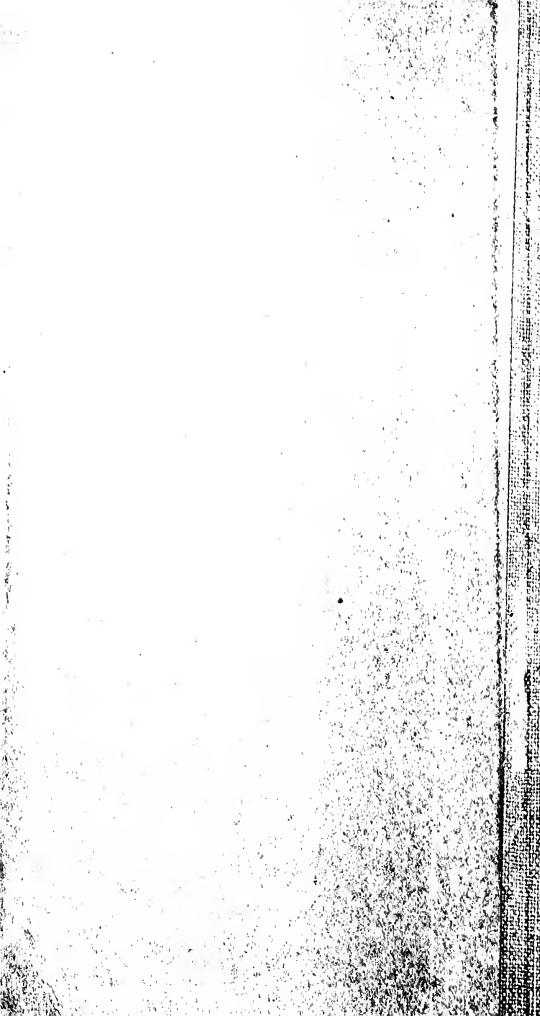


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THE

FORCE OF TRUTH:

AN

AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE.

BY THOMAS SCOTT,
MORNING PREACHER AT THE LOCK CHAPEL,
LONDON.

Ut si quis Asellum

In campos doceat parentem currere frenis....HOR.

Vain man would be wise, though man be born of a
wild ass' colt....JOB, c. xi. v. 12.

Who teacheth like him?....JOB, c. xxxvi. v. 22.

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PREFACE.

IF a book do not apologize for itself, it is in vain for the author to attempt it by a preface; I shall, therefore, only declare the nature and intent of this publication.

Indeed, it contains little more than the history of my heart, that forge of iniquity; and my conscience, that friendly, but too often neglected monitor. By men in general, this latter is hated, because, as far as informed, it boldly tells the truth: and their grand endeavour seems to be, to lay it asleep, or to render it as insensible as if seared with a hot iron. Through the deceitfulness of the human heart, the allurements of the world, and the artifices of Satan, this, at length, is commonly accomplished; and in the mean time, they deafen themselves to its remonstrances, by living in a continual noise and bustle. The conflict in my soul between these two is here related; and some account given of the artifices which Satan, in confederacy with my heart, made use of to keep my conscience quiet, and silence its remonstrances; and also of the means which the Lord employed to defeat this conspiracy, to give conscience its due ascendancy, and to incline my before unwilling heart to become obedient to its friendly admonitions; with the effect thereof upon my religious views and conduct.

As to the effect of this publication respecting my character and worldly interest; myself, and all that is dear

to me, I would leave in his hands, who causeth all to work together for good, to them that love him, whom he hath called according to his purpose. And he hath so evinced his care over me, and goodness to me, in all the concerns of my past life, that it were shameful, if I did not most willingly cast all my care upon him for the future. But, reader, the effect of it respecting thee, I have much at heart; and have had, and shall, I trust, continue to have it much in my prayers.

If thou art a believing servant of God, I hope thou wilt see cause to bless God in me, and wilt be established and comforted thereby; according to the fervent desire of my soul, for all that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. If thou art one, whose experience answers in many things to what is related in the former part of this narrative, as face answers to face in the water, may the Lord, the Spirit who convinceth of sin, alarm thy drowsy conscience, and bring thee under a serious concern for thy precious soul, and its eternal interests: may he incline thine heart diligently to use the means here spoken of, as far as conscience evidences it to be thy duty; and may he bless the means for enlightening thy mind with the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus; and guiding thy wandering feet into the ways of peace. This, be assured, is my hearty prayer for thee; and with this prayer I commend this work unto the Lord, that if it be his blessed will, he may employ it as an instrument for advancing his glory, and the salvation of souls.

THOMAS SCOTT.

Weston, Underwood; Feb. 26. 1779.

PREFACE

TO THE

SECOND EDITION.

ABOUT ten years have elapsed since the first publication of the ensuing narrative: In that space I have had much opportunity of re-examining the Scriptures, and of making observations, both in the world and in the professing church; as well as of getting a further measure of self knowledge. But I bless God, that upon a revisal of **THE FORCE OF TRUTH**, in order to a second edition, I see no cause to retract a single sentence, or to propose any matter differently than before. If any one should bestow the pains to compare this with the former edition, he will indeed find several *verbal* alterations, in which brevity, perspicuity, and precision alone have been consulted: but he will not meet with a single variation, which in any measure changes the meaning of the passage. Had I materially altered my sentiments, I would either have refused to concur in publishing a second edition, or have fairly avowed that alteration: but, on the contrary, I deem it incumbent upon me to declare, that I am more than ever established in the belief of all those doctrines that I before proposed, as the leading truths of Christianity.

THOMAS SCOTT.

London, Chapel-street, March 31, 1789.

THE
FORCE OF TRUTH.

PART I.

Giving an account of the state of the AUTHOR'S mind and conscience, previous to, and at the commencement of that change, whereof he purposes to give the HISTORY.

NOTWITHSTANDING that I was not educated in what is commonly considered as ignorance of God and religion; yet, until the sixteenth year of my age, I do not remember that I ever was under any serious conviction of my being a sinner, in danger of wrath, or in need of mercy; nor did I ever, during this part of my life, that I recollect, offer one hearty prayer to God in secret. Being alienated from God, through the ignorance that was in me, I lived without him in the world; and as utterly neglected to pay him any voluntary service, as if I had been an atheist in principle.

But about my sixteenth year I began to see that I was a sinner; a leper in every part, "there being no health in me;" out of many external indications of inward depravity, conscience discovered, and reproached me with one; and I was, for the first time, disquieted with apprehensions of the wrath of an offended God. My attendance at the Lord's table being expected about the same time, (though I was very ignorant of the meaning and end of that sacred ordinance,) this circumstance, united with the accusations of my conscience, brought an awe upon my spirits, and interrupted my before undisturbed course of sin.

Being, however, an utter stranger to the depravity and helplessness of fallen nature, I had no doubt but I could amend my life whenever I pleased. Previous, therefore, to communicating, I set about an unwilling reformation; and procuring a form of prayer, I attempted to pay my secret addresses to the Majesty of Heaven. In this manner having silenced my conscience, I partook of the ordinance, held my resolutions, and con-

tinued my devotions, such as they were, for a little space: but they were a weariness and a task to me; and temptations soon returning, I relapsed; my prayer book was thrown aside, and no more thought of, till my conscience was again alarmed by the next warning given for the celebration of the Lord's supper. Then the same ground was gone over again, and with the same issue. My goodness was like the morning dew, that passeth away; and loving sin, and disrelishing religious duties as much as ever. I returned, as the sow that is washed, to her wallowing in the mire.

With little variation, this was my course of life for nine years: but in that time I had such experience of my own weakness, and the superior force of temptation, that I secretly concluded reformation in my case to be impracticable. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" I was experimentally convinced that I was equally unable, with the feeble barrier of resolutions and endeavours, to stem the torrent of my impetuous inclinations, when

swelled by welcome, suitable, and powerful temptations ; and being ignorant that God had reserved this to himself as his own work, and had engaged to do it for the poor sinner, who, feeling his own insufficiency, is heartily desirous to have it done by him ; I stifled my convictions as well as I could, and put off my repentance to a more convenient season.

But being of a reflecting turn, and much alone, my mind was almost constantly employed. Aware of the uncertainty of life, I was disquieted with continual apprehensions, that this more convenient season would never arrive ; especially, as through an unconfirmed state of health, I had many warnings, and near prospects of death and eternity. For a long time I entertained no doubt, but that impenitent sinners would be miserable for ever in hell ; and at some seasons such amazing reflections upon this awful subject forced themselves into my mind, that I was overpowered with them, and my fears became intolerable. At such times my extempore cries for mercy were so wrest-

ling and persevering, that I was scarcely able to give over; though at other times I lived without prayer of any sort; yet, in my darkest hours, though my conscience was awakened to discover more and more sinfulness in my whole behaviour, there remained a hope that I should one day repent, and turn unto God. If this hope was from myself, it was a horrid presumption, but the event makes me willing to acknowledge a persuasion that it was from the Lord; for had it not been for this hope, I should probably have given way to temptations, which frequently assaulted me, of putting an end to my own life, in proud discontent with my lot in this world, and mad despair about another.

