inscribed on the face of the universe, we should find many facts which it is difficult, and some which transcend the utmost powers of reason to explain. The enemies of revealed religion examine, with scrupulous ingenuity, every part of that sacred volume which contains its history; and if its friends are not able to solve to the satisfaction of a captious philosophy, all the questions which, either the obliquity of ignorance, or the perversity of genius can raise upon it, they are inclined to reject the whole as a fable. No part of the whole system, perhaps, has been exposed to bolder inquiries than the Mosaic account of the fall of man, or been treated with more indecent levity than the test of his obedience proposed by divine wisdom in the fruit of the forbidden tree.

From the earliest dawn of science, the speculations of philosophy have been employed, without being able to arrive at any satisfactory conclusions on the subject, to account for the introduction of evil into the works of an all-powerful, wise, and benevolent Deity. Revelation has proposed only a few simple facts relative to it, without explicitly unfolding the inscrutable relations which it holds to the purity and holiness of the divine nature ; or pointing out the operations of the human mind in its progress from innocence to guilt. The first parents of the human race, had, already, the law of nature written on their hearts. It pleased the Creator, however to make proof of their constancy and perseverance in practical holiness, by an appeal to the great principle of all duty, which consists in obedience simply to the *will* of God. For this purpose it was requisite to impose upon the conscience some *positive* injunction ; that is, one to which no natural morality, or immorality is attached, but the obligation to which rested solely upon the *divine command* ; without any other moral consideration. From an action naturally immoral, a holy nature would instinctively shrink ; so that no temptation from that quarter could be made to reach it. But the act being originally indifferent, the mind could approach it near enough to contemplate it on every side whence an insidious suggestion could be thrown in to induce, for a moment, an oblivion of the authority of Heaven. Here would be opened a field in which the tempter, the great enemy of

God and man, might please himself with the hope of operating, not wholly without success.

Accordingly, the subject which Divine Wisdom selected for this probation, was the fruit of a single tree, of specious appearance, which alone was prohibited to man, of all the enjoyments furnished by the whole range of nature, and with this solitary exception, freely indulged to his use. This selection has afforded abundant matter of objection to ignorance, and of sarcasm to wit. Why was the proof of human virtue, it is asked, and, with it, the most important consequence to the whole family of mankind suspended on an action so trivial, if not contemptible, to use their own phrase, as *the eating of an apple*? Why was it not rested on some prominent precept, at least, of the moral code? To these inquiries let me answer, that we cannot, in all cases, and that we can, perhaps, in very few, enter into the reasons of the divine conduct, either in the structure, or the government of the universe. In the present instance, however, we have it in our power to propose some plausible conjectures, which may furnish sufficient grounds for the vindication, if not the perfect explanation of this portion of the divine economy, so little capable of illustration by any analogies drawn from the affairs of men.

This subject requires that we should not pass over it with a slight attention, inasmuch as every answer which can be

clearly given to the minutest, as well as the more important objections of unbelievers, is shedding some light on the cause of divine truth, and giving additional stability to its foundations.

In the first place, I hope to demonstrate, that the prohibition made to the parents of the human race, for the probation of their innocence, instead of being, in the language of the objection, of a mean and trivial nature, was drawn from a subject which, in that age, held the highest place in the economy of human life.

In the next place, I shall shew that, at that time, a subject on which to rest this trial could hardly have been taken from a different class of objects.

Those who affect to be very wise, or very witty, are pleased to say, with all the contemptuousness which the terms, in the present age, obviously imply, that Moses, by his narration, has suspended the destinies of the whole human race upon *the eating of an apple*. Let us seriously examine the truth of this sneering allegation, and inquire into the nature of that act by which Adam forfeited his primitive condition of happiness in Paradise.

It is uncertain what was the kind of this fruit, or the nature of the tree which bore it. It is probable that it was a tree

entirely singular in its nature, bearing a fruit of exquisite beauty to the eye, and of delightful fragrance and flavour to the taste and smell. It received its denomination of *the tree of knowledge of good and evil*, only to indicate the consequences of tasting its fruit; that, as the first pair had hitherto known only *good*, they would, by that act, become practically acquainted with *evil*. But, in order to a proper consideration of this action, it is necessary to understand that the only sustenance of human life, in the beginning, was derived from the spontaneous fruits of the garden, and its principal refreshments from their cooling and enlivening juices. The culture of grain was not yet practised, nor were sacrifices, at that period, drawn from the fold. The virtue of *temperance* then, which constituted the chief of the practical virtues of that state, must have had respect only to the quantity, or the kinds of the fruits which were then permitted, and used for nourishment; particularly, as there might have been, in the collections of that primitive garden, some species possessing highly exhilarating qualities, requiring caution in their use.— And it is far from being an improbable supposition, that the interdicted tree contained a liquor of intoxicating strength, calculated to throw all the fluids of the human body into unnatural tumults, immediately inciting to vice, and awaking impure and indecent passions; as we learn from the shame which affected our great ancestors, as soon as the influence of the first draught had somewhat subsided. And it is no less probable that it possessed properties of a most deleterious

nature, which infused into the veins an insidious poison, inducing that mortal tendency to corruption in the whole frame, to which it fell at length an irremediable victim.

In these reflections we may perceive, I presume, a foundation laid for making a just estimate of the importance of the subject which was chosen as the original test of man's obedience. The fruits of the garden furnished the whole subsistence of human life. In them were found all the means of temperate enjoyment ; and, in the forbidden tree, at least, we discern what was equivalent to the most pernicious viands of luxury and intemperance. No subject could exist, at that period, of greater moment, for the trial of man's integrity and perseverance in the principle of all duty ; which consists, as has before been said, in obedience simply to the *will* of God.

I proposed, in the next place, to shew the probability that divine wisdom could hardly have selected a subject from a different class of objects, on which this trial could have been rested. It has already been suggested, that any act which should have involved direct impiety of aim, or indicated impurity of disposition, would have been so immediately revolting to a holy mind, that a temptation to the commission of it, could hardly, for a single moment, have entered the mind, or been entertained there with favour. And, it is obvious, that none of the precepts of the decalogue, could have afforded any grounds for being made, at this time, a test of

this sublime duty. None of the moral relations of society, which we now see established among mankind, could then have yielded any possible occasion to transgression.—Let us examine them singly. Could man, for example, have denied the existence of God, or have profaned his holy name, or debased his nature by any of the images of idolatry, who daily held delightful commerce with him in the gardens of Paradise, and whose works were shining in all the freshness of their glory before his eyes, in the recent creation? Could the duty of children to their parents be violated by him who had no parent but God? How could murder, adultery, or falsehood in rendering testimony exist, where no subjects were found, on which these crimes could be practised? Or how should he covet, or trespass on the property of another, who was already lord of the whole creation?—It is evident, from these inquiries, that none of the moral precepts of the law could have been selected for this peculiar trial. It must be found only in some object addressing, exclusively the corporeal appetites, the indulgence of which, not involving any transgression of the laws of nature, would not of course, awaken any suspicion, or call up any extraordinary vigilance, or guard against the access of temptation. The restraint, of consequence, which this command imposed upon Adam, and his watchfulness against its approach, and the whole virtue of this act, was obedience simply to the divine *will*.—The prohibition, therefore, could affect only certain fruits of the garden. Within the compass of this

were included all the objects which could minister any temptation to man's sensual appetites. From it alone could be drawn any trial of his virtue, in the circumstances in which he was placed. And among all its fruits, it is manifest that none was more proper than that which applied so strongly to the principle of curiosity as well as of taste, and promised, at the same time, to open to their mistaken imaginations, a new and boundless field of knowledge. A new field it was, both various and extensive, to those who had hitherto known only good: but, ah! how miserable when their fond fancies came to be blasted by the fatal experiment!

Of these circumstances, the great enemy of God, and of human happiness made his advantage to accomplish his evil designs, and, by insidious steps, to approach the innocent mind of our first mother. Direct guilt could not touch her untainted soul. The tempter, therefore, artfully covered the crime in the apparent indifference of the object; and by his specious reasonings, and his dangerous example, in eating before her eyes of the same fruit without injury, led her confused and conflicting thoughts to the utmost verge of innocence. At last, her ardent thirst of knowledge, when she recollected that it was *a fruit to be desired to make one wise*, urged her, in the tumults of her mind, to yield herself up to the wiles of the tempter, and, in an unhappy moment, to pass the now imperceptible limit between her and vice. She was surprised by the artful snares which had been laid for her;



and, without being conscious of her state at first, *she fell*.— Intoxicated by the imaginary success of her experiment, and, at the same time perhaps, by the powerful juice of the fruit which she had just eaten, she brought a portion of it to her husband, and adding the irresistible force of her persuasions to the fascinating charms of her person, he yielded to the multiplied temptation, and he *fell with her*.

Will it be said that, if this picture should have any credence attached to it, our first parents appear to have been the victims of inadvertence rather than of guilt; their vigilance was surprized, and it would be a hard measure in the Creator to involve them in such fatal consequences for the inadvertence of a moment? Let it be remembered, that no inadvertence, or surprize can form a just apology for violating the positive command of God. Let us further reflect, that it is the certain and awful order of the moral world, that an imprudence, an intermission of our virtuous vigilance, an act of inconsiderate folly, is often the cause of irreparable calamities. Perhaps, men more frequently precipitate themselves into ruin, by what may be deemed imprudence, in the beginning, than by open crime, and hardened impiety.

The great ancestors of our race, inexperienced in the wiles of sin, had now arrived at the consummation of that fatal act which involved themselves and their whole race in irretrievable perdition. And, when the delirium, created by

that mortal juice, had subsided, they became conscious, for the first time, that they had forever lost the favour of God their Heavenly Father. They dreaded the approach of him whom they had so often met with confidence and joy, pouring at his feet the grateful homage of their hearts. When they heard the accustomed sign of his drawing near, they fled trembling from his presence, vainly thinking to *conceal themselves among the trees of the garden*. In the view of one another, as well as before the divine majesty they perceived that shame which is the disgraceful effect of sin, and in their confusion, they attempted to cover themselves with fig leaves.—This remarkable fact merits particular attention, as conveying a striking indication of the moral state of their minds, and perhaps also of the physical influence of the fruit which they had eaten.

The nakedness of their persons, which, in the period of their innocence, had never affected them with any emotions but such as were pure, now began to cover them with conscious blushes. Was it that the glow of beauty, and, perhaps, of a celestial radiance, which surrounded the primitive body of man, was now lost, and the deformity of a fallen nature began to appear? Or, was it that, formerly, the sentiments of devotion, of friendship, of a virtuous tenderness, of a sublime sympathy, of a high, noble, and intelligent conversation which reigned between them, so occupied their whole souls when together, that every pleasure of the

senses gave only a gentle heightening to the most pure and refined feelings of the mind ; but now, the tumults of a gross passion alone filled their hearts, always shameful, and, in their situation, incapable of being concealed, or subjected to the control of reason. Perhaps both these causes concurred to produce this singular incident in the history of the Fall. Their nature which had made a near approach to the angelic, was now sunk into a near resemblance of the brutal ; and as yet no Saviour had been announced to them, to tranquilize the tumults of their frame, or to correct the violence of their passions.

## 2. THE IMPORT OF THE THREATENING.

I am, in the next place, to consider the full implication of the threatening ;—*In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die* ; whence we may deduce, by the most legitimate inference, the *Life* which, by contrast is involved in the condition of obedience.

This denunciation may justly be supposed to pronounce the immediate dissolution of the transgressor. And this is the meaning, perhaps, which most obviously obtrudes itself upon the mind of the reader. But it may express, merely, the sentence of the law, pronounced by the judge, in consequence of which the criminal is considered as dead to society, and thenceforth, held in rigorous custody till the pe-

method of execution appointed by the supreme authority, arrived. If the latter be the interpretation of this awful sentence, which is supposed by the greater number of divines, still such a change must have immediately passed upon the bodies of the condemned, that the powers of immortal life became instantly extinguished, and the seeds of death began to work in their living members. And the corporeal principles, among which are those powerful agents, the appetites and passions, must, from the intimate alliance which subsists between the different parts of our nature, have extended their taint through the whole system, mental as well as bodily. The terms of this sentence, therefore, include the moral death of the soul, which, without the provision of the gospel, must adhere to it while its being endures. In these reflections we recognize the extent of that death temporal, spiritual, and eternal, which, according to our standards, was included in the denunciation on our first parents.

#### OF THE ORIGINAL IMMORTALITY OF OUR FIRST PARENTS.

The opinion of those who would subject Adam to immediate death, in consequence of his transgression, I will present to you, after having taken a view of his representative character. In the mean time, it is obvious to remark, that this denunciation must imply that, in a contrary event, man would have existed forever in a state of holiness and happiness, nor have been liable to the corruptions of a mortal bo-

dy, and the pains of dissolution. A question has arisen, in consequence, among divines; whether man would have continued his immortal being upon the earth, or have been translated, without pain, and, perhaps, with some high improvement of his nature, to a superior state of existence? But, as God has not been pleased to make any revelation of his will upon this subject, the inquiry would be fruitless; and, to propose any conjectures concerning it would indicate an unlicensed boldness of fancy, equally arrogant and vain. The enemies of revelation, indeed, have denied the possibility of the fact, that man should be immortal. The human constitution is said necessarily to tend to decay. The nerves by their very structure, although no disease should attack them, become rigid by age, and lose that elasticity which is requisite to carry on the functions of animal life.—This is judging of man before the fall, by the ruins of his nature since that fatal event. There are different species of organized matter, which seem calculated to endure forever, if not attacked by extraneous violence; to instance only in the diamond;—And why might not the substance of the human frame have been so modified as to be fitted for eternal duration, or that its changes should lead only to still increasing perfection? Some great and essential change has evidently taken place, not only in man, but in all animals, and in the whole system of nature, intended to demonstrate the displeasure of Almighty God at that sin which has spread its baleful effects over the entire face of the world. The beasts

which at first, only innocently cropped the green herbage, became, in many cases, the devourers of one another. And the soil, which, in the beginning was fertile and beautiful, and yielded a copious harvest of fruits to an easy and delightful culture, became sterile and deformed, and hardly afforded a scanty subsistence to the sweat and labour of its guilty possessor.

#### OF THE REPRESENTATIVE CHARACTER OF ADAM.

Upon this history a natural, and important inquiry arises, whether the trial imposed upon Adam, respected his own stability in this holy state exclusively, according to the opinion of some writers, or whether, according to the better opinion of the great majority of christians, his posterity were involved with him in its consequences; and whether we do not see, in his defection, the true source, not only of the mortality, but of all the calamities which have overwhelmed human nature? On this subject the sacred scriptures instruct us in the most explicit terms. "In Adam all die. By one man, sin entered into the world, and death by sin; so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." In this last expression there seems to be a small inaccuracy in the translation, which is calculated to lead the incautious reader into the opinion that death is the penal consequence of the individual act of every sinner; thereby transferring the cause of our mortality, contrary to the doctrine of the scrip-

tures, from the crime of the Covenant-Head of the race to each man's personal transgression. The immediate and proximate cause of this fatal and universal catastrophe to Adam, and all his descendants, was the depravation of his nature, by the first act of sin, thereby impairing, and tending finally to destroy all the principles of life. This order of things is essentially connected with the established, and immutable laws of the universe, in consequence of which a depraved and perishing offspring necessarily springs from a corrupted stock. The version of this passage, therefore, would be better amended,—“so death passed upon all men, because that all in him have become subject to the effects of his sin;” that is, to that depravation of nature which renders them liable to death, and utterly incapable of eternal life; except through the Second Adam, who, by his death, has opened to the transgressor the way for repentance, and the obedience of a New-Covenant.

#### OF THE JUSTICE OF THIS INSTITUTION.

If the enemies of our holy religion demand the justice of this order which subjects a rational, and moral being to an *hereditary* depravity? I answer, that this is not an objection which peculiarly affects *revelation*. It is a difficulty equally in the *religion of nature*, and the philosophy of the universe. We cannot be fairly required to explain the secret operations of the laws of nature, which are known only to

God, and to account for their wisdom, and their equity. Thus far the fact is open to our inspection; that man, who has become mortal, can transmit only a mortal constitution to his offspring. By the same laws, if his appetites, and passions have become disordered by sin, the same tendencies exhibit themselves in all those who spring from his loins. The corporeal temperament of the parent, and, frequently, the faculties of his mind, we see renewed in his posterity. It is in vain to remonstrate against the injustice of this order. The fact exists. And shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? In reasoning from facts we must confess that the corruption of human nature must infallibly grow out of the established laws for the propagation of animal existence. No impeachment, therefore, can justly be moved against the holy scriptures which, having exhibited the transaction with our primitive parent under the form of a covenant, have placed him at the head of his race, as their natural and moral representative. For, according to this eternal constitution, conformably with his virtue, or his vice, that is, his standing, or his fall, must have been the consequences on his posterity. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; so death passed upon all men, because in him all have sinned," and become subject to his depraved, and mortal nature.



## OF THE BENIGNITY OF THIS ORDINANCE.

Those who are unfriendly to our doctrine demand, where would be the benignity of the Creator, in calling into existence a whole race of beings, and, at the same time, subjecting their eternal destiny to the voluntary act of a frail, though innocent creature? And an *appearance* of severity it certainly would have, if it had not been his most merciful purpose, annulling the condition of the first covenant, now rendered impracticable by the Fall, to dispose the humbled and lost father of the race, and his whole offspring, immediately under the protection and grace of the Second Adam, and the blessings of a new covenant, established on *better promises*, enriched with more glorious hopes, and resting on a more perfect security in the righteousness of Christ. And it is not an improbable opinion of many wise and good men, that the condition of the human family, under this dispensation, is much to be preferred to that which would have existed under the most favourable operation of the first. The displays of the divine nature have been more glorious, the riches and consolations of the divine mercy have been more precious, the joys of eternal life more exalted, and triumphant. Yet, to this illustrious exhibition of divine grace the fall of human nature, in the unsearchable wisdom of God, became the necessary introduction. Its richest glory arises out of its deepest humiliation.

OF THE OPINION THAT DEATH WAS DENOUNCED TO TAKE  
PLACE ON THE DAY OF THE FALL.

Another interpretation of this awful sanction,—*In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die*, which is more literal than the former, and which limits the execution of the sentence to the day of the transgression, merits our particular consideration, at once, from its simplicity, and its obvious conformity to the letter of the law. On this interpretation, Adam, under his original covenant, could not possibly have had posterity. Nor is it probable that, if he had been permitted to live for a season, he could, without a *new covenant*, giving him the hope of life, have had any offspring, while precariously existing under the momentary, and overwhelming apprehensions of death. But the whole scene was changed by the promise of a Saviour, in these mysterious words, *the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head*, which hold out to our afflicted father the final destruction of the *power of evil*, and offer to his hopes the most illustrious displays of divine mercy and grace. Immediately we perceive the first fruits of this gracious promise upon our first parents; and Adam, in the hope of a numerous progeny, which was extinguished with the loss of his own existence, called the name of his wife, in the moment of his exultation, "*Eve*, in the Hebrew language, *Chavah*; because now he was assured that she was to become the *mother of*

*a living race.*—Though raised to better hopes, yet possessing only a depraved and fallen nature, he could impart no other to his offspring. All, therefore, are born under sin. But inasmuch as, without a Mediator, and a new covenant, none would have received existence, all who now are permitted to come into the world, enter it under the protection of this glorious Saviour; and, accordingly we see them in the seals of this gracious covenant, in the church, met with the offered blessings of the *righteousness of faith*.<sup>\*</sup> Hence *life and immortality* are proposed to *all*, not, as under the original covenant with Adam, to perfect obedience; but, through a Mediator, to sincere repentance, and evangelic obedience.

OF THE IMPORT OF THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE, AND  
THE TREE OF LIFE.

The last inquiry, proposed under this head, was to ascertain the purpose and meaning of the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and the tree of life*. Of the former, little question can exist. The fruit of that tree was designed to form the test of the *obedience* of man. And its denomination was manifestly derived from its destination: for, Adam, who, at first, had been acquainted only with *good*, became, from tasting its fruit, most fatally sensible of *evil*. The act in-

<sup>\*</sup> See this principle more explicitly stated under the article of *baptism*

roduced into his soul the afflicting consciousness of guilt, and the fatal daring of disobedience, once become familiar, perverted all his powers, and emboldened his sinful passions to farther transgressions. It threw the principles of duty headlong from their throne, and raised to the forsaken seat, all the irregular affections, and violent impulses of a depraved nature. This moral death of the soul was, at the same time, conjoined with the decay of all the powers of the body, and the corruption of the principles of animal life. On the other hand, it is by no means an improbable conjecture, that the tree of life possessed a health giving, and renovating quality, which added a vital stimulus to the corporeal powers ; but that the forbidden fruit, besides its intoxicating power, which has before been suggested, contained, likewise, a deleterious spirit which instantly diffused a slow consuming poison through all the veins, and introduced the principles of disease and death into the human frame.

Many respectable writers have believed that this life giving tree was placed in the garden as the symbol of immortality to this innocent pair, as long as they should persevere in their duty ; and probably a sacramental sign of the steadfastness of the covenant, to be ever before their eyes, to encourage their joyful hopes, and to awaken their ardent devotion.

## OF THE INTRODUCTION OF SIN INTO THE WORKS OF GOD.

Before I proceed to treat of the consequences of the Fall, either upon the parents, or the entire family of the human race, it will not, I hope, be deemed improper to introduce a speculative question which, has been found to occupy with much solicitude, the minds of men; and is often, by the enemies of revelation, made the occasion of casting reproach upon its doctrines. I introduce it, however, not with the presumption of being able satisfactorily to resolve to the minds of all, the difficulties with which it is embarrassed; but with the humbler hope of inducing unmurmuring submission to the will of God, whose decrees transcend the investigations of reason.—Why did the Infinite Creator, whose power and wisdom, can accomplish all his *will*, without encroaching on the peculiar prerogatives of human nature, permit the introduction of sin into his works? Why should moral and natural evil form a part of the system, conceived by the Infinite Mind, for the administration of this world? Or how could sin exist in the universe, in which we confess that all things depend solely upon his *will*, without imputing to him such an agency in the event as to palliate, at least, if not entirely excuse the transgression of the sinner?—It is doubtless gross impiety to ascribe iniquity to God, as its author, or to impute any indirect influence over the human mind to the Most Holy, inconsistent with the purity of his

nature. For, throughout the holy scriptures, his extreme abhorrence of sin, and his inflexible determination to punish it, is expressed in the strongest terms; but candour must compel every wise man to confess the difficulty of accounting for its permission; and above all, for its entering for so large a portion into the plans of the Sovereign Wisdom.

Some writers maintain the principle, that the existence of sin is a *necessary* consequence of the freedom of action. The principle is at least incautiously expressed. No inevitable connexion surely exists between *liberty* and *criminality*; otherwise, our freedom would be a pernicious gift.—It would be a more certain proposition, but would contribute little to satisfy the inquisitive mind, that the *possibility* of crime must be connected with perfect freedom of volition and action: it is not, therefore, surprising that, in any one instance the *possibility* should be converted into *fact*. A solution this which is abundantly sufficient to those who deny the decrees of God; but to those who believe that the decrees extend to every part of nature, and embrace the minutest actions of the mind, silence and submission is the truest wisdom.

#### OF THE OPINION OF LEIBNITZ.

Some German metaphysicians, especially the disciples of the school of Leibnitz, have adopted a theory peculiar to

themselves; that evil is necessary to the perfection of the universe; as necessary, to use their own similitude, as *shades to the beauty of a picture*. This fine maxim of the imagination, is certainly dependent on a theory of very questionable truth; or rather is contradicted by the soundest dictates of reason.—Their great dogma, which solves to them all difficulties, in physics, and in morals, is, that all the good which can possibly exist in the universe, and the whole perfection, in both orders of being, which can possibly proceed from the wisdom and the power of the Omnipotent is to be seen in his works. What does not exist is impossible.—This principle is bringing back the absurd *Fate* of the Stoics, and subjecting the Deity himself to the chains of necessity.—I must be permitted to observe on this whole question, that it presents to our reason one of those inscrutable subjects, on which it is wise, in the present state, to repose submissively on the wisdom of God; resolving what we cannot explain, into his sovereign will, and the unsearchable counsels of his understanding. Revelation, however, informs us that he will turn this disastrous event to subserve the noblest ends in the universe,—the illustration of his goodness, his mercy, and his justice, in the exaltation of his Son, so as to render the new creation more glorious than Eden.

## OF THE SERPENT AND THE TEMPTATION.

Of the duration of the state of innocence, no facts are presented to us from which any certain estimate can be formed. Nor have we any means of judging in what manner the temptation was addressed by the serpent, to our primitive mother. Many frivolous fancies have been uttered concerning the species of serpent, whose form the tempter assumed ; all of them, probably, without sufficiently adverting to the effects of the curse on the whole creation, and on the change, particularly, which must have passed on the forms and qualities of the animal tribes.

That the whole history of this most important of human transactions, is according to the opinion of some respectable writers, a mere allegorical fable, depicting in figure this truth, that the fascinations of vice deceived and seduced our first parents, appears to have no support in the language in which the narration is conveyed to us. The images of hieroglyphic, out of which this divine fable is supposed to be constructed, could originally have been drawn only from actual types, that is, from historical facts. And the serpentine hieroglyphic of eloquence, wit, and cunning, used at first, by the Egyptian priests, and supposed to be here employed, has every appearance of being itself borrowed from the fact which took place in Paradise. From the same fact, the prince of



evil spirits, has received, in the holy scriptures, his figurative denomination of the *Old Serpent*; and, among the heathen, the emblematic wand of Mercury seems to have had a similar origin. The denunciation pronounced upon that reptile, *upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat*, has, obviously, a reference to some transmutation passed upon his form, and his manner of moving and subsistence, designed by God to be emblematic of the humiliation, and the degraded state into which his arts had reduced the parents, and the whole race of man.

FRAGMENTS OF THIS HISTORY FOUND IN THE TRADITIONS  
AND FABLES OF ALL THE EARLIEST NA-  
TIONS OF ANTIQUITY.

It is an inquiry which will naturally suggest itself both to the friends, and the enemies of revelation—have any vestiges of a fact so unspeakably important to human kind, been found among the historical or mythological monuments of the most ancient pagan nations? If true, would not some tradition of it have naturally been preserved in the fables of every people so lately descended from the common head of the race? And several eminent and learned writers have bestowed no small pains in comparing the traditions and mythological fables of antiquity with the mosaic history, whence they have been thought to have derived a testimony of no inconsiderable authority to the authenticity and truth of the

sacred record. All who are in the least conversant with ancient learning, are familiar with the fables of the golden and the iron age, which are nothing more than the allegorical dress in which the poets have chosen to clothe the earliest history of mankind. The doctrine of the primitive innocence, and fall of man, the travellers, and philosophers of Greece, received from Egypt, and the East, along with their arts and sciences almost with the first existence of the nation. In the Egyptian mythology, particularly, we recognize the original innocence of man in the happy reign of Osiris over the world. His fall is depicted in the ravages of Typhon, their great and wicked Demon, or principle of Evil. And, lastly, we discover the promise of a Saviour, in the prediction of the resurrection and eternal life of Osiris, when he will triumph over the power of evil, and restore universal peace and happiness to the world.\*

The Magians of Persia believed in their enigmatical system of the egg of the world, which, at first, was shining and transparent, till broken by Ahriman, the Power of Evil, when happiness became every where confounded with misery. I have formerly spoken of the doctrine of the ancient Bramins of India, and its striking similarity, in this particular, to the history of Moses. I have there also referred to the representations of the catholic missionaries, so long resident

\* The travels of Cyrus, by the Chevalier Ramsay.

in the empire of China.\* And it merits particular observation, that the traditions of the most ancient nations, the higher they go up towards the origin of time, bear the stronger resemblance to the facts of the sacred history. Nor ought this to appear surprising, since all nations, as the scriptures assure us, have sprung from one common parent after the deluge. The nearer, therefore, they carry their history to its source, the more ought we to expect, what we actually find, some coincidence in its facts with those recorded in Moses. And those holy writings evidently lead us to the genuine fountain whence all their mythological streams have flowed, more or less pure or adulterated, in proportion as they approach, or recede from, the beginning of time. And so many striking, and undesigned resemblances afford a testimony of no slight value to the authenticity of the divine historian.

THE IMMEDIATE EFFECT OF THE FALL ON OUR FIRST  
PARENTS.

Before concluding this article, it will be requisite to consider the immediate effects of the Fall upon our first parents, as well as its consequent influence upon their whole posterity. On the former, it is manifest, from the testimony of the

\* On the evidences of religion. The coincidences of the traditions of the ancient nations with the sacred history.

holy scriptures, that the judgments of God became almost instantaneously visible. They lost the image of God in which they had been created.—In their persons they suffered a lamentable change, by which their native beauty was deformed; and their nature, which had been constituted immortal, became liable to pain, disease, and the gradual approaches of death. They were condemned to leave the garden of their original pleasures, in which they had so happily lived on the spontaneous fruits of the soil, and to labour in the earth rendered hard and sterile by the curse.—For the first time, they perceived the fears, and compunctions of a guilty conscience; and, instead of the pure and tranquil delights of virtue and piety, they became sensible only of the turbulence of sinful passions. One example of these presents to us a picture of some singularity. “The eyes of them both,” it is said, “were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.” From these facts it appears that they were then first sensible of that shame which naturally arises in the mind conscious of improper and corrupt emotions, in viewing the nakedness of the person. Perhaps in the change which passed upon them, they perceived a deformity in their bodies which before had never struck their eyes, which probably, in their original condition, had not existed. But this sudden and mortifying sentiment of shame, as I have before suggested, may have taken its origin chiefly from their being then first conscious of the emotions of lust,

and being in such a state, that they could not, at all times, conceal the disgraceful effect, except by such an artifice as that to which they now had recourse. The sense of shame, in consequence of lustful emotion, where it is not utterly extinguished by the violence of desire, or the force of depraved habit, involuntarily arises at all the visible indications of this gross passion, and at every object, exciting to it, presented to the senses, or the fancy. And in this, as in other subjects, we recognise the force of nature in the new fallen pair.

#### OF THE REPENTANCE OF OUR FIRST PARENTS.

Of the repentance of this unhappy pair after their lamentable fall, nothing is distinctly transmitted to us in the concise narration of Moses. But there is the strongest reason to presume that their penitence followed the promise given by God to console them in their affliction; that *the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head*, and thus destroy the Power of Evil; delivering her offspring by this act, from the dominion of sin, and death. And, in the highest degree probable it is, that the God, and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, in the midst of his righteous judgments on their transgression, still bestowed on them the most gracious and paternal care, in his provisions for their temporal comfort, and who, in their humbled state, still deigned to them his heavenly communication in the field, or at the

altar, would not be deaf to the cries of their misery, and their penitential sorrows.

Hardly, however, do these gloomy writers, who have dared to presume that these afflicted parents, in the midst of the wreck, and the rescue of their race, themselves perished without the mercy of that Saviour who had been recently promised to them, merit even this notice of an uncharitable opinion, which is not supported by any authority from the holy scriptures.

OF THE EFFECTS OF THE FALL ON THE WHOLE  
POSTERITY OF ADAM.

The plain and explicit testimony of the sacred writings teaches, that the state of sinfulness and misery, in which it is visible that human nature exists, is at once the fruit, and the punishment of the transgression of the great head, and representative of the human family. No testimony can be more clear and decisive on the subject than the declaration of the apostle Paul in his epistle to the Romans.—“By one man, sin entered into the world; and death by sin, so death passed upon all men, inasmuch as all in him have partaken of the same depraved and sinful nature.” The principal evil, and the source of all the other evils which result to mankind from the original transgression of our father is, not only the tendency of our bodies to decay, but the “moral

corruption with which all men are now born into the world.'—The existence of a *depraved nature* in man has been made the subject of ardent, and too often acrimonious controversies in the christian church. The Socinians and even the Arminians, probably mistaking the true meaning and extent of the proposition which asserts the original sinfulness and depravity of human nature, deny that we inherit from Adam any evil except that of pain and death. These writers, indeed, confess the tendency of mankind to *moral wrong* in many of their earliest acts. Yet, they refuse to admit the federal, or representative character of our primitive parent in the *covenant of works*. But all the orthodox symbols and confessions, from the first ages, maintain that “the covenant was made with him, not only for himself, but for all his posterity, who, consequently, sinned in him, and fell with him in his first transgression.”\* I must remark here, that those who believe that the penalty of the covenant was ordained to be inflicted on the day of the Fall, must use a language somewhat different, but the consequence becomes eventually the same, the inheritance by his offspring, after the promise, of a constitution corrupted by the principles of death and sin. For this, as we have before seen, is an universal law of nature affecting the descent of posterity ;—the scion must partake of the stock.

