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Discourses concerning the
being and natural

V. 1

DISCOURSES

CONCERNING THE

Being and *Natural Perfections*

OF

GOD,

IN WHICH

That First Principle of Religion,

THE

EXISTENCE of the DEITY,

IS PROV'D,

From the Frame of the MATERIAL WORLD, from the ANIMAL and RATIONAL LIFE, and from HUMAN INTELLIGENCE and MORALITY;

AND

The DIVINE ATTRIBUTES of SPIRITUALITY, UNITY, ETERNITY, IMMENSITY, OMNIPOTENCE, OMNISCIENCE, and INFINITE WISDOM, are explain'd.

By JOHN ABERNETHY, M. A.

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unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal Power and Godhead.

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SER-

SERMON I.

The Being of God prov'd from the Frame of the Material World.

Rom. i. 19, 20.

Becauſe that which may be known of God, is manifeſt in them, for God hath ſhewed it unto them. For the inviſible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly ſeen, being underſtood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.

THE mind of man, by attending to its own conſtitution, and to the ſtate and appearances of the world, is naturally led to an enquiry concerning the origin and cauſes of things, the proper meaſures of its own conduct, with the conſequences of them, and to future events as far as it can attain the knowledge of them, that is to an inquiry concerning God and religion. When a man, endued with all the vital, ſenſitive and intellectual powers which belong to

SERM. I.

SERM. I. his nature, and arrived at the perfect exercise of them, with a competent knowledge of himself, and the various relations and uses of things about him; when, I say, he deliberately views the obvious face of nature, when he beholds the vast expanse of heaven, the glorious light of the sun, and by it a numberless multitude of other objects, many of which, he knows, by his senses, his appetites, his affections and experience, are in different ways useful to him and to each other; reflecting at the same time on his own being, his various powers and perceptions, one would think he could scarcely avoid such inquiries as these, "Whence am I, and by what power pro-"duc'd? Whence all these beings with "which I see my self surrounded? As I "have no other knowledge of my exist-"ence, nor any other way to judge of its "duration, than by conscious perception, I "must conclude, that some time ago I was "not, for I had no consciousness nor percep-"tion of any thing. How then is this "wonderful transition from non-existence "into being to be accounted for? Is it to "be attributed to a superior designing cause? "and has that same mighty intelligent cause "form'd all those other beings I perceive,

"which

" which by their appearances ſeem to be re- SERM.
" lated to each other and to me, ſo as to I.
" make up one intire ſyſtem ? But now that
" I find my ſelf in ſuch a ſituation, what am
" I to do ? There are inſtincts in my na-
" ture, which prompt me to various actions
" and enjoyments ; I am furniſhed with the
" inſtruments of ſenſation and motion, I ſee,
" and hear, and taſte, and ſmell, and feel ;
" I can move the organs of my own body,
" and by them ſome other bodies, merely
" by an act of my own will, or the volunta-
" ry exertion of an inward ſelf-determining
" power ; I have hunger and thirſt at certain
" returning ſeaſons, and am readily ſupplied
" with meat and drink, whereby this body is
" nouriſh'd and ſenſibly refreſh'd. This is
" common with me to a multitude of living
" things in different ſhapes, with which the
" earth is ſtor'd : But I find in my ſelf the
" powers of reaſon and higher affections,
" whereof *they* give no diſcovery, which leads
" me to conclude there is a nobler end of my
" being, and I am capable of a greater hap-
" pineſs. I can reflect, compare my own
" perceptions of things, and inquire into
" their origin and tendencies ; I perceive at
" firſt view ſome truths, and they give me

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" pleaſure ; I inveſtigate others by a delibe-
" rate attention to my own ideas, and to
" their agreement and relations, ſtill with a
" growing ſatisfaction ; I am conſcious of li-
" berty or a freedom of choice, and the ideas
" of right and wrong in action, naturally oc-
" cur to me ; I muſt therefore be directed in
" my conduct by a regard to that difference :
" I find benevolence to ſenſitive beings, eſ-
" pecially thoſe of my own kind, naturally
" ariſe in my mind, together with reverence
" and gratitude to a ſuperior nature, the ſup-
" poſed author of my exiſtence and of all
" my enjoyments ; which affections, as they
" are reflected on with delightful ſelf-appro-
" bation, a more excellent enjoyment than
" any ſenſible object can yield ; ſo they are
" accompanied with a deſire to pleaſe that
" ſuperior Being, and be approved by him.
" But how ſhall I continue poſſeſs'd of exiſt-
" ence, with all the variety of enjoyment
" that belongs to it, which is ſo very deſira-
" ble ; and ſince experience convinces me
" that the preſent life is frail, and has in it
" a mixture of unhappineſs, what proſpect
" have I of a future ſtate, for the thoughts of
" falling again into nothing fill my mind
" with horror ; and how ſhall I attain to the
" higheſt

" higheſt perfection I am capable of? For it plainly appears that, at leaſt, the nobler powers of my nature may admit of a more various exerciſe than the preſent, and a further improvement. All that is poſſible for me to do, as an intelligent agent, whereby I may contribute to my own happineſs, and anſwer the end of my being, is to follow the guidance of my own reaſon and what nature points to, conſidering the whole of my conſtitution, and preſerving the juſt ſubordination of its lower, to its ſuperior parts: And for the continuance of my being, and what additional felicity, I may deſire or expect, I muſt hope in the ſame ſupreme power and goodneſs, to which I owe all that is now in my poſſeſſion." SERM. I.

If theſe are the inquiries and the ſentiments which the mind of man, unbyaſs'd by any prejudices or prepoſſeſſions, would naturally fall into, and whether they are or not, let any one judge who carefully attends even to the moſt obvious appearances in the human conſtitution: we may conſider whether they are not very becoming us. It is true we grow up to the exerciſe of our reaſon gradually; the firſt part of life is paſt

SERM. I.

over with very little reflection, the world is become familiar to us, we have learn'd the uſe of things and opinions concerning them, which engage our aſſent and our affections, before we come to that maturity of underſtanding which is neceſſary to qualify us for a thorough and rational examination. But neither the familiarity contracted with our own exiſtence and the world, (we cannot but be ſenſible, that our knowledge of both is of no long ſtanding) nor any prejudice we may have received in a childiſh immature ſtate, ſhould divert us, when we have attained to the full uſe of our reaſon, from attending ſuch important enquiries, which the leaſt ſelf-reflection will ſhew to be every way worthy of men. Whether our inquiries will rationally end in religion, founded on the belief of a Deity is what I am now to conſider. This, however, ſeems to be the plaineſt and moſt natural way of attaining ſatisfaction in that great point; for by the Deity we mean the powerful, wiſe and good parent of mankind, the maker, preſerver and ruler of the world; and how ſhall we know him but by the characters of his perfections ſtampt upon his works? Thus the apoſtle argues in my text, *That which may be known of*

of God is manifeſt to men, for God hath ſhew- SERM.
ed it unto them (by their own reaſon). *For* I.
the inviſible things of him from the creation of the world, are clearly ſeen, being underſtood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead.

It is certain, the belief of a Deity has generally obtained among mankind; excepting the objects of the mind's immediate intuition and of ſenſe, concerning which there can be no diſpute, excepting theſe, I ſay, perhaps there is not any one point to which Men have more univerſally given an explicit aſſent, than the Being of God. This is thought, by ſome, to be a ſtrong preſumption in its favour; for they alledge, nothing but the clear irrefragable evidence of truth could have induced all nations of the world to agree in it. As to vulgar opinions, acknowledged to be erroneous in other points, ſuch as the magnitude and diſtance of the heavenly bodies, the caſe is very different; for there the error plainly ariſes from inattention, and forming a judgment too haſtily upon the report of ſenſe, concerning appearances which it cannot examine. But in ſuch a point of ſpeculation as the exiſtence of the Deity, to the knowledge of which we are led by our own

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moſt obvious reflections, and which the more it is attended to, the more firmly it is believed; an uniform agreement ſeems to proceed from the voice of nature, or God himſelf ſpeaking intelligibly to every nation by his works. There is, undoubtedly, in the human mind a knowledge of things which are not the objects of ſenſe, nay in many inſtances reaſon corrects ſenſe, and diſcovers its miſtakes: indeed, the greateſt certainty we have is in the clear perception of an agreement between our own abſtract ideas; ſo that a concurring perſuaſion concerning propoſitions form'd of ſuch ideas, and concerning rational deductions from them, has the beſt appearance of being founded on truth, becauſe in them men are leaſt obnoxious to deception.

There have been however ſome, very few of mankind in compariſon, who have profeſſedly denied the being of God, and pretended to account for the formation of the world and all the phænomena of nature without him. Theſe men ridicule the common belief as ſuperſtitious, proceeding wholly from ignorance of cauſes, political fiction, cuſtomary tradition, or the paſſion of fear, which often produces groundleſs imaginations. I may afterwards have occaſion to examine

amine these pretences; in the mean time, without resting this first principle of all religion on the presumption in its favour, taken from the general consent of mankind, or any other presumptions, however strong, I shall proceed directly to establish it by clear evidence of reason, in the method which appears to me the most simple and natural: Only let it be observed, SERM. I.

That the notions of men, concerning the Deity and his attributes, have been very confus'd, and their opinions widely different, even *theirs* who agree in the profess'd belief of his Being: some have declared themselves unable to form any idea of substance distinct from body, and therefore concluded, that as the human soul is only a subtile kind of matter, or a particular modification of it, so God himself is corporeal; this way of thinking, tho' very gross, is plainly discovered in the writings of the celebrated stoic philosophers, mixt at the same time with noble sentiments concerning the Divine moral perfections and providence: Some conceiv'd that the creation of material substance was absolutely impossible, tho' it is intirely subject to the disposal of active intelligence, and that therefore it must be coeval with the supreme Being, whom they

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they imagin'd to be the eternal ſoul of an eternal univerſe: Others ſeem to have deny'd the unity of the Godhead, at leaſt, they divided their worſhip among a plurality of divine beings, ſo called, tho' 'tis probable, the Polytheiſm of the Gentiles is to be underſtood, concerning a multiplicity of inferior agents in the Divine adminiſtration, or miniſtring ſpirits, all ſubject to the one Supreme: Others again, have ſo perplex'd the doctrine of the Divine eternity and immenſity, as to render them unintelligible. But above all, the errors concerning the moral perfections, as they are moſt pernicious, have been the moſt frequent in the world, the *Chriſtian* world itſelf not altogether excepted. Not to mention the Gods of *Epicurus*, which he imagined, or pretended to have imagined, to be a kind of indolent happy things, neither the makers nor rulers of any thing, but like other beings, made out of atoms by accident; I ſay, pretended to have imagin'd, for it is not unlikely that part of his ſcheme was a complement to the religion of mankind, or rather a ſneer, ſuch as is not unuſual with writers of his ſort: The heathens had, many of them, very abſurd conceptions of the morals of their inferior gods, and *Jupiter* himſelf was far from

from being perfectly pure and good; there are, even among those who have the best means of instruction, very gross opinions, and of a dangerous tendency, concerning the justice and goodness of God, and the measures of his government over moral agents, which 'tis needless now to insist on more particularly. SERM. I.

The use I shall make at present of this observation, is, to avoid at our entrance on this subject, a particular definition of the Deity, by enumerating all the perfections which, I hope we shall in the sequel, see reason to attribute to him, because the present controversy is only with *Atheists*, not with any, even of the most imperfect *Theists*. Besides, I think, in such an inquiry, we ought to begin with the plainest principles, that having once seen them establish'd with clear evidence, we may then proceed to points less obvious. Thus, if it first appears by convincing proof, that there is an intelligent designing cause in the universe, to which the order and appearances of it are to be ascrib'd, we may thence take our rise to the consideration of the characters of that cause, and so by degrees advance to the most compleat notion of God which we can form.

I shall

SERM. I. I shall therefore consider the subject before us in the simplest view, and begin with an inquiry into the true cause of the visible frame of nature, stating the question, as it thus plainly stands between us and our adversaries, whether the material world, with its principal and most obvious phænomena, which fall under our observation, is form'd and guided by mere chance or blind necessity, which are the different hypotheses of *Atheism*, and I shall examine them severally; or if, on the contrary, it was produced by, and is under the direction of an active, understanding and intending Cause?

In order to this, let us first consider the ideas of intelligence and activity, of cause and effect, and of necessity and chance, which arise in our minds, by attending to what passes in them, and by observing what our senses inform us of, in the ordinary course of things. Perception is always and necessarily accompanied with consciousness. That a man sees and hears, and remembers and understands, and reasons, and desires and wills, needs no proof to him, nor indeed is capable of any; nothing being so evident to his mind, not the very existence of any thing without him, nor is it possible, without

out conſciouſneſs, to convince a man of any operation or perception in his own mind. Our agency, from an inward ſelf-determining principle, is as well known to us, as our paſſive perceptions are: As we cannot help ſeeing, hearing, perceiving pleaſure upon ſome occaſions, and pain upon others, whether external or internal; we are as ſenſible that we can, without a conſciouſneſs of any neceſſity impelling, turn our attention to one object in preference to another, we can recal the ideas which have been formerly in our minds, we can variouſly aſſociate them, compare and examine their relations to each other; conſcious that theſe operations do not ariſe from without, but depend wholly upon our ſelves, and we are equally ſenſible, that ſome corporeal motions proceed from the determination of our own wills. Our bodies begin to move, or particular members of them, ſome other bodies alſo are moved by their force, and all ſuch motions are continued or ſtopt, while we are not conſcious of any thing whereby either the continuance or ceſſation are produc'd, but our own ſimple volitions. SERM. I.

Hence ariſe the notions of free or voluntary Agency, and neceſſity as diſtinguiſh'd from

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from it, and of cauſe and effect. Such powers as we find in our ſelves, we can eaſily conceive to belong to other Beings, either in a greater or leſſer degree. As we have clear evidence of perception and ſpontaneous motions in other Animals, tho' different in kind from, and both of them much more confin'd than ours; ſo there is no difficulty in apprehending that there may be intelligence of a much larger comprehenſion than the human, and a more extenſive activity, producing more numerous, and vaſtly greater effects.

We have at the ſame time the idea of what is called paſſive Power, or a capacity of being moved and changed; for we can move our own Bodies and alter the ſituation, the external form and the ſenſible qualities of other bodies, by the uſe of proper means, which we have learn'd by obſervation and experience. And theſe bodies we find to be conſtantly and uniformly liable to the ſame or the like alterations by active force. Whatever appearance there is of action in this ſort of beings, will be found upon cloſer attention, to be really no action at all. A man can eaſily diſtinguiſh between walking, and being carried, between the involuntary motion

motion of his hand, and that which depends solely upon the command of his own will; in the one, he is an agent, in the other wholly passive. In like manner, a stone falling, which we do not conceive to move from an internal principle, because no power of self-motion ever appears in that kind of being, is no more active than the earth on which it makes an impression, or the human body which it bruises, occasioning a sensation of pain: And for other corporeal action, so called, producing various and considerable effects, such as that of fire and air, it can only be attributed to the intestine motion, not spontaneous, of more subtle material parts, and therefore is no more properly action than the motion of intire solid bodies, whose parts are at rest among themselves, that is, do not at all change their situation with respect to each other. SERM. 1.

Thus we are led to distinguish between the positive ideas of blind necessity and intelligent activity, as directly opposite to each other, the one belonging to a cause, the other to an effect. Indeed the negative idea of necessary existence is not self-contradictory, no more than that of infinity; but to say that unintelligent necessity operates, must, I think

SERM. I. think, appear to our minds to be a contradiction in terms; it is to assert operation, and at the same time deny it in a proper sense, and to destroy the very notion of activity, which yet we know as clearly as we do our own existence, being equally conscious of it. There may be, 'tis true, a train of necessary effects, as in the instance of motion communicated to various inanimate bodies, one impelling another successively, and the prior has the appearance of causing the posterior; but really they are alike passive, and to imagine that they operate, is to confound the most inconsistent notions of acting and being acted upon. And as thus the ideas of cause and effect, of active and passive power, of agency and necessity, take their rise from an attention to our selves, our own minds and our bodies; so we cannot avoid observing the same difference among all other beings which we know. I have not indeed the same intuitive knowledge of another man's conscious activity, as I have of my own, but yet I have such evidence of it, as excludes all doubt; nor can I question, but that the earth I walk on, the pen I hold in my hand, and other instruments of action which I use, are passive inanimate things, always

ways yielding to force, and never discovering the least sign of an inward self-determining principle. This distinction runs through the whole universe, as far as we are acquainted with it, and all the knowledge we have of being, our own or any other, leads us to discern the essential irreconcilable contrariety of spontaneous acting, to blind necessity. It follows, that if there be any things or appearances, which we judge to be effects in the world, and who can help observing a multitude of them; to attribute them to unintelligent necessity, is to attribute them to what we can have no notion of as a cause at all; and to say that such necessity is universal, is to say there is not, nor can be any such thing as a cause, or it is to deny the possibility of action. SERM. I.

It is still to be remembered, that the necessity here spoken of, is only such as excludes intelligence and design: The question concerning necessary agency in another sense, that is, whether an intelligent agent acts so necessarily, that it is impossible in the event he should act otherwise than he does, whatever the reason be; this question, I say, is intirely different, and not concern'd in the controversy with *Atheists*; for supposing it to

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be determin'd in the affirmative, ſtill it leaves us the idea of intelligent active power, as a proper cauſe producing effects; and with reſpect to the formation and order of the univerſe, the idea of an intelligent active power, equal to the production of ſuch an effect, which is what we mean by the Deity: But to attribute operation to undeſigning neceſſity, is to attribute it to an abſtract notion, and to confound all our ideas of cauſe and effect; and how can a man, who is as fully convinc'd of active power in himſelf, as of his own exiſtence, and in the ſame manner, that is, by being conſcious of it, reaſon with him who denies the being, and even the poſſibility of ſuch a power? And how abſurd an aſſertion muſt it appear, that nothing at all, not the leaſt being in nature, nor any mode or quality, not ſo much as the leaſt motion, could poſſibly (by an antecedent neceſſity, independant on deſign) have been otherwiſe than it is? Can a man believe this, who ſees ſuch marks of indifferency in a multitude of things, ſo many changes in the face of nature, and knows that ſo many depend on his own choice.

The notion of chance, ſo far as it relates to the preſent ſubject, ariſes wholly from men's ignorance of cauſes. As we ſee very often

in

in the world many changeable appearances, which by the novelty, variety, and other circumſtances of them, we can't help believing to be effects, but not being particularly determined by any neceſſity, nor yet by the intention of any agent which we can obſerve, the word chance is ſubſtituted in the place of the unknown cauſe. And this may be ſufficient for ſome purpoſes, for which the knowledge of cauſes is of no importance. But in an inquiry concerning the origin of things, to apply chance as a kind of hypotheſis to ſolve the appearances of nature, and account for the order of the world, is evidently abſurd; for the word ſo apply'd, can have no other ſignification than ignorance or nothing at all, tho' in ſome men's minds, at leaſt in their manner of expreſſing themſelves, there ſeem to be utterly inconſiſtent ideas, confuſedly jumbled together, as the ſignification of it; for they ſeem to imagine a kind of efficiency at the ſame time that there is no certain determinate cauſe (which it is impoſſible for them to know) that is, they moſt abſurdly attribute a real uncertain efficiency, to nothing, to an empty ſound, or a vague undetermined notion, when, if they would examine their thoughts, they would find that

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SERM. I. the true meaning of chance is only, we don't know what.

Thus we ſee the *Athieſtic* ſchemes concerning the formation of the world, its order and appearances, inſtead of giving a rational, intelligible account, are founded only in ignorance, and indeed are everſive of true human knowledge; the one of them (*Neceſſity*) deſtroys the very idea of intelligent and deſigning activity, which is as clear to our minds as any idea can be, being perceiv'd by an inward conſciouſneſs; the other (*Chance*) is an utter abſurdity, made up of inconſiſtent notions, and really meaning nothing but ignorance.

But I will not content my ſelf with arguing thus againſt the hypotheſis of the *Atheiſts* in general. Let us allow more than they have any pretence in reaſon to demand; let us ſuppoſe neceſſity to ſtand for ſomething, whoſe operation is like that of material cauſes, improperly ſo called, which effect appearances by an undirected impulſe, or without the interpoſition of any deſign; a conſtant uniformity however, muſt be included in the idea of ſuch operation, for neceſſity, whether it be applied to exiſtence, power, or whatever elſe, admits of no change, no inter-

interruption, no variety either in kind or degree : And let chance, however inconſiſtently, be ſuppos'd to be ſomething, we don't know what, which operates, but its operation is not determined, either by a natural neceſſity, or by counſel. Now, if neither of theſe hypotheſes, between which *Atheiſts* have been divided, ſome chooſing the one, ſome the other, and a different *Atheiſtical* hypotheſis never has been, nor can be deviſed; butif, I ſay, neither of them can reaſonably be admitted in accounting for the being and diſpoſition of things, as in fact they appear, there is then nothing left to reſt in but the contrivance and agency of an intelligent cauſe. But that neither of theſe hypotheſes does anſwer the profeſs'd deſign, *viz.* to explain the formation and order of the world, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew clearly, from the common appearances, which cannot poſſibly have eſcap'd the moſt careleſs obſerver. Whatever way we turn our eyes, to whatever part of the univerſe, or the whole of it which is viſible to us, the face of nature has theſe two characters, which no one can help obſerving; it is various, and it is uniform; the former is a convincing argugument againſt neceſſity, and the latter againſt chance. SERM. I.

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First, there appears in the visible frame of nature, a great variety. When we look up to the heavens in the day, our sight, piercing through a thin pellucid medium, terminates in a vast azure concave, without any diversity, only that we see in it a great luminous fiery globe, which we conclude to be the fountain of light, and sometimes interposed clouds, which by observation and reason, we know to be only watery exhalations from the earth, gathered together in a region not far distant from us, and when they are condensed, falling down again in rain; but when we turn our eyes the same way at night, the prospect is quite changed, and a new scene presented to us. The great ruling luminary of the day is withdrawn, and in his stead there are seen numberless lesser lights, among them, one larger than the rest, with various appearance, conspicuous, but pale, and shining with a faint and borrowed lustre. This is the constantly changing appearance of the heavens in every diurnal revolution, besides other periodical alterations in the course of the sun and the moon, which every one must observe. In our own globe, which our eyes can more accurately survey, there appears a much greater diversity; a vast collection

lection of waters, ſupplied by perpetual currents, diſperſed in ſeveral channels, continually flowing into it: On the ſolid part where we live, here mountains and rocks, there plains and valleys, in one place ſtately groves, in another flowry meadows, or fields covered with corn, all ſtock'd with numerous inhabitants; the ſea ſtor'd with fiſhes of ſurprizingly various ſhapes and ſizes, the dry land with as great a diverſity of beaſts, and the air with fowls. I do not ſpeak now of the mutual relations of theſe things, the ſuitableneſs of one to another, and the convenient regular diſpoſition of all, which muſt ſtrike an attentive mind with a ſenſe of natural beauty in the whole, and lead it to the acknowledgment of wiſdom and goodneſs in the author; but upon the moſt indifferent ſuperficial view, which preſents to us ſuch an amazing variety, and without looking narrowly into the compoſition of particular beings, which greatly increaſes it, let any man think, if he can, that blind, undeſigning neceſſity has produc'd ſuch a multiform appearance. The operation of neceſſary cauſes, if they muſt be call'd cauſes, is always alike, and admits of no changes. The mechanical powers of ſprings, weights and

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wheels, and other inſtruments of motion, are exerted uniformly: fire is another neceſſary corporeal agent, which operates always in the ſame manner, tho' it has different effects, according to the different texture of the bodies into which it penetrates, cauſing ſome parts to aſcend in ſmoak and flame, reducing ſome to aſhes, and making ſome liquid or malleable. To give theſe and ſuch like inſtruments, that diverſity of operation, which is neceſſary to anſwer even the low purpoſes of human art, and the conveniencies of human life, there muſt be, we know, a ſuperior intending Cauſe, to guide the application of them; but that ſuch neceſſary cauſes, as ſenſeleſs atoms, ſhould, out of themſelves, without any skill in the application of their force, or the interpoſal of any intelligent direction, produce ſuch a wonderful variety as there is in the viſible appearance of the world, the liquid waters, and the more fluid air of a different conſtitution, the ſtrangely ſubtle and penetrating light, the ſolid earth, and the firmer rocks, the almoſt infinite kinds of vegetables, diverſe in ſhape, colour, flower and fruit; not only the many ſpecies of animals and the numberleſs individuals, each intire, but the yet more various parts of their compoſition,

position, the solid and the fluid, the organs of motion and sensation; this is such a paradox, it must be an understanding of a very odd make, that can believe it. SERM. I.

The *Atheist* may next betake himself to chance, which is capricious enough, and variable, to answer the greatest imaginable or possible diversity of productions, if it be admitted to have any share in them. Necessity is limited, and must always produce exactly similar and unvarying effects, but fickle chance is tied down to no rule of operation, if it can operate at all; supposing it to determine the existence, and the order of things, what should hinder the diversity which there is in the world, nay, an infinitely greater diversity; why may not water, and air, and light, and rocks, and animals, and vegetables, all kinds of substances, and all possible qualities, be jumbled together? But as the variety which there is in the appearances of nature, is an invincible argument against their being the production of necessary causes, an equally strong objection lies against the hypothesis of chance, namely, their uniformity. Every one must be sensible, that *this* is as truly the character of the face of nature, as the *other*. Whenever we turn our eyes to the heavens,

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heavens, they have the ſame uniform aſpect as when we view'd them before, the ſun and the moon, and the ſtars, hold their places, and go on conſtantly in their courſes, producing a regular ſucceſſion of day and night, ſummer and winter: One wou'd think *they continue after an ordinance*, and are ſubject to a law, rather than guided by giddy hazard. In our lower world, not only *the hills are everlaſting*, and the *rocks not removed out of their place*, but the waters, however eaſily yielding to force, keep their perpetual channels, and the whole ſelf-balanc'd globe hangs in looſe fluid air, which has no ſtrength to ſupport it. The tender herbs which ſeem to die every winter, revive again in the ſpring, and cover the earth with a renewed verdure; the living things of ſo brittle a frame and ſhort-liv'd, yet do not quite diſappear and give way to different kinds, which being equally poſſible, have an equal chance for production, if chance ruled, but the ſame ſpecies are perpetuated in a conſtant ſucceſſion. If this argument were purſued more minutely, it would ſtill appear the ſtronger. If we do not take the works of nature in the groſs, and content our ſelves with a bare view of their outſides, but examine their interior conſtitution,

ſtitution, the evidence againſt hazard in their formation, will ſtill increaſe, for it muſt be plain to every one, that the more complicated any pieces of work, machines or ſyſtems are, deſign is ſtill the more apparent in their ſimilarity. But the moſt obvious view is ſufficient to our purpoſe, for let any man conſider whether he would not make a difference between heaps of ſand and ſtones huddled together in confuſion, and a regular building, between a fortuitous jumble of pieces of braſs iron and lead, and a well going clock, between a mob, or a tumultuous aſſembly of men without any order, and a well form'd political ſociety, or a well diſciplin'd army; let him conſider, I ſay, whether he would not make a difference in theſe caſes, preſuming there was counſel and deſign in ſome, but not in others. And now, if we apply the ſame reaſoning to the works of nature, whereas, upon the ſuppoſition of chance, there is infinite to one againſt any certain determin'd production, for chance ranges unguided, to the utmoſt verge of poſſibility, when in fact, we ſee amidſt an almoſt infinite variety of things, there is ſuch an obvious conſtant uniformity in the appearances of the world, is it not ſurprizing, that it ſhou'd

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The argument, so far as we have proceeded, seems to be fully conclusive, and we may confidently rest in it as prov'd, that neither the hypothesis of chance, nor of undesigning necessity, can account for the appearances of the universe. But we shall be more directly convinced that there is manifested intelligence and design in the frame of the mundane system, if in the next place we consider what the ancients called πανκαλα καλως, the beautiful and harmonious, the regular and convenient, the amiable and good, with which the world every where abounds. This point admits of a large illustration, all the discoveries which have been made in astronomy, natural philosophy, and natural history, tending to shew that there is a fitness in things, a correspondence in the parts of the world, one answering to another so as to demonstrate wise contrivance, and unity of design in the whole. There is not one region of the universe of which we have any knowledge, the heavens, the air, the earth, or the sea, not one intire particular being which we have the means of inquiring narrowly

rowly into, one fiſh, one fowl, one beaſt or one tree; there is not one of all theſe that does not appear to be artificially made, and does not by the exact proportion and harmony of its parts, diſcover deſign in the whole of its conſtitution. And indeed, in theſe laſt ages particularly, men of leiſure and penetration have ſo happily employed their time and their underſtandings in the ſtudy of nature, as to ſet the argument in a very clear light, proving beyond all rational contradiction, the wiſdom and goodneſs of God in his works, to the utter confuſion of thoſe who are either ſo ſtupidly blind or obſtinately wicked as not to *regard the operation of his hands.*

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But I ſhall only inſiſt on thoſe things which every underſtanding muſt diſcern, the appearances which every eye ſees, or the obſervations of fact which muſt occur to the moſt unattentive of mankind, who has but common ſenſe; for even *they* will be ſufficient to eſtabliſh this great truth upon. Let us firſt conſider the viſible world at large, as it appears to a naked eye, and to a plain, unimproved underſtanding. No man of the meaneſt capacity, and the loweſt way of thinking, can be ignorant that there is a relation

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relation between the parts of the univerſe; that from the ſun there is a communication of light and heat to the earth, which is the apparent cauſe of the various productions upon its ſurface, and of ſo manifold uſe to its inhabitants that they could not ſubſiſt without it. By that genial warmth tender plants of different kinds ſpring up from ſmall ſeeds, and are nouriſhed, ſome into ſtrong ſtalks, ſome into low ſhrubs, and ſome into ſtately trees, all bearing fruits which are the food of animals: And among animals there is an order and mutual uſefulneſs, the other kinds being in ſubordination to man, who, by the prerogative of his ſuperior nature, claims a dominion over their labours and their lives. To man particularly, and to other living things proportionably to the lower purpoſes of their being, the light of the ſun is ſo comfortable and ſo uſeful, that we cannot conceive how the ends of a life, conſtituted as ours is, could be anſwered, and its conveniencies obtained, without it. But that light, and the nouriſhing heat with which it is accompanied, is ſo conveniently diſtributed, as in the beſt manner to illuminate and animate the whole earth, the globular figure of which requires a diurnal rotation,

tation, that all the dwellers on it may be supplied in their turns; nor do any of them, especially not the principal, suffer by the darkness they are overspread with, whilst the sun visits others with his benign influences, for night gives man a necessary vacation from the labours of the day. But no one can avoid observing the changes of the seasons, occasion'd by the annual (apparent) course of the sun; if he kept one perpetual track, the greatest part of the earth must be uninhabited, either by reason of excessive heat or cold, the gloomy regions never visited by him, must be shut up in continual darkness and impenetrable frost, while the climates on which his beams should still directly fall, must be quite burnt up, yielding no sustenance for man or beast. But instead of these extremes, how commodiously is this great benefit dispensed, by the fixed periodical revolution of the great orb in a yearly course, so directed, as to prevent, as far as can be, the excesses both of heat and cold, and produce the grateful and useful variety of summer and winter, seed-time and harvest. Again, if we take but even a slight view of this lower world it self, we shall see an admirable correspondence between its parts; however different

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ferent they are, yet every one fitted to another, and to all the reſt, ſo as to make the whole a convenient dwelling-place for the ſeveral tribes of animals which live upon it, and for mankind eſpecially. The ſolid earth ſupports our heavy bodies, the thin air we breathe, is abſolutely neceſſary to our preſervation; and no one can be ignorant of how manifold uſe water is, not only more remotely, by ſerving the purpoſes of vegetation, but by the immediate refreſhment it gives, and as a means of the decent and comfortable enjoyment of life. Every element has its proper inhabitants, which by the peculiar make and organization of their bodies, are adapted to it; the fiſhes have fins, the land animals feet and legs, and even the groveling reptile is furniſhed with the proper inſtruments of its ſlow motion: All theſe ſo various, that the kinds of them can ſcarcely be numbered, have food convenient for them, and every thing which is ſuitable to their ſeveral natures.

Now, even upon this general imperfect view, let any man judge whether there be not clear evidence of contrivance and deſign in the formation of our world, indeed, whether it does not appear ſuch a regular con-

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nected ſyſtem, as conſidering the infinite variety of its parts, all of them ſo exquiſitely fitted to each other, and diſpos'd in ſuch exact order, as to make a perfect harmony in the whole; whether, I ſay, conſidering this, any underſtanding leſs than infinite, could have form'd the model? This is ſo plain, I do not think it needful to uſe many words in illuſtrating it; the truth is, I cannot help concluding, that without the moſt unaccountable infatuation or perverſeneſs, every one muſt acknowledge it. Surely it would be far leſs abſurd to imagine, that the moſt curious machine ever fram'd by human art, the moſt beautiful edifice, the fineſt picture, or the moſt delightful muſical harmony; that theſe, any, or all of them, made themſelves, by a merely caſual mixture of their parts, than that this ſtupendous and moſt artificial fabric of the univerſe, aroſe from nothing, or from rude, utterly indiſpoſed materials, by undirected neceſſity or hazard. SERM. I.

Before we proceed any further, let us ſtop here to make one obvious reflection, or rather indulge our ſelves in thoſe thoughts which will naturally ariſe. The human mind is ſo conſtituted, as to have a pleaſing ſenſe of beauty, in order, proportion and harmony,

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particularly, as it is thereby led to apprehend wiſdom and good deſign in the contrivance. It is this which affords ſo various and delightful entertainment, from the curious productions of the artiſt's hand, but firſt of his mind; one admires ſtatuary, another architecture, another gardening, others are delighted with the compoſitions which are merely the work of genius, without any groſs materials, ſuch as poetry and hiſtory; but ſtill it is the regularity that pleaſes, the proportion of the parts, and the harmony of the whole; and the more complicated and various the matter or the ſubject is, it is the more pleaſing, provided the regularity be apparent. Why then ſhould we not admire the beauties of nature, nay, don't we all agree, that thoſe are the moſt beautiful works of art, which copy the moſt exactly after nature, and are the trueſt imitation of her original forms.

Let us therefore fix our thoughts in a ſteady contemplation of the world about us, view it in this light, as a regular finiſh'd ſyſtem, diſcovering exquiſite skill in the exact proportion of all its parts, and a perfect ſymmetry in the whole. In vain ſhall we ſeek for beauty, harmony and order, in the productions of human genius; if we turn our eyes

eyes with attention to all things around us, in their ſimple natural appearance, the idea of a nobler regularity, and more grand deſign, will ariſe in our minds. Is there any image made by painting or ſculpture, equal to the human face and perſon, any map or landskip to the natural ſoil it ſelf, diverſified with real rocks and hills, tall trees in bloſſom or laden with fruit, and cattle ranging the wide paſture? How wonderful is the ſtructure of a ſingle animal, inimitable by art, its parts made according to exact meaſure, and ſo conveniently ſituated, that every one performs its proper functions, uſeful to the whole! this animal has a near relation to the kind, the kind it ſelf to other ſpecies; all in ſuch a due diſpoſition, that every individual is provided for, living commodiouſly on this terreſtrial globe, which continually receives its vital warmth whereby they are nouriſhed, from the far diſtant heavenly bodies, holding on their perpetual courſe. Here is a noble ſubject of meditation, to a mind that delights in harmony and order; but whither will it lead us? Directly to the acknowledgment of perfect underſtanding in the univerſe, of All-ruling wiſdom, in conjunction with the moſt amiable goodneſs, the true compleat o-

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riginal beauty, the fountain of all excellence and perfection. *Praiſe the Lord all ye his works, praiſe him ye angels and all his hoſts, praiſe him ſun and moon, praiſe him ye ſtars of light, praiſe him ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that are above the heavens. Let them praiſe the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created, he hath alſo eſtabliſhed them for ever, he hath made a decree which ſhall not paſs. Praiſe the Lord from the earth, ye dragons and all deeps, fire and hail, ſnow and vapour, ſtormy wind fulfilling his word, mountains and all hills, fruitful trees and all cedars, beaſts and all cattle, creeping things and flying fowl. Kings of the earth and all people, princes and judges. Both young men and maidens, old men and children. Let them praiſe the name of the Lord, for his name alone is excellent, his glory is above the earth and heaven.* * *O Lord, how manifold are thy works, in wiſdom thou haſt made them all, the earth is full of thy riches, ſo is the great and wide ſea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both great and ſmall beaſts. Theſe wait all upon thee, that thou mayeſt give them their meat in due*

* Pſal. cxlviii.

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ſeaſon. That thou giveſt them they gather, SERM. *thou openeſt thy hand, they are filled with* I. *good* *. Therefore let every one of us reſolve with the devout Pſalmiſt †, *I will ſing unto the Lord as long as I live, I will ſing praiſes to my God while I have being.*

* Pſal. 104. *v.* 24, 25, 27, 28. † *v.* 33.

SERMON II.

The Being of God prov'd from the Animal and Rational Life.

Rom. i. 19, 20.

Becauſe that which may be known of God is manifeſt in them, for God hath ſhewed it unto them. For the inviſible things of him from the creation of the world, are clearly ſeen, being underſtood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.

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THE main point in debate between us and *Atheiſts*, is concerning the intelligence of the ſupreme Being. They will not deny, that ſomething muſt have exiſted from eternity, either the world in its preſent form, or the materials of it put into form by chance or neceſſity; they will acknowledge too that the eternal ſelf-exiſtent Being muſt be call'd, in ſome ſenſe, the cauſe of all things; and perhaps they may add, that it has a kind of paſſive

passive perception and consciousness: The ancient *Hylozoists*, ascrib'd life and understanding to matter, whereby it form'd it self into regular systems; and some of the modern *Atheists* pretend to acknowledge a sort of necessary perception in the Deity, meaning by the Deity the universal substance, as they call it, that is, the intire system of things, comprehending all particular beings as its parts: But an active intelligence, as the proper efficient cause of the world, and distinct from the world, designing and directing its formation, all *Atheists* deny and must deny. SERM. II.

This is what I have propos'd to prove, shewing, according to the Apostle's assertion in the text, from the creation of the world, that the invisible things of God are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made; and I have in a former discourse, insisted on the general order of the visible world, the relation and mutual dependence of its parts, such as the heavens and the earth, with the vast number and various kinds of beings it contains, clearly demonstrating it to be one beautiful connected system, which necessarily required an active designing intelligence to its formation. But besides this general proof, distinct arguments

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to eſtabliſh the ſame principle, may be drawn from particular appearances in nature, which cannot poſſibly be explained by the fortuitous or neceſſary concourſe of atoms, or any rude and unprepared materials. And,

The firſt I ſhall mention is the animal life, of which we ſee a numberleſs variety; bodies growing up from very ſmall beginnings, by imperceptible degrees, to a large bulk, and animated by a principle, which is endued with ſenſe and ſelf-motion. The ſtructure of animal bodies is curious, conſiſting of parts exquiſitely fine, and moſt artificially diſpoſed for receiving nouriſhment and a gradual increaſe; but above all, the faculties of perception and ſpontaneous motion, are never to be accounted for, without the interpoſal of an intelligent Cauſe.

Some mechanic philoſophers, even who profeſs to believe a Deity, have made too near approaches to *Atheiſm*, at leaſt, too much ſerv'd its cauſe, by pretending to explain all the Phænomena of the world, without any divine interpoſition; but they appear to be very bungling world-makers, and their hypotheſis, not only defective, failing in a tolerably fair ſolution of many very important and very common appearances, but

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some of their essential principles have been demonstrated to be false: Especially in the point before us, their schemes are most remarkably defeated, for they have never been able to give, I do not say, a certain and satisfying, but even a plausible account of the animal constitution, in any state of its existence, or any step of its progress, from its commencement to its perfection, especially, not of the sentient and self-moving powers. The formation of the fœtus is, as the scripture justly calls it, a work *curious and wonderful*, according to a divine model; *its members were all writ in the volume of God's book*, that is, the composition of all its parts exactly answers to his designing idea. Not to insist on the modern discoveries, whereby it seems probable, that the nutrition of an animal, in the dark recess appointed for its first abode, and where its existence has been generally thought to commence, is no more than extending and enlarging upon the slender pre-existent, vital stamen, which leads us still more clearly to the acknowledgment of a mighty creating hand, the wise Author of nature; not to insist on this, it is evident to an attentive mind, that no general impulse or motion impress'd upon matter, according

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to mechanical laws, can give us the leaſt tolerable pretence for imagining that, in the firſt ſtage of its being, an animal cou'd have been produc'd without a ſpecial intelligent direction.

The notions of the Epicurean Atheiſts, concerning the origin of animals, and man in particular, are ſo ridiculouſly abſurd, that it is ſcarce decent enough to repeat them. They profeſs to imagine, that as numberleſs atoms, after moving fortuitouſly through a ſucceſſive infinite duration, in an infinite void, at laſt, by various unguided rencounters, accidentally jumbled themſelves into this terraqueous globe, and theſe beautiful celeſtial ſpheres; ſo the earth having been long barren, yet ſtill retaining the motive quality of its parts, (no body knows from whence derived) and therefore labouring with a ſtrong actual inteſtine motion, in proceſs of time brought forth monſtrous unſhap'd births, which had ſome little likeneſs to living things of the ſeveral kinds, and it may be ſome low beginnings of life which could not long ſubſiſt for want of proper vehicles; at length, after many imperfect eſſays, growing more skilful in the plaſtic art, ſtrange! how that ſhould come to paſs! ſhe produc'd finiſh'd com-

complete animals. If one ſhould ask how it happens that in all ages of the world, of which we have any hiſtorical monuments, there are not the leaſt footſteps of ſuch generation. No man ever ſaw, or pretends to have ſeen animals of any kind, perfect or imperfect, iſſue from the teeming womb of mother earth: what can the reaſon be according to this philoſophy? Is it that ſhe became barren by age? This is hard to conceive, conſidering that ſhe came to her prolific virtue ſo late as after an eternity was paſt, and that the conſtituent atoms had preſerved their vigour in an unwearied dance thro' numberleſs ages; or did ſhe wiſely (but who made her wiſe?) reſign her fertility, when the ſettled law (by what direction?) took place for the more orderly propagation of the ſpecies? Again, if it be inquired in what condition theſe earth-born animals appeared; did they come to the world in a ſtate of maturity, and of different ſexes, ready to increaſe and multiply? This is the account given in the Moſaic hiſtory of the creation, but muſt be reſolv'd as it is moſt reaſonably in that hiſtory, into the mighty command of the Creator as the ſole cauſe. But if the animals were thruſt out in infancy (which the Epicureans

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SERM. II. chooſe to ſay, that their formation in every ſtep of its progreſs may look the more like random work) the queſtion then will be, how were they cared for, how defended in that weak and helpleſs ſtate? Here the moſt precarious ſuppoſitions are heap'd up very unphiloſophically, a ſeveral hypotheſis to ſolve every particular difficulty, too plainly ſhewing, that philoſophers of this ſort will admit of any thing, be it ever ſo abſurd, rather than a Deity, and having reſolved in their hearts that they will not ſee God, they indulge their imaginations in the moſt unbounded liberty of forming pretences, whereby they may harden themſelves in unbelief.

Since I have mentioned ſome of theſe inferior appearances in the animal kingdom, I ſhall take notice of one more which ſtrongly evinces intelligent direction, that is the conſervation of the diſtinct ſpecies by a regular propagation. Is it not a ſurprizing thing, and to them who deny a governing wiſdom in the univerſe, utterly inexplicable, that for ſo many ages wherein we have any knowledge of animals being in the world, unerring nature has followed one invariable rule in their production? The ſeveral kinds remain as diſtinct

distinct as ever they were, they have never run into confusion, nor mix'd with each other: We see no such thing as Syrens and Centaurs, which are only the creatures of human imagination; and yet if we exclude ruling wisdom, they might have a chance for actual existence as well as intire men or intire horses, intire women, or intire fishes. But there has never once such a monster happened as a human face joined to a brutal body, or so much as the head of a bull placed upon the neck of an ass: Nay, so true is nature to her rule, and so nicely accurate in preserving the distinction, that when two kinds so nearly resemble each other, as the horse and the ass, that there is not difference enough in the outward form to direct the instinct of the sexes, and therefore they mingle together; there is no farther propagation of that sort, the anomalous breed terminates in the first production, and no new species arises. SERM. II.

Again, as none of the species have ever run into each other, so it does not appear that any of them have been lost, for want of the necessary means and opportunities of propagation. This evidently depends on the distinction of the sexes, and a proneness in them

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to continue their kind. Strange! that in ſo many deſcents there ſhould never have happened, if hazard ruled and not wiſe providence, all males of, at leaſt one ſpecies, or all females, or that the individuals of one ſex ſhould not ſo out-number the other, as to put an end to, at leaſt very much diminiſh the race; (but we ſee the contrary in fact;) and that there ſhould have been a never failing determination in the individuals to fulfil their natural law of propagation. The ſum is this, theſe appearances I have mentioned in the animal world, amount to the three following obſervations of fact, which may be depended on as certain and conſtant, and let the Atheiſt, if he can, reconcile them to his beloved chance or blind neceſſity. Firſt, that there is belonging to every kind of animals, a diſtinguiſhing nature, by the direction whereof all the matter by which they are nouriſhed, or an addition is made to their bulk, whether in the womb or out of it, is moulded into their particular and proper form. This *nature* we all acknowledge in the forms of living things, for when any extraordinary production happens, deficient in members, or with ſupernumerary members, or a ſituation of them different from what

what is uſual in the kind, we preſent- SERM.
ly call it monſtrous and unnatural. 2*dly*, II.
The ſpecies are preſerved by the diſtinction of ſexes in the individuals, and there has been of males and females belonging to the ſeveral kinds, in all the generations which have hitherto paſs'd, ſuch a proportion, as all circumſtances conſidered, is beſt calculated to anſwer the purpoſe of perpetuating the ſpecies. 3*dly*, The propagation thus provided for, depends upon inſtincts planted in the individuals, and theſe have always appeared ſtrong enough to anſwer their end.

If we proceed, in the next place, to conſider the principal, but very obvious phænomena of the animal, and eſpecially of the human conſtitution, *viz.* perception and activity with all their modes, in the ſame view with the frame of the viſible world, and the origin and regular propagation of the ſenſitive kinds, that is if we conſider them only as evidences of intelligence and deſign in their production; they add a force to the argument which, one would think, ſhould appear to an attentive mind irreſiſtable. For ſurely it can never be imagined, with any appearance of reaſon, that ſenſation and its different modes, ſeeing, hearing, &c. ſpontaneous

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taneous motion, and the various inſtincts of animals producing ſuch a regular œconomy in their lives, each individual caring for it ſelf and purſuing its own ends, by the proper uſe of its powers and organs, and all of the ſeveral tribes conſpiring together to promote the common good of the whole, ſo far as their ſeveral conditions require; much leſs that the powers of reaſon and reflection, the ſocial and moral affections wherewith men are endued, together with the improvements of them in the intire ſcheme of human life, and human ſocieties, comprehending ſo much order, contrivance and various enjoyment; it cannot, I ſay, be imagin'd, that all theſe are to be attributed to undeſigning neceſſity or chance.

There is a variety with uniformity and beautiful order, in the ſenſitive and intellectual, as well as in the material world, which muſt ſtrike every conſiderate perſon with a ſenſe of grand deſign in its formation. As in the corporeal ſyſtem, vaſtly numerous parts, all properly ſituated and commodiouſly diſpos'd, with an apparent mutual relation and uſefulneſs, is a clear demonſtration of wiſe contrivance in the whole; ſo the no leſs, perhaps much greater diverſity of percipient and active

tive powers, with the different degrees of them, which appears under visible forms, at the same time a regular unchanging similarity in the several species, which could no more proceed from chance, than the variety could from undirected force; and if we add to all this the convenient disposal of them, so that every individual power has a full scope for its exercise, and instead of interfering with each other, there is an apparent mutual correspondence throughout the whole of their state, and a subordination of use, according to the measures of their perfection, the lower still serving the higher, as inanimate nature ministers a constant supply to them all; this is at least an equally invincible proof of design in the author of the system. In short, the animal and rational inhabitants of this globe, even upon a superficial view of them separately, of their natures, capacities and conditions, and the œconomy which appears in the most obvious face of this living world, carry such irrefragable evidences of design, that referring to the comparison us'd by some of the ancients, it would be an equal, or even a greater absurdity to resolve these appearances into blind necessity or chance, than to account for the composure of the finest poem, by the

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SERM. II. neceſſary or merely fortuitous jumble of letters. How ſtrangely is the human underſtanding capable of being miſled by prejudices and prepoſſeſſions, ſo as not to diſcern the cleareſt truths?