A hymn of Dr. Watts', in his admirable little book for children, entitled, "The All-Seeing God," at this time fell in my way: I was much affected with it, and having committed it to memory, was frequently repeating it, and was thereby continually reminded of my guilt and danger. Parents may from this inconsiderable circumstance be reminded, that it is of great importance to

store their children's minds with such useful matter, instead of suffering them to be furnished with such corrupting trash, as is commonly taught them. They know not what use God may make of these early rudiments of instruction in future life. At this period, though I was the slave of sin, yet as my conscience was not pacified, nor my principles greatly corrupted, there seemed some hope concerning me; but at length Satan took a very effectual method of silencing my convictions, that I might sleep securely in my sins: and justly was I given over to a strong delusion to believe a lie, when I held the truth that I did know in unrighteousness. A Socinian comment on the Scriptures came in my way, and I greedily drank the poison because it quieted my fears, and flattered my abominable pride. The whole system coincided exactly with my inclinations, and the state of my mind, and approved itself to me. In reading this exposition, sin seemed to lose its native ugliness, and appear a very small and tolerable evil; man's imperfect obedience seemed to shine with an almost

divine excellency; and God appeared so entirely and necessarily merciful, that he could not make any of his creatures miserable, without contradicting his natural propensity. These things influenced my mind so powerfully, that I concluded that notwithstanding a few little blemishes, I was, upon the whole, a very worthy creature. Then farther, the mysteries of the Gospel being explained away, or brought down to the level of man's comprehension by such proud and corrupt, though specious reasonings; by acceding to these sentiments, I was in my own opinion, in point of understanding and discernment, exalted to a superiority above the general run of mankind; and amused myself with looking down with contempt upon such as were weak enough to believe the orthodox doctrines. Thus I generally soothed my conscience: and if at any time I was uneasy at the apprehension that I did not thoroughly deserve, and was not entirely fit for heaven, the same book afforded me a soft pillow, on which to lull myself to sleep: it argued, and I thought

it proved, that there were no *eternal* torments; and insinuated, that there were no torments except for notorious sinners; and that such as should fall just short of heaven, would sink into their original nothing. With this welcome scheme I silenced all my fears, and told my accusing conscience, that if I fell short of heaven, I should be annihilated, and never be sensible of my loss.

By experience, I am well acquainted with Satan's intention, in employing so many of his servant's to invent those pestilent errors, whether in speculation or practice, that have in all ages corrupted and enervated the pure and powerful doctrine of the Gospel; for they lead to forgetfulness of God, and security in sin, and are deadly poison to every soul that imbibes them, unless a miracle of grace prevent. Such, on one hand, are all the superstitious doctrines of popery, purgatory, penances, absolutions, indulgences, merits of good works, and the acceptableness of will-worship, and uncommanded observances; what are these but engines of the devil, to keep men quiet in their sins?

Man, resolved to follow the dictates of his depraved inclination, and not to bound his pursuits and enjoyments within the limits of God's holy law, catches at any thing to soften the horrible thought of eternal misery. This is the awakening reflection, God's sword in the conscience, which 'tis Satan's business, by all his diabolical artifice, to endeavour to sheath, blunt, or turn aside; knowing, that whilst the alarming apprehension is present to the soul, he can never maintain his possession of it in peace. By such inventions, therefore, as these, he takes care to furnish the sinner with that which he seeks for, and to enable him to walk according to the course of this wicked world, and the desires of depraved nature, without being disturbed by such dreadful thoughts. The same, on the other hand, is the tendency of all those speculations of reasoning men, which set God's attributes at variance with each other; which represent the Supreme Governor so *weakly* merciful, as neither to regard the demands of his justice, the glory of his holiness, the veracity of his

word, nor the peaceable order and subordination of the universe ; which explain away all the mysteries of the Gospel ; and represent sin, that fruitful root of evil, that enemy of God, that favourite of Satan, as a very little thing, scarce noticed by the Almighty ; and which, contrary to Scripture, and universal experience and observation, would persuade us, that man is not a depraved creature.

These latter sentiments I acceded to, and maintained as long as I could ; and I did it, most assuredly, because they soothed my conscience, freed me from the pressing fears of damnation, and enabled me to think favourably of myself. For these reasons alone I loved, and chose this ground ; I fixed myself upon it, and there I fortified myself with all the arguments and reasonings I could meet with. These things I wished to believe ; and I had my wish ; for at length I did most confidently believe them. Being taken captive in this snare by Satan, I should here have perished, with a lie in my right

hand, had not that Lord, whom I dishonoured, snatched me as a brand from the burning.

In this state of mind I attempted to obtain admission into holy orders. Wrapt up in the proud notion of the dignity of human nature, I had lost sight of the evil of sin, and thought little of my own sinfulness; I was filled with a self-important opinion of my own worth, and the depth of my understanding; I had adopted a system of religion, accommodated to that foolish pride, having almost wholly discarded mysteries from my creed, and regarding with sovereign contempt those who believed them. As far as I understood those controversies, I was nearly a Socinian, and a Pelagian, and wholly an Arminian; yet, to my shame be it spoken, I sought to obtain admission into the ministry, in a church whose doctrines are diametrically opposed to all the three; without once concerning myself about those barriers, which the wisdom of our forefathers have placed about her, purposely to prevent the intrusion of such dangerous heretics as I then was.

Whilst I was preparing for this solemn office, I lived, as before in known sin, and in utter neglect of prayer : my whole preparation consisting of nothing else but an attention to those studies which were more immediately required, for my reputably passing through the previous examination.

And thus after some difficulty, with a heart full of pride, and all manner of wickedness, my life being polluted with many unrepented, unforsaken sins, without one cry for mercy, one prayer for direction, or assistance in, or a blessing upon what I was about to do ; after having concealed my real sentiments under the mask of general expressions ; after having subscribed articles directly contrary to my then belief ; and after having blasphemously declared in the presence of God and of the congregation, in the most solemn manner, sealing it with the Lord's supper, that I judged myself to be inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take this office upon me, (not knowing or believing that there was a Holy Ghost,) on September the 20th. 1772, I was ordained a deacon. For

ever blessed be the God of all long suffering and mercy, who had patience with such a rebel and blasphemer, such an irreverent trifler with his majesty, and such a presumptuous intruder into his sacred ministry! I never think of this daring wickedness without being filled with amazement that I am out of hell; without adoring that gracious God, who permitteth such an atrocious sinner to live, yea, to serve him, and with acceptance, I trust, to call him father, and as his minister to speak in his name. "Praise the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name; Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all my sins, and healeth all thy infirmities; who saveth thy life from destruction, and crowneth me with mercy and loving kindness." May I love much, and very humbly and devotedly serve that God who has multiplied his mercies, in abundantly pardoning my complicated provocations!

My views in entering into the ministry, as far as I can ascertain them, were these three: 1. A desire of a less laborious, and

more comfortable way of procuring a livelihood, than otherwise I had a prospect of.— 2. The expectation of more leisure to employ in reading, of which I was inordinately fond.—And, 3. A proud conceit of my abilities, and a vain glorious imagination, that I should some time distinguish and advance myself in the literary world. These were my ruling motives in taking this bold step: motives as opposite to those which should have influence therein, as pride is opposite to humility; ambition to contentedness in a low estate, and a willingness to be the least of all, and the servant of all; as opposite as love of self, of the world, of filthy lucre, and slothful ease, is opposite to the love of God, and of souls, and of the laborious work of the ministry. Mine, therefore, be the shame of this heinous sin; and to God be all the glory of overruling it for good, I trust both to unworthy me, and to his dear people, the church, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

My subsequent conduct was suitable to these motives. No sooner was I fixed in a

curacy, than with close application I sat down to the study of the learned languages, and such other matters as I considered most needful, in order to lay the foundation of my future advancement. And would I were now as diligent in serving God, as I was then in serving self, and ambition! I spared no pains; I shunned, as much as I well could, all acquaintance and diversions; and I retrenched upon my usual hours of sleep, that I might keep more closely to this business. As a minister, I attended just enough to the public duties of my station to support a decent character, which I deemed subservient to my main design: and from the same principle I aimed at morality in my outward deportment, and affected seriousness in my conversation. As to the rest, I still lived in the practice of what I knew to be sinful, and in the entire neglect of all secret religion: If ever inclined to pray, conscious guilt stopped my mouth, and I seldom went farther than "God be merciful unto me." However, perceiving that my Socinian principles were very disreputable; and being

conscious from my own experience, that they were unfavourable to morality, I concealed them, in a great measure, both for my credit's sake, and from a desire I entertained, subservient to my main design, of successfully inculcating the practice of the moral duties upon those to whom I preached. My studies, indeed, lay very little in divinity, but this little all opposed that part of my scheme which respected the punishment of the wicked in the other world; and therefore, (being now removed at a distance from those authors whence I had imbibed my sentiments, and from whose reasonings I had learned to defend them,) I began gradually to be shaken in my former confidence, and once more to be under some apprehensions of eternal misery. Being also stately employed, and with the appearance of solemnity, in the public worship of God, whilst I neglected and provoked him in secret; my conscience clamourously reproached me with base hypocrisy, and I began to conclude, that if eternal torments were reserved for any sinners, I certainly

should be one of the number. And now again I was filled with anxious fears and terrifying alarms ; especially, as I was continually meditating upon what might be the awful consequence, should I be called hence by sudden death. Even my close application to study could not sooth my conscience, nor quiet my fears : under the affected air of cheerfulness, I was truly miserable.