\* Every thing deserving attention on this subject, will be found in President Edwards on Original Sin, and his antagonist Dr. Taylor.

To men who have not a favourite theory to support, derived from an erring reason, rather than the word of God, the holy scriptures teach, in the most unequivocal language, the doctrine of *original sin*; that is, that, by derivation from an unholy original, we are born prone to sin, and alienated from the "life of God, through the ignorance that is in us, because of the blindness of our hearts." "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity," saith the psalmist, "and in sin did my mother conceive me." "That which is born of the flesh," saith our Saviour, "is flesh. Marvel not that I said unto you, you must be born again." And the apostle, in the strongest terms, declares,—"The carnal mind is enmity against God, it is not subject to the law of God, neither, indeed, can be." But the scriptures are replete with testimonies to the same effect, which, to those who habitually, and devoutly read them, it would be superfluous to recite.

THE GOSPEL UNITED WITH THE LAW, IN THE MOMENT  
OF THE FALL.

Here we may contemplate for a moment, the benignity of the gospel, grafted upon the severity of the law, in the first moments of the calamity of our great ancestors, and its unspeakable mercy consoling them, and covering to them, and their posterity, the evils of the Fall. By our union with our natural head and representative, we inherit the depravity of his nature, both in body and in mind: but the Saviour be-



ing revealed to Adam, he, with his whole race were, at that instant, placed under the dispensation of mediatorial grace. And now, every infant is introduced into being, not on the terms which our degenerate father had forfeited, of life to the perfect; but of pardon and grace to the penitent, bestowed through the Mediator. And, inasmuch as the most merciful Redeemer, immediately, on the *promise* being made to Adam, took the world under his protection and government, the gracious aids of his Holy Spirit, are now in various degrees, extended to all men; but more especially to his chosen people of old, and since to his church, under both which dispensations, the precious seal of his covenant is appointed to be administered to all their infant seed, to assure them of this great salvation, promised through the atonement of the ever blessed Redeemer.\*

This, however, does not present to us the whole blessing of that form of the New Covenant confirmed to Adam in the mysterious promise, *The Seed of the woman shall bruise the Serpent's head*, shall destroy his power, and defeat his machinations. To our imperfect nature, it has converted the *curse*, as far as relates to the evils of this life, its labours and its pains, into a merciful dispensation; a *corrector* of its calamities, still more than their *punishment*. The aches, the pains, and diseases incurred by the Fall, become salutary monitors of our guilty original, and serve to lead the soul to

\* See this principle farther illustrated, under the head of the seals of the covenant.

the pious contemplation of its end. The industry, and ingenuity which, in a state of innocence, might have been drawn forth, by virtuous principle, to the improvement of the arts, the ornaments, and comforts of life, are now stimulated by its multiplied wants ; the necessity of labor is productive of the greatest blessings of society. The dependence, the restraints, the corrections, the painful application of childhood, and youth, are requisite for the early cultivation of the reason and virtue of mankind. Children, amidst all their imbecilities, are first protected, and then made wise for their own protection, by the wisdom of their parents. By the labours of the mind, and of the body, human nature is carried forward towards its highest improvement ; and the world itself is created anew in beauty, and rendered subservient, in ten thousand ways, to the use of man. The curse denounced on the woman, that in pain she should bring forth her children, and be the party chiefly subjected to the anxieties and toils of nursing and rearing them, is made, under this grace, the chief source of the endearments of domestic life. If children, from their earliest infancy, were, like the young of many other animals, independent of the protection, and the nurturing care of their parents ; if labor, and vigilance, and mutual assistance, were not generally requisite for the support, respectability, and comfort of families, the principal ties of parental affection, and filial duty would be dissolved. The habits would be destroyed, or never formed, which in the highest degree contribute to the happiness, increase, and beneficial

intercourse and improvement of nations. Every pain which the child suffers, every risk to which it is exposed, endears, it more to the parent; every anxiety, expense, and sacrifice devoted to its interest, more attaches the parent. Parents themselves, from these causes, become more tenderly united to one another; the mother by her pains, her sicknesses, her constant need of some kind support; the father by the manly protection and superior assiduities which he is able to afford to her delicate weaknesses. The mutual wants of individuals and of families, teach them to sympathise with one another, and aid their easy transition into national sympathies, and the coalescing of mankind into great communities.

Under the Saviour, therefore, who has taken the world under his protection and grace, the curse of the Fall, however much to be lamented in its original cause, has been rendered, in many respects, a blessing to our fallen and imperfect nature.

THE GENERAL STRAIN OF THE SACRED WRITINGS, A STRONG-  
ER PROOF OF THE DEPRAVITY OF HUMAN NATURE,  
THAN SINGLE AND DETACHED PASSAGES.

The sinfulness of human nature, is depicted in the strongest colours, in many positive declarations throughout the sacred scriptures; but in addition to the direct and unequivocal evidence of many detached and particular passages, per-

haps a more convincing proof of this important doctrine, so humbling to the pride of man, results from the general strain of the whole system of revealed truth. It is a fundamental point in the entire fabric, and is involved in all its principal doctrines. If a *Saviour* has been sent into the world, is it not to deliver mankind *fallen* and *perishing*, from their state of *sinfulness*, and its consequent *miseries*? Is it not to the *unholy* that the purchased *Spirit* is given to assist their repentance? Was it not to those whose *reason* had been obscured by the power of *sin*, that the *light of divine truth* had become *necessary*? Was not this also the language of the *sacrifices* of atonement under the *ancient dispensation*? Is not this the interpretation of the doctrines of *repentance*, of *sanctification*, of the *renovation* of the heart under the *new*? Are not the *seals* of the covenant, under both dispensations, emblems of a *necessary purification*? And do not the whole furnish such an accumulation of evidence on this subject, as can hardly fail to carry with it, to the candid mind, complete conviction that man is a fallen and sinful being?

#### THE TESTIMONY OF EXPERIENCE.

If any evidence of this unhappy fact could be added to the clear and uniform testimony of the sacred writings, we might derive it from the whole history and experience of mankind. Do we not observe the malevolent passions of human

nature displaying an unhappy force from the earliest years of childhood and infancy? Have we not, from our most remote remembrance, perceived within our hearts, the working of many impure desires and unhallowed passions? Is not the history of man, in a great measure, the history of his crimes? Does not the world present to us rather a prison destined for the punishment of the guilty, than a paradise, the delightful habitation of innocence? Does not the infant feel the pangs, and utter the cries of pain, from the moment of its birth? Do not pain and disease, though now sanctified to the penitent by the Redeemer, still pursue him, till they lay him in the grave? Do all these calamities indicate the state of an innocent being, under the government of a most merciful Creator? Or does not a strong impression again result from the whole, that man is fallen and guilty?

OF THE EXTENT OF ORIGINAL SIN, AND THE MODE OF ITS TRANSMISSION.

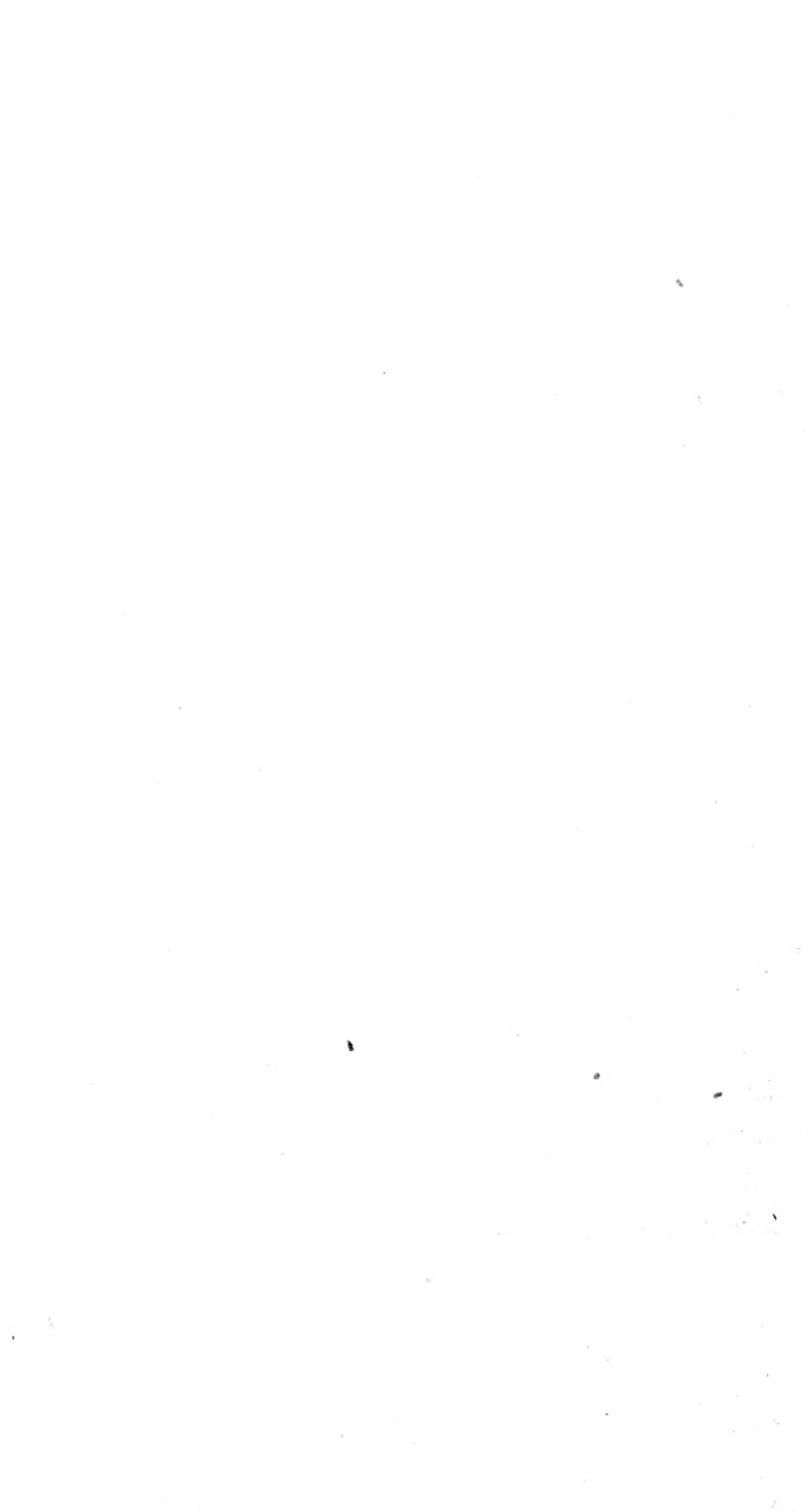
Two questions yet remain upon this subject, which merit the attention of the theological student. In the first place, to what extent is human nature corrupted?

Secondly, how is that sinful nature communicated, so as not to subject God most holy, to the impious charge of being the author of sin?

1. On the first, it is the decision of the word of God, and of the church, that the depravity of human nature pervades it in its whole extent. Its rational powers are perverse in their application, or rendered impotent through sinful tendency; and all its moral faculties, in their habitual action, have become criminal, by excess in their pursuits, by defect in their principles, or their motives, or by misapplication in their objects. The first moments of existence are certainly not chargeable with actual crimes, but with such perversion of nature from its original rectitude, that its earliest propensities, emotions, and affections, are directed to wrong ends, or to those that are lawful in a vicious degree. And, however the conduct of mankind may, in many parts of it, be beneficial to their fellow men, and, in so far, worthy of approbation, yet, in the sight of God, all acts are unholy in which the supreme desire of the soul in pursuing, and its supreme end in performing them, is not to render obedience, and glory to him from whom all existence is derived.

2. With regard to the second question, if we mean to ask how an impure and depraved nature may be imparted to the posterity of Adam without involving a deep reproach on the Author of our being? It is sufficient to answer, as the succession of all animals is continued. The whole nature of the parent is imparted to the offspring. But in what manner this, or any of the works of creation is produced, is utterly beyond our knowledge. *The modus operandi* is the secret of God.

But to say, as some weak men have done, in the hope of avoiding the impiety of making God the author of a sinful act, that God formed the soul pure, but uniting it to a sinful, disordered, or merely animal body, it has, by this junction, become necessarily infected with sin, is certainly an errant absurdity of pious folly. As if it were less contrary to the purity of the divine nature to form a being innocent, and immediately subject it to a state of necessary infection, than to suffer the laws of the universe freely to operate, by which an impure effect must proceed from an impure cause—a sinful progeny from sinful parents. Of much more moment is it to us, saith Saint Augustine, to understand how we are delivered from sin by Jesus Christ, than to be able to explain in what manner we have derived it from Adam.





OF THE  
**COVENANT OF GRACE.**

I. OF VICARIOUS SUBSTITUTION, AND ATONEMENT.

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FROM the declarations of holy scripture it appears that, immediately after the Fall, our condemned and unhappy parent, together with his whole race were, in the infinite mercy of God, transferred from the Covenant of Works, now broken, and cancelled as the condition of life, and placed under the protection of the Covenant of Grace, organized and administered under a Mediator, through whom their repentance might be accepted with their heavenly Father, and the Holy Spirit imparted to sanctify and restore their fallen nature. In treating of this covenant to which I now proceed, the first consideration which requires our attention, and that, indeed, which is fundamental to its existence, is the necessity of full and complete satisfaction for the sin of man. On no other condition could the holiness and justice of God receive the repentance of the sinner, and admit him to a new probation, on a new covenant, for eternal life. In discussing this subject, three preliminary questions present themselves to our inquiry. 1. In the first place, was satisfaction, or atonement for the sin of man indispensable to the existence of any

*new covenant* in his favour? 2. As man is utterly unable to offer an atonement adequate to the demerit of sin, is vicarious satisfaction, in the person of another, either possible, or just in itself, or useful in the administration of the divine government over mankind? 3. Could satisfaction offered by any being less than a divine person, be accepted in the room of the sinner?

#### OF THE NECESSITY OF ATONEMENT.

There are writers who affirm that Almighty God might by an act of sovereignty, have mercifully dispensed with any satisfaction for sin, and freely forgiven the offender, on his sincere repentance.—What God might, in sovereignty, have done, or could not, in consistency with the laws of eternal justice, do, seems impossible to be wisely and safely determined by us, and cannot be decided without presumption. We are infinitely more concerned to understand what God hath actually done, and, from the fact, to pronounce upon its justice, and utility. I may, however, be permitted to observe, that this opinion seems to be founded on very inadequate apprehensions of the necessary nature, and the inflexible claims of his holiness. And there are many important considerations which render it reasonable to believe that the punishment of the sinner, or a vicarious satisfaction to the justice of the law, in the person of a mediator, in all respects competent to this offering, was an indispensable require-

ment in the government of God. Indeed the fact, that it has been made, is decisive proof that it is *holy, just, and good*. The apostle, in contemplating this subject, devoutly exclaims;—"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable is his wisdom! and his ways past finding out!" Now "to principalities and powers in heavenly places, is known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." All the moral attributes of the Eternal are represented, in the holy scriptures, as having their most harmonious, and illustrious display in the death of Christ. In no other way, it is reasonable to believe, could the holiness, the purity, the justice, and the mercy of the divine nature have been demonstrated to mankind with such profound and impressive effect. The accumulated testimony of his holy word leads to the conclusion, that, in consistency with his perfections "he can by no means clear the guilty. He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. And he cannot look upon sin but with abhorrence."

When we bring this subject to the rigorous test of reason, reason pronounces the holiness and justice of the divine nature to be not less essential to his being, and his glory, than goodness and mercy. The requisitions of justice, therefore, must be acknowledged to be equally necessary in their nature with the demands of his most benevolent attributes. Many writers, indeed, we have seen contend for this principle that justice differs from other divine perfections, in this respect,

that its rights may always be relinquished without wrong. Admitting this maxim to be true in matters of private right between man and man; yet, even in human transactions, it does not hold with regard to its exercise in persons invested with a public character, and in cases in which the public good is essentially concerned. The *magistrate* cannot dispense with the execution of the law.

#### OF THE JUSTICE AND UTILITY OF VICARIOUS SATISFACTION.

As man is incapable, by his obedience, or his sufferings, of rendering complete satisfaction to the violated law, the justice and propriety of vicarious substitution has grown up in the church into an occasion of warm and uncharitable controversy. The Socinians strenuously deny the equity of substituting the innocent in the room of the guilty, and the utility of accepting the obedience, or the sufferings of one instead of those of another. This objection could not easily be answered if the substitute were obtruded, by any constraint, in the room of the sufferer, or, if, from any deficiency of power, or of dignity, he were incompetent to the high and arduous duty. To form a fair and equitable decision on this subject, it would be requisite to be well informed concerning the following facts:—in the first place, whether the substitution be perfectly voluntary in him who assumes the part of the sufferer; in the next place, whether he be free and independent, and have the entire right to dispose of his own life, without

being accountable to any superior ; likewise, whether he be perfectly competent to the undertaking, so that, from the intrinsic merit and dignity of his act, it may subserve all the wise and benevolent purposes of the law ; whether, also, in assuming this part, he be not lost to the universal interests of society, so that no gain to the great public of nature accrue from the substitution ; and, finally, whether the party, chiefly offended, be pleased and willing to accept the substitute in the room of the original offender.\*

If all these facts are fully ascertained, and these conditions strictly exacted, vicarious satisfaction appears to be entirely consistent with the principles of the soundest reason. If the substitute be free to dispose of his own person, and willing to undertake this benevolent office, the rights of justice cannot be impaired, nor the general interest injured by the exchange. Perhaps the sanction of the law appears more awful, and is rendered more effectual, when the penalty is, without abatement, exacted of the surety, than when claimed of the principal himself. An example in ancient history has been often appealed to, as illustrating this point with particular force. The legislator of the Locrians had enacted a law that any man convicted of adultery, should be punished with the loss of both his eyes. His own son happened to be the first criminal condemned on this statute. The father, mingling

\* Dr. Witherspoon's Lectures on the Covenant of Grace.

the righteous severity of the judge with the compassion of the parent, decreed that his son should lose one of his eyes, and that, for the other which justice required, he himself would lose one, in order perfectly to satisfy the requisition of the law. Every man, who is acquainted with the feelings of a parent, and the self-love of human nature, must pronounce this act the strongest proof that could be given to the nation, of the inexorable justice of the legislator. It is obvious that such a vicarious substitution must have had a more useful influence on the public morals, than the suffering of the full penalty by the culprit in his own person. On the same clear and acknowledged sentiment in the human breast, the substitution of the Son of God, in the room of our sinful nature, was the most effectual sanction of the divine law which could have been exhibited to the universe.

Besides the obvious consistency of this doctrine with the principles of reason and of public justice, it is explicitly declared throughout the sacred scriptures, in the strongest and most unequivocal terms, to be, at once, the truth of God, and the only hope of man. The term *satisfaction*, indeed, is technical, and employed chiefly by modern divines, for the convenience of their systematic arrangements. But every idea included in the full and most comprehensive meaning of the word, is taught in the scriptures in the plainest language, and illustrated by the most affecting images. Under the ancient institution, on the great day of atonement, and even at

the daily sacrifices, certain men were appointed to represent the people of Israel, and to lay their hands upon the head of the victim, confessing the sins of the nation. This grave and serious action can have no reasonable interpretation but as a vicarious substitution of the sacrifice in the room of the offender, and a typical transfer of guilt from him to the victim. The same idea is connected with that office of religion wherein the priests of Israel sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice upon the horns of the altar, sanctifying, by that act, both the sacrifice and the altar; in allusion to which holy rite the blood of Christ is called *the blood of sprinkling*, purifying all things covered by its sacred efficacy. The language of the prophet is peculiarly forcible. "He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. When he shall give his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed—he shall prolong his days—and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands. If, however, there were any obscurity in the type, and the figured language of the prophecy, the same truth is taught under the simplicity of the evangelic dispensation, in a style that can hardly leave any doubt in a fair and candid mind. Let me appeal to a few passages only, as an example of a great part of the sacred volume. Of the church, and of every individual believer, it is said, "they have been bought with a price. Redeemed not with corruptible things, such as silver, and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ.

“This is my blood,” saith Christ of himself, “shed for many, for the remission of sins. He gave himself a ransom for all.” And the triumphant ascription of the whole church is, “unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood!” The arts of criticism have been employed, with great industry, to give these and similar expressions a remote, and feeble, and circuitous interpretation. But every reader must be sensible of the effort that appears to accommodate the language to a favourite theory, and the little resemblance which, under this disguise, it bears to the plainness and simplicity of the gospel. The obvious meaning of the terms, on the other hand, presents to the mind, on their first impression, the doctrine of the atonement. From the preceding illustrations and reflections, we evidently perceive the principle of vicarious satisfaction established by the explicit and unequivocal testimony of the word of God, as it had before been vindicated by the clear decisions of reason.

THAT IT IS REQUISITE THAT SATISFACTION BE MADE BY  
A DIVINE PERSON.

A third question still remains upon this subject, which, from its nature, and its consequences, is of the highest importance:—Could any satisfaction for the sin of human nature, less than that offered by a divine person, be accepted by the justice of God? From the whole tenor of the sacred



writings, it appears that an atoning sacrifice of infinite value is the indispensable requisition of eternal justice.

But there is something so awful, and so profoundly humbling to the soul in this consideration, that various evasions have been resorted to for the purpose of weakening its impression. It is asked whether some superior order of created spirits may not be so far exalted above human nature, as to be able by obedience and suffering to offer ample satisfaction to the righteousness of the offended law. To this inquiry it may most justly be replied, that no created being can be so far raised in nature as to make the smallest approximation to Deity; or to be capable of offering an atonement for sin that shall cover, in any degree, the demerit of its guilt. Any finite being must, for this purpose, be liable to the suffering of eternal pains; a sacrifice that could contribute nothing to the illustration of the mercy of our heavenly Father. Besides, is not every created being under the highest natural obligations to do, or suffer whatever he shall understand the glory of God, and the general interests of charity and benevolence require; and if it were possible that the most exalted creature could have redeemed mankind, and glorified God, by any temporary sufferings, this sacrifice would, in the nature of things have been an original and indispensable duty; and the antecedent obligation would have deprived the offering of all *imputable* merit, which can reside only in the act of a free and independent being. But the *fact* of the appoint-

ment of the Son of God to this propitiatory office, whose nature has before been proved to be divine, is itself demonstration that no inferior victim could have been accepted. For, is it possible to believe that the eternal Jehovah would have made such a useless expenditure, if I may speak so, of divine perfection, when the same end might have been attained by means so far inferior ?

It has been urged with a triumph in the force of the objection, and with a confidence far from being warranted by the strength of the argument, that the supposition of satisfaction being exhibited by a person, in his nature divine, involves the absurdity of the Supreme Being making satisfaction to himself. To repel this suggestion, let it be recollected, that sin is not so much an offence against Almighty God, personally considered, if it is lawful to use this form of expression with regard to the Deity, as a violation of the principles of eternal justice, and, if we may speak so, of the public law of the universe. And there are not wanting many examples wherein a magistrate may so far lay aside his public character as, in his own person, to satisfy the requisitions of the law.

#### OF THE COVENANT OF GRACE,

The Covenant of Grace is defined by many eminent and pious divines to be a stipulation or agreement between God, and the believing sinner, to bestow on him freely, through

Christ, the forgiveness of sins that are past, imparting, at the same time, the spirit of sanctification to renew and perfect his nature, and finally, to bring him to the possession of eternal life; which mercies the believer accepting with an humble and sincere faith, that purifies the heart, the act assumes the character and form of a covenant. But as there is an infinite distance between God most holy, and a sinful worm of the dust; and as the whole transaction is a free gift, entirely gratuitous on the part of God, to style it a *covenant* is the language of divine condescension. Yet this is the gracious form of words employed by God himself. In the sacred scriptures it is denominated a *covenant of peace*; and mercifully announced as a *new covenant*, to distinguish it from the *covenant of works*, and the covenant of Sinai. And, finally, it is declared to be an *everlasting covenant*, as the characteristic distinction between it and every temporary institution established by God with his people.

On the preceding considerations, I prefer another definition, warranted by the best writers, more appropriate and descriptive of the genuine nature of this covenant. It is that of a free and gratuitous *promise* from the Father of Mercies, to *all* who receive the blessing with penitent faith, of the pardon of sin through the atonement of the Redeemer, accompanied with the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit, to lead them by the grace of holy living, to *life and immortality*, all which merciful propositions the believer sincerely ac-

cepting, it is thereby constituted an actual and formal covenant. This definition is conformable to the language of the sacred word, in which this gracious transaction is called the *promise*, and the *promise made of old unto the fathers*. And, indeed, when this whole system of grace is attentively considered, it is to be regarded chiefly as a *promise made to sinners through Christ*, to invite them to repentance and new obedience by the blessed and glorious hopes of the gospel; when it assumes the form of that species of covenant distinguished in our moral and civil codes by the title of *gratuitous*.

Every covenant, however, is, from its nature, invested with certain conditions which give it an air of reciprocity. The condition of *acceptance*, at least, is indispensable in the most *gratuitous promise*; and although salvation is an effect of the freest grace, yet, in order to the application of the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ for this end, *faith*, as it has already been explained, may be regarded as a *pre-requisite* condition; and holiness of heart, which is necessary to the actual possession of the final reward of the covenant; eternal life, may be considered as an *ulterior* condition. But these conditions are not to be viewed as constituting the meritorious causes of the blessing, or forming a real reciprocity in the covenant, but simply as terms of qualification necessary to prepare the believer, by the renovation of his nature, and of all his moral tastes, for the enjoyment of his heavenly inherit-

ance. The whole phrase, however, of the *covenant of grace*, though amply justified by the language of scripture, is technical, and invented, as many others have been, for the convenience of systematic arrangement.

#### A MISTAKEN VIEW OF THE COVENANT OF GRACE.

From the imbecility of the human mind, and the different conceptions often entertained by men of the same subject, we are frequently, and unhappily met by controversy in theology, as well as in other sciences. Those writers who, from their disinclination to considering the observance of the moral law as forming any condition of the covenant of our salvation, are stiled *Antinomians*, maintain this peculiar opinion, that the Covenant of Grace is not made with believers through the mediation of Christ; but has been established, from eternity, with Christ in the name of all believers. The paternal Deity, before the foundation of the world, entered into covenant with the Son, to give him a certain number out of the fallen human race, to be called, sanctified and saved by him, upon his consenting to assume human nature, and make atonement for their sins by his death. Founded on this supposed transaction between the eternal persons of the Godhead, they affirm the sole condition of the Covenant of Grace to be, not the obedience and faith of the believer, but the righteousness of Christ, making the believer a mere passive subject of mercy, and not responsible for any of his sins past,

or to come. Christ, the sole agent and representative of his people in this eternal transaction has, according to their principles, assumed all responsibility upon himself with regard to this chosen number, leaving the rest of mankind, without any provision for their salvation, to perish among those hopeless spirits who *kept not their first estate*.—Good men, I doubt not, have embraced this extravagant system as there is no absurdity of which the human mind, on some occasions, is not susceptible. But to me it appears fraught with presumption in pretending to unfold the transactions of the Deity with himself; and with extreme folly, leading to the most immoral consequences among enthusiastic men. This imaginary transaction has been called the *Covenant of Redemption*, and although so fanciful, has, under certain modifications, been embraced by some grave and profound calvinistic writers. In its unmodified extent, it presents to us many dogmas which, in their obvious import, must shock the common sense of mankind. To justify the severity of this animadversion, the following examples will be more than sufficient. *Believers, they say, are justified from all eternity. —In them God sees no sin for Christ's sake.—The merits of the Second Adam are as certainly and essentially transferred, from their birth, to his elect seed, as the default of the first Adam to his natural offspring.—The elect cannot throw themselves out of the covenant, but their justification equally remains whether they fulfil the law of righteousness, or, through the frailty of their nature, fall into any sin,*

*Christ having assumed all responsibility, and perfectly satisfied the law for them.* Many other absurdities, not less gross and palpable, naturally growing out of their principles, are found in their writings, which some ingenious men have thought they find means of explaining in consistency with good morals. For this bold irreverence of the imagination some expressions of the sacred writings have given a very slender pretence indeed. "I have set my king," saith the Psalmist, "upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the Lord said unto me, thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession, Ps. ii. 6. sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire. Then said I, lo! I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me; I delight to do thy will, O my God," Ps. xl. 6. And Isaiah, in a fine poetic rhapsody, has sung in the following strains;—"Behold my servant whom I uphold, mine elect in whom my soul delighteth! I have put my spirit upon him. He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. I the Lord have called thee in righteousness; I will hold thine hand, and keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles—to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and those that sit in darkness out of the prison house." Surely a man must have strong attachments to a system, and a most oblique facility of interpreting the scriptures, who can find the Covenant of Redemption in such poetical and

Grammatical representations as these of the counsels, and designs of Heaven, which exhibit Christ as the Illuminator of the world, and that Great Prophet destined to extend his church to the remotest ends of the earth. But when these writers can interpret, in this manner, a political convention—*The counsel of peace shall be between them both*—Zech. vi. 13. it assumes an appearance little less than ludicrous. I perfectly accord with the opinion expressed on this subject, by Dr. Witherspoon. “For my own part,” says he, “I fear to attempt to explain what is called the Covenant of Redemption, or to admit its existence. I fear it is humanizing too much our ideas of the divine nature, and presuming too far on our understanding the nature of the Trinity, and the transactions between its persons, if I may use that human phrase thus to give form to their counsels, thus to apply to them what, perhaps can only be proper when applied to the affairs of men. Besides, if we give scope to our fancy, and endeavour to embarrass with such technical forms of expression, the science of divine things, we might find a covenant in almost every act of God. But the being of God is unsearchable: and I apprehend, there is more of presumption and folly, than of piety and wisdom in a worm of dust attempting to modify his eternal counsels with himself.”\*

\* Taken down verbatim by the author from a discourse delivered by Dr. W. before his Theological class.



OF THE CONSTITUTION OF THE COVENANT OF GRACE IN  
ITS PROMISES AND CONDITIONS.

In the constitution of the Covenant of Grace the primary and essential principle which distinguishes it from the abrogated covenant with Adam is, that all its blessings are the effects of the free and unmerited mercy of Heaven. Man, having incurred, from the justice of his offended Creator, absolute and eternal condemnation, the whole plan of his recovery—his present mercies, and his eternal hopes are simply and entirely of grace; not the effect of obedience to the prescriptions of a law, but the result of the mere favour of God. For this end the system of redemption was instituted by Jehovah himself, through the mediation of Jesus Christ, who should, by his obedience, satisfy the holy requisitions of his law, and by his sufferings, vindicate the righteous claims of his justice. On this foundation of obedience and suffering, Christ becomes the author of eternal life to all who believe in his name. And the whole redemption of mankind is exhibited to us in the sacred writings, as the fruit of the freest mercy, and the effect simply of the benignity of God most holy, to the offending race of man. *It is of faith, saith the apostle, that it might be of grace, Rom. iv. 16.* And the Evangelist affirms that *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.*—This covenant is establish-

ed, not with man innocent as was that with our original parent, but with man fallen and guilty, through a Mediator; so that now, every blessing is derived to believers through Jesus Christ, *who, of God, is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.*

One definition of the Covenant of Grace, already presented to the reader, styles it simply a *promise*, and states it to consist of a *system of gracious promises* given as the consolation of human nature in its fallen and unhappy condition. These promises have been arranged, in different orders, but all embracing, in the result, the same comprehensive field. In order to their more distinct illustration, and omitting, for the sake of brevity, the detailed exhibition made of them by many writers, I shall dispose them in the following series, as being most accommodated for convenience and use in preaching the gospel. I. In the first place, the promises of a Saviour.—II. Next, as the free pardon of sin through him.—III. Thirdly, of the Spirit of sanctification.—IV. In the fourth place, of the favour of God, and all its happy fruits in the present state.—V. And finally, of everlasting life in a future world.\*

\* The analysis of the covenant considered in this view, by Dr. W. presented to his class.

## 1. OF THE PROMISE OF A SAVIOUR.

In the arrangement of the blessings of the covenant, the promise of a Saviour justly stands in the first place ; because it was the first made to our afflicted father, after his fatal delinquency. It is likewise that primary gift on which all the rest depend. And it affords the first ray of consolation and hope to a soul under the conviction of sin. This distinguished and leading promise, therefore, embraces the complete atonement of sin by the sacrifice of Christ. It points to Christ as the fountain of every mercy to mankind, and the channel through which they are conveyed to his people. He is the great and comprehensive *promise made of God unto the fathers*, embracing all the blessings of the gospel. He is the hope which the ancient church of Israel waited for ; and, a still more glorious distinction—*He is the desire of all nations* ; for his propitiatory sacrifice, even when unknown, is the foundation of acceptance to every true penitent among the Gentiles, as it was to the saints anterior to the age of the patriarch Abraham. He is, in one word, *the salvation of God*.