But if we conſider more particularly theſe principal appearances of the animal life, eſpecially the limited rational faculties of man, the argument will be yet more convincing to prove unoriginated intelligence and activity in the univerſe. I obſerv'd before, that by attending to our ſelves, and to the report of our ſenſes, concerning external objects, we have the eſſentially different ideas of percipient and unpercipient beings, of cauſe and effect, of active and paſſive powers, or of voluntary agency and neceſſity, as diſtinguiſh'd from it: And now I add, that we cannot avoid obſerving in our ſelves different kinds of perception, namely, ſenſe and underſtanding. By the *former* we have only the ideas of what are called primary ſenſible qualities, as extenſion, ſolidity, diviſibility and figure, and other ideas, ſuch as heat, coldneſs, colours, ſharpneſs, ſweetneſs and the like, which our reaſon tells us, are not in the objects themſelves, but perceptions or phantaſms rais'd in our minds by the various

texture,

texture, figure, motion and ſituation of parts, which are all we can conceive in ſuch beings, that can produce any effect. Every one of theſe latter ideas however, takes in the primary ſenſible qualities; whatever appears to us hot, cold, coloured, *&c.* appears at the ſame time extended, diviſible and figured. But we find alſo in our own minds, perceptions of another kind, which take in no ideas of any ſenſible qualities. By attending to the exerciſe of our own powers and the various modes of thinking, we have notions, and the knowledge of truths, which have no manner of relation to extenſion, magnitude, diviſibility, figure or motion. But the other and lower, even the ſentient principle, opens to us a ſcene in nature different from the curious and beautiful fabric of the heavens, the earth, and all other inanimate effects; for *they* require nothing beſides unactive and unintelligent matter for the ſubject of them, tho' they lead us to the acknowledgment of wiſdom and deſign in the directing and diſpoſing Cauſe; but *here* ſeems to be in the effect it ſelf a ſuperior order of Being, having properties and powers of a kind intirely different, and this ſeems to be in all the various ſorts of animals, in ſome degree or other, ſome of

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them being more, ſome leſs perfectly ſenſitive. It is true, we can't know what paſſes in brutes, as we do what paſſes in our own minds; yet when we conſider their organs in the exterior form, and in the anatomy of them, very much reſembling our own, and when we conſider the effects which follow the preſenting, and the application of material objects to them, very like thoſe which appear in us on the ſame occaſion, we cannot well avoid concluding, that they have the external ſenſes of hearing, ſeeing, feeling, taſting and ſmelling, in common with us, and the like perception of ſenſible qualities as we have. Some Philoſophers have repreſented them as meer machines, and the whole œconomy of their ſenſes and operations, as if it were no more than a curious piece of clockwork, form'd with exquiſite art. But this notion is deſervedly exploded, for indeed the obvious appearances can never be accounted for by any mechanical hypotheſis.

But let us conſider the ſenſitive powers as we find them in our ſelves, and though they are the lower part of our nature, far leſs excellent than ſome other faculties of the human mind, yet they ſeem to be of quite another kind and original, and of a higher nature

ture than the groſs corporeal part, or any of its organs, indeed higher than any naturally incogitative and unactive being is capable of, at leaſt, without the interpoſition of a ſuperior deſigning Agent. If now we have found a being, nay, a multitude of beings in the world, eſſentially diſtinguiſh'd from others by the peculiar powers of perception, exercis'd in a variety of modes, this muſt overthrow all the *Atheiſtical* hypotheſes; for their neceſſary mechanical cauſes in an infinite ſeries, and atoms by a fortuitous motion compounding and diverſifying themſelves into various forms, are wholly inſufficient to produce ſuch effects. But this particular appearance leads us directly to acknowledge ſomething reſembling it, rather ſuperior to it, that is underſtanding in the author. For can any one imagine, that a blind undeſigning cauſe could have produc'd perception, diſtinguiſh'd into ſo many kinds, as of colours, ſounds, pain, pleaſure, *&c.* all united in one undivided principle. This perceptive faculty is a low image of intelligence, which is very reaſonably attributed to a free intending Agent, who may, himſelf poſſeſt of perfect power and wiſdom, communicate various degrees of thoſe perfections to his works, as he ſees fit, but can never

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with any pretence of reaſon, be accounted for by chance or neceſſity, or by any unperceiving cauſe, eſpecially conſidering it as an abiding principle, uniformly ſubſervient to certain ends, ſubſiſting in a regular diverſity of outward forms, and in a great variety of degrees.

This will be ſtill more evident, if we conſider in conjunction with ſenſe, that other principal appearance of the animal life, ſpontaneous motion. We know that inanimate things at reſt, neceſſarily continue ſo, till they are moved by a force ſuperior to their own power of reſiſtance; but animal bodies, either the whole, or particular members of them, change their poſture, begin to move or continue in motion, by an inward activity and voluntary ſelf-determination. This, one would think, ſhould be a very ſurprizing phænomenon to the *Atheiſt*, who denies the exiſtence of an original active Cauſe. But how does he get rid of the difficulty? Why, he roundly denies any ſuch thing as ſelf-motion, and alledges, that all which looks like it in animal action, is the meer effect of the inward agitation of the machine, raiſed by the impulſe of external objects on the organs of ſenſe. But to this account the fact does not at

all

all agree, as every one may be eaſily ſatisfied by his own obſervation. Tho' 'tis true that in our ſenſations we are paſſive, and they neceſſarily ariſe, according to an eſtabliſh'd law, by the impreſſion which certain objects make upon us; we cannot avoid the perception of pleaſure and pain upon ſome occaſions, nor the hearing of ſounds and ſeeing of colours, when the organs are duly diſpos'd, and theſe ſenſations are neceſſarily attended with ſome motions in the animal ſyſtem; yet for the actions which are called voluntary, we know that, as they are never properly cauſed, they are often not ſo much as occaſioned by the impulſe of external objects. Is not every man conſcious to himſelf that he moves his hands, his feet and other parts of his body, by the ſole command of his will, frequently when there is no impulſe at all from without, exciting him to it, and that the proper agent in ſuch caſes is the ſame conſcious ſelf, which is intimately preſent in all parts of the body, perceiving the impreſſions which are made upon it by its organs of ſenſe. We cannot indeed explain the nature and manner of this operation, nor would the exacteſt knowledge we can attain of the animal œconomy enable us to underſtand it; for tho' a SERM. II.

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learned anatomiſt may deſcribe the muſcles, and ſhow their convenient ſituation, fitting them by their contractions to move the ſeveral members; yet how the act of the ſoul contracts thoſe muſcles, how it directs the courſe of the animal ſpirits, or influences whatever are the neareſt and moſt immediate inſtruments of the animal motion; this he is as ignorant of, as the moſt unskilful ruſtic, but this they equally know, and all mankind know it by an inward conſciouſneſs, which is the ſureſt evidence, that the motion takes its riſe from, being conſtantly and uniformly produc'd by a ſelf-determining power within.

Here then is a plain familiar example, directing us to form an idea of a mind acting upon matter, a percipient, ſelf-determining principle, moving bodies only by a volition. By this the ſupreme firſt Mover has left us a witneſs within our ſelves, which confounds the cavils of *Atheiſm*. Shall it be ſaid, that the whole ſyſtem of the univerſe, and all it contains, is to be reſolv'd into mechaniſm, without a directing immechanical principle, that the being of ſuch a principle, which is the ſpring of thought and active operations on unthinking matter, is unintelligible, and

that

that no motion can be conceiv'd to be effected but by a material impulſe; all this which *Atheiſts* call abſurd, is exemplified in that little ſyſtem, a ſingle animal. Shall we not acknowledge, that he who form'd this percipient ſelf-determining power, the ruler of the body which it inhabits, yet unknowing how it exerciſes its dominion; that he, I ſay, is poſſeſs'd of ſuperior intelligence and power, and is it not eaſily conceiveable, that ſuch intelligence and power may have a command over large material ſyſtems? This animal life, tho' far more excellent than inanimate nature, which yet is none of it without the characters of the author's perfections ſtampt upon it, gives us but a faint notion of the Deity; let us riſe to ſomething higher, and which carries in it a brighter and more illuſtrious image of the divine underſtanding. SERM. II.

What I mean, are the intellectual powers of the human nature, far tranſcending the ſenſitive, both in the excellence of their kind, and the extent of their exerciſe: When ſenſe and underſtanding perceive the ſame object, it is after a very different manner. The former diſcerns what we call the ſenſible qualities of material objects, that is, thoſe objects by effluvia from them, or by the intervention of

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of ſome corporeal medium, make ſuch impreſſions on our organs, as are the occaſion of exciting certain ideas in the mind, and here the capacity of ſenſe terminates, it can go no further. But we are conſcious of another power which can review thoſe ideas, examine their nature and relations, and by comparing them together, diſcover truths concerning them, which the merely animal capacity does not reach to. For example, when a coloured object is preſented to us, the idea of red, white, black, or any other colour is rais'd; here the report of ſenſe ſtops, and many unattentive perſons, too haſtily forming a judgment upon it, conclude that theſe are qualities really inherent in the bodies themſelves: But upon a more cloſe attention and careful enquiry, others are ſatisfied that they are really no more than our own ſenſations, cauſed by ſome particular diſpoſition of parts in the ſurface of the coloured body, giving ſuch a determination to the rays of light, that they form thoſe images in the organs of ſight, which are the nearer object of our perception. Our reaſoning in this and many other inſtances upon ſenſe, ſhows a power ſuperior to *it* in the mind, which apprehends the ſame objects after

ter a quite different manner; we have thoughts concerning them, which ſenſe could never have ſuggeſted, we conſider their relations, their ſimilitude and diſſimilitude, we form general notions, wherein the mind abſtracts from individual exiſtence, which the ſenſitive faculty is not capable of; we diſcern the agreement or diſagreement of our own ideas, their connexion and dependence; we form propoſitions upon them, affirming and denying, diſtinguiſhing between truth and falſhood, and having clearly perceiv'd ſome truths, we proceed in our ſearch after more, by conſideration and arguing. Now, tho' the occaſion of all theſe and others modes of thinking, may be introduc'd by the ſenſes, every one who attends, muſt be convinced, that the exerciſe of the mind in them is very different from ſenſation.

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But there are other objects of the underſtanding, not deriv'd either immediately or remotely from the ſenſes. Conſciouſneſs is no image or repreſentation of any thing without, that clear intuitive knowledge we have of our being and our own powers, with all their various exerciſes and acts, ſuch as perceptions of every kind, ſenſations, reflections, remembrance, judgment, reaſoning, ſelf-determinations,

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terminations, affections, desire, fear, hope, sorrow, joy; all these are accompanied with a consciousness in the mind, which does not, nor possibly can proceed from any external object, for an external object can only imprint something of it self, nothing at all of the inward active discerning self. Besides, the sensation we are now considering, as different from, and inferior to understanding, still takes in the qualities of passive matter, extension, divisibility, figure, *&c.* but there are other ideas in the mind as real and distinct, which do not represent extended, figured, divisible substance, nor have the least relation to any of its properties or modifications, such as the ideas of virtue, of honesty, benevolence, gratitude, justice, compassion, which have no manner of affinity with sensible qualities, yet are of great importance to the purposes of our being, the objects of strong affection, and a conciousness of them yields the most solid and substantial pleasure to the soul; we reason upon them as clearly, perceive truths concerning them, and draw consequences, in which the mind rests as much satisfied of their evidence, as in its knowledge of the figures, gravity and other affections of matter. And thus it plainly appears,

pears, that there are in the human ſoul in- SERM. II.
tellectual powers, ſuperior to, and different from the ſenſitive, both in reſpect of the objects about which they are converſant, and the nature and manner of their exerciſe, when the objects are the ſame.

If it be ſo, we have a more clear diſcovery than the animal powers can give us, of ſelf-original intelligence in the univerſe, for, either the underſtandings we find our ſelves poſſeſs'd of muſt be eternal and unoriginated, which no mortal ever imagined, or they muſt be originally derived from an intelligent Author, to whom theſe characters belong.

The reaſoning of *Socrates* on this ſubject ſeems to be very ſtrong and convincing, as it is related by *Xenophon* *: After he had endeavoured to prove the wiſdom of the Deity by the beautiful order of the material world, and particularly the frame of the human body, he argues to this pupoſe, that as every man is conſcious of a mind, an intelligent principle within him, he is thereby led to acknowledge underſtanding in the world without him. For, as in the compoſition of our bodies, there is deriv'd to us a part, and

* Memorab. Socrat. Lib. 1.

but

SERM. II. but a very ſmall part of the ſolid, the liquid and other ingredients, in the mighty maſs of ſurrounding matter, it would be very ſtrange, if reaſon, which is our higheſt excellence, ſhould come to us by ſome lucky chance from nothing, or no intelligent cauſe; and that there ſhould be no ſuch thing originally in the univerſe or the whole of being, when yet we ſee the plain marks of it in the orderly diſpoſition of all things.

The Stoics us'd juſt the ſame reaſoning, and added, that as in the human conſtitution, ſo in the intire ſyſtem of things, the whole is more excellent than a particular part, that it would be extreme vanity in mankind to fancy themſelves the head of the univerſe, being indeed but a very ſmall part of of it, and that which comprehends and preſides over all, muſt have in it ſelf all abſolute perfection, from which every real perfection ſcattered through the world is derived.

It was a received maxim among the ancients, but very differently underſtood, that Nothing can come from Nothing. Not to enter into the conſideration of the uſe which *Atheiſts* made of it againſt the creation of matter, which our preſent argument does not require, the maxim in this ſenſe is moſt certainly

tainly true, that nothing can be produc'd, without a sufficient cause in order of nature before it, and that no real * perfection can be in the effect, which is not in the cause, either actually or virtually, for if it were, that perfection would be produc'd without a cause, or by nothing, which is a direct contradiction. Now, applying this to the point before us, the question is, how came intelligence into the world, if not from an intelligent cause? The *Atheist* may, if he pleases, ridicule what we call perfection, for indeed his principles tend to level all things, and destroy the beautiful subordination which there is in nature; but it is surprising, that any one possess'd of rational powers should think so meanly of them. Is there no excellence in conscious thinking with all its various modes, in reasoning, the discernment of truth, and an intel-

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* The word Perfection is here used, as it is commonly, without explication. For understanding it the better, and to prevent mistakes, we may observe, that as the human mind cannot avoid discerning a difference in things, it as necessarily, upon comparison, prefers some to others. The measure of this preference in our judgment, is the sense we have of natural and moral Good: By perfection therefore is meant, a capacity of enjoyment, or a capacity of virtue, which we can't help apprehending real, and valuable in the degree wherein it is possess'd, and where it has the plain appearances of an effect, we can't help apprehending, as in all other effects, an equal or superior capacity is the Cause.

SERM. II. lectual progreſs in diſcovering it, in the exerciſe of liberty by a rational ſelf-determination, and of our beſt affections, with the various enjoyment they afford; is there, I ſay, no excellence in all this above the qualities of paſſive unintelligent beings? But though I think the human mind can ſcarcely help acknowledging a ſuperior excellence in the intellectual and moral capacity, far ſurpaſſing the powers of incogitative and merely paſſive being, which therefore muſt owe it ſelf to a ſuperior intelligent cauſe; yet waving this conſideration, 'tis impoſſible to doubt of the thing it ſelf, that there actually is what we call underſtanding in man: let us ſee then, if the riſe of it can be accounted for without a prior intelligence as its cauſe? Suppoſing, tho' ever ſo abſurdly, all the appearances of corporeal nature not to require, to their being and their order, the direction of any deſigning Agent, but that their magnitude, figure and all other qualities, proceed from unguided moving force, or the fortuitous jumble of their compounding parts; the queſtion is, if intelligence with all its modes is thus alſo to be explained, and if it has been ſtruck out in the ſame neceſſary or caſual manner? And any attentive perſon will be convinc'd

convinc'd, that this ſolution is altogether in- SERM.
ſufficient, and indeed extremely unreaſona- II.
ble. For all the viſible phœnomena of inanimate nature, whatever diverſity there may be in their exterior appearance, carry the marks of their internal conſtitution, having ſtill inſeparably belonging to them, the eſſential properties and primary qualities of that whereof they are compounded, ſuch as ſolidity, diviſibility, figure, its capacity of motion and reſt, to which it is in its own nature indifferent, not capable, of it ſelf, to change its ſtate from either to the other, but always yielding to force; intelligence can never be the reſult of theſe, any or all of them, or any compoſition or change of them; for let magnitude, figure and motion be ever ſo much altered, compounded or divided, they can really produce nothing but magnitude, figure and motion. But perception and conſciouſneſs have no relation to theſe; our ideas of them are as diſtinct as any can poſſibly be: What reſemblance has conſciouſneſs to motion or figure? Or, by an attentive conſideration, muſt not every one perceive, that reaſoning and volition have not the leaſt affinity with magnitude or diviſibility? And if, by the moſt apparent diſtinction of our own ideas,

SERM. II. we may not conclude a real difference of things, there is an end of all certainty, and our knowledge is reduc'd to utter confusion.

The secondary qualities of passive unintelligent being, such as colours, sounds, tastes, resulting from the various texture, disposition and motion of its parts, and our adversaries may suppose that all perceptions arise in the same manner as they do; these secondary qualities, I say, are really no more than our own sensations, not the modes of external objects but of thought, requiring themselves a peculiar principle for the subject of them, and therefore a superior power to produce them; consequently, instead of being an argument to show that understanding might possibly take its rise from unthinking matter and its modifications, they really serve the quite contrary purpose: If ever there had been nothing in the world but passive matter and motion, however compounded and diversified, not only there never cou'd have been any such thing as consciousness, but indeed there never could have been so much as colour, sound and taste, since these are only modes of perception, and therefore peculiar to beings indued with a perceptive power, which could only be produc'd by an agent himself percipient,

pient, either in that or a more perfect manner. Wherefore the reaſoning related in *Cicero* *, is extremely weak, when in oppoſition to *Socrates*'s argument already mentioned, *viz.* whence did we derive our reaſon, if there be no ſuch thing in the world, it is alledged one may as well ask, whence had we numbers, muſick or ſpeech ?—And again, if the argument be good, that becauſe there is underſtanding in us, therefore it muſt be originally in the world, by the ſame argument it may be prov'd, that the ſuperior intelligent in the world, muſt be an orator, a mathematician and a philoſopher; nor is their reaſoning any better who pretend, that if life and underſtanding in the effect require Life and underſtanding in the cauſe, whereby we find our ſelves oblig'd to acknowledge theſe powers eternal and unmade, by the ſame argument it may be prov'd, that ſenſible qualities muſt be attributed to the original Cauſe, and there muſt be, for example, an eternal unmade red and green. The anſwer to all which is very obvious, that none of theſe qualities mentioned require to their being, any thing diſtinct from the animal and

* De natura Deorum, Lib. 3.

SERM. II. rational powers with their proper exercise, and therefore it is by no means necessary to suppose, that they belong to the original author of them, whereas life and understanding, indeed the lowest perceptions, imply a perfection which passive unpercipient powers, merely of themselves, can never reach to, and therefore they must be produc'd by another cause, to which either they formally, or a superior excellence must be ascrib'd. Upon the whole then it is apparent, that the secondary qualities of corporeal nature, as they are called, being really and properly no more than modes of perception, nor the particular application of the human faculties, as in singing, speech and philosophy; I say, that none of these have any thing parallel to the case of intelligence, to weaken the force of the argument from its being in the world to prove that it must be eminently in the cause of it. But least of all is there any pretence for alledging, that from our reasoning it may be infer'd, that the cause of passive matter must have its properties, such as figure, divisibility, *&c.* as well as that the cause of intelligence must be intelligent. For daily experience shews in numberless instances, that intelligence produces effects very unlike it self,

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and of a quite different nature; whereas not only no inſtance can be alledg'd to ſhow that figure, diviſibility, *&c.* ever did produce conſcious intelligence, but it is impoſſible that ever they ſhould, for as has been obſerv'd, extended diviſible matter, with all its changes and modifications, can never produce any thing to which theſe its eſſential properties do not inſeparably belong; therefore not intelligence. SERM. II.

In this reaſoning I have abſtracted from the queſtion concerning the poſſibility of matter's being endued with thinking and active faculties, which ſome wiſe men have thought too difficult for us to determine, alledging, that the human underſtanding does not ſo thoroughly comprehend the nature of thought and of corporeal ſubſtance, as to be able to judge with certainty, that the latter may not, by the power of God, be made the ſubject of the other, tho' they agree that matter, with its paſſive powers and all its known properties, could never poſſibly of it ſelf have produc'd any degree of intelligence and activity. This is what I have aſſerted, and therefore that the human, rational and ſelf-determining faculties, whatever the ſubject of them be, could not poſſibly proceed from

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unintelligent matter and motion, or the fortuitous concourſe of atoms, which is all that *Atheiſts* mean, or that, I conceive, can be meant by undeſigning neceſſity or chance; conſequently, that active intelligence muſt be ſelf-original in nature. Nay, if we ſhould ſuppoſe that there is no ſubſtance diſtinct from body, and that the Deity himſelf is corporeal, if it be allow'd that he is the intelligent Cauſe of all things; this as truly overthrows the cauſe of *Atheiſm*, as the juſter principle of his eternal ſpiritual nature. Some *Atheiſts* have been ſo ſenſible of this inſuperable difficulty which preſſes their ſcheme, namely, to account for the riſe of thought from unthinking matter, without the agency of a deſigning Cauſe, that rather than abandon their fundamental principle that there is nothing in the univerſe but mere matter with its modifications, they have fled to that moſt abſurd hypotheſis, that all matter and every ſingle atom of it, is intelligent; which, not to mention any more reaſons, other *Atheiſts* themſelves have refuted by this invincible one, that then every living intelligent being, particularly every man would be, not a ſingle perſon or intelligent agent, but a multitude or a ſyſtem of them, contrary to what every one is conſcious

ſcious of. But the opinion of the Atomiſts is, if poſſible, yet more extravagant, who from the figure, magnitude and motion of parts, confeſſedly void of ſenſe and underſtanding, wou'd raiſe perception and conſciouſneſs, eſſentially different from all modes and compoſitions of magnitude, figure and motion, which is to ſuppoſe a real and diſtinct perfection to be produc'd out of nothing, or without a cauſe. SERM. II.

It may be objected againſt all this, that if from the order and harmony of the viſible world, and from a multitude of ſenſitive and rational beings, we juſtly infer a deſigning Cauſe; ſuppoſing this to be true, and that order and harmony, intelligence and activity are in the divine mind, what is the reaſon of this, and may we not prove by the ſame argument, that *it* muſt be attributed to a prior cauſe? I anſwer, our argument is not, that of every thing which has being, or which is wiſe and good, there muſt be a cauſe; but that, as in all other caſes, by various marks of contrivance in any work, the human mind is naturally led to acknowledge an intending author; ſo in this caſe, by the clear evidences of deſign in a numberleſs variety of inſtances, even all parts of the known

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univerſe, the inanimate, the ſenſitive and the rational, we find our ſelves oblig'd to recogniſe an underſtanding and deſigning Cauſe. And here we may reſt; if there be an intelligent Author of univerſal nature and of all the appearances we can diſcern in the whole world, of their mutual relations, connexions and dependencies, he is the God for whom we enquire. A ſearch after unſeen cauſes of unſeen Cauſes to infinity, can diſcover nothing but perplexity and confuſion of thought; the intelligent Fountain of all the wiſdom, all the good and the order which actually is in the univerſe, will appear to every impartial mind worthy of our higheſt veneration and eſteem, and juſtly intitled to our love and confidence.

But with reſpect to a firſt Cauſe, it is acknowledg'd by *Atheiſts*, as well as by us, that ſomething muſt have been from eternity, ſelf-exiſtent and independent: Accordingly they ſay, that the material world form'd as it is, or matter and motion, or bare matter, is that neceſſarily exiſting thing. I ſhall not now enter into the conſideration of this point, but I hope in its proper place, to ſhew that deſigning active mind has of all things the beſt pretenſions, nay, that it alone has any juſt

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pretenſions to the characters of neceſſarily ex- SERM. iſtent, ſelf-original and independent. II.

Upon a review of this whole reaſoning, and indeed of the intire oppoſite ſchemes of *Theiſm* and *Atheiſm*, with regard to the points which have been conſider'd, this remarkable difference appears; that whereas there is a great diverſity of beings in the univerſe, and a great variety of qualities, powers and perfections belonging to the ſeveral kinds of them, the *Atheiſtic* opinion makes the very loweſt of all, namely, ſenſeleſs paſſive matter, the firſt principle of all, the eternal ſelf-exiſtent being, from which, as the ſole independent origin, all things, even the moſt regular and beautiful aroſe, nay, the higheſt perfection of intelligence, virtue and happineſs, without an active deſigning Cauſe. For which reaſon that hypotheſis is incumber'd with inſuperable difficulties in every ſtep of the ſcale of being. It cannot account for any thing but by chance or neceſſity, which in reſpect of cauſality are really nothing, and as propos'd to the human underſtanding for a reaſon, only ſignify ignorance; it cannot ſo much as account for the order of the world, the exact proportion of its parts and the harmony of the whole, the apparent

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mutual relations of the heavens and the earth, as united in one syſtem, the convenient ſituation of the earth with reſpect to its diſtance from the ſun, and ſuch a proper direction both of its diurnal and annual motions as in the beſt manner to provide for the comfortable ſubſiſtence of its numerous inhabitants, the formation of the animal life in ſuch a variety of ſpecies, all preſerv'd diſtinct and without confuſion, and propagated by a ſettled law, each fitted to its own element, provided with proper food and with ſuitable inſtincts and organs, eſpecially ſenſation and ſelf-motion, the principal appearances of the ſenſitive life; and leaſt of all can the *Atheiſtical* hypotheſis account for conſcious intelligence and the various modes of it, which it diminiſhes into a vain empty ſhadow, the the merely accidental reſult of the figure and motion of matter, tho' it is that which makes every man *Himſelf*, and therefore nothing can appear to him more real and ſubſtantial.

But the doctrine of Deity and Providence is the perfect reverſe of all this, and explains the ſyſtem of the univerſe in a conſiſtent ſatisfactory manner. It repreſents intelligence as the firſt of things, the origin and cauſe of all

all derived beings, and by the help of its direction, ſets all things in a fair and amiable light. An eternal ſelf-exiſtent mind, immutably poſſeſs'd of all abſolute perfections, form'd the plan of the world, and wiſely finiſh'd it, according to its own moſt perfect model. It was to be expected that the work of ſuch an architect ſhould bear the ſignature of his hand, that is, his counſel and power in its magnificence, variety, proportion and beautiful harmony, and ſo it does. The low dark outworks of this ſtately building, that is the whole maſs of extended paſſive bulk, in it ſelf ſo mean and contemptible, is form'd into various beauty, by the energy of Spirit which inhabits it. From this there is a gradual aſcent towards the utmoſt height of excellence, and every riſing ſtep in the ſcale carries in it a growing diſplay of original perfection: Vegetation it ſelf is a vaſt improvement upon dead matter, ſhowing the ſuperior plaſtic virtue of ſpirit; but animal ſenſation and ſpontaneity, however low in compariſon, are ſtrong images of underſtanding and activity. Human intelligence, with its various powers, exerciſes and enjoyments, is the higheſt in our world, and leads us directly to the great Original it was form'd by, the

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the uncreated mind. Between theſe two there is a mighty chaſm, and we may well imagine many intermediate orders of celeſtial ſpirits, ſuperior to us, tho' the higheſt of them at an immenſe diſtance from unoriginated excellence.

Let any candid attentive perſon ſet theſe ſchemes againſt each other in his calm deliberate thoughts, and embrace that which appears the moſt rational. I do not doubt but you will be convinc'd the latter is the very truth, in which your minds may reſt with intire ſatisfaction. Let us therefore joyn in adoring the glorious fountain of light and life, and with all the wiſe inhabitants of heaven and earth, acknowledge him *worthy to receive glory and honour and power, who has created all things, and for his pleaſnre they are and were created.* Amen.

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SERMON III.

The Being of God prov'd from Human Intelligence and Morality.

Rom. i. 19, 20.

Becauſe that which may be known of God is manifeſt in them, for God hath ſhewed it unto them. For the inviſible things of him from the creation of the world, are clearly ſeen, being underſtood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.

I HAVE endeavoured in two preceding diſcourſes to prove the Being of God from his works, that is, as the queſtion is properly ſtated between the *Atheiſts* and us, to prove an active intelligence in the formation of the univerſe. Indeed the exiſtence of the very loweſt things we ſee, the moſt contemptible pebble or clod of earth, cannot be accounted for without the agency of an intelligent and powerful Cauſe, much leſs this beautiful ſyſ-

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tem of the world, disposed in such exquisite order, and having its parts so exactly fitted to each other, as to make up one regular whole. But above all, that understanding which we are conscious of in our selves, even constrains us to acknowledge the supreme eternal Mind as its Author; for if inanimate matter form'd into a system, discovers his glorious wisdom and activity, much more his own living image in our perceptive and self-determining powers. This last well deserves a more particular consideration, as containing a peculiarly illustrious manifestation of the divine wisdom, and I hope, by a due attention to what passes in our own minds, we shall find our selves obliged to recognize the All-ruling intelligence of our Maker, and to adore him who *is perfect in knowledge*. At least, supposing the former reasoning to be just, what I shall further offer upon this subject, will give us a more enlarged idea of the divine understanding, which is the principal point in our present inquiry.

Here I shall confine my self to what is called pure intellection, that is those exercises of the mind which abstract wholly from the external senses, and the sole object of them, singular corporeal existence: For tho', as I

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obſerv'd before, the ſenſitive and intellectual powers are imploy'd about the ſame object, apprehending it in a very different manner, yet are there intelligibles, indeed thoſe of the ſublimeſt kind, in which we have the greateſt certainty of knowledge, as well as the nobleſt mental entertainment, which do not at all fall under the perception of the ſenſes, ſuch as the abſtract ideas of natures or eſſences, eternal truths and moral qualities, which have all of them, tho' no ſenſible exiſtence, yet an important reality, and the ideas of them in the eternal mind are their original archetypes. SERM. III.

Firſt, Abſtract Natures or Eſſences are repreſented by ſome as the mere creatures of the human underſtanding, taking occaſion from the apparent ſimilitude and diſſimilitude of things to form abſtract notions of their ſeveral different kinds, which no where ſubſiſt but in the underſtanding it ſelf; at the ſame time referring to the internal conſtitutions of things, the true cauſe of the apparent ſimilitude and diſſimilitude of their outward forms. Theſe internal conſtitutions are the real Eſſences, for the moſt part unknown to us, and the eſſences which are the objects of our apprehenſion, are therefore called nominal,

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nal, becauſe the true interior nature of things, whereby they are what they are, complete in themſelves and invariably diſtinct from all others, lie too deep for us to diſcover. Now tho' this may be a fair repreſentation of the method in which the human underſtanding proceeds, and the true origin of its ideas of Eſſences, which being poſterior to individual exiſtence, and derived from it, can be no more perfect than our knowledge of individual exiſting things, yet it leads us by clear reaſoning to conclude, that there is a more perfect knowledge of Eſſences, which abſtracting from actual exiſtence, can only ſubſiſt as ideas in a mind, but it muſt be a mind infinitely more perfect than ours.

To ſhew this, I ſhall take leave to borrow an obſervation from a celebrated author, who gives the very account of Eſſences which I have been mentioning *. He tells us, that we know the Eſſences, and diſtinguiſh the ſpecies of artificial things, with far leſs confuſion and uncertainty than natural things, becauſe an artificial thing being a production of man, which the artificer deſign'd, and well knows the idea of, the name of it is ſuppos'd

* *Locke*'s Eſſay on Human Underſtanding. Book III. Ch. vi.

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to ſtand for no other idea, nor to import any other Eſſence than what is certainly to be known, and eaſy enough to be apprehended. He might have ſaid, that every ſenſible Artificer muſt perfectly know the real eſſence of his own work, ſo far as it is his own, however ignorant he may be of the nature of the materials, ſtones, timber, iron, ſilver, gold or whatever they are, which another intirely unacquainted with the mechanic art, may underſtand much better; yet the proper diſpoſition of the parts, and joining them fitly together, ſo as to make one compleat fabric or machine, which is his own work, he muſt know; and his underſtanding reaches to a thorough comprehenſion of the deſign, which is its true eſſence, before he begins the manual operation. Now applying this to the great Artificer of nature, *who ſtretch'd out the heavens by his wiſdom, and eſtabliſh'd the earth by his diſcretion*, we muſt conclude, that ſince he was the intending Cauſe of the world, and exercis'd active intelligence in the formation of all things, the plan was form'd in his All-comprehending mind; in other words, the deſign or the archetypal ideas of the true Eſſences of things, ſubſiſted in his underſtanding before the things themſelves actually SERM. III.

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had a being; for who can imagine such an inconsistency as intelligence in the operation and not in the intention? Can a work be made with wisdom, and wisdom not be prior to it, or the parts of a structure so put together as to show wise contrivance, without the Agent's having laid a scheme before-hand, and formed a model by which his proceeding should be directed.

But further we must conceive in a designing cause, freedom and choice, especially in a complicated production, which comprehends a great variety of parts: One general end is to be obtain'd, taking in many which are subordinate; a vast variety of means are presented to the mind, the fittest of which are to be chosen, and the rest rejected. This to imperfect understandings is the cause of long deliberation upon their projects, they take time to compare the means which offer themselves to their thoughts, and try which, upon the whole, as far as they can judge, are the most convenient; but without a plurality of such means or parts, we can have no notion of wisdom exercis'd in the work, for it consists in a choice or preference of the best and fittest. Now when we survey the world, so much of it as is known to us, (how extensive

tenſive actual exiſtence is beyond our ſight or the reach of our underſtandings we cannot poſſibly tell,) containing ſuch a multitude of beings as cannot be numbered, all form'd and diſpos'd with intelligence and deſign, ſhewing that the ideas of them ſubſiſted before in the mind of the author; what a vaſt variety of ideas (we loſe our ſelves in imagining it) muſt we ſuppoſe to have been in the ſame underſtanding, that there might be room for that preference, which we cannot help thinking, is abſolutely neceſſary to the exerciſe of wiſdom in his works. No one can ſay the world could not poſſibly have been otherwiſe than it is, or any of its parts otherwiſe than they are, in this ſenſe that it would imply a contradiction in the nature of things, for that is in effect to deny all free agency, and all wiſdom in the formation of the world, which is, I think, already prov'd by convincing arguments. But if that the world could not be otherwiſe than it is, ſuppoſes intelligence, and therefore means that of all poſſible ſyſtems appearing to his own mind, the Creator choſe that which in the whole, was the fitteſt and the beſt; this neceſſarily implies what I juſt now ſaid, namely, that other models or deſigns were equally in his

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power, and all alike actually in the view of his underſtanding, prior, I do not ſay in time, but in our order of conceiving, to the determination of producing the ſyſtem which now actually exiſts. This ſeems to be the true meaning of *Plato*'s ideas which he repreſents as the original forms and exemplars of whatever is in being, that is, the conceptions of the divine moſt perfect intellect, in which the whole ſcheme of exiſtence was laid; tho' ſome of the latter *Platoniſts* turned his doctrine to an abſurdity (and perhaps he gave too great occaſion to it himſelf) calling thoſe ideas not only archetypes and patterns, but living ſubſtances and phyſical cauſes, nay, a ſort of deities. Here then we find in the univerſe, not only intelligence, directing the frame of nature, finiſhing all the particular forms in it, and appointing them their proper places, diſpoſing the whole circle of being, and guiding the intire ſeries of cauſes, with their operations; but an underſtanding not limited by the univerſe it ſelf, reaching to the utmoſt bounds of poſſibility, and comprehending all conceivable eſſences or intelligible forms, relations, connexions and dependencies of things.

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2*dly*, As theſe abſtract ideas appearing to our minds, are the materials of all our ſcience, which is not converſant about ſingular exiſtence, and in proportion as they are diſcerned by every mind, they are the materials of its knowledge; ſo upon comparing them reſults truth (for it conſiſts in their agreement) which is another real and important object of the underſtanding. Our minds are made with a deſire to diſcover truth, and they reſt in it when found, with great ſatisfaction; tho' our knowledge of eſſences is very imperfect, and what we call the eſſences of natural things actually exiſtent, that is, our own abſtract ideas of them, are for the moſt part little more than nominal, yet the perception of their agreement is to us certain truth, and we acquieſce in it with pleaſure: But that mind which thoroughly comprehends the real natures of things, having form'd them with all their properties and powers, muſt ſee an infinity of truths in their various relations, which we cannot diſcern. Let it be eſpecially obſerv'd, that our principal and moſt ſatisfying knowledge is purely intellectual, the ſubject of it being our own ideas, which abſtract intirely from exiſtence. For example, the points, lines and figures which

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are the ſubject of mathematical demonſtration, are not perceived by our ſenſes, nor ſuppoſed to have a ſenſible exiſtence, but only are our own ideas abſtracting from all matter, really form'd, or imagined to be form'd into ſuch figures; thoſe ſtraight lines, curves, triangles, ſquares and other figures, whoſe properties, mutual relations, equalities and proportions are demonſtrated, perhaps could none of them exactly, certainly ſome of them could not be exemplified in bulky materials, nor do the demonſtrations concerning them depend on that, the ſubject of them being only our own ideas; yet no man who underſtands them will ſay they are chimerical, ſince he ſees real truth in them, to which he cannot refuſe his aſſent; nor can it be reaſonably ſaid that they depend wholly on the mind, and are its arbitrary combinations of its own ideas, for it cannot make truth or falſhood, but muſt conſider them as independent on its own pleaſure, and equally real whether it diſcerns them or not. It remains then that geometrical theorems and other propoſitions, for I mention them only as examples, are eternal verities, the ſame at all times, and, as ſome of the ancients ſpeak, ingenerable and incorruptible, alike true whether

whether any human mind perceives them or not, nay, whether any human mind exiſts or not. But were theſe eternal neceſſary truths altogether unknown before any human mind exiſted? No, they were the proper objects of eternal neceſſary intelligence, ſubſiſting in the eternal mind. The occaſion of our diſcerning them is taken from the works of God; it is from corporeal beings we get the ideas of figures and numbers (tho' the abſtract ideas we form of them, are not ſenſible but intellectual) and the ſame may be ſaid concerning the ſubjects of other ſelf-evident or demonſtrated propoſitions. Now has God ſcattered over his works ſuch traces of intelligence, that very imperfect obſervers are led by them to ſee, and be delighted with truth, and ſhall himſelf not diſcern that ſame truth, nay, muſt he not have diſcern'd it from everlaſting, ſince from everlaſting it was equally diſcernable by a perfect underſtanding, which comprehended the eſſences, that is the ideas of things with all their relations, whence that truth neceſſarily reſults? Surely we have no mental perfection but what is derived from the eternal Mind, the Father of our ſpirits: If then we are endued with a power of diſcovering truth (which we SERM. III.

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cannot reflect upon without having pleasure in it, as an excellence in our nature) he must have possess'd that power in a more eminent and perfect manner before we had a being, and the truths which were eternally knowable, must be to him eternally known. Human science lies within a narrow compass, but certainly it is one of the most delightful entertainments the mind can have. What pleasure does it give, to some at least, to see a proposition demonstrated which comprehends, and to full conviction determines the relation of a great variety of things, for example, the proportion of many different lines or figures; and can we imagine that our nature, in every part of its constitution carrying the plainest marks of understanding and design, could be made with a sense of beauty in such truths, and yet the designing Author of that nature, be ignorant of them? Thus we behold the divine wisdom manifested in the intelligible as well as the sensible world, and by some sketches of eternal truth which we our selves are enabled to discern with delight, we have not only clear evidence that the first of Beings, the original Cause of all things, is himself intelligent, but are led to a more enlarged view of what is the agreeable,

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tho' to us incomprehenſible object of his eternal contemplation. SERM. III.

3*dly*, This will ſtill more fully appear, if we conſider moral qualities and truths, which evidently appear to our minds, and are of the greateſt importance to the ends of our being. Without entring into the detail of theſe qualities and truths, which may be ſuppos'd to be ſo far known as is neceſſary to our preſent purpoſe, I ſhall only make the following obſervations concerning them. Firſt, That they are intirely abſtracted from the external ſenſes and their objects. Other animals which have thoſe ſenſes in common with us, give no diſcovery of their having any notions of morality, and are not reckon'd moral agents, which is the higheſt and peculiar character of rational beings. How could the external ſenſes lead us to any ſentiments of virtue, which has not the leaſt relation to any qualities of matter, either primary or ſecondary? What reſemblance have juſtice and benevolence to the figure and motion of bodies, or what affinity with colours, ſounds or taſtes? Nor indeed do the ends of ſenſitive life require ſo ſublime a ſenſe as that of morality; the preſervation of individuals and of the kind, and their uſefulneſs to other ſpecies

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cies of beings in their manner, which are its highest apparent purposes; these ends, I say, are all answered by lower instincts.

2*dly*, Moral qualities, which have no other subject than the affections of the soul, and actions proceeding from them, tho' intirely independent on matter and all its properties, are yet real, and necessarily regarded by our minds as such. A sense of moral beauty and deformity in human characters and actions, is as natural as a sense of another kind of beauty and deformity in corporeal forms; nay, our minds as necessarily perceive a difference between cruelty and mercy, gratitude and ingratitude, temperance and debauchery, as between light and darkness, sweet and bitter, harmony and discord, which we distinguish by our external senses. The idea of virtue, whether in our selves or others, is always accompanied with approbation, and vice with dislike. An excellent moral character constantly attracts our esteem, and a vicious one cannot be consider'd otherwise than with aversion; a beneficent action is applauded and a cruel one condemned, abstracting from any advantage or disadvantage to our selves arising from either. We review virtuous dispositions in our own hearts,

hearts, and virtuous works flowing from them, with the higheſt ſatisfaction, and the contrary are unavoidably attended with remorſe. It is true, that as there is a great variety in the practice of virtue, which in ſome inſtances is attended with embarraſſing circumſtances, and in our preſent ſtate there are many things to divert our attention from it; on theſe accounts, and becauſe of negligence, corrupt cuſtoms, the prejudices of education, and particularly falſe notions of religion, ſome may have far leſs knowledge of virtue than others, and the virtuous affections may be weaker in them, but a ſenſe of morality (capable indeed of more or leſs improvement, according to our opportunities and the degrees of our attention and diligence) ſeems to be indelibly imprinted on our nature, ſo that we can no more diveſt our ſelves of it altogether, than we can put off humanity it ſelf. SERM. III.

3*dly*, As moral qualities and truths concerning them, are real, and neceſſarily regarded by our minds, ſo they are of the greateſt importance to the happineſs of mankind. This I have hinted already with reſpect to particular perſons, having obſerv'd that the peace and ſatisfaction of their minds depends,

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in a great measure, upon an inward consciousness of virtuous dispositions, and the designed regulation of their conduct by them. I believe every man will find by experience, that he is not able wholly to extinguish his sentiments of morality, nor without the utmost violence to obscure and weaken them so, but that his heart will condemn him for his crimes, nor can he arrive to an unmanly ease in his vices, till after a long course of affected stupidity and sottish infatuation, which is reproachful to the rational nature, and takes away the truest self enjoyment. How unhappy are wicked men by their wickedness? What a train of miseries and misfortunes in the present state, arise from debauchery and sensual excesses, from fraud and violence? But if there be intelligence in framing the human nature, and appointing the condition of men, it must extend to the whole kind; and indeed morality may be therefore pronounced important to our natures, because it does not only in a sensible manner affect the interest of single persons, but the greatest collective bodies of them, nay, the intire species. Let any one imagine the whole human race to be without the least sense of virtue, of the fear of God, of good will

will to mankind, of the excellence of honeſty, gratitude, fidelity, temperance, and the turpitude of the contrary, ſo that there ſhould be nothing left but the fear of perſonal outward danger and inconveniences to prevent the moſt licentious rage of unruly deſtructive paſſions, and all the miſchiefs they could produce; how miſerable, upon ſuch a ſuppoſition, would our ſtate be? It may be reaſonably queſtion'd whether the kind could have ſubſiſted ſo long, or any remain'd to have inhabited the earth; but at leaſt it is certain, life muſt have been a dull, uncomfortable, inelegant and inſipid thing, in compariſon of what it now actually is, unadorned with thoſe arts and inventions which are owing to the ſecure poſſeſſion of peace and liberty, unimprov'd by ſcience, and deſtitute of the high pleaſures of friendſhip, and all kinds of delightful ſocial entertainment; not to ſpeak of a future ſtate, the happineſs of which (if there really be ſuch a thing) muſt neceſſarily depend upon virtue, nor is it poſſible for the mind of man, calmly and deliberately to judge otherwiſe; and of that future ſtate we have conſtant premonitions in our own preſaging thoughts (ſo ſtrong as moſt ſenſibly to affect

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affect the comfort of our preſent being) without, at leaſt, any poſſible ſecurity againſt it.

Now if theſe obſervations be true and juſt, and whether they are or not, let every man upon calm reflexion, judge for himſelf, let us ſee what conſequences may be fairly drawn from them to our preſent purpoſe. In the firſt place, here is an important part of the human conſtitution which can never be accounted for upon *Atheiſtic* grounds, that is chance or mechaniſm, the fortuitous rencounter of atoms, or the neceſſary reſult of matter and motion. Suppoſing an accidental concourſe of atoms moving in an infinite void, or an undirected force impreſs'd on matter, could poſſibly produce corporeal ſyſtems and their various beautiful forms which we ſee, tho' even that has been already prov'd to be ſufficiently abſurd, yet how ſhall this hypotheſis ſolve the phœnomena of moral Entities? What ſtrange colliſion of atoms, or undirected impulſe of matter, could produce beauty and deformity in human characters and actions? Could any combination of figures or diſpoſition and agitation of material parts, ſtrike out the ideas of juſt and unjuſt, kind and unkind, ſober and vicious? Shall it be ſaid that theſe are mere fancies, the

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arbitrary figments of the mind without any true and ſolid foundation in nature? I anſwer, that indeed our ideas of morality are not ideas of corporeal exiſtence, but it does not follow that therefore they are not real. Let any man try how he can ſatisfy himſelf concerning the reality of any object of his knowledge; if his organs are duly diſpos'd, if he is conſcious to himſelf that he has the free and undiſturb'd exerciſe of his rational powers, if his perceptions be clear and diſtinct, and eſpecially if they be conſtant and uniform, his ideas always the ſame, independently of his own choice, whenever he applies his mind to the review of them; when it is ſo, there can be no doubt concerning the reality of ſuch knowledge, unleſs we introduce an univerſal ſcepticiſm. Can any man in his ſenſes make it a queſtion whether his ideas of colours, and taſtes and ſounds, be real or phantaſtical? As little reaſon has he to doubt the reality of his ideas of *pure, and true, and juſt, and honeſt, and virtuous.* In the beſt ſtate of his mind, when his underſtanding is cleareſt and freeſt from diſturbance, whenever he thinks of moral differences, they appear always the ſame, nay, the more he conſiders them, the more plain and important

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important they appear. Can we doubt whether a thing exiſts which cauſes in us pleaſure or pain, whether we will or not; for example, whether the fire exiſts which warms or burns us, whether a ſharp iron inſtrument exiſts, which piercing our fleſh cauſes the ſenſation of acute pain. In like manner, has any man reaſon to doubt whether there be a real difference between virtuous diſpoſitions and works, which diffuſe inward ſerenity and ſatisfaction through his mind, and vicious ones which neceſſarily fill him with horror and the moſt painful ſelf-condemnation? We muſt therefore, to account for this appearance, abandon the *Atheiſtic* ſcheme and all the forms of it, and have our recourſe to an intelligent Cauſe, which has deeply interwoven into the human conſtitution, a ſenſe of things intirely independent on matter and all its properties and powers, as real however as any we perceive by our external ſenſes, concerning which we can form propoſitions as true and certain, and draw conſequences from them as clear as any which appear to our minds; for even the properties of lines and geometrical figures, and the incommenſurability of ſome with others, is not more evident than the moral fitneſs and unfitneſs of ſome actions. 2*dly*, The

2*dly*, The importance of morality to the human life, and to its main ends, ſhews wiſdom and deſign in giving men the ſenſe and knowledge of it. Political conſtitutions are reaſonably judg'd to be form'd with underſtanding, becauſe of the ends which they anſwer. When laws are well fram'd for the preſervation of public peace and order, the meaſures of civil authority and ſubjection wiſely ſettled, proviſion made for ſupporting the legal powers of the rulers, and liberties of the people, for ſecuring them againſt foreign invaſions and inteſtine broils, for deciding their debates about property in an equitable manner, for incouraging induſtry and other virtues, which tend to the benefit of the ſociety, and reſtraining thoſe irregularities which threaten its deſtruction; when all this is apparent in the conſtitution of any community, no one will attribute it to a caſual unconcerted encounter of men, ſince there are ſo plain evidences of wiſdom and deſign in the whole ſcheme. As little reaſon is there to imagine, that when a ſpecies of intelligent beings are ſent into the world with ſentiments of morality, which are ſo evidently conducive to their happineſs, tending to improve their nature, to ennoble SERM. III.