This was my state of mind when the change I am about to relate, began to take place. How it commenced, in what manner, and by what steps it proceeded, and how it was completed, will be the subject of the second part of this work. This first part I shall conclude by observing, that though I was staggered in my favourite sentiment before mentioned, and in my views of the person of Christ, was verging toward Arianism ; yet in my other opinions I was more confirmed than ever. What those opinions were, I have already in brief declared ; and they will occur again, and be more fully explained, as I proceed to relate the manner in which I was constrained to re-

nounce them, one after another, and to accede to those that were directly contrary thereto. Let it suffice to say, that I was brim full of proud self sufficiency, very positive, and very obstinate: and being situated in the neighbourhood of some of those whom the world calls methodists,* I joined in the prevailing sentiment, held them in sovereign contempt, spoke of them in derision, declaimed against them from the pulpit, as persons full of bigotry, enthusiasm, and spiritual pride; laid heavy things to their

* Methodists, as a stigma of reproach, was first applied to Mr. Wesley, Mr. Whitfield, and their followers; to those who, though professing an attachment to our established church, and disclaiming the name of Dissenters, were not conformists in point of parochial order, but had separate seasons, places, and assemblies for worship. The term has since been extended by many to all persons, whether clergy or laity, who preach or profess the doctrines of the reformation, as expressed in the articles and liturgy of our church. For this fault they must all submit to bear the reproachful name alike, especially the ministers; nor will the most regular and peaceable compliance with the injunctions of the rubric, exempt them from it, if they avow the authorized, but now exploded doctrines to which they have subscribed. My acquaintance hitherto has been only with Methodists of this latter description: and I have them only in view, whenever I use the term.

charge, and endeavoured to prove the doctrines which I supposed them to hold, (for I had never read their books,) to be dishonourable to God, and destructive to morality. And though in some companies I chose to conceal some part of my sentiments, and in all affected to speak as a friend to universal toleration; yet scarce any person could be more proudly and violently prejudiced against both their persons and principles.

PART II.

Containing a HISTORY of this change: the manner in which, and the means by which it was at length effected.

IN January, 1774, two of my parishioners, a man and his wife, lay at the point of death. I had heard of it, but according to my general custom, not being sent for, I took no notice of it: but one evening, the woman being already dead, and the man dying, I heard that my neighbour, Mr. —, had been several times to visit them. Immediately my conscience reproached me with be-

ing shamefully negligent, in setting at home within a few doors of dying persons, my general hearers, and never going to visit them. Directly it occurred to me, that whatever contempt I might have for Mr. ——'s doctrines, I must acknowledge his practice to be more consistent with the ministerial character than mine. He must have more zeal and love for souls than I had, or he would not have walked so far to visit and supply my lack of care to those who, as far as I was concerned, might have been left to perish in their sins.

This reflection, affected me so much, that earnestly, yea, with tears and without delay, I besought the Lord to forgive my past neglect; and resolved thenceforth to be more attentive to this duty: which resolution, though at first formed in ignorant dependence on my own strength, I have by divine grace been enabled hitherto to keep. Immediately I went to visit the survivor; and the affecting sight of one person already dead, and another expiring in the same chamber, served more deeply to impress my

serious convictions; and from that time I have constantly visited the sick of my parishes, as far as I had opportunity; and have endeavoured, to the best of my knowledge, to perform that essential part of a parish minister's duty.

Some time after this, a friend recommended to my perusal the conclusion of Bishop Burnet's History of His Own Times, especially that part which respects the clergy. It had the intended effect: I was considerably instructed and impressed thereby; I was convinced, that my entrance into the ministry had been the result of very wrong motives, was preceded with a very unsuitable preparation, and accompanied with a very improper conduct: some uneasiness was also excited in my mind, concerning my neglect of the important duties of that high calling. And though I was too much the slave of sin, devoted to other studies, and in love with this present world, to relinquish my flattering pursuit of reputation and preferment, and change the course of my life, studies and employments: yet I experienced,

by intervals, desires, and purposes at some future period, of devoting myself wholly to the work of the ministry, in the manner to which he exhorts the clergy.

All these things increased the clamorous remonstrances of my conscience; and at this time I lived without any secret religion, because, without some reformation in my conduct as a man and a minister, I did not dare to pray. My convictions would no longer be silenced or appeased; and they became so intolerably troublesome, that I resolved to make one more effort toward amendment. In good earnest, and not totally without seeking the assistance of the Lord by prayer, I attempted to break the chains wherewith Satan had hitherto held my soul in bondage. It pleased the Lord, that I at this time should obtain some advantages; part of my grosser defilements I was enabled to relinquish, and to enter upon a form of devotion. Formal enough indeed it was; for I neither knew that Mediator, through whom, nor that Spirit, by whom, prayers are offered with acceptance to God;

and yet though utterly in the dark, as to the true and living way to the throne of grace, I am persuaded, there were even then seasons, when I was enabled to rise above a mere form, and to offer petitions so far *spiritual*, as to be accepted and answered.

I was now somewhat reformed in my outward conduct; but the renewing in the spirit of my mind, if begun, was scarce discernible. As my life was, in my own judgment, less wicked, my heart grew more proud;—the idol self was the object of my adoration and obeisance: my worldly advancement was more eagerly sought than ever; some flattering prospects seemed to open, and I resolved to improve my advantage to the uttermost. At the same time every thing tended to increase my good opinion of myself; I was treated, with kindness and friendship by persons, from whom I had no reason to expect it; my preaching was well received; my acquaintance seemed to be courted; my foolish heart verily believed, that all this, and much more, was due to my superior worth; whilst conscience, which before, by

its mortifying accusations was useful to preserve some sense of unworthiness in my mind, was now silenced, or seemed to authorize that pride, which before it checked. And because I had the disadvantage of conversing in general with such persons, as either favoured my sentiments; or out of good manners, or because they saw it would be in vain, would not contradict me; I concluded that my scheme of doctrine was the exact standard of truth, and that by my superior abilities I was capable of confuting or convincing all, who were otherwise minded. In this view of the matter, I felt an eager desire of entering into a religious controversy, especially with a Calvinist.

It was at this time that my correspondence with Mr. ——— commenced. At the visitation, May, 1775, we exchanged a few words in an argumentative way, in the room among the clergy, which I believe drew many eyes upon us. At that time he prudently declined the discourse, but a day or two after sent me a short note, and a little book for my perusal. This was the very thing I wanted. and I

gladly embraced the opportunity, which, according to my wishes, seemed now to offer. This I did, God knoweth, with no inconsiderable expectations, that my arguments would prove irresistibly convincing, and that I should have the honour of rescuing a well-meaning person from his enthusiastical delusions.

Indeed at this time I had conceived a very favourable opinion of, and sort of respect for him; because I was acquainted with the character he sustained even among some persons, who expressed a disapprobation of his doctrines; they were forward to commend him as a benevolent, disinterested and inoffensive person, and a laborious minister. On the other hand, I looked upon his religious sentiments as rank fanaticism, and entertained a very contemptible opinion of his abilities, natural and acquired. Once I had the curiosity to hear him preach, and not understanding his sermon, I made a very great jest of it, where I could do it without giving offence. I had also read one of his publications; but for the same

reason, I thought the greater part of it to be whimsical, paradoxical and unintelligible.

Concealing, therefore, the true motives of my conduct under the offer of friendship, and a professed desire to know the truth, (which, amidst all my self sufficiency and prejudice, I trust the Lord had even then given me,) with the greatest affectation of candour, and a mind open to conviction, I wrote him a long letter; purposing to draw from him such an avowal, and explanation of his sentiments, as would introduce a controversial discussion of our religious differences.

The event by no means answered my expectation; he returned me a very friendly and long answer to my letter; in which he carefully avoided the mention of those doctrines, which he knew would offend me: he declared, that he believed me to be one that feared God, and that was under the teaching of his Holy Spirit; that he gladly accepted my offers of friendship, and was nowise inclined to dictate to me; but leaving me to the guidance of the Lord, would be glad, as

occasion served, from time to time, to bear testimony to the truths of the Gospel, and to communicate his sentiments unto me, on any subject, with all the confidence of friendship.

In this manner our correspondence began, and was continued, in the interchange of nine or ten letters, until December the same year. Throughout I held my purpose, and he his. I made use of every endeavour to draw him into controversy, and filled my letters with definitions, inquiries, arguments, objections, and consequences, and required explicit answers; he, on the other hand, shunned every thing controversial, as much as possible, and filled his letters with the most useful, and least offensive instructions; except that now and then he dropped hints concerning the necessity, and the true nature and efficacy of faith, and the manner in which it was to be sought, and obtained; and concerning some other matters, suited, as he judged to help me forward in my inquiry after truth. But they much offended my prejudices, afforded me matter of disputation, and at that time were of little use to me.

This, however, is certain, that through the whole of the correspondence, I disputed with every argument I could devise against almost every thing he advanced; was very much nettled at many things he asserted; I read great part of his letters, and some books he sent me, with much indifference and contempt; construed his declining controversy into an acknowledgment of weakness; and triumphed in many companies as having confuted his arguments. And at the last, when I could not obtain my end, at my instance the correspondence was dropped.