## 2. OF THE FREE AND FULL PARDON OF SIN.

The second promise of the covenant, as they have been just arranged, is the free and full pardon of sin to those who humbly and penitently seek this mercy through Jesus

Christ. It is consolatory to mankind, under the view of their sins, to perceive, in the benevolent purposes of God a Saviour ordained for the sincere penitent. But frequently, beneath the deep and overwhelming compunctions of guilt, the humbled spirit of the sinner trembles at the thought of daring to appropriate the merits of that Saviour, the blessings of that promise, to itself. It requires the most clear and explicit assurance of the gospel for its encouragement in making this particular application of the general offer of divine mercy. A consideration which renders the free and gracious promise of pardon through the Redeemer so precious to the convinced soul. The fears of guilt require the supporting hand of divine grace to save it from utterly despairing. For this reason, the Holy Spirit in his sacred oracles, pitying the infirmity of our nature, crushed under the terrors of the law, seems to have exhausted the powers of language for consolations and encouragements to the repentant sinner. *Ho ! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters ; and he that hath no money ! come ; buy wine and milk, without money, and without price.* It was the special command of Christ to his disciples, *to preach the forgiveness of sins to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.* And, that no penitent may be discouraged on the consideration of his personal unworthiness, or the aggravations of his former sins, the invitation is extended to all men, in terms the most universal.—*Come unto me, all ye who labor and are heavy laden, and, I will give you rest.—Him that cometh to me I will, in no wise, cast out.*

On this subject an injudicious controversy has been raised on the following question, as men, like gladiators, to shew their intellectual skill, are often prone to contention on the slightest occasion of difference; whether Christ has died for all men? or only for an elected number? Those who arrange themselves in the ranks of the latter insist that, if, on the principles of their antagonists, we say that Christ has died *for* all men, we make his death in vain to the greater number of those for whom it was offered. The former, with, perhaps, greater justice, affirm, that, if he hath died only for a selected number, the rest of mankind are necessarily excluded from the possibility of salvation, and, therefore the offer of the gospel to them is impiously imputing to God a duplicity in his transactions with the weakness of human nature, so much the more unworthy of his infinite goodness that it would be insulting the miserable, with ostensible but fallacious offers of mercy. Neither of these parties intend the consequences imputed to them by their rivals, and which their own terms literally taken, seem to imply. The forms of expression, on both sides, are imperfectly calculated to convey accurate conceptions of their respective principles. And it would be more consistent with the spirit of the gospel, and with common sense, and, probably, with their own intentions to say, that the death of Christ was designed generally to make atonement *for sin* to the justice of God, so that *God might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth*, and that an indiscriminate offer of pardon to sinners might be fairly and ingenuously

founded upon his death.—And this mode of expression is the more reasonable, because the same merit in the sacrifice which is sufficient for the expiation of one offence, is sufficient for the offences of the whole race. And the *secret* counsels of God, which are inscrutable, ought, in no case, to influence the duty of men.

### 3. OF THE PROMISE OF THE SPIRIT OF SANCTIFICATION.

The forgiveness of sin lays a foundation for access to God, and communion with him by the spirit of devotion. Under the dispensation of the New Covenant, the whole system of nature, and of providence is subjected to the directing power of the Holy Spirit by Jesus Christ, in subserviency to the great ends of the moral, and spiritual world. And that celestial influence which was first employed to convince the soul *of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment*, is now imparted to the believer to assist the renovation of his nature—to confirm and increase his habits of holiness—to enable him to discharge all his duties with a proper temper of mind—and to ripen his qualifications for the kingdom of Heaven. Almost innumerable are the particular promises to this effect, included under the *general* title of the Covenant in the sacred writings. “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and the house of Judah. And this is the covenant that I will make; I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their

hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people," Jer. xxxi. 31, 33. And in Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 27, "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean. From all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." But, it is the constant testimony of the holy scriptures, not only that repentance and faith, but that every pious disposition in the believer proceeds from the operation of the Holy Spirit. Therefore it is, that all the graces of the christian life are denominated *the fruits of the Spirit*.

The chief question which remains on this part of the subject, and which, indeed, affects the whole doctrine of the agency of the Spirit, is, whether at any time he operates by immediate influx on the heart, as in creation, independently of the divine word, the ordinances of the church, or those means continually occurring in the course of providence, or in the transient reflexions, and glancings of the mind, calculated to awaken pious thought, to inflame holy desire, or touch the devout sensibilities of the soul? or whether he does not always, and exclusively, operate by those scriptural, rational, natural, or appointed means of instruction and grace, or those secret suggestions arising out of them, which are fitted to inform the reason, and affect the heart? I am disposed to believe that he always works by natural means, and

never, in the ordinary exercises of the christian life, by immediate impulse, or direct influx, without them. The doctrine, or fancy of immediate and direct or independent influx is liable to great abuse; especially in men of a vivid imagination, and morbid sensibility, or of a gloomy complexion of soul, who are subject, in consequence, to frequent, strong, and irregular impressions. And when ignorance, or inattention cannot trace the origin of their thoughts, or assign the causes often secret or forgotten, of their sudden emotions, they are prone, on one hand, to ascribe them to the influences of the Holy Spirit, or, on the other, to the suggestions of infernal agency. Hence we see men often disturbed by superstitious terrors, or enthusiastic visions. One of the most common and injurious effects of this tendency of mind in persons of weak judgments, and warm sensibilities, is a proneness to decide on their spiritual state entirely by momentary feelings, instead of the general tenor of their affections, and their lives, compared with the only standard of truth in the word of God. "To the law, and to the testimony, if they speak not according to these, it is because there is no light in them." On the subject, on which I have been speaking, there is a strong analogy between the natural, and the spiritual world.—In the former, all its movements, the case of miracles only excepted, proceed, uniformly, according to the established laws of nature; in the latter, its laws operate with equal certainty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. There are no devious movements, no eccentric impulses



which start aside from this order, according to the dreams of enthusiasts ; and although we cannot always trace the fine relations of actions with their motives, of ends with the means which lead to them, yet, in every case the moral means are intimately conjoined with their proper end. And, in no instance, does the Holy Spirit, more than the Sovereign Author of nature, act upon the human mind, or produce any effect independently of the means naturally connected with it, and fitted in the moral structure of the universe to influence its movements.

#### 4. OF THE PROMISE OF THE FAVOUR OF GOD, AND ITS HAPPY FRUITS IN THIS LIFE.

In the series of promises entering into this gracious transaction, I have mentioned, in the next place, the favour of God, with all its happy fruits in the present life ; including the constant protection and care of his holy providence over those who place their undivided trust in him, and his benediction upon them as his children and people in covenant. I shall not proceed to particular details under this promise ; they will be obvious to those immediately concerned in its accomplishment ; it will be sufficient to refer the serious mind to the general grounds of the believer's confidence. " Wherefore, come out from among them and be ye separate ; and I will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty,"—2 Cor. vi. 17. Here is the sure foundation of their support under the various afflictions

of life and the steadfast ground of their hope that, in the issue, all their trials will be rendered blessings to them, and be sanctified to their use. "All things shall work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called, according to his purpose. For all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present or things to come; all are your's, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

#### 5. OF THE FINAL BLESSING AND PROMISE OF THE COVENANT.

The conclusion and consummation of all the gracious purposes of God, secured by the New Covenant, to his believing and obedient children, is eternal life. It is the peculiar glory of the gospel that, in it, *life and immortality are brought to light* to those who, by their relation to their original parent, were the hopeless heirs of death. It is impossible to know what would have been the felicity of life, or the perfection to which human nature would have attained in it, in consequence of the obedience of Adam. But it is justly to be presumed that the immortality obtained by Christ, for all who are redeemed from the earth by his blood, exalts the believer to a much higher degree of glory and of happiness. For, "when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality."

Having thus shortly unfolded this comprehensive concatenation of promises constituting the Covenant of Grace, it may perhaps be demanded, if it be useful in the public instructions of the church, to observe this order of arrangement?— I regard it, certainly as not without its benefit, for the clearer illustration of the gracious system of the gospel; and for communicating precision and distinctness to the conceptions of the christian in contemplating that institution of mercy under which we now exist. It is that order in which its blessings naturally offer themselves to the heart of the believer for the encouragement and consolation of his faith, and to the mind of the convinced sinner, to invite his confidence in supplicating the throne of grace for the pardon of sin; and to confirm his trust in building his eternal hopes on the foundation of Christ. Under the deep sense of his misery, and of the utter impotence of nature to impart any relief to his troubled mind, the promise of the Saviour must yield his first consolation, and offer his first refuge. Under the convictions of guilt, and of the just displeasure of Almighty God, the promise of the free and full forgiveness of sin, must first administer peace to his anxious thoughts. And when persuaded to embrace the gospel in faith, he will experience the necessity of having continual recourse to the promises and aids of the Holy Spirit, for the sanctification of his nature, and his growth in grace. Without this precious resource, he would find himself too weak to contend against the corruptions of his heart, and the seductions of the world. In

the progress of the divine life he will experience the benefit of continually resorting to the promises of the covenant for his encouragement in duty, his comfort in trials, and, at length, his support in the great conflict of death. Finally, in the promise of eternal life we behold the glorious reward of his faithful labours, and the blessed consummation of all his pious hopes. In this order, therefore, a sincere believer will most reasonably be led to contemplate the precious promises of the new covenant.

#### OF THE CONDITION OF THE COVENANT OF GRACE.

Having treated of the constituent promises of the covenant, it falls next in order to state its conditions. Those who confound the Covenant of Grace, and the Covenant of Redemption, pronounce the righteousness of Christ to be its sole and exclusive condition. And if we inquire after the meritorious title of the redeemed sinner to eternal life, it is, beyond all question, to be found only in the Redeemer's righteousness. Those, on the other hand, who adopt the principle—that the covenant is made with the believer through Christ, affirm that *faith* is its proper condition;—that is, his explicit acceptance of the gracious propositions of the covenant, with full understanding and hearty acquiescence in their terms. This sincere, intelligent, and affectionate act of the soul, gives him, according to the promise, an interest in the merits of the Redeemer, and lays the foundation of that holi-

ness of heart which introduces him to the possession, and qualifies him for the enjoyment of eternal life.

A proper decision on this subject depends, in a great degree, on the implication of the term condition. If it intend any act of obedience on the *merit* of which the blessing is bestowed, it is evident that the believer possessing no such merit in himself, and the covenant, in relation to him, being wholly of grace, it must, in this view of it, be without any condition, there can be no covenant with the believer. But if, by this term, be intended the qualifications which prepare the soul to receive and enjoy the ultimate blessings of this most gracious institution, and in consequence of which the blessing is received through Christ; it comprehends all the virtues and graces of the divine life, springing from faith as their root. With strict propriety, indeed, they cannot be denominated *conditions* of the covenant; but ought justly to be ranked among its promised blessings. They are the gifts of God through the Spirit.

In order to give to this subject as much simplicity and plainness as possible, agreeably to the system hitherto pursued, it is necessary to bear in mind, what has been before suggested, that the new covenant is to be ranged under that species of contracts which are denominated gratuitous. In this class the condition requires only the explicit acceptance of the favour, with proper dispositions, and a hearty acqui-

escence in the object, and concurrence in the designs of the benefactor.

The dispositions, then, with which we ought to receive the blessings of the covenant arise out of a just sense of the wants, imperfections and miseries of our natural state, for which the covenant is designed to provide a gracious remedy, and a due appreciation of the infinite mercy of God, through Christ. A profound conviction of sin serves to exalt the condescension, and grace of God in this great salvation. And a pious, and believing estimate of the freeness, the richness, and completeness of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, must have the effect to awaken the gratitude of the saint, to inflame his love, and to produce a fervent devotion of heart to the service of God. Such are the fruits of a cordial reception of the covenant ; and they are the natural offspring of a sincere belief in the gospel. Faith in Christ may, therefore, with propriety, be esteemed the condition of this covenant. It prepares the believer to accept its blessings with proper and humble dispositions. And this is the testimony of the evangelists, and of all the apostles—"thy faith hath saved thee,—by grace ye are saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." The mercy of God requires only a willing mind, and a well disposed recipient to bestow on it all the plenitude of his grace, through the merits of the ever blessed Redeemer.

Another requisite in compacts of this kind, is a hearty acquiescence in the object, and views of the benefactor. Of this whole dispensation of grace then the acknowledged object is the restoration of human nature to its lost holiness, as the only way to perfect happiness, and to immortal life. In the desire of happiness all men will earnestly concur, but not all, of a happiness through sanctification of their nature; the acquiescence of the heart in this object, implies the love of universal holiness. Of this affection, the efficient principle is a cordial belief in the gospel of our salvation, and in Jesus Christ, the great sum of the gospel. Therefore, in this view also, faith is to be regarded as the condition of the covenant. But it must ever be remembered that it is a condition simply of qualification, not of merit. Merit in man would destroy the idea of mercy in God. How, indeed, can our belief of the most pure and excellent truths, although ultimately preparing the soul for her heavenly inheritance, be the ground on which we can meritoriously claim the possession of the blessing? Faith, therefore, is only the gracious condition of a most gracious covenant.





OF

## SANCTIFICATION.

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THE principle which next claims our attention is the sanctification of our fallen nature, and its continual advancement in the habits of the divine life. Sanctification is an effect of the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, enlightening the mind in the knowledge of divine truth, and deeply affecting the heart with the perception, and love of divine things. It is begun in regeneration, and advances constantly and often almost imperceptibly, in the steadfastness of its virtuous principles, and the strength of its holy affections, till it attains at length the consummation of holiness in the kingdom of heaven.

The principal questions arising on this subject respect—the nature of the change effected in regeneration—the agency of the Holy Spirit in producing this change—the means of cultivating genuine sanctity of heart—and lastly, the obligation of practical holiness, which is not superseded but increased by the doctrine of salvation by free grace.

## OF REGENERATION.

Regeneration is a term entirely of figurative meaning, and has respect to the new principles of life and action introduced into the soul by the faith of the gospel. The same term was anciently employed by the schools of philosophy, to indicate the change produced on ignorance, and vice in their pupils by the force of instruction, and the well conducted influence of education. The man becomes, in a great measure, a new man, through the illumination of his understanding, the correction of his passions, the regulation of his affections, and the amelioration of all his principles of action. In the school of Christ it assumes a purer and sublimer meaning, and designates that new and spiritual state of life to which the believer is introduced by the doctrines, and the spirit of his Saviour. It is distinguished by new feelings, new ideas, new dispositions, tendencies, and habits of the soul. The heart, which had existed like the embryo before birth, in a state of darkness and blindness, only feebly warmed with the principles of life, now emerges into light. The world presents to it a new face—the heavens disclose wonders of creating power which it had never discerned—it feels itself a new being. This change, in its immediate effects, consists in a just discernment of the moral glories and perfections of the supreme, self-existent, and omnipresent Jehovah; in a profound abhorrence of sin; in a strong and

lively perception of the *beauty of holiness*; in an ardent devotion and obedience to its laws; in an overwhelming sense of gratitude for the mercies of redemption; and, under the deep and affecting impressions of the whole, in a warm, extended, and increasing benevolence to mankind.

OF THE AUTHOR OF REGENERATION.

The holy scriptures in speaking of this blessed change, ever represent the Holy Spirit as its immediate Author, by his illuminating influence on the understanding, and the heart. A peculiar clearness of perception, is imparted to the believer's apprehension of divine things, and all the moral sensations of the soul, if this language may be employed, are exalted to a much higher tone of sensibility. In this understanding the mind is enlightened, not so much through the intellect, as the heart; but in the whole there is an ineffable perception of divine truth, in proportion to the natural vigour of the mind, combined with a warmth and glow of devout affection unknown to the natural man. They mutually communicate their light and heat, till the whole soul is dissolved in an enlightened and holy love. Human cultivation is capable of accomplishing much in the amelioration of the manners and dispositions of the young; so that every good man, beholding them with the eyes with which our Saviour regarded the amiable youth in the gospel, shall *love* them; but it is utterly incompetent to producing that mighty

moral change implied in *regeneration*. The most ingenious powers of human nature, raised to their highest refinement by the force of the most judicious culture, still fall far short of the genuine *charity* of the gospel. "That which is born of the flesh, saith our Saviour, "is flesh; but that which is born of the spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto you, you must be born again." And the apostle Peter pronounces believers "elect, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, and sanctification of the Spirit." St. Paul also uses the following impressive language—"but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." The Spirit of God is indeed the primary and effectual agent in the regeneration of the soul; not properly by a *creative* act, or any immediate operation exerted upon it independent of the appointed means of grace, as the language of some writers would lead us to conceive; but by means, which, under his influence and direction, are peculiarly adapted to the end; especially by his holy word, and the instituted ordinances of his grace. The Holy Spirit, in the ordinary government of the church, never works, except by the instrumentality and co-action of instructions, or providential dispensations which are naturally calculated, in the moral structure of our nature, to inform the reason, and to touch the heart. For this purpose, he has instituted the reading and preaching of his word, the administration of his most holy sacraments, and the habitual use of humble and fervent prayer to the Father of all mercy and grace; and, in subserviency to the same design, he di-

rects the movements of his almighty providence over the world.

TWO ERRORS ON THIS SUBJECT.

Two errors exist on this subject, equally distant from the truth; one which ascribes the regeneration, or rather as they would say the moral cultivation of the heart, and the whole progress of our improvement in virtue and sanctity of life, merely to the reasonings and reflections of our own minds, aided, perhaps, by the word of God. And supposes the moral effects which, in holy scripture, are ascribed to the Divine Spirit, to be attributed to him, solely, because he has illuminated the understandings of the sacred writers, and dictated to them those truths intended to enlighten, and reform the world. Whence, by a natural and common figure of speech, the Author is substituted in the place of his work.

The other is to impute so much to the immediate, and exclusive operation of the Holy Spirit, that the instrumentality of the word, or, indeed, of any of the ordinary means of grace, seems to be, in a great measure, superseded. Their language conveys this idea, that the change upon the soul is strictly an act of creation, which is necessary to pass upon the state and dispositions of the heart, before the motives of the gospel can have any operative and sanctifying

influence upon it. To support this principle they maintain that the practical motives of duty arising out of the system of divine truth cannot be discerned in their proper nature, and their spiritual beauty, and must consequently remain inoperative, till the heart is assimilated by the power of God, to the spirit of the gospel. For motives drawn from the *beauty of holiness* cannot touch the soul till its native darkness, and defect of a divine taste be removed. Can an eye which is obscured by a film, they demand, discern the light which shines around it, till the cause which obstructs its vision be taken out of the way? Can the heart perceive the truths of the gospel in their holy nature, and feel them in their divine efficacy, till its inherent depravity be changed?—Illustrations drawn from material analogies seldom apply with entire accuracy to spiritual subjects; and then, by pursuing the resemblance too minutely, they tend only to mislead. In the present instance, the effect is, obviously, made to precede the cause. In the moral changes of the heart, the blindness which hinders its discernment of the light of divine truth is cured by the light itself. As in cultivating a taste for the beauties of science and the arts, or the moral tastes of virtue, the mind, however obscured by ignorance or error at first, is gradually improved and approaches ultimately intellectual perfection by presenting to it the most beautiful objects in the arts, and suggesting continually only the justest maxims of scientific truth. The analogy in this case is infinitely more exact than in the former. Spiritual darkness is cured by the

spiritual light, as addressed to the soul by that heavenly teacher, the Holy Spirit of truth. Powers still reside in reason and conscience, notwithstanding the deep corruption of the fall, capable of discerning in a degree, though it were as the twilight before the dawn, the illumination of divine truth shining around them in the word of God, which may be perceived by every diligent inquirer through the concurrent aids of the Holy Spirit, which are now, by the grace of Christ, universally diffused in the church. For as miracles exist, at present, in the spiritual more than in the natural order of things. The sparks of light will, at first indeed, be small and feeble, but each advance renders them susceptible of still farther increase, till they become the principle of a new life.

What is the peculiar nature of the agency of the divine Spirit, distinct from, and superior to the ordinary influence of education; or what is his internal operation on the mind must, like all the works of God, be inscrutable. But the reality of his concurrent influence in illuminating the understanding, in rectifying the action of the will, in regenerating and sanctifying the heart, are truths most explicitly taught in the holy scriptures. The agency of this divine principle in the moral world, bears a resemblance to the operations of providential agency in the system of nature: being in all things, perfectly concurrent with the established laws of material action in the universe. The movements of the Spirit of God, where no miracle is intended, are ever conducted

according to the laws of the rational system, the laws of human liberty, and the moral laws of the heart. In accomplishing the regeneration of the believer, the blessed Spirit is able, by the finest lights, imperceptibly to instruct the intellect in divine things—by the finest insinuations, secretly to touch the heart; but there is, in no instance, any violation of the laws of the moral world. Nor is there any end accomplished, even in the regeneration and sanctification of the soul, except by means which, under his most wise and holy direction, naturally contribute to produce the effect. In moral effects, the means are instruction, and correction; instruction by the word of God, and correction by the power of conscience, assisted by the dispensations of divine providence. And one office of the Holy Spirit seems to be to assemble and combine those various means in the way best adapted to subserve the gracious and sovereign designs of Heaven, with regard to the spiritual and eternal state of each individual.

SANCTIFICATION IN THIS LIFE IN A STATE OF PROGRESSIVE IMPROVEMENT.

The sanctification of the believer commences in regeneration; but, through the whole of the present life, is continued in a condition of gradual approximation towards a state of perfect holiness. Some christians use a language upon this subject, which, I must charitably presume, does not express



their genuine sentiments; as if the believer may attain a state of perfect holiness, while residing in this world of necessary imperfection. The principles of corruption are so deeply rooted in our nature, that they never can be completely eradicated. While we remain in the garden of God upon earth, a corrupted stock must still send forth degenerate scions. Gradually to be subduing them without arriving at complete victory over their luxuriant growth, is the utmost that the humble christian can hope. And the condition of the real disciple in the present life, is only a condition of constant and progressive improvement. *Grow in grace*, saith the apostle, *and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*. That there are always many defects mixed with the virtues and graces of the most eminent saints, is manifest from the whole tenor of the sacred writings; and appears continually in the confessions, and records of the experience of the saints. “There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not. In many things, we all offend.” And the most devout and affectionate of the whole college of the disciples pronounces—*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*.

At the first view, this idea seems to contradict the language of our symbols which assert that the believer *is renewed in the whole man, after the image of God*. But between these propositions, when rightly explained, there is no opposition.

This symbolic language, far from signifying the holy perfection of the believer, simply implies that the predominant action of the powers of human nature in him is habitually directed by the principles of the gospel; and the supreme aim of all his affections is, to fulfil the will of his Creator, and to advance the interests, and the glory of his Redeemer's kingdom. *The flesh may lust against the spirit*; and, in some critical circumstances of temptation, the principle of grace may find it difficult to preserve its ascendancy against the sinful propensities of corrupted nature. But wherever the character truly exists, there will be found also the predominance of the habits of holiness. Every principle of nature, every tendency of the heart, all the actions of the life, will, in its general tenor be subject to the commanding influence of the spirit of divine grace. But, according to the temperament of different natures, it may appear in some in a higher, and in others in a lower tone of fervent piety. It is the habitual ascendancy of the principles of duty which characterizes that state of holiness which may be called *the renovation of the whole man*.

#### THE HOLINESS OF THE BELIEVER IMPERFECT IN THIS LIFE.

Some christians have injudiciously boasted of having arrived at a state of perfect holiness. And a few expressions in the sacred scriptures are appealed to as justifying this arrogant claim. Noah is said to have been "a just man, and

perfect in his generation." "Be ye perfect," saith Christ, "as your Father who is in heaven is perfect. Whom we preach," saith the apostle, "that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." "Whosoever is born of God," saith John, "doth not commit sin, for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God,"—John iii. 9. Many expressions there are which speak a similar language. But it obviously appears from their whole strain, and the connexions in which they stand, that the perfection which the scriptures ascribe to believers, implies something very different from that state of holiness which is exempted from all sin, error, and frailty.—This term in our language, as well as the corresponding terms in the Greek and Hebrew, has obtained a figurative signification, even in common usage, by which it is made to express that state of objects in which they possess all the necessary parts, and the usual properties of the species to which they belong. We say of a child which is complete in all its limbs and organs, that it is a perfect child. And of one who has rendered himself competently master of all the requisite branches of liberal art to qualify himself for public life, that his education is perfect. The same term is familiarly applied to plants and animals, and generally, as already indicated, to all objects which possess the genuine properties of their species.—If, then, we suppose the dispositions, affections, and principles, which distinguish sincere believers, to form the characteristics of a moral species, that state of the soul which embraces all these properties, may justly be styled a state of

christian perfection. This perhaps, is simply the idea annexed to that form of expression by the sacred writers. The christians were sometimes pronounced perfect by the apostles, when, with unshaken firmness they endured labours, and sufferings in the cause of Christ, in allusion to the *athletæ* among the Greeks, from whom these holy writers borrow many images, and who were said to have attained *perfection* *τελειότητα*, in their discipline, not only when they were well practised in the tactics of their art; but, especially, when they could endure fatigue, and pain without shrinking, or complaint. *Let patience*, says St. James, *have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire.*

That expressions which, in their literal import, signify perfection, are applied to different degrees of maturity in the divine life, and, therefore, cannot be intended to mark its consummation in the present world, is rendered evident by the language of St. Paul himself: for that great apostle pronounces concerning his own state and experience—"not that I have already apprehended, either am already perfect; but I follow after, that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended by Christ Jesus." This declaration by St. Paul must be the annihilation of any claim to absolute perfection in other believers. And I unhesitatingly add, that the experience of all sincere christians contradicts this proud idea; and the professions of a few weak enthusiasts to the contrary, who are little capable of forming a judgment of

their own hearts, can hardly be regarded as an exception to the general conclusion.

OF THE ORDINARY MEANS OF SANCTIFICATION.

The Holy Spirit is acknowledged by all devout and rational disciples to be the supreme efficient agent in the regeneration and sanctification of his people: but as he acts only through means instituted by God himself, it is a practical question of no small importance to every christian, in what way he may best promote the holy culture of the heart, and advance in the habits of the divine life. These subjects are so constantly illustrated in the instructions of the pulpit, and enter so largely into the scheme of all the practical writers on religion, that, in a general system of theological doctrine, they require only to be briefly suggested. They may be embraced under the following heads:—the diligent study of the holy scriptures, and of the writings of wise and pious men, designed to illustrate and enforce their sacred truths—fervent prayer to the Father of Spirits; frequent and profound meditation on divine things; pious association, and conference with judicious christians; faithful attendance on all the public and private institutions of religion; and strengthening, by constant exercise, the habits of a holy life.

THE NECESSITY OF GOOD WORKS CONSISTENT WITH THE  
DOCTRINE OF SALVATION BY FREE GRACE.

Those who are unfriendly to this principle demand—why should good works be required of the believer, if it be indeed the doctrine of the holy scriptures that salvation is *of grace, without the works of the law?* In order to answer this inquiry satisfactorily, it is to be remembered that our salvation consists not only of deliverance from the curse of the violated law, which is effected through Christ, paying the forfeit, or bearing the punishment of our sins, and is acknowledged to be purely the fruit of the unmerited mercy and love of God; but of the restoration of the holiness and perfection, and consequently, the happiness of our fallen nature. The latter must, in a nature degenerate and corrupted like that of man, be equally with the former, the fruit of divine favour. For without the merciful aids of the Holy Spirit, an impure nature cannot be restored; nor without the grace of holy living, can either its perfection, or its happiness be rendered complete. The sanctity of the life, therefore, manifested by its good works, is indispensably requisite in the christian, not, indeed, as the *cause*, in any degree, of his salvation, but as the certain indication of his nature being renewed, sanctified, and restored to its original moral principles, and to the power of enjoying its original happiness. This is the proper idea of salvation.

Heaven consists less in local situation, than in the dispositions of the soul which qualify it for the enjoyment of God, and of that supreme felicity which is to be possessed only in his immediate presence. And these dispositions are, above all things, to be cultivated upon earth in the acts and habits of a holy life, in the prospect of our future, and eternal existence.

OF THE HOLINESS AND PERFECTION OF A MORAL AND RELIGIOUS ACT.

It is, in this place, perhaps, proper to inquire what constitutes the rectitude of a moral act, and procures it acceptance with God? Every morally perfect act proceeds in the first place, from a good motive; that is, from the desire of glorifying God, or of promoting the happiness of man, and from both these intentions, where they can be combined in the same action. One ruling and habitual principle governs the whole conduct, and presides in each individual act of a believer's life;—I mean the profound sentiment of obedience to God, and of Gratitude to the Redeemer of the world, which strengthens and animates the principle of every particular duty. The next requisite is, that the substance of the act in itself be good; that is, calculated to promote some proper, useful, or benevolent end; embracing, within the range of these objects, the glory of God, and the felicity of human nature. Which condition excludes, of consequence,

all the acts of a fanatical zeal, or a gloomy superstition, which is equally the sacrifice of human happiness, and of the rights of human nature, to a mistaken rage for the pretended honour of the Deity, or glory of the most merciful Saviour. Another requisite to constitute an action good, is, that the form and manner of it be also right. If there be any mode prescribed by the laws of society for fulfilling human duties, or of God for fulfilling those that are divine, it becomes a christian most scrupulously to conform to the instituted rite.— There is some fault attached even to the worship of God, if in any material act, it contradicts, or departs from the rules or examples of holy writ. And, above all, if it either omits, or adds to the forms prescribed by the sacred writers, as far as they are explicitly defined, or we can, by the faithful exercise of our own reason, discern them. If there be no form prescribed, the mode which we adopt should be such as we conscientiously believe will best subserve every valuable purpose of piety; leaving to our fellow christians the equal right of judging for themselves. The last requisite is, that it should stand in its proper place, and be performed in its proper time, so as to be consistent with the whole system of our duties, and with all the laws of prudence and propriety. If an action be defective in any of these particulars, it is in the same proportion removed from perfection as an act of virtue.

Many other questions, connected with this subject, but of a speculative rather than practical nature, have been agitated



by different writers, which it would be unnecessarily tedious to discuss in this place, and the disquisition of which is of the less importance, as they will often occur in the course of your reading. I proceed, therefore, to the consideration of the last blessing usually enumerated by Calvinistic writers as flowing, in this life, from the Covenant of Grace, which is

THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS.

The idea annexed to this principle is, that those who have once been regenerated, and sanctified by the Spirit of God, shall never lose the seed effectually implanted by that Divine Teacher, but be able always to preserve it, and persevere in the discharge of every duty to eternal life, amidst partial fluctuations, however, arising from the imbecility of human nature. Many writers of distinguished name in the church deny this doctrine entirely. For, not acknowledging the predestinating decrees of God, and ascribing little to the extraordinary influences of the Holy Spirit, they pronounce that the sanctity of the believer, like every moral quality in man, must partake of the mutability of human nature. To render the perseverance of the believer *certain*, they affirm, requires the operation of some necessary cause incompatible with the moral freedom of the mind. This objection has already been considered, and obviated, when treating of the decrees of God; when it was, I hope, clearly shewn that the influence of the Divine Spirit over human actions may be ex-

erted, so as to attain the most infallible effects, without impairing, in the smallest degree, their moral freedom.