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the life of every one of them, filling it with a variety of rational pleaſure, and to render them eminently uſeful to one another, ſo that it is hardly to be conceiv'd to what a height of perfection and felicity they would be rais'd, if theſe moral ſentiments were duly improv'd and had their full effect, and on the other hand how miſerable the whole race would be, if intirely deſtitute of them; it is unreaſonable, I ſay, to imagine that this ſhould be without a directing Intelligence in the Cauſe of it.

Nothing can be more groundleſs and unſupported with any pretence of reaſon, than to alledge that the notions of morality, ſo common and prevailing in the world, were originally invented by politicians, and by their artifice impos'd upon credulous mankind, as the dictates of nature. For, beſides that ſtrict virtue is often too little agreeable to the maxims and meaſures of their policy, to give it any appearance of proceeding from ſuch an original; every man who will look carefully into his own heart, may find there a ſtandard of right and wrong, prior to any inſtructions, declarations and laws of men, whereby he pronounces judgment upon them: Nor was it ever known

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that any human invention, or any thing which was not the voice of reaſon and nature it ſelf, appeared ſo uniform and unvaried, always conſiſtent with it ſelf, and always in the ſame light to the minds of men, as the principal moral ſpecies do. The forms of civil government differ according to the circumſtances and inclinations of the people who create them; the external forms of religion too are variable, and ſo is every thing of poſitive appointment and inſtitution; but juſtice and mercy, gratitude and truth never alter, the learned and the unlearned, the moſt uninſtructed and the moſt polite nations agree in their notions concerning them, and whenever they are intelligibly propos'd, approve them. SERM. III.

It is therefore evident, that morality is a part of the human conſtitution, and muſt be attributed to its author. Let this be underſtood in a ſenſe agreeable to the nature of the thing. I do not mean that we are neceſſarily virtuous, as we are ſenſitive and intelligent, or that the practice of virtue is ſo eſſential, that no man can poſſibly be without it, for the very notion of it imports free agency or choice; but I mean, that the mind of man is ſo fram'd, as when it attains the

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full exercise of its rational powers, to be neceſſarily ſenſible of moral obligations, and ſo far determin'd to ſatisfy them, that it cannot wilfully and deſignedly act a contrary part, without doing violence to it ſelf, which is all the neceſſity that is conſiſtent with the nature of ſuch a being, and the nature of morality. If it be ſo, we may ſurely infer, that the cauſe of this conſtitution was intelligent: Since all the individuals of mankind are found to have a ſenſe of virtue, and every one of them who reflects upon it muſt be conſcious that it is engraven on his heart, prior to any intention of his own, or any inſtruction that he knows of, it muſt either have happened without any deſign at all, or it muſt have been deſign'd by the Author of our being. To ſay that moral agency, which is ſo univerſally the character of men, that without it no one can be reckon'd perfectly of the kind, and which is of ſo great importance, not only to the ornament and conveniency of life, but to all the higheſt purpoſes of our being, ſo far, that the want of it would make an eſſential difference in the ſpecies; to ſay that this is merely accidental, in other words, that there is no cauſe to be aſſign'd for it at all, is too groſs an abſurdity

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to require any confutation. If our minds can reſt ſatisfied with that ſolution, there is an end of all rational enquiry; it may be ſaid every thing came from nothing, and there is no cauſe to be ſought of any perfection whatever. But if this be what we cannot poſſibly acquieſce in, and indeed I will venture to ſay no man can, however he may force himſelf to a ſtupid inattention, there is nothing left to conclude, but that we were made moral agents by an intending intelligent Cauſe. I do not at preſent carry the argument ſo far as to infer from it the moral perfections of the Deity, tho' it will very well bear even *that*, but he that will ſhut his eyes againſt the evidence of underſtanding and deſign in the formation of the human nature, as we ſee it is form'd univerſally, with a ſenſe of virtue and vice, good and evil, right and wrong in actions, and with a neceſſary approbation of the one and diſapprobation of the other; I ſay, he that can ſhut his eyes againſt this evidence, is hardened beyond the power of reaſonable conviction, and is no more fit to be argued with. SERM. III.

Thus I have endeavoured, by a diſtinct conſideration of the various works of God in the inanimate, the animal, the rational

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and moral world, to prove his Being, that is, which was the point to be prov'd, and is directly the point in controverſy between us and *Atheiſts*, that the formation of the univerſe and all its parts, is to be attributed to an active intelligent and deſigning Cauſe. But if this be ſo clear as we alledge, how comes it to paſs that any of mankind ſhould deny it, nay, that men, in whoſe writings there is a conſiderable appearance of reaſoning and learning, profeſſedly maintain the contrary principle. That men ſhould be ignorant of God may be accounted for from their inattention, nor is it any preſumption at all againſt the truth of his Being and Attributes, ſince we know in a multitude of inſtances, that the generality of mankind are ignorant of the moſt certain truths, tho' *this* is a matter of ſuch common concernment and ſo univerſally acknowledged in the world, that ſcarcely any one is without a loud call to attend to it. But if the evidence be ſo ſtrong as is pretended, it is ſurprizing that men otherwiſe ſenſible, and whoſe knowledge qualifies them to write in a tolerably conſiſtent manner, ſhould avow a disbelief of this grand article.

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To remove this prejudice which may arise in some minds from the profession of *Atheism* by learned men, let it be observ'd, *First*, That other great absurdities, contrary to the clearest evidence, even that of sense, have in like manner been advanc'd by philosophers themselves, whether from an affectation of superior knowledge, enabling them to puzzle the plainest truths and confound vulgar understandings, or from whatever other cause it proceeded, the fact is certain, that the most extravagant opinions have been vented with a show of strong arguments to support them, and demonstrations have been boasted of to prove what all mankind by their eye-sight knew to be false. It is very well known that *Zeno* and other philosophers have pretended to prove by demonstrative reasons that there is not, nor can be any such thing as motion. *Secondly*, The nature of this subject is such, that our weak minds must necessarily be embarrass'd in their conceptions of it; the necessary existence and absolute perfections of the supreme Being, which our reason obliges us to ascribe to him, are so far beyond our comprehension, that we cannot possibly form an adequate idea of them. How can we, seeing all things about

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us in the world circumſcrib'd within certain bounds, conſcious of limited exiſtence, a limited power and underſtanding, and a ſhort duration, comprehend infinity and eternity, which muſt belong to the firſt Cauſe of all things? This incomprehenſibleneſs and theſe difficulties in conceiving what is ſo high above us, have been magnified by men, thro' the pride of their hearts, into ſtrong objections againſt the truth, otherwiſe fully evident; and a fond conceit of their own abilities, which made them ſcorn to acknowledge any thing too hard for them, was the fatal ſnare which betray'd them into the moſt horrid impiety. Thus, by what they called *wiſdom*, or by a falſe ſhow of knowledge, *they knew not God*, tho' he manifeſted himſelf clearly to them by his works. *Thirdly*, The opinions concerning the Deity, which ſometimes prevail'd among thoſe who profeſs'd to believe it, were ſo abſurd, that ſome were tempted by them to doubt of, or deny it altogether. When the *glory of God was changed into the image of corruptible men, and of birds and four-footed beaſts and creeping things*, and the Godhead was parcell'd out among a multitude of things, or rather inconſiſtent notions which had no manner of likeneſs to the

the true God; when the doctrine of *Theism* was thus misrepresented, it is not very much to be wondered at, that some should be led to reject it in the lump, who had not understanding, candor and patience enough to examine things narrowly, that they might distinguish between truth and falshood. The transition from *Polytheism* to *Atheism*, and from a foolish, immoral and barbarous religion to none at all, was only a transition from one absurdity to another. SERM. III.

But in the last place, above all, the viciousness of men's tempers and the wickedness of their lives, which they were unwilling to part with, was the prevailing snare whereby they were led into this greatest of all errors. They must have been very unattentive to what may be commonly observ'd in the world, and indeed to the constitution of the human mind, who do not know that it is often biass'd by its affections, and misled in its judgment of things by interest and passion. Men are difficultly persuaded to embrace disagreeable opinions, and too easily induc'd to believe what they wish to be true; the slenderest appearances of reason on the side of inclination, pass for strong arguments, and insuperable difficulties against *it* are neglected

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as trifling objections. Now, as the idea of God always takes in authority over men, his inſpection into their affairs and their accountableneſs to him, and is therefore accompanied with a ſuſpicion at leaſt, that the crimes with which their conſciences charge them, will meet with his diſapprobation, and a puniſhment from him, of which they know no meaſure nor end; 'tis this which fills them with a dread of his Being, and becauſe they are obſtinately unwilling to reconcile themſelves to the thoughts of it, and make it ſit eaſy on their minds by a reſolution of forſaking their vicious courſes, they are led at laſt to an utter denial of it, that ſo they may get rid of thoſe uneaſy apprehenſions which ariſe in them from the conſideration of his moral character.

But the generality of bad men treat the principles of religion with neglect; they don't carry their oppoſition to them ſo far as to form any thing like a conſiſtent ſcheme of *Atheiſm*, in which their minds may reſt ſatisfied as truth, but rather endeavour to bury them in forgetfulneſs, applying their thoughts to other affairs and amuſements in which they take greater pleaſure; they greedily entertain a bold jeſt or a ſally of wit

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which tends to countenance their vices; but the main ſupport of them is ſtupid inconſideration, which has all the effects of infidelity, with regard to any influence on their practice, for principles not at all attended to, can no more excite the affections and regulate our conduct, than if they were not believ'd. Nor is inconſideration leſs criminal; for the guilt of wrong opinions ariſing wholly from negligence, prejudices and bad diſpoſitions, wherever theſe are equally prevalent, they are equally faulty, whether they produce errors in judgment or not.

It may be alledg'd on the other hand, that virtuous minds are prejudic'd in favour of *Theiſm:* As morality appears to them moſt amiable, they are apt to imagine, perhaps without ſufficient evidence, ſuch a conſtitution of things in the univerſe as is favourable to it, to intitle it to a perfect underſtanding of which they think it is worthy, and put it under the protection of irreſiſtible power. I acknowledge this is ſo far true, that I believe it is hardly poſſible for a ſincere lover of virtue, not to have his affections engag'd to the Deity, not to wiſh his Being earneſtly, if it ſhould appear at all doubtful, or that any ſuſpicion lies againſt it, and not to

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rejoyce in it when he is fully perſuaded that it is true. Let an *Atheiſt* call this prejudice if he will, I ſhould never be aſham'd of it. A principle which has a neceſſary connexion with virtue, is its chief ſupport, and without which it cannot prevail in the world; ſuch a principle is not dangerous if it can poſſibly be a miſtake, tho' its excellent tendency, I may ſay abſolute neceſſity to the happineſs of mankind, is a ſtrong preſumption of its truth. But if this be the prepoſſeſſion of virtuous minds, the contrary temper diſpoſes to a contrary opinion: let theſe two be ſet againſt each other, that we may judge which is the moſt becoming human nature, and has the greateſt probability of leading us to a right judgment; I believe at laſt the cauſe of religion and virtue muſt ſtand or fall together, and the hearty friends of the latter cannot be enemies to the other.

But ſtill it may ſeem ſtrange that this great fundamental article ſhould be liable to any controverſy, that ſince it is of ſo great Importance to the duty and happineſs of intelligent creatures to acknowledge the ſupreme Being, the evidence of his exiſtence and his attributes is not ſo ſtrong as to exclude all poſſibility of doubt. If this be meant

meant as an objection againſt, or ground of ſuſpicion concerning the truth of that grand article, the being of God, it has no colour of argument to that purpoſe; for the only principle it can reſt upon, is this, that Nothing is to be certainly believ'd, which can at all be contradicted, and if that be allow'd, our knowledge will lie within a very narrow compaſs. Except our own being, and ſome few axioms of very little uſe without ſuch applications of them, and conſequences from them, as may be involv'd in diſpute, almoſt nothing will paſs for certain. The exiſtence of matter, the poſſibility of motion, and even geometrical truths have been argu'd againſt and deny'd; nay, perhaps there is ſcarcely any propoſition capable of proof, but what is capable of being contradicted, thro' the weakneſs, inattention or prejudices of men. If the pretence that the evidence of the divine Being and Attributes is not ſo ſatisfying as might be expected, at leaſt not ſo neceſſitating as to exclude all poſſibility of doubt; if, I ſay, the pretence be carried no farther than as an alledged inſtance of defectiveneſs in the human conſtitution, and therefore difficultly reconcil'd to the wiſdom and goodneſs of it's Author; the conſideration

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of it in that view, does not belong to this place, where we are only inſiſting on the evidence of the principle it ſelf. And yet, not to paſs it by altogether unregarded, I obſerve that the true meaning of the objection, really amounts to no more than this, that it is hardly conſiſtent with the wiſdom and goodneſs of God to make rational creatures ſo imperfect as we are, or wanting a certain perfection which we imagine would have been very proper for them, particularly without an intuitive knowledge of his exiſtence, ſuch as they have of their own being. Now how is it poſſible for any man to prove that ſuch a conſtitution was wrong, that in a world which contains ſo great a variety of creatures with ſo many different kinds and degrees of perfection, wiſdom and goodneſs did not allow that there ſhould be an order of intelligent beings, who ſhould not indeed have the knowledge of their Maker (upon which their duty and their greateſt happineſs depends) forc'd upon them, ſo that they could not poſſibly reſiſt it, yet with ſufficient evidence of the truth, and faculties enabling them to diſcern it; at the ſame time under obligations, which muſt appear if they reflect on their own conſtitution, to uſe their faculties for that purpoſe? How

How wiſdom and goodneſs may require that Atheiſts ſhould be dealt with, is quite another queſtion, what unhappineſs they may bring upon themſelves by their own perverſeneſs, leading them into their fatal error, or what allowances are to be made for particular infelicities in the condition of any, which may give ſome occaſion to it, God knows beſt, and the Judge of the whole world will ſurely do right. But for us, our proper buſineſs is, without murmuring at any appointed imperfections in our make, to improve all the advantages of it in the beſt manner we can, that we may attain to the affectionate practical knowledge of our Creator, and thereby to all that perfection and happineſs to which it tends to raiſe our nature. And to conclude with a particular application of the argument I have been inſiſting on, ſince we have ſo full proof of ruling intelligence in the formation and government of the world, ſince all the works of nature proclaim it, and eſpecially our own conſtitution, for who but the author of our being *hath put wiſdom in the inward parts, and given underſtanding to the heart*; (a) this is the character of the Deity which claims our higheſt vene-

(a) *Job*, 38. 36.

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ration. It is a very elegant deſcription which *Job* (6) gives us of the excellence of wiſdom and which every attentive mind muſt aſſent to, *Man knoweth not the price thereof, it cannot be gotten for gold, neither ſhall ſilver be weighed for it. It cannot be valued with gold of Ophir with the precious onix or the Saphir. The gold and the chryſtal cannot equal it, and the exchange of it ſhall not be for jewels of fine gold. No mention ſhall be made of coral or of pearl, for the price of wiſdom is above rubies. The topaz of Ethiopia ſhall not equal it. But where ſhall wiſdom be found, and where is the place of underſtanding? The depth and the ſea and deſtruction and death, ſay it is not in them*; the effects of it are ſcatter'd over all the works of nature, and the whole œconomy of providence in a beautiful variety; and the lively image of it is ſtampt on rational creatures, whom God has taught what is their true wiſdom, namely *to fear him, and to depart from evil*, and to whom he has communicated ſuch an underſtanding as we cannot but account the high diſtinguiſhing privilege of their nature: But how much more to be admir'd, and worthy of our moſt peculiar veneration and eſteem, is the eternal fountain of intellectual light who is himſelf only *perfect in knowledge*.

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(6) Chap. 28.

SERMON IV.

The Spirituality of the Divine Nature explain'd and asserted.

John iv. 24.

God is a Spirit.

I HAVE endeavour'd in the foregoing discourses to prove that first fundamental principle of religion, the existence of the Deity, or of an active intelligent Being, who is the original Cause of all the great appearances in the corporeal system of the universe, and of those self-moving, sensitive and intellectual powers with which many particular beings are endu'd. But intending to establish this great truth on such a foundation as should comprehend all believers in God, however otherwise differing in their opinions, at the same time the most evident, and the least liable to difficulties, I abstracted from

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the conſideration of thoſe properties, perfections or attributes which belong to the Divine nature, not inſiſting even on its ſpirituality. Nevertheleſs, it will ſet the whole ſubject ſtill in a clearer light, and add great force to the arguments which have been already adduc'd, if we can advance one ſtep farther, and prove that the ſupreme, active and intelligent Cauſe of all things, is ſpiritual or immaterial; and this I ſhall endeavour to do in the following method, *Firſt*, I will ſhew, from the frame and appearances of the material world it ſelf, that there is ſuch a thing as ſpirit, eſſentially different from matter. *Secondly*, That the beings which are endued with life, ſenſe and underſtanding, in a limited degree of perfection, are ſpiritual; from whence it will evidently follow, that the original Cauſe is himſelf a pure Spirit.

Firſt, To ſhow from the frame and appearances of the material world it ſelf, that there is ſuch a thing as ſpirit, eſſentially different from matter. This alone is ſufficient to overthrow the fundamental grounds of *Atheiſm*, for however different its forms be, they all agree in excluding ſpirit from any ſhare in the origin and conſtitution of things, and in the

the effects we see produc'd, ascribing them all, even sense and self-motion which we perceive in animals, nay, and understanding which we are conscious of in our selves; ascribing all, I say, to senseless matter and its casual or necessary motion. The admission of spirit would ruin the *Atheistic* scheme, for spirit is suppos'd to be essentially distinct from body, being by its nature active and intelligent, and if that be once allow'd to have an existence separate from, and independent on matter, by what pretence of reason shall counsel and design be excluded out of the formation and government of the world, or any part of it, nay, where can a barrier be fixed against infinite perfection, or the Deity? Now that spirit must be admitted, will appear from this consideration, that attending carefully to the obvious common properties of matter, we shall find it impossible, without having recourse to the agency of spirit, to account for the motion, the changes of the situation, and of the magnitude, figure and other qualities of corporeal beings. It is the necessary condition of all bodies, the very law of their nature, to continue in the state wherein they are, and to resist any alteration, until it be effected, and the resistance

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conquered by an external force. If this neceſſarily belongs to all matter, its ſmalleſt and its greateſt quantities, how ſhall the beginning of motion and the moſt common appearances in material nature it ſelf, ſuch as the changes of its form which depend upon motion, be explained without an external agent?

Thoſe who have ſtudied the powers of matter with the greateſt exactneſs, find that there is eſtabliſhed among all bodies a law of mutual attraction and gravitation; and by the help of this one obſervation, attending to it cloſely and purſuing it through all its conſequences, they have made the greateſt improvements in natural philoſophy, and given the moſt ſatisfying explication which has yet appear'd, of the conſtant motions and other great phœnomena in the viſible heavens and the earth; but they do not pretend to tell us the cauſe of attraction and gravitation, whereby all bodies tend towards each other, with a force greater or leſſer according to their diſtances; only 'tis certain, this active moving force is not in bodies themſelves, for all which can be call'd their action on each other, or their impulſe, is by the contact of their ſurfaces, whereas the force of gravity operates at a diſtance,

stance, and is always in proportion to the solid content of the gravitating and attracting bodies; and therefore the immediate Cause must be something which pervades the intire mass of them even to their very centers, and makes an impression upon every particle. In vain should we fly for a satisfying solution of this appearance, to a subtle fluid matter, which penetrating solid bodies and filling their interstices, impels them towards each other; for besides that this is but an arbitrary supposition, it ought to be considered that subtle matter is matter still, passive and undesigning, not acting but acted upon. The difficulty will remain, and the question, as chang'd by this hypothesis, be as hard to answer as the question concerning the cause of gravitation without it. What is it that determines and gives a force to the (essentially unactive) subtle matter of the sun, and the subtle matter of the earth, whereby they impel those bodies towards each other, with a force proportionable to the quantity of solid extended substance they contain, when other bodies which contain a lesser quantity of the like extended solid substance, but are as open to the impressions of the undistinguishing subtle matter, do not so gravitate. In short, if we SERM. IV.

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ſhould heap material cauſes upon material cauſes to infinity, we ſhall never be ſatisfied in that way; there muſt be a beginning of operation from an active principle which we call ſpirit, eſſentially diſtinct from matter; the ideas of it and its properties, namely, activity and conſciouſneſs, are as different from extenſion, ſolidity, diviſibility and figure, which belong to all bodies, as any ideas in our minds can poſſibly be. The more we conſider, the more we ſhall be convinc'd that matter of it ſelf, and without ſpirit, can produce nothing even in it ſelf, none of its own appearances, neither motion, gravity nor form; it is capable of being variouſly compounded and divided, it is capable of various figures and ſituations, but it can neither compound nor divide it ſelf, neither change its figure nor ſituation.

If it be ſo, we muſt conclude there is ſuch a thing in the world as ſpirit, eſſentially different from, but intimately preſent with all bodies which we ſee, and continually operating upon them, for it is the efficient cauſe of their moſt common and conſtant appearances: Mechaniſm it ſelf cannot be without ſpirit, for the mechanical powers of matter, commonly ſo called, depend upon it,

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since gravity is owing to its influence. It is true all this does not directly prove understanding in the cause of motion, gravity and other common appearances in the material world, but it proves activity essentially different from matter, which forms it and produces the most important effects that appear in it; and this is sufficient to overturn the grounds of *Atheism*, showing that matter is not the sole being or substance in the universe, and the sole origin and cause of all things. Besides, as we find by experience in our selves, and other agents as far as we know, activity is still accompanied with thought and perception; there can be no rational pretence for denying understanding to the great active forming principle of the corporeal system, without which matter, if it could possibly have existed, must have remain'd an eternal chaos, devoid of motion, and consequently of various figure, or any kind of regular appearance. What limits can be set to the intellectual perfection of that mighty Agent, who is independent of the material world, on whom it necessarily depends, prior in nature, for he is the author of its form, and has moulded its parts into their different shapes, with all the diversity

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of their different qualities, and given it thoſe laws by which it is ſtill govern'd; rather indeed what we call its laws, are his own continued, uniform and regular operations. And tho', as I obſerv'd before, ſome who believ'd a Deity, weakly imagin'd him to be corporeal, not conceiving any ſubſtance diſtinct from matter; this was only an inconſiſtency in their notions, which proceeded from not attending to the irreconcileable difference between the ideas of material qualities and intelligence; if they had fully conſidered their own acknowledg'd principle of an eternal, all-wiſe and powerful mind, comparing with it the eſſential and moſt obvious properties of all matter, this would have corrected their error; but the caſe is very different of thoſe who therefore exclude ſpirit, becauſe they exclude original contrivance and agency, who not only profeſs, but their ſcheme neceſſarily requires them to do ſo, as the chief ſecurity of their grand principle againſt the exiſtence of God, that there is no being in the univerſe but matter, from the modifications whereof all appearances ariſe, even intelligence it ſelf; which ſcheme is effectually refuted, if it be prov'd that the ſimpleſt and moſt common qualities of matter upon which

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its appearances depend, must be attributed to the energy of an active immaterial principle. SERM. IV.

Secondly, The beings which are indu'd with life, sense and understanding, in a limited degree of perfection, are spiritual, that is the vital, sensitive and intelligent principles in them are spiritual. Indeed it would seem impossible in the nature of things, that matter should by any modification, that is, any motion and change of the figure and order of its parts, be exalted even into animal sensation, much less into pure intellection abstracted from any sensible quality. The reasoning of some ancient writers is very strong to prove that the percipient of material objects and their sensible qualities cannot be it self material; for if it were, the perceptive faculty must either be lodg'd in one single indivisible point, or in every point of the extended substance, or else every part must receive only a several part of the image or impression, and the perception be the result of the whole compar'd and united together. The first of these suppositions is an evident absurdity, there being no such thing as an indivisible point or particle of matter, and if there were, how can it be conceiv'd

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that a ſingle atom in every animal ſhould be only ſenſitive, the reſt wholly incapable of that privilege, that it ſhould alike receive the impreſſion of all magnitudes, and that it ſhould be invariably permanent through the whole life, when the other particles of matter which enter into the conſtitution are in a perpetual flux. That the whole perceptive power or the entire ſenſation, is not in every part of the ſuppoſed material ſoul, is as manifeſt, for upon that ſuppoſition, an animal would be, not a ſingle percipient but a collection of them, and the perception it ſelf muſt be various, compounded of many, contrary to what we know it is by our own conſciouſneſs of its perfect ſimplicity. And *Laſtly*, to ſay that every part of the perceiving extended ſubſtance, receives a ſeveral part of the image or impreſſion of the external object, will no way account for perception, becauſe perception being ſingle, it muſt, on that ſuppoſition, be the reſult of the whole united, and in order to that union, the parts muſt be brought to an indiviſible point, properly the percipient, which has been already ſhewn to be abſurd. If this reaſoning be thought not obvious enough (I have however, ſet it in the cleareſt light I could) yet it

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will naturally appear to any attentive person, very unreasonable to think, if not altogether unconceivable, that a body put into any form, being really no more than an aggregate of parts void of life and sense, should by any possible disposition of its parts, be rais'd to a capacity of animal sensation, the idea of which has not the least affinity with divisibility, magnitude, figure or any quality of matter. If it be so, we must conclude that there are beings in the world essentially different from matter. But the argument for the immateriality of the human soul will appear still stronger, if we consider the exercise of its purely intellectual powers. We have the ideas of matter by our senses, representing to our minds its sensible qualities, from which we infer its particular kind of existence, as the occasion, or somewhat which has the power of exciting those ideas. But attending to the exercises of our own minds and reflecting on them, we have ideas of an intirely different kind, which do not take in any of the properties of matter, such as solidity, divisibility and figure, nor its secondary qualities, as hardness, colour and the like, nor the idea of motion. Of this sort are perception, consciousness, the affections of the mind, its desires and volitions

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tions or ſelf-determinations, and the more complex qualities of gratitude, juſtice, generoſity, mercy and other virtues; the ſubject of theſe we call ſpirit. Now theſe two kinds of ideas are as different as any can poſſibly be, without any mutual relation or agreement at all; and if we may not from thence infer a real difference between the ſubjects of the properties which are repreſented by ſuch eſſentially diſtinct ideas, there can be no certainty of human knowledge.

If theſe two points be ſettled upon clear evidence, that the active principle which form'd and governs the corporeal world is a ſpirit, and that the animating principles of the ſenſitive and rational life are ſpirits, we muſt infer that God alſo is a Spirit, for either he himſelf is the immediate forming and directing Cauſe of the corporeal ſyſtem and its appearances, or the active principle which is the immediate Cauſe is deriv'd from him; and all the intelligent agents in the univerſe, not abſolutely perfect nor eternal and unoriginated, of which there is a numberleſs variety, being ſpirits, cannot be the accidental or neceſſary reſult of certain diſpoſitions in the parts of matter, but muſt proceed from an original intelligent and powerful Spirit;

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for that no perfection can belong to the effect which does not, in the same, or a more eminent degree belong to the Cause. But even upon supposition that the argument were not conclusive with respect to sensitive and inferior rational beings, and that it were not impossible for a particular system of matter to be endu'd with all the faculties of the human soul, yet still it holds concerning the supreme original Cause of all things; for that supposed possibility (which some learned men allow, at the same time firmly believing that the Deity is, and necessarily must be immaterial) means no more than that we are so ignorant of the essences and properties of things, as not to be sure of an utter inconsistency, in supposing that Omnipotence may endue a part of matter with the capacity of thought; but that matter meerly of it self, and without the agency of a superior power, has not that capacity, and consequently, that original intelligence cannot be corporeal, is sufficiently evident. SERM. IV.

Let us now more particularly consider this perfection of the Deity, which in our Saviour's judgment is a most necessary point of belief, for he taught it to a very ignorant person, and lays it as the foundation of the most

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perfect and acceptable worſhip thus deſcrib'd, *worſhip in ſpirit and truth.* 'Tis principally with this view we ſhould apply our minds to the conſideration of the Divine Attributes. All men who believe the Being of God, agree in acknowledging he is to be worſhipped: Nature teaches us benevolence to an intelligent Being, reverence and ſubmiſſion to a ſuperior, and gratitude to a benefactor; but if there is a God, he is the moſt perfect Intelligence, the ſupreme Lord, as being the independent Cauſe of all things, and to him we owe our exiſtence, all our powers and all our happineſs; therefore to him our beſt affections are unqueſtionably due, with the moſt proper and reaſonable expreſſions of them; beſides his unlimited dominion over us makes it our higheſt intereſt to pleaſe him as far as poſſibly we can, and obtain his approbation. Theſe conſiderations ſhow that nothing can concern us more than to underſtand the true character of the Supreme Being. Their ignorance of him involv'd multitudes of mankind in ſuperſtition, which was reproachful to their rational nature, and in conſequence of that, in moſt ſcandalous and deſtructive vices; *becoming vain in their imaginations* concerning the divine

divine perfections, *their fooliſh hearts were darkened, and they changed the glory of the incorruptible God into images made like corruptible things*, in purſuance of which they were abondon'd to *vile affections, to a reprobate mind* *, and to unnatural wickedneſs. It is true, that errors concerning the moral attributes of God, have the moſt immediate ill influence on the tempers and manners of men, becauſe he being firſt ſuppos'd to be an object of the higheſt eſteem and veneration, we will naturally incline to imitate the diſpoſitions and qualities which we aſcribe to him, and account it our glory to do ſo; for which reaſon, when the heathens imagin'd their gods were corrupt, paſſionate, revengeful and laſcivious, it was to be expected that the worſhippers ſhould alſo, after their example, be corrupt, indulging themſelves without reſtraint, in the ſame paſſions and the ſame ſenſual gratifications. But the natural perfections of the Deity are of a different conſideration, for they are not the patterns which we pretend, or are ſuppoſed to imitate; it never enter'd into any man's mind that he muſt be eternal, immenſe and unchangeable like God, SERM. IV.

* Rom. i. 21, 23, 24.

or

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or such a spirit as he is. Yet the natural perfections tend to raise in our minds a high admiration of God, and besides, are consider'd as the foundation of the moral attributes, in the eminent degree wherein he is possess'd of them; so that erroneous opinions concerning the *one*, lead to pernicious mistakes about the *other*, and therefore it is necessary for us to inquire, as far as our faculties will enable us, into those divine perfections which are commonly called natural by way of distinction from the moral, and to settle our notions concerning them. We cannot indeed by searching find out God, nor understand the Almighty to perfection: His essence is not to be comprehended by the human understanding, nor any of his attributes; when we call him a Spirit, 'tis but a very obscure and inadequate idea we express by that word. The truth is, tho' we know there is a real difference between body and spirit, and this distinction is generally thought (I will not affirm it to be exactly true) to comprehend all kinds of beings in the universe, the subjects of the properties, qualities and modes of which we have any notion, or as they are commonly called, substances, yet, we do not understand the intimate essence of either.

either. But the denomination of spirit is justly attributed to God, and gives us a true, tho' imperfect idea of his nature, as comprehending consciousness, intelligence, liberty and affections, the foundation and capacity of moral perfection and happiness, which are the chief excellencies of inferior spirits above all material beings, and must eminently belong to the Father of Spirits. SERM. IV.

That we may proceed further, and avoid mistakes in forming our notions of this subject, let it be observ'd, that as in the corporeal system we see a vast variety of forms, and in respect of various and important use, regularity, magnificence and other qualities which strike the imagination, there are some bodies which appear much more excellent than others; so we cannot doubt but there may be, indeed that there are, many different kinds of beings comprehended under the general denomination of spirit. One low kind which we know best, are our own souls, which in the exercise of their faculties, have at present, a great dependence on our bodies and their organs. But there is no reason at all to imagine, that the same is the condition of all spirits, and in every state; for as we perceive an essential difference be-

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tween body and ſpirit, between the ideas of which and their properties there is no connexion, the mutual dependence of them which we find in our ſelves, cannot be reaſonably thought to ariſe from the nature of ſpirit; but the union of ſoul and body ſo as to make one man (the nature of which union we do not underſtand, only diſcern that the compounding parts have a mutual dependence and influence on each other) this, I ſay, is rather to be attributed to the free conſtitution and appointment of our Creator. There is no reaſon then why we ſhould not conclude that our ſouls may, and that they ſhall ſubſiſt in a ſeparate ſtate, and exert their powers more perfectly than they do now, and there is no reaſon why we ſhould not believe that there may be, and that there are other kinds of ſpirits, which have not, nor ever had a dependence, in their being, perfections and operations, on matter or any bodily organs. Theſe appear to be the moſt excellent kind of ſpirits, which are the moſt independent on bodies, as being more unconfin'd in their manner of perceiving external objects, and their activity not limited to a narrow ſphere; beſides being free from many other inconveniencies, which our own experience

rience teaches us that such a condition as ours is liable to. But the supreme Spirit is alone absolutely perfect and independent, having the intire system of matter under his direction, to form and dispose of it at his pleasure, not subject to such impressions from it, nor tied down to such a manner of acting upon it as inferior spirits are, by the limited condition of their nature, and by the constitution which he has appointed for them. SERM. IV.

The notion of some ancient philosophers, particularly the stoics, that God is the soul of the world, was mean and unworthy of his high perfections. Tho' it imply'd an acknowledgment of the Divine Presence in all parts of the universe, every where intelligent and governing the whole, and represented all, even the most different and the most distant parts of the world, as united together in one system, under the care and direction of one sympathizing intelligent nature, which continually promotes the greatest absolute good of the whole, which was a noble sentiment much insisted on by some of those learned men, and improv'd by them to excellent practical purposes; yet that the Deity animates the *Mundane* system in the same manner that the human soul animates the human

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body, is too low a way of thinking concerning the ſupreme Being. For beſides that it naturally leads one to imagine an independence of the world in its being, on the eternal Spirit (as the human mind does not make its own body, nor has a power over its exiſtence) which probably was the erroneous opinion of ſome of the ancients, and tends to limit the Divine abſolute Perfections and Preſence to created nature; it carries in it ſuch an idea of his ſubjection to impreſſions, and even uneaſineſſes ariſing from the diſorders of the world, as is inconſiſtent with the infinite immutable excellence and happineſs of his independent Being. The notion of an eminent modern philoſopher is much more juſt and reaſonable, who, as the reſult of his moſt curious and excellent obſervations on the Divine counſel and power manifeſted in the ſyſtem of the univerſe, ſays that the Deity imports the dominion of a ſpiritual being over the world, not as his own body but as his ſervants, intirely ſubject to his government *.

This leads us to conſider the peculiar and tranſcendent excellence of God as a Spirit. Tho' ſome inferior beings have the ſame de-

* Sir Iſaac Newton, *Schol. Gener.*

nomination

nomination, and are truly of a spiritual nature, yet he is of an intirely different, and infinitely more perfect kind. There may be, for ought we know, as great a diversity in the spiritual, as in the material world, as many different species of spirits, that is, of beings which have no bodily substance, as there are of visible forms, and some of them as much inferior to, as well as distinct from others, as the lower kinds of life, perception and activity are from dead and senseless matter it self. We must not therefore imagine, that we have form'd an adequate idea of God's nature, when we have prov'd him to be a spirit and conceive of him as such, meaning by that name a living, intellectual and active being, essentially distinguish'd from corporeal substance; for tho' that is truly affirm'd of him in common with other spirits, yet he excels all other, even intellectual natures, more than our souls do the lowest inanimate beings. SERM. IV.

There are two principal properties of spirit, intelligence and activity, which as I have shewn, must be attributed to the Deity, but they belong to him in an infinitely higher degree, and are exercis'd by him in a more perfect manner than by any dependent being. Tho' the common use of all languages a-

ſcribes to God the perceptions we are conſcious of in our ſelves, as ſeeing and hearing and remembrance, nay, and the organs of ſenſation, ſuch as eyes and ears, yet ſcarcely are there any ſo ignorant as to underſtand theſe forms of ſpeaking in a literal ſenſe, but every one means by them the Divine moſt exact knowledge and diſcernment of things, to which our low and imperfect manner of perceiving by corporeal organs, bears ſome analogy. He that *made the eye* of man, to convey to him ſuch a repreſentation and knowledge of external objects as is not compleat and thoroughly comprehenſive of their nature, but accommodated to the purpoſes of our preſent ſtate, and proportionate to the other imperfect faculties of the human mind; *he*, the Maker, *ſees*, not in a ſtrict and proper ſenſe as we do, but underſtands all things in a more eminent and perfect manner; he that *made the ear*, the inſtrument by which are convey'd to us, the ſentiments and deſires of our fellow creatures moving our affections; *he*, in a ſuperior and more perfect way, knows and underſtands the ſentiments and deſires of all intelligent beings, whether conceiv'd only in the mind or expreſs'd by the mouth. In like manner as the human ſtrength and pow-

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er of operation are exerted by the means of arms and hands, these bodily organs are figuratively attributed to God, to denote his Almighty power, tho' it is exercised by him in a quite different manner, which we cannot comprehend, but we are sure it is not like tedious and laborious human operation. SERM. IV.

In a special manner it is to be observ'd, that many of the springs of action in embodied spirits, setting their powers a work, and which we are conscious of in our selves, tho' they are analogically attributed to the infinite eternal Mind, yet do not properly belong to him. The wise Author of our constitution has seen fit to mix in it, with superior faculties, some lower appetites and passions, which powerfully excite us to pursue the ends of our nature in the present imperfect state: Our minds are furnish'd with determinations which tend to the preservation of the body, and to the comfort and happiness of the animal life; we have desires and affections which rise no higher in their design; and we have passions which are excited by, and accompanied with certain motions in the body. But the divine purely spiritual nature is infinitely above these infirmities. Some of the heathens were so gross as to think the gods

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capable of ſenſual deſires, and pleaſure in the gratification of them, and perhaps there are others who imagine ſomething like human paſſions in the Deity, particularly the paſſions of pity, hatred, anger and grief. Indeed the Scripture it ſelf ſpeaks of God's hating the wicked, of his bowels of compaſſion mov'd for diſtreſſed creatures, and of his anger and grief; but theſe expreſſions are only us'd in the ſame figurative manner of ſpeaking as when the bodily organs of ſenſe and motion are aſcrib'd to him, and we ſhould be far from thinking there are any ſuch emotions in his moſt bleſſed and perfect mind, as we feel in our ſelves ariſing from things ſurprizing or diſagreeable to us. A little reflection would convince us that ſuch paſſions ſhow the imperfection of our ſtate, and a mixture of unhappineſs in it; and therefore they cannot poſſibly affect the infinite ſelf-ſufficiency, the undiſturb'd reſt and the perfect felicity of the ſupreme independent Being. When therefore he is ſpoken of as having indignation, compaſſion, anger or grief, it is only to be underſtood as an analogical repreſentation of his conduct as governor of the world towards his creatures; what men would do when they are compaſſionate, angry

gry or grieved, that God does, or produces a similar effect, with unerring wisdom, perfect tranquility and goodness, without the weakness of pity, the sensation of sorrow, or perturbation of wrath. SERM. IV.

Again, an unchangeable life or absolute immortality, is a property belonging to the Divine nature as it is spiritual. Our spirits are subject to pains and changes in their condition, from the body and otherwise; other spirits of a higher order may be so too in various degrees; but the most perfect Spirit is infinitely above the reach of sufferings, and infinitely remote from all possibility of change: Such is the absolute simplicity of his Being, free from any mixture or composition, there are no seeds or principles of decay *within* him, nor can he suffer from any thing *without*. We find by experience, that our compounded natures, made up of different parts, are liable to dissolution; it is the more simple spiritual part of our constitution that shall outlive the present state, and being dislodg'd of the earthly tabernacle, shall subsist separately: But there is a great difference between our immortality and God's; ours, as we were *created for his good pleasure*, continually depends upon it, and may cease if he pleases,

ſes, but it is impoſſible he ſhould not be the *living* God, the ſame immutable Spirit, *yeſterday and to day and for ever.*

I ſhall only add, as the foundation of the improvement I propoſe to make of this ſubject, and which the text leads us to, namely, the regulating of our worſhip, that the Deity is not reſembled by any ſenſible forms, His nature and attributes are alike eſſentially different from all the properties and qualities of matter, and no one part of it makes any nearer approaches to him than another. He is not be touched or handled, and *no man hath ſeen him at any time, nor can ſee him*: The moſt ſubtle æther or the pureſt light is no image of his ſpiritual ſubſtance, and the human ſhape is no more a true repreſentation of God than the ſhape of any other animal, nay, than a clod of earth or any other inanimate thing. It was therefore wiſely provided by the Lawgiver of the *Jews*, whoſe principal care ſeems to have been the preſerving of their worſhip from idolatry, that no image ſhould be made of the Godhead, and he gives the reaſon for it, that in all the miraculous appearances and extraordinary manifeſtations God had ever vouchſafed to them, and they were very many, they had never ſeen any

any *similitude*; there was never any handle given them for so absurd and gross a conceit, as that the Deity is like any visible being in the whole world. We read often of God's discovering his glory to them, as at the giving of the law, by a prodigious tempest, thunder and fire, and in their march thro' the wilderness, by a cloud in the day, and a pillar of fire in the night, which were called the tokens of his *presence*, tho' really he is alike present in all places; such astonishing things were apt to strike the minds even of very stupid people with a sense of his interposition in their behalf, and that his care and power were employ'd for them; but still there was no determinate shape, no figure of any abiding sensible object, imitable by human art, whereby they should have the least countenance or occasion given them, to make an image of their God, or *change his glory into the likeness of any creature.* It is true, we read sometimes in the Old Testament of divine appearances in a human form: Thus God is said to have *spoken to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend*, and of the three angels which appeared to *Abraham* in the likeness of men, before the destruction of *Sodom*, one was distinguish'd by the peculiar veneration of that eminent

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minent saint, as of a superior character. But this seems to be rightly understood by interpreters concerning the *Messias*, that divine Person who was in *the form of God*, before his incarnation: Several passages of the Old Testament and the New compar'd together, plainly intimate that he was with the *Israelites* conducting them as the divine *Presence*, and the *Angel of the covenant*, in whom *the name of God* was. St. *Stephen*, in the 7th of the *Acts*, speaking of God's appearing to *Moses* in the burning bush, and saying with an audible voice, *I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob*; St. *Stephen*, I say, expressly attributes this to the person whom he calls the *Angel of the Lord*, and who *was with Moses in the church in the wilderness*; and the Apostle *Paul* * mentioning the sins and punishments of the *Israelites* in the wilderness, for an *admonition to us on whom the ends of the world are come*, clearly insinuates that *Christ* was present with them directing their affairs, for he says * *neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.* Thus as our Lord Jesus Christ, *the image of the in-*

* 1 Cor. x. † v. 9.

visible

visible God, in *the fulness of time*, assum'd the human nature, *the word was made flesh and dwelt with us* as in a tabernacle, manifesting *the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*; before his incarnation he acted with full power, representing his Father in his transactions with men, *by him God made the worlds*, and by him govern'd the church: But the Divine nature it self, the essence of the supreme Being is invisible; *to whom is God like, or whereunto can he be resembled?* SERM. IV.

I shall in the next place, consider the practical purpose to which our Saviour has gone before us, in applying this important doctrine of natural religion asserted in the text, namely, the regulating our worship. First of all, we may see the absurdity of that practice which great multitudes of mankind have run into, the forming corporeal images of the Deity as mediums of worship. The worshipping of false gods, that is beings, whether real or imaginary, to which Divinity is falsely attributed, is an error against other religious principles, either against the existence of the true God, or his unity: But this species of idolatry so early introduc'd into the world, and which so generally prevail'd in it

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for many ages, is a moſt direct and heinous indignity to the ſpiritual Divine nature. The unreaſonableneſs of it, one would think, might eaſily appear to men, if they did but ſeriouſly reflect on themſelves; for how juſt and evidently concluſive is St. *Paul*'s argument to the *Athenians*, Acts xvii. 29. *Foraſmuch then as we are the offspring of God*; (we intelligent creatures, conſcious of intellectual and ſelf-determining powers, and of noble affections which do not terminate on ſenſible objects, but on ſpiritual and moral excellence); *we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold or ſilver or ſtone, graven by art or man's device.* What man is ſo far loſt to a juſt ſenſe of the dignity of his nature, as not to know that the vital principle within him of thought, of choice, of ſublime deſire, of rational and moral pleaſure, is far more noble than a whole world of corporeal inanimate beings, and ſhould we then ſo affront the Father of our ſpirits, from whom all their excellence is deriv'd, himſelf the original and pureſt Spirit, as to imagine he is like any material and corruptible thing.

Superſtition grew by degrees in the world, to ſuch a height of ſtupidity and barbarity, as was reproachful to the intelligent human

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nature; but the beginnings of it were more refin'd and plausible. The first idols probably were the sun, moon and stars, not as the ultimate objects of worship, but as the suppos'd habitations of the Deity, the visible instruments and magnificent representations of his power and goodness; but afterwards those creatures themselves were *honour'd besides the Creator*, and were admitted to a participation of the respect due to him. For such is the weakness of men's minds, and if they do not carefully watch against it, their attention is so easily ingross'd by the objects of sense continually before them, and which they find useful, that they forget things of vastly greater excellence and moment, which require careful reflexion to preserve a lively sense of them. They proceeded next to the deifying of departed Heroes, imagining that their virtues were rewarded with an exaltation to a high dignity in the other world, and that they were even taken into a share of the divine administration, still having an affectionate remembrance of their friends and their country, to which they had been useful upon earth. As these men, supposed to be advanc'd to Godhead, were of mixt characters, the idea of the Divine moral purity and perfection

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fection began to be alter'd, and vices had their patrons among the gods, till at length ignorance and corruption ſtill increaſing, ſome of them were worſhipped with the moſt obſcene and inhuman rites. Even brute animals of ſeveral kinds, and vegetables too became idols, and in fine, whatever recommended it ſelf to the affections of men by its uſefulneſs, and whatever was dreaded by them becauſe it might be hurtful, was worſhipped. Thus we ſee that the tendency of departing from the ſimplicity of a reaſonable ſervice, is to the moſt abſurd opinions and practices, as oppoſite to real religion as *Atheiſm* it ſelf is; in this reſpect worſe, becauſe they deſtroy humanity, and under the pretence of devotion, give a ſanction to thoſe crimes which nature it ſelf, abſtracting from any conſideration of God, would abhor. Every kind of idolatry, even the moſt refin'd, and for which the beſt excuſes are made, ſuch as that worſhip is not intended to terminate on the inferior beings, ſenſible objects or others before which it is offered, but that they are only us'd as helps to devotion, preſerving ſtill a higher regard for God, who is the ultimate object of adoration; every kind of idolatry, I ſay, is founded in falſhood, as the natural

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progress of it is to the utter subversion of all true piety and virtue; it proceeds from, or imports such notions as these, which are contrary to the absolute perfection of the divine, immense and spiritual Being, That the presence of God is confin'd to some particular parts of the universe, to the sun, the stars or some eminently sacred place upon earth, and that he can possibly be represented by some visible similitude, or that there are some material objects which give us a truer and juster idea of his nature than others. It is therefore necessary above all things, in order to the practice of true religion, and persevering in it, that we endeavour by a constant and diligent attention, to fix in our minds becoming sentiments concerning the Deity, as a most pure and perfect Spirit. SERM. IV.

I have said that idolatry (which in all its forms, even the most innocent of them, is an error against the doctrine of the text) tends to corrupt the tempers and the manners of men; but the observation deserves to be farther considered, and we may see it justified by the constant experience of the world. St. *Paul*, in the first chapter of his epistle to the *Romans*, teaches us concerning the Gentiles, and their own histories confirm it, that

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tho' they knew God, for his works proclaim his being and perfections intelligibly to all mankind, and their firſt and moſt natural ſentiments concerning him were the beſt; yet not liking to *retain him in their knowledge, they chang'd his truth into a lie*, that is, into idolatry, built upon a falſe foundation, and repugnant to the real nature of the Deity; in conſequence of which, they were abandon'd to ſuch monſtrous and unnatural wickedneſs, as nothing could have drawn them into but their idolatrous ſuperſtition; and we find that the declenſions of the *Jews* to impiety and wickedneſs, began with inventing means and inſtruments of ſervice to the true God, but from thence proceeded to groſſer kinds of ſuperſtition, which at laſt extinguiſhed all ſenſe of virtue and humanity, carrying them to the unnatural cruelty of ſacrificing their own children to *Moloch*. Even among Chriſtians themſelves, ſuperſtition has had very lamentable effects, ſome of them not only ſubſtituting their falſe worſhip in the place of virtue, and making atonement by it for their ſins, but being led by a blind zeal for their own inventions, to ſuch barbarity, as men, without a pre-

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tence of religion, would never have been guilty of. SERM. IV.