His letters and my answers are now by me; and on a careful perusal of them, compared with all that I can recollect concerning this matter, I give this as a faithful account of this correspondence, though different from what has been represented. His letters will, I hope, shortly be made public, being such as promise greater usefulness to others, than, through my proud, contentious spirit, I experienced from them. Mine deserve only to be forgotten, except, as they are useful to me to remind me what I

was, and to mortify my pride; as they illustrate my friend's patience and candour, in so long bearing with my ignorance and arrogance; and notwithstanding my unteachable, quarrelsome temper, continuing his benevolent labours for my good; and especially, as they remind me of the goodness of God, who, though he abominates and resists the proud, yet knows how to bring down the stout heart, not only by the iron rod of his wrath, but by the golden sceptre of his grace.

In this manner our correspondence and acquaintance, for the present, were almost wholly broken off; for a long time we seldom met, and then only interchanged a few words on general topics of conversation. Yet all along he perseveringly told me, to my no small offence, that I should accede one day to his religious principles; that he had stood on my ground, and that I should stand on his; and he constantly informed his friends, that, though slowly, I was surely feeling my way to the knowledge of the truth. So clearly could he discern the dawnings of grace in my soul, amidst all

the darkness of depraved nature, and obstinate rebellion to the will of God.

This expectation was principally grounded on my conduct in the following circumstances: Immediately after the commencement of our correspondence, namely, in May, 1775, whilst my thoughts were much engrossed by some hopes of preferment; one Sunday, during the time of divine service, when the psalm was named, I opened the prayer book to turn to it; but, (accidentally shall I say, or providentially?) I opened upon the articles of religion: and the eighth, respecting the authority and warrant of the Athanasian creed, immediately engaged my attention. My disbelief of the doctrine of a trinity, co-equal persons in the unity of the Godhead, and my pretensions to candour, both combined to excite my hatred to this creed; for which reasons, I had been accustomed to speak of it with contempt, and to neglect reading it officially. No sooner, therefore, did I read the words, "That it was to be thoroughly received and believed; for that it might be

proved by most certain warrants of holy scripture;" than my mind was greatly impressed and affected. The matter of subscription immediately occurred, and from that moment I conceived such scruples about it, that until my view of the whole system of gospel doctrine was entirely changed, they remained insuperable.

'Tis wisely said by the son of Sirach. "My son, if thou come to serve the Lord, prepare thy soul for temptation." I had twice before subscribed these articles, with the same religious sentiments I now entertained. But conscience being asleep, and the service of the Lord no part of my concern, I considered subscription as a matter of course, a necessary form, and very little troubled myself about it. But now, though full of pride, of ambition, and of the love of the world, my heart was sincerely toward the Lord, and I dared not to venture on a known sin deliberately, for the sake of temporal interest. Subscription to articles which I did not believe, paid as a price for church preferment, I looked upon as an im-

pious lie, a heinous guilt, that could never truly be repented of, without throwing back the wages of iniquity. The more I pondered it, the more strenuously my conscience protested against it. At length, after a violent conflict betwixt interest and conscience, I made known my scruples, and my determination not to subscribe : thus my views of preferment were deliberately given up, and with an increasing family I was left, as far as mere human prudence could discern, with little other prospect than that of poverty and distress. My scruple was, as I now see, a mistaken one ; much self-sufficiency, undue warmth of temper, and obstinacy, were betrayed in the management of this affair, for which I ought to be humbled. But my adherence to the dictates of my conscience, and holding fast my integrity in such trying circumstances, I never did, nor I trust ever shall, repent of.

No sooner was my determination known, than I was much blamed by many of my friends. They all, I am sensible, did it out of kindness to me, but they used arguments

of different kinds. And though I was confirmed in my resolution by the reasonings used to induce me to alter it; yet were they at length made instrumental in bringing me to this important determination: "not to believe what any man said, as to take it upon his authority, but to search the word of God with this single intention, to discover whether the articles of the church of England in general, and this creed in particular, were, or were not agreeable thereto." I had studied the Scriptures in some measure before for the sake of becoming acquainted with the original languages, and in order to fetch thence detached texts to support my own system; and I had a tolerable acquaintance with the historical and perceptive parts of them: but I had not searched this precious repository of divine knowledge, with the express design of discovering the truth in controverted matters of doctrine. I had very rarely been troubled with suspicions that I was, or might be mistaken; and now rather thought of becoming better qualified upon scriptural grounds to defend my deter-

mination, than of being led to any change of sentiments.

However, I set about the inquiry ; and the first passage, as I remember, which made me suspect that I might be wrong, was James i. 5. “ If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.” On considering these words with some attention, I became conscious, that though I had thought myself wise, yet certainly I had obtained none of my wisdom in this manner ; for I had never offered one prayer to that effect in my life : and I also perceived this text contained a suitable direction, and an encouraging promise in my present inquiry : and from this time, in my poor manner, I began to ask God to give me this promised wisdom.

Shortly after I meditated upon, and preached from John vii. 16, 17. “ My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me ; if any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.” I was surprised.

that I had not before attended to such remarkable words. I discovered that they contained a direction and a promise calculated to serve as a clue in extricating the sincere inquirer after truth from that labyrinth of controversy wherein, at his first setting out, he is like to be bewildered. And though my mind was too much leavened with the pride of reasoning, as yet to reap that benefit from this precious text, which it is capable of affording to the soul that is humbly willing to be taught of God; yet, being conscious that I was willing to risk every thing in doing what I thought his will; I was encouraged with the assurance, that if I were under a mistake, I should sometime discover it.

I was farther led to suspect that I might possibly be wrong, because I had not hitherto sought the truth in the proper manner, by attending to Proverbs iii. 5, 6. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding: in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." Evidently I had not hitherto

trusted in the Lord with all my heart, nor acknowledged him in all my ways, nor depended on his directions in all my paths ; but in my religious speculations, had leaned wholly to my own understanding.

But though these passages and some others, made for the present a great impression upon me, and influenced me to make it a part of my daily prayers, that I might be directed to a right understanding of the word of God ; yet my pride and addictedness to controversy had, as some desperate disease, infected my whole soul, and I was not to be cured all at once. I was far from being like a little child, sitting humbly and simply at the Lord's feet, to learn from him the very first rudiments of divine knowledge. I had yet no abiding suspicion, that all which I had heretofore accounted wisdom, was foolishness, and must be unlearned, and counted loss, before I could attain to the excellency of the true knowledge of Jesus Christ : for though I began to allow it probable, that in some few matters I might have been in an error. yet in the main I still

was confident my scheme of doctrine was true. When I was pressed with objections and arguments against any of my sentiments, and when doubts began to arise in my mind, to put off the uneasiness thereby occasioned, my constant practice was to recollect, as far as I could, all the reasonings and interpretations of scripture, on the other side of the question; and when this failed of affording satisfaction, I had recourse to controversial writings. This drew me aside from the pure word of God, occasioned by being more remiss and formal in prayer, and furnished me with defensive armour against my convictions, with fuel for my passions, and food for my pride and self sufficiency.

At this time, "Locke's Reasonableness of Christianity," together with his "vindications of it," became my favourite piece of divinity. I studied this, and many other of Mr. Locke's works, with great attention, and a sort of bigoted fondness; taking him almost implicitly for my master, adopting almost all his conclusions, borrowing many of his arguments, and being scarce able to

endure such as would not agree with me in my partiality for him. This was of great disservice to me,* as, instead of getting forward in my inquiry after truth, I was thereby furnished with more ingenious and specious arguments, wherewith to defend my mistakes.

But I read one book at this time, because mentioned with approbation by Mr. Locke, that was of singular use, namely, "Bishop Burnet's Pastoral Care." Therein I found but little that offended my prejudices, and many things, which came home to my conscience, respecting my ministerial obligations. A few short extracts I shall lay before the reader, that were most affecting to my own mind. Page 111, having men-

* After having spoken so freely of Mr. Locke's divinity, which I once so highly esteemed, it seems a piece of justice to acknowledge the very great obligations, which the whole religious world is under to this great man, for his Treatise on Toleration, and his answers to those who wrote against it. The grounds of religious liberty, and the reasons why every one should be left to his own choice, to worship God according to his conscience, were perhaps never generally understood since the foundation of the world, until by these publications Mr. Locke unanswerably made them manifest.

tioned the question proposed to those who are about to be ordained deacons: "Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you this office, to serve God, for promoting his glory, and the edifying of his people?" He adds, "Certainly the answer that is made to this, ought to be well considered; for if any one says, 'I trust so,' that yet knows nothing of any such motion, and can give no account of it, he lies to the Holy Ghost, and makes his first approach to the altar with a lie in his mouth, and that not to men, but to God." And again, p. 112, "Shall not he (God) reckon with those, who dare to run without his mission, pretending that they trust they have it, when perhaps they understand not the importance of it; nay, and perhaps some laugh at it, as an enthusiastical question, who yet will go through with the office! They come to Christ for the loaves; they hope to live by the altar and the Gospel, how little soever they serve at the one, or preach at the other; therefore they will

say any thing that is necessary for qualifying them to this, whether true or false.