The following, therefore, is the only question on this subject, which requires your careful investigation, and which, with regard to the doctrine, must be decisive. Has God given to the believer, in his holy word, such direct and explicit promises, as to be a sufficient ground of trust, that he will always grant him such a measure of grace, and of his holy influence, as will dispose and enable him to continue faithful till death? A few, even of Calvinistic writers, believe that the holy scriptures do not contain such promises, but that the grace which he hath bestowed at his pleasure, he may, at his pleasure, or when the precious gift is negligently improved, withhold. The great majority of these writers, however, think it reasonable to believe that Almighty God doth never bestow his grace in vain, but that the seed which he hath once implanted he will cherish to perfection. Besides the apparent reasonableness of this opinion, they support the principle by many proofs of holy writ which, they suppose, do either directly, or by necessary implication, assert it. And this, indeed, is the only foundation on which it can safely be rested. All other reasoning is mere theory, and must depend on the accuracy with which principles are laid down, and conclusions legitimately drawn, concerning which the minds of men are seldom in perfect accord.—  
The following are a few of the passages which always have

been quoted on this occasion ; and which I repeat without comment, as being more than sufficient, I presume, to support the general truth, in the mind of every candid interpreter of scripture. “ And there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall do great signs and wonders, so as to draw away, if it were possible, even the elect,”—*Matt.* xxiv. 24. “ This is the will of my Father who hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose none ; but I shall raise it up at the last day,”—*John* vi. 39. “ And I give to them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hands. My Father who gave them to me is greater than all, and none shall pluck them out of my Father’s hand,”—*John* x. 23, 29. “ For we know that to those who love God, all things work together for good, to those who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, those he foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he should be the first born among many brethren. For whom he did foreknow, those he also called ; and whom he called those he also justified, and whom he justified those he also glorified,”—*John* viii. 28....30. “ Now he that establisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us is God : who also hath sealed us, and given us the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts,”—*2 Cor.* i. 21, 22. “ Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God whereby ye have been sealed unto the day of redemption,”—*Eph.* iv. 30. “ For us who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last

time,"—1 *Pet.* i. 5. These declarations seem evidently intended, and certainly are abundantly forcible, to support the conclusion, that those who have once been brought to sincere repentance, and to true obedience, shall never lose the habits of grace, so as, in the language of the systems, *finally and totally to fall away.*

#### OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS DOCTRINE.

If it be demanded, of what utility can the belief of this doctrine prove to a sincere christian? This is an inquiry to be answered only by the experience of the saints. And many of the most pious christians have given to it their humble and fervent testimony, that it has contributed to preserve them continually mindful of their entire dependance on the gracious aids of the Spirit of God, the true source of their ability for every duty. And the doctrine may afford a lively consolation to the believer in those moments when his faith is strong, and his holy affections are most animated, and fervent, to be assured by the promise of God, of being at all times sustained against the weakness of human nature, and rendered secure of the ultimate possession of eternal life. Yet, confessed it must be, that it can afford small consolation to the most experienced saint when his graces are feeble and languishing, and his mind, in consequence, often in a state of perplexity and doubt. Its enemies stigmatize it with being an indolent doctrine, as if the security of happiness, whatever

effect it might have upon the hypocrite, would ever dispose a pious and generous mind to the neglect of any duty ; and would not rather stimulate it to augmented diligence in the divine life, by the powerful excitement of gratitude. This objection must arise from inattention to the genuine principles of human nature ; and to the scriptural grounds on which the doctrine rests. As to the first, the assurance of possessing a felicity which we greatly value, and have long earnestly sought to acquire, often redoubles our exertions, and always, in a generous mind, raises its powers to a higher tone of action. With regard to the second, the grounds on which this doctrine rests in the holy scriptures is, the merciful constitution of the Covenant of Grace, and the promised influences of the Holy Spirit. These principles, as they have been already explained, far from nourishing an indolent temper, are connected with the highest exertions of the human faculties and the most faithful use of all the appointed means of sanctification. Upon the whole, however, this doctrine, in the discussions it has undergone, and the manner in which it has often been treated, has unhappily been connected more with the truth of speculation, and contended for more earnestly on that ground, than for its influence on practical holiness. Speculative truth, however, is intimately conjoined with practical utility. But many of the truths involved in the disquisitions which have taken place on this subject, rest upon principles so sublime, or of so refined a nature, as hardly to be obvious to the greater part of those

for whom the gospel was chiefly designed, and are found, in experience, easily liable, in ignorant minds, to mistake and perversion.

The Calvinistic writers appear to me generally to form their conclusions on grounds of the soundest reason, and most according to the spirit of the sacred writings. But, from mutual prejudice, and mistake, the discussions on this, and several related subjects, have been managed, on all sides, with less temper and forbearance than become the professors of a mild and humble religion. Consequences have been mutually imputed which no party would acknowledge. Differences have been studiously magnified. And a writer is liable to incur the censure of all, for presuming to judge candidly between them. But let me entreat you to remember, that, into the pulpit, speculations too abstruse, and passions too warm, should never enter. All these doctrines, so necessary for preserving the unity and harmony of the system of christian theology, may, by a meek and charitable mind, be treated without acrimony, and with a calmness and benevolence of discussion which the humility of true piety requires, and which, indeed, is best adapted to general edification.

It ought ever to be remembered, however, that the most pious and judicious assertors of this doctrine do never repose themselves in indolent security upon their faith in the final

stability, and safety of their spiritual state. None are generally more assiduous to make *their calling and election sure*. They rest their hope, it is true, on the faithfulness of a divine promise, but, like all the promises in the word of God, it is intimately connected with the co-action of the believer's mind, which is always and equally embraced in the divine purpose. Their stedfastness in holiness here, or in happiness hereafter, is not the consequence of any physical necessity of nature imposed by the decrees of God ; but is effected entirely by practical motives adapted to the rational and moral principles of a holy and sanctified mind. The decrees of Heaven cannot be certainly known, but, whatever they are, they are the concern only of the Supreme and Infinite Mind. They are not designed to affect the duties of human nature, which are regulated wholly by another law.





OF  
JUSTIFICATION.

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JUSTIFICATION is the immediate consequence, on the part of God, of a sincere faith ; and is defined, in the orthodox symbols, to be an act of God's free grace, by which the penitent and believing sinner is acquitted from the guilt and condemnation of his sins, and accepted, and treated as righteous, only for the sake of the merits of Jesus Christ ; received by faith, and imputed to him, according to the tenor of the New Covenant. Justification is a forensic term taken from a process in law, in which the criminal is acquitted of the charges exhibited against him, so as to be absolved from the penalties pronounced by the law, and he restored, and again entitled to the privileges of citizenship. This is a peculiar case in which the criminal, though culpable with respect to every charge, is absolved through the mediation of another, who has satisfied the demands of justice and the law in his room. The reasonableness and equity of vicarious substitution, and consequently, of the imputation of the merits of one to another in certain cases, has been already considered, under the Covenant of Grace.

Justification is not a grace of the heart, but solely an act of God's free mercy, absolving the penitent sinner from the penalty due to his transgressions, and entitling him, according to the promise of the covenant, to the inheritance of eternal life. I need hardly appeal to particular passages in support of these ideas, they are so uniformly borne on the face of the whole scriptures, and, especially, of the writings of the great apostle of the Gentiles.

Some writers conceive an opposition, amounting almost to contradiction, between the ideas of free grace, and the imputation of the perfect righteousness of the Redeemer. If the law is completely satisfied, they ask, what can be demanded more of the penitent believer? In this objection they must certainly forget, or their prejudices must be unwilling to admit, that it is the effect merely of divine mercy, that such a satisfaction has been made for offending man; and, when made, it is equally of free grace, in consequence of the merciful constitution of the covenant, that it is applied to the believer. "For it is not through works of righteousness which we have done, but by grace we are saved through faith; and that, not of ourselves, it is the gift of God." It is the qualification of faith alone which prepares and enables the believer to receive and enjoy the blessings of salvation.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE APOSTLES ST. PAUL AND  
ST. JAMES ON THIS SUBJECT.

It is frequently objected to us, that the apostle James ascribes the justification of the believer, not to his faith, but to his good works. To understand St. James, in this place, it is necessary carefully to attend to his object in writing this epistle. He wished to turn the attention of the church to that criterion by which the disciples of Christ should most effectually demonstrate the sincerity of their faith, and their attachment to their Redeemer. There were in that age, as there are in every period, many who presumed to recommend themselves to their fellow-christians by a boastful ostentation of religious zeal, while they were destitute of those works of piety and virtue which alone could adorn their holy profession, in the esteem of mankind. Such false and hollow pretences occasioned great reproach to the nascent cause of christianity. The apostle, therefore, was solicitous to purge the church of these blots on the Christian name; and to convince the world that the faith of Christ, instead of being a cover for indolence and vice, is the most effectual principle of good morals and sanctity of life. In his epistle, therefore, he earnestly teaches that, in the actual circumstances of the church, it was of primary importance, that the disciples of Christ should exhibit, in their example, the virtuous and holy influence of their doctrine. And, as faith was publicly known

to be the fundamental principle of their practical system, he was anxious to redeem it from the misrepresentation and reproach of infidelity, as partaking only of the spirit of a weak credulity, without any of the useful energies of virtue and charity, which would render it a blessing to the world. Hence he was so much concerned that the gentiles should be impressed with the conviction that the disciples had not made a vain boast of the efficacy of the vital principle of their religion; but, that before the world, they should justify by their good works, the sanctifying power of that faith which they had so highly extolled. This would bring real glory to the gospel of Christ. Therefore, whatever false disciples may pretend about a visionary, unproductive faith, to the discredit of their Saviour, a sincere believer will always be studious to demonstrate his faith by his works of charity and righteousness. So that the design of the blessed apostle appears to be, not to make the justification of the sinner before God to depend upon his good works; but to make the good works of the believer to be the justification of the sincerity of his faith before the church, and before the world. Thus was *Abraham's faith, justified by his works*. For, *as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also*.

By some divines of respectable name, this is called a second justification; thereby meaning a justification to ourselves, to the church, and to the world, of the integrity of our profes-

sion of the name of Christ, and of the purity of that holy principle of faith which governs in the heart of a true disciple. And this practical manifestation of a pure and sincere faith, is, indeed, the genuine source of the pious consolation of a believer, and the only stable ground on which he can apply to himself the gracious promises of the New Covenant. For, although the integrity of his faith is known to the Omniscient Jehovah, in the first moments of its existence, as well as at any future period; and his justification passes immediately with God, before any practical proofs exhibited to men of its pious and charitable works; yet, by its fruits alone can we certainly demonstrate our title to rejoice in our interest in the redemption that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

THE BELIEVER, NOTWITHSTANDING HIS JUSTIFICATION,  
STILL SUBJECT TO THE CALAMITIES OF THIS LIFE.

The believer, notwithstanding his deliverance from the dominion of sin, and his being made an heir of eternal life by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, must continue, in this world, subject to the manifold evils resulting from the frailties of a mortal body, and frequently from a disordered mind. By the introduction of the New Covenant, established in the power and grace of the Mediator, provision is made for his ultimate redemption from eternal death, when he shall have laid in the grave the corruptions of the flesh. In the mean time, the moral depravation of the soul is gradually de-

stroyed by the spirit of sanctification, and all his temporal evil, though not removed, while the body remains, are, through the covenant, converted into blessings, and become a salutary discipline, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, to cultivate the heart for heaven. And highly useful they are to elevate the soul above all undue attachments to the present world, and to break within it the strength and power of sin. It is among the laws of our nature that, in our education for eternity, no less than in our education for discharging usefully and honourably the offices of this life, we should grow wise by our errors, and that correction should often be necessary to preserve the mind attentive to its duties.

The Romish church taught the extraordinary and unscriptural doctrine, that the sufferings of our blessed Saviour did not accomplish a complete atonement for the sins of mankind; but that the afflictions imposed on believers in the arrangements of providence, are to be regarded as part of the penalty of the divine law; and if the destined measure of their pains should not be entirely inflicted in the present life, they are to be fulfilled in a future and purgatorial state. On the same ground they have built the still more absurd doctrine, of the efficacy of voluntary mortifications to complete the requisite proportion of the sufferings of Christ in them, and to deliver them from a correspondent part of the pains of purgatory. But the doctrine most obnoxious to common sense, and farthest removed from the humble spirit of the

gospel, is, that eminent saints, for whom the demands of the law have been already satisfied by the sufferings of Christ, together with their own, may, by voluntary and extraordinary duties, inflictions, and sacrifices, lay up a store of merit, to be imputed, along with that of the Saviour, to believers less advanced in the road of perfection. On this wretched foundation was built that shameful traffic of indulgences, and purgatorial exemptions, which grew to such enormity, as to become, at length, one of the principal causes of the reformation in the sixteenth century. A single passage in the epistle to the Colossians, and that grossly misinterpreted, by the knavery of the Popes, and the ignorance of the Monks, was the sole support of this monstrous fabric. It is contained in the following words:—*Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ, in my flesh, for his body's sake, which is the church,*—ch. i. ver. 24. The expression *my sufferings for you* evidently refers to the pains which he endured in their service; and that which follows, on which the principal stress is laid, *the afflictions of Christ* ἀλιψείας Χριστοῦ, is a Grecism which signifies *the afflictions borne by him for the sake of Christ*; and is similar, in the structure of the phrase, to other expressions, παθημάτων τοῦ Χριστοῦ—ἐν ἑαυτῷ Κυρίου Ἰησοῦ—ὁνειδισμῶς τοῦ Χριστοῦ, the import of which has never created any difficulty, because there is no sinister purpose to be answered by a false interpretation. The full force of these phrases may be given in the following words: *Who now rejoice in the*

*sufferings that I bear for you, which are necessary to fill up that measure of afflictions in the service of Christ which providence has still destined for me in my assiduous endeavours to promote the interest of his church.*

Before dismissing these brief remarks on the justification of the sinner, through faith in the righteousness of the ever blessed Redeemer, it deserves our particular notice that this doctrine, contrary to the misrepresentations of its enemies, far from being unfriendly to morals, is peculiarly favourable to the interests of practical virtue and piety. And as far as human observation extends, it has ever been found that the friends of this system of truth have been distinguished as the warmest advocates, and the most eminent examples of sanctity of life. It is particularly worthy the attention of the devout and rational christian, that, not only is this true as an historical fact, but it is the natural result of the principle. Resting, as it does, on the full and perfect atonement accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ, instead of affording any indulgence or protection to sin, it is the most effectual mean of destroying its power in the life, and utterly exterminating its root from the heart. To establish this truth on the surest foundations, let us consider the whole structure of the gospel of our salvation, whence the consequence will arise with conspicuous evidence to our view. Its foundation it deeply lays in the humiliating doctrine of the entire depravity of human nature, and our consequent subjection to the



righteous condemnation of eternal death. From this fearful sentence the humbled soul finds no relief, but in the rich redemption that is in Jesus Christ, by faith in his name. A profound persuasion of these interesting facts, attested equally by the gospel and his own afflicting experience, renders the salvation of the cross so indispensably necessary to the peace, and so infinitely precious to the hopes of the guilty offender. But, in the astonishing humiliation of the Son of God, on which this system of divine grace is built, and his sufferings, under the imputed guilt of human nature, the believing penitent is led to discern, and strongly to feel how obnoxious he is to the righteous displeasure of Almighty God. Hence naturally arises in his heart an overwhelming sentiment of the evil of his sins, and a profound and fixed abhorrence of their defilement and their power. These principles are intimately involved in one another, and almost necessarily spring from the united view of himself as a sinner, and of Christ as his Redeemer.

With them are essentially conjoined an ulterior discovery and most intimate persuasion of the impossibility of the forgiveness of sin, without a complete atonement for the violation of the divine law, the grandeur of which, while it displays the malignity of our offences, exhibits, at the same time, and in the same high colours, the infinite compassions and love of the Redeemer to the human sinner; a sublime

idea, which reciprocally tends to exalt the love of the believer to him who is the glorious author of all mercy and grace.

When all these views are taken in at once, as they must be by those who sincerely receive this self-abasing but consolatory doctrine, what a profound and sanctifying effect is it fitted to produce on the heart! What an efficient principle does it become of the purest morals and virtue in the life! I do not say, indeed, that these happy consequences will arise from any speculative conviction of these principles, however clearly they may be conceived by the understanding; but to the warm and affectionate believer, they spring almost necessarily out of the united views of the justice and the mercy of Jehovah our Saviour.

This doctrine of justification by grace through the atonement of a divine Redeemer, by presenting to the mind the most sublime discoveries of the holiness of the divine nature, suggests by a reflex act, the perfect purity of soul which should reign in all our approaches to the Deity, in his holy ordinances, in his church on earth, and should pervade the entire intercourse of mankind with one another. That is, in one word, which should regulate the whole system of their moral conduct, both with regard to Almighty God their Creator, and to the great fraternity of their brethren;—Their piety, their justice, their truth, their amiable charity, and universal benevolence.

I add; that it contributes, in no inferior degree, to promote the practical holiness of the believer, by the powerful motive of gratitude for the redeeming mercy of Heaven. For, no where else can the condescension of Almighty God to the imperfection of the creature, and his grace to the unworthiness of the sinner, be discerned in so resplendent and impressive a light; no where else, do the perfections, and love of the Creator, and Redeemer of mankind, shine with such conspicuous evidence, and calculated to raise the devout affections of the soul to so transcendent an elevation. Here infinite justice is contemplated as combined with infinite mercy, and mercy appears more glorious, when it is seen emerging, for the salvation of the sinner, from beneath the heavy clouds of a consuming justice. No view of the mercy of God most holy, and of the infinite love of the Redeemer is fitted so completely to absorb all the powers of the soul. *We love him because he first loved us.*

Let us now consider the aspect which the love of God, so powerfully promoted by this doctrine bears on the general morals of christianity. It is the supreme principle of all genuine religion, whether it be the religion of nature, or of revelation. Wherein, then, does it consist? Not, surely, in the love, or even the conception of his *essential* nature. For of that no idea can be framed by the human intellect. It is the love only of his *perfections*, by which alone he can be conceived of by us; and especially of his moral attri-

butes, his holiness, his justice, his boundless goodness, his universal love, so illustriously displayed in the salvation of the sinner through the cross of Christ.

Here, then, O Christian! we discern the genuine root of a holy life, in the supreme love of perfections which form the most efficient principles of christian morals; and which, operating on all the springs of action in the soul, create the nearest resemblance on earth, to the image of God, which is the perfection of holiness and virtue.

#### OF ADOPTION.

In the order of systematic arrangement, Adoption is usually considered as immediately following, and intimately connected with the doctrine of justification. Few words are necessary for stating or explaining this subject, it being rather expressive of that *external* relation, in which it pleases God to place the believer to himself, than descriptive of the moral state of the mind. The *spirit of adoption*, indeed, spoken of by the apostle, embraces all those dutiful sentiments, and pious dispositions, which become so great a mercy and so intimate a relation: but adoption simply is expressive of the relation itself which the justified believer holds to his Heavenly Father. It is a forensic term taken from the modes prescribed in the laws of most nations, by which a child, not born in a certain family, is legally received into it,

and becomes entitled to its privileges, honours, and inheritances. As applied to believers it is a figure which designates, with no small propriety and force, the blessings to which they are advanced in consequence of their justification. They are assimilated to the image of their heavenly Father—they partake of his paternal protection and care—and, according to his gracious promise, and the constitution of the New Testament confirmed in the blood of Christ, they are made heirs of an eternal inheritance. Taken from a state of hostile estrangement, they are introduced into his family.

This figure was peculiarly expressive and obvious, at the time when the evangelists and apostles wrote, and within the limits of the Roman empire; because the necessity and the practice of adoption, was in that nation, and in that age, more prevalent than at any other period of history, or in any other portion of the globe. There are many passages in the sacred writings which justify the introduction of this term into our systems to express this relation of the believer to God under the Covenant of Grace. “As many as received him,” saith the evangelist John, “to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe in his name.” And the apostle Paul; “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God, for ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the spirit of adoption, by which we cry Ab-

sa! Father! The Spirit itself testifieth with our spirit that we are the sons of God; and, if sons, then heirs—heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ,”—*Rom.* viii. 14....17. To the Ephesians he writes; “Having foreordained us unto adoption through Jesus Christ, unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace,”—*Eph.* i. 5, 6.

Adoption is an act of the free grace of God towards the unworthy, and the guilty; and, along with justification is the immediate effect of faith, and one of the promised blessings of the covenant of grace.

Before concluding this article, I will briefly, and in a single word, state the happy consequences of this blessed relation to his Creator and Redeemer into which the believer is taken. In the first place, peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, the cause of his displeasure being removed, and there being no longer any obstruction to that intimacy of union which should connect the soul with God, and that fullness and freedom of affection which should fill the heart of a dutiful son towards his Heavenly Father.—In the next place, peace of conscience, which is amongst the sweetest enjoyments of which the renewed soul, formed after the image of God, is capable.—Thirdly, the profound and delightful sentiment of the Love of God for his unspeakable mercy, inspiring the continual desire of acting worthy of that high re-

lation into which the believer is received by the spirit of Adoption.--And, finally, habitual and increasing sanctification of heart and life, and growing preparation for that "inheritance uncorrupted, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time," 1 *Pet.* i. 4, 5.





OF THE  
**NATURE OF FAITH ;**

ITS EFFICACY AND EXCELLENCE AS A PRACTICAL PRINCIPLE OF HOLINESS, AND CONSEQUENTLY THE REASON-  
ABleness OF ITS POSSESSING SUCH A DISTINGUISHED PLACE IN THE CHRISTIAN SYSTEM.

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HAVING already pronounced faith to be the condition of the Covenant of Grace, and briefly spoken of the justification, adoption, and sanctification of the believer, as among the precious fruits of this covenant, I have, however, thought it necessary, on account of the high importance of the doctrines of faith in the christian system, to treat of it with somewhat greater extent and precision. As it is the fundamental article of the gospel, it has accordingly been attacked by the enemies of christianity with peculiar virulence, and with the most disingenuous sarcasm; insultingly presuming that the gospel needs the support of faith, only in proportion as it is destitute of reason. The evidences on which our faith is sustained have been already discussed, as far as this compendious system would admit. And, on the most rigorous investigation, it will be found to rest on secure

and solid foundations. Its enemies, taking advantage of an obvious prejudice against the name of faith, find an occasion, either through ignorance or enmity, to impeach the whole system as an appeal to the credulity of mankind. On the contrary, this doctrine, when calmly and dispassionately considered, will be found, notwithstanding the objections of its enemies, not less conformable to the principles of reason, than it isto the prescriptions of Christ. For it is equally true of every moral institution, as of the gospel, that its doctrines, its laws, its sanctions, and the authority on which the whole depends, must be clearly comprehended, and heartily believed, before they can acquire an influence on manners and conduct. Had christianity been simply a philosophic institute, intended to regulate morals, and to persuade mankind to a virtuous life, yet must its doctrines have been received as truth, with a proper understanding of their nature, worth, and importance, (and what else is faith?) before they could have exerted any practical effect on the heart and affections.— Thus does the principle of faith become, not only a necessary, but a most rational basis of the gospel, whether we consider it as a code of doctrine addressed to the intellect, or a system of precepts regulating the practice. And, inasmuch as the mass of mankind are incapable of deducing the system of their duties from the fountains of reason alone; still less are the wisest of their sages capable of entering into the unsearchable counsels of God, so as explain to us on what terms the repentance of a sinner may be accepted of him, in

order to his reconciliation ; or of penetrating the darkness which hangs over the everlasting destinies of mankind ; and since truth, and comfortable hope, on these subjects, must be purely the effect of revelation, faith is, with still more propriety, made the fundamental principle of the christian system. It is confessed that the peculiar and discriminating doctrines of christianity cannot rest on the discoveries of human reason. They must be received, if they are rationally received at all, upon the evidence of those omnipotent works performed by Jesus Christ, which identify him with the Author of all truth. We believe, not because he hath taught like the leader of a philosophic sect, in a chain of the most accurate and conclusive reasoning ; but because he hath made it evident, that, in his words, God himself, the Author of all truth, hath spoken. For, we can have no doubt of the presence of God in the midst of those astonishing displays of divine power, with which the Saviour hath invited the attention of the world ; nor of the veracity of that testimony, the truth of which the Almighty has deigned to confirm with his own seal. As it is the privilege of children to receive the lessons of duty and wisdom from the mouth of a wise parent, which they ought to admit with implicit reverence, before their minds are sufficiently mature to discern their foundations in the eternal principles of reason, so the disciple of Christ humbly learns, by faith, at the feet of his Redeemer, those truths which he could not otherwise receive, till the soul, ripened by the instructions of his grace and Spirit, shall

be enabled to contemplate them, in the light of heaven with an angel's reason.—I proceed, therefore, to exhibit the nature of Faith, which is our best reason, till the period arrive of immediate vision.

#### DEFINITION OF EVANGELIC FAITH.

Evangelic Faith, in its most general import, consists in receiving the holy scriptures, with clear understanding, and with inward and profound conviction of their truth, as containing the infallible word of God; and in embracing Jesus Christ, who is the principal subject of them, as the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world. Apostles, and prophets, and inspired men are his organs to declare his will to mankind; but, to the believer, it is God himself who speaks in them.

On this definition several guards and explanations are to be made, in order to the more distinct understanding of the subject. The holy scriptures, besides the revelation of Jesus Christ, and of eternal life through him, contain a wide compass of miscellaneous information, more or less directly connected with their principal end, the publication of the glad tidings of peace, to a guilty world. Faith, therefore, besides receiving these miscellanies as truths which highly concern the church, respects the holy scriptures chiefly as revealing a system of mercy to fallen man. And, amidst

their various contents, those subjects are more peculiarly incorporated in the object of faith, which are most essentially conjoined with this idea of divine mercy: For example; the fallen and guilty state of human nature; the perfect atonement for sin made by our Lord Jesus Christ; the infinite greatness, holiness, justice, goodness, sovereignty, and truth of God; the beauty and excellence of the law of holiness; and the promise of eternal life to the penitent. On other subjects opinions may be more various, ideas may be more indefinite and obscure: but on these, belief ought to be precise, clear, strong.

In stating the nature of faith, however, a distinction is to be made between that belief which has a reference merely to the integrity and veracity of the prophet, the apostle, or the messenger of Heaven, and that which respects also the nature, importance, and excellence of the doctrines which these divine instructors communicate. Let me illustrate my meaning by a familiar example. We may possess perfect confidence in the wisdom of an eminent moralist, or admire the talents of a fine writer, who points out, with all the truth of criticism, the beauties of any classic work; but for want of having the reason properly cultivated by education, we may not perceive the soundness of his remarks, or the accuracy of his reflections; or, through deficiency of taste, may not be able to discern the beauty of his examples, nor the delicacy of his illustrations. The principles and doctrines

of the one, or the delicate beauties of the other, cannot be strictly said to be objects of our belief; because the former are not justly apprehended, nor are the latter truly discerned, requiring for this purpose, the delicacy of a refined taste, and cultivated understanding. To apply these remarks. A genuine, practical, and operative faith in the gospel, which is that alone after which we seek, consists, not merely, in acknowledging the scriptures to be the word of God, or in confessing the divine authority, and heavenly mission of the apostles, the prophets, or of Christ himself, all which may be nothing more than an hereditary opinion, or pious prejudice derived from education: but it implies, as still more essential to it, a clear perception of the spiritual nature and discernment of the divine excellence and beauty of the doctrines which they teach, especially as they regard the glory of God, the system of our redemption, and the duties and immortal hopes of man; and I must add, still further, a profound persuasion, which is a necessary consequence of the former, not only of their truth, but of their infinite importance to our everlasting peace and happiness. These doctrines, therefore, are not received with genuine faith, but in proportion as their true nature, as far as they are within the comprehension of the human mind, is clearly understood; and clearly understood they cannot be but in proportion as the heart discerns their spiritual excellence, and, with a holy and divine taste, relishes their spiritual beauty; for the *excellence* of virtue, the *beauty* of holi-

ness, is part of its idea. Here then we begin to perceive the moral and sanctifying influence of a sincere faith; for what the heart thus understands and loves, discerning its supreme excellence, must govern the practice. The believer perceiving, by this gracious principle, the *perfection* of these doctrines, or, in the language of the scriptures, *the beauty of holiness*, is led, by the sweet attraction of a renewed taste, to *delight in the law of God after the inward man*.

THE DEPENDENCE OF SAVING FAITH ON THE GOOD  
DISPOSITIONS OF THE HEART.

Here also we discern, which is my next observation, the dependence of faith upon, or its necessary connexion with the good dispositions of the heart.—By the understanding we judge of speculative truth. And many writers have maintained that this power of the mind alone is employed in a rational and consistent faith. But it ought always to be remembered that the convictions of the understanding are greatly influenced, on all moral subjects, by the state of the affections. It is the heart alone, profoundly touched by the Spirit of grace, which creates those lively and affecting conceptions of the beauty and excellence of divine things, which together with the conclusions of reason, form the essence of a practical faith the active and operative principle of a holy life. Hence the apostle hath said; “with the heart man believeth unto righteousness.” And Philip repli-

ed to one asking the condition of baptism.—If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest.

Will it be asked if we do not, by this representation, require the regeneration of the heart, or the formation in the soul of a divine and holy taste of truth, as a prerequisite to faith, of which, change, however, faith is acknowledged to be the only genuine principle? By no means. Degenerate as human nature is, it so far possesses ideas of moral excellence, and *consents to the law of God that it is good*, as under the gracious influences of the Divine Spirit, co-operating with his holy word, to present to that heavenly Teacher a sufficient foundation for an understanding faith in its incipient state. And when once this holy illumination, this divine taste exists in the weakest degree, it prepares the soul, under the culture of the same word, and the continued influence of the same Spirit, to receive every doctrine of the gospel with a fuller conviction, to perceive increasing beauties in the system of grace, and to feel, with augmented force the obligation of the whole law of holiness. There exists a strong analogy between the progress, and effects of education whether moral or scientific, and the influence of this divine culture on the mind, under the teachings of the Holy Spirit. The mind begins her course blind to the beauties of truth, and averse to the constraints of a necessary discipline; but the light which is gradually shed into the mind improves, both the judgment, and the taste, and con-



tributes, by a fine and almost imperceptible influence, to ameliorate the heart. We cannot pronounce that a happy and formed taste must precede the power of perceiving the beauty or the light of virtue, or of science in their incipient state: nor can we say, on the other hand, that the perception of the beauty of virtue must precede the formation of a virtuous taste. They are simultaneously cultivated, and, by a mutual influence, produce their effects on each other by an insensible reciprocation of ideas and feelings, which is too fine to be marked in language; but does not fail to be perceived by all who are accustomed to attend with precision to the operations of their own minds.

THE RETRIBUTIONS OF ETERNITY INCLUDED IN THE IDEA  
OF AN OPERATIVE AND EFFICIENT FAITH.

In speaking of faith as an efficient principle of sanctification, it is requisite, besides the spiritual understanding of the doctrines of the gospel, and the divine taste of their excellence and beauty which it implies, to include also in its idea, those powerful motives of holiness and obedience which it derives from celestial and eternal things. In the language of the apostle, "it is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen." It penetrates the veil which conceals them from mortal eyes, and presents them to the devout mind, as far as the human faculties are susceptible of these sublime ideas, with a transcendent, and

ineffable sensation. Among these heavenly objects we discern especially the glory of God, the infinite love of the Redeemer, the final judgment of the universe, and the everlasting retributions of the righteous, and the wicked ;—considerations which add a mighty and practical force to the delightful attractions of redeeming love.

#### ASSEMBLAGE OF THE PRECEEDING PRINCIPLES.

Let us review the principles which I have hitherto laid down upon this subject. Faith consists in the first place, and in its most general idea, in receiving the sacred scriptures as containing the gracious revelation of the will of God for our instruction in righteousness, and our eternal salvation.—It consists in the next place, not only in the belief of the divine authority and direction under which the scriptures have been communicated to the world, but in a clear and spiritual understanding of the nature, and a divine perception of the excellence and perfection of their holy doctrines.—Thirdly, in a strong impression on the heart of those high motives to practical piety and virtue, which religion has drawn from the glory of God, from the redemption of the cross, and the retributions of eternity. And, finally, in a profound persuasion of the personal, and everlasting concern which we have in those precious, those glorious, and those awful truths.

## THE EFFICACY OF FAITH.

We conclude, therefore, with the justest reason, that no moral system, or institute of religion, has ever laid such a foundation for purity of heart, and sanctity of life, as the christian economy, resting, as it does, on the doctrine of a sincere faith in the Redeemer of the world. If we assemble all the objects of faith in one view, and receive them as the infallible truths of God, not with a vague, unmeaning assent, the fruit merely of custom and example, but with a profound conviction, arising from reflection, from examination, from the holy influence of prayer, aided by the concurrent illumination of the Eternal Spirit, I may ask, with confidence, what motives drawn from any other source, can be compared with those derived from the gospel, for the purity of their influence, and their persuasive power on the heart?

THE EXCELLENCE OF THIS PRINCIPLE AS A PRACTICAL  
BASIS OF RELIGION.