2*dly*, Since God is a Spirit, we can never reasonably hope to please him by merely corporeal things or bodily exercises. There are, 'tis true, external acts of homage and adoration necessary to be perform'd to God: In our present state the affections of the mind are naturally express'd by outward actions; benevolence, esteem, gratitude and other dispositions towards our fellow-creatures, are not silent and unactive in the heart; nature and custom have taught us the proper expressions whereby they shew themselves, and if *these* be altogether omitted, we shall scarcely believe the inward principles have a being. By parity of reason, if we have internal good affections towards the Deity, the sincerity and the force of them appear by proper outward acts: But the sincerity of intention, and truly pious affections can only be acceptable to God; without these no forms of devotion or seemingly religious works, however pompous, expensive and magnificent, are of any value at all; such formal service not proceeding from just sentiments, nor animated by inward good affections, is unworthy of our rational spirits to perform, and

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unworthy of the divine Spirit to accept. What notion can any man have of the Deity, who imagines that ſacrifices and other ceremonious performances will pleaſe him, when ſeparated from virtuous diſpoſitions and a good life? The queſtion which the *Pſalmiſt* puts in the name of God to the formal worſhipper, is a very proper one, *Will I eat the fleſh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?* * For, however abſurd that be, no better account can be given of the hypocrite's ſpiritleſs devotion, who is laborious in the forms and ceremonies of worſhip, but utterly negligent of moral duties, which alone he has any reaſon to think, can recommend him to the approbation of a pure ſpirit. *God does not ſee as man ſees*, he has not thoſe views of ſenſible things, nor thoſe affections and deſires to them which we have. Will he be delighted with a fine picture or an expenſive ſtatue? are gold and ſilver more precious to him than common earth? Has he ears like ours, to be delighted with the melody of ſounds? Theſe are groſs imaginations, unworthy of reaſonable beings: Strange! that ever it ſhould enter into the heart of a man, that he

* Pſal. l. 13.

could

could reconcile himself to God by *thousands of rams, and ten thousand rivers of oil,* or that *offering the fruit of his body* could expiate his crimes; and yet it is certain, there is such a proneness in mankind to this sort of superstition, that not only they have been guilty of it who had no other guide than the light of nature, trespassing thereby against the plain dictates of reason, and particularly this important principle that God is a Spirit, but even they who enjoy'd the benefit of a divine revelation, have, many of them fallen into the same error, contrary to the most express warnings and reproofs given them by God's extraordinary messengers. Many of the ancient *Jews* plac'd their religion in sacrifices and other ceremonial observances, in which they trusted as sufficient to recommend them to the divine acceptance, and to make amends for the want of true repentance and reformation, notwithstanding the most express declarations of the prophets, that no external service, tho' of divine institution, would be acceptable to God, without purity of heart and the practice of righteousness. The prophet *Jeremy* tells them * that to trust in the *temple of the Lord* for their se-

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* Chap. vii. *v.* 4.

curity, whilſt they did not amend their lives, was to truſt *in lying* words; he puts them in mind of the deſolation that was brought upon *Shiloh* for the wickedneſs of their fathers, tho' it was a place once as ſacred, and the preſence of God was there, as conſpicuouſly as afterwards in the houſe which was built for him in *Jeruſalem*; and by that remarkable example in their own hiſtory, he warns them that the temple would be no protection to them, if they continued in their crimes; nay, while they were guilty of murder, adultery, oppreſſion, fraud, perjury and idolatry, their entrance into the temple as worſhippers was a profanation of it, and turning the *houſe of God into a den of thieves and robbers*; but if they would pleaſe God and be intitled to the accompliſhment of the promiſes made to their fathers, they muſt thoroughly *amend their ways and their doings, they muſt execute judgment between a man and his neighbour, they muſt not oppreſs the ſtranger, the fatherleſs and the widow, nor ſhed innocent blood, neither walk after other gods* *. The declarations of the prophet *Iſaiah*, are as clear and ſtrong againſt their vain confidence in their ſacrifices and religious aſ-

* *v.* 5, 6.

ſemblies,

semblies, at their new moons, sabbaths and other festivals, Chap. i. 11. *To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me saith the Lord.—I delight not in the blood of bullocks or of lambs, or of he-goats. When you come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hands? Bring no more vain oblations, incense is an abomination to me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of the assemblies I cannot away with, it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting: But wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, plead for the widow.* SERM. IV.

I wish *Christians* were not chargeable with the same fault; but it is certain many of them are. Tho' our Saviour has taken great care to give his followers just notions of the divine nature, and on that foundation to raise a reasonable service; and tho' the *Christian* worship has the characters of plainness and simplicity in a more eminent degree than any other form ever had, yet has it been greatly corrupted by some *Christians:* Especially the church of *Rome* has multiplied her rites and ceremonies to a greater number, and thereby made her service more burdensome than the

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Jewiſh inſtitution it ſelf was. If it was abſurd in the worſhippers of *Baal* to think that they could prevail with their God by cutting themſelves with lances, is it not equally abſurd in *Chriſtians*, and much more inexcuſable, to imagine that their God, whom they acknowledge to be a pure Spirit, will hear them for their ſpeaking much, will be pleaſed with their vain repetition of formal inſipid devotion, which is the exerciſe of the body and not of the mind, with poſtures and veſtments which carnal worſhippers have deviſed, as fondly fancying a kind of humility and decency in them, or with faſtings, pilgrimages and ſuch like ſeverities, which God has not commanded, and which inſtead of promoting repentance and true holineſs, are relied upon in place of them; thus *making void the precepts of the moral law*, which are of eternal and immutable obligation.

Other *Chriſtians* make too near approaches to the ſame kind of ſuperſtition, who place their religion in points of mere ſpeculation, in a zeal for matters of ſmall importance, or in poſitive duties, a diligent attendance on aſſemblies for worſhip, receiving the ſacrament and ſuch like outward performances. *Theſe things ought not to be left undone*, be-

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cause God has prescrib'd them, but they are enjoin'd to intelligent creatures, and the uses and designs of them are fully explain'd: in general they are all intended for the promoting of good dispositions in men, and the practice of virtue, and we may be assured our observance of them is no farther pleasing to God, than as they are, this way, useful to our selves. Therefore to lay any stress on positive institutions, as if by any merit or efficacy in them, they could procure our acceptance with God, or in some other unintelligible manner, do us good, without contributing to our instruction, the exciting good affections in our minds and our progress in piety, righteousness and charity; this is to alter the very nature of them, to separate the means from the end to which God appointed them to be subservient, and to abuse his ordinances to superstition, which cannot be pleasing to him who is himself perfectly intelligent, and delights in the reasonable service of his creatures. And to conclude,

Lastly, If God is a Spirit, our duty in consequence of this principle, and in opposition to the errors already mention'd, is to *worship him in spirit and truth*, that is, with sincerity,

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ſincerity, with our beſt affections, and the moſt vigorous exerciſe of our inward powers. We cannot but have an abhorrence and contempt in our minds of hypocriſy; any profeſſions of reſpect to our ſelves which we know to be inſincere, and not to proceed from the heart, we would certainly reject with deteſtation as real affronts, and ſhall we then offer ſuch an indignity to the omniſcient Spirit? But if we conſider what the ſervice is which our own minds, upon calm and deliberate reflexion approve, we ſhall thereby underſtand what is acceptable to God; it is the homage of the heart, the inward devotion of the ſoul and affections, with ſerious attention, proceeding from clear apprehenſions and a firm perſuaſion of his adorable perfections, and evidencing its ſincerity in our whole converſation by the fruits of holineſs; it is an humble reverence for, and high eſteem of his glorious excellencies, gratitude for his benefits, confidence in his mercy, ſubmiſſion to his will and an imitation of his purity and goodneſs. Wherefore, *let ſinners cleanſe their hands, and the double-minded purify their hearts, and thus, if they draw nigh to God, he will draw nigh to them.*

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SERMON V.

The Unity of God prov'd from the apparent Unity of Design in his Works.

Deuteronomy vi. 4.

Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.

SINCE we are convinc'd by the most full and satisfying evidence, that the system of the universe is intellectual, or that the formation of the world and all its parts is to be attributed to a designing Cause; our next inquiry is, where shall that wisdom be found, and where is the place of understanding? Whether in a plurality of beings, co-ordinate and independent, or in one original perfect mind? That intelligence and activity are seated in a mind as their proper subject we know; for the knowledge we have of what passes in our selves, teaches us to distinguish between perception and a percipient, between operation

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operation and power, as the principle from which it proceeds; and that mind is a being or ſubſtance different from matter, eſpecially that ſpirituality muſt neceſſarily be implied in original intelligence, has been prov'd. The preſent queſtion is not whether there are other orders of underſtanding agents, ſuperior to men, which may be eaſily allow'd upon all ſuppoſitions; for tho' our own reaſon does not furniſh us with demonſtrative proof of it, yet who can find any difficulty in ſuppoſing, even if the world were made by chance, and there were no intending Cauſe in the origin of things, that there are many minds, and many different ſpecies of them, whoſe capacities are much larger than ours, who have a much more comprehenſive knowledge, and a far leſs limited ſphere of action, whoſe manner and extent of perception tranſcends ours, as much as we in underſtanding ſurpaſs the brutal kinds; and their activity may reach to vaſt quantities of matter, whereas we are confin'd to a ſmall part of it, and very unfit for great operations. And as there are many different kinds of ſpirits with very different degrees of perfection; thoſe who maintain the unity of God, the firſt independent Cauſe and ſupreme Ruler of

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the universe, do not at all doubt of his employing such inferior spiritual agents, as the ministers of his providence. But the question properly is concerning the original Cause of things, and the monarchy of the world, whether there be one supreme intelligent Being, to whom all other Beings owe their existence and all their powers, and who has an absolute dominion over all, the fountain of being, of understanding and power; or whether there be a variety of partial, independent, unmade causes of the universe, and all its appearances?

This last is most properly call'd *Polytheism*, but it has been exploded by the generality of men who have thought on this subject with any tolerable degree of attention. And indeed, the idea of a Deity, as it is explain'd both by those who assert and oppose his existence, naturally leads us to attribute singularity to him, to appropriate that character to *one*, and exclude all others from a partnership in his perfections and prerogatives. For the notion of God is of an absolutely perfect, uncaus'd, and therefore necessarily existent Being on whom all things depend, by his intelligence directing, and by his powerful will producing whatever actually

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tually is, the whole frame of nature with all the kinds and degrees of order and perfection which it contains. Now the true ſubject of controverſy between us and *Atheiſts*, is concerning the exiſtence of ſuch a Being; we believe that the phœnomena of the world cannot otherwiſe be accounted for, they maintain the contrary. But there is no appearance of reaſon for a plurality; the doctrine of *Theiſm* does not require it, for the Being of one God abſolutely perfect, is fully ſufficient to all its purpoſes. The *Atheiſtical* ſcheme oppoſes the unity of God; in fact the arguments of the *Atheiſts* are levell'd againſt it; and in reaſon, a multitude of independent agents ununited in deſign and operation, ſo diminiſhes the idea of abſolute perfection, and ſo diſſipates and enervates the ruling counſel of the univerſe, as to ſap the foundations of religion, and leave *Atheiſm* little to quarrel with. *Epicurus* himſelf, a violent adverſary to the Being of the true God, the Maker of all things, yet imagin'd a multitude of independent Deities, conſiſtently enough with his principles, excepting in one circumſtance, that he ſaid they were incorruptible, which can never be reconcil'd to his hypotheſis, that all things, and even

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the gods were generated by the casual encounter of atoms. But of what sort were these Deities? Only idle unactive beings, who liv'd in pleasure, without any share in the formation of the world, or in presiding over it; and the truth is, to suppose a plurality of partial independent causes, under no common direction, almost leaves the origin of things in the same confusion, and signifies as little to the purposes of religion as the fiction of *Epicurus* *. SERM. V.

* If it should be suppos'd, that there may possibly be a plurality of eternal independent beings, the makers of the world to whom the characters of necessary existence and absolute perfection belong, and consequently, who must be united in all their counsels and operations, for that infinitely perfect intellectual powers should differ, is a manifest absurdity: This hypothesis is imagin'd without any necessity (all appearances being at least, as well accounted for on the contrary supposition of unity) and supported by no argument. Besides, as multiplicity, at least possible, naturally accompanies the idea of effects, whose contingent existence and limited perfections are determined by the power and will of the designing Cause: so the idea of necessary existence and unlimited perfection seems to exclude all diversity of being, and how can it be thought that a plurality of independent, infinitely perfect beings, essentially immense, all-powerful and all-knowing, should divest themselves of these perfections, or the exercise of them, by dividing among them the formation and government of the world, for which every one singly is allowed to be sufficient. But as no such opinion is maintain'd, so far as I know, by any adversaries of religion, nor would at all serve their purposes; I shall not insist any farther upon it, but endeavour to prove unity of design in the frame and government of the world, which is the just foundation of our pious affectionate regards to the Deity.

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The *Polytheiſm* of the *Gentiles* ſeems to be a ſtrong argument againſt what I have ſaid. It is notoriouſly known, that before the times of *Chriſtianity*, mankind univerſally, all but the *Jews*, worſhipped *many Gods and many Lords*, and not only the ignorant vulgar, but even the moſt eminent philoſophers. How then can it be alledged that there has been any thing like an agreement, among the wiſe themſelves, in believing the unity of God? I anſwer, that upon a careful inquiry into the hiſtory of ancient times, it appears indeed that learned men complied with the ſuperſtition of their ſeveral countries, but at the ſame time ſtrenuouſly argued for, and profeſs'd to believe one ſupreme Being, the abſolute Lord of all; inſomuch, that if we except the *Epicureans*, there is not one philoſopher of note, who aſſerted a multitude of independent gods. There are clear authentic teſtimonies, ſtill remaining, which fully prove that the moſt celebrated authors among the *Perſians*, the *Greeks* and even the *Egyptians*, the moſt idolatrous of all nations, aſſerted that there is one unoriginated, ſelf-exiſtent Cauſe, to whom they gave the characters of the GREATEST and the BEST, the Maker

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of all things, the Father of gods and men. The poets themselves, the great depravers of the *Pagan* theology, filling it with fables, yet plainly and frequently declar'd this truth. SERM. V.

There are various accounts given of the *Heathen Polytheism*, or worshipping a plurality of gods, whereby it appears to be consistent with the acknowledgment of one supreme, undivided Monarchy of the universe; as *First*, That the one eternal and self-existent Deity was the ultimate Object of their adoration, under different names. Thus *Pan*, and *Janus*, and *Jupiter*, and *Cælus*, and *Saturn*, and *Pluto*, and *Apollo*, and *Minerva*, these and other Deities, so called, however the true notion of them may be disguised by the fabulous inventions of the poets, and even pretended histories given of their originals and acts, which represent them as so many derived and temporary beings, yet the testimonies collected by *Christian* writers, who have search'd accurately into this matter, from the most sensible *Pagans*, plainly shew that these several names did not signifie different gods, for that they had each the characters of the universal *Numen* ascrib'd to them, tho' the superstitious and credulous vulgar imagin'd a diversity, which

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falſe imagination was induſtriouſly cheriſh'd among them for political reaſons. Nor is it an argument of any weight to the contrary, that ſome of the names were alſo uſed to denote particular parts of the viſible world, as the heavens, the ſun, the earth and the ſea, for this only ſhews that their theology was obſcur'd, as it certainly was by a multitude of ambiguous words uſed in it, not that the wiſeſt among them did not intend by theſe very words, that their devotion ſhould terminate on the great God, the Creator of heaven and earth, which themſelves expreſsly ſay they did.

It is further alledged, and very probably true, that many of the *Heathens* deſigned by their different denominations to ſignify, not diſtinct beings, but partial conſiderations of the ſupreme Deity, as manifeſting himſelf by his various works. The vaſt multitude of creatures which are produc'd, and the numberleſs variety of appearances in the world, tho' all proceeding from the ſame original Cauſe, might give weak minds occaſion to imagine a diverſity of operating and governing principles; yet others really meant, and explain'd themſelves as meaning, no more than a diverſity of effects. Thus, tho' the *Pa-*

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gan worship might seem at first sight to be divided between the Divinity presiding in the heavens, in the sun, the moon, the air, the earth, the sea, and the invisible state of separate spirits; yet the wiser sort intended it to the one supreme God, to whose dominion the whole world is subject, whom they believed to be every where present, pervading all things, as they express'd themselves, and diffusing the fruits of his power, wisdom and liberality thro' all parts of the universe. And therefore when the inanimate parts of the creation were personated, and deified, such as the sun and the earth, we cannot reasonably think that, at least the men of sense and learning among the *Heathens*, were so stupid as to imagine that the material systems themselves were proper objects of religious invocation; but the true meaning was, either that they were animated by subordinate intelligences, whom they honoured with an inferior worship, as I shall afterwards observe, or rather that the sovereign virtues of this Deity, tho' one in the principle, yet multiform in their apparent exertions, were to be reverently acknowledged wherever they are manifested. From the deifying of the works of nature, as containing so many dif-

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ferent manifeſtations of the Divine power and providence, they proceeded farther to make gods of unſubſtantial things, mere accidents, ſuch as the qualities, the affections and paſſions of the human mind; virtue, juſtice, clemency, hope, had temples conſecrated to them and altars erected; not ſurely that theſe were thought to be perſonal deities, ſubſiſting by themſelves, but it was deſigned to be acknowledged, that in them the Author of nature has diſplay'd his virtues, giving a moving force to created beings, whereby important effects are produc'd in the world.

If this was the true ſenſe of the more intelligent *Pagans*, and by the many quotations which learned men have taken the pains to collect from their writings, it ſeems to be ſo, we muſt conclude, that under an appearance of *Polytheiſm*, they conceal'd a real perſuaſion concerning the real unity of God. And this will be ſtill more evident, if we conſider what I obſerv'd on another occaſion, that ſome of them worſhipped the Deity as the Soul of the world, than which, however wrong in it ſelf, nothing can give us a clearer idea of unity, or a ſtronger intimation that they believed it; for as we know

know by our own consciousness, that the human soul is one percipient active being, so a common soul, animating the whole system of the universe, must be apprehended to be one. I have already shewn, that this notion was gross and unworthy of the supreme Being. It is probable, that many of the philosophers who thus express'd their sentiments, intended no more than that the Divine reason, as they spoke, or understanding, is intimately present with all things, wisely governing them; some of them certainly had more sublime conceptions of the Deity, as an infinitely superior nature, the Author of the world, inhabiting it not as a Soul, but as a sovereign Ruler, who continually superintends all its affairs, and exercises a just and gracious care over them; and some of them imagin'd a plastic and intelligent universal nature, deriv'd from him, which was properly the Soul of the world, and they called it a secondary God. But however divided their opinions might be as to that point, they agreed in this, that the supreme Deity, the ultimate Object of worship, is One only, manifested in the several parts of the universe, either as his animated members, or his works, in which he is intimately

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preſent, continually diſplaying his wiſdom, power and goodneſs; ſo that he *containeth all things in himſelf*, and *all things are full of him*, which they carried ſo far, that this was not an uncommon ſaying with them, *Deus unus et omnia.*

Laſtly, It is certain that the *Pagans*, the wiſeſt and moſt learned of them, deſignedly and avowedly worſhipped inferior gods, ſubſtantial inviſible powers, whom they ſuppoſed to be created or generated by the one ſupreme Being, either in time or from eternity, and employ'd by him as the miniſters of his providence. Theſe Deities were of ſeveral ſorts, as ſeparate ſpirits of various orders and degrees of perfection, who never inhabited terreſtrial bodies, but were either altogether incorporeal or poſſeſs'd only aerial or ætherial vehicles, each preſiding over a particular part of the univerſe, as the ſtation and province appointed to him by the univerſal King; and the departed ſouls of heroes, whom they ſuppoſed to be advanc'd to a high degree of power, dignity and happineſs, as a reward of their virtues, and the eminent ſervices they had done to mankind, while they were upon earth.

The pretences by which the *Heathens* justified this part of their devotion were such as these, that since there are so many excellent beings, subordinate indeed to the great God, and his servants, but superior to men, and by whose ministry many and great benefits are convey'd to them; it seems reasonable that their favours should be acknowledg'd with gratitude, and that they should be honoured by men, in proportion to their dignity and beneficence. Besides, that as there is an infinite distance between the supreme Majesty, and mortals dwelling upon earth, it seems fit that they should not presume to approach his presence immediately with their adorations, but by the mediation and intercession of his favourite ministers, who continually stand before him and surround his throne. In both these sorts of worship, I mean the supreme and inferior, they used ceremonies and external symbols, especially sacrifices and images; sacrifices in testimonies of gratitude and acknowledgments of dependence, likewise bloody victims, as rites of deprecation, and for expiating their sins; and they used images, not as at all participating in their worship, at least the more intelligent pretended so, but only to

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make a more ſenſible impreſſion on their minds, and thereby help their devotion. Beſides, ſome of the *Pagans* did, and ſome do at this day, pay a kind of religious reſpect to evil dæmons, from no principle but that of ſervile fear, intending to appeaſe, at leaſt mitigate their malice, and eſcape the harm which otherwiſe they might and are inclined to do; or elſe, men, having themſelves miſchievous deſigns, implore the aſſiſtance of wicked ſpirits in accompliſhing them: But many others utterly diſclaim this, as impious and altogether unworthy of men, who acknowledge the ſupreme dominion of a good God over the world, whoſe providence directs the whole ſeries of events, and tho' it may permit malevolent creatures to exert their power and execute malicious deſigns in ſome inſtances, yet always permits them only for wiſe reaſons, and over-rules the iſſue for good.

What I have ſaid concerning the *Pagan* theology and worſhip, is not at all intended to excuſe their errors and corruption of it. It is impoſſible to vindicate idolatry, or giving divine honour to others beſides the Almighty Maker of heaven and earth, as the ſcripture ſpeaks, *worſhipping the creature beſides*

sides the Creator who is blessed for evermore; for SERM. V.
that is certainly to rebel against the clear light of reason, whereby he discovers himself to us, requiring that we should glorify him as God, that is, that we should dutifully recognise his peerless Majesty, and pay him an homage which cannot possibly be due to other beings in any degree, on account of his not only unequal'd but incommunicable excellency, as the sole self-originated fountain of all being, power, wisdom and goodness. To adore the Deity as the Soul of the universe, is to confound him with his creatures, and to disparage his absolute perfection by jumbling it into one composition with the most imperfect of all things; to worship him under the partial consideration of particular benefits communicated to us, as by the sun, the earth, corn and wine, is to lead unthoughtful men, as in fact it probably did lead many of the vulgar *Heathen*, into that most stupid notion that these creatures themselves are original Deities, which is rather *Atheism* than any kind of religion: And to serve angels or the departed spirits of good men religiously, as it is liable to the same inconvenience with the particular last mentioned, namely, ensnaring weak minds into that most

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moſt pernicious error of attributing independent Divinity to them; it has no foundation in reaſon, ſince we know not what communication thoſe ſeparate ſpirits have with us, or what knowledge of our affairs, nor have we any ground to believe it is acceptable to them; rather on the contrary, that they are diſpleas'd with it, as an affront to the God whoſe ſervants they are, and before whom they proſtrate themſelves with the humbleſt reverence. Beſides, the *Gentile* worſhip, wrong in its foundation, as contrary to plain reaſon, was ſtill more deprav'd by the craft of prieſts and politicians, who fram'd it to their own ſelfiſh purpoſes, not without the ſecret concurrence of evil ſpirits, intending miſchief to mankind, by enſnaring them into vice and unhappineſs under the ſpecious pretence of religion. By theſe means the devotion of the greateſt part of mankind grew to a monſtrous abſurdity, ſome of it at leaſt ſo irrational, ſo foul, barbarous and obſcene, as to be a diſgrace to the human nature; and in conſequence of it, as St. *Paul* very well obſerves in the firſt Chapter of his Epiſtle to the *Romans*, they were wretchedly debaſed in their morals, running into the moſt enormous and unnatural crimes. But however inex-

inexcusable the *Heathen* idolatry was, from the observations which have been made, I think it evidently appears, that amidst all the corruptions which prevail'd, and notwithstanding the strong appearances of *Polytheism*, still that grand principle of natural religion was maintain'd by the most understanding and thoughtful men, that there is one only living and eternal God, and they endeavour'd to explain their worship in a consistency with it. SERM. V.

It is not to be dissembled however, that there has been a real difference upon this head among professed *Theists*, nay, among professed *Christians*; some have asserted that there are two eternal, unmade, independent Principles, one good and the other evil; which opinion others have rejected as a very great error. The philosopher of greatest note who maintained the being of an eternal evil dæmon, the author of all the mischief and disorder that is in the world, was *Plutarch* the celebrated moralist. He pretends indeed that he was not singular in this notion, but that some of the most learned among the *Persians* and *Egyptians*, as well as *Greeks*, especially *Plato*, went before him in it; which in all probability is a mistake, at least

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leaſt with reſpect to *Plato*, and the other eminent *Grecians*: For the ſentiments of the *Perſian Magi*, it is more doubtful, whether *Arimanius*, whom their theology repreſented as the head of the oppoſition to goodneſs, were underſtood by them to be a ſubſtantial, unmade, independent principle or not. Among the ſects of profeſs'd *Chriſtians*, almoſt every one knows that *Manes* and his followers were charg'd with this error, (and from him it bears the name of *Manicheiſm* to this day) how juſtly, it is hard to determine, for it is certain that the hiſtory of ancient hereſies is involv'd in great darkneſs. However that be, the grounds of the opinion are of much greater importance, and more neceſſary to be conſidered than the hiſtory of its riſe and progreſs. Now what gave the principal, I may ſay, the only occaſion to it, was the difficulty, and as the abettors of it alledge, the impoſſibility of accounting otherwiſe for the origin of evil. Shall we, ſay they, attribute all the good that is in the world to a good author, and from his works infer his being and his moral character, which is allow'd to be a juſt way of reaſoning; and ſhall we not, in like manner, impute the evil that is in the world, to an evil cauſe?

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Or is it to be imagined, that a Being essentially good, would have produc'd or even permitted, when it was in his power to have prevented, so much wickedness and so much unhappiness as we see among mankind? It is plain, that the point thus stated, is not proper for our present consideration, because it is apparently an objection against the goodness of God, and we have not yet proceeded so far in our inquiry as to any of his moral perfections. I shall therefore wave it at this time, and only argue against the *Ditheistic* scheme, as well as *Polytheism*, from the foundations already laid, that is, I will, in the remaining part of this discourse, consider whether the proofs which have been adduc'd for the Being of God, or an universal, designing and active intelligence in the world, will lead us this one step farther, to conclude the unity of that intelligence or not?

The only argument which has been insisted on for the existence of a Deity, or an intelligent Cause of all things, is taken from the evidence of design in the formation of the universe, and its several parts; in the obvious and most common appearances of the material system, such as the variety and uniformity, which, upon the slightest view,

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we cannot but obſerve in the works of nature, the apparent harmony and order of our world, and the mutual relation of its parts, as the heavens, the air and the terraqueous globe, divided into collections of waters and dry land, in each of which are numerous living inhabitants, ſuited by the frame and texture of their bodies to their proper elements; in the production of animals and their various kinds, preſerv'd unmix'd, and propagated by a ſettled never-failing law; in the principal phœnomena of the animal life, ſenſation and ſelf-motion; and eſpecially in the human underſtanding, its abſtract notions, its knowledge of eternal truths, and above all its knowledge of morality, of ſo great and important uſe to the perfection of the intelligent Nature, and the common advantage of the whole ſpecies. Now if we review all theſe particulars and compare them together, we ſhall ſee that they diſcover not only deſign in the origin and contrivance of them, but unity of deſign, and therefore that all things are derived from one eternal ſource of intelligence and activity, or one God: But I ſhall content my ſelf with making a few remarks on ſome of them, eſpecially on their mutual dependence and connexion, directing

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us to consider them as parts of one system, and consequently as proceeding from one intelligent Cause. SERM. V.

First, As gravity is the common quality of all bodies, arising not from the nature and properties of matter, nor to be explain'd without the agency of a foreign Cause, yet producing numberless uniform effects in the corporeal system; it is in all reason to be attributed to one contrivance, rather than the different designs of two or more partial independent causes. What a vast variety of appearances in nature depend on this one, the self-balanc'd earth hangs upon its centre, the mountains are set fast, there is a perpetual flux and reflux of the sea, vapours continually arise, the clouds are balanced till by their own weight they descend in rain, animals breathe and move, the heavenly bodies hold their stations and go on in their constant course, by the force of gravity, after the *ordinance* of that wisdom which appointed them this law. Now when we see a multitude of effects proceeding from one Cause, effects so various in their kind and so important, a Cause simple and unvaried in all the diversity produc'd by it, can we avoid ascribing this to an unity of intelligence, if there be intelligence

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ligence in it all? For could we ſuppoſe different independent beings, acting with different deſigns, and by diſtinct operations to have form'd the ſeveral parts of the world, and the ſeveral ſpecies of creatures which are in it, what reaſon can be imagin'd why they ſhould all be govern'd by, and all neceſſarily depend upon one law? The Maker of the ſun, or if a partial cauſe of nature could be ſuppos'd to have an underſtanding large enough for it, the Contriver of the whole viſible heavens, muſt, one would think, have finiſh'd his ſcheme independently on any other, without borrowing aid from the work of another God; in like manner the Gods of the ſeas and of the dry land, and the creator of animals would have compleated their ſeveral ſyſtems, each by it ſelf, not depending on any other for its order and preſervation: Whereas, on the contrary, we ſee in fact they are none of them independent, but all held together by the common bond of gravity; the heavens and the earth continue in their ſituations at a proper diſtance from each other by the force of this law, the ſea keeps within its channels, and animals live and move by it. All which leads us to acknowledge one directing Counſel in the whole

whole frame, for what but an understanding which comprehends the whole extent of nature, reaching from the utmost circuit of heaven to the center of the earth, could have fix'd such a common law, so necessary to all its parts, that without it not one of them could subsist, nor the harmony of the whole be preserved. The strict cohesion of the parts which constitute particular bodies, requires a peculiar cement, different from that of the gravitating force, and as it can never be explain'd by the nature and properties of matter itself, and is absolutely necessary to the forms and the uses of bodies in the several far distant regions of the world, it must in like manner be attributed to the contrivance of an understanding, and the agency of a power which takes in the whole corporeal system, not to a partial Cause limited in its intelligence and operation. SERM. V.

2*dly*, The beautiful order and harmony of the universe, since it must be acknowledg'd to be the work of understanding, has all the appearance which is necessary to satisfy any fair inquirer, of its being form'd under the direction of one governing wisdom. Disconcerted counsels can never produce harmony; if a plurality of intelligent causes pursue each

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his ſeparate deſign, diſunion will continually cleave to their works, but when we ſee an intire piece made up of many parts, all correſponding to each other, and conſpiring together ſo as to anſwer one common end, we naturally conclude unity of deſign. As a work of art is formed according to the preconceived idea of a deſigning artificer, without which it has not its neceſſary intireneſs and uniformity, the ſame may be obſerv'd in the works of nature. A tree is as much one as a houſe, an animal as compleat a ſyſtem in it ſelf (only much more curiouſly fram'd) as a clock. If we carry our views farther into nature, and take in whole regions of the univerſe, with all their contents, the ſame characters of unity are ſtill viſible. The earth it ſelf is not a confus'd maſs, or a medley of incoherent and unrelated parts, but a well contrived fabric, fitted and plainly deſign'd for uſe; If we conſider what a multitude of living creatures are in it of different kinds and degrees of perfection, each ſort having proper apartments aſſign'd them, where they dwell conveniently together, with ſuitable proviſion made for them, and inſtincts directing them to the uſe of it; if we conſider the intereſts of the ſeveral kinds, not interfering in the

the main, but rather serviceable to each other, furnished with necessary defences against the inconveniencies to which they are liable, either by the preventing care of nature, which without any thought of their own has provided for their safety, by the appointed advantages of their situation, or by an implanted wisdom directing them to find out the means of it; and if we consider the constant interposition of the same liberal intelligent nature, appearing by the daily new productions from the same fertile womb of the earth, whereby the returning wants of animals are reliev'd with fresh supplies; all the species of living things having the common benefit of the air, without which they could not subsist, and the light of the sun, which cannot at once illuminate the whole globe, being dispensed among them with so good œconomy, that they have every one what is sufficient to guide them in the exercise of their proper functions, that they may fulfil the purposes of their being. When we consider all this, can we doubt but the earth is dispos'd and govern'd by one intending Cause? If in a large house, wherein are many mansions, and a vast variety of inhabitants, there appears exact order, all from the highest to the lowest continually attend- SERM. V.

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ing their proper buſineſs, and all lodg'd and conſtantly provided for ſuitably to their ſeveral conditions; we find our ſelves oblig'd to acknowledge one wiſe œconomy; and if in a great city or commonwealth there be a perfectly regular adminiſtration, ſo that not only the whole ſociety enjoys an undiſturb'd peace, but every member has the ſtation aſſign'd him which he is beſt qualified to fill; the unenvied chiefs conſtantly attend their more important cares, ſerv'd by the buſy inferiors, who have all a ſuitable accommodation, and food convenient for them, the very meaneſt miniſtring to the public utility and protected by the public care; if, I ſay, in ſuch a community we muſt conclude there is a ruling Counſel, which if not naturally, yet is politically one, and unleſs united, could not produce ſuch harmony and order; much more have we reaſon to recogniſe one governing Intelligence in the earth, in which there are ſo many ranks of beings diſpos'd of in the moſt convenient manner, having all their ſeveral provinces appointed to them, and their ſeveral kinds and degrees of enjoyment liberally provided for, without encroaching upon, but rather being mutually uſeful to each other, according to a ſettled

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and obvious subordination. What else can account for this but a sovereign Wisdom, a common provident nature presiding over, and caring for the whole. SERM. V.

But the earth, as great as it appears to us, complicated in its frame, and having such a variety in its constitution, sustaining and nourishing so many tribes of animals, yet is not an intire system by it self, but has a relation to, and dependance on other parts of the universe, as the beings it contains have upon it. It owes its stability to the common law of gravitation, it derives its light and its heat from the sun, by which it is render'd fruitful and commodious to its inhabitants. In short, a bond of union runs through the whole circle of being, as far as human knowledge reaches, and we have reason to make the same judgment concerning the parts of the world which we do not know, and to conclude that they all together compose one great whole, which naturally leads us to acknowledge one supreme uniting Intelligence. To object against this, the possibility of wild confusion reigning in worlds unknown, is to feign and not to argue, and to suppose disorder prevalent in an infinity of being which we are unacquainted with, which is the *Atheistic* hy-

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potheſis, is to take away all rational foundation for regularity any where, tho' we ſee it actually obtains every where, as far as our obſervation can reach. But confining our ſpeculations on this ſubject within the compaſs of known exiſtence, as we ought to do in a fair inquiry, the apparent order of the effects is a ſtrong evidence of unity in the Cauſe. For if different independent cauſes produced, each a part, why are there no footſteps of this in the whole extent of nature, why does not ſo much as one piece appear, as the ſeparate monument of its author's power and wiſdom? From divided counſels one would naturally expect interfering ſchemes; but on the contrary, we ſee an univerſal harmony. Men indeed from a ſenſe of their indigence, and by the direction of inſtincts, which muſt be attributed to the deſigning author of their conſtitution, joyn in ſocieties, which, tho' compos'd of many, are govern'd by one counſel: But that is only an artificial union, a ſubmiſſion to the majority, or to thoſe who have the ſupreme power delegated to them, rather than an agreement in deſign. But this cannot be the caſe of independent beings, ſelf-exiſtent, and each compleat in it ſelf, without relation to any other: And yet we ſee in nature

ture a perfect harmony, from whence it is plain there must be an agreement at least in counsel and design, if we could suppose a plurality of independent causes. But whence comes this agreement? To say by chance, is *atheistically*, and very unreasonably to attribute the most perfect of all effects, universal order, to no cause at all; if we say by design, it must be one comprehensive design, forming the whole scheme of nature and providence, which directly brings us to what we are looking for, one sovereign commanding Intelligence in the universe, or one God. This was the argument by which some of the ancient philosophers prov'd that there is one only eternal and independent Principle, the Fountain of being and the Author of all things. *Pythagoras* called it a *Monad*, and *Aristotle* argu'd from the phœnomena that all things are plainly co ordered, to one, the whole world conspiring into agreeing harmony, whereas if there were many independent principles, the system of the world must needs have been incoherent and inconspiring, like an ill agreeing *drama*, botch'd up of many impertinent *interspertions*. And he concludes that things are well administred, which they could not be under the govern- SERM. V.

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ment of many, alluding to the verſe in *Homer*, Ουκ αγαθον Πολυκοιρανιη, εις Κοιρανος εστω.

3*dly*, The condition and order of inferior, derived, and evidently dependent intelligent agents, ſhew not only intelligence, but unity of intelligence in the Cauſe of them. Every man, a ſingle active conſcious ſelf, is the image of his Maker; there is in him one undivided animating principle, which in its perceptions and operations runs through the whole ſyſtem of matter that it inhabits, it perceives for all the moſt diſtant parts of the body, it cares for all, and governs all, leading us, as a reſemblance, to form an idea of the one great quickening Spirit which preſides over the whole frame of nature, the ſpring of motion and all operation in it, underſtanding and active in all the parts of the univerſe, not as its ſoul indeed, but as its Lord, by whoſe vital directing influence it is, tho' ſo vaſt a bulk, and conſiſting of ſo many parts, united into one regular fabric. Again, the general apparent likeneſs which there is among all the individuals of the human kind, is a ſtrong evidence of their being the children of one Father. I do not mean principally the ſimilitude of the exterior form, tho' even that, in reaſon, ſhould be attributed to the direc-

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tion of one intelligent Cause, but that where- SERM. V.
by we are especially God's offspring, our intellectual capacities, which as far as we can judge, are very nearly alike; a great difference there may be, no doubt there is, in the improvement of them, but the powers themselves, and all the original modes of perception, in the different individuals of mankind, seem to resemble each other, as much as any really distinct things in nature. Now from a multitude, or a constant series of similar effects, which do not arise from necessity; we infer unity of design in the Cause: So great a number of rational beings as the whole human race, dispos'd of in the same manner, endued with like faculties and affections, having many, and those principal things in their condition common, provided for out of the same fund and made for the same purposes; may reasonably be supposed to belong to one family, to be deriv'd from the same origin, and still under the same paternal care.

Above all, the moral capacity of mankind, which is a most important part of their constitution, tending to the highest perfection of their nature, and the principal bond of regular society among them, as it proceeds from a wise intending Cause, shews unity of wis-

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dom in the Cauſe; and the government over the moral, as well as the natural world, evidently appears to be a monarchy. Since, as I obſerv'd before, a ſenſe of good and evil in characters and actions is indelibly imprinted on every human heart, and there are affections of very great force, planted in our minds, whereby we are determined to act according to that ſenſe, and ſince this is the effect of an original conſtitution, interwoven with the very frame of our nature, and no otherwiſe to be accounted for than by the deſign of its Author; let us ſee how this is to be explained upon the contrary ſuppoſitions of one Supreme, or a plurality of independent governing minds? The evident tendency of virtue is not only to the private happineſs of ſingle perſons, but the good of the whole kind, an univerſal benevolence links us together and intereſts every one of us in the affairs of another, ſo far as to deſire and endeavour their ſafety and happineſs, not inconſiſtently with our own. There are other particular determinations of the virtuous kind, ſuch as compaſſion, natural affection, gratitude and the love of our country, ſo confeſſedly natural to men, as by common conſent to obtain the name of humanity, but ſo prevalent in ſome as to put them

them upon the moſt ſelf-denying and hazar- SERM. V.
dous enterprizes, nay, to ſacrifice their private intereſts, even to their very lives, for the good of others; and theſe determinations of the human mind every one muſt ſee, do not center in it ſelf, but that the ultimate intention and effect of them is to promote the good of the whole ſpecies. Now if we are thus form'd with deſign, and if this conſtitution be the reſult of intelligence, is it reaſonable to attribute it to different intelligences, having different views, each framing and purſuing a ſeveral ſcheme, when the principal effect, which in a work of wiſdom muſt be the principal intention, is not the ſeparate good of one or a few, as it muſt have been upon the hypotheſis of various independent cauſes, each caring for his own workmanſhip, but the common good of all; or rather does not this view of the conſtitution, which is a very plain and natural one, pointing out its main end, evidently ſhew that the whole collective body of mankind, comprehending *all the nations of men, which are made of one blood to dwell upon the face of the whole earth*, is the family of *one God, the father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all?* It is true, there are found in men diſpoſitions con-

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contrary to virtue, which produce effects hurtful to ſociety, and deſtructive of the common peace and happineſs, yet this does not prove a contrariety in the conſtitution, which muſt be attributed to the influence of oppoſite cauſes in the frame aud contrivance of it: Whether theſe bad diſpoſitions are an argument againſt the goodneſs of the Author, ſhall be conſider'd in its proper place; in the mean time we may obſerve, that not only we have powerful inſtincts, whereby we are prompted to purſue the greateſt univerſal happineſs of mankind, but we are under the greateſt neceſſity that voluntary agents can be under, of acting according to thoſe inſtincts, becauſe of the connexion our doing ſo has with our own happineſs, for we cannot otherwiſe be approved to our own minds, nor conſequently have any true ſelf-enjoyment; which plainly ſhews that the governing deſign of the human frame was one, namely the good of the whole, and therefore that the one Father of all men is the Author of it, tho' he has made us in an imperfect ſtate, and not without the poſſibility of rebelling againſt the law of our nature.

From this may be infer'd the whole duty of man, ſumm'd up by our Saviour in theſe

two

two branches, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self.* The obligation of the latter, the love of our neighbour, or every one of mankind, arises from the law of our creation. Since we are children of the same family, the offspring of one father, and plac'd under a constitution which is wisely and graciously intended for the greatest and most extensive good of the whole kind, what can be more natural and reasonable, than that we should do all the good offices in our power to each other? This is to answer the end of our being, and to work together with God. The inanimate creatures serve the purposes for which they were made, without any thought, and the brutal species act according to their instincts, without discerning the design of them; but since God has indued us with a capacity of understanding the end of his own works, and of our own powers and affections, is it not evident that we ought to fulfil that end, in a nobler manner, not by an unintelligent necessity, but voluntarily? It is true, we have a principle of self-love planted in us, which far from thwarting the design of the social affections,

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fections, is perfectly consistent with it, and ministers to it, for the care of every individual, is for the good of the whole species. But to confine our affections and our cares to our selves, neglecting the offices which arise from the relation we have to men, as our brethren, is to trespass against the establish'd order of the world, and to violate the respect which we owe to the one God and Father of all, who is the Author of it.

2*dly*, The principal duty of mankind is to love the Lord their God and to serve him. This follows directly from the acknowledgment of his unity; and accordingly *Moses* having in the text, called upon *Israel* to hearken to this important truth that the Lord our God is one Lord, immediately adds in the following verse, *and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.* The same duty is otherwise express'd at the 13th verse, refer'd to and thus quoted by our Savior, * *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and him only shalt thou serve.* The constitution of our minds leads us directly to that honour and service God requires, so that we

* Matt. iv. 10.

need

need not ſay *who ſhall aſcend to heaven for us, or deſcend to the deep*, to bring us inſtruction concerning our duty to him, the knowledge of it is *near us, even in our hearts.* If we look attentively into our ſelves, we ſhall find that intelligence neceſſarily attracts our eſteem, and that gratitude to a benefactor is the natural growth of our minds; an inward veneration ariſes for wiſdom diſplay'd in a variety of works wherein one noble end is regularly purſued; and good communicated with deſign, produces warm affections in every heart which deliberately attends to it, and is not under a ſtrong unnatural prepoſſeſſion. Now ſince our reaſon convinces us that all the wiſdom of the univerſe centers in one mind, that all the effects of intelligence which we behold in the univerſal ſyſtem of nature, are to be attributed to one Cauſe, that all the ſcattered rays of intellectual light which we diſcern in limited, dependent underſtandings, are but emanations from one eternal fountain of wiſdom, and all the good we poſſeſs, or ſee, flows from one never-failing, bountiful Spring; then in all reaſon, according to the direction of our intelligent nature, our higheſt eſteem and moſt intenſe affection ſhould be plac'd on that eternal Mind,

SERM. V. Mind, that glorious, perfectly wise and benevolent Cause of all things; he is intitled to a peculiar honour from us, such as no other being can claim, we ought to have the greatest respect for him in our hearts, and carry it always with the humblest reverence towards him in our whole behaviour; so reasonable is that rule of revealed religion, and which is one principal design of it, that men laying aside all superstition and idolatry, should worship and serve the true God, the supreme Being alone, *and have no other gods before him*, still remembring that he *is a Spirit, and they that worship him* acceptably, *must worship him in spirit and truth*, not with outward forms of devotion, which when separated from good dispositions of mind and the obedience of our lives, cannot please him, but with the imitation of his holiness and goodness, and obeying his precepts of eternal and immutable righteousness, according to that excellent declaration of the Apostle St. *John*, * *This is the love of God that we keep his commandments.*

* 1 John v. 3.

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SERMON VI.

Abſolute Eternity explain'd and ſhewn to be a peculiar Attribute of God.

Pſal. xc. 2.

From everlaſting to everlaſting thou art God.

ALL men who believed the being of God, have ever agreed in aſcribing eternity to him as an abſolute perfection of his nature, tho' tis impoſſible for our minds to comprehend it. We have very clear notions of intelligence and activity, which, being conſcious of them in our ſelves, we can eaſily aſcribe to other beings in a greater or leſſer degree; but a preſent exiſtence which was from everlaſting or without beginning, that is an infinite duration now actually paſt; this at the firſt propoſal overwhelms our feeble underſtandings, and our ideas of it muſt be inadequate. It becomes us therefore to enter

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on the conſideration of this ſubject with a ſenſe of our own weakneſs, and with a reſolution to reſt ſatisfied, if we have convincing proof that God is, in the higheſt ſenſe eternal, tho' there may be puzzling objections rais'd againſt it, which really amount to no more than this, that the object is too big for our faculties, and that we cannot by ſearching find it out, nor underſtand it to perfection.

The words eternal, everlaſting, for ever, and others of the like import, have different ſignifications in common ſpeech and in ſcripture; ſometimes they mean no more than a very long duration, ſometimes a continuance ſo long as the ſubject to which they are applied ſhall exiſt; the higheſt ſenſe in which they are uſed concerning created beings, is that of an endleſs future ſubſiſtence; thus they denote the immortality of the human ſpirit and of angels, and the never-ending felicity of good men after this life: But the eternity of God is the unchangeable permanency of his being, as compleat in himſelf and independent, not only without end, but without beginning, which is the moſt perfect manner of exiſtence. Whatever is deriv'd from another voluntary and intelligent cauſe, receives

receives its limited condition of being from, is always ſubject to, and may ceaſe to be, by the power and will of that Cauſe; but he who is unoriginated, and therefore abſolutely unlimited and totally ſelf-ſufficient, remains in the ſtricteſt ſenſe,, eternally the ſame, liable to no alteration by any power, and, as it is expreſs'd in the text, *from everlaſting to everlaſting God*: I ſhall in this diſcourſe, *Firſt*, endeavour to prove the doctrine of God's eternity: *Secondly*, to ſhew what are the moſt proper, tho' they are imperfect conceptions, we can form of it; and then I will make ſome practical reflexions. SERM. VI.

Firſt, To prove the doctrine of God's eternity; and the moſt intelligible method of proceeding in it, is, I think, by the following ſteps; *Firſt*, the idea of eternal duration naturally forces it ſelf upon the human mind; we may indeed, abſtract from the conſideration of any particular being, or of all beings as exiſtent in it, or we may imagine an eternal nothing; but ſtill the idea of eternity will remain. Now the difficulties which attend our notion of the Divine eternity, ſeem equally to attend the notion of eternity, unapplied to the exiſtence of any being; for ſhall it be ſaid that the duration of the Dei-

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ty without ſucceſſion, is what we can have no idea of, and on the other hand, his eternal ſucceſſive duration is alike inconceivable, as ſuppoſing infinity unequal, and capable of addition and diminution; and may not the ſame be ſaid concerning duration conſidered abſtractly? Theſe difficulties therefore ought not to be made objections againſt God's being from everlaſting to everlaſting, ſince they equally lie againſt an abſtract duration without beginning and without end, which yet is inſepareble from our thoughts. The truth is, ſuch reaſonings only ſhew us the imperfection of our own underſtandings, that have real ideas familiar and unavoidable, of things which they cannot comprehend, namely, ideas of duration and ſpace, neceſſarily growing up to infinity, too large therefore for the human mind to graſp, being it ſelf finite; we know they are, but do not know what they are, we know they are both diviſible into ſo ſmall parts that we cannot diſcern the leaſt of them, and both of ſo great an extent that we cannot attain to the knowledge of their utmoſt bounds. Shall we then object againſt the eternity of God as incomprehenſible? And yet we cannot avoid thinking on, and being perſuaded of eternity, which,

which, without him, is equally incompre- SERM. VI.
henſible.