Again, page 122, having interwoven a great part of the excellent office of the ordination of priests, into his argument concerning the importance of the work and weight of the ministry; he adds, "Upon the whole matter, either this is all a piece of gross and impudent pageantry, dressed up in grave and lofty expressions, to strike upon the weaker part of mankind, and to furnish the rest with matter to their profane and impious scorn; or it must be confessed that priests come under the most formal and express engagements to constant and diligent labour, that can be possibly contrived, or set forth in words." He concludes this subject of the ordination offices, with exhorting all candidates for orders, to read them frequently and attentively, during their season of preparation; that they may be aware beforehand of the obligations they are about so solemnly to enter into; and to peruse them at least four times in a year, ever after their ordination, to keep in their

minds a continual remembrance of their important engagements. How necessary this counsel is, every minister, or candidate for the ministry, must determine for himself: for my part, I had never read the office over once, when I was ordained, and was, in a great measure, a stranger to the obligations I was about to enter into, until the very season; nor did I ever afterward attend thereto, till this advice put me upon it. The shameful negligence, and extreme absurdity of my conduct in this respect, are too glaring not to be understood, and applied, by every one, who hath been guilty of a similar omission. I would, therefore, only just mention, that hearty, earnest prayer to God, for his guidance, help, and blessing, may be suitably recommended as a proper attendant on such perusal of our obligations.

Again, p. 147, he thus speaks of a wicked clergyman: "His whole life has been a course of hypocrisy in the strictest sense of the word, which is the acting of a part, and the counterfeiting another person. His sins have in them all possible aggravations; they

are against knowledge and against vows, and contrary to his character: they carry in them a deliberate contempt of all the truths and obligations of religion; and if he perishes, he doth not perish alone, but carries a shoal down with him, either of those who have perished in ignorance through his neglect, or of those who have been hardened in their sins through his ill example." Again, p. 138, having copiously discoursed of the studies befitting ministers, especially the study of the Scriptures, he adds, "But to give all these their full effect, a priest that is much in his study, ought to employ a great part of his time in secret and fervent prayer, for the direction and blessing of God in his labours, for the constant assistance of his Holy Spirit, and for a lively sense of divine matters; that so he may feel the impressions of them grow deep and strong upon his thoughts; this, and this only, will make him go on with his work without wearying, and be always rejoicing in it."

But the chief benefit which accrued to me from the perusal of this book, was this: I

was excited by it to an attentive consideration of those scriptures which speak of the obligations and duties of a minister, and which hitherto I had not observed, or very loosely attended to. In particular, it is yet fresh in my memory, that I was much affected with considering the charge of precious souls committed to me, and the awful account one day to be rendered of them; as this subject occurred to me in meditating on Ezekiel xxxiii. 7, 9. “So thou, O son of man! I have set thee as a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way, to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity, but thou hast delivered thy soul.” I was fully convinced with Bishop Burnet, that every minister is as much concerned in this

solemn warning, as the prophet himself. Acts **xx.** 17—35, was another portion of Scripture, which by means of this book was brought home to my conscience; especially ver. 26, 27, 28, which serve as an illustration of the foregoing Scripture: “Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”

In short, at his instance I was put upon the attentive and repeated perusal of the Epistles to Timothy and Titus, as containing the sum of a minister’s duty in all ages. I searched out, and carefully considered every text I could find in the whole Scripture, which referred to this argument. I was greatly impressed by 1 Cor. ix. 16. “For necessity is laid upon me: yea, wo is me, if I preach not the Gospel.” Nor was I less struck with Colossians. iv. 17. “Say to

Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received of the Lord, that thou fulfil it." This was brought to my conscience with power, as if the Apostle had in person spoken these words to me. But especially I was both instructed and encouraged by meditating upon 1 Peter v. 2—4. "Feed the flock of God that is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind, neither as being lords over God's heritage, but as examples to the flock: and when the chief shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory, that fadeth not away."

I hope the reader will excuse my prolixity in speaking on this subject; because in itself it is very important; and though I got no new views of gospel truth from this book, yet I received such a deep conviction of the difficulty and importance of that work, in which I had thoughtlessly engaged, and of the imminent danger my soul was exposed to, if I neglected to devote myself wholly thereto; that therein was laid the founda-

tion of all my subsequent conduct, and change of sentiment. Indeed, I was guilty of very criminal procrastination, after I had been thus convinced; and being engaged more than I ought in other matters, I postponed and neglected, for a time, complying with the dictates of my conscience. But I never lost sight of the instruction I had received, nor ever had any comfortable reflection, until having broken off all other engagements, I had given myself up to those studies and duties which pertain unto the work of the ministry. And I have cause to bless God, that this book ever came in my way.

Still, however, my self confidence was very little abated, and my advance in the knowledge of the truth very small. I next read Tillotson's sermons, and Jortin's works; and my time being otherwise engaged, I gave in to the indolent custom of transcribing their discourses with some alterations, to preach to my people. This precluded free meditation on the word of God, and led me for a time to take up my

opinions upon trust. My preaching was in general that smooth palatable mixture of law and gospel, which corrupts both ; which, flattering the pride and prejudice, and soothing the conscience, pleases the careless sinner, and self-righteous formalist ; but does real good to none.

About this time I foolishly engaged in a course of diversion and visiting, more than I had done since my ordination : this unfitted me for secret prayer and close meditation, and rendered the Scriptures, and other religious studies, insipid and irksome to me, (a never-failing consequence of this vain compliance with the world.) For a time, therefore, my ardour was damped, my anxiety banished, and my inquiries retarded. However, I was not permitted entirely to drop my religious pursuits ; generally I made it a rule to read something in the Scriptures every day, and had a task of daily devotion ; but I was very formal and lifeless in both of them.

Yet not long after I was engaged in earnest meditation on our Lord's discourse with

Nicodemus, (John iii.) I felt an anxious desire to understand this interesting portion of Scripture; especially to know what it was to be born again, or from above, and of the Spirit; which in five verses our Saviour hath three times declared absolutely necessary to salvation. It was absurd to suppose that such strong expressions implied no more than baptism with water. Tillotson's controversial sermons on this subject, afforded me no satisfaction. Some great and total change I supposed to be intended, not only in the behaviour but also in the heart. But having not yet clearly experienced that change, I could not understand wherein it consisted. However, having offered some poor prayers for divine teaching, I undertook to preach upon it; but I talked very darkly, employed a considerable part of my time in declaiming against visionaries and enthusiasts, and reaped very little benefit from it. Yet I was so well satisfied with my performance, that in the course of my correspondence with Mr. —, I sent him these sermons for his perusal: who, in re-

turn, sent me some of his own upon the same subject. But though sincerely desirous to understand our Lord's meaning in this important matter, I was too proud to be taught by *him*: I cast my eye, therefore, carelessly, over some of them, and returned the manuscript without attending to any thing contained in it.

Nothing material occurred after this, until the next spring, 1776; when I was induced by what I had learned from Bishop Burnet, to establish a lecture once a week in one of my parishes, for expounding the Scriptures. This brought many passages, which I had not observed, under attentive consideration, and afforded my reflecting mind abundance of employment, in attempting to reconcile them with each other, and with my scheme of doctrine.

Little progress, however, had been made, when, in May, 1776, I heard a dignified clergyman, in a visitation sermon, recommend Mr. Soame Jennyn's "Treatise on the internal evidences of Christianity." In consequence of this recommendation, I perused

it, and not unprofitably. The truth and importance of the gospel revelation appeared with convincing evidence to my understanding, and came with efficacy to my heart, by reading this book : thence I received more distinct and heart-affecting views of the design of God in this revelation of himself ; and I was led to much serious reflection, and earnest prayer, to be led to, or established in the truth, concerning the nature and reality of the atonement by the death of Christ ; for hitherto I was a Socinian, or very little better in this respect.

But to counterbalance this advantage, Dr. Clarke's Scripture doctrine of the Trinity, and the controversy which ensued upon its publication, became a favourite part of my study. The Arian scheme seems so inconsistent with reason, that when reflecting men, in order to avoid those mysterious, and, as they imagine, unreasonable conclusions, which, according to the true meaning of words, the Scriptures contain, have been induced to become Arians ; it is wonderful they do not, for the same cause, embrace

the Socinian system. This is the natural progress of unhumbled reason; from Arianism to Socinianism; from Socinianism to Deism; and then to Atheism. Many and awful have been the examples of reasoning and learned men, who, under the name of philosophers, arrogating to themselves the prerogative of superior discernment, have manifested the propriety with which they claimed this pre-eminence, by treading this downhill road, almost, if not quite, to the very bottom.

But when a man has fallen so low as Socinianism, not merely for want of information, or by blindly and implicitly adopting the sentiments of other men, but by leaning on his own understanding, and preferring the conclusions of his own reason, to the infallible dictates of the Holy Ghost; it is not common for him to return gradually by the retrograde path, first to Arianism, and then to the received doctrine of the Trinity. Yet this was my case. Dr. Clarke appeared to me so undeniably to establish his argument, by express Scripture evidences,

and so plausibly defended his system on both hands, and backed his cause with so many seeming authorities, that on one side I found myself unable any longer to maintain my Socinian principles, but was constrained to relinquish them as untenable; and on the other, I was not aware of the flaw in his reasoning, and the unavoidable consequence of his middle doctrine; namely, that the Son, and the Holy Ghost, however exalted, or dignified with names and titles, must either be *mere creatures*, or that otherwise there must be three Gods. Not perceiving this, and my newly acquired reverence for Scripture, and my old self-confidence and fondness for reasoning, being, by this conciliating scheme, both humoured, I cordially acceded to his sentiments, and for a long time could not endure any other doctrine.