The enemies of the gospel profess to be offended at its resting so much on the doctrine of faith; insinuating that the whole is merely an address to the credulity of mankind, in which believing its pretensions is made a substitute for piety and morality. The evidences of our holy religion, proposed in the introduction of this treatise, are a sufficient reply

to the former insinuation. The gospel, instead of declining any fair scrutiny, requires of its disciples the most rigorous investigation. And the illustration which has just been given of the doctrine, as a practical principle of morals, will rescue it from the obloquy of the latter; and will vindicate the reasonableness of building the whole evangelic system upon this foundation. The ground on which the sacred writers extol this grace is, not that its merit is sufficient to supply the defect of every other virtue: but, that it is the proper spring of all true virtue, and the most efficient principle of a holy life. Let us pursue this reflection a moment. We may lay it down as an infallible maxim in morals, that right principles truly understood, and firmly believed, will ever be followed by right conduct, and that false principles, on the other hand, tend to vitiate the fountains of virtue and piety in the heart, and lead to many pernicious errors in the habits of life. What then is evangelic faith, but embracing on the authority of a divine and infallible teacher, and on the renewed taste of a mind enlightened by the inspiration of truth, the purest principles of practical virtue, the holiest law of universal duty, which has ever been prescribed to mankind. It is subjecting the soul to the influence of the most sublime and powerful motives of holiness which the wisdom of God has ever published for the regeneration of the world. The laws of morals, as they have been prescribed in the systems of the wisest men who have not drawn them from the fountains of inspiration, are susceptible of

so much disputation, and are liable, in their application, to so many exceptions and modifications, in favour of each man's inclinations or interests, that they form a most uncertain and fallacious rule of duty. It is, besides, a rule as feeble in its authority, as it is defective in its prescriptions, being liable to be changed, or set aside, by every caprice of self-love, or impulse of misguided passion. But every thing in the discipline of Christ, is clear and luminous as the eternal laws of truth from which it emanates. Here are no enfeebling doubts, no uncertain reasonings which make the law too often speak the language of a corrupted heart. Where, then, can be found, in all the systems of human wisdom, such a basis of morality as in that faith which is the practical principle of the gospel of Christ? Has any philosophy, the candid unbeliever himself being judge, ever taught so pure and excellent a doctrine, derived it from so sublime a source, enjoined it by sanctions so weighty and important, or added to it the force of obligations, and the persuasion of motives, so transcendent in their nature, and fitted to interest all the best powers of the soul?—Such are the moral effects of a genuine faith in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, in the esteem of every candid and pious mind, will repel all the contemptuous sneers of infidelity, and vindicate the high place which it holds in the christian dispensation. *It works by love, and purifies the heart.* It is the commencement of that pure and heavenly spirit, which, unfold-

ed and cherished in the regions of immortal love, will be the consummation of *that grace wherein we now stand.*

#### OTHER DEFINITIONS OF FAITH.

Before dismissing this branch of the subject, let me take notice of some definitions, or representations of this grace, confessedly just, but the coincidence of which with the views hitherto presented to you, may not immediately appear. Sometimes it is characterised in the holy scriptures by one of its principal acts. *Abraham* is said to have believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. This consequence could have flowed only from his having trusted implicitly in the divine promise, in opposition to the most untoward events, and to appearances that might have discouraged the strongest hopes. Such confidence in the covenanted promise of God could have existed only in a heart prepared to receive, with submissive duty, every part of his declared will.

Sometimes it is designated by one of its principal objects; as in the command of the apostle to the jailor, *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.* In another circumstance, the same great founder of the christian faith, descending to an idea still more particular, says; "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

The doctrine of the resurrection of Christ is so intimately involved with the accomplishment of the atonement, and with the truth of all the promises and hopes of christianity, that sincerely to receive this glorious truth in all its relations and consequences, is to embrace the whole gospel.

On the other hand, the pious and learned compilers of the confession and catechism of the presbyterian church have chosen to describe it by one of its essential and inseparable consequences ; *receiving and resting upon Christ alone for salvation*. Desiring to give some single criterion of this grace which would be least liable to be mistaken by a believer himself in judging of his own spiritual state, they have fixed on this self-renunciation, and this absolute dependence of the penitent sinner on the grace and merits of the Saviour, as one that is most certain, because one to which the pride, and self-complacency of man most reluctantly submits : one to which he never does submit, till the sense of his own unworthiness and guilt,—of the purity, holiness, and justice of the divine law,—of the grace of the Redeemer, and the all-sufficiency of his righteousness for the satisfaction of the violated law,—in a word, till the whole gospel has taken full possession of his soul.

## OF FALSE RESEMBLANCES OF FAITH.

Systematic writers on the subject of faith present to us different counterfeit resemblances of this grace, which it is of importance, in practice, to discriminate from the genuine principle. Among them, those which chiefly require our notice, have been called an *historical* faith, and a *temporary* faith. By the former is intended that assent which is yielded to the truth of the holy scriptures merely through custom, education, and sympathy with general opinion and example. Or it may embrace that which arises from the convictions of the understanding yielded to a rational examination of the evidences of our religion, but without producing that discernment of the spiritual beauty, and that heartfelt perception of the excellence of its moral and divine doctrines, which creates a fervent love of the truth, and begets a deep and personal application of it to the heart, for its sanctification and instruction in righteousness. This is that *faith*, if it deserve the name, which fills our churches with formal, indeed, but cold professors, destitute of the *life and power of godliness*. Which occupies the garden of God with fair and sightly trees that put forth leaves and flowers, but bring none of the genuine fruits of holiness to perfection. The history of our Saviour is, to them, like other credible narrations of ancient, or of distant events, and generally creates as little interest in the heart.



On the other hand, that which is improperly called a *temporary faith*, is usually nothing more than an occasional, and sometimes constitutional susceptibility of heart on religious subjects, excited by a variety of concurrent circumstances; and, like other transient emotions, passing away without fruit, or any radical change of character. In those moments of religious feeling, the gospel is regarded rather as a system of beneficence to the creature, than of mercy and grace to the sinner. The sinner is prone to rejoice in the ideas of the divine benignity; and often melts with the sympathetic recollections of the Saviour's sufferings and love, without entering deeply into the depravity of our nature, and, from the heart, abhorring its corruptions. He perceives the triumphs, not the humility of religion. The consequence is, that, not duly sensible of the evil of sin, and penetrated with the sentiments of repentance, he does not properly regard the righteousness of Christ as forming the sole meritorious title of our acceptance with God. When the passions and temptations of sin are from any cause suspended in their actions, mistaking this temporary quiet for the change of heart required in the gospel, he may perceive an elevated joy in the hopes of eternal life and happiness; but, having no root of holiness in himself, when persecution, or shame, or the sacrifice of interest or of pleasure is to be encountered for the sake of the *word, bye and bye he is offended*; or, when the transient fit of religious sensibility has passed off, it leaves nothing behind it but the passions of the world.

This great and practical principle of duty is attempted, by different writers, to be analyzed into various acts concurring to constitute its essence ; such as repentance for sin—a desire to glorify God through Jesus Christ—a love of divine things—hungering and thirsting after righteousness—receiving and resting upon Christ for justification, sanctification, and complete redemption. These acts form an injudicious analysis of the grace of faith. They are natural consequences resulting from the devout and humble state of the mind in the exercise of faith ; but are not more peculiarly allied to this grace than to other principles of the divine life. There is, however, a discrimination in this act, according to its degrees of clearness and strength, into a *weak faith* and a *strong faith*, which has a real foundation in the experience of good men. And the holy apostle evidently justifies the distinction, speaking of some of his converts as being yet only *babes* in Christ. And, in his second epistle to the Thessalonians, exulting in the faith of that church as *growing exceedingly* ; by which language he strongly marks a progression in this grace. His followers at Rome he exhorts “ not to think more highly of themselves than they ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every every man the measure of faith.”

## IN THE FIRST PLACE, OF A WEAK FAITH.

This title implies a certain feebleness in the impressions which divine truth makes upon the mind, so that it does not habitually yield that clear apprehension of its nature, and firm persuasion of its glorious reality, which raises the believer, at all times, above the seductive influence of the world, and gives him that lively sense of his interest in the atonement and intercession of Christ which contributes, in the highest degree, to his comfort in the divine life, and to the most useful discharge of his various duties. This feeble habit of religious feeling, may arise from different causes, which will naturally display themselves in proportionally different effects upon the character and manners. Sometimes it springs from a natural imbecility of mind in conceiving its ideas; and, at other times, from possessing only narrow views, and very limited opportunities of information. The consequence of which, usually, is an unhappy mixture of low and superstitious ideas and practices with the better principles of religion. Not unfrequently, it is derived from certain errors in principle, which occasion the forms, and the external duties of religion to be too much, or too little regarded; either absorbing the heart in its ceremonial, or, by a pretended superiority to outward form, withdrawing from the weakness of human nature the aids which have always been found necessary for preserving alive the warmth and vigour of pious af-

fection. By suffering certain habits of conformity to the world to grow up in the heart unobserved, we sometimes see a state of manners gradually introduced, unfriendly to the cultivation of the divine life, and of that strictness of walk, and purity of conversation before God, which is most edifying to the church, and becoming the gravity of the christian profession. Too often a weak faith may be occasioned by peculiar temptations, against which a christian has not been sufficiently on his guard; or it may grow out of certain habitual situations in life wherein so many worldly engagements and avocations press upon his attention, as unhappily to occupy a great portion of that time which ought to be devoted to the studies, meditations, and duties of piety. The strength of his faith will, in this case, often be little superior to the influence of the world, and will be a feeble principle either of comfort to his own soul, or of advancement in the habits of holy living. On particular occasions, sin may have surprised the vigilance of the most sincere and humble believer, and so distressed his conscience, that he cannot discern in himself any satisfactory evidences of his peculiar relation to Christ. In other instances, a constitutional gloominess of mind inclines some good men habitually to contemplate the spiritual state of their own souls in an unfavourable light. They entertain no doubt, indeed, of the truths of the gospel. They may regard them with the highest veneration and affection. Firmly believing the general principle of the power and grace of God, they cannot, however, in the afflicting

darkness of their minds, discern their own privilege to appropriate the gracious promise of the covenant to themselves. It is not of the mercy, or the promise of God, that they entertain any doubt; but of themselves. They lose the comforts of a composed and settled state of piety and devotion; and that time is often spent in gloomy retreat, and anxious conflicts with their own hearts, which would be better employed in active duty. Active duty is the best mean of removing the doubts of humble piety, by giving to the true believer the best evidences of a regenerate and sanctified principle of action. In retirement, the mind often broods over its own evils, and increases the gloom which induces it to court seclusion from the world. There are two acts, however, by which the sincerity of the weakest faith may be demonstrated. The one is humility, under a deep sense of the evil of sin, and of the imperfection of our own righteousness, producing unceasing desire of an interest in the redemption purchased by Christ Jesus. The other is an earnest endeavour to render that interest clear to the heart, by the faithful discharge of every duty, and a constant study to glorify God by holiness of living, and universal obedience to his will. Where these characters exist in sincerity, faith, although it may be feeble, is still genuine, and the believer may be truly an heir of eternal life; although, dubious and uncertain of his relation to Christ, his mind may be often covered with darkness and perplexity.

## OF A STRONG FAITH.

This exercise of the soul implies such a clear, deep, and habitual persuasion of divine truth as easily overcomes the undue and seductive influence of worldly things. And the habitual warmth of its devotion, and its zeal in promoting, as far as its power extends, the interests of the Redeemer's Kingdom, impart such internal evidence of sincerity, as leaves no doubt or hesitancy, in the most humble believer, in appropriating the free and gracious provisions of the gospel. Confiding in the amplitude and riches of divine grace, and the faithfulness of the divine promise, he enjoys such a serene and stedfast assurance of faith, as frequently enables him, in the language of the apostle, to *rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory*. This calm and settled confidence in the security of his spiritual state, and interest in the covenanted mercy of God, forms one of the distinguishing characters of a strong faith, and enables the believer to discharge his duty with the greater comfort, and to fulfil its labours, and endure its trials, with the greater constancy and fortitude. Job presents an interesting example of this faith, in his devout and fervent exclamation, *I know that my Redeemer liveth, and though, after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet, in my flesh, I shall see God*. This also is that degree of faith testified by the apostle Paul in the following language: *I know in whom I have trusted, and am persuaded that he is able*

to keep that which *I* have committed to him against that day. It is the same which, in another place, he calls *the full assurance of faith*. To it, likewise, the prophet Isaiah seems to allude, in an expression that deserves to be explained—*Let him take hold of my strength that he may make peace with me*; alluding evidently to the privilege which certain criminals enjoyed of fleeing, and taking hold of the horns, which were the *strength* of the altar, in order to escape the stroke of vengeance or of justice. The obvious interpretation of which language is—let him, with confidence, trust my power to save, and therein enjoy the security of my protection.

There is, indeed, a confidence of salvation, and a joy arising out of this assurance which the hypocrite may taste as well as the believer, and, sometimes, in a higher degree. But these affections may be discriminated from each other, by considering the necessary effects, and certain fruits, of a genuine faith. Believing the entire corruption of our nature, it produces the deepest humiliation before God. The joy of the hypocrite, on the other hand, begets an exultation of heart, in which little of the true humility of repentance is to be found. To the believer, the goodness and mercy of God, to a sinner so unworthy, occasions the profoundest self-abasement; in the hypocrite it creates an unreasonable estimation of himself, and a pharisaic self-complacency in the idea that he is better than others. The one, although his own happi-

ness contributes greatly to heighten his joy of faith, rejoices chiefly in the *beauty of holiness*; to the other, his own felicity is the principal consideration in those triumphs which at some times occupy and elevate his soul. The one loves God supremely for the holiness of his nature; the other is soothed by a flattering self-complacency, in being distinguished as a peculiar object of divine favour.

BY WHAT VIRTUE IN FAITH IS IT THAT IT CONFERS A  
RIGHT TO THE BLESSINGS OF THE COVENANT.

Having before pointed faith out as the condition of the covenant of grace, I will now consider a question which arises in consequence, and is often asked, by what virtue in that grace is it that all the rich and unmerited blessings of the covenant are freely conferred on the unworthiness of the believing sinner?—Several figurative expressions found in the holy scriptures, or employed on this subject by various divines, have been resorted to as suggesting the proper answer. But all this kind of imagery, serves rather to amuse the imagination, than to afford satisfaction to the judgment. Faith has been said, for example, to act as the hand which, by accepting the mercies freely proffered to the believing sinner, constitutes, according to the tenor of the covenant, his lawful title of possession. Other figures exhibit the believer as taking refuge in Jesus Christ, as a harrassed pilgrim, beneath a secure covert from the tempest, or a defence-



less man, behind his shield, from the dart of an enemy. These may form agreeable images in eloquent discourse, but do not explain the subject to the understanding. The efficacy of faith does not arise from any natural, or necessary virtue in this act of the mind to merit, or procure the blessing, but from the good pleasure of God, and the merciful constitution of the covenant of grace.—To render the subject more obvious, I lay down the following propositions. God infinitely merciful delights not in the misery of the offender. His supreme felicity consists in imparting happiness to all who can be made to enjoy it in consistency with the holy perfections of his nature, or, in other words, with the eternal and necessary laws of the moral universe. Having been pleased that the indispensable claims of his justice should be satisfied by the sacrifice of the cross, he now only wants a fit subject of his mercy, most freely to bestow it. Faith possesses this virtue, that, by the belief of the gracious truths, and promises of the gospel, it becomes, the most efficient principle of the regeneration and sanctification of our nature. The proper efficacy of faith then is, that it prepares the soul to be a fit recipient of those blessings which the infinite benevolence of the Deity is ever willing to confer on those who know how to value them, and are qualified to enjoy them. All the mercies of the gospel are transferred to the believer through Jesus Christ, through whom it has become just in God to justify the sinner. Such being the constitution of the covenant of grace,

faith hath been made the principle of a moral and legal union with Christ, so that all his merits are imputed to the believer, and become his title with divine justice, as if he were one with the Redeemer. This union is represented in the holy scriptures under different images which indicate it to be of the most intimate kind. It is the union of the members with the head—the connexion of the branches with the vine—the junction of the whole building with the corner stone upon which it rests. Expressions which convey, in lively figures, the relation of believers to Christ through faith, and the intimacy of union which subsists between them.—Such is the virtue of the grace of faith, on which it becomes a rational, as it is acknowledged to be the scriptural ground of bestowing on the believer all the blessings of the New Covenant.

OF THE  
EXTERNAL SEALS  
OF THE  
COVENANT OF GRACE.

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As God has been pleased to exhibit his grace to the world under the idea of a covenant which he condescends to enter into with the penitent and believing sinner, and provisionally offers to all who, by the gospel, are called from among our fallen and corrupted race, to seek the inheritance of eternal life, we have just ground to expect that every ordinary form, which usage has annexed to a transaction of this kind among men, will be preserved in this appointment of God. Therefore, to the gracious *promise* of the covenant, which, as has before been shown, constitutes its essence, he has annexed his seal, in order to add greater authenticity to this object of our faith, and give it a more affecting impression on the heart.

BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER BOTH SEALS OF THE  
COVENANT OF GRACE.

A seal is usually, any emblematic symbol employed in consequence of the agreement of parties, or appointed by

public authority, to be a sign, and memorial of consent in covenants, or an authentic testimonial, that any transaction into which we have entered, is our own act. For the same purpose, in the early and rude ages, parties forming a solemn compact frequently erected a pillar as a permanent memorial of the fact, or, more solemnly, built an altar, confirming their paction by an act of religion. Often they gave a small portion of the soil which was transferred by the contract, a penny of the sum which was to be paid, or some earnest or pledge of possession or fulfilment of the covenant. All these acts were of the nature of seals. In ages more refined instead of these rude devices, some hieroglyphic or symbolic representation was added to written contracts for the same purpose. In the church God has instituted symbolical actions, by which the Covenant of Grace is visibly ratified, when he offers it to the acceptance of believers and their offspring, as in the ordinance of baptism; or by which they solemnly declare their acceptance of its terms, as in the Lord's Supper. Baptism may be called the hieroglyphic, or symbol of regeneration; as the Lord's Supper is of the sacrifice of our redemption, and of the charity which should unite believers in love to their common Lord, and to one another. These actions, therefore from their nature, and from the uses to which they are applied, partake of the essence of seals.

Their being appointed by Almighty God to be employed as seals of the Covenant of Grace, may be further established, from the express words of the apostle, by whom circumcision is styled, *a seal of the righteousness which is by faith*; Rom. iv. 11: and from the analogy which subsists between the ordinances of baptism and circumcision. Both are emblems of purification; both administered on the condition of believing the promise of God in the Messiah; both are the external sign and confirmation of this faith; and both are applied, as shall be shewn, hereafter, for attaining all the gracious purposes of the covenant to believers, and to their infant seed. And this style has been used, with respect to baptism in particular, by the earliest writers in the christian church; and by those who were cotemporary with, or who immediately succeeded the apostles.

#### OTHER DENOMINATIONS APPLIED TO THEM.

Besides the denominations which these ordinances have respectively received, arising from circumstances peculiar to each; such as the *regeneration of water* applied to baptism, and the *eucharist*, and *communion* applied to the Lord's Supper, they have, from the earliest ages, been entitled *mysteries* and *sacraments*. The former term was borrowed from the pagan worship, and cherished by the converts from that superstition, through a natural attachment to ancient forms and usages, from which cause it was early introduced

into the temples of christianity. The sublime principles of natural religion which were discovered by the philosophers, or had been handed down by tradition from the remotest antiquity, and preserved in their temples by their priests, who had mingled them, however, with the grossest superstitions of the vulgar, were considered as too elevated for the popular understanding. They were separated, therefore, from the common mass of pagan doctrines, and reserved to be communicated only to a few men whose rank gave them superior means of information, or who had rendered themselves worthy the distinction by eminent virtue and prudence. When men of this character offered themselves to the college which presided over the public religion, they were, with great solemnity introduced into the recesses of their temples, and there instructed in those theological principles which it was supposed the body of the people were not capable of understanding, or were not worthy to receive. Those who were thus instructed were called the *initiated*, and the rites accompanying these instructions, were named *mysteries*, from a Greek term implying silence, because they respected doctrines which were not to be communicated to the people. And the initiated were laid under the most sacred obligations not to reveal aught, which passed on those occasions, within their temples. Since the sacraments of the christian church were designed, in like manner, to discriminate the faithful from the profane, and were not to be imparted promiscuously, but reserved for those only who had attained a spiritual, and sub-

limer knowledge of its principles, which the world did not enjoy, they were, in allusion to the mysteries of their ancient temples, which had acquired their early reverence, and were held in great veneration throughout the Roman empire, called by the same name.

The denomination of *sacrament* has a different origin. It was the military oath among the Romans, by which the soldiers plighted their allegiance to their general, or to the emperor. And as the christian life has been styled a warfare, in which the believer contends not only against spiritual enemies, but often, especially in that early age, was exposed to the most formidable dangers, he is justly said to pledge himself, in these ordinances, to the Lord Jesus Christ, *as the captain of his salvation*; to fight under his banner; to endure, in his service, every trial; and to expose himself, if necessary, to danger, and to death. And the primitive christians, in the immediate prospect of great conflicts, and of persecution, often renewed, by these holy rites, their vows of fidelity to their Lord, and reanimated their courage in suffering; especially by the sacrament of the Lord's supper. The term sacrament is not found among the writers of the New Testament; it was, however, very early adopted by the first christians. The apostles having represented the service of the cross under allusions borrowed from a state of warfare, and their followers finding, in painful experience, the perils and sufferings they were compelled to endure, soon

applied to the vows by which they devoted themselves to their Redeemer, a title so familiar to them in the military life.

#### THE DESIGN OF THE EXTERNAL SEALS OF THE COVENANT.

It is of importance to every christian distinctly to understand the import of his public use of the seals of the Covenant, and of the obligations which he imposes on his soul by this solemn act. Annexing our seal to the Covenant of Grace, or using the seal which God has appointed, necessarily implies our full belief of the precious doctrines involved in that covenant, and a hearty acquiescence in all its conditions. It implies, at the same time, a vow of consecration, by which he renews his self-devotion to the service of God through Jesus Christ. And, lastly, it implies, with regard to the believer himself, a personal ratification of the Covenant, on his part, by a sensible symbol calculated more strongly to authenticate the transaction—to assist faith by the co-operation of sense—to fix a deeper impression on the heart, thereby confirming the purposes of duty, and leaving a more awful testimony for God, if he should afterwards prove unfaithful to this most sacred of our duties in the church.

#### THE DIFFERENT IMPORT OF THE TWO SEALS.

The ordinances of baptism, and the Lord's supper, being both regarded as the seals of the Covenant of Grace, it is



necessary, with particular care, to attend to the proper distinction existing between them. The former may be regarded chiefly as the seal annexed immediately by God, through his public servants in the church, to this covenant, to give it authenticity, and to ratify it on his part to his people. The latter may be considered principally as the seal annexed by the believer to the same covenant, confirming his acceptance of its terms, and laying his soul, by that act, under the most sacred obligations of obedience. A covenant, being a mutual stipulation, requires, in order to its completion, the seals of the respective parties. God, by the ministry of his servants, who are officers in his church, annexes his own seal in baptism; and in the communion of the body and blood of the Lord, the believer personally affixes his seal to the same instrument. The veracity of God, indeed, needs no such adventitious confirmation. But as he has been pleased so far to adapt himself to the weakness of human nature, which is ever strongly moved by sensible impressions, he has not only offered his grace to the world in the form which takes place in covenant transactions among men, but confirmed it, according to the same customs, by the legal and authoritative sanction of a seal. That baptism is to be viewed chiefly as the seal of God affixed to his own covenant, may be concluded, not only from the ordinary forms of this instrument, but from its analogy to circumcision, in the room of which rite it has manifestly been substituted. The apostle declares that Abraham received, from God, *circumcision, a seal of the right:*

*eousness which is by faith* ; that is, a sign and assurance that, through the Redeemer, he would accept the righteousness of faith instead of the perfect obedience of the original *law of works*. You observe the style of the expression:—The *seal* of circumcision he *received* from God confirming this gracious privilege to the believing patriarch. It is not said that he gave this rite or seal as a pledge of his own obedience.

The intention of the rite is justly argued from its being applied to the infant offspring of Abraham as it is now administered to the children of christian parents who are the spiritual seed of Abraham. Infants, of this tender age, are not capable of any covenant transaction by themselves, and in their own name ; but they are susceptible of provisional and covenanted blessings through their parents from the infinite Author of all mercy and grace. And surely it is a blessing, and an act of grace of the first magnitude, in God, to meet us who were heirs of death, at our entrance into the world, by the provisional propositions of salvation through Jesus Christ, visibly ratified under the seal of that covenant which cancels the condemnation of the violated law, and places us by this act, publicly and solemnly under the dispensation of mercy in the New Covenant established with the second Adam.

**I** add, that, although baptism is to be regarded chiefly as the seal of God, which he visibly and publicly annexes by

the church, to his own proffers of mercy ; yet, as the rites of religion may, frequently, be taken in a double sense, this ordinance as it respects the act of the parent, may be viewed also as his own seal, by which he declares his belief, and acceptance of the covenant, its promises, conditions and duties on his own behalf—his choice of its blessings as the portion of his child—and his consecration of himself, and his precious offspring, to the glory and service of Almighty God.

1. Baptism is our christian circumcision, *a seal of the righteousness which is by faith.* But that we may have a clearer view of the nature and importance of this ordinance, we must go back to the origin of its type in the ancient church. When religious truth was likely to perish from the world, which, in a few ages after the deluge, was overwhelmed in idolatry, and sunk in extreme dissolution of manners, it pleased God, nearly in the beginning of that general darkness and corruption, to establish a church in which he might preserve the knowledge of his *name*, and deposit his holy oracles with the future hopes of the universe. This church consisted, in the beginning, of the single family of Abraham, with whom he entered into a gracious covenant, accepting, as his title to eternal life, *the righteousness of faith* in the future Saviour,\* who was to spring from his own loins ; engag-

\* This is fairly inferred from the expression of the apostle, who styles the seal of the Abrahamic Covenant *the seal of the righteousness which is by faith.*

ing that "he would be a God to him, and to his seed after him;" and promising that, finally, in him *all the families of the earth should be blessed by the Advent of the Messiah.* That this grace might be rendered the more sure, and that the faith of this chosen friend of God might have the firmer ground on which to rest, he added to his *promise* his *sacramental seal or oath*, that, *by two immutable things in which it was impossible for God to lie, Abraham, and all who follow the faith of Abraham, might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them.* For, saith the apostle, *Abraham received circumcision a seal of the righteousness, that is, of the means of justification and acceptance with God, which is by faith.*—This covenant, with all its appendages of rites and forms, of types and symbols, of prophets and priests, of altars and victims, with all its doctrines, its precepts, and its promises, was placed in the keeping of the church, for its consolation, for its *instruction in righteousness*, and for the quickening and direction in the divine life of all true believers. If we ask, then, with the apostle, what profit is there of circumcision? the answer will yield some useful lights on this subject. It is the seal which God has been pleased to annex to the propositions of his mercy, by which anciently he confirmed to the church the great charter of her spiritual privileges, and which, being impressed on every Israelite, continually reminded him of his obligations—continually placed before him his duties, and his immortal hopes—assured him of the gra-

cious protection of Almighty God, and designated him as a member of that chosen community to whose pious custody were committed his holy oracles, those precious treasures of divine truth. While other nations were left to the obscure teachings of nature, and the errors of a depraved reason, this sealed nation were made the depositaries of clearer lights, and the heirs of sublimer hopes. The emblems which were engraven, if I may speak so, on that seal, I mean the *blood* of circumcision, corresponding with the water of baptism, pointed to that purity of heart which is the end of all true religion; and to that precious blood, which is, at once, the purchase of our salvation, and the fountain in which all our sins are cleansed. Such was the benefit of this ancient rite to the church founded in Abraham, and afterwards embracing all the posterity of Israel: to them were committed the oracles of God with all their lights, their hopes, their graces, their means of holiness and of eternal life.

These brief expositions will afford some principles by which to explain the nature and the benefits of that baptismal rite which Christ has substituted in the room of the Abrahamic and Mosaic symbol of the promise. Baptism is our christian circumcision; the seal of a more pure and luminous dispensation of the covenant than that either of Moses, or of Abraham. And it is with the view of proposing, as far as I am able, some precise and definite ideas on this initiating institution of the christian church, that I have made these pre-

fatory observations on the corresponding rite of the preceding dispensation.

That I may give as much perspicuity and precision as possible to our ideas concerning this holy ordinance, it will be necessary to go into some details concerning its original institution and design, and its proper subjects; because with these its benefits are intimately connected, and from them its duties and obligations immediately result.

1. The nature and design of baptism may be rendered obvious from two sources of illustration; one is the use and application of a similar rite which was frequent in the ancient Jewish and Greek nations, whence, probably, it was transferred into the christian church; the other is the denomination, borrowed from the Abrahamic dispensation of the covenant, which, from the very first ages, it has received among christians, of a *seal* of the Covenant of Grace.

Many of the great and distinguished teachers, and founders of sects among the Jews, applied baptism as a right of initiation into their respective schools. It was a symbol of discipleship, and regarded as an emblem of that purity of mind, and that virtuous simplicity of manners, which spring from the love of truth, and are expected in all those who are engaged in the pursuit of wisdom. Such was, probably, the meaning of the baptism of John, the great forerunner of the

Messiah.\* He taught a new and more rigorous discipline of repentance than was known to the Jews of that age. And the disciples who followed him, admiring the sanctity of his doctrine and the abstemious purity of his manners, he initiated by baptism,† preparing them, in this manner, for that still more pure and perfect discipline which was shortly to be introduced by the Saviour of the world. It was, besides, required by the customs of that nation, that all proselytes from among the Gentiles should be initiated into the church of Israel and make their profession of the doctrines of Moses, and the prophets, by baptism.

The ordinance of baptism, therefore, considered simply in the view which has just been presented to you, contains a pledge of our discipleship—a public avowal of Christ as our great Master and Teacher—an explicit profession of our faith in the doctrines taught by his Spirit in those holy oracles committed to the custody of his church for its illumination and sanctification.

\* The same rite of initiation into their schools, and with the same meaning, was frequently used by the philosophers of Greece, as well as of many eastern nations, from whom the Greeks borrowed it.

† This fact serves to explain a passage in the Acts of the Apostles. Paul meeting with certain disciples in Asia who were very imperfectly instructed in the principles of the gospel, demanded of them *unto what they had been baptised?* that is, to what system of doctrines? They answered, *unto John's baptism.* They were disciples of John, and had embraced only the doctrine of repentance which he had taught. This custom explains the meaning of St. Paul when he *thanks God that he had baptised none of them but Crispus and Gaius, lest any should say he had baptised in his own name,* thereby putting himself at the head of a new sect.

Although a man, at the age of reason, may justly make this profession for himself, it may be asked, perhaps, if a parent can rightfully make it in the name of his infant, so that when that infant shall have arrived at maturity, it shall be legally considered as his act? Whatever differences of opinion may exist with regard to this question, according to the various lights in which the subject of it may be viewed, all will agree in the following principle, that it is both the right, and the duty of a parent to place his beloved offspring under the best means to enlighten and cultivate their minds, to form their hearts, to regulate their lives, and to prepare them, if possible, for the highest happiness, both in this world, and the world to come; in one word, to initiate them in the school of Christ.\* This school is the church: these means of education are the ordinances, the instructions, the discipline, the watchful care, and prayers of the church. And it is one, and not the least of the spiritual blessings resulting from baptism in infancy, that, thereby, parents, in addition to the tender constraints of natural duty, impose upon themselves the most solemn voluntary obligations to *train*

\* Upon this subject, one would think that there could not exist any diversity of opinion. It seems to be a manifest principle of justice, that a parent has a right to enter into contract, or to make any engagement in the name of his child, for his benefit, which it is the privilege of his child, when he arrives at mature age, to accept; although he is at liberty also, to his own detriment, to reject; and which, if it involves his duty, as well as his interest, as in the present case, he is under sacred obligations to fulfil. Such engagement is not imposing on our posterity a *burden*, but gaining for them a *benefit*.



up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; and that children enjoy still further advantages by being placed under the immediate and special care of that holy community to whom are committed the oracles of God.