Secondly, It has been univerſally acknowledged, even by *Atheiſts* who pretended to reaſon for their opinions, that ſomething muſt have exiſted from eternity, and that if there ever had been nothing, there never could have been any thing; indeed 'tis difficult to imagine how this could be denied by any man, for we cannot conceive of a commencement of being otherwiſe than as an effect, and an effect without a cauſe is too palpable an abſurdity for any one to maintain; it is really an effect which at the ſame time is not an effect: Vain therefore are the cavils of unbelievers againſt the eternity of God, which muſt equally affect all their own hypotheſis, an eternal chaos, an infinite ſucceſſion of worlds, or an infinite ſeries of dependent cauſes. Again, our minds attribute, and cannot avoid attributing duration to all beings of which they have any knowledge: We are conſcious of it in our ſelves, by attending to the ſucceſſion of our own thoughts, and we cannot help conceiving it to be inſeparable from all exiſtence. But what kind of duration ſhall we attribute to an uncauſed being? It muſt be without a

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beginning as the exiſtence is without a cauſe; the ſuppoſition of a beginning neceſſarily importing the poſſibility of a cauſe: So that if the mind finds it ſelf conſtrained to aſſent to this propoſition, that there is an uncauſed being, it ſeems to be under the ſame neceſſity of acknowledging that being to be without beginning, or abſolutely eternal. And tho' our ideas of uncauſed and eternal are negative, the meaning of that expreſſion is not, that nothing poſitive is intended by theſe words, for then they could not ſignify the attributes of any being, and uncauſed eternal exiſtence, would be a contradiction in terms; but the negation only is of our fully underſtanding the ſubject, and the mind apprehends as implied, real attributes of the Deity which tranſcend its own capacity to conceive, a poſitive manner and duration of exiſtence above its comprehenſion.

Thirdly, It appears alſo certain that intelligence is eternal. It has been already prov'd, that intelligence is diſcover'd in the formation and conſtitution of things; therefore it muſt have been in the origin of the world, and before it; for the Cauſe, I mean the voluntary directing and contriving Cauſe, muſt be before the effect. If it be alledged that the

the argument amounts to no more than that intelligence was before the preſent ſyſtem which we ſee, or whatever we have any knowledge of, not that it is abſolutely without beginning; I anſwer, if it appears with ſufficient evidence, that wiſdom is the firſt thing and the firſt principle of all things, of which we have any knowledge, whether animate or inanimate, ſenſitive or rational; this is ſufficient to our purpoſe, and to flee to the arbitrary ſuppoſition of bare poſſibility beyond the compaſs of known exiſtence, is a poor refuge, unworthy of a fair reaſoner, when the inquiry is concerning what has actually exiſted. If it be certain beyond all rational contradiction, that ſomething has exiſted from everlaſting, and there is no difficulty or pretence of argument againſt the eternity of intelligence, but what is equally againſt the eternity of any exiſtence whatever; and if it be alſo certain, that there is nothing we can diſcern or fix our thoughts upon in the whole circle of being, but what, in the production and the frame of it, muſt be attributed to intelligence in the Cauſe, ſo that it muſt be acknowledg'd prior to the whole known univerſe; the concluſion ſeems

SERM. VI. to be very evident that intelligence is abſolutely eternal.

Beſides, the very ſame reaſoning which demonſtrates that ſomething muſt have exiſted from eternity, proves alſo that underſtanding is eternal, or without beginning. For as Non-entity could never have produc'd being, ſo unintelligent Being could never have produc'd underſtanding; to imagine it, is the ſame abſurdity, as in the other caſe, to imagine an effect without a cauſe. And not to inſiſt on this, which yet is very plain to any attentive mind, that to deny intelligence to a Cauſe, is really to deny cauſality or efficiency altogether, there being properly no cauſe but a voluntary and deſigning, that is, an intelligent one, the tranſition is as great (and requires no leſs power to effect it) from meer ſenſeleſs inanimate being to intellectual capacities, as from nothing to exiſtence. And *Laſtly*, to deny intelligence to the firſt Cauſe, or which amounts to the ſame, to ſay that ſomething unintelligent exiſted before it, and produc'd it, is to attribute the order and all the appearances of the world to chance, or neceſſity, or to nothing, if not immediately, yet remotely; that is, to run directly into *Atheiſm*, which has

has been already refuted, or at leaſt into as great an abſurdity as any *Atheiſt* has ever yet advanced, namely, that indeed intelligence produc'd the regular ſyſtem of the univerſe, but mere hazard or undeſigning neceſſity, as a præ-exiſtent Cauſe, produc'd intelligence. SERM. VI.

Laſtly, The active intelligence which form'd the world, and ſtill governs it, is ſeated in one eternal Mind; the effects of it are diffus'd through the whole extent of being, and there is no one appearance in the univerſal ſyſtem of nature in which it is not manifeſted, and which is not under its direction; but the ſource is one everlaſting ſpring of thought, one conſcious underſtanding principle. This I ſhall take for granted as already prov'd, for if there be one Cauſe of all things, *in whom they conſiſt*, form'd by his ſovereign power and wiſdom, into a regular whole under his ſupreme abſolute dominion, it muſt be acknowledg'd that he is before all things. The *Atheiſtic* ſcheme agrees with ours in acknowledging eternity, nay, the human underſtanding muſt neceſſarily acknowledge it, it being impoſſible for it, as was before obſerv'd, to remove from it ſelf the idea of eternal duration; it is agreed farther, that ſomething has exiſted from eternity,

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ternity, but that ſcheme fixes on no individual permanent being to which the character of eternal belongs, unleſs it be chance or neceſſity, which are only confus'd general notions, rather empty inſignificant names, and with reſpect to individual beings, eternity is the attribute of none, but belongs to a ſeries of ſeparate exiſtences, which is at leaſt as difficult to conceive, as the everlaſting duration of a ſingle abſolutely perfect being. But if it be true, and it has been prov'd, that the character eternal muſt be aſcrib'd to the one intelligent Cauſe of all things, this leads us to the idea of a peculiar condition or manner of exiſtence: While it is undetermined to a certain object in our thoughts, and unappropriated to a ſingular exiſtence, it ſeems to be apprehended no otherwiſe than as a long continuance, or as duration in general, which is common to all beings, not diſtinguiſh'd by any differences in their nature; it belongs juſt the ſame way to the moſt excellent and the moſt contemptible of all things. But the idea of eternity, as ſolely the attribute of one intelligent Being, carries in it what muſt appear to our minds grand, and attractive of a ſpecial veneration, as ſhall be afterwards obſerv'd. In the mean time this

this leads me to what I propos'd in the next place. SERM. VI.

Secondly, To ſhew what ſeem to be the moſt proper, tho' they are imperfect conceptions, we can form of the Divine eternity. And *Firſt*, it includes ſelf-exiſtence, neceſſary exiſtence, and independence. Theſe are characters of the ſupreme Being, of which we have very imperfect and inadequate ideas, becauſe there is nothing that we are conſcious of in our ſelves, nor does any thing appear in the objects we perceive by our ſenſes, and from theſe ſources are deriv'd all the firſt materials of our knowledge; there is nothing, I ſay, that we know, which bears the leaſt reſemblance to the ſelf-exiſtence, neceſſary exiſtence and independence of the Deity, or can give us any notion of them. The ſelf-exiſtence of God is not to be underſtood in this poſitive ſenſe, that he produc'd himſelf, or was the cauſe of his own being, for that is evidently an abſurdity, ſuppoſing him to be both prior and poſterior in nature, both cauſe and effect; but it ſignifies, that as he did not ariſe from nothing, which is true concerning all beings, ſo he was not produc'd by any other, which muſt be true concerning a being abſolutely and in the higheſt

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higheſt ſenſe eternal. I doubt our underſtandings do not proceed much farther in diſtinct and poſitive knowledge, by adding the character of neceſſarily exiſtent, which ſeems to mean little more than that, ſince the Deity was not cauſed by an external agent, his exiſtence and perfections could not be hinder'd by any; for as to an antecedent neceſſity in the nature of the thing, conſider'd as a foundation for us to reaſon upon, inferring from it an apparent impoſſibility of not being, or that the ſuppoſition of non-exiſtence implies an expreſs contradiction; this I'm afraid is, at leaſt not obvious enough to every capacity. Indeed if the impoſſibility of the Deity's not being, or that the ſuppoſition of his non-exiſtence implies an expreſs contradiction, can be clearly conceiv'd, it puts a ſpeedy end to all controverſy with *Atheiſts*; but it does not with full and ſatisfying evidence ſtrike every, even attentive mind; for which reaſon it is neceſſary to uſe other arguments. The independence of the Divine Being carries in it the ſame idea I have been mentioning, only with this addition, that in all the periods of duration, his eternal exiſtence and ſelf-ſufficient, becauſe underiv'd perfections, cannot be affected by any

any external cauſe; for it is not to be appre- SERM. hended, that what receives its being, and VI. whatever belongs to the perfection of its ſtate from no cauſe, can, for its continuance depend upon, or be ſubject to any external power.

It may not be amiſs however, tho' theſe characters ſelf-exiſtent, neceſſarily exiſtent, and independent be very obſcure, and our ideas of them very inadequate, to conſider them a little further, with a view to the pretenſions which other beings beſides the Deity may have to them; and if it appears that there is no ground for ſuch pretenſions, we ſhall be the more convinc'd that we rightly appropriate them to him, as the peculiar attributes of his eternal exiſtence. Since all men are agreed that ſomething muſt have been from eternity, they muſt all conſequently ſay, that that thing whatever it were, exiſted of it ſelf neceſſarily and independently. Accordingly, the *Atheiſts* acknowledge neceſſary exiſtence to be the attribute of the material world, whether of bare matter, or matter and motion, or of the form alſo in which it appears; and the moſt ſtrenuous modern aſſerters of *Atheiſm* have declar'd for the laſt of theſe opinions, agreeably to another principle

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ciple of theirs, that there is no ſuch thing as free agency, but that God himſelf (meaning by that word univerſal ſubſtance) operates only by neceſſity; ſo that things could not poſſibly be otherwiſe than they are, even as to the manner and order of their ſubſiſtence. I have on another occaſion, ſhewn that the multiform appearances, which we ſee in the face of nature, cannot reaſonably be attributed to neceſſary cauſes; and indeed, conſidering what we are conſcious of, namely, that ſome alterations in the form and order of material objects, depend on our own power and will; conſidering this, I ſay, it is ſurpriſing any man ſhould think that none of them could poſſibly be otherwiſe than as they now actually are, much more is it ſurpriſing, when we conſider the variety of objects and events which daily occur to us, that it ſhould be imagin'd none of them could have happen'd in any other manner than they do, not becauſe they are directed by unerring Wiſdom, but from an impoſſibility in the nature of things, or want of power to have determin'd otherwiſe, for that is the real meaning of their being produc'd by a neceſſity of nature. If we know any thing at all, we know there is a great diverſity of beings

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in the univerſe, each having a ſingular and ſeparate exiſtence, independent on the reſt. What connexion is there between the being of a horſe and a fiſh, of a tree upon this earth and a fixed ſtar in the far diſtant heavens. Can all theſe things, the whole ſyſtem and every one of its parts exiſt neceſſarily, ſo that not one individual of any kind, nor even the moſt minute particle in their compoſition, could poſſibly be wanting. One would think ſuch a world has the leaſt appearance of being underived and ſelf-exiſtent, which ſeems rather to be a manner of being perfectly uniform and uncompounded, as abſolutely neceſſary and proceeding from no cauſe. At the ſame time there is an apparent relation of particular things, and the parts of the univerſe to each other, which has been prov'd, and every one may ſee it, as between animals and the earth, fiſhes and the ſea, the whole terraqueous globe and the heavens; this plainly diſcovers wiſdom in their Cauſe, not their neceſſary exiſtence, which is abſolute in it ſelf, and unrelated to any thing. *2dly*, Motion, upon which the appearances of the material world depend, is not neceſſary, for whereas that which is ſelf-exiſtent is uniform, and without variation, nothing appears to be farther

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farther from that character than motion: It is by our ſenſes only we have any idea of it, and they repreſent it as the moſt precarious of all things, in its being, forms and degrees, as begun, increas'd, diminiſh'd and chang'd arbitrarily, inſomuch that the firſt ſelf-evident axiom concerning it is this, that all bodies continue in their ſtate of motion or reſt, till it be alter'd by a force impreſs'd upon them. And *laſtly*, bare matter, the moſt paſſive and variable of all things, the moſt evidently dependent in its ſtate, infinitely diviſible, compounded and circumſcrib'd in its being, having no power but that of inactivity, has of all others the leaſt claim to neceſſary or ſelf-exiſtence. Since therefore it is agreed on all hands, that theſe attributes, ſelf-exiſtence, neceſſary exiſtence and independence muſt belong to ſome being, as having an inſeparable connexion with abſolute eternity, and ſince none of thoſe things which have been ſet up in oppoſition, have any title to them; it remains that they are the ſole unalterable characters of that ſupreme intelligent being, who is abſolutely, in the higheſt ſenſe eternal, and the firſt Cauſe of all things.

2dly, Ano-

2*dly*, Another perfection neceſſarily connected with abſolute eternity, is unchangeableneſs, and it ſeems to be deſignedly expreſs'd in the text, *from everlaſting to everlaſting thou art God*, poſſeſſing the ſame uniform and unvaried being, in all the periods of duration. God is the ſame that he was before the world began; indeed without beginning, and ſhall continue without any change for ever. The ſcripture often delivers this doctrine in very ſtrong and emphatical terms, as in *Rev.* i. 4. *From him which is, and which was, and which is to come*; not barely meaning that the Divine Nature ſubſiſts in different ſucceſſive periods, which in ſome ſenſe may be ſaid concerning other beings, but that the one God and Father of all is rightly deſcribed by this peculiar character, the Being which is, and which was, and which is to come, who in himſelf immutably excellent, poſſeſſes all his perfections, glory and happineſs, *without variableneſs or ſhadow of turning*, in paſt, preſent, and future duration. In this reſpect other beings are compared with God, and he is prefer'd to thoſe of them which ſeem to be the moſt firm and ſtable. The frame of the heavens above, which has continued ſo long,

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and the foundations of the earth laid ſo ſtrong and deep, yet may be changed, the ſcripture tells us *they ſhall periſh, yea all of them ſhall wax old like a garment, and as a veſture be changed*; but God who effects all changes in nature, is himſelf *the ſame, and his years ſhall have no end.* The firſt of Beings uncauſed by any other, exiſts in a way ſuperior to, and more excellent than all others; all the periods of beginningleſs and endleſs eternity are connected in him; there never was any time when he was not, and he ſhall endure for ever.

As imperfect as our knowledge is of the eſſence and perfections of the Deity, we cannot but be convinc'd by our own reaſon, that immutability is imported in, or is a conſequence from his eternity, as it has been explain'd, that is, from an eternal, uncauſed, neceſſary exiſtence. That which had neither beginning nor cauſe, which is the true meaning of abſolute eternity, cannot be depriv'd of its being by any power, nor be liable to any change. Other things may continue to eternity, always depending on the pleaſure of their Maker, for the power which created can annihilate their ſubſtance, as well as alter their forms; that only which has no precarious

precarious exiſtence, and does not owe its being, nor any of its perfections to an external cauſe, has a fixed immutable permanence of being, in it ſelf abſolutely uncapable of any alteration; and this being peculiar to the Divine nature, that it is ſelf-original, and depends upon nothing, it can be ſubject to no power, nor ever be affected by any thing. SERM. VI.

The natural perfections of the Deity, his power, and knowledge, and wiſdom, not depending even upon his own will, as they are derived from no other cauſe, but included in his Eſſence it ſelf, muſt be like it, invariable; 'tis impoſſible they ſhould ever ceaſe to be, or ſuffer any diminution, being the eſſential characters whereby he is what he is, ſo that they muſt be, as his exiſtence, neceſſary, to everlaſting, as well as from everlaſting, liable to no influence from without, uncapable of any change within himſelf, impaired by no time, nor limited by any periods of eternal duration. The moral attributes indeed, ſuch as Holineſs, Goodneſs, Juſtice and Veracity, are of ſomewhat a different conſideration, and our way of thinking concerning them does not lead us to the ſame notion of their immutability. We have a very clear and determinate idea of moral

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rectitude; but it carries in it free agency, and is in our ſelves and other inferior moral agents, accompanied with a poſſibility of doing wrong. How then moral perfections ſhould be eſſential to any being, always free in their exerciſe, depending on the will, and yet ſo neceſſary as to be abſolutely immutable; this is hard for us to conceive. At the ſame time, as moral goodneſs is neceſſarily high in the eſteem of the human mind, ſo that we cannot account any being abſolutely perfect without it, and every property of the Divine nature, proceeding from no external cauſe, muſt belong to it in a manner which we cannot comprehend, different from the limited and derived qualities of all inferior beings, we muſt conclude that the moral perfections of the Supreme Being are, like his other attributes, eſſential, neceſſary and eternal, tho' the manner of their being ſo, is to us incomprehenſible. And ſince this does not ariſe from any defect of power, knowledge or wiſdom, but on the contrary, from the infinite fulneſs of all real perfection, the unchangeableneſs of the Divine moral attributes does not leſſen, but heighten their glory; which is plain from this conſideration, that every one will acknowledge, that the more

more mutable any good moral character or diſ- SERM. poſitions are, the leſs valuable, and the more VI. ſteddy any perſon is in goodneſs, the more excellent. It is therefore a very amiable repreſentation which the ſcripture gives us of the juſtice of God, that it is like *the great mountains* [a] ſtedfaſt and unmoveable, of his truth, *that it endureth for ever* [b], and of his goodneſs, that it *endureth continually* [c], and with the *Father of lights from whom every good and perfect gift cometh down, there is no variableneſs nor ſhadow of turning* [d].

But let us conſider a little farther, how our minds may be aſſiſted in forming conceptions (which tho' weak and inadequate, yet may be uſeful) of the immutable Divine eternity, or of duration always paſſing, as it is applied to the Supreme Being, with whom there is no change. It has been already obſerv'd, and ought to be always remember'd, that the ſubject is above our comprehenſion; how is it to be imagin'd, that a finite underſtanding can form an adequate idea of that which is actually and poſitively infinite? That eternity is beyond the reach of our underſtandings, will ſtill appear more plainly,

[a] Pſal. xxxvi. 6. [b] Pſal. cxvii. 2. [c] Pſal. lii. 1. [d] Jam. i. 17.

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when we conſider how they come by the idea of duration it ſelf, and proceed upon it. It takes its riſe from the ſucceſſion which we obſerve in our own thoughts, it is enlarg'd, and time is meaſured, that is diſtinguiſh'd into longer and ſhorter periods, by the regular ſucceſſive motion of certain bodies, ſuch as the ſun and the moon; but imagination draws it out beyond all we know to have actually paſs'd, or beyond all the meaſures convey'd to our knowledge by means of the ſenſes or reflexion, ſtill with a conceived poſſibility of addition; ſo that by this method, we can only attain to a negative idea of eternity, as a duration which is indeterminable, or to which no limits can be ſet; juſt as from circumſcrib'd corporeal magnitude, we take our riſe to the idea of infinite extenſion, which is negative, like the other, but our reaſon convinces us of ſomething poſitive in both, which we call infinity.

Now the Divine eternity being thus incomprehenſible, we muſt reſt ſatisfied with a very imperfect knowledge of it. Some have repreſented it as excluding all manner of ſucceſſion, which they apprehend to be inconſiſtent with the abſolute perfection of the Supreme Being, to whom there can be no paſt

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and future, but all things muſt be ever preſent to him with whom there is no variableneſs. Beſides, they imagine there cannot be an eternal ſucceſſive duration, for the reaſons mentioned before, ſuch as that an infinite ſucceſſion paſt ſeems to be inconceivable, and that this would be to ſuppoſe greater and leſſer in infinity: Therefore they call eternity as attributed to God, a *ſtanding point*, which comprehends all poſſible duration, and co-exiſts with time and all its changes, but does not paſs, like it. But this ſeems to be utterly unintelligible. How can any man conceive a permanent inſtant, or which co-exiſts with a perpetually flowing duration; one might as well apprehend a mathematical point, co-extended with a line, a ſurface and all dimenſions. And for the reaſoning uſed to ſupport this notion, it really proves no more than the weakneſs of our underſtandings, which cannot form a poſitive adequate idea of duration without real or imagin'd limits, tho' we are ſure there is an unchangeable exiſtence, to which unlimited duration belongs. SERM. VI.

It is certainly reaſonable however, as the Deity's manner and condition of Being is infinitely more perfect than ours, to underſtand

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his duration with as little variety in it as poſſible, and as free from all the infirmities which cleave to our mutable nature. All things about us are in a perpetual flux; matter continually changing its form, and paſſing into different ſtates and conſtitutions, by generation and corruption; our own bodies ſo continually alter their compoſition, that in a few years very little remains of the ſame matter: As to our ſouls, we know very little of their eſſence; it is conſciouſneſs only which gives us an idea of perſonal identity, but in the exerciſe of our rational powers we find a very great variation. Our thoughts change, ſo do our deſires and hopes, and all our other affections; with great difficulty and uncertainty, and often not without miſtakes, we endeavour to recollect what is paſt, and we look forward with anxiety, to unknown hereafter. All theſe are marks of imperfection, and it does not appear that any finite being can be altogether free from them. But it is not ſo with the firſt Cauſe, the original, ſelf-ſufficient and underived Fountain of Being, whoſe Eſſence cannot be capable of any alteration, nor do his powers and perfections vary with the changes of time. His omnipotence ſuffers no diminution by any oppoſite force, no more

more than by a natural decay; the heavens were ſtretched out and the earth eſtabliſh'd by the irreſiſtible determination of his will, which the ſcripture elegantly calls his command, intimating that the greateſt works, even creation it ſelf, are eaſy to him; and this mighty ſtrength remains in its full unimpair'd vigour, and whatever pleaſeth him that he doth. His knowledge comprehends all things, paſt, preſent and future, not as if all exiſted at once, tho' they are at once in his view; there is a ſucceſſion in the objects, but not in his underſtanding, which ſuffers no change; things paſt and to come are as clear to his All-comprehending mind as the preſent. There can be no ſuch thing in his perfect underſtanding as what we call remembrance, that is, reviving former images or impreſſions, which are obſcur'd or forgotten by new ones ſucceeding in their place, for he ſees through the whole compaſs of duration backwards, as well as to the utmoſt bounds of preſent being, and he perceives the moſt diſtant futurity with the ſame clearneſs; *known to him are all his works*, and all the works of his creatures, which ſhall be, as well as thoſe which are, and *he ſees the end from the beginning*. There can therefore be

no

SERM. VI. no poſſible alteration of his purpoſes and meaſures, but his *counſels ſhall ſtand for ever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations.* Whatever changes there may be in the ſtate of things without, according to the limited and imperfect condition of their nature, there is no change in his knowledge and counſels. *One day is with him as a thouſand years, and a thouſand years as one day* *; not as if he did not ſee the real difference between theſe unequal durations, but they do not affect him, either in his deſigns or his felicity, as they do finite beings, for no unforeſeen event can arrive, in the leaſt to alter his condition or his deſigns. The intire ſcheme of his adminiſtration was form'd from everlaſting, and the whole extent of futurity was at once in his view, ſo that nothing can poſſibly happen unexpected, nothing new which may ſuprize him; no ſudden emotion can ariſe in his mind, no paſſion, no painful deſire, no uneaſy hope, no anger, fear or ſorrow, but he poſſeſſes an eternally uniform and undiſturb'd tranquillity. The creation of worlds, and diſpoſing them in beautiful order and harmony, the forming innumerable

* 2 Pet. iii. 8.

living

living intelligent beings, and communicating various pleaſure to them, according to the ſeveral capacities he has given them; again, the convulſions of nature, wholly altering the form of ſome parts of the creation, together with the great revolutions which fall out in the ſtate of ſome rational creatures, whereby they, originally made for good and for happineſs, become evil and miſerable; all theſe things, and whatever other important changes arrive, which are amazing to limited minds, and muſt produce admiration with divers kinds of affections and feelings, yet paſs under his eye, and under his direction, without producing any alteration in his counſels or his happineſs. They were all perfectly foreſeen, juſt as they come to paſs, without the leaſt variation in any one circumſtance, and all wiſely adjuſted in his eternal decrees. All this is eaſily intelligible, and neceſſarily follows from the abſolute perfection of the Divine nature, and it may be a conſiſtent explication of that ſo much celebrated deſcription of the Divine eternity, that it is *interminabilis vitæ, tota ſimul et perfecta poſſeſſio*; but to make it literally a ſtanding perpetual NOW, comprehending all periods of duration, is what we can have no notion of.

I come

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I come now *Laſtly*, to draw ſome practical inferences. The whole controverſy concerning the Being and Perfections of God, is of the greateſt importance, to the purpoſes of forming men's tempers and directing their practice, and it is ſo regarded by all parties. The *Atheiſts* are warm in their oppoſition, becauſe they cannot help ſeeing what reverence and dutiful diſpoſitions (which they are averſe to, imagining or pretending that it is a ſervile ſtate of mind) the Divine perfections demand, if once they are acknowledg'd; and the believers in God find themſelves oblig'd to contend with a hearty zeal for the reſpect due to his character. But there is no one attribute which appears more venerable than that of abſolute independent Eternity; tho' it is but little we know of it, yet that little fills the mind with the greateſt awe, and raiſes an idea of magnificence, unparallel'd in the whole circle of being. We find our ſelves poſſeſs'd of an exiſtence which is confin'd within very narrow limits, our remembrance is but of yeſterday, our conſciouſneſs reaches only to a very ſhort period: We ſee all things about us continually paſſing, beings like our ſelves diſappear after acting their part but a few years on this ſtage,

and

and their places know them no more ; we cannot avoid apprehending the ſame fate to our ſelves, that we ſhall ſoon withdraw into darkneſs and make room for others, rather indeed, upon this ſuperficial view of things, we are perfectly ignorant of what ſhall come after. What then, has exiſtence it ſelf no ſtable foundation? Is there nothing in nature but a perpetual round of tranſitory being, nothing we can fix our thoughts upon that is permanent and undecaying, which holds together the whole ſeries of ſucceſſive exiſtence, and eſtabliſhes a connexion of paſt, preſent and future ? This way of thinking ſpreads horror and confuſion over the whole face of nature, diſorder on the origin of all things, and darkneſs on their laſt reſult. Nothing looks great, nor ſo much as real ; exiſtence it ſelf vaniſhes into a ſhadow, and conſciouſneſs into a dream, with an univerſal blank before and behind it. But when we ſee an eternal intelligence, ſelf-exiſtent and immutable, the ſame yeſterday and to day and for ever, how is the proſpect changed ? Every thing appears in a fair and amiable light ; however variable the exterior face of nature may be, there is a permanent wiſdom in the Cauſe which directed the beginning of

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of things, and eſtabliſhes their continuance, which holds faſt the foundations of exiſtence and unites it to a central point; that gloomy ſpectre of eternal nothing flies away, or which is no better, rather the ſame under empty inſignificant names, eternal chance or blind undeſigning neceſſity. This ſtate of order, and intelligence at the head of it, is what a wiſe attentive mind could not but wiſh for, and rejoyce in finding it true, as giving it a comfortable enjoyment of its own exiſtence, and a delightful idea of regularity and beauty in the appearance of the univerſe. But when conſidering the conſtitution of things, our remoteſt view either backward or forward terminates in non-entity, or in ignorance and confuſion, the preſent ſtate it ſelf loſes all its ſolidity and all its excellence, the higheſt perfection of being ſinks into emptineſs and vanity. Such is the diſmal condition of the *Atheiſt*'s mind; his exiſtence is his all, and a poor inſipid thing it is, ſcarce having any enjoyments above the brutal kinds, and its low enjoyments allay'd with ſuſpicions and fears which the brutal kinds are not capable of: It knows of no being without it to whom it owes it ſelf and all the good which it poſſeſſes, and there-

fore

fore nothing to warm it with gratitude, (that noble felicitating affection) nor to be the ſupport of its confidence ; nothing in the world appears worth the caring for, the world it ſelf is ſtript of all its glory and beauty. The *Atheiſt* finds no wiſdom to entertain his underſtanding with ; that order, proportion and harmony, which are ſo entertaining to other minds, are loſt to him, regarded no otherwiſe than as chimeras ; he ſees nothing without him that is excellent, feels nothing within his heart that is generous and manly. Benevolence it ſelf decays, unſupported by any juſt ſentiments ; tho' its root is too deep fix'd by the wiſe unknown Author of his being, to be altogether extirpated, yet the more he views human nature in the falſe light of his mean principles, the leſs amiable it appears. How is humanity ſunk in theſe unhappy creatures, and the dignity of our being, indeed of all being loſt to them, through their affected ignorance and perverſeneſs ? Their ſtate ſurely is not to be envied, but extremely to be pitied ; their boaſted freedom, what is it but a freedom from the knowledge and the mental enjoyment of all that is wiſe, and good and great, which is the principal happineſs of the human nature. SERM. VI.

2*dly*, In

2*dly*, In a ſpecial manner that one unchangeable, intelligent, eternal fountain of exiſtence and all perfection, muſt be tranſcendently glorious in our eyes. A mind that reflects on its commencement, conſcious of preſent being, and comparing it with former nothing, rejoyces in its own exiſtence, the foundation of all its acts and enjoyments; the ſame is the neceſſary foundation of all excellence without us. It appears therefore a perfection to be, and yet a greater perfection to continue in being, but an uniform immutable conſcious exiſtence, is the utmoſt conceivable perfection; it is impoſſible to imagine any thing beyond it, nay, the imagination cannot comprehend it. This is the character of the Deity, which raiſes him high in our eſteem, and intitles him to that name, which *Moſes* ſays, he gave himſelf, and claims as peculiarly belonging to him, I AM THAT I AM, importing that he exiſts in a peculiar manner unchangeably, not like other beings which might not have been at all, or might have been otherwiſe than they are, depending wholly on the will of their Maker, and may be hereafter quite different from what they are at preſent.

Again,

Again, God is to be ador'd by us, as being immutable, not only in his Eſſence, but in his purpoſes. Changes of thought and deſign are among the moſt important which befal us, and they are attended with a conſciouſneſs of our own infirmity. How little do we look in our own eyes, when we reflect on that imperfection of underſtanding, and other frailties, which make it neceſſary for us often to alter our reſolutions and our conduct; and what a diminutive idea have we of other intelligent beings, whoſe fickle tempers vary as outward accidents do? Tho' at the ſame time it muſt be acknowledg'd the glory of imperfect creatures, when thro' weakneſs they have erred from the truth, and by temptations been led aſtray from the paths of righteouſneſs, not to perſiſt obſtinately in their miſtakes and evil courſes, but to forſake them, and to change their ſentiments and their conduct; for truth and right are immutable as God himſelf, and as he inviolably cleaves to them through the abſolute perfection of *his nature*, ſo ought we to return to them, renouncing the errors and faults into which we have fallen, through the imperfection of *ours*. But how glorious is it and excellent to be of one mind, and to preſerve SERM. VI.

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the ſame unvaried temper and tenor of conduct, from an abſolute perfection of knowledge, and an unalterable rectitude of will. From hence ariſes an indiſpenſible and perpetual obligation on us, and all intelligent creatures, of worſhip and homage to the Deity. If the glory and perfection of his nature can ſuffer no diminution, and in conſequence of that, the meaſures of his government are through all ages the ſame, the foundations of our duty to him are unmoveable. Here is an eſſential difference between the true God of the univerſe, and idols, fictitious Deities which either have no real being, but are only the creatures of deluded human imagination, or at leaſt have no divinity, no dominion over the world, or authority over men, upſtart gods, whoſe honour raiſed on no juſt foundation, ſhall quickly periſh; but the God of the univerſe thus deſcribes himſelf, *Iſai.* xliii. 10. *I am he, before me there was no God formed, neither ſhall there be any after me.*

3*dly*, The eternity of God ought to be conſidered in conjunction with all his other attributes, it is the character of every one of them; his power and wiſdom, his righteouſneſs, goodneſs and truth are eternal and unchangeable

changeable as his being; and by this conſide- SERM. VI.
ration all our religious duties are greatly enforced. He is the proper object of our fear, becauſe his dominion reaches to the utmoſt limits of our exiſtence. A temporary power can only claim a temporary obedience, and indeed not an abſolute obedience, even while it ſubſiſts, for as the relation between human governors and ſubjects may be diſſolv'd, and the ſervant become free from his maſter, which will ſoon be the caſe in fact of all ſuperiors and inferiors among men, whom death will put upon a level, tho' it does not extinguiſh their being; ſo the expectation of that change diminiſhes the preſent reſpect which a ſhort-liv'd authority claims. But the Ruler, whoſe power extends to all futurity, and who, as he lives and reigns for ever, has the diſpoſal of our condition in ages at the remoteſt diſtance, as well as the preſent, is intitled to our unlimited ſubjection and perpetual fear. Our Saviour's direction is therefore very juſt, * *Be not afraid of them which kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do, but I will forewarn*

* Luke xii. 4, 5.

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Again, the grounds of our hope and confidence in God are firm and ſtable. As the Goodneſs to which we owe our being, and all the happineſs we enjoy, is eternal, God loves his creatures *with an everlaſting love*, ſo, *becauſe he is the Lord and changes not, they are not conſumed*; he can provide againſt all future dangers as well as the preſent, and however the appearances of things may vary, they are none of them without his foreſight, and the direction of his wiſe and powerful providence. Therefore the objections of men againſt the Divine adminiſtration, when things fall out otherwiſe than they expected, are vain and groundleſs, and their concluſion extremely raſh, that his promiſes are not to be truſted. If ſcoffing infidels ſay, * *Where is the promiſe of his coming to judge the world*, and render recompences to men, for *ſince the fathers fell aſleep, all things continue as they were*, the anſwer in which his ſervants reſt contented,

* Pet. iii.

ſtill

ſtill humbly confident in his mercy and faithfulneſs, is *a thouſand years are with the Lord as one day*, all times are equally in his power, and ſooner or later he will fulfil all the reaſonable and juſt *deſires of them that fear him.* SERM. VI.

SERMON VII.

The Doctrine of God's Omnipresence explain'd and vindicated.

Pſal. cxxxix. 7, 8, 9, 10.

Whither ſhall I go from thy ſpirit, or whither ſhall I flee from thy preſence? If I aſcend up into heaven, thou art there, if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there, if I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermoſt parts of the ſea, even there ſhall thy hand lead me and thy right hand ſhall hold me.

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IT is evident to any one who attentively conſiders the conſtitution of the human mind, that it was not made for a full comprehenſion of things and a thorough underſtanding of their natures, but that all the intellectual capacities and modes of perception with which it is indued, were intended by the wiſe contrivance of its Maker, to anſwer

swer other particular purposes. Our sensa- SERM. VII.
tions do not at all let us into the knowledge of the essence of those material objects which produce them in us, indeed not directly and immediately into the knowledge of their existence it self; and tho' we have an inward consciousness of our own perceptions and volitions, our perceiving and self-determining powers, and of our own existence, yet what the intimate nature is of that conscious self, we do not understand. The Father of our spirits and of lights *from whom every good gift cometh down*, has given us such knowledge as is sufficient, and was design'd for directing our practice, and for communicating such enjoyment as he intended for us, not for our comprehending fully the nature of any thing, which does not seem requisite to the ends of our being.

But least of all can we form any adequate notion of the supreme Being himself; not only the absolute perfections of his nature cannot be thoroughly understood by us, but we have no immediate perception of them, as we have of other objects. We have distinct ideas of sensible qualities, such as the figure and magnitude of bodies, and a direct intuitive knowledge of our own rational faculties

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ties and operations; we have also very clear apprehensions of moral qualities, as of goodness, justice and gratitude; but of the divine, peculiar and incommunicable attributes, necessary existence, eternity and immensity, we have not, nor are capable of forming any positive idea. It seems reasonable enough to believe that the human mind might have been form'd otherwise than it is, and not improbable that it may have capacities and ways of perceiving in another state of existence, different from those it now has, even such as shall have God and his perfections for their immediate object. I do not say, that it is possible for a finite understanding to comprehend infinity, but as we have now an intuitive knowledge of the qualities and existence of some objects, the essences of which are hid from us, it is not at all inconceivable, that we might have had, and may hereafter have a direct intuition of the Divine glorious Being and Attributes, tho' *his* Essence and *their* utmost extent will still be past finding out. Let it be observ'd, that many of our original ideas, the materials of our knowledge, are not to be accounted for, and the reasons of them explained from the nature of things, but we must resolve them into an arbitrary

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conſtitution of the Author of our being. No man can tell (I mean give a reaſon from a prior knowledge of their nature and ours) why material objects raiſe the ſenſations in us which we find in fact they do raiſe, and which it is not in our power to hinder, or in the leaſt to alter. Who then can take upon him to ſay we could not poſſibly have had, or that we may not in another ſtate actually have, very different perceptions from the preſent, and particularly, that the abſolutely perfect Being and his Attributes, may not be the immediate object of our perceptions. This is what St. *Paul* means by the figurative expreſſion of ſeeing God and Divine things *face to face, not darkly and through a glaſs* * as we do now, which he repreſents as the high attainment of perfected ſpirits; that is, their knowledge ſhall be as much ſuperior to the preſent in clearneſs, and in its power of exciting good affections, and giving pleaſure to the mind, as an intimate acquaintance with, and immediate viſion of the perſons and other objects we now know, is to faint images and obſcure diſtant repreſentations.

* 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

At

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At present, our knowledge of the Deity is very dark and imperfect, collected from his works and the manifestations he has made of himself, by reasoning, a more difficult and unaffecting way than that of direct intuition: By reflecting on our selves, on the constitution of our own nature with its various powers, tendencies, affections and operations, and by considering external objects, which we perceive by our senses, with their relations and dependencies, we are led to a persuasion of his being, power, wisdom and goodness. 'Tis true, by this method of inquiry, and exercise of our understandings, we are convinc'd, not only of the Divine existence and perfections, but that God is intimately present with us and all beings in the universe, continually *working on every side*, yet it is only by the means of sensible effects which are the direct objects of our perceiving powers we attain to this conviction, the Divine nature and Attributes themselves, the inward principle of his various operations, *no man hath seen at any time nor can see*; not only he does not discern by his external senses, but he has not such a clear, immediate perception of them, as of other things which are neither seen, nor heard, nor felt, have no relation to body nor any

any of its properties, such as our own rational faculties and affections, and moral qualities. The obscurity and imperfection of this kind of knowledge which we have of God is elegantly describ'd in the book of *Job*, * *Behold, I go forward but he is not there,* (visible) *and backward but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand that I cannot see him.* Hence it follows, and we find it so in experience, that the perfections of God which are the most clearly manifested, and immediately exercis'd in his works, are the best understood by us. We have much more distinct apprehensions of power, and wisdom, and goodness, than of those characters of the Divine nature which are, in no degree, communicable to any dependent being, its self-existence and infinity; the *latter* are not nor can possibly be represented by any image, nor is the notion of them convey'd by any discernible effect, the *other* have produc'd a resemblance of themselves in inferior agents, and the marks of them are engraven on all the Divine operations. It is impossible that the

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* Chap. xxiii. ver. 8, 9.

condition

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condition of a creature ſhould lead us into the notion, as containing in it ſelf any image of uncauſed exiſtence, that a temporary being ſhould give us an idea of duration without beginning, or that a body circumſcrib'd within certain limits, tho' by the poſition of its parts and its ſituation with reſpect to other bodies, we get our firſt notion of diſtance and place; that, I ſay, it ſhould give us a clear perception of immenſity. As theſe are the attributes which it is hardeſt for us to conceive, we ſhall ſtill think and ſpeak of them the moſt clearly and uſefully when, as far as that can be done, we conſider them with relation to the works of God, which are the means whereby we attain to any knowledge of him. Thus, I think, particularly, we have a much better notion of the Divine omnipreſence, and more applicable to practical purpoſes, by conſidering it as filling the whole univerſe, or the whole of created actual exiſtence, not confin'd to any part of it; we have a better notion of his univerſal preſence in this view, becauſe we conſider him as continually working in all places, continually exerting his active perfections, his power, wiſdom and goodneſs, than by applying our thoughts to the abſtract ſpecula-

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tion of abſolute immenſity, or exiſting in the whole of extramundane boundleſs ſpace. SERM. VII.

But tho' the manner of God's exiſtence before the world was made, and of his being in infinite ſpace beyond its limits, now that it does ſubſiſt, ſurpaſſes our underſtanding, we cannot help being convinc'd that he does ſo exiſt. We have a clear enough idea of ſpace not fill'd with matter, indeed demonſtrative evidence, that not only there muſt be an abſolute vacuity within the bounds of the corporeal ſyſtem, but without it, for the greateſt corporeal magnitude muſt be terminated; nay, we cannot remove out of our minds the idea of immenſity, that is of infinite extenſion or ſpace, no more than of eternal duration, tho' we are far from being able to comprehend it. Our ſenſes convey to us the notion of diſtance, we eaſily imagine a greater diſtance than can be perceiv'd by them, but the imagination endeavouring to graſp its utmoſt extent, preſently loſes it ſelf in an object too large for its capacity, and all the length it can proceed is only to this negative concluſion, that no limits can be ſet to ſpace. Some have apprehended the ſpace which is beyond the world, to be nothing real, they call it imaginary, that it is no more than

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than a meer capacity of being, and if infinity is to be attributed to it, 'tis but a potential infinity. But others think, that since there are certain limits to the material world, there must be measurable distance on its utmost surface, and its parts distinguish'd in their situation, as well as within the system, and those distances on the outside, having like others, equality and different proportions, which cannot be said of absolute nothing, that therefore space is something real, consisting of truly different, tho' inseparable parts, and that immense space is more than a bare possibility, tho' we cannot form a positive idea of it. But whatever it is, and the manner of God's existence in it, we cannot avoid attributing immensity to him. The ideas of uncaused and unlimited existence seem to be connected together, and he who comprehends all things, must be without, as well as within them, his essence circumscrib'd by no bounds. Still however, as was observ'd before, what we are sure of, and more clearly understand, is that the power and wisdom which stretched out the heavens and established the earth, are intimately near to them, and all their parts; which notion of the omnipresence of God, that he fills the whole

whole univerſe, continually preſerving and governing it, as it is the moſt intelligible, ſo it is the moſt uſeful, tending to excite in our minds the moſt becoming affections towards the Supreme Being. This therefore I ſhall principally inſiſt on in the following diſcourſe, that as the ſcripture ſpeaks, *God fills heaven and earth*, not limited in his being and operations to one region of the univerſe, he poſſeſſeth the whole as the ſovereign diſpoſing Cauſe, and ſupreme Ruler; inthron'd in heaven where the higheſt orders of created beings dwell, and pay him their homage, he exerciſes his dominion in all places at once, not mediately by the delegated power of others, who in his abſence rule under him, but by his own immediate preſence, powerfully preſerving and wiſely ſuperintending all things. This I will endeavour to prove and to explain, and then make ſome practical reflexions upon it.

Since we have ſufficient evidence of wiſdom and deſign in the formation and government of the world, and ſince this appears in every work of nature which we have any knowledge of, we have reaſon alſo to conclude the ſame concerning thoſe which are leaſt known to us. If the motions of the

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ſun and moon, and all the phœnomena of the earth, not only the animal life, but even plants and inanimate things; if they all manifeſt the counſel and power of the one univerſal Cauſe, who can doubt but the ſame active intelligence rules in diſtant worlds, and ſyſtems beyond ours, if there are any ſuch, even to the utmoſt bounds of exiſtence. Hence we infer the omnipreſence of God in the ſenſe we are now conſidering it, from the very arguments by which we prove his being. For ſince that active intelligence to which all things are to be attributed as their Cauſe, is ſeated in a Mind, that Mind muſt neceſſarily be every where, in heaven and earth, becauſe it muſt be wherever it perceives and operates.

Again, it is to be obſerv'd, that the world is not a work, which the Author having put the laſt hand to it, and ſettled it in its finiſh'd form, can ſubſiſt by it ſelf without any care or interpoſition of his, like the productions of human art, which receive no more from the artiſt than the mere outward form, and the mutual relation of their groſs parts, which could as well have ſtood by themſelves in another form, if his hand had never touch'd them; the Divine operations enter deeper into

into the conſtitution of things, which muſt be upheld and directed to their various uſes, by the continued influence of the ſame power which firſt gave them being. The gravitation of bodies is an example of this kind which I mention'd before, not to be accounted for by any powers originally given to matter, whereby it can, if left to it ſelf, produce ſuch an appearance, but it requires the conſtant impulſe of an external agent to effect it; and being ſo neceſſary as it is to the corporeal ſyſtem, to its form and continued order, and to its anſwering the purpoſes it was made for, ſhews plainly the preſence of an intelligent activity in all parts of it, powerfully preſerving and governing them. What therefore we commonly call the laws of nature, whereby the inanimate ſyſtem is ruled, is really no more than a conſtant ſeries of uniform Divine operations upon matter, whereby its parts cohere in their regular forms, and anſwer their ends. SERM. VII.

But the other, particular and very various productions of nature, which cannot be explain'd by any general mechanical laws, ſtill more clearly ſhew the preſence of God with all his works. The formation of plants and of animals, the curious texture of their parts,

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the disposing of them in the several places, which are the most convenient for their nourishment and their special uses, the preservation of their several kinds unmix'd, the propagation of them in an establish'd regular method; these things constantly falling out, not according to any general laws impress'd on matter and motion, but by the particular direction of a plastic power, evidently prove continued design in every one of them, descending to the most minute. For it is not merely the first model of a vegetable, as a pattern for all the rest of the kind, and the formation of the first individual sensitive life of every species, that shews the skill and power of the maker; they could never have been propagated of themselves, and every new production requires the exertion of the same power, and the direction of the same wisdom.

The human life in the whole of its constitution, and especially its nobler powers, have a constant necessary dependence on the intelligence from whence they are deriv'd. It has been already observ'd, that the ideas of sensation, which we find in our minds necessarily and independently of our own choice, on the occasion of certain objects, do not arise

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from the nature of things, nor can we account for them from any knowledge we have, either of the objects, or the powers of our own minds; they must therefore be resolv'd into the free constitution of our intelligent Maker; which seems not merely to signify his general will, establishing a connexion between objects and our sensations, but rather is to be understood as his continued operation, since the exertion of some power is necessary to produce new perceptions, and there appears no other agent; for we are conscious that our minds, in receiving these ideas, are as passive as the objects which are the occasion of them. The same judgment, I think, is to be made concerning our natural instincts, the meer being, and the first motions of which are, properly speaking, neither virtuous nor morally evil, since they are not our own works, for experience teaches us that they prevent any thought, deliberation or design of ours, and do not depend on our will: But as they are of great use to the purposes of our nature, tending, all of them, either to public or private good, I see no reason why they may not be attributed to the operation of that great intelligent Cause, in whom *we live and move*

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and have our being. And for those powers of human nature which are the most strictly and properly active, tho' we are inwardly conscious of freedom in the exercise of them, and of merit and demerit in the actions proceeding from them, yet that freedom must be infinitely different from self-original and uncaused liberty; for our self-determining activity, being derived and dependent, known by experience to be capable of increase and diminution, and very much directed and influenc'd by things without us, not in our own power, nor within the reach of our understandings, needs the continual supporting influence of the first Cause, *who worketh in men both to will and to do.* In short, if we judge by what we see in things about us, and find in our selves, we cannot conceive that any creature is, or can be plac'd in a state of independence on its author, for its preservation, and for its exerting powers of any kind, but that he is, and must be intimately near to all his works, upholding them by his power, and conducting them by his wisdom; thus manifesting his eternal Godhead. Having thus endeavour'd to prove the omnipresence of God, in that sense which is to us the most important and the most useful, that

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is, not the abſolute immenſity of his nature, of which our notions muſt be very obſcure and inadequate, but his being at once in all parts of the univerſe, and intimately near to all his creatures, let us in the next place SERM. VII.

2dly, Endeavour to form the moſt clear and diſtinct conceptions of it, we can. Since we have the ideas of extenſion and of place, by the means of ſenſible objects, the primary notion of preſence is that which belongs to them, and it is ſuch as excludes all others of the ſame kind, I mean all ſolid ſubſtance, for it is the property of every particle of matter to fill a certain part of ſpace, ſo as no other can poſſibly be in it, at the ſame time. But there are other beings of which we have different conceptions, namely, of their activity and intelligence, not at all including extenſion and ſolidity; yet theſe beings we conceive to be preſent, or in place, not indeed after the manner of bodies, as impenetrably filling certain parts of ſpace, but by the exertion of their powers. We know by conſciouſneſs, the exiſtence of our own ſpirits, and we know by their operations, that they are in our own bodies, ſo as they are not in others. The ſame individual percipient and active principle within us, extends the exer-

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cise of its perceptive and active faculties, to all the parts of the system which it animates, and to that it is confin'd. Our manner of perceiving objects *without* and *within* that which we call our selves, is exceedingly different; upon its own body the mind acts immediately, and only by the intervention of its members, can act upon other bodies. In our bodies therefore, our souls are peculiarly present. But it is easy to apprehend that other spirits may have a larger sphere of perception, and a wider command of matter; at the same time a higher perfection in both, that is, they may have a more compleat knowledge of the systems they inhabit, and a more absolute dominion over them: For as to us, it is certain that we do not thoroughly understand even our own constitution, and its œconomy is not put intirely in our own power (which may not be the case of other intelligent beings,) our perceptions in it, and government of it, being both of a limited nature, and given to us only for particular ends.