Nothing farther, of any consequence, occurred till about December, 1776, when Mr. Law's "Serious Call," a book I had hitherto treated with contempt, was carelessly taken up by me. But I had no sooner

opened it, than I was struck with the originality of the work, and the spirit and force of argument wherewith it is written. This I speak merely as to his management of the subject he treats of; for there are many things in it, that I am far from approving; and to be sure it contains as little gospel, as any book of religion I am acquainted with. But though a very uncomfortable book for a person who is duly brought under a serious concern for his soul; yet it is very useful to prepare the way, to show the need which we have of a Saviour, and to enforce the practice of that holy diligence in the use of means, which the important interests of eternity reasonably demand. This was its use to me. By the perusal of it, I was convinced that I was guilty of great remissness and negligence; that the duties of secret devotion called for far more of my time and attention than had been hitherto allotted to them; that if I hope to save my own soul, and the souls of those that heard me, I must in this respect greatly alter my conduct, and increase my diligence in seeking and serv-

ing the Lord. From that time I began to study in what manner my devotions might be rendered more fervent and pertinent; I transcribed and laid up in my memory, scripture petitions; I employed some time in reading manuals of devotion, made attempts to compose prayers myself, and became more frequent and earnest, and I trust more spiritual than heretofore, in my secret addresses to the Majesty of Heaven.

About this time, after many delays, I complied with the admonitions of my conscience, and disengaged myself from all my other employments, with a solemn resolution of leaving all my temporal concerns in the hands of the Lord, and of entirely devoting myself to the work of the ministry. Being thus become master of all my time, I dropped every other study, and turned the whole current of my reflections, inquiries, and reading into another channel, and thenceforth scarce opened a book, which treated of any thing beside religion.

The first step I took after this disengagement, was to keep commonplace books :

one I had for noting down remarkable passages out of other authors; and another for collecting into one view every text I could meet with in Scripture, respecting the most important and controverted doctrines of the gospel. Though I held this but a little time, (for when my engagements multiplied, I dropt it,) yet I found it very useful, in bringing me acquainted with many passages of the word of God, to which I had not hitherto much attended; and it prepared the way for penning my sermons on doctrinal subjects, with the scripture testimonies concerning the point in hand, in one view before me.

In January, 1777, I met with a very high commendation of Mr. Hooker's works, with the honourable distinction of *judicious* bestowed upon him. This excited my curiosity to read his book, which accordingly I did, with great profit. In his discourse upon justification, page 496, folio edition, printed 1682, I met with the following remarkable passage, which, as well for its excellency, as for the effect thereof upon my religious views, I shall, though somewhat

long, transcribe. “ If our hands did never offer violence to our brethren, a bloody thought doth prove us murderers before him. If we had never opened our mouth to utter any scandalous, offensive, or hurtful word, the cry of our secret cogitations is heard in the ears of God. If we did not commit the sins, which daily and hourly, in deed, word, or thoughts, we do commit ; yet in the good things which we do, how many defects are there intermingled ! God, in that which is done, respecteth the mind and intention of the doer ; cut off then all those things, wherein we have regarded our own glory, those things which men do to please men, and to satisfy our own liking, those things which we do for any by respect, not sincerely, and purely for the love of God ; and a small score will serve for the number of our righteous deeds. Let the holiest and best things which we do, be considered : we are never better affected unto God, than when we pray ; yet when we pray, how are our affections many times distracted ! how little reverence do we show unto the grand

Majesty of Heaven, unto whom we speak! how little remorse of our own miseries! how little taste of the sweet influence of his tender mercies do we feel! Are we not as unwilling many times to begin, and as glad to make an end, as if in saying, 'Call upon me,' he had set us a very burthensome task? It may seem somewhat extreme, which I will speak; therefore let every one judge of it, even as his own heart shall tell him, and no otherwise. I will but only make a demand! if God should yield unto us, not as unto Abraham; if fifty, forty, thirty, twenty, yea, or if ten good persons could be found in a city, for their sakes, the city should not be destroyed: but, and if he should make us an offer thus large: Search all the generations of men since the fall of our father Adam; find one man, that hath done one action, which hath passed from him pure without any stain or blemish at all; and for that one man's only action, neither men nor angels shall feel the torments which are prepared for both. Do you think that this ransom to deliver men and angels could be

found among the sons of men? The best things which we do have somewhat in them to be pardoned; how then can we do any thing meritorious, or worthy to be rewarded? Indeed, God liberally promiseth whatsoever appertaineth to a blessed life to as many as sincerely keep his law, though they be not exactly able to do it. Wherefore we acknowledge a dutiful necessity of doing well, but the meritorious dignity of doing well we utterly renounce. We see how far we are from the perfect righteousness of the law; the little fruit, which we have in holiness, it is, God knoweth, corrupt and unsound; we put no confidence at all in it; we challenge nothing in the world for it; we dare not call God to reckoning, as if we had him in our debt books. Our continual suit to him is, and must be, to bear with our infirmities, and pardon our offences.”

I had no sooner read this passage, than I acquired such an insight into the strictness and spirituality of the divine law, and the perfection which a just and holy God, according to that law, cannot but require in

all the services of his reasonable creatures: that I clearly perceived my very best duties on which my main dependence had hitherto been placed, to be mere specious sins; and my whole life appeared to be one continued series of transgressions. I now understood the apostle's meaning, when he affirms, "That by the works of the law can no flesh be justified before God." All my difficulties in this matter vanished; all my distinctions and reasonings about the meaning of the words law and justification, and all my borrowed criticisms about them, failed me at once. I could no longer be thus amused; for I was convinced, beyond the possibility of a doubt, that all men were so notoriously transgressors of every law of God, that they none of them could be justified in his sight, according to any law: I was sensible that if God should only call me into judgment before him, according to the strictness of his perfect law, for the best duty I ever performed, I must be condemned as a transgressor; when weighed in these exact balances, it would be found wanting.

Thus was I effectually convinced, that if ever I were saved, it must be in some way of unmerited mercy and grace, though I understood not clearly in what way, till long after. Immediately, therefore, I took for my text, Galatians iii. 22. "But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise that is by faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to them that believe;" and preached from it according to Hooker's doctrine; expressing, as strongly as I could, the defilements of our best actions, and our need of mercy in every thing we did; in order the more evidently to show that salvation was of grace, through faith, not of works, lest any man should boast. However, I had not yet attained unto the knowledge of the foulness of that fountain whence all these polluted streams flow forth so plentifully into our lives and conversations.

I was not then able to receive the following nervous passages concerning justification, (p. 495.) "But the righteousness, wherein we must be found, if we will be justified, is not our own: therefore we cannot be justi-

tioned by any inherent quality; Christ hath merited righteousness for as many as are found in him. In him God findeth us if we be faithful; for by faith we are incorporated into Christ. Then, although in ourselves we be altogether sinful and unrighteous, yet even the man who is impious in himself, full of iniquity, full of sin; him being found in Christ through faith, and having his sin remitted through repentance; him God upholdeth with a gracious eye, putteth away his sin by not imputing it; taketh quite away the punishment due thereunto by pardoning it; and accepteth him in Jesus Christ as perfectly righteous, as if he had fulfilled all that was commanded him in the law. Shall I say more perfectly righteous, than if himself had fulfilled the whole law? I must take heed what I say; but the apostle saith, '*God made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*' Such are we in the sight of God the Father, as is the very Son of God himself. Let it be counted folly, or frenzy, or fury, whatsoever: it is

our comfort and our wisdom; we care for no knowledge in the world but this, that man hath sinned, and God hath suffered; that God hath made himself the Son of man, and that men are made the righteousness of God.”

Equally determinate and expressive is what he says, p. 500, “As for such as hold with the church of Rome, that we cannot be saved by Christ alone without works, they do not only by a circle of consequence, but directly, deny the foundation of faith; they hold it not; no, not so much as by a single thread.” If the *judicious* Mr. Hooker’s judgment may, in this important concern, be depended on, as I suppose it will not easily be proved erroneous, I fear the foundation of faith is only held by a small part of that church which has honoured her champion with this distinction.

Page 508 and 509, he thus defends his doctrine against the objections of the Papists, (for at that time none but the Papists objected to it,) “It is a childish cavil, wherewith. in the matter of justification, our ad-

versaries do so greatly please themselves, exclaiming that we tread all Christian virtues under our feet, and require nothing of Christians but faith; because we teach that faith alone justifieth. Whereas, by this speech we never meant to exclude either hope or charity from being always joined as inseparable mates with faith, in the man that is justified; or works from being added as necessary duties required at the hands of every justified man;—but to show that faith is the only hand which putteth on Christ unto justification; and Christ the only garment, which being so put on, covereth the shame of our defiled natures—hideth the imperfection of our works—preserveth us blameless in the sight of God: before whom, otherwise, the weakness of our faith were cause sufficient to make us culpable, yea, to shut us from the kingdom of heaven, where nothing that is not absolute can enter.”