2. But there is another and more interesting light in which this ordinance is to be viewed. It is the seal by which God has condescended visibly to confirm to the church the blessings of the New Covenant which he has graciously established in Christ for the redemption of the world. This was the import of the correspondent rite of the church of Israel. God gave to Abraham circumcision *a seal of the righteousness which is by faith.\** And this is one of the principal denominations by which baptism has been designated in the christian church from the earliest ages. But here it is necessary to remark and correct an error upon this subject which has unhappily disturbed the ideas of many good and excellent men. Baptism has been regarded by them as the

\* *A seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had, being uncircumcised.* This expression cannot reasonably be supposed to mean, as has been asserted by some writers, merely a declaration of the sincerity of Abraham's faith; for this seal was administered to the offspring of Abraham at an age in which no such declaration could be expected from them. Besides the apostle, in the place is speaking of circumcision, not merely as a sign given to Abraham in particular, but as an ordinance of the church. In this general view it was designed as *a seal of the righteousness of faith*; that is, of that gracious covenant which has substituted the *righteousness which comes by faith* in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the room of the *perfect and personal obedience* required by the first covenant, and which has now become impracticable to the frailty and corruption of human nature, being possible only through a Mediator, and Surety.

seal of the believing parent given, both in his own name, and in that of his child, as its natural proxy, testifying his entire acquiescence in the conditions of the covenant; and, by the same act, laying the child under an obligation of acquiescing in them, and fulfilling them, as soon as it shall attain the age of reason. And undoubtedly, the act of the parent, in offering his child to receive the seal of baptism is, on his part, a formal acknowledgment of the covenant and profession of faith in its gracious promises. It has, likewise, been admitted, and has been before asserted, that a parent possesses from nature, and from religion, a right to enter into any righteous covenant in the name of his child, when the objects of that covenant are only blessings, and privileges; and especially when its conditions or terms are antecedent duties.

Baptism, however, in the just and scriptural view of it, is chiefly to be considered as the outward and visible seal which God has been pleased to annex to his own promise; a promise which he has graciously given to the church under the form of a covenant engagement; by this seal ratifying, and confirming to her, and to all who are taken into her care, the propositions of his grace and mercy, through Jesus Christ. Abraham did not give to God the seal of circumcision as a pledge of his duty and obedience; but the scripture declares, he received it from God for himself and his offspring, in order to confirm that gracious covenant, or pro-

wise which he had made to *the father of the faithful*; *I will be a God to you, and your seed after you.\**

Do you ask if it is not doing dishonour to the faithfulness of Jehovah to suppose that his promise requires to be confirmed by symbols and sacraments, by oaths and seals? Is not his word alone the firm, and immutable foundation of every believer's trust and hope? It is true the veracity of God needs no support from outward forms; and it is not for his sake, but for ours, that he is sometimes pleased to employ them, in order to give the deeper impression to divine truth upon the heart. Frail as we are, and receiving all our impressions through the medium of the senses, ideas, merely intellectual, are neither

\* If we refer to the whole strain of the history, in the 17th chapter of Genesis which records the transactions of God with Abraham, this interpretation will be confirmed. It was a covenant entirely of the *gratuitous* kind, on the part of God, engaging by an expression of the most comprehensive meaning—[I will be a *God* to you, &c.] to bestow the most ample spiritual blessings on his chosen servant, and on his posterity. In every covenant of this nature the forms of ratification are used by him only, and are intended to oblige only him who bestows the favour. The beneficiary simply receives the promise, or charter which, when confirmed by the requisite legal forms, and ratified by the seal of the benefactor, becomes his title of inheritance, or possession, on the performance of whatever condition it contains.

It was not an unusual thing for Almighty God thus to confirm his promises and covenants to patriarchs, and holy men, by some external sign, or token. His promise to Noah he confirmed by his bow in the clouds. To Gideon he gave a sign, or seal of his commission to be the deliverer of Israel, by consuming his sacrifice upon the rock. To Abraham he gave the sign of circumcision. And, on another occasion, he caused a burning lamp to pass between the parts of his sacrifice. To Hezekiah the sign of the shadow returning back upon the dial was added to the promise of his recovery. And to the house of David, and of Israel, he gave by the prophet Isajah, this mysterious sign, *a virgin shall conceive and bear a son.*

so clearly conceived, nor take such firm possession of the soul, as when they are embodied, if I may speak so, and conveyed to us under sensible images. It is not, therefore, unworthy of the glory and wisdom of God ; on the other hand, it is a proof of his infinite benignity and condescension, to confirm to us the everlasting truth of his word, by such impressive and external symbols as will unite the influence of sense with that of intellect and faith, in giving the doctrine of his grace their full effect upon the mind. Hence God has been pleased to exhibit the promises of his mercy to mankind through Jesus Christ, under the gracious title of a *covenant* ; and, after the manner of such conventions among men ; and in order more perfectly to adapt himself to that susceptibility of sensible impressions which belongs to our nature, he has condescended to confirm his truth in that transaction by publicly and visibly annexing to it his own seal. Let me illustrate this idea by an analogy borrowed from civil transactions. As charters conveying special privileges to corporations, or to individuals are sealed, and authenticated by public officers duly appointed and commissioned for that purpose by the sovereign power ; in like manner, is this precious charter of our spiritual and immortal privileges, confirmed to us by the seal of the Great Head of the church affixed to it, in the name of God, by ministers solemnly set apart for this end according to the order which he has established in his spiritual kingdom ; so that whatever is rightfully performed by them may be justly said to be done by him. *Baptism,*

therefore, is the seal of God applied to his own covenant, thereby confirming to those, to whom it is administered, the propositions of his mercy through Jesus Christ, and visibly testifying that they are taken from under the curse of the original and broken covenant, which admitted only of *perfect obedience*, and condemned the transgressor to eternal death, and placed under the new dispensation of grace, which confers forgiveness on repentance, and salvation on the obedience of faith.

As every public seal contains emblems expressive of the nature, and security of the blessings it confers, we see in like manner, this christian seal distinguished by emblems, the most simple, indeed, but the most impressive and august. We see in it the symbol of that precious blood which was shed for our redemption, and of the Holy Spirit by whose gracious influences the principles of a divine life are infused into the soul, and cherished to perfection; and, finally, the symbol of that heavenly purity which should adorn and distinguish the disciples of Jesus Christ.

Thus have I presented to you this ordinance in its double signification: as the rite by which we are initiated into the school of Christ; and as the seal by which God continually repeats and confirms the gracious propositions and promises of his covenant to the seed of the church.

2. I shall, in the next place, proceed to point out the proper subjects of this ordinance. For on the right of our children to receive the seal of the covenant depends, in my view, its principal benefits. This right, then, is demonstrated from analogy; from scripture example; and from the whole stream of the history of the primitive church.

1. From analogy, in the first place.—If the father of the faithful received from God *the seal of the righteousness which is by faith*; that is, of the covenant of grace, in which that faith which unites us to Christ, making us partakers of his merits, and acting as the principle of a holy life, is accepted instead of the perfect righteousness of the law; and if he was permitted, as a precious privilege, to impress it on all his offspring; does not this right belong, with still stronger reason to believing parents, under the dispensation of the gospel? For the coming of the Messiah, far from having abridged, has greatly extended the privileges of the faithful.

2. Let us hear in the next place, the clear and strong language of the apostle Paul. “The promise,” saith he, “was not to Abraham or his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. And it is of faith that it might be by grace;” that is, of free favour, and not purchased by any meritorious works of man, “to the end, that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not to that only which is of the law,” or his natural posterity, composing the Jewish church,

but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham,—*Rom. iv. 13—16*: meaning the believing Gentiles who should be called to a participation of his privileges. What, then, is that *promise made sure*, by the seal of the covenant, *to all the seed*, both under the law, and under the gospel? If we look back to the institution of this covenant with Abraham, and of the holy seal by which it was confirmed, we there find the promise; *I will be a God to thee and to thy seed after thee*. This is what was emphatically called *the promise* by the ancient Jewish writers; and was, as I have formerly shewn, another denomination for the *covenant of grace*. Under the same denomination it is frequently referred to in the writings of the apostles. And whenever this holy transaction is mentioned by the sacred writers, under this form, it is manifest that they intend the peculiar promise of the gospel, which is salvation by Christ through *the righteousness of faith*, comprehending all that is implied in *the covenant of grace*. Of this no other proof need be adduced than its being so often put by them in contrast with *the law*.\* To receive the seal of this promise

\* See particularly the Ep. to Gal. ch. iii. v. 16, 17, 18,—21—23.—18, If the inheritance be by works of the law, it is no more of *promise*. 21, Is the law, then against the *promise* of God. 24—23, The *law* is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. If we be *Christ's*, then are we *Abraham's seed*, and heirs according to the *promise*. 16, 17, Now to Abraham and his seed were the *promises* made. And this I say that the covenant, plainly implying the covenant contained in the promises, which was confirmed before of God in Christ, the *law* which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the *promise* of none effect. The *promise* here is evidently equivalent to the *covenant* made with Abraham: and what could that covenant be which *was confirmed of God in Christ*, but the covenant of grace?

was the precious privilege of the seed of Abraham; it was the privilege of his children's children to the remotest generations. And on the same ground, pursuing the apostle's reasoning, it is the privilege of the children of his faith, *for they who are of faith are the children of Abraham. If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise; the promise given to Abraham at the institution of the covenant—I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee.* To confirm this conclusion, no language can be stronger or more unequivocal than that of the apostle Peter addressed to the vast assembly at Jerusalem touched by his powerful discourse. "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all who are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." As soon as he enjoins it upon them to be baptized, he reminds them of an ulterior duty, to have this holy rite administered to their children, and their household after the example of Abraham: quoting to them that covenanted promise with which every Israelite was so well acquainted, and to which every believer, as well as the patriarch Abraham, is entitled;—the promise of forgiveness, and acceptance with God

It deserves here to be remarked, that the very language which is used, *the covenant confirmed* of God, corroborates, and places almost beyond doubt, the principle, that circumcision, under the ancient dispensation, and baptism under the new, is the *seal of God* by which it was confirmed, and was added to strengthen our faith, and to give it deeper impression on the heart of the believer.



through the righteousness of faith. He adds, *and not to you only and to your children*, who are naturally descendants of Abraham, but to the Gentiles also, who are frequently designated in holy scripture by those who are *afar off*. Called by Christ into the church, which was so long confined to the posterity of Israel, they are now equally with Jews, entitled to all its blessings, and its privileges, and among others, to this precious seal of the covenant for themselves, and their offspring.

It is in vain to allege, as has been done by certain writers, that the promise here refers to the prediction of the prophet Joel, who foretold that *in the last days God would pour out his Spirit upon all flesh*. For what connexion has this prophecy with the command *to be baptized*? The apostle is answering the anxious inquiry of his hearers, who were *pricked in their heart*; *men and brethren, what shall we do*? And in his answer, directs them to the proper source of peace, and consolation; *repent and be baptized*, and you shall receive the Holy Ghost in his sanctifying power, and his comforting influence: for the promise, through Christ whom I preach, is, according to the tenor of the covenant with your father Abraham, *to you and to your children*; and not to you only, but to the Gentiles, also, *to those who are afar off*, who, by faith shall become children of Abraham, and heirs of his blessings.

Such is the clear and obvious conclusion resulting from the apostle's words. The same consequence arises, with no

less certainty, from the advice addressed by St. Paul to a believing husband or wife, not to separate from the unbelieving wife or husband with whom they may be respectively connected. For, saith he, the unbeliever is sanctified by the believer, *else were your children unclean, but now are they holy.* What is the proper import of this term? Throughout the sacred scriptures, it is applied only to such persons or things as are peculiarly set apart, and consecrated to God. In the connexion in which it stands in this passage, it can imply nothing less than that children are qualified, by the profession of faith, or the church membership of one of their parents, to be solemnly set apart from the world, and devoted to God—a rite which can visibly take place only in the ordinance of baptism.\*

If the right of infants to the ordinance of baptism evidently results, as, by the preceding illustrations, it appears to do, from the analogy of the christian with the Abrahamic seal of the covenant, it is still farther confirmed by the practice of the apostles. The passage to which reference has

\* It is a prostitution of language, in this place to confound, as has been done by one sect of christians, holiness with legitimacy of birth. The whole train of the apostle's observations, and reasoning, translated according to this meaning of the term, would be absurd or ridiculous.—*For the unbelieving wife is sanctified*, that is, made a legitimate subject of marriage, *by the believing husband*, and *the unbelieving husband is sanctified*, that is, made a legitimate subject of marriage, *by the believing wife*, therefore, their marriage was lawful; else were your children illegitimate, but now are they lawfully begotten. Besides other absurdities, this would be proving the lawfulness of the marriage by the legitimacy of the children, and again the legitimacy of the children by the lawfulness of the marriage.

just been made, affords no slight attestation to the practice of St. Paul. In addition to this, when Lydia declared her faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the same apostle, along with her, *baptized her household*. With Jarius also, he *baptized all who were in his house*. It has been objected to the evidence which he would derive from these facts, that those who are referred to, by the sacred historian, in the *house of Jarius*, and the *household of Lydia*, were only the adults of the respective families, who were themselves believers. What will not the prepossessions of party, or the pride of theory maintain and defend? For this pretence certainly, the history affords no ground. It assigns no other reason for baptizing these families than simply the faith of Lydia and of Jarius.\*

3. I add that, if any apostolic usage can derive confirmation from the uniform practice, and tradition of the church, to modern, and very recent times, it is that of infant baptism. It is attested by Justin Martyr, who lived only forty years

\* This was perfectly conformable to the example of the Jewish church in receiving proselytes either by circumcision, or by baptism, from the Gentile nations. The pagan convert who professed his faith in the great legislator of Israel, and the promises made to the fathers, at once incorporated his whole family along with himself, into the body of that chosen people.

It is said, indeed, by the writers who differ from us upon this subject, that, in the history of the New Testament, baptism is never administered except to a personal profession of faith. But, let it be remembered that this history records only examples of proselytes from unbelieving nations. In a similar case, a personal profession of faith would be required by the warmest friends of infant baptism. In the few instances in which families have been mentioned, we see that they always follow the faith of the head.

after the age of the apostles. And the evidences of the fact are conveyed down in a continued, and unsuspected stream of history, to the time of St. Augustine, and Pelagius, who, though antagonists in the controversies which were raised in that age, on some of the most important doctrines of religion, and both of them among the greatest scholars, and most eloquent writers of the period in which they lived, declare, "that they had never heard, that they had never read of any, even the most heretical churches, who denied the baptism of infants."\*

\* But few of the writers of the earliest age of the church have escaped the ravages of time, and come down to us entire. And no controversy existing at that period, on the subject of baptism, few occasions occur of directly introducing any precise opinions concerning it, or of explicitly stating the practice of the apostles, and their immediate successors. But wherever this ordinance is mentioned, either more or less directly, the testimony of the primitive writers is uniformly in favour of the baptism of infants. In the second, and especially in the third and following centuries, circumstances having more frequently called for explicit opinions on questions relative to this subject, the practice of the primitive church becomes, from this time more and more evident. Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus, who lived from forty to sixty seven years after the apostles, both speak of those "who were made *disciples*, and *regenerated* to God in infancy," a figurative mode of expression familiar in that age, to signify *baptism* the symbol of *discipleship and regeneration*. Just. Mar. apol. II. Iren. adv. haeres. lib. 3 chap. 39.

In the second century some doubts having arisen in the church concerning original sin, and the nature and degree of guilt which adheres to infants, we find in the discussions which arose on these subjects, more frequent mention made of the baptism of infants than in the former period. The illustrious Origen, who flourished in the very beginning of the second century after the apostles, maintaining the original corruption of human nature, derives one of his principal arguments from the universal practice of the church, of administering baptism to the youngest children;—"If infants, says he, are not liable to original sin, why are they then baptised?" Homil. 8. in lev. chap. 12.

St. Cyprian bishop of Carthage, who wrote about one hundred and fifty years after the apostolic age, establishes the general usage of infant baptism by a most convincing fact. He informs us that a council of sixty six bishops being assembled at Carthage, a doubt was proposed by one of them, whose name was Fidus, whe-

Having established the right of christian parents to have their offspring placed under the guardianship and care of the church, in the ordinance of baptism, let us examine, in the next place, what privileges and blessings are conferred by this act.

Whether we consider baptism as the rite by which our children are initiated into the church as the *school* of Christ, or as the *seal* which God has been pleased to annex to his covenant, in order to ratify, and more effectually, to confirm to our faith the promises of his grace, its privileges and blessings, rightly understood, are manifold and great. For to Abraham and his seed, to the church, and the seed of the church, are committed the oracles of God, with all their lights, their comforts, their precious promises, their immortal hopes. In order to give, at once, force and illustration to

the baptism ought to be administered to infants before the eighth day after their birth; doubting whether or not the custom of the Jews in this respect ought to be followed. The council unanimously decreed that baptism ought not to be postponed till the eighth day. After stating the grounds of their decree, they conclude in these words;—"Wherefore dearly beloved, it is our opinion, that from baptism and the grace of God who is benignant to all, none ought to be prohibited by us; and, as this is to be observed with regard to all, so especially is it to be observed with respect to infants who are just born, and deserve our help, and the divine mercy."—Cyp. ep. ad. Fidum, chap. 63.

Let me subjoin the very pertinent remark of a judicious writer; "Origen was born about eighty five years after the apostolic age. His father and grandfather were both christians, and as there can be no doubt of his being baptized in infancy, from the manner in which he speaks of infant baptism, this fact verifies the practice of the apostles; and so carries up the universal usage of the church to within a very few years of those blessed companions of our Lord."

this reflection, let us imagine our children born where the dispensation of grace is not known, and to have been left under the darkness of paganism, to the feeble glimmerings of nature, to lead them to a knowledge of their Creator, their Redeemer, and their duty ; imagine them, under all the calamities of life, to have been forsaken of the comforts of religious hope ; and, after their most anxious endeavours to look into futurity, and to appease the forebodings of conscience, unable to penetrate beyond this dark sphere, or to discern any certain means of access to the holy and righteous Judge of the universe, and, at length, abandoned to the cruel despair which, without the light of revelation, rests upon the shadows of the grave ; imagine all this, and then judge of the inestimable value of that blessed sacrament which, agreeably to the command of Christ, places us, from the beginning of life, in the bosom of the church, where a divine illumination continually shines ; where life and immortality are brought to light ; where the veil which covers the eternal world is drawn aside ; where the way of peace is clearly revealed to sinful and perishing men ; where the care of parents, and the fidelity of the ministers of religion are engaged under the most solemn obligations, for the discipline, and instruction of the infant mind ; where the influences of the Holy Spirit are promised to assist the effect of these instructions ; and where all the means and aids are enjoyed which it has seemed good to infinite wisdom to afford to mankind, for the attainment of their everlasting salvation.

Such are the blessings connected with baptism, considered merely as an initiating symbol introducing us into the church of Christ. We are placed by it under the happiest, and most effectual cultivation for Heaven.

Let us now contemplate this symbol in another light, as the seal which God has annexed to his covenant for the solemn confirmation of his promises, and we shall discover in this view of it, a new treasure of spiritual blessings.

Every child of Adam, by *his* error, and fall, and by the rigorous tenor of the violated covenant, has become an heir of death. But God, in his infinite mercy, at the moment of transgression, placed the frailty of man under a dispensation of grace in Jesus Christ. Of this most benignant and merciful dispensation, which obviates, or remedies, the evils of the broken law, circumcision anciently, and now baptism, is the gracious assurance and seal. In the symbol of baptism, therefore, you behold the visible pledge, and annunciation, on the part of God, that the baptized infant is taken from under the impracticable conditions, and the curse of the first covenant, and placed under the grace of the second.\* You behold that precious infant, on its first entrance into exist-

\* It is not intended by this to say, that the act of baptism transfers us from the one covenant to the other. That was done by the *promise of the Saviour* immediately after the Fall. But it is the solemn authentication of this truth on the part of God, and the declaratory seal of this grace.

ence, met with the covenant of peace, and the promises of eternal life sealed in the blood of the Redeemer.

Is baptism, then, a certain title to eternal life? I say not that; but it is a solemn and authentic proposition of the covenant of grace, with all its privileges, blessings, and conditions under the seal of God. It is, therefore, a visible and sacramental confirmation of the provisional title of the baptized to life and immortality on the terms of the gospel; that is, on sincere repentance, and a true faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Let me illustrate this principle by a familiar example. By charter from the government of your country, or bequest from a dying parent, you may become entitled to ample privileges, or rich possessions, on the performance of certain conditions. The seal annexed to that charter, or that testament, by the proper authority, is the declaration of the will of your parent, or your country, and consequently, the formal authentication, and security of your title the moment the condition shall be fulfilled. This condition is, to all who have grown to such mature age as to be capable of actual sin, not perfect obedience, according to the tenor of the first, and broken covenant, but according to the constitution of the covenant of grace, repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, which, however, leads to perfection, and plants in the heart the seeds of holiness, and of eternal life. But to every infant dying in infancy, it is an unconditional assurance, of a glorious inheritance in the



kingdom of heaven. The infant being placed under the grace of the second covenant, is delivered from the curse of the first, so far, that, being united by a new and blessed relation to the Second Adam, its original taint and impurity, derived from its relation to the first, is covered by the blood of the atonement. It is, therefore, through the mercy of God in Christ, made an heir of eternal life. Of these precious truths baptism is the sacramental pledge, and seal of assurance given by God. What a consolation does this view present to the christian parent, who weeps over the dear remains of the infant snatched untimely from his embrace! What a comfortable and extended prospect does it exhibit of the grace of the gospel.\*

Having offered to your consideration, in a few plain and obvious principles, the right of infants born within the church, to the seal of the covenant, and pointed out the blessings of which they become partakers by it; I will next endeavour to designate, more particularly, the limits of the visible church, and exhibit the nature and extent of that profession of the name of Christ which entitles a parent to offer, and the

\* Very far would I be from insinuating that those who die without baptism do, therefore, fail of salvation. But between the baptized and unbaptized infant dying in infancy, there is this difference—that, to the one, the inheritance of eternal life is conveyed by covenant from God, under his appointed seal; the other is left to the free, indeed, but unauthenticated pledge of his mercy in this ordinance.

church to receive his infant offspring to a participation of this holy ordinance.

The principal question which has been raised upon this subject, turns on this single point, whether the church on earth, consists only of those who are truly regenerated, and have added sincere and new obedience to their open profession of the name of their Redeemer; or, on the other hand, embraces all those who have been baptized, and continuing to profess the doctrines of the Saviour, submit themselves to the counsels, admonitions, reproofs, and to the whole discipline of that spiritual body whose head is Christ.

The constitution of the Jewish church, the type and counterpart of the Christian, will assist us to determine this question. All who believed in Moses, the great prophet of God, and submitted to his law, were embraced in the external bonds, and received the distinguishing seal of the covenant. But, *they were not all Israel, who were of Israel.* A distinction existed among them, which must always exist upon earth, among the professing disciples of Christ, between the visible, and the invisible church. The latter is composed of those only, who, by sincere piety, and an entire renovation of heart, bear the inward image of their Lord and Master. The former embraces all who are united together under the profession of the same system of doctrines, who enjoy the same ordinances, and who submit to the same discipline for

regulating the exterior order and manners of its members. To the church of Israel, comprehending the entire nation, were the oracles of God committed. And the seal of that gracious covenant, which was contained, and explained in these oracles, and exhibited to the ancient church under a thousand typical rites, was impressed on all their offspring, and on all who were born in their houses, and trained up in the knowledge of divine truth under their care. Analogy, then, will lead us to extend the application of the christian seal to the *households*, and especially, to the *children* of all who are members of the visible church; that is, who have been baptised themselves, who acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, who profess to embrace the holy scriptures as containing the only certain rule of duty, and the only foundation of their immortal hopes, who submit themselves and their households to the discipline and instruction of the church, and who promise to concur with her in the pious education and government of all those whom nature hath given to their affection, or providence subjected to their authority.

To the invisible church baptism cannot be confined, because men have no certain rule by which to discriminate it from the mass of visible professors. Let me ask those who suppose that somewhat more is necessary in the recipient to the validity of this ordinance than regular morals, an open profession of the faith, and submission to the discipline of the

church, Is it because they esteem the actual sanctification of the parent essential to the rightful administration of baptism to the child? Who, then, can know, with certainty, that he is baptized? Do they say that it is, at least, necessary, that in the judgment of charity, a parent should be a sincere believer? Where is the scripture rule which rests the benefit of baptism on our judgment of the internal state of a man's heart? or makes it the standard by which we are to admit his infant to the external privileges of the covenant of grace? Will not those judgments of charity vary in different churches? Will they not vary, perhaps, in different pastors in the same Church? Too earnestly he cannot be admonished, indeed, that vital and universal holiness of heart and life is essential to salvation, and essential, likewise, to the faithful and acceptable discharge of this, and of every duty in the sight of God; yet it cannot be essential to the validity of this ordinance, and its spiritual benefit to his infant offspring.

Let us recur again to the proper meaning and design of this ordinance, and this conclusion will not fail to strike us with additional force. It is, in the first place, the rite of our initiation into the school of Christ, in which we receive those lessons of divine wisdom, which cannot be taught to man by the wisdom of the world; and in which we enjoy the happiest means of promoting our virtue and holiness, and the most effectual aids for the attainment of our salvation.

It is, in the next place, the seal which God hath annexed to the external dispensation of his covenant, in order that he might, by a rite, so solemn, though so simple, confirm the propositions of his mercy to fallen man, through the atonement and mediation of the ever blessed Redeemer. The church openly annexes this seal to the covenant, in the name and by the authority of God himself. The church takes the infant under her protection and instruction. Most desirable it is to have the co-operation and assistance of the parents in this sacred and important duty : and they they are bound, by every obligation, of nature and religion to afford it. But it is still more the duty of the church to enlighten and direct the infant's opening reason, to imbue it with holy and heavenly principles, to illustrate, to inculcate, to press upon it the precious privileges, the gracious promises, the glorious hopes of which she has given it the seal. The church when she is faithful to her trust, adopts every infant, whom she receives by baptism, within the pale of her privileges. It is her faith, her fidelity which is to be regarded in this ordinance even more than that of the parent.

It is with the view chiefly to the pious education of the seed of the church that this ordinance is administered to infants. *I know him*, saith God of the father of the faithful, at the institution of this rite, *that he will train up his children, and his household after him, to keep the way of the Lord.* In the primitive ages, when many parents were in-

capable themselves of fulfilling these holy duties, benevolent and pious sponsors offered themselves to discharge them in their room. But the church was considered as sponsor for all her children, and she is, certainly, the best, and most faithful sponsor, when she considers her duty aright, for every infant whom she receives to her protection and care by this ordinance. On this ground it was that she required exposed children, and children of whatever parents, with the care of whose pious education she charged herself, to receive, under her direction, the holy rite of baptism.

#### ON THE FORM OF BAPTISM.

If the mode of administering this ordinance had been essential to its validity we should justly have expected to see it prescribed with as much particularity as any of the Levitical ceremonies. On the other hand, there is no definite prescription on this subject, farther than that water is to be applied as a symbol of that regeneration and purification of our nature which all men need, and which a sincere faith in the gospel is intended, and fitted to produce. Any application, therefore, of this cleansing element, which is a natural emblem of spiritual purity, especially, if it be justified by the usage of the church, and the import of the terms employed by the sacred writers, is its proper and legitimate form. In warm climates where daily bathing is the customary mode of cleansing the person, immersion may be used with the high-

est propriety ; in other regions, where it is seldom necessary for this purpose, to wash daily more than a part of the body, a partial application of water may be made with equal reason. An action of our Saviour recorded in the thirteenth chapter of the gospel of John, is full of instruction on this subject. It was usual with the Jews, before eating, to wash their feet, a practice which had become necessary, both from the fashion of their dress, and their manner of reclining upon couches at their meals. Christ, in order to give his disciples a lesson, at once, of humility, and purity, condescended himself to wash their feet. When Peter understood the meaning of this action, and that it was intended as a symbol of his purification, and acceptance with his Lord, he exclaimed in the fervour of his zeal, *Lord! not my feet only, but also my hands, and my head.* But, as the action of the Saviour was merely symbolical, cleansing that part of the body which it was customary to wash at that time, was sufficient to answer the design ; therefore, he replies to Peter, *he that is washed, needeth not save to wash his feet, but it is every whit clean.*

Having made these preliminary remarks, I observe that the term baptism, in the sacred writings, is applied indifferently, to signify either partial, or entire washing—either sprinkling, or immersion, according to the situation of the agent, or the object of the action. It is unnecessary to cite all the passages in which this is demonstrated. To one or

two only I shall refer. When Jesus went to eat with a certain pharisee, *the pharisee wondered that he had not first washed*; referring to the Jewish custom of washing their hands before meat. In the original it is, *he wondered that he had not first baptized*. Many other things there be, saith the evangelist Mark, *which they have received to hold, as the washing (in the original, the baptism) of cups, of pots, of brazen vessels, and of tables*. As the sacred writer is probably referring to the instruments of the temple service, or to those domestic utensils which were religiously purified, according to the same forms, the whole Levitical ritual proves that these purifications were effected by various sprinklings, or aspersions. As the term baptism, and all those derived from the same root are employed to signify sprinkling, and partial washing, no less than immersion, so it is well known that the primitive church used indifferently, and according to present convenience, the one, or the other of these forms, in administering the baptismal rite; particularly in the case of *clinici*, or the sick, and those of great delicacy of constitution, or of health. And in forming our judgment of the validity of the mode by aspersion, it deserves to be particularly remarked, that sprinkling is, throughout the sacred writings, used as one of the most common and significant emblems of purity, of cleansing, of repentance, of every thing that is implied in the waters of baptism. Not to speak of the innumerable aspersions used, for this



purpose, under the Levitical law, the blood of the atonement is expressly called *the blood of sprinkling*. Isaiah, in announcing the office, and grace of Messiah, declares *he shall sprinkle many nations*. The prophet Ezekiel, in proclaiming the sanctifying influence of the gospel, does it by this figure; *Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean*. And when the apostle would express, in the strongest terms, that purity of mind which, in our approaches to God, we ought to bring with us to the throne of grace, he says; *Let us come to him, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience*.—But I forbear to multiply proofs. These are sufficient to demonstrate that either mode, by immersion, or by sprinkling, will answer the whole intention of the ordinance, as an emblem of that purity of life which becomes a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The principal evidence on which the advocates for immersion, as essential to the rightful administration of this ordinance, rest their opinion, is an expression used by the apostle in his epistle to the Romans, and in that to the Colossians; *buried with him by baptism*. Whether this allusion be made to the practice of immersion, borrowed from the custom of bathing in warm climates, or not, it establishes no exclusive form for this ordinance. It is an expression highly figurative; and no argument can be safely rested on a figure of speech. It affords, at the utmost, only a collat-

eral, and indirect support to other arguments, by its supposed reference to an existing custom. But, admitting that reference to be real, in the present case ; and the inference establishing the existence of the custom to be ever so justly drawn, still it could not impose immersion on the church as the indispensable, and exclusive form of baptism. For, if the custom were to create a rule which could not be departed from, that custom should be entirely and completely adhered to. But I presume baptism with the person naked, which was the practice, where plunging was used in those warm climates, in imitation of bathing, would not now be desired, or tolerated by any christian sect. The habits, modes, and customary ideas of that age, took away that sense of impropriety which would justly shock the delicacy of our modern sentiments. Even on the ground, then, of this figure containing a reference to an existing custom, that custom would not infallibly bind men in every age, and in every climate or state of society.

But, let us carry on this argument from figure into the following verses, and see how it will operate ; *For*, saith the apostle, “ if we have been planted in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection ; knowing this that our old man is crucified with him.” Here then are three figurative expressions, all referring to the same object, the ordinance of baptism, and its symbolic signification of a death unto sin ; viz. “ buried with him by baptism unto death ;

planted in the likeness of his death ; and crucifying with him our old man." According to this reasoning, therefore, baptism should contain something in the mode of its administration corresponding to all these figures : so that, if the first figure necessarily implies the justification of the mode of baptizing exclusively by immersion : the last will, on the same ground, justify, and require the form of the church of Rome in baptizing with the sign of the cross. But as the friends of immersion do not admit of the latter consequence, those who conform to the practice of baptizing by sprinkling, with equal reason, do not think themselves bound by the former.

Upon the whole view of this subject, I conclude, and I think, from the fairest reasoning, that the mode of administering baptism, whether by sprinkling, or immersion, is not essential to the validity of the ordinance, which requires only that the emblem of its cleansing and purifying virtue be significantly preserved.



OF THE  
EXTERNAL SEALS  
OF THE  
COVENANT OF GRACE.

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OF THE LORD'S SUPPER.