From this we may take our rise to a notion of the Divine omnipresence, in the sense in which I am now considering it; I mean, we may conceive of it in this manner, that the

the Deity has a comprehenſive knowledge of the whole univerſe and every part of it, and that he exerciſes an abſolute uncontrouled power over all. If any one will ſay this is hard to be underſtood; how can one mind comprehend ſo vaſt a variety, or be capable of ſo extenſive a government? I own that *ſuch knowledge is too high for us, we cannot attain to it*, but there is no inconſiſtency in ſuppoſing it. Let us firſt try to explain, if we can, how our minds perceive at once, the different impreſſions made on diſtant parts of our bodies, and move their members by a meer determination of the will; and if this be too difficult for our underſtandings, tho' there is no fact we know more certainly, what pretence is there for alledging, becauſe the manner is incomprehenſible, that the Deity, ſuppoſed and proved to be an infinitely more perfect ſpirit, cannot ſee through, and govern the whole world, his own workmanſhip. Perhaps to an intelligent being, confin'd to a very ſmall portion of matter, with ſenſes ſcarcely capacious enough to take in the dimenſions of a body ſo large as one of ours (which is no impoſſible ſuppoſition,) it might appear wonderful, almoſt incredible, that a mind ſhould be able to govern ſo

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vaſt and ponderous a machine, and perceive in all its parts; nor would it, on the other hand, be extravagant for us to imagine that a mind vaſtly more capacious than any of ours, tho' far from abſolute perfection, might animate, and in a more perfect manner, a corporeal ſyſtem to which this little human tabernacle is but a point in compariſon; and will any one then venture to ſay 'tis impoſſible that the moſt perfect mind ſhould perceive and operate through the whole ſolar ſyſtem, nay, and whatever ſyſtems there are beyond it? when we have ſo clear evidences of his wiſdom and power in all parts of the univerſe, which we have any knowledge of, the moſt minute, as well as the greateſt. He muſt have very little conſider'd the nature of ſpirits, ſo much as may be known of it, and the very different degrees of their perfection, which even fall under our own obſervation, who will call it an abſurdity to ſuppoſe that the ſpirit, which is the fountain of being and underſtanding, comprehends all his own works and rules over them, tho' it is ridiculous to imagine we ſhould know the manner of it, for that were to ſuppoſe our capacity equal to his.

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I do not intend by this to repreſent God as the Soul of the world, which is a very low and unworthy notion of the Deity. He had the ſame immutable Being, Power and Wiſdom before it was made, and is not now confin'd to it, tho' the manner of his exiſtence in immenſe ſpace, is what we have no idea of; and to ſuppoſe that his intelligence and operations have ſuch a dependence on external created objects, as ours have upon bodily organs, and that he is ſo affected with the motions in the univerſe and its changes, as we are by the impreſſions made on our bodies by external objects, and the motions thereby cauſed within them; to ſuppoſe this, I ſay, were an evident abſurdity. I only propoſe by this low and imperfect image, to aſſiſt our weak underſtandings in forming an idea of his intimate preſence with, and univerſal care over all things in the world, preſerving it and wiſely ſuperintending its affairs; that as in us, there is one individual conſcious ſelf, that ſees, and hears, and feels, and determines for the whole body, ſo in the univerſe there is one conſcious intelligent Nature, which pervades the entire ſyſtem, at once perceiving in every place, and preſiding over all, yet in an infinitely more perfect manner,

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manner, and free from those infirmities which attend our constitution. But it is especially to be observed (and indeed the example I have made use of for illustrating this subject, helps to guard us against so gross an error) that we must not conceive of the Divine presence, after the manner of corporeal magnitude, which being essentially divisible, cannot be all in one place, but its different parts take up different spaces, and its operation, if it can be said to operate at all, can only be by the successive presence of its parts in motion; whereas the Omnipresence of the Divine Spirit, is only apprehended by the exercise of his power and understanding (which does not include the ideas of extension or successive motion) in all parts of the world; his intelligence and activity are confin'd to no place, and no where excluded. To speak of the Immensity of God as if it were a single point co-extended with infinite space, is the same absurdity as describing his eternity by an instant which co-exists with all duration. Such unintelligible subtleties, whereby the doctrines of religion are pretended to be explain'd, tend to confound men's understandings, and bring religion it self into contempt. What appears easily conceivable

ble on this ſubject, becauſe our own con- SERM. ſciouſneſs furniſhes us with ſome reſemblance VII. of it in our ſelves, is that the ſame ſimple being may exert its perceptive and active faculties, at the ſame time, in different parts of ſpace; and if this can admit of no difficulty, becauſe we have an example of it in our own minds, which perceive and operate in all parts of the body, then to compleat the idea of Omnipreſence, we need only enlarge our notion of that ſpace which is the ſphere of active intelligence, to the whole extent of the univerſe; and I think we cannot avoid apprehending that God is, wherever he exerciſes his power and underſtanding, tho' the manner of his preſence is to us, incomprehenſible.

One falſe imagination ought carefully to be avoided, which may be apt to ariſe in our minds, from our method of forming the notion of the Divine Omnipreſence, namely, that the multiplicity of objects which engage the attention of the Supreme Underſtanding, may embarraſs it. Suppoſing God to be every where, intimately near to all beings in the univerſe, as our ſouls are to our bodies; and ſince all things in the world are not equally conſiderable and worthy of care, it may ſeem

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more respectful to the greatest of beings, and a conception more suitable to his dignity, to imagine that his immediate inspection is employ'd about matters of the highest importance, leaving easier affairs to inferior agents; as the most eminent persons on earth who fill exalted stations, do not descend to minute things which would be thought beneath them, attending only business of greater moment. This mistake is occasion'd by our being accustom'd so much to think of the narrow human capacity, which not being able to take in a great variety of objects at once, finds it self oblig'd to make a choice of the more important and necessary for its attention, and it is certainly wisdom to do so: But it is a wisdom which at the same time implies weakness. No one can doubt of its being a higher perfection to comprehend a great multitude of things, so as to bestow the necessary care upon them, without neglecting any, and it is the highest perfection of all, appropriated to the self-existent unlimited Being, the first Cause, to comprehend the whole universe at once, disposing wisely of every, even the least thing in it, which being sufficiently evinc'd by strong arguments, it would be very unreasonable in us to doubt

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of it, merely becauſe it ſo vaſtly tranſcends our capacity. The ſeveral kinds of finite intelligent beings in the world have their limited ſpheres of perception and activity; there is a determin'd extent to which they can reach and no farther, a certain number of objects fall under their obſervation, and their perceptions of thoſe objects and their operations upon them, are of very different kinds. The lower ſort of underſtandings can have no notion of the manner of perception, and the powers which belong to ſuperior intelligent beings, no more than an animal wanting any of the external ſenſes, can have of the ideas which are convey'd by that ſenſe. Surely then it ſhould not ſeem ſtrange to us that theſe various degrees of limited intelligent perfection, deriv'd from the All-perfect Mind, fall infinitely ſhort of its own capacity, which at once comprehends all its own works, and governs them without perplexity or confuſion. SERM. VII.

It would be extremely weak to imagine that the difference we make by our ſenſes, either external or internal, between places as pure and impure, ſhould at all affect the Supreme Being. For what we call uncleanneſs, not moral but natural, is only relative, depending

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depending wholly on the frame of our bodily organs, which determine sensible qualities, that is, the images or representations made on our minds from the exterior surface of corporeal objects. An intelligent being therefore, with organs otherwise made, or without any material organs at all, would not receive the same impressions from the bodies called impure, which we do, nor be affected with their nearness as we are. Especially that pure Spirit, who perceives not as man does, the external appearances of things only, but their inmost essences, cannot receive offence or suffer uneasiness, like what we feel, from that which is called defilement, which is a merely sensible idea. And as to *moral turpitude*, tho' we are made with an abhorrence of it, producing strong emotions and painful sensations in our minds, shame, sorrow and resentment, which is a wise part of the human constitution, being a design'd preservative against the greatest evil and unhappiness; yet we ought not to imagine that the Deity is affected with it in the same manner as we are. He sees moral evil, and is present where it is committed, without any participation in it, and disapproves without being made uneasy by it; he preserves his

creatures,

creatures, moral agents as well as others, and exerciſes that care over them which their dependent natures ſeverally require, ſupporting their active powers, which is neceſſary to their exertion, even when they are acting irregularly, yet without any concurrence in the irregularity, or any perturbation ariſing from it, which tho' it be a manner of preſence and of acting, that we are not capable of, by the limited condition of our nature, and the ſpecial laws of our conſtitution, yet is it not difficult to conceive concerning the Supreme Being, if we conſider his abſolute perfection and bleſſedneſs, far above the poſſibility of being miſled into any error, or touch'd with any painful paſſion. Having thus endeavour'd to prove and to explain the doctrine of God's Omnipreſence, I come now in the

3*d* place, to draw ſome uſeful inferences from it. It is not to be conſider'd as a point of mere ſpeculation, but may be applied to very important practical purpoſes, and ought to have a great influence on the temper of our minds, and our whole behaviour. The *Pſalmiſt* deſcribes it very affectionately in the text, and purſues his devout meditation on the ſame ſubject, through the whole *Pſalm*, conſider-

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ing it eſpecially as a motive to ſincerity, and a ſtrict attention to every part of his conduct, not merely that which is open to the view of the world, but chiefly his moſt ſecret actions, and the diſpoſitions and purpoſes of his heart. How ſtrongly muſt this conſideration affect an attentive mind; "Had I the "command of univerſal nature, ſo that I "could tranſport my ſelf whither I pleas'd "for a ſafe retreat, there is no poſſibility of "avoiding the preſence of God. If I mount "up to the utmoſt extremities of this mate-"rial world, even to the ſurface that parts "it from the immenſe void, I ſhould find "my ſelf there within the verge of his ſove-"reign dominion. If I deſcend to the dark-"neſs which is hid from all living, there I "ſhould be naked before him, there is no "obſcurity impenetrable to his All-ſearching "eye, the wings of the morning are not "ſwift enough to carry me from his pur-"ſuing hand, and the ſhadows of night are "as open to his view as the brighteſt ſun-"ſhine. But where the Deity is, there is the "Power and the Underſtanding which made "the heavens and the earth, and form'd the "ſpirit of man within him". This certainly ought, and when it is ſeriouſly believed

ed and deliberately attended to, it will ſtrike our minds with the moſt profound reverence, which is not a weak and fooliſh dread of we don't know what, but a dutiful affection, very natural to the human mind, ariſing from a full and rational perſuaſion of a real awful preſence. SERM. VII.

Before men of ſuperior power, and reputation for wiſdom; we are ſtruck with awe, and ſolicitous to behave in ſuch a manner as to obtain their approbation; but theſe are only faint images of greatneſs, that glorious Being who is the original Fountain of all power and wiſdom, is infinitely more to be feared, and it muſt be of infinitely greater importance to approve our ſelves to him, requiring at the ſame time much greater vigilance and application of mind, becauſe his preſence reaches to our inmoſt eſſence, and he knows our ſecret thoughts. The Scripture therefore very inſtructively deſcribes the whole of religion by that comprehenſive expreſſion, *walking before God*, which ſignifies a conſtant ſerious ſenſe of the Divine Preſence upon our minds, producing a circumſpect care to pleaſe him in all things. It is not merely an outward decorum in our con-

duct; that the presence of the invisible God teaches us, nor only a watchful care of our behaviour in the solemnities of devotion, the influence of this great article of religion extends to our most hidden retirements, and it requires very strict attention to the springs and motions of deliberate action in all the affairs of human life, as being all equally *naked and opened unto the eyes of him, with whom we have to do*, as our Ruler and our Judge.

And if there is no darkness or shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves, if their *secret sins are set in the light of God's countenance*, how confounding must this consideration be to the sinners, whose consciences witness against them that they have wilfully and habitually indulg'd themselves in wickedness; and if they are thoroughly convinc'd that their transgressions have been committed in the sight of that God, *who is of purer eyes than that he can behold iniquity* with approbation, what stronger motive can there be to their betaking themselves to his mercy by a speedy repentance? On the other hand, it yields mighty consolation to sincerely good men, that a desire of approving themselves to God rules in their hearts,

hearts, and by it they have form'd their conduct; the rash censures and erroneous judgments of fallible men concerning their actions, do not greatly disturb their minds, since they are conscious to themselves, of having endeavour'd by an uniform integrity of heart and life, to obtain the approbation of an unerring Judge. SERM. VII.

2*dly*, This is a sure foundation of hope and confidence to good men in all the vicissitudes of time, and in all the dangers and distresses which befal them, for the presence of God is a presence of Power, against which no force can prevail, and of Wisdom which no device can over-reach. The most formidable appearances are frequently controul'd, and the most threatening tendencies over-rul'd by Divine Providence to happy issues, for the defenceless who trust in God, and *cast their burdens on him.* * *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.* It is

* Psal. xlvi. 1, 2, 3.

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true, the care of Providence is to us invisible, and we cannot possibly penetrate into the methods of its interposition, nor into its designs; yet it must be a perpetual source of comfort to good minds, that *the eyes of God run to and fro throughout the earth, to shew himself strong in behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him* *. He does not indeed give them a perfect security against troubles, to which the condition of man is always liable in this life, and we have none of us reason to expect an exemption from them; but it ought to give us perfect contentment, and we should acquiesce in it with pleasure, that God is ever near to us, that his wisdom governs the world, and directs the whole series of events in it.

3*dly*, If God is every where present, he is every where to be worshipped, his Perfections not confin'd to any place, are to be acknowledg'd and ador'd by his reasonable creatures in all places. To imagine that the Deity dwells in *Temples made with hands*, as if his presence were appropriated to them, is a very unworthy notion. Indeed as public

* 2 Chron. xvi. 9.

worship

worſhip is reaſonable, that is, that men pro- SERM. feſſing to believe in God ſhould joyn toge- VII. ther in calling upon his name; it follows, that proper places ſhould be provided for it; but that is only for the conveniency of the worſhippers, not as if God were more acceſſible, or better diſpos'd to hear prayers and accept ſervices, in one place than another. There may be, 'tis true, peculiar manifeſtations of the Divine power and glory in ſome parts of the creation and not in others; the heavens are therefore called the throne of God, and his habitation, becauſe there the ſplendor of his Majeſty and his high Perfections ſhine moſt illuſtriouſly, in the view of thoſe creatures which are the beſt qualified to diſcern it; but his Eſſence, infinitely perfect in wiſdom and power, is equally preſent in all places. In like manner, during the *Jewiſh* policy, ſome places were held more ſacred than others, as the tabernacle which *Moſes* made in the wilderneſs, and *Solomon*'s temple, becauſe God was pleas'd, for ſpecial reaſons, to appropriate to them the external ſervice, he then appointed to the *Iſraelites*, and to diſtinguiſh them by viſible extraordinary tokens, called his *Preſence*; but theſe ſpecial reaſons

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have long ago ceased, and now, according to the more pure and spiritual form of religion which our Saviour has instituted, wherever men *worship in spirit and truth*, wherever they call on God out of a pure heart, *fearing him and working righteousness*, they are accepted. Nay, excepting the reason already mention'd, the conveniency of numerous assemblies, which only relates to *public* worship; excepting this, I say, to make a choice of places for devotion, as imagining greater sanctity in some than others, is at best but silly superstition, if it is not rather to be imputed, as in some cases certainly it is, to a vain hypocritical pretence of zeal, which the God of truth never approves. Our Saviour therefore enjoyns his disciples, that they may have the clearer and more satisfying evidences of sincerity in their own minds, to choose the greatest secresy for their private worship, to *retire into their closets, and pray to their heavenly Father, who sees in secret*, and is pleas'd with that undissembled piety which honours him as an Omnipresent God.

Lastly, This doctrine shews the absurdity of worshipping idols. Gods that are acknowledged

knowledged not to be *every* where, are not worthy of religious reſpect *any* where. In reality, and *by nature they are no gods* * as St. *Paul* ſays very juſtly concerning them, they are *lying vanities*, ſo the Scripture often calls them, their divinity, the mere fiction of the human imagination; but by the confeſſion of their worſhippers, they have only a limited preſence, power and underſtanding, gods only of particular countries, or perhaps only of particular places in them, *gods of the hills and not of the vallies*; and how they came by their ſeveral ſituations, and had their diſtinct provinces aſſign'd them, their votaries cannot pretend to tell, which one would think, ſhould be an inſuperable difficulty attending the very foundations of their ſuperſtition. Who can give a reaſon for *Chemeſh* his being the god of the *Moabites*, and why *Milcom* ſhould exerciſe his godſhip over the children of *Ammon*; and if the titles of the topical Deities cannot be made out, the honours paid to them may be miſplac'd, and men be ſerving the wrong god. But it is needleſs to inſiſt on particular arguments, againſt a de-

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* Gal. iv. 8.

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votion which, in the whole of it, is ſo apparently irrational. That ſupreme eternal Being who has manifeſted, and does ſtill manifeſt his power and intelligence, and thereby his eſſential preſence every where, is alone worthy to receive the praiſes, the religious homage and adoration, of all intelligent creatures in heaven and earth, and is *ever nigh to all that call upon him in truth.*

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God's Almighty Power, by what Acts manifeſted, and in what Senſe to be underſtood.

Gen. xvii. 11.

The Lord appeared unto Abraham and ſaid unto him, I am God Almighty.

AS the idea of power is one of the moſt familiar to our minds, it ariſes from a multitude of occaſions, from an attention to our own activity, and the many changes we ſee in material objects, which lead us to the conſideration of a cauſe or cauſes, that is, power producing them; ſo Omnipotence is one of the firſt perfections which reaſon has taught men to aſcribe to the Supreme Being. We cannot avoid obſerving a great diverſity of operations and effects, and conſequently

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quently a great difference in the degrees of power; but the highest measure of this perfection must belong to the first universal Cause, whose characters have in the preceding discourses, been prov'd, and indeed by all who believe his existence, are acknowledg'd to be intelligence and activity. If there is one immense, necessarily existing and eternal Spirit, the designing original Author of all appearances and of all powers, distinct from his own, in the universe, his power must be the greatest of all, nay, the greatest and most absolute that can be, for it must be sufficient for its own productions, superior to all which are derived from it, and to suppose the possibility of a greater, is to suppose that a superior power may proceed from an inferior and insufficient cause, or from nothing. Accordingly, all of mankind who acknowledg'd the one supreme eternal Deity, have constantly agreed in attributing to him the character which the *God of Abraham* claims for himself, that he is *Almighty*; however they might differ in their notions concerning his other perfections, here they are unanimous. The idea of power always accompanies that of Divinity; the prophet *Isaiah* therefore, having asserted the supremacy

cy of the God of *Iſrael*, which is prov'd by his wonderful works, reproaches the heathen idols with weakneſs, he calls upon them to ſhew their Godhead by the operations of their power, either *in doing good or evil* *, for an impotent God is an abſurdity, in the opinion of every man; but if there be one independent God from everlaſting, on whom all things depend, there appears no colorable pretence for denying that he is All-powerful. And as this is among the firſt principles univerſally receiv'd in ſpeculation; ſo it has a moſt direct and immediate influence to the purpoſes of religion; for tho' all the Divine perfections concur in exciting religious diſpoſitions, and taken together, they form that amiable character, which is the object of our devout affections; yet the conſideration of Almighty power, in a particular manner ſtrikes the mind with awe, and produces that fear which is a great ſecurity of our obedience. I ſhall therefore in this diſcourſe endeavour to explain the attribute of Omnipotence, which by the cleareſt evidence of reaſon, we are convinc'd, belongs to God. And I will, *Firſt*, ſhew wherein it conſiſts,

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* Iſaiah xli. 23.

and

SERM. VIII. and by what works it is manifested. *Secondly*, In what sense and with what limitations it is to be understood.

First, Let us consider *wherein the Omnipotence of God consists, and by what works it is manifested.* The Principle it self, the Almighty Power of the Deity, by which can be meant nothing else but his infinitely active Nature, is too high for us to understand; all the idea we can have of it is by its operations, which is inadequate, but it represents the object to our minds as being very great, since the effects by which we form it, even those of them which fall within our own particular knowledge, are so many and so wonderful. All things that are in the universe, the first Cause himself only excepted, are his works, and all power is derived from him. Now, if the effects vastly transcend the capacity of the human mind, how can it by searching find out the Cause; if we cannot reach to the utmost limits of created nature, nor comprehend the productions of Divine Power, how shall we comprehend the Power it self, which must be suppos'd to be far superior to them? What pretence can there be for denying or doubting that he can do whatever pleaseth him,

him, *who made the heavens and all the hoſts of them, the earth and all things that are therein, the ſea and all that therein is, and who preſerveth them all?* * But we need not puzzle our thoughts by endeavouring to imagine the utmoſt extent of poſſibility, when we begin to form an idea of Divine Power, let us conſider it as manifeſted in actual exiſtence, for that will furniſh us with inſtances to which we ſhall find our underſtandings unequal. SERM. VIII.

The giving being to things that were not, is an exerciſe of Power which ſurpaſſes our comprehenſion, becauſe it is unparallel'd in other cauſes, and far beyond any activity that we are conſcious of in our ſelves, or can by means of our ſenſes diſcern in others, which requires pre-exiſtent materials to work upon. A power to change the exterior and viſible forms of matter is what we can eaſily comprehend, for *that* we find our ſelves able to do in many inſtances; and the more difficult operations of nature in changing the inward frame of things, whereby the ſame ſubſtance paſſes into a variety of very different appearances; for example, that which

* Nehemiah ix. 6.

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is now earth and water, having undergone several preparatory alterations, becomes corn and other vegetables, afterwards it is converted into animal juices, from whence some of it perspires in small particles and mixes with the air, the rest adheres to the solid parts of the animal body or is discharged in various forms: These, I say, and such like operations, however it may exceed our skill to imitate, or even to comprehend them fully, yet are familiar to us, being daily exemplified before our eyes in natural generation and corruption. But to bring something out of nothing, or cause that to exist which had no existence before in any form, requires a Power so much superior to ours, and is so unlike any agency which falls within our observation and experience, that no materials of our knowledge can furnish us with any notion of it; and this is an operation which we ascribe to Almighty God.

Some indeed have presum'd to assert, that creation in this sense, is in it self absolutely impossible; so that it pass'd into an axiom with the ancient *Atheists*, which they relied on as the chief support of their cause, that nothing can come from nothing; nay, some *Theists* themselves are said to have acknowledg'd

ledg'd it, ſo far as to aſſert the eternity of matter, which however they believ'd, was ſtill ſubject to the Power of the co-eternal Deity, to modify and diſpoſe of it at his pleaſure. But tho' I grant that this philoſophic opinion does not utterly deſtroy the firſt and main principle of religion, and a man, not altogether inconſiſtently with his believing the being of God, may entertain the notion laſt mentioned, that is, concerning the eternity of matter; yet I muſt obſerve, that theſe philoſophers ſeem not to have duely conſidered the true notion of abſolute eternity, which includes ſelf-exiſtence, neceſſary exiſtence and independence; characters which can never reaſonably be attributed to merely paſſive unintelligent things, and therefore, as has been already ſhewn, they cannot be abſolutely eternal, but their very being as well as their forms and appearances, muſt be produc'd by the Divine Power: But indeed if we attend to the propoſition it ſelf abſtractly, *that Nothing can come from Nothing*, we ſhall ſee no rational foundation, upon which it could be received as a certain truth in this ſenſe, that nothing can poſſibly be created, or no real entity begin to be. What appearance is there of a contradiction in ſuppoſing

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that

that matter, a kind of being so imperfect, intirely passive and liable to so many mutations, should begin to exist, or that it should cease to be, by the efficiency of a powerful agent? Is there any absurdity in conceiving that there might have been more or less of it than there actually is; nay, is not that a supposition which our minds come easily into? And if so, there can appear no absurdity in placing it within the compass of creating power; one can scarcely imagine what should have led men into such a way of thinking, as that creation, in the strictest sense, is impossible, unless it be that they are sensible it is above their own power, and above the ordinary operations of nature which we discern: But shall we measure all power by our own scantling, and conclude there is none greater than what we possess, at least, than we can comprehend, when there are numberless appearances daily in the world, the productions of an invisible Power, which we neither have ability to effect, nor can understand the reasons of them.

Yet methinks, if we attend to the operations of our own minds, the formation of new being, needs not appear so strange to us, as to give any occasion for imagining it to be

be impoſſible ; for tho' our minds are une- SERM.
qual to the production of new ſubſtances, VIII.
yet their works are ſo far above the operations of matter, which are the objects of our ſenſes, that creation is not more unlike the higheſt efforts of the human capacity. The riſing up of new ideas and ſentiments in the mind, and new diſpoſitions, its giving by its own activity a new determination to the exerciſe of its own faculties, and raiſing an intirely new motion in ſome bodies; I ſay, creation is not more unlike theſe, than they are to mechaniſm, which ſhews us that operations of one ſort can give us no idea of another ; but we have no reaſon on that account, to deny the poſſibility of them. Suppoſing an intelligent being to have no idea of ſelf-determining power (which is no impoſſible ſuppoſition, for there does not appear to us any ſuch connexion between the ideas of perception and ſelf-determining action, but that they may be ſeparated ;) ſuppoſing this, I ſay, ſpontaneous action would ſeem as ſtrange to ſuch a being, as making ſomething out of nothing does to us, and there would in that caſe, be the ſame reaſon for denying the poſſibility of the *former*, that any man has for denying the *other* ; indeed

there is no more reason in either case, than a blind man has to deny that there is, or can be, any such thing as light or colours.

But why should any man imagine that the power of bringing things into being from pure non-existence, is absurd, who reflecting on himself, is naturally led to conclude, that he began to be, and therefore is an instance of a new substantial production, by creating Power. Every man knows that his own personality, that is, his consciousness had a commencement, and is of no very long duration (for the arbitrary supposition of the pre-existence of souls even from eternity, we may pass by, as a conceit not worthy of our notice, being supported by no kind of evidence; nor is the creature here spoken of a new spiritual substance abstractly, but a new person;) and since this thinking conscious Self, a substantial Being, of whose existence we have the greatest certainty, began to be, not of it self, but produc'd by a Cause, it may be to us a satisfying proof of creating Power; for what greater difficulty can there be in conceiving that *God made heaven and earth*, than in conceiving that *he formed the self-conscious spirit of man within him.* Is matter any more

more real than the principle of thought and volition, and could not the Power which gave exiſtence to the *one*, alſo produce the *other*. To ſay that the ſpirit is no more than a certain modification or quality of matter, ariſing from the figure, compoſition and motion of its more ſubtle parts, is a pretence which I have elſewhere diſprov'd, and ſhall not now conſider it. But without entering into any inquiry concerning the nature of ſubſtances, material or immaterial, and the power they may poſſibly be endued with, of which we have very little knowledge; any man who calmly attends to the beginning of his own perſonal exiſtence, that is, of his conſcious thinking, muſt ſee in it an exertion of power of which he can form no diſtinct idea, and which he cannot but be convinc'd is to him as inexplicable as the creation of the material world.

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But tho' creation in the ſtricteſt ſenſe, or making things out of pure nothing, is far from being abſurd, indeed there lies no juſt objection againſt it, for its being incomprehenſible to us is no argument at all, ſince it does not appear to our minds impoſſible, or to imply a contradiction; on the contrary, we have great reaſon to believe that both our

own spirits, and the matter of the universe, were originally the productions of infinite Power, out of absolute non-existence: Yet creation, in this strictest sense, is not the principal and most obvious manifestation, whereby we understand the invisible things of God, his eternal Power and Godhead; but that which may be also, and usually is styled creation, and which by the clearest evidence of reason we know to be the work of the Deity, namely, the disposing all things in the world into the regular forms which we see, and framing them into vast and beautiful systems, which comprehending an infinite variety of parts, all plac'd in the most exact order, and all conspiring to make one harmonious whole, shew not only the perfect intelligence, but the activity of the great Author, and that he has an unlimited command over universal nature. When we consider that he *telleth the number of the stars and calleth them all by their names, he covereth the heaven with clouds, and prepareth rain for the earth, he giveth snow like wool, and scattereth the hoar-frost like ashes*[a]: *He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hang-*

[a] Psal. cxlvii.

eth

eth the earth upon nothing ; he bindeth up the waters in his thick cloud, and the cloud is not rent under them [a]. *He hath meaſured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out the heaven with a ſpan, and comprehended the duſt of the earth in a meaſure, and weighed the mountains in ſcales, and the hills in a balance* [b] ; when, I ſay, we conſider all this, we muſt conclude that *great is our Lord and of great power, theſe are only a part of his ways, how little a portion is heard of him, but the thunder of his power who can underſtand* [c] *?* SERM. VIII.

For it is to be obſerv'd, that the power of a voluntary agent muſt ſtill be ſuppoſed ſuperior to all its effects, all his ſtrength is not exhauſted in his works, but the virtue which produc'd them is ſufficient to produce more : So that tho' we knew all the works of God, which we do not, we ſhould not thereby be able to make a judgment concerning the utmoſt extent of his power, which remains one undecaying principle of operation, ſufficient for new productions beyond what we can imagine. But the effects of Divine Omnipotence which actually exiſt, far ſurpaſs

[a] Job xxvi. [b] Iſaiah xl. [c] Job xxvi. 14.

our comprehenſion. It is one advantage not unworthy of our notice here, which we have by the modern improvements of natural philoſophy, that thereby our idea of the works of God is greatly enlarged. Formerly men were uſed to think that this earth is the only habitation of living creatures, except that the angels, pure ſpirits, who require no ſuch place of abode, ſtand in the immediate preſence of God, and ſurround his throne in the heavens. But later and more accurate obſervation has given men reaſon to believe that other bodies of a vaſt magnitude, within the ſolar ſyſtem, and of a conſtitution not unlike that of our globe, are alſo inhabited. Why ſhould it enter into our minds to imagine that ſuch ſtupendous orbs are made for nothing, but to be very imperfectly diſcern'd by mankind? Is it not much more rational to think, that ſince they are fitted for beings of a conſtitution like ours, they are poſſeſs'd by ſuch, and that by their conſtant rotations round their own axis, and by their periodical revolutions about the ſun as their center, they are illuminated and warm'd by it in the ſame manner as the earth is? Nor is it unlikely that the fixed ſtars, ſhining by their own unborrowed light, at ſo prodigious a diſtance

a diſtance from us that no judgment can be made of it, are the centers of other ſyſtems, each of them perhaps as large as this, and how many there may be of them, and how remote from each other as well as from us, no one of mankind can pretend, with the leaſt degree of probability to conjecture. Theſe ſpeculations, which in the main ſeem to be juſt, being founded on obſervation of the magnitude and diſtance of the heavenly bodies, and their viſible variations, tend to give us a very magnificent idea of the works and the power of God. How wonderful are they? How great is *He, worthy to receive glory and honour, who has created all theſe things for his good pleaſure*, who has rais'd worlds above worlds, far beyond the reach of human knowledge, all of them ſtock'd with proper inhabitants, qualified to underſtand and admire his perfections diſplay'd in them, and to ſhew forth his praiſe. SERM. VIII.

But the *everlaſting God*, the creator of the heavens and the earth, *fainteth not nor is weary*, his *hand is not ſhortned*, nor has his ſtrength ſuffer'd any abatement by all he has done. It is impoſſible for us to imagine what works of the ſame, or of different kinds, he is able to produce. One thing we are ſure

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of, and it gives us a very awful idea of his Omnipotence, that he can deſtroy his own works; for the power which has made, is ſufficient to unmake, and the beings which owe their exiſtence originally to him, and continually depend upon him, muſt ceaſe to be at his pleaſure. He can unhinge the whole frame of nature, and diſſolve the great ſyſtems which his Power has rais'd. It is not ſo eaſy for human force to demoliſh the fabric, which with great labour it has erected, as for Omnipotence to reduce the heavens and the earth to their original chaos; for they can none of them make the leaſt reſiſtance to his will. Thus the Scripture elegantly deſcribes the ſovereign dominion of Almighty God over the world, and his power to remove thoſe parts of it which ſeem to be built on the moſt ſtable foundation; *he removeth the mountains and they know it not, he overturneth them in his anger, he ſhaketh the earth out of her place and the pillars thereof tremble; he commandeth the ſun and it riſeth not, and ſealeth up the ſtars*[a]. *The pillars of heaven tremble and are aſtoniſhed at his reproof, he divideth the ſea with his power, and by his*

[a] Job ix.

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underſtanding he ſmiteth through the proud [a]. *He rebuketh the ſea and maketh it dry, and drieth up the rivers. The mountains quake at him and the hills melt, and the earth is burnt at his preſence* [b]. So that if the whole world is not involv'd in confuſion, and the frame of nature does not ſuffer an univerſal diſſolution, it does not proceed from any defect of power in God, but from the perfection of his wiſdom and goodneſs, which leads me to obſerve, SERM. VIII.

2*dly*, The manifeſtation of the power of God in preſerving his creatures, as he originally gave them being, and in governing them. The whole univerſe ſubſiſts by the word of his power, and all the parts of it, with their various motions and changes, are ſo directed by his mighty providence, as to anſwer the ends for which they were made. I obſerved before [c], that ſome of the greateſt and moſt common appearances of nature are not to be accounted for otherwiſe than by the interpoſition of the Divine power. And tho' this is often the leſs attended to becauſe of the apparent uniformity in the courſe of things, which perhaps unthoughtful men conſider as

[a] Job xxvi. [b] Nahum i. 4, 5. [c] Diſcourſe 7th.

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if they follow'd by a kind of natural neceſſity, rather than intelligent direction; yet a ſerious reflexion would ſatisfy us that the *hand of the Lord does all theſe things*, that it is Divine Providence which upholds the order of the world, and rules the courſe of nature, *which makes the day ſpring know its place, and ſtretches out the ſhadows of the evening, that commands the ſun to ſhine by day and the moon by night, that prepares a place for the rain, and a way for the lightning of thunder, that maketh the herbs to grow upon the earth*, and brings the fruits to perfection, that fixes the limits of the ſea and the dry land; I ſay, the Providence of God does all this as truly, and by as real an efficiency, as if there were no order and dependence of things, no general laws by which they are govern'd, but the appearances of every moment were ſo many ſeparate, independent effects, requiring, each a ſeveral cauſe, or at leaſt, a ſeveral unconnected exertion of power to produce them. The wiſdom of God is conſpicuous in the ſimplicity of his providential adminiſtration; at leaſt, our finite underſtandings are enabled to diſcern and to admire his counſel in the regularity of his works, by what we call ſimplicity, as being more eaſy to our underſtandings,

ings, tho' no more eaſy to his infinite power and wiſdom. When we ſee a train of events following each other in orderly ſucceſſion, and a multitude of effects depend on one cauſe, it gives us a delightful idea of wiſe and ſteddy counſel in the government of the world, and we are thereby directed to form our ſchemes and take the meaſures of our conduct in life: But it would be extremely ſtupid ſo to engage our attention to the ſettled courſe of events, as to overlook the inviſible power which governs them, not to *behold the majeſty of the Lord, nor regard the operations of his hands.* SERM. VIII.

Yet God does not confine himſelf to what are commonly called the laws of nature, really no more than the ordinary ſeries of his own operations, for inanimate things, which we are here conſidering, do not properly obey laws, they are ruled only by an immediate influence of power, which they cannot reſiſt; but, I ſay, God is not confin'd to theſe laws, ſometimes he acts againſt the common courſe of nature, whereby he manifeſts his power, not as if it were really greater in theſe inſtances, or the operation more difficult to him; but to awaken the attention of men by an extraordinary interpoſition, and excite them to their duty. Of this ſort

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of works were the great flood, whereby *the old world of the ungodly was overthrown*, the consuming of *Sodom* and *Gomorrah* by fire from heaven, the dividing of the red sea, so that the *Israelites* were preserv'd and the *Egyptians* drown'd, the terrible convulsions of nature at the giving of the law in the wilderness, the preternatural events which accompanied the death and resurrection of our Saviour, and many miraculous works done by him and his apostles, of which we have clear historical evidence. 'Tis true, we cannot be absolutely certain from the nature of the things themselves, that all these, and such like events, are the peculiar works of Omnipotence; how far the capacity of inferior unseen agents may reach, and what power they may have, by Divine Permission, over what is commonly called the course of nature, we know not; but this we are sure of, that there is one eternal King whose *throne is prepared in heaven and his kingdom is over all*, the Fountain of all power and authority; and if his ministring spirits are able to effect such prodigies as are astonishing to us, this heightens, instead of lessening our idea of his Majesty, since the highest of *them* are under his command, and absolutely sub-

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ject to his diſpoſal, holding their powers, and the very foundation of them, their being, by no other tenure than his free gift. SERM. VIII.

3*dly*, The Perfection of God's ſupreme power is diſplay'd in the manner of his operation, which is, not like that of finite active beings, gradual and ſucceſſive, painful and laborious, but his work is as eaſy to him, as it is irreſiſtible by any oppoſite ſtrength; and if there be a repetition of Divine acts, or a continuance in working, that does not ariſe from any difficulty he finds in the execution of his purpoſes, which is the caſe with inferior agents, and the cauſe of their leiſurely proceeding. But the greateſt of all the works of God, I mean the moſt incomprehenſible to us, perhaps to any finite mind, is, and muſt be perform'd in an inſtant, that is creating things out of nothing, or giving them the beginning of their exiſtence; for the tranſition from nothing to being admits of no ſucceſſion. We have however, ſome faint imperfect image of the Divine operations in the activity of our minds; for tho' we are ſlow and weak in underſtanding, and the defect of our knowledge muſt be ſupplied, ſo far as we are able to ſupply it, by conſideration, that we may form our purpoſes as wiſely

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as we can, yet when they are form'd, the execution is neither tedious nor difficult, within the narrow sphere to which we are confin'd. We are not conscious of any thing but the mere determination of the will, than which nothing can be conceiv'd quicker in producing its immediate effect, that moves the organs of the body, which alone are properly, tho' not absolutely subject to the mind; more distant works necessarily require longer time, from the nature of material instruments, and the imperfect power we have over them. But if we suppose a spirit intimately present in all parts of the universe, having a more perfect knowledge of, and absolute dominion over every thing in nature, than we have over the nearest and most immediate organs of sensation and motion; this gives us a faint notion of the Divine power, and the manner of its exercise; it operates with the most perfect ease and without any resistance, the counsels of God are fulfilled only by his determining them to be done; *by the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the hosts of them by the breath of his mouth* *, *and when he sendeth forth his*

* Psal. xxxiii. 6.

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commandment upon earth, his word runneth very ſwiftly, giving ſnow, hoar-froſt and ice: Again, he ſends his powerful word and melteth them, and cauſeth the waters to flow *. From this imperfect account it appears, that we cannot think too highly of the power of God, which is abſolute, and properly called *Almighty*, ſince to it the whole world and all things therein owe their being and perfection; for no reaſon can be aſſign'd why any thing within the bounds of poſſibility, ſhould not be if God pleaſes, ſeeing it requires no more power to produce it, than has been actually manifeſted in the production of that which does exiſt. I come in the

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2*d* place, to conſider in what ſenſe, and with what limitations, the doctrine of Divine Omnipotence is to be underſtood. And the firſt and moſt obvious limitation has been juſt now inſinuated, namely, that when it is ſaid the power of God is infinite, the meaning is not that it reaches beyond poſſibility, or extends to the doing of what is in it ſelf impoſſible, that is, implies a contradiction. The meaſure of poſſibility to us is inconceivableneſs; that of which we can have no idea,

* Pſal. cxlvii.

but

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but that reflecting on it, appears to be nothing, we pronounce impossible, and not to be effected by any power. I do not intend by this that we should call things impossible, or pretend to judge that the Power of God cannot produce them, merely because we cannot comprehend, or have any idea at all of the manner of operation, but where there is an apparent inconsistency in the idea of the effect, so that one part of it necessarily destroys another, for that is really the idea of nothing, which is not the object of power. To say that by the Power of God, a thing may be and not be at the same time, that a whole may be no greater than one of its parts, that number or magnitude may be at once equal and unequal, that bodies, contrary to their nature, may be without solidity, and be in different places at the same time; to say that these and such like absurdities may be effected by the Power of God, is only to set his power in a ridiculous light, and to destroy all the foundations of our knowledge. And it is absurd to imagine, that the Being of God himself, and his attributes, essentially unchangeable, are subject to any power whatever. And therefore,

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2*dly*, We ought not to ascribe to the Power of God any thing which is unworthy of his other perfections, any thing which is inconsistent with the wisdom, or the moral rectitude and goodness of his nature; for that is absurdly to set the attributes of the Deity at variance with each other, and to dishonour his true character, under the pretence of magnifying his power. Men may foolishly imagine, that what they call arbitrary power, is a most exalted and glorious condition; judging not by any real perfection in the thing it self, but only by the distinction and superiority which it gives them above others If by arbitrary power be meant that which is independent and liable to no controul from without, in that sense it does belong to Almighty God; but if it signifies a power of acting according to mere will and pleasure, without any regard to right and reason; this is so far from being in it self an excellency, however it may be desir'd by weak ambitious mortals, that nothing can appear more deform'd, and odious to the unbias'd human mind. Can any man calmly considering, and not under the influence of passion, think brutal force amiable, that is, force separated from reason, equity and goodness; rather does it not fill SERM. VIII.

the mind with horror? If we compare human governments, of theſe directly oppoſite characters, the one limited by law and juſtice, where the rights of ſubjects are ſecured on the ſame equitable foundation with the prerogative of the prince, and equally ſafe from violent invaſion; the other wholly deſpotic, where the lives, liberties and eſtates of men, are abſolutely ſubject to the caprice of a paſſionate mortal, accuſtomed to tyrannical cruelty, and flatter'd into an opinion that it is the higheſt glory, which the human nature is capable of being rais'd to; upon ſuch a compariſon, it will be eaſy to determine whether arbitrary power, in the ſenſe already explain'd, be a real perfection in the eſteem of intelligent beings. Far be it from us to entertain any ſuch notions of the Divine dominion, which, tho' it be abſolutely uncontroulable, that is, it cannot be reſiſted by any oppoſite ſtrength, for *who can ſtay God's hand, or ſay unto him, what doſt thou?* Yet is always exercis'd with perfect wiſdom and moral rectitude. It is therefore alike impoſſible to alter the nature of things which he has made, that is, make them to be what at the ſame time he has made them not to be, (that were to deſtroy the power by which they

they are produc'd and do ſubſiſt) and for him to act againſt that invariable reaſon which muſt always appear to his perfect underſtanding, and againſt his moral perfections which are, equally with power, inſeparable from his eſſence. And for this reaſon the Scripture juſtly aſſerts moral evil to be impoſſible for God, or any thing which ſuppoſes him to have done amiſs; as when it ſays that it is impoſſible for him to lie, and to repent; which impoſſibility, tho' in ſome reſpects different from what is meant by a contradiction in the nature of things, yet ſtands upon as ſure a foundation; for the attributes of God which are called moral, do as really and immutably belong to his nature, as his natural perfections, and are as neceſſary a part of his character. Thus *Elihu* excellently ſpeaks concerning the government of Providence *, *Far be it from God that he ſhould do wickedneſs, and from the Almighty, that he ſhould commit iniquity. For the work of a man ſhall he render unto him, and cauſe every man to find according to his ways. Yea, ſurely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment.* And this, inſtead of SERM. VIII.

* Job xxxiv. 10, 11, 12.

shewing any defect of power, arises from the plenitude of it, for, as *Elihu* adds in the 13th verse, *Who hath given him a charge over the earth? or who hath disposed the whole world?* Men are therefore tyrannical, because they are impotent; a secret consciousness of dependent, precarious power, and a misgiving fear of harm from others, whom their passions represent as formidable enemies, put them upon exerting their utmost ability, in executing their wrath without delay; but he who is secure in his unchangeable All-sufficiency, absolutely independent, and therefore incapable of fear from any adverse power, or of any other passion which terminates in self-defence, can never be tempted to act otherwise than according to the most perfect wisdom, rectitude and goodness.

To form in us a right temper towards God, and that affectionate practical regard to him, which is our principal duty, we should carefully endeavour to have just notions concerning his government (I mean that which is most strictly and properly so called) over rational and moral agents: The sole foundation of it cannot be the natural attribute of Power, for that alone can never produce such obedience, as the voice of our own reason will

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pronounce truly good, and acceptable to the Deity. So the human mind is conſtituted, as neceſſarily to diſcern the difference between moral good and evil, and be directed to form its conduct by a regard to that difference, otherwiſe it cannot enjoy inward tranquillity with ſelf-approbation. If this be the invariable law of our nature, the declared will of any being, how powerful ſoever, cannot be the rule of our actions, inconſiſtently with our original moral ſentiments, nor indeed any farther than as it appears agreeable to them. The true foundation therefore of God's moral government is, not his abſolute power to diſpoſe of the creatures as he pleaſes, but the unchangeable rectitude and goodneſs of his nature, manifeſted in that moral human conſtitution, of which he is the Author; tho' the conſideration of his natural dominion powerfully enforces our obedience, as containing motives that rationally work upon our hopes and fears, which are not indeed the original ſprings of morality, but of great uſe, eſpecially in this imperfect ſtate of trial, to ſupport the mind againſt temptations, and anſwer objections taken from the ſeeming oppoſition of virtue to our intereſt. SERM. VIII.

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Again, we naturally consider all just government over intelligent agents as intended for their good; so that 'tis scarcely possible, any power or authority over men, should appear to the human mind amiable, which does not pursue this end: The same is the great ruling principle of action in every good member of society as such, and he studies according to his station and capacity, to promote the public benefit in the best manner he can. If the true interest of a community were universally known, and all the members sincerely dispos'd to pursue it uniformly, there would be no occasion for laws; but therefore they are necessary, because many of the subjects are ignorant of their duty to the public, or may be diverted from attending to it, by their private irregular affections and passions. Human civil constitutions provide against these inconveniencies as well as they can, tho' still but imperfectly; those forms of government are the best, which most effectually preserve the power of legislation from the influence of human passion, caprice and corruption, and secure its continuance in persons of the greatest reputation for wisdom and integrity; for these are the characters of highest authority among rational beings, and which

which only are regarded by ingenuous minds: Penalties added to Laws, which derive all their force from meer power, cannot produce a willing and reaſonable obedience; and, as St. Paul juſtly ſays, * ſuch *laws* with ſanctions, *were made, not for the righteous, but for the diſobedient and the lawleſs.* SERM. VIII.

But the Divine moral government, as the obligation it lays upon us, cannot be ſatisfied otherwiſe than by an intelligent and affectionate obedience, ſo every part of its exerciſe, carries the cleareſt evidence of wiſdom, equity and goodneſs, the ſtable foundations of authority which reaſon cannot reſiſt. Whatever *God requires* of us, he at the ſame time *ſhews to be good*, perfectly agreeable to the cool dictates of our own underſtandings; either what appears intrinſically good at firſt view, ſuch as the love of himſelf and our fellow creatures, or what, upon calm reflection, we muſt diſcern to have a neceſſary connexion with thoſe principal duties, as plain conſequences from them, or as proper means in order to our performing them. 'Tis true, that for the purpoſes of morality, as well as of civil government, every ſubject has not ſuf-

* 1 Tim. i. 9.

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ficient knowledge to discover the best means; and therefore God may condescend to interpose (as he actually has interposed where he has granted a revelation to men) for promoting true moral piety and virtue, to establish certain positive institutions, which are only to be considered as means of religion; but even those positive institutions, at least in *Christianity*, may be discern'd, by attentive minds, to be eminently useful to the moral ends for which they are appointed, and so far they stand upon a moral foundation: And where the usefulness of such positive appointments cannot be clearly discern'd, our obligation to the observance of them does not arise from God's absolute supremacy and natural dominion over us, which cannot produce a reasonable and liberal service, but from a firm persuasion of his immutable rectitude and goodness, and of his unerring wisdom: Tho' we do not at first view, see the propriety and expediency of every such institution in particular, yet deference to the perfect wisdom and goodness of our Ruler, who appointed it for our advantage, does rationally determine us to use it, with diligence and the best application of our thinking powers, that we may

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obtain the benefit by it which he graciouſly intended. SERM. VIII.

Theſe, I think, are the beſt and moſt becoming ſentiments we can have of God's moral government; it is founded, not on his ſovereign irreſiſtible power and natural dominion, but on his abſolutely perfect purity, wiſdom and goodneſs; the end of it is the moſt abſolute univerſal good and happineſs of the rational creation; its laws are perfect *truth and righteouſneſs*, which every proper ſubject, that is, every intelligent creature may ſee, and thereby be induc'd to yield a reaſonable and willing obedience, which alone is real religion, and only pleaſing to him; his power in the adminiſtration of this government is exercis'd, not arbitrarily, but according to the moſt perfect equity, and rewards and puniſhments are diſtributed in exact proportion to the meaſure of moral good or evil, in the diſpoſitions and actions of every particular moral agent.