Had I at this time met with such passages in the writings of the Dissenters, or any of those modern publications, which, under the

brand of methodistical, are condemned without reading, or perused with invincible prejudice, I should not have thought them worth regard, but should have rejected them as wild enthusiasm. But I knew that Hooker was deemed perfectly orthodox, and a standard writer, by the prelates of the church in his own days. I learned from his dispute with Mr. Travers, that he was put upon his defence, for making concessions in this matter to the church of Rome, which the zealous Protestants did not think warrantable; that he was judged by the more rigid, too lax in his doctrines; by none too rigid. I had never heard that it had been insinuated, that he was tinctured with enthusiasm; and the solidity of his judgment, and acuteness of his reasoning faculties, needed no voucher to the attentive reader. His opinion therefore carried great weight with it; made me suspect the truth of my former sentiments, and put me upon serious inquiries, and deep meditation upon this subject, accompanied with earnest prayers for the teaching and direction of the Lord

therein. The result was, that after many objections, and doubts, and much examination of the word of God, in a few months I began to accede to Mr. Hooker's sentiments. And at the present my opinion in this respect, as far as I know, coincides with these passages of this eminent author, and is supported and vindicated with the same arguments; he, therefore, who would prove our doctrine of justification by faith alone to be an error, will do well to answer in the first place these quotations from Mr. Hooker.

And, indeed, as far as I can understand him, there is scarce any doctrine, which, with no inconsiderable offence, I now preach, that is not as evidently contained in his writings, as in my sermons. Witness particularly his "Discourse of the certainty, and perpetuity of faith in the elect," in which the doctrine of the final perseverance of true believers, as far as seems worth contending for, is expressly taught and maintained: And he closes it with this noble triumph of full assurance, as resulting from

that comfortable doctrine in the hearts of confirmed and experienced Christians : (page 532.) “ I know in whom I have believed ; I am not ignorant whose precious blood has been shed for me ; I have a shepherd full of kindness, full of care, full of power ; unto him I commit myself. His own finger hath engraven this sentence in the tables of my heart : *Satan hath desired to winnow thee as wheat, but I have prayed that thy faith fail not ;* therefore the assurance of my hope I will labour to keep as a jewel unto the end, and by labour through the gracious mediation of his prayers, I shall keep it.” With such words in my mouth, and such assurance in my heart, I wish to live, and hope to die.

The insertion of these quotations from this old author, I hope will need no apology ; many have not his works, and these extracts are worthy of their perusal ; others, for these specimens, may be prevailed on to read, what perhaps hath hitherto been an unnoticed book in their studies. Especially I recommend to those who admire

him as the champion of their external order and discipline of the church, and such as willingly allow him the honour of being distinguished by the epithet judicious; that they would attentively read, and impartially consider his doctrine. This would put an effectual stop to those declamations, that either ignorantly or maliciously are made against those very doctrines as novel inventions, which have just now been explained and defended, in Mr. Hooker's own words. For my own part, though I acknowledge that he advances many things I should be unwilling to subscribe to; yet I heartily bless God, that at this time I read him; the first material alteration that took place in my views of the Gospel, being in consequence thereof.

One more quotation I shall produce, and so take my leave of him; (page 552,) addressing himself unto the pastors, who are appointed to feed the chosen in Israel, he says, "If there be any feeling of Christ, any drop of heavenly dew, any spark of God's good Spirit within you, stir it up :

be careful to build and edify, first yourselves, and then your flocks, in his most holy faith. I say, first yourselves; for he, which will set the hearts of other men on fire with the love of Christ, must himself burn with love. It is want of faith in ourselves, my brethren, which makes us watchless, (careless,) in building others. We forsake the Lord's inheritance, and feed it not. What is the reason of this? Our own desires are settled where they should not be. We ourselves are like those women, which have a longing to eat coals, and lime, and filth; we are fed, some with honour, some with ease, some with wealth. The Gospel waxeth loathsome and unpleasant in our taste. How should we then have a care to feed others with that we cannot fancy ourselves? If faith wax cold and slender in the heart of the prophet, it will soon perish from the ears of the people." 'Tis not needful to add any reflections upon this passage; every one will readily make them for himself; we are, however, reminded thereby of Solomon's words, (Eccl. i. 9,

10.) “There is no new thing under the sun; is there any thing whereof it may be said, see this is new? It hath been already of old time which was before us.” (Eccl. iii. 15.) “That which hath been, is now, and that which is to be, hath already been.”

To my shame be it spoken, though I had twice subscribed the articles which allow the book of Homilies to be sound and wholesome doctrine, I had never yet seen them, and understood not what that doctrine was. But now, being engaged in a serious inquiry after truth, and Hooker’s works having given me a most favourable opinion of these old authors, I was inclined to examine them; and read part of the book with some degree of attention. And though many things seemed hard sayings, that I could not receive; yet many others were made very useful to me, especially concerning justification. In short, I perceived that that doctrine which I had hitherto despised as methodistical, was the standard doctrine of the established church, when that book was composed; and, consequently, that it was so still: for that book

has lost none of its authority ; though much of its esteem with those who subscribe the thirty-nine articles. This weakened my prejudice, though it did not prove the doctrine true.

About this time a new and unexpected effect was produced by my preaching. I had hitherto been satisfied to see people regularly frequent the church, listen attentively to what was discoursed, and lead moral, decent lives. The way in which I had been led was so smooth, and the progress I had made so gradual ; I had lately so little experienced distressing concern for my own soul, and had so little acquaintance with persons conversant with these matters ; that though I declared the strictness, and spirituality, and sanction of the law of God in an alarming manner, yet it never occurred to me but that they who profited thereby, would proceed in the same easy gradual way. But I had scarce begun this new method of preaching, when application was made to me by persons in great distress about their souls ; their conscience being

awakened to a sense of their lost condition by nature and practice, they were anxious in inquiring, what they must do to be saved? I knew not well what to say to them, my views being very clouded, and my sentiments very perplexed concerning justification: but being willing to give them the best counsel I could, I exhorted them to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, though I was neither capable of instructing them concerning the true nature of faith, nor in what manner they were to seek for it. However, I better understood my own meaning, when I advised them to the study of the Scriptures, accompanied with prayer to God, to be led to the right understanding of them; and when I inculcated amendment of life. In this manner the Lord slowly brought them forward; and though, for want of a better instructor, they were a considerable time before they arrived at establishment in the faith, yet some of them, having their minds less leavened with prejudice and the pride of reasoning, were more apt scholars in the school of Christ than I was, and got the

start of me in the knowledge both of doctrine and duty ; and in their turns became, though without intending it, in some things my monitors, to my no small advantage.

This singular circumstance of being the instrument of a work of grace in others, whilst I myself so little understood the true Gospel of Jesus Christ, very much increased my perplexity. I became doubly earnest to know the truth lest I should mislead those who confided their precious souls to me, as their spiritual instructor. This added to my diligence in reading and meditating on the word of God ; and made me more earnest in prayer to be guided to the knowledge of the truth. And under every difficulty I constantly had recourse unto the Lord to preserve me from ignorance and error, and to enable me to distinguish between the doctrines of his word, and the inventions and traditions of men.

At this time I established a weekly lecture for expounding Scripture in my other parish, which occasioned my farther acquaintance with the various parts of the

word of God. It was my general practice in penning these lectures, to search out all the Scriptures referred to in the margin, and all others I could recollect upon the subject, and to make use of them in explaining each other. This method enabled me to store my memory with texts of Scripture, and made way for a greater exactness in discussing doctrinal subjects, than I had hitherto been acquainted with.

In the course of this winter, 1777, I was engaged in deep meditation upon Luke xi. 9. 13; concerning the Holy Spirit being given in answer to prayer. And, at length, having made a collection of all the Scriptures I could meet with which respected that important doctrine, and having diligently compared them together, and meditated upon them, and besought the Lord to fulfil the promise to my soul, I wrote two sermons upon the subject; one from Luke xi. 13.—“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him.”

The other from James i. 16, 17.—“Do not err, my beloved brethren, every good gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights.” By this my views of a Christian’s privileges and duties in this respect, were much enlarged, and my requests were made known unto the Lord in a more full, exact, and believing manner, than heretofore. Though much in the dark in many important matters respecting the person, offices, and work of the Holy Ghost; yet I had discovered more of what was promised concerning him, and therefore knew better what to ask for.

My obligations to Bishop Beveridge are next to be acknowledged. When I first began to peruse his sermons, I conceived a mean opinion of him, and it was some time before I could prevail with myself to examine any farther into his writings; but being now farther advanced in my inquiry after truth, those singularities which at first offended me became tolerable, and I began to relish the simplicity, spirituality, and love of Christ. and affection for souls, which

eminently shine forth in many places of his works. Indeed I received considerable instruction from him; but especially his sermon on the real satisfaction made by the death of Christ for the sins of believers, was the blessed means of clearing up my views, and confirming my faith respecting that fundamental doctrine of Christianity. On Good Friday, 1777, I preached a sermon upon that subject, from Isaiah liii. 6. "All we like sheep have gone astray;—we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid, (hath caused to light,) on him the iniquities of us all." Wherein I endeavoured to prove that which hath ever since been the sole foundation of all my hopes; namely, that Christ indeed bore the sins of all who should ever truly believe in all their guilt, condemnation, and deserved punishment in his body on the tree. And I explicitly avowed my belief, that Christ, as our surety and bondsman, stood in our law place, to answer all our obligations, and to satisfy divine justice, and the demands of the law for our offences: and I publicly re-

nounced, as erroneous and grievous perversions of Scripture, all my former explanations and interpretations of these subjects.