THE second seal attached to the covenant of grace, or the second sacrament of the New Testament, is the Lord's supper. This ordinance was instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ, immediately before his final sufferings, in which he appointed bread and wine to be used as memorials of his death for the sins of the world, and symbols of the union of his people to him, and to one another. The apostle Paul, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, ch. ii. v. 23—26: has stated the origin of this festival, and the manner in which it was celebrated by our Lord himself, with his disciples, as an example for the imitation of his church in all ages. Corresponding with this exhibition, is the account recorded by the evangelists Matthew and Luke. And, from the whole, it is evident, that the broken bread was employed as an emblem of the body of the Saviour broken in the room of sinners, and the wine in like manner, was used as an emblem of his

blood shed for the remission of sins. These simple, but lively images were ordained to call up to the memory of the believer, the death and sufferings of his Redeemer, with greater vivacity and force than can be done by the preaching of the gospel in our ordinary assemblies.—*Do this*, said our Lord, while he broke the bread, and distributed the cup, *in remembrance of me*. But the ordinance, as I have said, has another and secondary object, which is to represent the union of believers with their great Head by faith and love, and among themselves, by the spirit of charity. “The cup of blessing which we bless,” saith the apostle, “is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? and the bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For, we, being many, are one bread, and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread.”

The different ends which a christian may have in view in this ordinance, have been marked in the various denominations which it has received in the primitive church, the chief of which are continued down to the present age. *The Lord's supper*, and *the table of the Lord*, are denominations nearly equivalent; the one taken from the time in which it was celebrated; the other taken from the manner in which it was eaten, wherein it resembled an ordinary meal. It has been a practice in all countries to commemorate great, and interesting events, and to testify mutual joy, and affection on such occasions, by feasting together. These denomina-

tions, therefore, imply, that this ordinance is to be viewed as a festival of commemoration, in which the faithful meet at the same table, to testify their common interest in the great sacrifice of the cross, and their common faith, and hope, in the redemption which is in Christ Jesus their Lord.

In reference to these objects, chiefly, it is, that these devotional acts have been styled the *communion*, the *eucharist*, or the *cup of blessing*, not only from the act of thanksgiving by which it is consecrated, or blessed for the use of the communicant, but from the praise and gratitude which should fill the heart of the humble believer in this holy service, and which is usually expressed with ardour by the voice, while occupied in celebrating this memorial of the infinite goodness and mercy of Almighty God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. It is denominated, likewise, by the apostle, the *breaking of bread*; and, to mention no more, out of the many titles which it afterwards received in the church, it is, in the holy scriptures, called *our passover*; because it was, under the new economy, evidently instituted in the room of that ancient sacrament under the antecedent dispensation. There existed indeed, an obvious analogy between the two ordinances. The paschal lamb was a type of Christ. That victim was offered in commemoration of the great deliverance of Israel from the bondage of Egypt, which had a typical allusion to the infinitely greater salvation of the cross, in which were consummated all the types of the altar. The

principal difference between these ordinances, which serves, however, to illustrate their analogy, is, that the one was the memorial of a temporal, the other of an eternal salvation—the one consisted of a bloody victim which prefigured the great sacrifice of the gospel; the other is the bloodless memorial of the last of victims, which hath finished our salvation and accomplished an everlasting righteousness.—The ceremonies of the one, were also borrowed from those of the other. For, the victim apart, which can no longer be offered under the gospel, the bread was used in imitation of the unleavened bread of the passover, which the Jews ate, after being blessed or consecrated by prayer and thanksgiving. The cup, likewise, formed a considerable part of the paschal festival, which they always blessed, before receiving it, by a form of prayer, and action of thanks; and the last cup, which concluded the whole service, was succeeded by an hymn; which hymn, their learned men inform us, consisted of the following psalms, 113—118; and is supposed, by many writers, to have been the same which Christ, with his disciples, sung at the conclusion of his last supper.

OF THE CEREMONIES WITH WHICH THE ADMINISTRATION  
OF THIS ORDINANCE OUGHT TO BE ACCOMPANIED.

As the dispensation of the gospel entirely rejects the cumbersome ritual of the law, and rejoices only in the simplicity and purity of its spirit, the administration of this ordinance, al-



though the most solemn which is known, under the new covenant, ought to be accompanied only with those simple ceremonies recorded by the evangelists in its original institution, and recited by St. Paul in its repetition. They consist merely in prayer and thanksgiving, by an administrator properly authorized to consecrate the elements, and separate them from an ordinary to a sacred use—in the breaking of the bread, and distribution of the cup, in the presence of the communicants—in a declaration of the nature and design of the ordinance, by the officiating priest, and of the proper qualifications of those who may be admitted to partake of its grace—in receiving it in both kinds in the usual posture of feasting which obtains in each country—and, finally, concluding the whole with some proper form of thanksgiving, and some devout hymn of praise. Our Saviour employed unleavened bread in this holy office, because no other was eaten at Jerusalem in the season of the passover ;—his posture was, reclining on a couch, which, in that age, was the only one in use at public feasts, and generally, also at private meals. But, as there is no precept enjoining the use of unleavened bread, as in the Jewish festival, christians may use their liberty as to the kind ; though the church of Rome, which is negligent of other parts of the divine example, is scrupulous in using bread, or wafers without leaven. The same church, as well as some of the protestant communion, receive this sacrament in the posture of adoration, instead of the ordinary attitude of feasting, which was used by our

Lord, and his disciples. But in determining what ceremonies ought to be employed in conformity with the great example which is to direct our conduct, and what punctilios may be varied or dispensed with, it is necessary to bear in mind the end of the institution, and the circumstances attending the time of its original celebration. Its double end, as we have seen, was to be a memorial of the death of our Lord, and a symbol of the union of his people ; both which were attained by the institution of a solemn festival. It is conformable to reason, therefore, that the posture of feasting, as it prevails in each country, ought to be preserved in this religious act. But the species of bread, used in this ordinance, or the time of the day devoted to it, at its original administration, being intimately connected with the customs of the Jewish passover, do not impose upon the christian church any obligation of conformity in these respects.

The posture of adoration, and the denial of the cup to the laity, having sprung, in the church of Rome, from superstitious views of the ordinance, and false ideas of the miraculous conversion of the bread and wine into the real body and blood of Christ, ought to be rejected along with the superstitious service.

The ceremonies accompanying this christian rite, appear to have been copied, in general, from those which obtained in the Jewish passover. Among that people, the adminis-

trator always blessed the elements, or pronounced a prayer of benediction and thanksgiving over them, and especially over the cup, distributing it afterwards to all who were present at the table. In reference to this act of devotion the psalmist exclaims, *I will take the cup of salvation; and will call upon the name of the Lord.* And, in the christian church the cup was given to the laity, as well as to the clergy, till, a short time after the commencement of the thirteenth century, a different custom began to prevail among the Latins. And, finally, in the council of Constance, in the year 1414, the laity were entirely prohibited from receiving the cup, as if it actually contained the blood of the Son of God. "It would be impious," said those blind and superstitious priests, "if any of the divine and heavenly drops should, by any accident among the communicants, be spilled upon the ground." For the same reason, these ignorant men ordered the bread to be formed into a wafer, and put into the mouth of each communicant, least any crumb should be lost, and that each might receive the whole *host*, as it was called, a superstitious term derived from the Latin, and signifying the *sacrifice*, or *victim*. The original custom, however, still prevailed throughout all the East, among the Greeks, the Russians, the Armenians, the Abyssinians, the Copts, and even the Nestorians, and Jacobins; and has been received in all the reformed churches.

Pure wine, wherever it can be obtained, ought to be employed not only because it is the best emblem of that precious blood which gives life and strength to those who use it, but because it is strictly conformable to the example of the Saviour in its original institution. Where wine cannot be obtained, or where it remarkably disagrees with the stomach, reason dictates that it must, or that it ought to be omitted. But they are to be blamed who, like the hydroparastatæ, substitute water, or any other liquor in the room of wine. The custom of substituting weaker liquors, void of spirit in the room of wine, which was practised by certain small sects, was, probably, introduced originally, by some weak, but pious men, as a preventative against intoxication, too many instances of which, as we learn from the apostle, had taken place, to the great reproach of their holy profession, in consequence of too liberal a use of that strong liquor. For, in that age, they literally feasted upon bread and wine, a diet to which they had been accustomed from its plenty, and did not use it in that sparing manner which has since been practised in our christian assemblies—1 *Cor.* xi. 21.

A declaration of the nature, and design of the ordinance, and of the requisite qualifications of those who may be admitted, by the officers of the church to receive it, along with the faithful, is evidently a custom of great propriety, in order to recal to mind, more forcibly, the import and solemnity of that sacred transaction, and to assist the ignorant in ex-

*examining themselves* ; a serious duty which is incumbent upon all before they adventure to *eat of that bread, and drink of that cup*—1 Cor xi. 28.

The only circumstance farther, which it is of importance to remark in the administration of this ordinance, is, that, in all ordinary cases, it ought to be performed only by a person properly qualified, and ordained to the pastoral office by the government of the church. It was, in the first instance, dispensed by our Lord himself. Afterwards it fell to be administered by the apostles, and those whom they had set apart to preach the word, and dispense the sacraments. And, generally, it is requisite, for the sake of order, and common utility, that this holy office should be confined to those, who are the regular successors of the apostles, and ordained according to that form which the gospel has prescribed, or the church esteems best calculated for preserving purity of doctrine, and of manners.—Yet, where any society of christians is, from the nature of their circumstances, deprived of those aids, perhaps they ought to assemble for the worship of God, and may, without violence to the institutions of Christ, appoint men of prudence and piety, from among themselves, to lead in their devotions, and to preside in these sacred festivals of love. This is a liberty, however, which ought always to be used with the most profound caution, and only after the most serious conviction of its absolute necessity.

## OF THE USE OF CEREMONIES, OR EXTERNAL SYMBOLS.

Since the gospel is a dispensation, and requires a worship of the most pure and spiritual kind, it may well be made a question, why any material elements, or symbols like these should be employed in its religious services? And I would answer, that it appears to arise simply from a gracious condescension in Almighty God, and accommodation to the imperfection of our nature. While we remain in the body, we are necessarily and strongly affected by certain striking and sensible signs, on serious and interesting occasions. The bloody robe of Cæsar displayed to the populace of Rome was more eloquent than all the harangues of the assertors of her liberty. On this principle of our nature, statues, and altars have been erected, and festivals instituted to the memory of great men by the gratitude of nations, or employed in the celebration of illustrious events. On the same principle, we love to wear some relic, or to adopt some symbol of mourning, to recal the idea of our departed friends. On the two greatest occasions, herefore, in our christian course, our initiation into the church of Christ, and giving our public and explicit assent to our christian covenant, it appears to be wise and good to require these solemn and interesting acts to be confirmed by apt, and significant symbols which are calculated deeply to impress the mind by affecting the senses. On the other hand, it is equally good and wise in him,

not to have loaded his worship with an unmeaning multitude of ceremonies. For, it is not more certain, that, on all just, and great occasions, sensible emblems properly chosen, have a powerful and useful effect, than that too great a multiplication of ceremonies, strongly inclines the mind to a frivolous superstition, substituting rites, and external forms in the room of true devotion and holiness of life.

#### OF TRANSUBSTANTIATION.

In different parts of the church, some errors have been introduced into this holy rite, but since the light which has so abundantly been shed upon it by the protestant writers, they are no longer in danger of producing any pernicious effect, and the palpable absurdity of Transubstantiation, in particular, hardly requires a serious refutation.—By this term, which, for a long time, misled, with almost magical effect, the church of Rome, was intended, the transmutation supposed to pass on the elements of bread and wine, into the real body and blood of Christ: an opinion, most evidently, contrary to reason, and common sense; and which has no support in the language of scripture, or the usages of the primitive ages. This doctrine contradicts the evidence of all our senses, by which alone we can form an accurate judgment on the qualities of material subjects. If our senses could be so far misled that the essences of flesh and blood could be covered under the sensible qualities of bread and

wine, we could have no criterion left by which to judge of any miracle; the whole rational evidence of religion would be annihilated by this single position. Besides, it involves the most palpable contradiction, which it is scarcely worthy your time to point out, that the same body should be entire in heaven, and upon earth; in ten thousand pieces of bread, or drops of wine; and in ten thousand different places at the same time. And a man, according to this monstrous absurdity, by living on the sacramental elements, might become transmuted, vile as he is, into the real body of our blessed Saviour. The follies of this doctrine were strongly combated by the protestant writers of the last age; for, having recently emerged from the bosom of popery, they were every where mingled with numerous adherents to that superstition. But in our age, and country, little need be said to guard pious men against such an irrational dogma. The disciples of popery allege, in support of this strange opinion, the words of our Lord himself;—*This is my body which is broken for you*; making him to be alive, and breaking, and distributing his dead body at the same time. The expression which follows might have cured, or prevented this mistake—*do this in remembrance of me*, as a standing memorial of my death. It is a plain, and obvious figure of speech, familiar in the language of all nations. A sentence of Cicero, which seems as if written with a view to this occasion, might have been a sufficient refutation of the absurd interpretation of this language.—“*Dum fruges Cererem, vinum Liberum dicimus,*



genere nos quidem sermonis utimur usitato, sed ecquen tantamentem esse putas, qui illud, quo vescatur Deum credat esse?" Cic. de nat. Deor. lib. 3. chap. 16. §. 41.

Transubstantiation is a doctrine of which we find nothing in the writers who flourished in the four, or five first centuries of the church. In the sixth century, the elevation of the *host*, as it began then figuratively to be called, was first introduced; not, however, for the purpose of adoration, but that all might see it, and that it might the better represent the elevation of Christ upon the cross. It was not, until the extreme ignorance of the twelfth, and thirteenth centuries, that this idolatrous opinion and practice generally prevailed.

The consequences, and abuses of this doctrine we have seen in the denial of the cup to the laity—the idolatrous adoration of the *host*—sending it to the absent—keeping it in their houses, and about their persons, as a charm—carrying it through the streets on occasions of great public calamity—giving it to the dead, by laying it on their breasts, especially if they were priests, and even burying it with them as a passport to heaven.

#### OF CONSUBSTANTIATION.

It is so difficult entirely to divest the mind of its prejudices, and to cast off errors which have incorporated them-

scives deeply with our habits of thinking, that Luther, and his followers, although convinced of the error and absurdity of transubstantiation, were attracted, by the power of prejudice, into some unintelligible resemblance of their ancient principle. They condemned the absurdity, if not impiety, of the actual transmutation of the bread and wine into the real body and blood of the Son of God; but, in a language not much more clear and comprehensible, maintained that this precious sacrifice was wholly received *in, with, and under*, the elements in the supper. I do not profess to explain these mysterious terms; but, if they have any definite meaning, they embrace one of the principal absurdities which embarrass the other doctrine.—They represent the same body as present in many different places at the same time. The great reformer impressed, by his education, with a superstitious veneration for the symbols used in this ordinance, wished equally to avoid the error into which the Catholics had been led, and to favour his own prejudices, and therefore embraced a form of expression, which imposed upon himself, while it was destitute of any clear and definite meaning.

OF THE REQUISITE QUALIFICATIONS IN THOSE WHO  
WOULD WORTHILY PARTAKE OF THE  
LORD'S SUPPER.

Many writers have alleged, and of these not a few in the very first ages, that the constitution of the christian and visi-

ble church requires, that those who have been initiated by baptism, should be introduced also to the participation of its ultimate sacrament in the Lord's Supper. This opinion arises from a misconception of the nature and design of the two ordinances; which may be learned from a small attention to the origin of the church. Baptism was designed to make a visible and public proposition of salvation on the terms of the New Covenant, to those who, otherwise, were the heirs of death, through the condemnation of the original covenant. To every baptized infant this proposition of salvation is provisionally made, on the conditions of repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. So far, then, the infant is the passive subject, or recipient of the divine mercy in this ordinance. And it is his visible warrant to embrace these gracious terms of our redemption. The Lord's Supper, on the other hand, is an active service; and contains an active pledge of our having embraced the covenant, and of our fidelity to all its conditions. This places a material difference between the two ordinances, and requires in particular, of those who would worthily partake of the Lord's Supper, "that they examine themselves of their knowledge to discern the Lord's body, of their faith to feed upon him, of their repentance, love, and new obedience." A condition which cannot reasonably be required of infants.—Without a just knowledge of the nature and design of the ordinance, we cannot offer a rational, and acceptable service in it to Almighty God. Faith is requisite to give importance to the object of

our worship, and a proper interest in the duty. While we celebrate the dying love of our Redeemer, it becomes us, with profound humility, and repentance, to recollect the sins for which he endured such sufferings, and with the most lively gratitude and love, to recal him to mind who laid down *his life* that *we* might *live*.

I add, farther, that, as this ordinance is a feast of charity and love, it is most highly requisite, that all who would worthily partake of it should be in perfect peace with their brethren; be ever ready to forgive their enemies, and cherish no hatred against any man. Charity among our fellow men is the truest image of God our Heavenly Father. But in the exercise of the discipline of the church, we can only examine into the knowledge of the communicant; receive the profession of his faith; and see that his external deportment is consistent with the doctrine and example of his Saviour.

OF THE BENEFITS OF A SERIOUS AND PIOUS USE OF THIS  
HOLY ORDINANCE, AND THE DANGERS OF ITS ABUSE.

Before concluding these observations on the Lord's Supper, suffer me very shortly to remark the benefits resulting from a devout attendance on this holy ordinance; and the dangers of its abuse. Its evident tendency is to confirm our resolutions of duty, and to awaken and strengthen all the graces of the christian life. But as every act of religion per-

formed in an irreverent manner, contributes to harden the heart, and alienate it more from real and vital holiness, these consequences, in a much higher degree, attend, or follow the abuse of an institution so sacred and solemn. In the first age of the church, many insincere disciples, only partially reclaimed from paganism, misled by the ideas and habits existing in the festivals of the heathen gods, introduced a licentiousness in its celebration, highly unbecoming the sanctity, and purity of the christian church. In that miraculous period, the disorder was consequently, followed by visible and frequently instantaneous judgments from Almighty God. *For this cause*, saith the apostle, *many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.* And, probably, to these effects chiefly, the same apostle had reference when he utters the following denunciation—“He that eateth, and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.”

These terrible examples of divine displeasure, thus miraculously inflicted, seem to have contributed to throw the christians of the following age into the opposite extreme of excessive fear, and superstitious veneration of this holy ordinance. Since miracles have ceased, the judgments which follow the abuse of the Lord’s Supper, appear to be rather of a spiritual, than a temporal nature—lukewarmness in every pious feeling, and hardness of heart, which gradually leads to the total dereliction of the offices of piety. This fearful

state of abandonment by God, is, perhaps, more hastened by an improper use of this holy rite, than by all other deficiencies in religious duty, and, almost, by all other vices.

Other pretended sacraments, added to the ritual of the holy scriptures by the church of Rome,\* it is unnecessary to take up your time either to explain or refute. I proceed, therefore, to a brief consideration of our future state of existence.

\* Confirmation, Penance, Ordination, Marriage, Extreme Unction.

ON  
A FUTURE STATE.

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THE last doctrine of revelation which remains to be considered, is that of our future state of being. The hope of existing after the present life was not utterly lost from among mankind, even amidst the darkness and corruptions of paganism. But, to the vulgar mass, the prospect was so obscure, and the hope so uncertain, that it could afford but small excitement to duty in life, and to the timid, and miserable, but little consolation in their last moments. It was so blended with the melancholy phantoms of a superstitious imagination, it served rather to oppress than shed any comfort on the hour of death. We have seen in our disquisitions on natural religion, and its ultimate motives to virtue, that many of their sages were able to create to themselves more reasonable, but still dubious expectations of existing hereafter. But it is only in the word of God, and, especially, in the gospel of our blessed Saviour, that the trembling hopes of nature are rendered fixed and certain, and the obscurities of reason, are enlightened. And to the doctrine of the immortality of the soul it has added a principle which the human mind had never before dared to conceive; I mean the resurrection of the

body, and its future and eternal union with the soul, as respects the pious, in a happy state of existence ; but the impious in a state of misery.

This doctrine is peculiarly a doctrine of revelation. On this authority simply our credence, or faith ought to be founded. It is one of the chief glories of Christ, our Redeemer, that he hath *brought life and immortality to light* ; and so hath rescued it from the blindness of sense, and the doubtfulness of reason. But in the sacred scriptures, the doctrine of our future existence is so intimately blended with that of the resurrection of the body, that we can hardly consider them apart ; and it is this which renders the whole revelation of this doctrine peculiarly precious to man, as it brings our future being more within the comprehension of the mind, and gives it a stronger interest in the heart which knows no other condition of human existence but this compound state of being. The immortality of the soul would have been easily received by both the Jews and the Greeks. It already formed part of the popular belief. It was the resurrection which created among these people so much astonishment, and was received with so much incredulity. To combat this infidelity, and place our immortal life upon its true foundation, the apostle sets himself in this part of his epistle to the Corinthians, where he informs us that “this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality.”



That we shall continue to exist from the moment of death, till the final introduction of our immortal state, the scriptures give us no reason to entertain a doubt, but wherein that intermediate condition shall consist, as they have not condescended to inform us, it would be presumptuous in us to frame an opinion. On the subject of the resurrection, and of our immortal life, they are as explicit as, perhaps, it is competent to our present state of frailty, and mortality to comprehend.

Let us, therefore, with the sacred writer, employ a few moments in contemplating the certainty and importance of this doctrine, its practical uses, and its spiritual consolations.—Its certainty can, to the christian, rest only on the express declaration of the word of God ; although, when thus communicated, many facts and analogies, drawn from the course of nature, concur to facilitate our conceptions, and strengthen our confidence in this precious hope. “The time is coming,” saith the infallible Spirit of truth, “when all they who are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of Man, and shall come forth, they that have done well to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation.” It has always been a subject of anxious inquiry to human reason ; *with what bodies do they come?* Can these corporeal systems, after they have been long dissolved into their original elements, and variously dispersed in a thousand different directions, and after they have successively passed, perhaps, into a thousand

other animated systems, be again collected and reorganized in the same body which perished at death? If it were possible, would it be a reasonable object of desire in that spiritual and immortal state, that the soul should be again united to a sluggish mass which might be regarded as its former prison, which impaired its active powers, and was perhaps the seat of all the errors of reason, and of all the disorders of the passions?

The same objections have ever been presented as insolvable difficulties to reason. But what christian can entertain a doubt concerning the Almighty power, and the omniscient wisdom of God, which is equally able to accomplish the resurrection, as the creation of human nature? The apostle meets the difficulty by a beautiful image taken from the grain which the husbandman casts into the earth. It seems to perish. It becomes a mass of putrefaction. But there is a delicate, and almost imperceptible germ which survives, and presently assumes a new, and much more beautiful form. Can we doubt but that the whole vegetable, with all its apparatus of fruits and flowers, was included in that minute and invisible particle which receives a new life in the midst of death? On the resurrection another lesson is suggested to us from the numerous transmutations of the insect tribes which daily pass under our review. A deformed and sluggish grub weaves a tomb for itself. It seems to become ex-

tinct. But, in a little time, we see it mount into the air in a new form, and adorned with the most beautiful colouring.

Of spiritual and celestial objects, which are so far above the reach of our present faculties, frequently, we are left to collect our judgments only from analogy. And although such analogies can never convey adequate images of things *which eye hath not seen, and of which it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive*, yet they seem to throw some feeble rays of light upon them, and to offer some foundation on which the mind, exhausted by its own efforts, can rest. In casting our view around, then, nature teaches us important lessons, and presents to us many impressive images of the future resurrection of the body. Some resemblance of it we see in the new creation which every vernal season produces, when all the glories of the year are seen to spring, if I may speak so, from the tomb of Winter. These images, indeed, are only imperfect representations, adapted to the weakness of our nature, of that great object of our faith. The only solid and immovable foundation of a christian's hope, as I have already said, is the word of God, *but now is Christ risen, and become the first fruits of them that sleep.*

Another objection against the doctrine of a resurrection is drawn, from the ills and inconveniencies resulting to the soul from its union with the body in the present life. This slug-

gish and unwieldy mass of matter is supposed to be rather the prison than the helpful companion of the soul ; to have a tendency to cloud, and darken the clearness of its perceptions, and to oppress and enchain the activity of its powers.—Although these evils should be justly objected to the present gross and disordered bodies which we inhabit, yet such is the nature and order of human spirits that it is only by being united to some corporeal system that they can receive any ideas at all. And, at the resurrection of the just, all that is gross, all that is disordered, all that is impure, we are assured from revelation, shall be for ever separated from the bodies of the saints raised in immortal life ; and, we are farther taught to believe, that their powers, their activity, and glory shall correspond with the exalted rank which the soul shall hold in the scale of being in her celestial state.—If it be asked, whether these, can be the same bodies that we inhabited here, which shall assume such different properties, and present so much more glorious an appearance ?—Certainly this cannot be incredible to a christian, or a philosopher, when we are continually beholding the same elements receiving from the hand of nature the most various forms. Do not the same elements compose the unsightly clay which we trample under our feet, and the resplendent diamond which imitates the sun in the crowns of princes ? The lightning which, in its destructive course, rends oaks, and rocks to pieces, and the mild and glorious rays of the orb that gives life, and health, and beauty to the whole universe. Accordingly the

apostle hath said, that all flesh is not the same in its outward form, and visible appearance ; but “ there is one flesh of men, and another of beasts,” though nourished by the same herbage ; “ there is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another of the stars ;” though all proceeding from the same light. Not less difference may we expect to find, between our present tenements of clay, which, at death, return to their original dust, and those celestial temples, in which the glorified spirit shall dwell forever. Raised to heaven by the power and love of the Redeemer, to inhabit the worlds of light above, this corporeal system will be conformed in beauty and perfection to its immortal habitation. —“ This mortal shall put on immortality. Sown in weakness, it shall be raised in power ; sown in dishonour, it shall be raised in glory ; sown a natural,” that is, a gross and animal “ body, it shall be raised a spiritual body”—a body, inconceivably refined, and purified from the dregs of matter, and possessing, at once, the rapid energy, and the imperishable nature of spirit. It shall be invested with new forms, and be fitted with new organs, adapted to its celestial state ; and having attained its highest perfection, we have the same authority to declare that it shall for ever shine with undecaying lustre in the kingdom of God.

In addition to the christian doctrine of the immortality of the soul, which contains the most glorious hope of human nature, the resurrection of the body and its immortal exist-

tence in reunion with the soul, is peculiarly precious to man by the very constitution of his nature, meets, in the best possible manner, his ideas, and hopes of happiness.

Spirits there may be of a superior order which have no connexion with any material system, and are not dependent, for their knowledge, or their enjoyments on any sensible organs. But of their modes of existence, and their sources of happiness, we can frame no conception. All our ideas, and all our pleasures come to us through the medium of sense. And our spirits are of such an order, as has been before remarked, that their knowledge, their felicity, their perfection, depend on their connexion, in some way, with a corporeal system. Every thing connects us with the body, every thing attaches us to the body. Hence the apostle has said ; —“ We, who are in this tabernacle, do groan, being burdened, not that we would be unclothed ;” not, that it is the object of these anxious wishes to be disembodied, “ but that we may be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven ;” with that celestial, and regenerated body which shall be freed from all the pains and imperfections of this mortal flesh, and which is only our present nature exalted to its ultimate perfection and glory. “ The earnest expectation of the creature,” continues the same apostle, “ waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God,” at the resurrection of the just. “ The whole creation groaneth, even those who have received the gifts of the Spirit, groan within themselves, waiting for the

redemption of the body."—What, indeed, would be the pleasure of existence to the soul, if we could suppose it conscious of existence, deprived of the action, and aids of the senses, which are, at present, the only inlets of its knowledge, and the chief sources of its enjoyments?

As the christian, and scriptural doctrine of the resurrection corresponds, in this manner, with the dearest hopes, and wishes of the human heart, it contributes likewise, to assist the perceptions of faith. We are not left in total darkness concerning the nature of our future being. Some ideas we may frame with relation to this obscure subject, without the hazard of being entirely lost in the unsubstantial regions of fancy. The state of our future existence presents to us, no longer an inscrutable mystery. Although it offers to our hopes a condition of existence inconceivably improved and raised above the present, still we can discern between them some points of resemblance, which present to us ideas on that subject, at once intelligible to our reason, and infinitely precious to the heart.—In a future life, we have reason to believe, our faculties will be employed, in some measure, as here, but with an activity and vigour inconceivably augmented, in searching into the wonderful works of God, in admiring the order, the beauty, and harmony of the universal system; in adoring, and, with the angels, endeavouring to penetrate the astonishing mysteries of divine grace to man. Blessed, and eternal sources of knowledge, and felicity!

The faculties which we now feebly exert, in the search of truth, and in the service of our Creator and Redeemer, will be new created in celestial vigour, and raised in a state of undescribable perfection. All the obstacles to our advancement in knowledge, at present, arising from the narrowness of this corporeal sphere, the imperfection of these mortal powers, the inactivity, and sluggishness of these gross and earthly organs will be removed. That carnal and disordered mass which now renders the body the seat of impure passions, and impedes the holy aspirations of the soul, will be refined and purified. A body of celestial light; a *spiritual body*, as it is styled by the apostle; that is, a body active and unembarrassed in its movements like spirit, rapid as imagination and thought, will, in heaven, be the fit instrument of the glorified soul, in its sublime, and blissful employments.

From the doctrine of the resurrection of the same person results a consoling anticipation arising from the knowledge of our pious friends with whom we have been connected upon earth; the reunion, in the highest felicity, of the same hearts which have been united here in the tenderest affections. What ravishing pictures may imagination frame, without being liable to the charge of a fallacious enthusiasm, of friendships renewed in heaven; of the mutual joys of pious friends who meet on that happy and eternal shore, escaped from all the ills and dangers of life; of their sweet intercourse, purified from all the passions, and weaknesses of the flesh,



which disturb the harmony of this world ; of the range they may be permitted to enjoy, in society with one another, amid the glories of the heavenly world, to nourish their celestial devotions, and diversify their holy enjoyments ; of those flights which they may be allowed to take together into distant provinces of the universal empire of God to collect knowledge, and to admire and adore him in the astonishing operations of his hands ; or of the raptures with which every ray of the Sun of righteousness will penetrate their hearts, when they turn their faces towards the heavenly Zion, the more immediate residence of the divine glory, to raise their common ascriptions of praise to the Father of the universe, and to recognize, at the foot of his throne, their boundless obligations to redeeming love.—But restraining all unlicensed excursions of fancy, exquisite, and now ineffable must be the felicity, springing from a thousand different sources, that shall arise from meeting in those blissful habitations, the friends who have been most tenderly and affectionately loved upon earth. Oh ! how is the religion of our blessed Saviour adapted to the finest feelings, and fitted to cherish the noblest sympathies of the human heart !—Away with that cold philosophy, which, at death, would devote our existence to eternal oblivion, and hopelessly rend asunder those delightful unions which form the dearest portion of ourselves ; the chief joy of our being.—Jesus ! Saviour ! who art the first fruit of the resurrection of the dead ! who art thyself the resurrection and the life ! we adore and bless thee who hast

given this consolation to suffering humanity ! What sublime, and glorious prospects does our holy religion present to the imagination ! what blessed hopes to the heart !—But who can speak, as they deserve, of those scenes of everlasting peace ; of those mansions illuminated by the eternal splendours of the Sun of righteousness : those bodies of light ; those souls of fire ! “ Eye hath not seen, nor hath ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things which God hath prepared for those who love him.”

OF THE FUTURE AND ETERNAL PUNISHMENT OF THE  
WICKED.

The doctrine of the resurrection, and of an eternal existence beyond the grave relates to the whole race of man, and embraces equally the righteous, and the wicked. For, as the former shall rise to glory and immortality, the latter also shall be *raised to shame and everlasting contempt*. Under the Second Adam human nature recovers its immortality, and it is, under his administration, put into a new state of trial. The whole doctrine of a future state, however, and of the manner of our existence there, not being the subject of sense, and being entirely beyond the range of human experience, all knowledge concerning it must be derived solely from revelation. Reason can pronounce nothing with certainty, on the subject. We must take it simply as it is stated in the word of God. And here we find the ever-

lasting punishment of the wicked asserted in terms as explicit and strong as the life, and felicity of the pious; it is, therefore, equally entitled to our assent, and most imperiously commands our belief. Of the unrighteous it is said, "they shall be cast into the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone;" and it is added, "that the smoke of their torments ascendeth for ever and ever." In the final judgment of the world, we are assured that the Judge shall pronounce upon them this irrevocable sentence, *depart ye cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels.* These are strong figurative expressions intended to convey the certainty, and the fearful nature of the future sufferings of guilt; fire being employed as the hieroglyphic emblem of extreme torments of the body, or the mind; and their eternal duration is indicated in the strongest terms that language can use. Objections are brought against this conclusion so interesting to human sympathy, not from scripture, as they ought to be, if they were well founded, but from a pretended reason, where reason is, and forever must be utterly silent.