There is however ſome part of the Divine adminiſtration, which in another ſenſe, with reſpect to us, may be called arbitrary; that is, we cannot pretend to find out the reaſons of it, but ought to reſt ſatisfied in the ſovereign freedom of his will. What I mean is, that

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tho' God always preserves inviolable the rights which he has given to his creatures, and acts towards all of them according to the exactest measures of wisdom, equity and goodness, not one of them ever has reason to complain of being treated with an undue severity; yet, as it pleases him to manifest his power, his manifold wisdom and goodness, in the variety of his works, it is not to be expected that we should comprehend the particular grounds of this variety, or understand the reasons why he makes a distinction among his creatures: This only we are sure of, that he never injures any of them, nay, that he deals bountifully with all, which are the proper objects of goodness. The Potter's power over the clay, is a similitude which the prophet *Jeremy* uses, and after him the apostle *Paul*, to represent the dominion of God over the creatures, and particularly men. As the Potter intending vessels for various uses, out of the same mass, arbitrarily chooses materials for the coarser, and the finer sort, distinguishing them by his workmanship, according to the different purposes they are designed for; so the forming hand of God has made a difference among his creatures, as it pleased him; out of the same matter, originally

nally alike capable of all forms, he has made bodies terreſtrial and celeſtial, with all their different glories, the ſhining conſtellations in the heavens, beautiful flowers, and clods of earth. In like manner there is an apparent diverſity in the condition of intelligent beings, towards whom the Divine moral perfections are exercis'd: They are of ſuperior and inferior orders, ſome indued with higher, ſome with lower powers; for which diſtinction, ſo far as it relates to individuals, and that they are appointed each to their particular rank, no reaſon is to be given, but that it ſo pleaſed the ſovereign Lord of all: But he is juſt and good to every ſpecies, and every individual of them, none has cauſe of complaint, but ought to acknowledge the bounty of the Creator, whoſe condition of being is better than Non-exiſtence. Particularly among mankind, the wiſdom of Providence has ſeen fit to appoint a great difference in many reſpects. Their outward eſtates, the conſtitution of their bodies, the natural endowments of their minds, the opportunities for improving them, and their advantages for attaining to the knowledge of religion; all theſe are very unequal; ſome are rich ſome poor, ſome weak others ſtrong, ſome

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are favour'd with excellent means of education and instruction, while others are bred up in ignorance. And especially the privileges of God's peculiar people, first appropriated to the *Jews*, and afterwards enlarg'd to the *Christian* nations, which the Scripture highly celebrates, as they are indeed very great, for God has favour'd his people with an express revelation, *he hath shewed them his word, his statutes and his judgments, while he has not dealt so with other nations* *; these privileges, I say, are only to be attributed to the distinguishing favour of God. It was not for any merit in the *Jews* above all others, that God chose them to be a peculiar people unto himself, and the nations in which the light of *Christianity* has shin'd, were perhaps sunk as deep in ignorance, superstition and vice, as any other in the world.

But tho' in this branch of his administration God may be said to act arbitrarily, *giving no account of his matters*, and it is necessary that it should be so, for the order of the world and the great ends of his providence; yet he never acts against the rules of equity and goodness towards any of his creatures.

* Psal. cxlvii. 19, 20.

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There's none of mankind left without mani- SERM. VIII.
feſtations of his mercy, and the diſtinction he makes by diſpenſing his ſuperadded gifts *ſeverally as he will*, is not the meaſure of his final diſtribution as judge of the world. If he beſtows his favours freely on ſome, he does not thereby injure others, as our Saviour teaches us in his parable *, applying this moſt reaſonable defence of the Divine government to the caſe of the *Jews*, who are repreſented as murmuring, becauſe the *Gentiles*, called late to the ſervice of God, were advanced to the ſame privileges with them. The anſwer is, to which there can be no colourable pretence of an exception, *Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?* And in the parable, *Mat.* xxv. God is repreſented as acting with ſovereign freedom, in committing his goods to the care of his ſervants, *to one he delivers five talents, to another two, and to another one*, according to his own will, or according to the judgment which his perfect wiſdom makes of *their ſeveral abilities*. This unequal diſtribution makes indeed a difference in their capacity of ſervice, and lays a foundation for different

* Matt. xx.

degrees

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degrees of happiness, which may be supposed in every state and every period of our existence, consistently with the righteousness and the goodness of God's moral government; but it is not the measure by which recompences are awarded, for in the sequel of the parable, we find *they* are given according to to the improvements severally made by the servants. God will render to every man impartially according to his own works, and the degrees of his diligence and fidelity in using the talents he was entrusted with, not according to the talents given him, or the abilities and opportunities he enjoy'd, for these were properly the *goods of another*.

I shall conclude with this one reflexion on what has been last insisted on, that it gives us a just idea of the Divine government over the moral world, shewing in what sense it is arbitrary, and in what sense it is not; from both which useful instruction arises; and indeed there is nothing comprehended in the supreme power and dominion of Almighty God, of greater importance, and more directly applicable to our selves. On the one hand, since it has pleased the great Ruler of the world, to manifest his power, wisdom and goodness, in the variety of his works, and

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of his diſpenſations towards his creatures, we ought in this to recogniſe his abſolute ſupremacy, and with all humility to acquieſce in his ſovereign and uncontroulable diſpoſition of things. In this great fabric of the univerſe, wherein God has diſplay'd the glory of his Majeſty and of all his perfections, it was neceſſary there ſhould be a diverſity; for in the different conditions appointed to the creatures, and the different degrees of perfection and happineſs communicated to them, his glory ſhines more conſpicuouſly than it would have done in an uniform production, and in their various ways, his works harmoniouſly join in praiſing him. Since then it was neceſſary that the world ſhould be diverſified in the manner it is, who but the Creator himſelf could diſtinguiſh the ranks of beings, and appoint to every one its proper ſtation. As *for his good pleaſure all things were created*, there can be no pretence of injuſtice done to any of them, for they could have no rights capable of being violated, prior to their being, nor indeed any pretence of unkindneſs, if their ſtate is more eligible than not to be, which muſt be acknowledg'd concerning the ſtate wherein all the creatures were made. *Shall the thing formed*

God's Almighty Power, by what acts manifested, formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus? Shall a brute complain that it was not made a man, or a man that he is inferior to an angel? Every kind of beings, and every individual have reason to be satisfied with the condition appointed to them, and no ground of discontent (always supposing it to be better than non-existence;) for if there were any ground of complaint, any one must have it to whom that lot should fall; and then the objection must lie against the wisdom of God, and the exercise of his power, in making any such order of creatures at all; which objection an attentive mind must condemn, for who can take upon him to say that any thing in the works of God is superfluous, that any particular species of beings was not necessary, and a proper part of the universe. The same reasoning will hold in proportion, for men's submitting to the order of Providence, in the worldly condition which is appointed them; for the place of our nativity and education, our state of sickness or health, riches or poverty, with a multitude of other such like circumstances, are as much subject to the Divine disposal and direction, as to what species of beings we belong, and no more strictly within

within the ſphere of diſtributive juſtice, the final and compleat exerciſe whereof is reſerved to a future ſtate. God does not leave the government of human affairs to inferior cauſes, he interpoſes himſelf by a ſovereign irreſiſtible efficiency. Vain mortals are apt to imagine that the differences of their condition are principally owing to themſelves, and they aſcribe the ſucceſs of their endeavours to their own skill and induſtry; but it is much rather to be attributed to the ſovereign agency of Divine Providence, as the *Pſalmiſt* juſtly obſerves, [a] *Promotion cometh not from the eaſt, nor from the weſt, nor from the ſouth; but God is judge, he pulleth down one and ſetteth up another.* It becomes us therefore in all the changes of our ſtate, humbly to acknowledge the ſupreme dominion of Almighty God in the government of the world, who has divided the earth and the enjoyments of it among the children of men, in what proportions he ſees fit: And as they who are in lower ſituations, ought not to envy their ſuperiors; ſo neither have the great any reaſon to glory in their acquiſitions, and treat their inferiors with contempt,

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[a] Pſal. lxxv. 6.

[a] *Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches. But let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving kindness, righteousness and judgment in the earth*; let him rejoyce, and be humbly confident in the supreme and absolute dominion of that God who wisely governs the world, distinguishing some by his special favour, without doing wrong to any. To which purpose also may be applied (the case refer'd to, being of a parallel nature, and the reasoning founded on the same principle) what St. *Paul* says concerning the extraordinary gifts of ministration, wherewith some were endow'd for the service of the *Christian* Church, [b] *Who maketh thee to differ from another, and what hast thou that thou didst not receive; why then dost thou glory?*

But the Divine government is not arbitrary in another sense, it is not administred by lawless force, like that of the tyrants in this world, but with the most impartial equity, tempered with goodness, and directed in its

[a] Jer. ix. 23, 24. [b] 1 Cor. iv. 7.

exercise

exerciſe by the moſt perfect wiſdom. * *God hath ſpoken once, twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God. Alſo unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy, for thou rendereſt to every man according to his work.* Tho' he beſtows his gifts freely as a ſovereign, and makes what diſtinctions he pleaſes among his creatures, in the capacities of their nature, and in reſpect of outward advantages confer'd on ſome, which are deny'd to others; yet in the exerciſe of his moral government, eſpecially in the diſtribution of final recompences, he will ſtrictly obſerve the exacteſt meaſures of equity. He *will not contend with his creatures by his great power*, nor ſhew his abſolute dominion *by cruſhing under his feet the priſoners of the earth*, who have no defence againſt his might; but will, without reſpect of perſons, render to all men according to their works. Which conſideration, as it is terrible to the impenitent workers of iniquity, whom no power can ſcreen from his juſt diſpleaſure, ſo it is a never-failing encouragement to good men, who *rejoycing in the teſtimony of their conſciences*,

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* Pſal. lxii. 11, 12.

that in simplicity and godly sincerity they have had their conversation in the world, assure their hearts before him, confident that his power will not be employ'd against them, but for their salvation, and therefore, because *he is God Almighty, they walk before him and are perfect.*

SERMON IX.

The true Notion of Divine Omniſcience, of its Nature, Manner and Extent.

Pſal. cxlvii. 5.

His underſtanding is infinite.

I Have obſerv'd on another occaſion, that the main controverſy between *Atheiſts* and believers in God, is concerning his intelligence; none of the infidels, whether ancient or modern, have in expreſs terms denied the being of God, but by that word they mean, not a particular deſigning and perfect Agent, the Maker of all things, which is the true notion of the Deity, but either blind unintelligent neceſſity, to which they attribute the exiſtence of the world and every thing it contains, as the cauſe of all, or

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univerſal ſubſtance, comprehending the whole univerſe and all beings in it. As therefore in oppoſition to theſe abſurd notions, we have full convincing proof of the exiſtence of one Supreme Being abſolutely perfect, the Maker and governor of the world; by the ſame clear evidence we know, that intelligence is a primary and eſſential attribute of his nature: And as this is what all his works teach us, the inanimate, the ſenſitive and the rational parts of the creation, joyn in proclaiming the underſtanding of their Maker; ſo without acknowledging it, we can have no right conceptions of him at all. The idea of a being without knowledge, even ſuppoſed eternal, immenſe and all-powerful, as *that* ſignifies not a voluntary activity, but a neceſſary cauſe, is really an idea of nothing at all to the purpoſes of religion, of nothing which can raiſe any admiration, honour and eſteem, and is indeed of no importance to us. The worſhip of an ignorant Deity is the reproach of human nature; as no tolerable apology could be made for the *Heathens*, who ſerv'd idols *that had eyes and ſaw not, and ears but heard not*; ſo none can be made for us if we pay our religious homage to a being ſuppoſed void of underſtanding, whatever other perfections

fections we aſcribe to him, which are really no perfections at all in the deliberate eſteem of the human mind. SERM. IX.

I ſhall not now attempt to prove the intelligence of the Deity in general, for that has been already done by the arguments which prove his being; nor do I pretend to give a compleat idea of the Divine knowledge, which it is not to be imagin'd we can comprehend, for that were to ſuppoſe that our underſtandings are like his, infinite: But my intention in this diſcourſe is, to make ſuch obſervations concerning the nature, the manner and extent of it, as may give us a juſt and magnificent, tho' imperfect idea of that adorable perfection, and tend to produce thoſe pious diſpoſitions, and that dutiful reſpect which it claims from us.

Firſt, It is certain that the knowledge of God extends to the whole compaſs of exiſtence; ſince all things that have being are either God himſelf or his works, it is impoſſible that any thing ſhould be unknown to him. He is the moſt excellent of all objects, and the moſt incomprehenſible by us, but yet a reflection on what paſſes in our own minds will lead us to this concluſion,

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that his perfections which infinitely tranſcend our capacity, are in the neareſt and moſt immediate view of his own underſtanding: For all the conceptions, and all the actions of intelligent beings, with the principles from which they proceed, are accompanied with conſciouſneſs. Of all the ſubjects to which we apply our thoughts, our own faculties and the exerciſe of them are the moſt clearly diſcern'd, and the beſt underſtood by us: We know every idea that is preſented to our minds, every imagination, every deſire and volition, every enjoyment; the ſelf-conſcious ſpirit of a man knows every thing in him; and ſo we muſt judge concerning all intelligent beings, even to the higheſt and moſt comprehenſive underſtanding. Now if God thoroughly knows his own perfections, if he knows his eternity better than we do our temporary duration, and his immenſity more perfectly than we do our limited condition of being; if he knows his own perfect comprehenſion of things, but as clearly as we do our ſenſations, and his Almighty power, as clearly as we diſcern the limited activity of our minds; this is an extent of knowledge which ſeems to follow neceſſarily from the ſuppoſition of his intelligence, as

evident

evident as his being, but muſt appear to us very great, the object being of all others the moſt above our underſtanding, and paſt our finding out. Indeed God's knowledge of himſelf, of the proper exerciſe and unlimited perfection of his own powers, may be ſaid in ſome ſenſe to be the knowledge of all things; for the utmoſt bounds of poſſibility do not exceed Omnipotence, and the whole compaſs of truth is within the reach of infinite underſtanding. I have obſerv'd elſewhere, * that the Eſſences of all things muſt, before the formation of the univerſe, have been known to the eternal Mind, as every wiſe agent forms a deſign in his thoughts before he executes it. Can any thing be difficult to him who ſees all things in the firſt Cauſe, the whole frame of nature and all its parts, with the intire ſeries of events from the foundation of the world, in his own counſels; who ſees them, I ſay, with as great clearneſs, and with as great certainty, as we do the perceptions and determinations of our own minds?

* SERM. IIId.

But

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But it is directly and immediately evident that the whole of created exiſtence is perfectly known to God, becauſe it is all the work of his hands, and upheld by the word of his power. Every voluntary agent muſt be ſuppoſed to underſtand his own productions; the skill of the meaneſt artificer reaches to the limits of his own art, tho' he may be unacquainted with the nature of the materials he works upon, he knows the labour he beſtows on them, and the compoſitions, figures and other ſenſible effects which depend upon his own operation. Since therefore God is the voluntary Maker of all things, diſpoſing the whole frame of nature as it pleas'd him, and continually governing it by his own immediate agency, nothing can be hid from him. If in all that variety of being, and all the appearances which are in the univerſe, from the greateſt to the leaſt, from the utmoſt circuit of heaven to the center of the earth, there is nothing which his hand has not form'd, and his providence does not direct, every thing muſt be thoroughly known, for wherever his power works, there his underſtanding diſcerns.

This conſideration leads us to form an idea of the Divine knowledge as different from,

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and infinitely more perfect than ours, even with respect to those objects which are, in some measure, known to us. It is from a reflection on our own understandings we take our rise to the apprehending of that perfection in the Deity; but we ought not to imagine that things appear to him in the same manner they do to us. Nothing is more evident than that different perceptive powers have different views of the same object. Our reason in many cases corrects the report of our senses, and sees things in quite another light; much more is it to be thought that an infinitely perfect mind *sees not as man sees*, that things are known to him, not in a remote and distant way, by their external appearances and effects, as they are to us, but that his understanding penetrates into their inmost natures, and discerns clearly all their properties and powers. The little knowledge we have, was given us for particular purposes, not for a thorough comprehension of things; nor are they, any of them, put absolutely into our power, to govern and to use them every way, and for all the ends they are capable of serving, which would require a thorough understanding of their nature, attributes, and powers of every kind. We

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diſcern by our ſenſes ſome qualities of material objects, rather they are the occaſion of exciting certain ideas in us, whereby the bountiful author of nature has made them uſeful to the preſervation, the conveniency, and enjoyment of life; our reaſon goes a little farther, diſcovering by obſervation, and by attending to the connexions and dependencies of things, other properties and relations, which may be applied to uſeful purpoſes in life, and afford various entertainment to the mind; ſtill however there remains a great deal unknown to us, indeed the human underſtanding ſeems to be unequal to the comprehenſion of any thing. But the Maker and abſolute Governor of all things, knows them perfectly, not by external appearances and effects aſcending to the diſcovery of cauſes, as we do; but as he form'd the plan of the whole univerſe and the intire extent of being, in his own counſels, he ſees effects in their cauſes, having by the free determination of his own will, given them whatever meaſure of power and perfection they poſſeſs; none of thoſe eſſences can be hid from him, of which he had the perfect idea in his own mind before the being actually exiſted; he can be ignorant of no proper-

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ty, virtue, or efficiency (nor any thing that can be effected by it) which is derived wholly from himself; all the powers of nature, with the remotest consequences which depend upon them, must be at once in his view, and seeing he has all the creatures absolutely under his dominion, disposing of them at his pleasure, and actually does govern them by the immediate exercise of his power, he must have, not a partial knowledge like ours, of some particular uses they serve, but a thorough understanding of their utmost capacity. SERM. IX.

Besides the wide difference which there is between the knowledge of God and that of finite beings, particularly mankind, in the extent of them, both with respect to the number of objects, and the discernment of their nature, properties, relations and uses; the one is narrow and confined to a few things, the other reaches to the whole circle of being, the one is superficial and inadequate, the other sees its object on all sides, discerns not some only, but all its relations, and not the exterior appearances and effects only, but its very essence and the secret springs of all its operations: Besides this, I say, there are other important differences, relating to the manner

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of knowledge; and to the apprehending of thoſe differences we are alſo led, by obſerving the exerciſe and progreſs of our own underſtandings in various inſtances. There are ſome of our perceptions perfect in their kind from the very beginning; our original ſimple ideas are ſubject to no alterations, capable of no improvement, the ideas of colours and other ſenſible qualities remain invariably the ſame; the conſciouſneſs we have of our own exiſtence, our powers, perceptions and operations, is always clear and determinate; not only ſo, our knowledge of ſome truths is diſtinct and compleat, from the firſt moment of their being intelligibly propos'd, without any difficulty or labour in reaſoning, and this knowledge is call'd intuitive. But there are other things in the knowledge of which we make proficiency, and proceed to the diſcernment of them by degrees. We can variouſly compound and aſſociate our ideas, we obſerve their connexions and differences, their agreement and diſagreement; and from one truth clearly perceiv'd, we go on to the diſcovery of another, which, according to the meaſure of evidence that appears in the connexion, is judg'd certain or probable. Such is the narrowneſs of the human mind as not

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to be able to perceive actually at once, all things which it has known, and this defect is in some measure supplied by memory, or the revival of ideas which were in it before. This progress of our understandings arising from their limited capacity, evidently shews their imperfection, and must be attended with difficulty, confusion, and uncertainty in some part of our knowledge, which probably in some degree, all finite beings are subject to. But the supreme Mind is *perfect in knowledge*; all things are clearly perceiv'd by it, and all their connexions, differences and relations, without any confusion, obscurity or uncertainty; the variety and multiplicity of the objects cause no perplexity in his understanding, which is large enough to contain them all, without being embarrass'd or forgetting any thing; *there is no creature that is not manifest in the sight of God, but all things are naked unto his eyes and opened*, even to their inmost essences, and without the labour of investigating truth by reasoning, he discerns, by a simple and direct intuition, the whole series of causes and effects. Thus we ought to conceive of the Divine knowledge, as altogether free from the imperfections and infirmities which cleave to ours; SERM. IX.

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and tho' the intellectual powers which God has given to ſome creatures, as they are a convincing proof of his own intelligence, and may be juſtly call'd the moſt excellent of his works, making honorable diſtinctions among the creatures, in the degree wherein they are poſſeſs'd, for knowledge is neceſſarily eſteem'd by every rational being; yet are they all, even the higheſt of them, but faint images of that original perfect underſtanding, from whence they are derived, which therefore juſtly challenges our higheſt admiration and eſteem. Human acquirements in knowledge, ſhort and defective as they are, procure reſpect; the men, who by diligent ſtudy, have improv'd their minds in uſeful learning, are on that account in reputation; we think of the angels with greater veneration, as a far higher order of beings, and their ſuperior excellence conſiſts in, at leaſt one principal branch of it is, a more extenſive knowledge. But even this is only a faint ray deriv'd from the *Father of lights*, the pure eternal Fountain, who communicates light in various meaſures to the intellectual world, whereby it is animated, directed and fitted to proclaim his praiſe, yet ſuffers no diminution of his infinite underſtanding,

as the ſun illuminates, beautifies and refreſhes all things within its ſyſtem, without any abatement of its ſplendor. To that pureſt Intelligence, that moſt perfect Wiſdom, which has *taught us more than the beaſts of the field*, and to whoſe *inſpiration* we owe our *underſtanding*, which is the very capacity of all our enjoyments, to that bleſſed, underived Spring of knowledge, let our minds always give the higheſt honour and pay the moſt dutiful reſpect, adore him who *commanded the light to ſhine out of darkneſs, and hath put wiſdom into the heart*, the image of his own perfection. SERM. IX.

The 2*d* obſervation concerning the Divine knowledge is, that it reaches to all the actions of free moral agents. This is a point of the greateſt importance to us, and ſhould affect our minds in the moſt ſenſible manner, becauſe we *have to do with God*, as our Lawgiver and our Judge. He has, by various methods, made their duty known to mankind; ſome notices of his will are given to all men, *the work of his law is written in their hearts*, and he has *ſhewed them that which is good*, by the light of nature; ſome of them he has favour'd with a clear and expreſs revelation, and will call them all to account for their obedience to the law they were under. Now

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for this important part of his adminiſtration, as the ſupreme Ruler of the world, he is perfectly qualified by his exact knowledge of men, of all their ways and all their works, even to the moſt ſecret of them. His knowledge of other things may excite our admiration, but this more immediately concerns us, and calls for our attention, becauſe the greateſt conſequences depend upon it, our happineſs in the enjoyment of his favour, if he ſees that *our works are perfect*, and that we have *walked before him in integrity and with upright hearts*, or the laſting miſerable effects of his diſapprobation, if he knows that we have been workers of iniquity.

As no conſideration can be more awful than that of the Omniſcience of God, extending to all our works, and every circumſtance which may heighten their moral goodneſs or malignity; ſo it is particularly to be remember'd, that his eye penetrates into the ſecret ſprings of action, *he ſearches the hearts and tries the reins of the children of men.* And this is abſolutely neceſſary in order to a perfect judgment of our moral behaviour; for virtue and vice, religion and irreligion do not conſiſt merely, or principally, in outward acts, but in the intentions and diſpoſitions of the

the mind, of which every man's conſcience is a witneſs, for it approves or reproaches him, not according to the external appearance of his works, but according to the inward affections and purpoſes of his heart. Human judicature cannot proceed ſo far; works, as they appear in the view of men, and the ſenſible effects of them, come only under its cogniſance. Indeed intention is ſuppos'd, without which an action cannot be ſaid to be rational, or properly human, but it is not known with certainty, and if it were, it is but a very imperfect judgment which could be made by it, concerning the morality of works; for all that civil judicature ſuppoſes, is, that a man is the voluntary cauſe of his own actions, or that he deſigns to do what he does, it does not pretend to judge of his remoter views, of the prevalent affections of the heart, and the motives which influenc'd it, and of the regard had to the approbation of God and of conſcience; all which are points of the greateſt moment, in order to a preciſe determination of right and wrong in the moral ſenſe. But God ſees, not as man ſees, he looks not to the outward appearance, but the heart, diſcerning all its moſt ſecret imaginations and contrivances. And indeed

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without this, he could not be the righteous Judge of the world, rendering to all men finally according to their works.

The direct proof of this point, is the ſame that has been already inſiſted on, for the perfection and univerſal extent of God's knowledge in general, namely, his being the intelligent Cauſe and Diſpoſer of all things, which ſhews that the active powers of the rational creatures are as well known to him, with their utmoſt exertions, as the paſſive powers of matter and all its modifications. Theſe kinds of beings are eſſentially different, and ſo are their powers, but they are equally the work of God's hands, and therefore muſt be equally known to him; the free agency of ſome, wholly derived from, and depending on himſelf, does not place them out of his view, and ſince he is the deſigning Author of that faculty, and form'd it for certain ends, he muſt underſtand all its exerciſes, whereby it is fitted to anſwer thoſe ends. And as the natural government of the Deity, from which the freeſt created agents are not exempted, proves his perfect knowledge of all his creatures, and all their works, ſo of his moral government over mankind, which requires a perfect knowledge of their moral actions,

tions, we have a natural intimation in our own preſaging thoughts. Thoſe to whom God has not given any poſitive revealed law, yet have a rule of life written in their hearts, to which *their conſciences bear witneſs*; and their own *accuſing and excuſing thoughts*, as they are attended with the greateſt pleaſure and pain which the mind is capable of, and which are the preſent ſanction of the law of nature; ſo they are premonitions of farther rewards and puniſhments, to be diſtributed by the ſupreme Judge. But to this purpoſe they derive all their force from a ſecret impreſſion, which ſeems to be indelibly engraven on every human heart, that God is the inſpector of all our actions, and all our thoughts. With a view to a trial by men, we ſhould have no farther ſolicitude than about the evidence of overt acts, becauſe that is the rule according to which they muſt proceed; but ſince the teſtimony of conſcience is the meaſure of our expectations from God, this neceſſarily ſuppoſes a perſuaſion that he is *greater than our hearts, and knows all things.* The argument will be greatly ſtrengthened by the conſideration of God's moral perfections, his rectitude, his goodneſs and juſtice, which cannot be fully exerciſed towards rational beings, with-

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out an infallible and compleat knowledge of their works; at preſent I only ſuppoſe his moral government, which cannot reaſonably be doubted, ſince it is evident he has given us a moral nature, and a clear intimation that not only it is fit he ſhould, but that he actually will call us to an account: Accordingly, it has been ſtill the common belief of all men, who had any juſt ſentiments concerning the Deity, that he is perfectly acquainted with the conduct of all moral agents, and will at ſome time or other, render them recompenſes according to their works.

If the foundation upon which we believe this particular branch of the Divine Omniſcience, be juſt, namely the evidences of a moral conſtitution and government of reaſonable creatures, and the natural undeceiving impreſſions on the minds of men, of their being accountable for all their actions to God as their Judge, the conſequence muſt be allow'd, that his knowledge of our hearts, and of all that enters into the morality of our works, is very perfect: For the character of a moral governor requires, not only that the condition of men ſhould be determin'd according to the moral quality of their tempers and actions in general, *that it ſhould be*

well

well with the righteous and ill with the wicked, but alſo that the ſentences paſs'd upon them ſhould bear a proportion to the meaſure of their goodneſs and ſinfulneſs in a ſtate of trial, which ſhews how exact the knowledge of their Judge muſt be. SERM. IX.

Altho' all men come under the denomination of good and bad, and accordingly the ſtate to which they ſhall be adjudged, is called a ſtate of happineſs or miſery in general; yet both theſe admit of a great variety. As good men are not all alike good, and vicious men are not all alike vicious, ſo neither will their enjoyments and ſufferings by the judgment of God be equal. * *They who have ſown bountifully ſhall reap bountifully, and they who have ſown ſparingly, ſhall reap alſo ſparingly*, that is, men ſhall enjoy felicity in exact proportion to the degree of their virtuous affections and virtuous labour; on the other hand, ſome *evil ſervants ſhall be beaten with few, and ſome with many ſtripes*, their puniſhment ſhall be inflicted in proportion to the obligations they have violated, which depend on their various circumſtances, capacities, and opportunities of doing good. Now

* 2 Cor. ix. 6.

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to adjuſt all this exactly, and appoint to every man ſuch a degree of happineſs or of puniſhment, as is ſtrictly proportionable to the meaſure of good or evil in his diſpoſitions and his works, which a perfect moral government requires; to do this, I ſay, none but an infinite underſtanding is ſufficient, a clear and certain knowledge of the hearts of men, of the affections which are prevalent in them, of their motives of action, and of all the circumſtances which concur to the perfection of their good works, or which either aggravate or extenuate their evil ones.

This extent of the Divine knowledge muſt appear to us wonderful. We find our ſelves ſecure within the incloſure of our own breaſts, from the inſpection of every human eye, and we are ſenſible that none of us can diſcern the thoughts and deſigns of other men, farther than as they diſcover themſelves by outward ſigns. But how ſhall we form an idea of an underſtanding which reaches to the moſt hidden receſſes of all mens minds, and infallibly diſcerns the ſecret thoughts and intents of their hearts? Yet this evidently appears to be the prerogative of the ſupreme Being, who without it could not be the proper Judge of moral actions, as we are convinc'd

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he is, and cannot remove the impreſſion of it out of our minds. And indeed the conſideration of his Omnipreſence, naturally leads us to acknowledge it: For as our own minds perceive and operate in all parts of the little ſyſtems which they animate, ſo the moſt perfect Mind being every where, not in a partial derived manner, but in the fulneſs of its active intelligence, muſt diſcern every thing. Thus the *Pſalmiſt* celebrates the glory of the Divine Omniſcience in this amazing inſtance of it, * *O Lord thou haſt ſearched me and known me. Thou knoweſt my down-ſitting, and mine up-riſing, thou underſtandeſt my thoughts afar off. Whither ſhall I go from thy Spirit, or whither ſhall I flee from thy preſence?* "No change of place can hide me from thy "All-ſeeing eye, for in all parts of the uni- "verſe, I ſhould be alike under thy inſpec- "tion, and ſurrounded with thy powerful "preſence". *Thou haſt poſſeſſed my reins, thou haſt covered me in my mother's womb.* "As all the powers of my nature were de- "rived from thee, as to thy forming hand, "they owe the beginning of their exiſtence, "and the various ſteps of their progreſs to

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* Pſal. cxxxix.

"per-

" perfection, and are ſtill upheld by thy " mighty providence; ſo they are continual- " ly in thy view, and every exertion of them " is perfectly known to thee ". Since in God we live and move and have our being, ſince all our animal and rational powers neceſſarily depend upon him, and by his continued influence the frame of nature is preſerved, no vital act, not even the leaſt or moſt ſecret movement in our minds, or our bodies, can be hid from his eye.

Before we proceed any further in our inquiry concerning the Omniſcience of God, it may not be amiſs to make ſome practical reflexions on what has been already obſerv'd. There is no conſideration more affecting to ſerious attentive minds, or which more directly tends to produce ſincerity in our whole behaviour, than this of God's knowing our hearts. There is naturally a diſpoſition in the minds of men to approve themſelves to thoſe intelligent beings who are witneſſes of their Conduct. Thus a deſire of pleaſing one another has a great ſhare in forming our outward deportment, ſo far as it is open to human obſervation. But as the Divine approbation is infinitely more important, ſo the deſire of obtaining it has a vaſtly more extenſive

sive influence, reaching not only to the external behaviour, but to the inward dispositions and the intents of the heart. How ridiculous does hypocrisy appear to a man who considers that all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do, that no outward solemnities, no forms of devotion, or appearances of zeal, can impose on his perfect understanding, that he sees through the most subtle disguises and plausible pretences which an insincere heart can put on, and that they are as odious to him as open bare-fac'd wickedness. SERM. IX.

Let us therefore always remember the excellent instructions of our Saviour * concerning acts of devotion and charity, which may also be applied to other duties, namely, that if we would hope for acceptance with God in our prayers and our alms, it is absolutely necessary to avoid outward pomp and ostentation. A prevailing desire of human applause, or as he expresses it, making it our chief end *to be seen of men*, will undoubtedly destroy the sincerity of religious works, so called, and cut off our claim to the Divine approbation; but if we perform our obedience

* Matt. vi.

only

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only as unto our heavenly Father, with an affectionate ſenſe upon our minds, of his All-ſeeing eye, obſerving us in ſecret, and with an upright intention to pleaſe him, he will accept of our ſervice and *reward us openly.* Thus religion ſeated in the mind, and expreſſing it ſelf by an uniform courſe of good actions, appears to be moſt reaſonable and worthy of men, for it purſues the important deſign of obtaining God's favour, by the propereſt means. But on the other hand, if it be certain that God knows the ſecrets of all hearts, and will judge them, hypocriſy is extreme folly, as well as wickedneſs, for what good purpoſe can an inſincere profeſſion of piety ſerve, ſince we cannot hope to deceive him; or what rational account will a man be able to give of it to his own mind? Unleſs we will ſuppoſe the hypocrite perſuaded that *God does not know*, and that *there is in the moſt high no knowledge* of man's actions, which probably is the caſe of very few: The worſhip which he performs with the greateſt ſolemnity, and appearance of devotion, muſt appear to his reflecting thoughts, the moſt trifling and inſignificant part of his conduct; it ſeems yet more abſurd than the loud cries and extravagant rites of the prieſts of *Baal*, in that

that ridiculous light wherein the prophet *Elijah* elegantly sets them, * for it is not less unreasonable to awake a sleeping God by clamour, or call him off from other business, which he is supposed to be attending, than to address services to one whom we believe to be awake and attentive, yet without any design to obtain his approbation? SERM. IX.

And not only should this consideration of the Divine Omniscience engage men to sincerity in their worship, but to universal purity of heart, and integrity in their whole conversation. For as all the parts of our moral conduct are equally under the direction of his law, which requires us to do justly and to love mercy, as well as to walk humbly with God, and every work shall be brought into judgment before him, with every secret thing, whether it be good or evil; so his eye is continually upon us in all the affairs of life, and in every other deliberation and design, as well as our immediate addresses to himself. In vain *the † eye of the adulterer waiteth for the twilight, saying, no eye shall see me, and disguiseth his face; and the murtherer riseth with the light to kill the poor and*

* 1 Kings xix. 27. † Job xxiv. 15.

needy,

needy, lurking as a thief in the night, till he find an opportunity to execute his villanous purpoſes; for tho' ſuch wicked men may be able to hide their deſigns from the view of the world, and thereby eſcape with impunity in it, yet God is witneſs to their moſt ſecret devices, even to the miſchief which they have meditated in their hearts, altho' their hands have never executed it, and he will diſcover it hereafter to their utter confuſion.

2*dly*, Since it is God's prerogative to know the hearts of men and judge them, we ſhould not preſume to invade it by raſh cenſures. Some works of men both good and bad are manifeſt, ſo that we cannot avoid paſſing a judgment upon them, tho' ſtill it is an imperfect one, for we cannot enter into the ſecret ſprings and motives of action; but other works are altogether hid from our knowledge, and concerning them we ought not to * *judge before the time, until the Lord come, who will bring to light the hidden things of darkneſs, and make manifeſt the counſels of the heart, and then ſhall every man have praiſe of God,* the praiſe which is juſtly due to his works. It is therefore with great reaſon that

* 1 Cor. iv. 5.

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the apoſtles inſiſt ſo much on this neceſſary caution to *Chriſtians*, that they do not judge one another; which is not only becoming the deference they owe to the ſuperior knowledge of their common maſter, and their profeſſed expectation of appearing before his tribunal, but is the only foundation upon which charity and peace can ſubſiſt among them. It is the violation of this rule, and *Chriſtians* adventuring to pronounce judgment upon their brethren, even upon the ſecrets of their hearts, cenſuring and caſting them out of their fellowſhip, as inſincere in their religious profeſſion, becauſe of different ſentiments and practices in matters confeſſedly not eſſential; 'tis this, I ſay, which has brought ſo great reproach on *Chriſtianity*, and occaſion'd ſuch fierce and ſcandalous contentions among the followers of *Jeſus Chriſt*. On the other hand, we ought not to be immoderately affected with the unjuſt cenſures which frail mortals may ignorantly paſs upon us. Every man, 'tis true, deſires to ſtand fair in the eſteem of the world, and good men value reputation, even with the weak, as that whereby they are render'd the more capable of being uſeful to them; but ſtill there is a ſufficient conſolation to the ſincere againſt

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againſt unjuſt reproaches, in the teſtimony of their own conſciences, and the impartial unerring judgment of him who ſearches the heart. If the praiſe of wiſe and virtuous men be a ſupport againſt the undeſerved calumnies of the ignorant and the wicked, much more may he enjoy an undiſturb'd tranquillity in his own breaſt, who having the approbation of his own mind, can ſecurely appeal to an infallible witneſs, and leave his actions to be tried by the righteous Judge of the world, for to him *it is a very ſmall thing to be judged of men's judgment, ſeeing he that judgeth* juſtly *is the Lord* *. The laſt branch of the Divine perfect knowledge, to us incomprehenſible, which ſhall be the ſubject of the

3*d*, Obſervation, is preſcience or foreknowledge of future events. That things to come as well as the paſt and preſent, are known to the firſt intelligent Cauſe, is evident; for their being depends on his will, and all their powers are derived from him, he muſt therefore foreſee the utmoſt which thoſe powers can produce, and cannot be ignorant of what he intends himſelf to do. E-

* 1 Cor. iv. 3.

very

very free agent is conſcious of his own intentions, which, if there be not a defect of power, may infallibly aſcertain the event; but the *everlaſting God fainteth not nor is weary*, he is as able to accompliſh his deſigns at the remoteſt diſtance of time, as when they were firſt form'd, and therefore *known to the Lord are all his works from the beginning*. As to the effects of neceſſary cauſes, we can eaſily conceive that he foreſees them, for they are, properly ſpeaking, his own works; as he is the firſt mover in the material world, who by his wiſdom originally diſpos'd its various parts, and by his active power gave them all their force, he foreknows all the revolutions which can ever happen in it, and all the productions which can ariſe from it, for he is really the cauſe of them, and they are to be attributed to his continued operation. But that the free moral actions of intelligent beings, of which themſelves are the ſole compleat cauſes, depending wholly on the determination of their wills, and intirely imputed to them as their own; that theſe ſhould be foreſeen by any underſtanding, muſt appear to us very wonderful, becauſe it is ſo far above the reach of human knowledge, and becauſe there appears in it to us, no particular ground

SERM. IX. of certainty, or manner of attaining it, conſiſtent with the freedom of the agents, whoſe future actions are ſuppos'd to be known. But yet that it really is ſo, that not only God knows the preſent thoughts and intents of all men's hearts, but what they will do and incline to do, in all circumſtances wherein they ever ſhall be, has been believed by the generality of mankind, who have thought ſeriouſly on this ſubject, to be included in the Divine Omniſcience. It ſeems to be unworthy of his infinite perfection to place ſuch a multitude of things, ſome of them very important, and on which great conſequences depend, out of the reach of his foreſight: And as from the Omnipreſence of God, and the abſolute dependence of all rational creatures upon him, ſo that their powers of liberty and choice, as well as others are derived from him, and ſupported wholly by his providence, we juſtly infer that thoſe powers cannot exert themſelves in any manner without his preſent knowledge, which is as incomprehenſible to us as Preſcience it ſelf; it ſeems reaſonable to conclude, that ſince theſe foundations of his knowledge are immutable, and alike clearly underſtood by him from eternity, being really nothing elſe but his

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own perfections and operations, the object must be equally in his view at all times, and and that he must discern at once all the creatures, and the intire series of their actions, during the whole of their existence : Nay, the argument taken from God's being the intelligent Cause and supreme Ruler of all things, to prove that he knows the whole of actual existence, and whatever is done within its compass, in which all the operations of rational beings are included ; this argument concludes as strongly for the same extent of his absolute eternal Prescience : For if the intire frame of nature now actually in being, and the intire scheme of providence, which he is now carrying on, comprehending the whole series of events ; if these be the works of design, they must have been known before they began to be, and it is absurd, that powers wholly derived from, and absolutely depending on a wise Author, for ends which he intended, should not be foreseen by him, with all their exercises and all their possible productions. I shall not insist on it as a proof of this doctrine, that there have been prophecies fulfill'd, of future events, which depended on the choice of free agents ; not only believed by the weak and superstitious vul-

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gar, but by men of the beſt underſtanding, upon clear hiſtorical evidence; ſuch as the famous prediction of *Iſaiah* concerning the great revolution in the *Eaſtern* monarchy, which was tranſlated from *Babylon* to *Perſia*, and particularly concerning *Cyrus*, whom the prophet expreſsly names long before he was born, deſcribing his memorable acts, and the favour granted by him to the *Jews*; nor the yet more illuſtrious example of our Saviour's death, foretold as fix'd in the *determinate counſel and foreknowledge of God*, tho' *by wicked hands he was crucified and ſlain*: Altho' no reaſon can be aſſign'd why, if the Divine Preſcience extends to theſe caſes, wherein men have acted their part as freely as in any other, the ſame Preſcience may not be ſuppoſed, equally to extend to all parallel caſes, that is, to all the voluntary actions of men, and all the events which are accompliſh'd by them. But, not to inſiſt at preſent on arguments taken from revelation, however convincing they may appear to be, it would ſeem that if we only acknowledge the univerſal dominion of the ſupreme Being over the world, and his moral government over his rational creatures, the freeſt actions of men, and all other moral

agents,

agents, are foreſeen by him, otherwiſe there must be an uncertainty in the meaſures of his own adminiſtration. As the diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments is a very eminent part of his government, in which the honour of his Majeſty, and his moral perfections, is nearly concern'd, and which is attended with the moſt remarkable changes in the ſtate of the world, it muſt be unforeknown to himſelf in particular, with all the conſequences of it, if the behaviour of rational creatures, to which it bears an exact proportion, is unforeknown; but this is a ſuppoſition which we can hardly think conſiſtent with the glory of his abſolute ſupremacy, the perfection of his wiſdom, and the immutability of his counſels. SERM. IX.

But the great difficulty, which I hinted before, is concerning the conſiſtency of this infallible Divine Preſcience, with the liberty of human actions. If God knows all future events certainly, and it is impoſſible any thing, particularly any action, ſhould not come to paſs which he foreſees, and in the manner in which he foreſees it, how then are theſe actions free? The anſwer is, that foreknowledge has no influence at all upon the nature of things, to make the leaſt alte-

ration in them: The events which are neceſſary are foreknown as neceſſary, and thoſe which are contingent and voluntary, are foreknown no otherwiſe than as contingent and voluntary. As our knowledge of things preſent, be it ever ſo certain, does not affect their condition or manner of being; the mechanical motions of bodies are alike neceſſary, and the moral actions of men are alike free, whether we know them or not; and our foreknowledge of theſe different ſorts of events, ſuppoſing we had it, could affect them no more than our knowledge of them when preſent; ſo neither has the ſimple Divine Preſcience any kind of cauſality in the production, or does at all affect the nature and kind of events which are the objects of it. The foreſight men have of their future actions in certain circumſtances, does not in the leaſt degree leſſen their liberty, nor does God's foreknowledge of his own actions make him the leſs free; no more is there any reaſon to imagine that his Preſcience of what other agents will do, impairs their freedom. We are conſcious to our ſelves of all the liberty in action, which we can think eſſentially requiſite to the purpoſes of morality; we know that we are under no conſtraint

ſtraint in doing good or evil, but that our choice and refuſal of the one or the other, proceeds from our own affections and the inward determination of our own minds, and this is the foundation of the inward ſelf-condemnings and ſelf-approbations which we feel; and as the knowledge which God has of our actions, whether preſent or future, is what we are not conſcious of, nor find any influence of it upon our ſelf-determining and active powers; ſo it does not really change their nature or quality, making them more or leſs free. SERM. IX.

As to the manner of God's foreknowing certainly contingent future events, that is, which have no neceſſary cauſe, nor are to be accompliſh'd by his own power, and the determination of his will, but produc'd by other free agents; this ſeems to be incomprehenſible by the human underſtanding: That any mind ſhould foreſee with certainty, a diſtant event, which does not neceſſarily proceed from the nature of things, nor is fix'd by the purpoſe of a voluntary agent, is wonderful to us and far ſurpaſſes our conception; for as our knowledge of futurity can only reſt on one or other of theſe foundations, we can form no diſtinct notion of any fore-

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knowledge without them. It is probably their apprehending the Divine Preſcience after the ſame manner, and limiting it to the ſame grounds, which has occaſion'd ſo much perplexity in the minds of men, and involv'd their ſpeculations upon this ſubject in ſo much confuſion. Some imagining that contingent events could not otherwiſe be ſo aſcertain'd, as to be infallibly known, have ſuppos'd peremptory eternal decrees concerning all of them, even the freeſt actions of men; and not only ſo, but a previous Divine influence on the active powers of rational creatures, exciting them to action: But others judging this to be utterly inconſiſtent with human liberty, and with reſpect to evil actions, inconſiſtent with the purity and goodneſs of the Divine nature, yet ſtill adhering to the ſame limited foundation of foreknowledge, have denied the doctrine of Preſcience altogether, or doubted concerning it. I believe the beſt way for us to get rid of theſe difficulties, is wholly to neglect the hypotheſes, which have been invented to account for the manner of the Divine Preſcience, acknowledging that it is to us inexplicable, and yet concluding that this is no ſufficient objection againſt a doctrine, otherwiſe well

well confirmed. The futurity of contingent events is real, tho' we cannot tell the cauſe of it, or upon what grounds it is to be known: A free action now done, was yeſterday, or in any preceding point of duration, as truly future, as it has to day actually come to paſs; therefore it is not impoſſible, (for our minds can diſcern no contradiction in it) that an infinite underſtanding ſhould foreknow ſuch events, tho' that knowledge is *too high for us*, or perhaps any finite mind, *we cannot attain to it.* And here we may ſafely reſt, as we find our ſelves oblig'd to do in our inquiries concerning the other perfections of God, which are evidently prov'd to belong to his nature, and therefore believ'd, tho' to us incomprehenſible. We acknowledge his Omnipreſence, Eternity, Self-exiſtence and Omnipotence; yet the nature of theſe attributes, and the manner of their being, particularly the exerciſe of the laſt mentioned, his power in creating things out of nothing, as much exceeds our comprehenſion as his foreknowledge of future contingencies. We cannot indeed believe contradictions, and to impoſe them upon us is to affront the rational nature, but it is no abſur-

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dity to believe the exiſtence and the properties of a being, whom *we cannot by ſearching find out, nor underſtand to perfection.*

This particular branch of God's Omniſcience, gives us a very high idea of him, as the proper object of our adoration. How wonderful, how much to be eſteem'd for its perfection, is that underſtanding, which not only ſees diſtinctly all the paſt and preſent actions and thoughts of all intelligent beings, but thoſe which are yet future, and diſcerns, even at the greateſt diſtance of durations, all the productions of free as well as neceſſary cauſes? What can be hid from him *who underſtandeth our very thoughts afar off?* Surely no darkneſs can cover any thing from his ſight. How deſpicable are the idols of the nations *who have eyes and ſee not, ears and hear not,* and who know not, and *cannot declare things to come?* How infatuated are their worſhippers? How unhappy as well as inexcuſable, are they who acknowledge no other God than chance or neceſſity, for what ſatisfaction can an intelligent being have in a world, ſuppos'd to be under no intelligent direction, but the

courſe

courſe of things hurried on in it by giddy fortune, or irreſiſtible fate, equally unknowing of futurity? On the contrary, the ſincere ſervants of the true and living God have this never-failing conſolation, that however ignorant they are of what is to come, concerning which their minds are naturally anxious, he ſees the end from the beginning, and no event can poſſibly ſurpriſe him, for even the freeſt purpoſes of men, and all other rational agents, were known in his eternal counſels, and the iſſues of them comprehended in the fore-appointed ſcheme of his adminiſtration. SERM. IX.