Eternal punishments are pronounced to be contrary to the natural perfection of the Deity which consists in universal goodness.—It is said to be contrary to the design of his moral government, which is intended for reformation rather than punishment; and aims finally, at the perpetuity of happiness to all virtuous minds.—In the last place it is strenuously argued, that eternal pains are disproportioned to the frailty of

offending man, and to the shortness of human life, in which only offences can be committed.—A simple and very brief answer must suffice on each of these topics; for as we are most incompetent judges of the infinite counsels of the Sovereign Mind, our supreme duty on these high questions is silence and submission.

1. When we say that the everlasting punishment of the wicked, is contrary to the natural and essential perfection of God, which consists in universal goodness, and the love of all being—this plea being introduced on the present occasion, as a defence of the crimes of wicked men from the rigours of the divine law, is treating the infinite benignity of Jehovah, as consisting merely in an indulgent regard to the frailties, appetites, and passions of mankind. These sins must necessarily be the subjects of divine animadversion; and the essential perfection of the Deity, which includes justice in its idea, requires the punishment of crime, not less than his benignity embraces innocence with love. And each in strict conformity with the divine perfection, infinite in its nature and operations. Justice therefore pursues crime with punishment, as long as the subject in which it inheres exists.—In the next place, if the essential perfection of the Deity be affirmed to consist in goodness, let us inquire wherein that goodness consists. Is it not in the love of being; and, in rational and moral beings, in virtue as essential to their highest happiness? Every affection, the higher and purer it is,

implies its contrast. Opposite characters and qualities, become the objects of opposite purposes and feelings. In proportion to the love of goodness and virtue, must be the abhorrence of iniquity, and crime. And these must be as permanent as their subjects on the one side, and on the other ; that is, they must be eternal.

2. When again, it is affirmed that eternal suffering, in any part of the works of God, is contrary to the design and end of his universal government, which is reformation, rather than extermination, or the perpetual pains of any portion of his creatures—Who, then, is competent to embrace in his mind the boundless extent of the divine government ; its objects, its ends, or the measures of its administration ? Or how shall a worm of dust pronounce on questions so high, and utterly beyond the ken of our limited faculties ? Take a single example of the possible benefits which may result to the righteous in their everlasting career of happy existence, from the continual view of the painful and unceasing sufferings inflicted upon hardened vice. The perpetuity of their virtue may be greatly assisted, and consequently their stability in happiness be not a little promoted by occasional discoveries of the issue of the most fortunate state of sin, presented to them as most afflictive, hopeless, remediless. We have the faithful promise of Almighty God for the certain preservation of the redeemed from falling. But surely this stability in virtue and happiness is not the result of any

physical necessity of nature. It must be effected by practical motives adapted to the rational and moral principles of a virtuous and holy mind; in the everlasting career of sanctification and blessedness, the saints in glory will be moved, excited, restrained, or stimulated by the same principles, and motives, but highly exalted, and improved, which govern the most holy souls in the present life. The final perseverance of the redeemed, though most securely fixed in the promise of God, is for ever influenced by moral principles, and motives. Who then can say that, in the universal government of God, this awful and eternal example of suffering may not be useful, or even necessary to subserve the ends of his infinite wisdom? But as this is a subject on which reason cannot pronounce, being lost in the infinitude of the universe, and of the divine nature, it ceases to instruct, and refers us to the simple declarations of the word of God. Here must we rest, assured that as *the righteous are received into life eternal, so the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment.*

The enemies of this doctrine, in the last place, rely, for the support of their opinion, on the frailty of human nature, which cannot with justice, they say, be subjected to eternal sufferings: and to the shortness of human life, which cannot have formed inveterate habits, or contracted a degree of guilt in any proportion to such pains. I reply, that these awful denunciations affecting our future existence, are not

made against the errors merely of frailty, but against obstinate and determined guilt, shewn, since the annunciation of a Saviour, by the rejection of his grace. If the sins of mankind are the offences of a frail and feeble nature, their sufferings will, undoubtedly, be proportioned to the imbecility of the offender; but their sinfulness, inhering in their nature itself, their guilt must co-exist with their being; and its penalties, of consequence have the same duration.—To the second part of this objection, respecting the shortness of life, it is reasonable to reply, that eternity has no reference to the length of this probatory state, but to the inherent virtue or vice of the subject of trial; for, if it were protracted ten thousand times, it could not bear the smallest proportion to our interminable existence. The wisdom of God has adapted the continuance of life, together with all its means of instruction, and grace, to our moral culture, and preparation for our eternal being; if, then, they fail of their proper object, the cultivation of our nature, and the sinner continues in his course of impiety, it can only be ascribed to the perversity of his nature, which, having exhausted the day of grace and mercy, leaves him thereafter, only to suffer the righteous retributions of eternity. Of these the duration must be exclusively learned from the written word. No reason can be assigned for the cessation of future punishment, unless it could be shewn, contrary to all probability, that the actual infliction of extreme pains would produce a reformation which the apprehension of them, aided by all the means of grace, un-

der the direction of the Holy Spirit, and the powerful assistances of future hopes and fears, had been unable to effect. The great and learned Origen believed that the actual endurance of punishment in the next life, will produce moral effects to which the apprehensions of it only in the present state, had been insufficient, and that it might terminate, after a long course of ages, in the reformation of the most abandoned sinner. But, says the equally learned, and eminent bishop Horsely; “the principle that the effect is possible, that the heart may be reclaimed by force, is, at best, precarious, and the only safe principle of human conduct is the belief that unrepented sin will suffer endless punishment hereafter.”

In the conclusion of this interesting subject, let me ask of the professed disciples of our blessed Lord and Saviour; have you through Christ, the assured hope of thus gloriously rising to immortal life? Let it prove to you the most powerful motive to cultivate in your hearts those affections of piety, and in your lives those habits of holiness, which will prepare you for your eternal being in the heavens.—By temperance, by purity, by the exercise of virtue, endeavour more and more to assimilate these perishing bodies, to that pure and celestial nature in which you shall hereafter behold the glory of God. Remember that the hope of rising again to everlasting life, strips death of its greatest terrors. Death is no longer what it appears to be, the destruction of our be-



ing. It yields to the grave only the grosser parts of these mortal bodies. The temporary dissolution of the body, and the soul causes no intermission in the consciousness of happy existence. Even if the soul itself, according to the opinion of some good men, should sleep till the revivification of universal nature, there is no perception of time in the insensibility of this mortal sleep. The moment of dissolution touches upon the moment of our restoration to life. The grave, sanctified by the death, and triumphed over by the resurrection of our blessed Saviour, is made to all his disciples only the gate to a new, a glorious, and immortal existence. "This corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality. O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; but thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord!"



## A SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE OPENING OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH; IN THE YEAR 1808.



*Epistle of Jude, 3d verse.*—That you should contend earnestly for the faith  
once delivered to the saints.

THE physical order of things is evidently intended by the Creator to be subservient to the benefit of the moral world. And divine wisdom itself, in the arrangements of nature, and the dispositions of providence, seems to be employed supremely in promoting the ends of divine goodness. In conformity with this order established in the universal system, God has connected the knowledge of truth, with the practice of duty, and the duties with the happiness of human nature. The connexion of truth with practical utility, is acknowledged universally in science. In religion alone it has been doubted, or denied, so far as to become even a fashionable maxim,—that it is of little importance to piety, or virtue, what opinions, upon these subjects, are maintained by mankind, provided their conduct in society be peaceable and honest. There are natural sentiments of right and wrong implanted in the human breast; and, to whatever errors in speculation the weakness of reason, or the prejudices of education, may have given birth, the moral instincts of our nature,

it is presumed, in all ordinary cases, will correct their practical evils. Hence has resulted an unhappy indifference to religious truth in those who embrace this maxim; and, with it an indifference to all the institutions of religion.

The apostle Jude, in this epistle, apparently from a deep conviction, that erroneous principles in morals, are ever proportionally connected with a lax virtue, condemns in a fervent and indignant style, the efforts which were made, in that early age, to corrupt the purity and simplicity of the gospel of Christ. In opposition to the insidious arts of these pretended disciples, who studied to *turn the grace of God into lasciviousness*, he exhorts his christian brethren to *contend earnestly for the faith*, zealously to maintain the truth as it is in Christ, which alone is able to *redeem men from all iniquity*, and make them *wise to eternal life*.

This injunction of the sacred writer rests for its foundation on the inseparable union between sound principles in religion and morals, and a pure and virtuous tenor of life. It strongly implies, therefore, that every real christian, and especially that every minister of Christ, is under sacred and indispensable obligations to search for the truth in religion, with faithfulness, to embrace it with sincerity, to maintain it with firmness, and to promote it with zeal.

If, indeed, evangelic truth had no peculiar relation to sanctity of life, but any principles were equal to the ends of religion, the knowledge of it would not merit either the labour bestowed on its acquisition, or the praise ascribed to its possession; christianity itself would be deprived of its chief glory; and it would be indifferent to every purpose of piety, or virtue, whether we were christians or pagans, believers or infidels.

In the following discourse, I purpose, under the divine blessing,

I. In the first place, to illustrate the connexion that exists between duty, and evangelic truth; or generally between principles and conduct.

II. And in the next place, to urge the exhortation of the apostle, to *contend earnestly for the faith*, the fountain, and comprehensive sum of all good principles in religion.

I. Permit me, then, in the first place, to illustrate the connexion that exists between duty, and evangelic truth, and in general, between principles and conduct.

As the great springs of human action lie in the passions and appetites, the desires and wants of men, so the control and direction of these springs is to be found only in an un-

derstanding, and a conscience enlightened by divine truth. An it is a fact confirmed by the general experience of the church that, if the mind be early imbued with the principles of piety and virtue, cultivated under a regular and prudent discipline, it usually ripens into a fixed and steady character of virtue, and by the co-operation of the Spirit of divine grace, into habits of sincere and rational piety. On the other hand, if youth, at this early and forming period of life, are suffered to grow up without moral culture, and left to form their principles under the influence of vicious companions, among whom they are taught to vindicate the indulgence of the passions, by the corrupt maxims of the world, there is hardly any point of profligacy in their manners, at which we should be surprised eventually to see them arrive. The system of truth, indeed, and the law of duty, have the same common source in the perfections and the will of God. The more perfectly therefore we can separate it from every impure mixture, the more powerful are the motives which we enjoy to universal holiness of living.

On the other hand, is it not one of the plainest, and most obvious conclusions of reason, that, if men embrace principles which favour the passions, and remove from the mind the restraints of religion; if they deny, for example, the existence, or the providence of Almighty God; if they frame false or imperfect conceptions of the divine attributes; if they invent maxims which, in a state of dissolute manners is

always done, to palliate insincerity, fraud, intemperance, or lust, the ties of moral obligation are thereby necessarily relaxed? Could you, on great and critical occasions, rely on the integrity of a man who should avow such principles? Would you be willing to entrust to him the honour and virtue of your families, where he could violate them with secrecy, or with impunity? Would not his passions, his interests, his pleasures be thenceforward the supreme law of his conduct?

But does not dissolution of manners frequently precede, and itself become the cause of the general corruption of principle, in individuals, and in nations? It does.—And this fact places the truth of the proposition which I have assumed to illustrate, in a new light. For so powerful is the force of truth upon the heart, that men cannot preserve the peace of their own bosoms, amidst the conflict of their principles, with their actions. They are obliged, therefore, if they do not reject the law of Christ, to set themselves to corrupt and modify it if possible, to the standard of their inclinations. If the law of Christ has not been able effectually to constrain their obedience, they must shut their eyes against its light, or study, by every subtil artifice, to pervert its spirit.

The efficacy of divine truth early instilled into the mind, and received with a docile temper, is conspicuous, to a candid observer, in the excellent fruits which commonly proceed from a virtuous and pious education, conducted with

prudence, and persevered in with steady and consistent wisdom.

Remark the youth who have been sedulously and prudently instructed in the principles of religion: compare their sobriety, their temperance, their regular and exemplary manners, with the character and conduct of such as have grown up, like neglected weeds, without culture. Is it not usually, among these that the church finds her future supports, and her future ornaments? If, in the course of life, they should be exposed to temptations which give too strong an action to their passions, how long will their early principles resist the corrupting current? How often will conscience, roused by that secret voice which they awaken in the breast, recal them to their duty? Or when, for a season, like David, or the young Solomon, they have been drawn aside from its path, how often are these secret monitors, recovering force, by some interesting dispensation of divine providence, made the means of bringing them back to their duty, and to God, with humiliation and repentance? Here let me notice, only to condemn, the injustice of a frequent remark, that the most serious and pious education is commonly followed by the greatest dissolution of manners. So far is this from being verified by the fact, that it is, on the other hand, the comparative rarity of the example, and its striking incongruity with our most reasonable expectations, which has occasioned its being so much noticed, in a few in-



stances, that the frequency of the reproach has been mistaken for the commonness of the effect. And the fact, where it does exist, may usually be traced to some gross defect of prudence, or of skill, in the conduct of their education.

I acknowledge, indeed, and it is only a confirmation of our doctrine, that those who have finally broken through the restraints of a pious discipline, like those who have burst the bounds of modest and of decent manners, are usually more profligate than other sinners; harrassed in their evil courses by their early principles, they are often tempted to run to greater excesses than others, that they may, at once, if possible, extinguish the distressing light of truth, and drown the reproaches of their own consciences.

Against the preceding reasonings an objection has been raised from two interesting facts—one that we not unfrequently see men of vicious manners professing the best principles; another, that we find good men among all sects of christians. True it is, that orthodox opinions in religion may be ostensibly avowed by men of very exceptionable morals. They may be merely modes of speaking received by inheritance, or adopted as the distinction of a party; while, at the same time, they have not entered deeply into the convictions of reason, nor taken possession of the sentiments of the heart.

The second fact I do not deny, but rather rejoice in its existence, that there are found pious men, who are ornaments of their holy profession, among all denominations of christians. But does this prove that there is no distinction in their moral effects between truth and falsehood? or that all principles are equally favourable, or indifferent to true religion, and sanctity of manners? No, it is an interesting proof, to the benevolent and candid mind, that every denomination of christians embraces, in its system, an important portion of evangelical truth. The great and central doctrines of our salvation, from which all the practical principles of piety and morals naturally radiate, are so clearly borne upon the whole face of the sacred scriptures, that they are received under one form of expression, or another, in the symbols, confessions, and creeds of almost all who assume to wear the name of christian. Yet, along with them, the frailty of the human understanding, or some latent bias of the human heart, has frequently mingled more or less of error, which proportionally impairs their sanctifying influence. As every truth is connected with some right disposition of the heart, and contributes to promote it; so every error, in a similar degree, tends to strengthen some sinful propensity, or to weaken the obligation of some duty. Hence particular sections of the church, according to the purity and extent in which they embrace the truth as it is in Christ, are distinguished above others, for the general sanctity of their manners; for a zeal in religion, at once rational and fervent; and for the

numbers who adorn, by their practice, the doctrine of God their Saviour. But among the truly pious of all denominations, there is a greater harmony of sentiment, and of faith, than they themselves, in the jealousy of party, in the pride of disputation, and even in the delicate apprehensions for the truth, which some good men, who have moulded all their feelings in religion to certain set forms of words, are willing to allow. In terms they differ more than in spirit.

Unhappily, indeed, there are in our age, as there were in the age of the apostles, those who wear, and who glory in the christian name, who yet remove the basis of christianity, by *denying the only Lord God, even our Lord Jesus Christ*. But as then they were, they still are, known by the coldness of their piety, and the laxness of their moral system. *Spots* are they in the church, in which should exist only the continual feast of christian love; *unfructifying clouds without rain, borne about by the winds of human passions*. It would be more honour to the cause of Christ, or rather less dishonour, if they would renounce the name which they abuse.

Having thus far endeavoured to illustrate the connexion between truth and duty; that is, between faith, or the genuine doctrines of the gospel, and holiness of living—

II. I proceed, more directly, to urge the exhortation of the apostle, to *contend earnestly for the faith*, the fountain and the sum of all good principles in religion.

If moral truth were of no importance, or if it were not essentially connected with our duty, with our salvation, and with the best interests of human nature, this exhortation would be without reason. But related as they are by the immutable constitution of heaven, this union imposes on us inviolable obligations, to seek for the truth in religion with fidelity, to maintain it with firmness, and to promote it with zeal. The duty is incumbent on every christian, in proportion to his means of information, and his opportunities of doing good. It is, above all, incumbent on the church as a community, the depository of the oracles of the living God; and on those, in a peculiar manner, who are appointed to be her watchmen, her instructors, her guardians, and examples.

Where, then, is to be found that precious truth which we are required to maintain in the face of every open enemy, or insidious friend, and earnestly to promote with a zeal worthy of its high importance. In this, all sects concur with one voice, that the pure evangelical truth is to be discerned only in the holy scriptures. But when we attempt to collect it from the loose style of parable and narrative, in which it is frequently conveyed, or to divest it of that oratorical, or poetic dress in which the sacred writers have often clothed it, and reduce it to plain and simple propositions, here, I con-

fess, is some room for uncertainty and doubt. Here it is that men introducing their own speculations, and mingling their own philosophic systems with the word of God, have corrupted its simplicity, and made the christian church, like the schools of Greece, a theatre for the conflict of contending opinions. Are the divine scriptures, then, of doubtful interpretation? Or do they afford any ground for this gladiatorial play of intellect? No, they are full of light; but like all the manifestations of the will of God, in the works both of creation and providence, they are liable to be misinterpreted by ignorance, or perverted by some dishonesty of the heart, or by some mistaken bias of education. They are a fountain of truth to those who submit themselves with humility to the wisdom of God, and who, with genuine simplicity of spirit, have no other aim but to discern in them their own duty, and no concern but to understand the will of their heavenly Father, in order to obey it. If, with these dispositions, we approach the study of the holy scriptures, although some unavoidable errors should still adhere to the frailty of the human understanding, we cannot materially swerve from that system of truth which, as disciples of Christ, we are called to defend. And in that field of human infirmity in which we may be permitted to err, we shall find ground for the mutual exercise of charity with our fellow-christians.

Are, then, all portions of scripture, all the tenets which enter into the body of our creed, equally the objects of that holy zeal required by the apostle in defence of the faith

Every truth of the gospel is precious to a real believer. But peculiarly precious are those fundamental doctrines on which the whole fabric of christianity rests. If I may be permitted to make this selection, they are the doctrines of the atonement—of the agency of the Holy Spirit—of the regeneration of the heart—of the free grace of God in the salvation of the world—of the final judgment—of the resurrection of the body—and the life everlasting. They are to him, in the language of a great reformer, *articulæ stantis aut cadentis ecclesie*, articles by which the church must stand or fall.

To truth, a pure mind attaches itself with a powerful attraction. It is the image of the divine wisdom. It is the glory of God that he is the fountain of truth. To declare the truth to the world the Saviour became incarnate. To give it efficacy on the hearts of men, the Holy Spirit has been shed upon his church. The pursuit and discovery of truth, with wider and still wider extent, will be among the most delightful employments of the redeemed in heaven. With the progress of evangelic truth upon earth, is connected the glory of God, the honour of the Redeemer, the highest and best interests of mankind, objects peculiarly dear to every sincere disciple of Jesus Christ. With fervour, therefore will he embrace it from the heart, and with unceasing zeal will he study to promote it.

A superior duty is imposed upon the ministers of religion who are appointed as *watchmen upon the walls of Zion*, and as heralds to the world of the *glad tidings of salvation*. They are *set*, in the language of the apostle, *for the defence of the gospel*. Among their first cares, it ought to be, as far as possible, to preserve the church from corruption of principle, and to cultivate within it that unity of sentiment, and harmony in interpreting the great doctrines of religion, so necessary to the peace and order of the *body of Christ*. When conflicting doctrines are preached in the same church, the principles of the people become unsettled. To temporary scepticism, succeeds indifference to truth; a state of mind not much less dangerous than error itself.

I fear not to be charged with illiberality, though I assert that, if among those who are otherwise agreed in the distinguishing doctrines of christianity, there are such differences of opinion, even upon minor points, as would disturb the harmony of their devotions, let them worship God in separate communions. The existence of various denominations may even be attended with some advantages; and where their members are found walking agreeably to the commandment of Christ, they may embrace one another in the spirit of christian charity. But union in the same body ought sacredly to be preserved. Division on the other hand, and on the other that extreme of charity, which indicates an indifference to truth, are, in the highest degree, pernicious. "Be of one

mind. Endeavour to keep the unity of the spirit, in the bond of peace."

But the injunction of the sacred writer, in this passage, implies an obligation not only to maintain the purity of the faith, and, as far as possible, its unity ; but to defend it against every enemy, and to promote with all our powers of persuasion and reason, its holy influence over the hearts of men.

The humble and benevolent religion of Jesus Christ, always obnoxious to the corruptions of the human heart, is obliged incessantly to combat with open, or insidious enemies, and to meet them in their ever new, and ever varying modes of attack. It is assailed by inveterate foes from without, or betrayed by false and pretended friends within the bosom of the church itself. In no age have enemies more numerous, or more subtil, erected themselves against the standard of the cross. Not, indeed, armed with power, and followed by flames, as in ages past ; but more to be dreaded, perhaps, by pure and undefiled religion, they come armed with all the subtilty of a false and ostentatious science, and supported by the dissolution of the public manners.

The press is often a good criterion of the state of the public morals, and the public taste. Look over the list of new publications in Europe. Examine the catalogues of those writings which obtain the favour of the most numerous class of readers, both there, and in our own country. What do



you see in these writers but continual incentives thrown out to corrupt the imagination, and inflame the passions of the young? What but a shameless sophistry designed to emancipate every lust of the heart from the remaining restraints of religion? What but continual efforts to undermine the foundations of the gospel, and boldly to tear down the walls and the ramparts of our christian Zion? Even the fences of natural religion are attempted to be overthrown. The existence of God has been called in question by a delirious philosophy; his providence over the world has been resolved into contingency, or fate; the apprehensions of futurity have been derided as childish fears; and human nature robbed of its most precious treasure in the hopes of a happy and immortal existence, only that religion may not derive from them any effectual control over the consciences of men. All the powers of learning, wit, and perverted genius, have been assembled against the glory of the Saviour. A kind of traditionary respect, indeed, is still pretended to be paid to the name of virtue: but a name it is, and nothing more. It does not prevent the outrage of almost every duty which a creature owes to his Creator. It does not impede the indulgence of the most atrocious passions under the abused name of honour; nor the violation of the most sacred ties of society, of friendship, of humanity under the pretence of an innocent pursuit of pleasure. A deluge of infidelity in the old world is sweeping before it principles and morals, and has, long since, begun to roll its fearful tide to the new. Along with ancient corruptions in government and religion, it threatens to de-

stroy religion and government themselves; and to overwhelm, in undistinguishing ruin, whatever is rendered venerable by time, and sacred by its relations to God, and the felicity of human society. And the new clouds which are gathering in our horizon at this moment, look dark and dismal. In this day of trouble, of rebuke, and blasphemy, what is the duty of the watchmen on the walls of Zion? Are they not called to increasing diligence, to higher efforts of faith and constancy, to more fervent zeal, to greater sacrifices in the cause of the Redeemer, more earnestly than ever to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints? Truth, indeed, which is eternal, although it may seem, for a season, to be vanquished by the powers of darkness, will eventually prevail over all the variable forms of error; but its weapons require to be wielded by skilful, and by honest hands.

In order to fulfil the requisition of the text, therefore, the ministry of the gospel, ought to possess both *talents*, which will enable them to meet the foe upon equal ground; and *fidelity*, which will never shrink from any labour, or any danger, which it may be necessary to encounter in the Redeemer's cause.

Will it not then be esteemed reasonable to assert, that the ministers of religion ought always to stand in the foremost ranks of literature and science in their country. And it is a fact which will hardly be disputed, that, hitherto, the world has owed more to its religious orders for the cultivation,

and progress of letters, than to all other classes of society. This is a general proposition which extends beyond the christian church, to those in every nation who are supremely occupied in the studies and concerns of religion. The Magians and the Bramins, the priests of India and of Persia were the scholars, and instructors of those great nations. The *schools of the prophets* were the seminaries of literature among the people of Israel. The sacerdotal colleges of Egypt were the schools of Greece, which afterwards became the school of the universe. After the overthrow of the Roman empire by the northern tribes, nothing contributed so much to extend among those ignorant and rude barbarians, the influence of christianity, and by degrees to ameliorate their savage manners, as the superior knowledge, as well as piety of the great body of the christian clergy. In the churches and monasteries, to whatever objections the latter afterwards became liable, were preserved those sparks of ancient learning which served to re-kindle the flame of modern science. To the clergy, almost exclusively, we owe the brilliant resurrection of letters in the fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries. And in their hands, ever since, has been deservedly placed the direction of learning; and with them it is likely to remain. Is this a language which ought to create offence to any order of men? No; it ought only to awaken a generous emulation among the real friends of religion and learning of all professions. And I am willing to urge this point the farther, at present, for the sake of so ma-

ny young men who are here before you, with the view of devoting themselves to the holy ministry.

To them permit me to say, that true piety is first, and above all things necessary in a minister of Christ. But, next to this, and not much less important, is sound science, and general literature, that he may be able to confirm the truth, and *convince gainsayers*, and that, in delivering and defending the gospel, he may be able to *bring from his treasures things new and old*; and acquire that ascendancy over the minds of men, which acknowledged virtue, a luminous eloquence, and extensive information alone can give. That on trite subjects, he may be always new. That, having fixed himself in the hearts of his people, by faithfulness in every duty of the pastoral office, he may take possession of their understandings also, by his ability to teach. Lamentable is the falling off when a young pastor, who has at first been well received, exhausts his little fund, in a few of his early discourses. The repetition of the same truths, however important, in nearly the same language becomes insipid even to a pious audience. To every *candidate* for this holy office, therefore, let me insist, that his preparations for appearing in it with dignity and usefulness, should be neither superficial, nor hasty; and to every *minister*, may I be permitted to add, that his studies never should end but with his life.

If those who publish the gospel to mankind ought to be scribes well instructed in the law of Christ, for the edification of the church, not less requisite is it that they be furnished with all the resources of human science, in order to repel those enemies of the faith, who, by an abuse of learning, and a shameful misapplication of the talents which God has given them, are endeavouring to overturn, to their foundations, his glorious city, and temple. The philosophers are setting themselves against the ministers of religion, the schools against the altars. But wielding as you do, in this spiritual conflict, the mighty force of truth, your encouragement is, that, you must prevail, if you are not reproachfully delinquent to the king of Zion. I am aware that many pious men regard all considerations of this nature as partaking too much of the spirit and policy of the world. They profess to place all their reliance, not on any human means, but solely on the omnipotence of divine grace; and strangely seek a refuge for their own indolence in the abused doctrine of the operations of the Holy Spirit. Almighty God has established, in the constitution of nature, a certain connexion between the means and the end; and never does he depart from this order, which is his will, except where the occasion demands a miracle. Shall we then faithlessly suffer the temple of the Living God to be levelled to the dust, by the attacks of so many insidious adversaries as assail it on every side, while we look on with a lazy and indifferent gaze, under pretence of doing honour to the sovereignty of divine grace? Or since the church shall last while the sun and the moon en-

sure, will not God wrest her interests out of our hands, and commit them to hands more worthy to defend them?

Will it be said, what learning can do, has been done already? That the learned and pious divines of the last, and preceding century have furnished the church with the ablest defences of revelation, with the most admirable elucidations of the sacred writings, with the most victorious refutations of the principles of infidelity? It is true,—and the praise of these wise and holy men is in all the churches. But if we have not ourselves skill and force for the combat, how shall we be able to wield the armour of Saul? God most justly expects, that we should bring to the service of his altar every human aid, as well as every divine grace. *Be ye wise as serpents, saith the Saviour, and harmless as doves.* And what doth the apostle, who possessed all the arts of Greece, and all the divine learning of Israel, intend by these injunctions to his son Timothy; “Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee. Meditate upon these things. Give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear unto all!” Can the divine author intend, according to the views of some weak and enthusiastic sects, that, in devoutly reading the sacred writings, God imparts some *extraordinary* influx of the Holy Spirit, to render their meaning clear; thus making one inspiration necessary originally to communicate the scriptures to the apostles and prophets of old, and another to the church in the present day, to enable it to understand them?

With prayer and pious meditation, indeed, every christian ought devoutly to study them. The more nearly we can raise the soul to the tone of pious fervour, and sublime devotion, in which the prophets and apostles composed their sacred hymns, their divine histories, and epistles, the more we shall perceive the spiritual beauties of the word of God; the more clear, and impressive will its heavenly truths be to the heart. But let all who are preparing to enter into this holy office be assured that there is hardly an art, or branch of knowledge, in the whole circle of science, or of literature, from which some useful illustration of the sacred writings may not be drawn.

In earnestly contending for the faith, in the next place, talents alone are not sufficient to acquit your high and holy duties to God and the church. Fidelity in the discharge of all the functions of the sacred ministry is not less necessary. That is, plainness and integrity in declaring the whole counsel of God, a spirit of warm and unaffected devotion, and unwearied diligence in the offices of your holy calling, arising from a deep conviction of the value of immortal souls, and the infinite importance of the sacred cause in which you are engaged. Without genuine piety, and holy zeal, the labour of preaching the gospel must be both unpleasant and unfruitful. With what comfort, or effect can a cold, formal, or worldly minded man preach the doctrines of repentance, of self-denial, of purity of heart, of sanctity of life? But divine truth illustrated with clearness, declared with faithfulness,

and flowing from a heart deeply affected with the eternal interests of mankind, possesses a majesty and force, that subdue the mind, an illumination and conviction that penetrate the soul, a tenderness and persuasion that touch and move all the springs of action in the heart. "It commends itself to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

As there is every thing in the subject to awaken the zeal of a sincere christian, and especially, of a faithful minister of Jesus Christ, in publishing the glad tidings of salvation to a guilty world, and carrying the standard of the cross through the ranks of opposing enemies, so there is every thing in the circumstances of the present time, to raise that zeal to an unusual fervor.—Impiety has broken in like a flood upon the nations, and is carrying before it, not the young and inexperienced alone or those who have made it their interest, by unholy living, to embrace the principles of infidelity ; but we see borne on the tide philosophers, legislators, magistrates, those who should be the instructors of mankind, who should be the guardians of the public morals, who, seated in the throne of the laws, should be examples of virtue and obedience to the people. It already threatens to bear with it the mass of society, if Almighty God, to whose throne we daily send our supplications to defend us from this calamity, do not interpose to arrest the overwhelming flood, saying to its rage "hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther ; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed." From the prevalence of corrupted manners, I see a fatal evil invade the church it-



self, "Because iniquity abounds the love of many waxeth cold." The *wise* and even the *watchmen* on the walls of Zion, seem to be *asleep* along with the secure and unapprehensive crowd of *foolish virgins*. The present seems to be the reign of evil over a great part of the world which calls itself christian. And Christ may now say as he did to his persecutors and murderers, "this is your hour, and the power of darkness."

If we see the blessed gospel openly and almost triumphantly insulted by powerful enemies, is it not also in many parts of the church, insidiously corrupted by false friends? Where it is still preached with a degree of evangelic purity, does it not seem to fall powerless from the lips of those who are appointed to proclaim its grace to the world? For many years we have seen the columns of civil society, and the temples of religion falling together. We have heard the horrible crash at a distance. We have sometimes felt the earth tremble under our feet, to warn us of our approaching danger. Roused for a moment, we have only sunk down again into a sleep like the sleep of death.—Can occasions more loudly call, shall I say, on the ministers of religion? Shall I not say on all christians? I was going to say on all good citizens, earnestly to contend for the faith, for the purity of those principles of morality and piety, for the blessedness of those immortal hopes, once delivered to the saints? To stem the increasing torrent of impiety—to arrest the dissolution of the public morals—to promote the designs of divine mercy to

mankind—to recal the departing glory to our churches—to exalt the grace of the ever blessed Redeemer—to reanimate the almost extinguished love of his disciples to him, and to one another. My brethren in the holy ministry! who is sufficient for these things? Although we might justly tremble when we contemplate the weakness of the human instrument, be encouraged, holy brethren! by the example of the apostle, who hath said *through Christ we can do all things.*

The political, the moral, and religious horizon looks dark and gloomy. The tempest, which has shaken half the world, threatens, as we have long foreseen, to extend its fury to us. Yet, in the gathering cloud, I seem to see some luminous spots which invite us not to despair. In every event, however, which may chequer the mysterious aspect of divine providence, one truth is certain, one truth should console you, my dear brethren, “be you faithful unto death, and you shall receive a crown of life.”

*Now to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, be glory, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be world without end!—AMEN!*

THE END.











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