2*dly*, As this knowledge is peculiar to God, neceſſarily ariſing from the infinite perfection of his nature, and no finite mind can attain to any part of it with certainty, otherwiſe than by communication from him, he has wiſely hid it from men, that they may learn to truſt his providence with abſolute reſignation. We are not to form our ſchemes in life, and take the meaſures of our conduct, by a diſcernment of particular future events, for they are cover'd from our ſight under impenetrable darkneſs, but by general laws which God has given us, and

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and by our obſervations on the ordinary courſe of things. No man can be ſure of ſucceſs, *the race is not to the ſwift, nor the battle to the ſtrong*, the beſt concerted projects are liable to a multitude of accidents which do not fall within the reach of our foreſight. But this ought to give us contentment, and here we ought to reſt with pleaſure, that the wiſe and good God knows all things, and having done what was on our part reaſonable, we may ſafely *commit our way and our work* to him, leaving the direction of events to his providence. Nor ought we to pry too curiouſly into futurity, which God has concealed from us. This is an error which weak and diſtruſtful minds are apt to fall into. The *Gentiles* were not ſo inexcuſable in it, *who knew not God*, but for *Chriſtians* to apply themſelves to ſuch as practiſe the arts of of necromancy and divination, for revealing ſecrets and foretelling things to come, is to expoſe themſelves as a prey to impoſtors, and to diſhonour the true God, who has favour'd them with a clear manifeſtation of himſelf, by attributing to dæmons and their pretended agents, that knowledge which peculiarly belongs to him. And,

Laſtly,

Laſtly, Let us *take no thought for to mor-* SERM.
row, for our heavenly Father *knows what we* IX.
need; he knows what is beſt, and what the event of things will be: And let us not *boaſt of to morrow*, nor be vainly puff'd up, with any expectations in this world, for God only knows, we know not, what *a day*, or any future time, *may bring forth.*

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SERMON X.

The Wisdom of God manifested in the Constitution and Government, both of the natural and moral World.

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1 Tim. i. 17.

Unto the king eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

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IT is evident beyond all rational contradiction, that the world was made, and is govern'd by design, and that the appearances of nature, and the series of events, which every one may observe, cannot be accounted for without supposing intelligence in the universal Cause. But there is a difference between understanding and wisdom, as between a power, or faculty, and the right use of

of it. Understanding is the fundamental capacity of wisdom, and wisdom is the proper exercise and improvement of understanding. Our own experience, and our observations upon the conduct of mankind, lead us to distinguish between acting with design and acting wisely, the *former* is the character of all rational agents, but, alas! we have too good reason to know that the *latter* does not always accompany it: And wisdom admits of various degrees, the inequality arising from several causes, either an unequal measure of knowledge, for according to our discernment of the reason of things, their relations, connexions and dependencies, so must our conduct be wise or unwise; or from the motives which influence the springs of action. We find in our selves a variety of affections, which prompt us to act, preventing deliberate attention: Men do not always govern themselves according to the dictates of cool reason, and pursue the measures which themselves know, or believe to be the best, but are often bias'd by prejudices, and misled by their particular propensities, to do what their own minds do not approve. Therefore knowledge and wisdom are different qualities, and they must be consider'd

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as distinct attributes in the Deity, tho' in him, as may be afterwards observ'd, the one is justly infer'd from the other, and the same arguments which prove his intelligence in general, prove him also to be wise.

Wisdom in any agent is estimated by his approbation of such ends, as in the judgment of the person forming the estimation are most suitable to his nature, and an invariable pursuit of those ends by the best and most effectual methods. It is first of all, absolutely necessary that a right design be propos'd, else no scheme of action can possibly obtain our esteem as wise, or intitle the agent to that character. If we see a man ever so ingenious about trifles, and contriving methods which have the greatest aptitude, to accomplish low ends, and unworthy of his rational nature, this can never raise any veneration for him in our hearts, nay, we shall pronounce all his contrivances foolish. Now concerning ends, 'tis plain that to us they are determin'd by our affections, and the measure of them, I mean the rule whereby we judge whether they be good or bad, right or wrong, is no other than our own approbation: Subordinate ends are only considered as means, and derive their value from the higher purposes which they serve;

ſerve; and ultimate ends to the human mind are either private happineſs, or the good of others, to the purſuit of which we are determin'd by ſelf-love and benevolence, the general governing ſprings of action in our nature; 'tis the actions only which ultimately terminate in thoſe ends, or which have a tendency to promote them, that we pronounce wiſe. The man who takes the meaſures, and ſteddily adheres to them, which have the ſtricteſt connexion, not with the gratification of a particular appetite or paſſion, but his own true, moſt extenſive and complete felicity, or with the greateſt public good, is to be acknowledged a wiſe man; he who acts upon lower and inconſiſtent views, does not merit that character. SERM. X.

But the queſtion is, how ſhall we judge concerning the ends of the Deity, ſo as with underſtanding to pronounce him wiſe? Can we pretend to know what is or is not becoming the dignity and perfection of his nature? Or, ſhall we make the inſtincts planted in our minds for the particular purpoſes of our being, a ſtandard whereby to examine his actions, and paſs a judgment upon them? I anſwer, that tho' indeed the Divine excellencies infinitely ſurpaſs our underſtanding,

and we cannot take upon us to judge, as from a complete knowledge of them, what views they may require to be pursued; yet there are some things which we cannot possibly help thinking worthy of every intelligent nature. Our minds are so constituted that we necessarily approve and admire goodness, and the Being who appears in his counsels to have intended, and by his actions to promote the most extensive happiness of other beings which are capable of it, we must judge to have the first and essentially requisite qualification of a wise agent. Again, tho' we have not such a knowledge of the Divine perfections, and of the nature and reason of things, as to qualify us for judging, *a priori*, what is fittest for him to do; yet by observing the mutual relations and harmony of things which he has made, and the aptitude of some, as means, to answer others as the ends of them, we may collect, what in fact he did intend, and thereby discern the wisdom of the whole constitution. It is impossible indeed for any finite understanding to penetrate into the depths of his designs, or take in the intire scheme of his administration; we know not what remote and very important purposes may be serv'd by his works,

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beyond all the views which fall under our obſervation, *for who hath known the mind of the Lord, and who hath been his counſellor?* But even by ſuch a partial obſervation as our limited capacity can reach to, we may be able to trace the marks of excellent underſtanding in ſome of the ways of God, and from thence reaſonably conclude, that perfect wiſdom governs the whole. For example, the Divine government over mankind, and the methods of providence towards them, may have a relation to the univerſe, and affect other orders of intelligent beings in a manner which we cannot comprehend; but conſidering it abſtractly, and as intire in it ſelf, without any ſuch relation, which is our way of conceiving, it may appear to us wiſe, and worthy of the moſt excellent Being. SERM. X.

2*dly*, Wiſdom conſiſts in the choice and the uſe of proper means for accompliſhing good ends. Suppoſing an agent to have very right intentions, which is ſo far praiſe-worthy, yet it ſhews a defect of underſtanding, if he fails in the execution, by chooſing means which are not fit: And it is this which is principally meant by wiſdom, ſo far as it denotes an intellectual ability, for to the ends which they purſue, moral agents are deter-

min'd by their affections, but in the choice of means their understanding only can direct. Therefore imperfect minds which do not comprehend all the relations and connexions of things, and do not foresee all future events, must be deficient in wisdom, tho' without any fault in a moral sense, and the character of wise must be appropriated to God as it is in the text, for *he is only wise*, having a perfect knowledge of every thing which shall ever come to pass, and which any power will, or can possibly produce. It is elegantly said in the book of *Job*, *he putteth no trust in his servants, and his angels he chargeth with folly* *; their understandings, tho' vastly large, are not infinite, their great natural capacity is improv'd to a very high measure of knowledge, by their standing always in the presence of God and receiving his instructions; yet it is insufficient for the government of the world, and the direction of its affairs, which God hath reserv'd in his own hands, committing nothing to the contrivance of his ablest ministers, (they are only employ'd to execute his orders) because of their imperfection in wisdom.

* Job iv. 18.

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In this ſenſe, the perfect wiſdom of God is neceſſarily infer'd from the other abſolute perfections of his nature. If he be every where preſent, and wherever he is preſent, there is activity which cannot be reſiſted, and intelligence which cannot be miſled or impos'd upon, if he is abſolutely Omniſcient, knowing not only all things which now are, with the greateſt exactneſs, even the moſt ſecret thoughts of intelligent beings, but alſo all things which ſhall be produc'd, whether by neceſſary or free cauſes; it follows that he can never poſſibly be miſtaken in his meaſures, or come ſhort of a right judgment upon the expediency of things, or the fitneſs of means for attaining the ends he propoſes. Since his power is infinite and cannot be controul'd, nor his deſigns defeated by any oppoſition, and there is no imaginable cauſe which ſhould induce him to alter his deſigns, * *but his counſel ſtandeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations*; ſince it is ſo, nothing can be wanting to the higheſt perfection of wiſdom; no weakneſs, no error, no irreſolution or unſteddineſs can ever be charg'd on any of his meaſures. Such is the SERM. X.

* Pſal. xxxiii. 11.

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raſhneſs and folly of poor ſhort-ſighted mortals, that they take upon them to cenſure the works of God as defective in wiſdom, altho' we have not only the ſame evidence of this which is common to other of his attributes, that is, we know it by its fruits and effects; but ſuppoſing his other perfections to be prov'd, his knowledge, and his power, and his omnipreſence, we are ſatisfied before hand, by reaſoning which is fully convincing, without conſidering his works of creation and providence, which abundantly diſplay his wiſdom; we are ſatisfied, I ſay, that he is, and neceſſarily muſt be infinitely wiſe.

Another general argument to prove the wiſdom of God, is taken from the faint and imperfect images of it which are in ſome of the creatures, and which muſt be deriv'd from the *father of lights*, himſelf therefore poſſeſs'd of that perfection in the higheſt degree. As intelligence in the effect is a clear evidence of it in the Author, tho' of a ſuperior kind, for it could not poſſibly proceed from an unintelligent Cauſe; ſo particularly, the higheſt improvement, and the beſt uſe of underſtanding, can never exceed, nor indeed equal the original Fountain from which all knowledge flows, and therefore the wiſdom of

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God is abſolutely ſupreme. Since God only hath *put wiſdom into the inward parts and given underſtanding to the heart*, all the meaſures of wiſdom which any created and finite beings can attain to, muſt needs be inferior to his, for the effect can neither originally have, nor ever poſſibly arrive to the perfection of the voluntary complete cauſe; if it could, then of that equal, and therefore independent perfection, or degree of perfection, it would be a cauſe to it ſelf, rather there would be no cauſe at all. Tho' 'tis true *this* is an improvable ability in imperfect minds, which grow in wiſdom by attention, induſtrious inquiry, and careful obſervation, yet never independently on God, nor can their acquirements riſe to an equality with the Divine underſtanding; for the very capacity of improvement is derived from him, the means are under the direction of his providence, and the ſucceſs depends on his good pleaſure. And the increaſe, as it is limited in its degree, by the will of him who hath determin'd the meaſures of perfection to which every one of his creatures ſhall, or can attain, ſo it implies an imperfection from which the firſt Cauſe is abſolutely free, whoſe wiſdom, as

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all the other excellencies of his nature, is uncapable of any addition or diminution.

But the most obvious proof of the wisdom of God, and to attentive minds it is fully convincing, is, by his works of creation and providence, his originally making all things in heaven and earth, and disposing them in the order in which they appear, his preserving them all and governing them, in the way which is most suitable to their several natures, and so as they may best answer the ends of their being. They are made so as to have a visible mutual relation to each other, with the most exquisite skill and contrivance, and plainly to discover that the whole is under the direction of one ruling Counsel. Inanimate things are upheld by the power of God, and directed in their motions, constantly and uniformly, to serve particular purposes; sensitive beings have a suitable provision made for the support of their lives, and are govern'd by instincts which determine them to pursue the proper ends of their nature; and rational agents have laws given them for regulating their conduct, and they are furnished with proper motives of action, by the influence of which they are directed, freely, and with understanding to

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purſue the proper ends of their being. Upon a general ſurvey of theſe works of God, there appears an obvious congruity in the whole, and a deſigned ſubſerviency of ſome to others. It is evident, that the motions of the heavenly bodies, and the conſtant uniform influence of them in the various productions upon our globe, are under ſuch a direction as to anſwer the end of ſuſtaining a multitude of living things in their regular ſucceſſions; animals are under an apparent œconomy, whereby they are render'd uſeful to one another, and all of them ſubordinated to man. Now I ſay, even upon ſuch a ſlight and general view, we have a clear diſcovery of infinite Divine wiſdom. The greater variety there is in any ſyſtem, which muſt all be within the comprehenſion of the mind that form'd it, provided there appears unity of deſign and regular contrivance, the larger ſtill we muſt conclude the underſtanding to be. A narrow capacity reaches only to a few things, placing them in due order, if a great multitude be put under its care, it is embarraſs'd and thrown into confuſion; but how vaſt is the comprehenſion of that providence which takes under its guidance the whole heavens and the earth, with all things

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SERM. X. that are in them, which conducts the motions of the cœleſtial orbs, yet without neglecting the meaneſt animal or vegetable on this earth, and ſo adjuſts all the parts of the ſtupendous fabric, that whatever changes any of them may undergo, their correſpondence to each other is uniformly maintain'd, and the harmony of the whole.

Eſpecially the variety of kinds, yet more than the multitude of individuals, properly diſpos'd, demonſtrates the wiſdom of the Creator and ſupreme Governor of the world. There is no diverſity at all in the productions of neceſſary unintelligent cauſes, and in proportion to their meaſure of underſtanding, the operations of free agents are confin'd to a few ſimilar effects, or extend to a greater variety. It is thus that we eſtimate a human genius; the man who is skill'd in many different branches of learning, in hiſtory, in languages, in politics and philoſophy, or who knows how to act a proper part in very different ſtations of life, is reputed wiſer than he whoſe knowledge is confin'd to a few particulars. But how adorable is that wiſdom which has diſplay'd it ſelf marvelouſly in the whole gradation of being, which ſhines conſpicuouſly, not only adjuſting with the utmoſt

utmoſt exactneſs, the mechaniſm of the material world, but has form'd intirely different and ſuperior kinds, namely ſpirits, to whoſe nature and condition of being, the methods of his providence are as well accommodated as to the other. The conſtitution and form of government under which intelligent creatures are plac'd, is, at leaſt, as clear a manifeſtation of the Divine wiſdom, as the frame and direction of the corporeal ſyſtem. And, which is moſt worthy of our obſervation to the preſent purpoſe, theſe eſſentially different kinds are moſt conveniently diſpos'd of, with relation to each other: Spirit and body are united in the human compoſition, and as the ſyſtem is diſtinguiſh'd in its formation by the Creator's skill, it is as much diſtinguiſh'd by the adminiſtration of his providence. From man there is a deſcent, I mean as to the degrees of their perfection, in the works of God which we are beſt acquainted with. The next inferior rank are the brutal ſpecies, and among them a beautiful variety, ſome making a much more conſiderable figure than others in the animal kingdom; ſome more eminently uſeful, and even making nearer approaches to the human underſtanding. From them the perfection of

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animal life lessens by various descending degrees, till it comes so near the vegetable world as scarcely to be distinguished. Of vegetables there are as various kinds, all of them ministring to sensitive beings as a superior order, and these latter are directed to the proper use of them by particular instincts: And inanimate things are constantly so govern'd as to serve the purpose of producing the several sorts of herbs, trees and fruits. This order is maintain'd amidst an infinite diversity, and as there is a scale of being appointed by the great designing Author, so there is a subordination of use, the lower still serving the higher, till we ascend to man, the chief of the works of God in our world. Who that attends to this obvious face of nature, and the daily administration of providence, can help acknowledging not only design, that is, the being of God, but perfectly wise counsel, discover'd in the admirable œconomy of all things, as far as his works come within our knowledge?

A more particular and accurate inquiry into all these things, would set the evidence of Divine wisdom still in a clearer and stronger light, showing not only that the universe considered as one intire work, discovers

vers wonderful counſel in the conſtitution of it, having all its parts for ſeveral uſes regularly diſpos'd and fitted to each other, but every particular being which can be conſider'd as a ſeparate intire ſyſtem, and complete in it ſelf, carries in its frame the cleareſt manifeſtations of its Author's perfect underſtanding. Not only *the Lord by wiſdom ſtretched out the heavens, and eſtabliſhed the earth by his diſcretion*, but in the conſtitution of every ſingle terreſtrial and celeſtial body, is manifeſted the exquiſite skill of their deſigning intelligent Maker. As to the celeſtial, they are too far diſtant for our minute obſervation, and human ſcience is principally converſant about their magnitude, diſtance and regular motions, in which the modern improvements of aſtronomical learning open a ſurpriſing ſcene, diſplaying the wiſdom of God beyond what appears to the firſt views of an uninſtructed ſpectator: In the compoſition of bodies whoſe properties are better known to us, as air, water, earth, ſtones, minerals, vegetables of every kind, animals, and eſpecially the human body; in all of theſe and each of them, the manifold wiſdom of the Creator is diſcover'd. And here alſo it is worthy of our obſervation, that the progreſs

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of learning has moſt eminently tended to eſtabliſh the foundations of religion, for the diſcoveries which have lately been made in natural hiſtory, philoſophy and anatomy, have greatly illuſtrated and confirm'd this important article we are now conſidering. It is not convenient in this ſhort diſcourſe to deſcend to particulars, even which are commonly known; but this I may ſafely ſay, that it ſhows an amazing infatuation in any man, who has not ſpent his life in the utmoſt obſcurity, intirely unacquainted with that knowledge of nature which is the ſubject of common converſation in this age and theſe parts of the world, not to be convinc'd, that as the works of God are *manifold*, ſo *in wiſdom he has made them all*, and particularly that the human body is *fearfully and wonderfully made.*

If we proceed farther to conſider man in his better part, which *God made after his own image*, the workmanſhip will appear in a peculiar manner, worthy of the Author's perfect underſtanding. And firſt of all, let us obſerve our ſituation in the univerſe. We are nearly allied and cloſely united to the corporeal world, a part of matter fitly organiz'd to convey the notices of external things,

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and to be the mind's inſtrument of action, is a part of our ſelves. Is not wiſdom manifeſted in placing rational capacities thus conveniently for contemplation, and for the proper improvement of them in a rational happineſs, which eſpecially ariſes from adoring, and actively ſhewing the praiſes of the Almighty, All-wiſe and bountiful Creator? Since this earth is ſuch a beautiful fabric, ſo curiouſly fram'd and adorn'd, and all God's works in it, even thoſe which are unintelligent, praiſe him in a ſilent way, by giving to rational beings an occaſion of obſerving and admiring his perfections manifeſted in them, can we help thinking it was worthy of the wiſe Author, nay, does it not appear to be the finiſhing excellence of ſuch a work, to furniſh it with underſtanding inhabitants, fitted with proper powers and affections for enjoying it, capable of diſcerning its various beauty, and applying it to the delightful purpoſe of celebrating his praiſe. This honorable province is therefore wiſely aſſign'd to man, as he is qualify'd for it by the faculties of his nature, and holds the firſt rank in this lower viſible part of the creation.

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But if we conſider the human conſtitution by it ſelf, it will appear to be the finiſh'd production

duction of a wise Author. To judge of this it is necessary to have in view the ends of our being, which obviously arise from the very frame of our nature. Man is a compound of body and spirit, by the former of which he has a necessary relation to the material world, which is the first appointed stage of his existence, his life consider'd as an animated system of matter, is nourish'd by the productions of the earth, and the necessities of his animal nature employ the cares of his mind. The other part, the spirit, is endued with nobler powers, and is capable of higher enjoyments, of the pleasures of virtue, of self-approbation and the favour of God, which are wholly independent on the body. These ends, as different as the essences of soul and body, are united in our constitution, and may be joyntly pursu'd without confusion. For the purposes both of the animal and rational life, we are fitted with proper faculties, instincts and affections; we have senses whereby are communicated to us such ideas of external objects as are useful to the animal nature, and likewise the materials of entertaining knowledge to the mind; we have appetites directing and prompting us to the use of those things which are the means

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of preſerving the preſent life, and of ſuch happineſs as it is capable of, without being left wholly to the conduct of calm reaſon, which would be too weak to anſwer the end ſufficiently, and by attending ſuch affairs would be too much diverted from more important employments: And particularly, in conſidering the animal part of the human life, it can hardly eſcape our obſervation, that provident nature has ſhewn her wiſe care for the ſpecies, by planting in the individuals, inſtincts which powerfully determine them to purſue its general intereſts, tho' often accompanied with great labour, anxiety and pain. The ſuperiour part in our compoſition, the ſpirit, is made for nobler ends, and is qualified to purſue them by nobler faculties, affections and determinations; it has underſtanding, liberty, choice, an inſtinct of benevolence as well as ſelf-love, and conſcience, whereby it judges of its own diſpoſitions and actions, according to a deeply engraven and invariable ſenſe of good and evil, from the conſciouſneſs of which different moral qualities in it ſelf, ariſes the moſt ſolid inward joy, or the moſt painful reflexion. Theſe powers appear to our own minds to have a very great excellence in them, and to dignify us highly

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above other beings in the world about us, and the regular exercise of them leads to a great, perpetually increasing happiness, to the pursuit of which we are directed by attending to our own frame. The understanding is a faculty which points to its own proper use and improvement, not only directing the exercise of all our other powers, but affording it self an eminent pleasure, far superior to all sensual gratifications. Liberty, tho' in us unavoidably accompanied with a possibility of doing wrong, yet is absolutely necessary to our doing right in a moral sense, from which the highest satisfaction arises in the mind. It is virtue which raises our nature to the greatest perfection it can attain to, and what stronger inducement can there be to the practice of it, than what is inseparable from our very constitution, the joy of self approbation which naturally flows from it, and the self-reproach which necessarily follows the contrary? And as the human mind is naturally sollicitous about futurity, another state of existence is the subject of its presaging thoughts, and its earnest desires extend even to immortality, which, together with the scanty measure of its attainments here, both in knowledge and enjoyment, far

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below what its faculties are capable of, and ſeem to be deſign'd for; is at leaſt a probable argument that it is deſign'd to ſubſiſt hereafter. That ſame conſciouſneſs of integrity or moral goodneſs, which affords the trueſt preſent tranquillity and ſatisfaction to the mind, gives it alſo confidence towards God as the righteous Judge of the world, rendering it ſecure in the expectation of all changes which he ſhall appoint. SERM. X.

If we deſcend to a more particular conſideration of the laws of nature, we ſhall find that they are every way worthy of a wiſe Law-giver, as having a certain connexion with the ends of his own conſtitution, and of our being. The virtue of ſobriety, a very important part of the law written in our hearts, evidently tends to the preſervation and the eaſy enjoyment of life, and to the more vigorous exerciſe of our ſuperiour powers and affections; the fear of God, as it is our wiſdom, the injunction of it ſhews the wiſdom of the natural law, for it improves the mind, and yields it the moſt delightful entertainment, and it ſecures the practice of every other virtue; and charity is *the perfect bond* of human ſociety, fit therefore to be preſcrib'd by that gracious Governor whoſe care

extends to all mankind, and who by thus providing for the common ſafety, has wiſely promoted, inſtead of diminiſhing the happineſs of every individual; for the trueſt contentment of mind accompanies an univerſal, undiſſembled good will. Thus all the works of God have the evidences of his wiſdom clearly ſtampt upon them, whether we view them in the whole or in parts, and the more diligently we apply our ſelves to this inquiry, the more we ſhall be ſatisfied that the character of *only wiſe*, juſtly belongs to him.

Another illuſtration of this ſubject is taken from the manner of the Divine operations, which are ſo contriv'd, that a vaſt multitude of effects depend on one or a few cauſes. This is always regarded as an excellency in any work, which ſtill appears the more beautiful, manifeſting the capacity of the Author, the more various its regular appearances are, and the greater ſimplicity there is in the manner of producing them. When every ſeveral effect has a particular ſeparate cauſe, this gives no pleaſure to the ſpectator, as not diſcovering contrivance; but that work is beheld with admiration and delight, as the reſult of deep counſel, which is complicated in its parts, and yet ſimple in its operation, where a great variety

riety of effects are ſeen to ariſe from one prin- SERM. X.
ciple operating uniformly. That this is the true character of the works of God, we ſhall be ſatisfied by conſidering the natural and the moral world, in both which a vaſt diverſity of appearances depend upon ſingle cauſes. The beſt explication which has yet been given of the great phœnomena in the mundane ſyſtem, reſolves them into attraction and gravitation, that is, a force impreſs'd on all bodies whereby they mutually attract, or tend towards each other, according to the quantity of matter they contain, and in proportion to their diſtances. It is this which accounts for the regular motion of the planets, ſo neceſſary to the beauty and order of the viſible world, for the preſſure of the air ſo uſeful to the preſervation of the animal life, for the aſcent of vapours from the earth and the waters, and their deſcent when collected and condenſed, in refreſhing rains, for the perpetual flux of rivers, for the ebbing and flowing of the ſea, and for the ſtability of the earth, ſupporting innumerable living creatures, with all convenient furniture for their accommodation ; and it is the foundation of all human mechanical arts, without which

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life would not be tolerable. But this simple cause, productive of so many important appearances in nature, must be attributed to God the first mover, as his work; for it is not to be explained without having recourse to his power and will; it is evidently an active force, and therefore cannot be ascrib'd to matter which is wholly and essentially unactive, and whatever appearance of action it has, can only be by the contact of its superficial parts; whereas the force of gravity penetrates to the centers of all bodies, and affects them at the greatest distance: Either therefore it must be the immediate operation of the first Cause himself, or of an inferior agent by his direction, acting constantly and uniformly on every part of corporeal nature. Other instances might be given, to shew that the material world is govern'd by the influence of single causes, producing a great diversity of effects, according to the different nature of the subjects they work upon, as in the general laws of motion, the various operations of fire, the almost numberless effects which depend upon the constant unvaried nature and properties of water, and many more; but that of gravity mention'd before, is the most universal that we know, and the

most

moſt ſatisfying to inquiſitive minds; as to a careful attention to it, and diligent obſervation of its effects, are owing the greateſt modern improvements in natural philoſophy, all directly leading to this concluſion, that God himſelf, by his own interpoſition, wiſely and conſtantly guides, what is commonly called the courſe of nature. SERM. X.

I ſhall not inſiſt on the principal appearances of the animal life, which are not to be attributed to mechaniſm, depending on gravity, tho' ſome have vainly attempted to account for them that way; this however may be obſerv'd concerning them, that they ſeem to be laid on one general uniform foundation. As there are common mediums by which the images or impreſſions of material objects are convey'd to ſenſitive beings, ſo the perceptions rais'd in them which are ſimilar, as far as we can judge, not ariſing from the nature of things (for no man can account for the particular ſenſations in animals from the figure and other primary qualities, or from the motion of the bodies which occaſion them;) they muſt proceed from a general law of nature, or, which means the ſame thing, the uniform operation of the firſt ſupreme Cauſe. In the ſame manner, the in-

ſtincts and appetites of animals, determining them by a ſhort and eaſy method, to uſe the neceſſary means of their own preſervation, and of ſuch enjoyment as they are capable of, muſt be reſolv'd into the uniform direction of nature, caring for its own works.

But the moral world is the chief of God's works which we know, wherein his wiſdom is principally diſplay'd, and the ſame character of ſimplicity, may be juſtly applied to the conſtitution by which *it* is govern'd. The main ends of it are the perfection and happineſs of intelligent beings, ends moſt worthy of ſupreme Goodneſs; but it is the province of wiſdom to direct the means by which they ſhall be obtained. Now to this purpoſe, the great Author of nature has not given a ſeparate rule to every individual, whereby it ſhould be directed to purſue its own intereſt independently on all others; but together with ſelf-love, wiſely implanted in every one, in order to provide for private happineſs, has united them under the general law of benevolence, which attracts free agents into a beautiful harmonious ſociety, as by the force of gravity bodies are united into a regular connected ſyſtem. What could be better contriv'd to preſerve the common

peace

peace, and promote the common felicity of a multitude, than to charge every one with the care of his fellows, and make his own happineſs depend upon it. And tho' the perfect happineſs of mankind in the firſt ſtage of their exiſtence, is not actually attain'd, that is no argument againſt the wiſdom of the conſtitution, nor proves that the Author's intention is fruſtrated; for as in many other productions of nature, eſpecially in every kind of life, there is a gradual progreſs, which when compleated, is in the whole kind, an admirable inſtance of the Creator's wiſe deſign, tho' during the increaſe, but imperfectly diſcern'd, and many of the individuals never arrive to it; ſo the principles planted in the human mind, tending to its own and the common happineſs, do not produce their proper effect in ſome individuals, through their own fault, and not their full effect in the whole of the preſent ſtate, being a ſtate of appointed imperfection; but they produce even now, ſuch a meaſure of happineſs as is ſufficient to juſtify the wiſdom of God in the conſtitution; and the ſame principles rais'd to higher perfection in another ſtate, will, by a more powerful operation, fully anſwering their end in the complete happineſs of

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all and every one, more illustriously manifest the infinite understanding, as well as goodness of the supreme Being.

As self-love and benevolence, or the desire of private and public happiness, are not barely enjoyn'd by the authority of a Lawgiver, but the affections themselves are planted in the heart of every individual, determining them all, as far as free agents in such a state could properly be determin'd, whereby the whole species are wisely directed to pursue the true ends of their being; so these two principles are intended to controul and regulate the exercise of all other affections and passions. It was necessary that the human nature should be furnish'd with inferior private appetites and passions, for the purposes of the animal life, and likewise with particular instincts of the public kind, such as compassion, gratitude and natural affection, where nearer attachments and pressing circumstances require a more vigorous and speedy interposal by kind offices, in behalf of some of mankind, than of others; which is evidently serviceable to, and ordain'd for the public good. But the universal principles of dispassionate self-love and benevolence, have properly the supremacy in our minds, to moderate

derate the lower ſprings of action belonging to their ſeveral kinds, and to prevent their exceſſes; if lower ſelfiſh deſires hurry us with too great violence, they are reaſonably reſtrain'd by calm ſelf-love to the whole of our true intereſt; if particular inſtincts determining us to relieve and communicate pleaſure to others, carry us at any time beyond their juſt meaſure, which is the caſe with minds in which compaſſion and natural affection are very ſtrong, they are check'd by a calm conſideration of the moſt public good, which is the governing virtuous principle. And now upon a deliberate view of this whole conſtitution, as deſign'd by the Author of nature, muſt it not be acknowledg'd that wiſdom appears in it? Suppoſing the intention to be the happineſs of mankind, the greateſt happineſs they are capable of, what could be more wiſely contriv'd for anſwering the end? Theſe general plain laws univerſally complied with, and having their full effect, would raiſe the human nature to its higheſt perfection, and ſpread united joy and felicity over the whole kind; and they are made eaſy to every man by being the dictates of his own mind, and we are prompted to obey them by inclination. And where-

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as our preſent condition of being is ſuch as required a variety of particular inſtincts and determinations, to render it the more comfortable, and defend us from ſome inconveniencies we are liable to, from which variety there might ariſe an occaſion of perplexity in our conduct, by the interfering ſprings of action; the great ruling principles are always ready at hand, to be applied in every caſe for our direction.

Perhaps it may be alledg'd, that the proof of the wiſdom of God in his works, which has been laſt inſiſted on, namely, *that* taken from this conſideration, that a vaſt multitude of effects depend on one, or a few cauſes; that this, I ſay, is not concluſive, becauſe we cannot be abſolutely certain that it is a method of operation, in it ſelf, the beſt and moſt effectual for obtaining the ends propos'd; tho' there is an apparent conveniency in it to imperfect agents, whoſe minds might be embarraſs'd with a multiplicity of means, and their power inſufficient for a great diverſity of operations at the ſame time; but this reaſon cannot affect the infinite underſtanding of the ſupreme Being. Without entering into this inquiry, which is perhaps too difficult for us, or pretending to prove that the

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method of operation which the Author of nature has plainly choſen, is more excellent and reaſonable in it ſelf abſtractly conſidered, and with reſpect to him; I ſhall only anſwer to the objection, that ſince God graciouſly intended to make his ways known to his intelligent creatures, and to manifeſt his wiſdom ſo as they might be able to diſcern it, the method he has taken, is on that account, and to anſwer that end, abſolutely the beſt. If the manner of working had been intirely different, if the means had been as various as the particular ends accompliſh'd by them, if there had been as great a diverſity of cauſes in nature, as of effects, and every deſign carried on by a diſtinct method of proceeding; this might have been as effectual for any thing we know, and we are ſure no more difficult to Omnipotence and infinite Underſtanding; but then it muſt have been to us utterly incomprehenſible, and minds ſo limited as ours are, indeed any finite minds, could have had very little knowledge of the wiſdom of God; whereas in the preſent conſtitution, he has ſo accommodated the methods of his operation to the capacities of his intelligent creatures, that the *inviſible things of him may be clearly ſeen by them, and* they

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they may trace the footſteps of his perfection in the things which he has made, which is the foundation both of their duty and their happineſs, affording a moſt delightful entertainment to their minds, and directing them to form the meaſures of their conduct.

But one obſervation is neceſſary to be added, that tho' God has given us clear manifeſtations of his wiſdom, and ſufficient for our conviction, if we do not wilfully ſhut our eyes, againſt the light which breaks in upon us from every part of the known univerſe, from the conſtitution and the government of the inanimate, the ſenſitive, and the rational creatures; yet a great deal does and muſt ſtill remain ſecret to us; there are treaſures of wiſdom and knowledge hid in him, which we cannot poſſibly comprehend; indeed the intire ſcheme of his counſels and works can be known to no underſtanding but his own. Every attentive perſon muſt be ſenſible, that our knowledge of nature is very imperfect. Our ſenſes, which convey to us the ideas of material exiſtence, are confin'd within a narrow ſphere. We have reaſon to believe there are vaſt regions in the univerſe beyond the reach of their diſcernment, and by what peculiar methods they

may

may be govern'd, different from thoſe which take place in our ſyſtem, we cannot pretend to judge. There may be alſo, no doubt there are other orders of intelligent beings beſides mankind, and the laws by which they are ruled may differ in ſome particulars, from thoſe which are given to us. Beſides, of the things which fall under our obſervation, nay, which we are moſt familiarly converſant with, there are a great many properties and relations, indeed their very eſſences, the foundation of all their properties, are unknown to us. They are only the external appearances of things which we obſerve, and their connexions and dependencies are the ſubject of human ſcience; but their intimate natures from which theſe appearances flow, are unknown. But ſhall we from our own ignorance, infer a defect of wiſdom in the ſupreme Maker and Diſpoſer of the univerſe? On the contrary, it ought to be allow'd, that if there be ſatisfying evidence of wiſdom in all his works which we know, there is no reaſon to doubt of it in thoſe parts which are remote from our view, or too deep for our penetration. What mind can be ſo weak or ſo prejudic'd as to ſuppoſe, that indeed wiſdom rules in all that we ſee (the regularity and

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and harmony of things extorts this acknowledgment,) but in all the rest of the universe confusion and discord may reign, and nature be under no wise direction? Wisdom is the perfection of a cause, not of an effect, it belongs to an agent uniformly directing the exertion of his active powers, not confin'd to some of his operations; and therefore, if a being appears to be wise in a great variety of his works which we know, we reasonably conclude that the same wisdom directs the whole of his conduct. This observation, with respect to the works of creation and providence, is justified by experience, for whereas some things in the world, the uses of which were not at all known in the infancy of learning, such as vast tracts of mountains, barren deserts and wide seas, have been strongly insisted on as arguments to shew the want of wisdom in the frame of nature; these very things are since found, by later discoveries, and a more accurate inquiry, to be highly useful and to serve very important purposes. And as other objections of the same kind derive all their strength only from human ignorance and weakness, a more thorough knowledge would make them all disappear, and establish a conclusion directly

contrary

contrary to that which unlearned ſceptics would infer from them. In the mean time, it ſhows the moſt conceited and preſumptuous folly for men to cenſure the Divine adminiſtration, merely becauſe there are ſome things in it which they cannot comprehend, when the general voice of nature and providence proclaims it wiſe.

The proper uſe to be made of this doctrine is, that we ſhould praiſe God. *All his works praiſe him* by manifeſting his wiſdom, and we whom he has made capable of diſcerning the characters and evidences of that perfection, owe him the tribute of the higheſt honour and eſteem. Power may ſtrike our minds with awe, and ſupreme Majeſty make our hearts tremble, but it is wiſdom that attracts veneration; in whatever degree any agent appears to be poſſeſs'd of that quality, he is intitled to a proportionable meaſure of our reſpect. Wiſdom and folly make the principal diſtinction among men, by which they are held in reputation or contempt; tho' the differences of outward condition may be often too much regarded, and men of ſervile ſpirits may flatter the rich and great in their folly, while the *poor man's wiſ-*

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As praise is the noblest employment of the mind, one can't but be sensible of dignity and self-worth in doing honour to transcendent excellence, by affectionate acknowledgments and applauses; so it is a most delightful exercise, pleasure is inseparable from the hearty congratulation, and the soul even partakes of the intellectual and moral perfection, which it joyfully celebrates: And since the consciousness of dignity, and the delight which accompanies praise, must always bear a proportion to the apprehended excellency of the object, the praise which is given to the supreme Being, with understanding and sincere esteem, must, on this account, infinitely exceed all others. It is therefore most becoming such imperfect rational creatures as we are, to contemplate the works of God, with this design, that we may discern the manifestations

feſtations of his wiſdom in them, and thereby excite in our ſelves thoſe pious and devout affections, and that ſuperlative reſpect, which are the very eſſence of praiſe, as it is a reaſonable and moral ſervice. SERM. X.

Any one who attentively conſiders the frame and condition of human nature in this world, muſt ſee, that tho' its capacities are great, and viſibly intended for important ends, yet this our infancy of being, is very weak, that the preſent is a ſtate of probation, wherein the progreſs of our underſtandings and our moral powers, with the enjoyment ariſing from them, in a great meaſure, depend upon ſuch a diligent uſe of our own faculties, as a careful attention to the nature and order of them will direct. The firſt impreſſions made upon our minds are by ſenſible objects, and our appetites to them naturally ariſe, which being cuſtomarily indulg'd, the higher powers and affections of the ſoul are neglected and become weak; yet are we not left without an obvious remedy againſt this inconvenience and infirmity of our nature: As the leaſt reflection will convince us, that there are higher and nobler powers in our nature, capable of a rational, a more

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refin'd and sublime enjoyment, than any which can belong to the animal part of our constitution; so the proper exercise of those higher faculties is naturally pointed out to us, by the work of God's law written upon our hearts, and by the evidences of his being and perfections, which are most plainly inscrib'd on his works, wherewith we are continually surrounded.

But still it is in our power to neglect the culture of the virtuous affections, and to let the natural motives of piety slip out of our minds; whether we will do so or not is a great part of our trial: This however is certain, that nothing can be more worthy of us, or of more immediate importance to our greatest perfection and happiness, than that we should, with deliberation, design and diligence, apply our selves to the proper exercise and improvement of our rational and moral faculties, in order to establish the supremacy of conscience, and, on that foundation, the inward harmony of the mind, and to obtain that enjoyment which naturally arises from universally self-approving, virtuous integrity. But tho' this be evidently rational and important, (scarcely will any thing

thing be alledg'd in juſtification of the contrary ;) yet how few are there of mankind, even of thoſe who are in reputation for wiſdom and virtue, who make it their buſineſs to cultivate their rational and moral capacities, or have ever taken a reſolution to make that their chief care through the courſe of their lives ; for the moſt part, we learn our piety and virtue, as a foreign diſcipline, and only by outward inſtruction ; therefore it ſits ſo awkwardly upon us, and the exerciſe of it is attended with little of ſuch dexterity, vigor, warmth of affection and pleaſure, as accompany the buſineſs of nature, which religion really is, in it ſelf, and in the primary way God has taken to teach it to us, that is, by writing its main principles and inſtructions upon our hearts. SERM. X.

If we are ſincerely diſpos'd to employ our ſelves in this excellent, this comprehenſive duty of praiſing God, wherein our beſt affections join their force, and all the ſprings of manly pleaſure unite in raiſing the ſatisfaction of the mind; if, I ſay, we are ſincerely diſpos'd to employ our ſelves in it, the means are ready at hand ; the works of God, in a moſt amazing and beautiful inſtructive va-

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riety, present themselves to us with their manifestations of his wisdom; they pour their evidence from all quarters, and into all the avenues of the mind, inviting us to behold perfect counsel and wise design, which is the most agreeable object we can contemplate. There is no part of the universe to which we can turn our attention, nor any species of beings in it, that does not afford us the plainest discoveries of Divine skill and power in their formation and œconomy. *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work, day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. The beasts of the field and the fowls of the air teach us, and the fishes of the sea declare to us*; that he is perfectly wise who gave them their being, and appointed their various uses, with all the circumstances of their condition. In this view *the work of the Lord appears honourable and glorious*; and it is *sought out of them that have pleasure therein*; they trace the signatures of counsel upon it, with the highest admiration, and their hearts are fill'd with joy and praise. A heart full of such sentiments will be its own instructor in religion, and needs not to be

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taught from abroad, what duty it owes to God, what love and gratitude, what confidence, obedience and reſignation. SERM. X.

Providence, as I have already obſerv'd, has afforded us great and peculiar advantages for making proficiency in this kind of knowledge, and thereby advancing in ſubſtantial piety. Some eminent perſons in theſe laſt days, and that part of the world where we live, have happily employ'd an uncommon capacity, in ſearching out the works of nature, and illuſtrating the marvelous diſplays of Divine wiſdom in them; ſo that the ſubject appears in quite a different light from what it has hitherto done, and is even brought down to the level of vulgar underſtandings. What has been ſometimes called philoſophy, the vain, the poor production of impiety, ignorance and pride, was really what the Apoſtle calls, *the wiſdom, through which the world knew not God:* But happy our times! wherein whatever is worthy to be called learning, evidently terminates in religion as its laſt reſult, and ſhews us *all things full of God.* Let us purſue the method which has been ſo clearly mark'd out to us; let thoſe whoſe

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talents and leiſure enable them, endeavour to build a farther ſuperſtructure on the noble foundation already laid, and by inveſtigating the ſecrets of nature, ſo far as human underſtanding can reach, diſcern the counſels of its Author, that they may give him due praiſe: And let them who are unqualified for ſuch an undertaking, yet ſtudy to be acquainted with the uſeful diſcoveries others have made, and by affectionate meditation on them, feed the pure flame of rational devotion in their own breaſts.

But above all kinds of natural knowledge, there is one branch which may be moſt profitably improv'd to the purpoſes of religion, by contemplating the wiſdom of God in it; I mean the philoſophy of human nature it ſelf, not only or principally of the corporeal part, tho' even *that* is a wonderful work of God, a moſt curious ſtructure, wherein Divine wiſdom ſhines conſpicuouſly. It is indeed ſurprizing, that any who have ſtudied the animal conſtitution and œconomy, ſhould forget God its Maker; others, we know, have made many juſt and pious reflections upon it, as an admirable monument of the Creator's skill, where-

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in he has ſhewed himſelf *great in counſel and wonderful in working*. But what I chiefly aim at is, that we ſhould apply our ſelves to the ſerious conſideration of our more inward fabric, that of the mind, whereby we are diſtinguiſh'd with the character of rational creatures. Of all the external objects we diſcern, bearing, in a vaſt variety, the marks of the Creator's intelligence and power, there is none which has any reſemblance to this; it has no ſhape or colour, or any other ſenſible quality, yet there is nothing more real, nothing more important to us; we are conſcious of its various, many of them deeply intereſting perceptions and operations, accompanied with different kinds and degrees of pleaſure and pain. This object, intimately near us, (for 'tis that whereby we are what we are, *our very ſelves*,) will, in that view of things we are now conſidering, appear moſt worthy of our firſt and careful attention. To this purpoſe, ſome of the principal appearances have been obſerv'd, in the preceding part of this diſcourſe; but in every view we can take of it, it appears a beautiful offspring of God's light, and a noble production of his

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his power: The intellectual and self-determining faculties, the self-reflecting, authoritative and controuling judgment of the mind, upon its own dispositions and voluntary acts, and the affections to spiritual and moral objects, characters and actions; these are subjects of contemplation, to which we meet with nothing parallel in the whole of material nature; and when, in conjunction with them, we consider the other subordinate powers and determinations of the human soul, its senses, appetites and passions; there is a beautiful scene open'd to us, wherein we may entertain our selves most agreeably, and be furnish'd with excellent arguments of praise to our great and wise Creator. This Divine workmanship appears a regular system, comprehending a multitude of parts, but all connected together and variously related: The great end of a perpetually increasing rational perfection and happiness, is plainly intended, and the means are excellently fitted to it; There are many inferior powers, instincts and affections, each serving a several useful purpose, and having pleasure annex'd to it, but all in subordination to the ultimate

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end, which nature directs us ſteddily to purſue: In a ſyſtem ſo various, containing ſo many different powers and ſprings of action, of oppoſite tendency, it can ſcarcely be expected, at leaſt in its infancy and ſtate of appointed imperfection, but that ſome diſorders ſhould happen, and ſo we find it in fact; but ſtill the remedy is in the ſoul it ſelf; by the proper exertion of its own powers, there is proviſion made for inward order, harmony and peace, which is the natural, healthful and happy ſtate of the mind. This ſcience, like others, has had its viciſſitudes; ſometimes in a more flouriſhing, ſometimes in a declining ſtate; ſome eminent attempts have, of late, been made to reſcue it from the obſcurity and ignorance of the barbarous middle ages: But that every man, for himſelf, may ſtudy it ſucceſsfully, nothing is more neceſſary than frequent, careful and unprejudic'd ſelf-inſpection, whereby pious affections will be excited in our minds, and we ſhall be led to aſcribe, *to the only wiſe God all honour and glory for ever.*

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2*dly*, As by the manifestation of God's wisdom in the frame and constitution of things, we are directed to celebrate his praises with understanding and sincere affection; so by the continued exercise of the same glorious attribute in his government of the world, we are encourag'd to trust in him at all times and in all circumstances, if we sincerely endeavour to approve our selves to him by imitating his moral perfections, and obeying his laws (the only condition upon which, by the very constitution of our nature, we can have confidence towards God;) for he has the whole series of events under his direction, appointing even the remotest issues of them. Vain are the contrivances of wicked mortals, against the gracious designs of providence towards good men, *the counsels of the froward are turned headlong*, their mischievous purposes are disappointed, *for the Lord knows how to deliver the godly from temptations.* We ought not to pronounce judgment upon the first face of things, nor be greatly discouraged because of irregular appearances; we may be assured they are no more than appearances, for it is impossible there should be any real disorder,

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where infinite Wiſdom rules: And tho' our knowledge of particular events is very ſhort, this may always yield us ſatisfaction and ſupport our hope, that the whole courſe of nature, and all the viciſſitudes of human affairs are govern'd by perfect reaſon. SERM. X.

Here is, one would think, a ſolid foundation of inward tranquillity to intelligent creatures, and a relief under all their anxieties for the future; for what could a rational being deſire, but that eternal unerring reaſon ſhould direct the ſeries of events, and determine what comes to paſs. If, in fact, the world be ſo govern'd, and our perſuaſion of it reſts upon ſolid grounds, this muſt be delightful to the human mind, a never-failing ſpring of conſolation: Suppoſing on the contrary, that there were no ſuch thing as counſel in the government of the univerſe, but that all things were guided by blind chance or neceſſity; how muſt this diſſipate the vigour of the ſoul, diſorder all its powers, and fill it with horror: The preſent ſtate, and indeed the whole of exiſtence, would then be, in the ſtricteſt and moſt proper Senſe, as *Job* repreſents the ſtate of death,

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death, * *a land of darkness as darkness it self, and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness.* But since it is not so, since *the only wise God reigneth, his counsel standeth for ever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations*, let all the rational inhabitants of the *earth rejoyce, and the multitude of the isles be glad thereof:* What can give greater satisfaction and inward security to a considerate unprejudic'd mind; for, upon this principle, the last result of all things must be, just as such a mind would wish it to be.

Lastly, We ought always to acquiesce in the present disposition of things by Divine providence, and comply with its counsels, as far as we know them. God's ways are unsearchable, and his judgments past finding out; but when he is pleas'd to show his purposes in particular events, tho' we cannot discern the reasons of them and their full design, it becomes us to submit, not because of his sovereign dominion, which, abstracting from the consideration of his wisdom, can never produce a rational resig-

* Job x. 22.

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nation, nor ſatisfy our underſtandings any more than unintelligent fate, the blind idol of *Atheiſts*; but becauſe we know he is infinitely wiſe, who in theſe inſtances declares his will. He has, 'tis true, given us underſtanding, and we ſhould uſe it in the beſt manner we can, for the direction of our own practice; prudence however will direct ſuch as are conſcious of their own weakneſs, to carry it with great deference to acknowledg'd ſuperior underſtanding, and hearken to inſtruction: But ſurely the very imperfect underſtandings of men, ſhould never exalt themſelves againſt the perfect Wiſdom which rules the univerſe. Therefore when God is pleas'd to interpoſe by diſappointing our deſigns, and breaking our meaſures, the humbleſt reſignation is our unqueſtionable duty; and what he has plainly diſcover'd to be the deſign and appointment of his providence, we ſhould chearfully ſubmit to, becauſe we are ſure it is wiſeſt in the whole: Still remembring, as a firſt maxim, and of the utmoſt importance, that what God has evidently ſhown, by the clear light of our own reaſon, to be the proper ends of our being, theſe we ought

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ought constantly to pursue, and inviolably adhere to that invariable rule which he has given us for the conduct of life. We cannot fathom the depth of his wisdom, nor know the secret of his counsels, *but unto man he has said,* * *Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.*

* Job xxviii. 28.

FINIS.