This was the first doctrine in which I was clearly and fully brought to acknowledge the truth, though I had with no little earnestness for two years been inquiring about it; to so astonishing a degree was my blinded understanding filled with prejudice against the doctrines of the word of God!—Hitherto they had been foolishness to me, but now, under the divine teaching, I began, though very dimly, to discern the wisdom of God in them.

I say dimly, for I was still under many and great mistakes, and in much ignorance in the most important matters. I knew sin to be a transgression of God's law; but I did not see its odious deformity, in being deliberate rebellion against God's sovereign authority, and an express contradiction to his holy nature: in charging God foolishly, as either wanting wisdom or goodness in laying such restraints upon the inclinations of his creatures; and as tending to overturn all

subordination in the universe, and to introduce anarchy, confusion, and misery, into the whole creation of God. My own best actions I perceived to be defiled; but I understood not that this was the effect of a depraved nature, and a polluted heart. The doctrine of original sin, as the fruitful root of these multiplied evils, was not yet a part of my creed. Inconsistently I was an Arian or a Clarkist in my sentiments concerning the person of Christ, and the divinity of the Holy Ghost. Some faint conception I had formed of that sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in the soul; the beginnings of it I little understood. And I continued to entertain an implacable enmity to the doctrine of election, and those connected with it. But my faith was now fixed upon a crucified Saviour; (though I dishonoured his person and denied his deity,) and I had a sincere desire of being devoted to the Lord. He, therefore, in mercy accepted his own work in my heart, and pardoned all that was mine, and at length extricated me out of that labyrinth of difficulties, in which I was entangled.

About this time, in the course of my lectures, our Lord's discourse with Nicodemus came again under my consideration. Notwithstanding much meditation and many prayers, I could not satisfy my mind about it. I was convinced some internal change must be implied in the expressions, being born from above, and being born of the Spirit; and according to what I had experienced, I endeavoured to explain it; but I was much in the dark, and had many doubts whether I was right or wrong.

Hitherto, excepting "Leland on the Deistical Writers," I had not read any book written by a dissenter, with the least degree of candour and attention; but at this crisis I met with the first volume of Doctor Evan's sermons, entitled, "The Christian Temper." I was induced to read it by the recommendation of a friend; but such was my proud, foolish heart, that I opened it with great prejudice, because I understood the author was a dissenter. However, this book came with a blessing; for by perusing it, I at length perceived, that fallen man,

both body and soul, is indeed carnal, and sold under sin; that by nature, in every man living, the reasonable and immortal part is destitute of spirituality, immersed in matter, and by a dishonourable and miserable prostitution, is given up to make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lust thereof; and that man must be renewed in the spirit of his mind, new created unto good works, born of the Spirit of God, made partaker of a new and divine nature, before he can possibly be made meet for, or admitted into the kingdom of God. In a very little time all my difficulties about this matter vanished, and the truth became so exceedingly plain and evident, that until I had made the experiment, I could scarce be persuaded, but that every person who heard it rightly explained must assent to it. This doctrine I have ever since invariably preached with good effect, I trust, in opening the eyes of sinners, and turning them from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God. (Acts xxvi. 28.)

About this time. my acquaintance with

Mr. ——— was resumed. From the conclusion of our correspondence in December, 1775, till April, 1777, it had been almost wholly dropped. To speak plainly, I did not care for his company; I did not mean to make any use of him as an instructor, and was unwilling the world should think us any ways connected.

But under discouraging circumstances I had occasion to call upon him; and his discourse comforted and edified me, and my heart being, by his means, relieved from its burden, became susceptible of affection to him. From that time I was inwardly pleased to have him for my friend; though not as now, rejoiced to call him so. However, I had no thoughts of learning doctrinal truth from him, and was ashamed to be detected in his company; but I sometimes stole away to spend an hour with him. About the same time I once heard him preach, but it was still foolishness to me; his sermon being much upon the believer's experience: and, therefore, though I loved and valued him, I considered him as a per-

son misled by enthusiastical notions, and strenuously insisted that we should never think alike, till we met in heaven.

All along, in the progress of this inquiry, I grew more and more concerned about my character; I saw myself continually verging nearer and nearer to that scheme of doctrine which the world called Methodism: nor could I help it, without doing violence to my convictions. I had, indeed, set out with the avowed, and, I trust, sincere resolution of seeking for the truth, as impartially as possible; and of embracing it wherever I found it, without respect to interest, reputation, or any worldly consideration whatsoever: I had taken patiently, and supported comfortably, the loss of my opening prospect of preferment, I trust mainly from the supports of grace, and the consciousness of having acted with integrity; but I am not sure, but there might therewith creep in some consolation to my deceitful heart, from a vain imagination that my character would be no loser. Ambitious thirst after the praise of men was much more my peculiar

corruption, than covetousness ; and I had been in no ordinary degree proud of my natural understanding ; the people called Methodists, I had been accustomed to hear mentioned with contempt, as very silly, as fools, and sometimes as madmen ; with no small degree of complacency, and self-preference, I too had despised them, as weak enthusiasts. But I now began to be apprehensive, that the tables were about to be turned upon me ; if I professed and taught these doctrines, I must no longer be considered as a man of sober understanding, but one of those persons, whose heads being naturally weak, had been turned by religious studies ; and who, having fallen under the power of enthusiasm, are become no better than fools.

This was the sharpest trial I passed through, having not yet learned, that, “when we are reproached for the name of Christ, happy are we.” Nor did I remember that the Apostles were fools for Christ’s sake ; were deemed to be beside themselves : went through evil report, and good

report, as deceivers, and yet true ; that they were every where spoken against, as the fellows that turned the world upside down ; were treated as vain babblers, and accounted the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things. I did not consider that Jesus himself, the brightness of the Father's glory, the Word and Wisdom of God, who went about doing good, and spake as never man spake, was not only rejected, but despised, as not worth hearing, as one that had a devil, as in league with the devil, as a blasphemer, a Samaritan, a madman, a devil himself. I read indeed, but my understanding was not yet opened to understand such plain Scriptures as these, (John xv. 19, 20 ;) "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own : but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world ; *therefore* the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you : the servant is not greater than the Lord ; if they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you." And Mat. x. 24, 25 : "The disciple is not above his master, nor the

servant above his Lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of the household?" And Mat. v. 11, 12: "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets, that were before you." Not being aware of these consequences, when my resolution was first formed, I was as one who hath begun to build with counting the cost, and was greatly disturbed, when I saw the favourite idol of my proud heart, my character, in such imminent danger.

It must be supposed this would make me cautious what doctrines I admitted into my creed; and unwilling to be convinced, that those things were true and important, the profession of which was sure to bring infamy on my character; and that even after the fullest conviction, I should thereby be rendered very careful in what manner I preached them. In general, however, though the

conflict was sharp, I was enabled to be faithful. The words, "necessity is laid upon me, yea, wo is me, if I preach not the gospel," were commonly upon my mind when I penned my sermons, and when I entered the pulpit; and though when a bold declaration of what I believed to be the truth, with an offensive application of it to the consciences of my hearers, drew opposition and calumny upon me, I have secretly resolved to be more circumspect the next time; yet, when that time came, my heart and conscience being both engaged, I have not dared to conceal one tittle of what appeared to me to be true, and to promise usefulness. But whilst with perturbation of mind, and with many disquieting apprehensions, I declared the message with which I supposed myself to be intrusted; to screen myself from the charge of Methodism, and to soften the offence, I was frequently throwing out slighting expressions, and bringing the charge of enthusiasm against those who preached such doctrines as I was not yet convinced of. On the other hand, my con-

cern about my character quickened me very much in prayer, and increased my diligence in searching the Scriptures, that I might be sure I was not, at this expense, preaching cunningly devised fables, instead of feeding the souls committed to my care, with the unadulterated milk of gospel truth.

In this state of my mind, which is easier understood by experience than description, I met with Mr. Venn's Essay on the prophecy of Zacharias. I was no stranger to the character he bore in the eye of the world, and did not begin to read his book with great alacrity, or expectation; however, the importance of the subjects therein treated of engaged my attention, and some degree of impartiality as I proceeded. I disapproved, indeed, and quarrelled with many things; but others evidenced their truth and importance to my understanding and conscience; especially, I found a word in season, respecting my weak and wicked shame and attention to character in inquiring after divine truth, and in the performance of the important duties of a gospel

minister. These solemn words in particular went home to my heart: "If the spirit of the world, pride, carelessness respecting the soul, and the neglect of Christ, be not hateful to God, and destructive to men, the gospel, (with reverence I speak it,) is an imposition. Do you abhor that thought as blasphemy? Abhor as much a fawning upon Christ from year to year in your closet, calling him there your Lord and your God: and then coming out to consult the world, how far they will allow you to obey his plain commands, without saying you are a Methodist? Cease rather to profess any allegiance to Christ than treat him, under professions of duty, with such contempt. I would, saith he to the Church of Laodicea, thou wert cold or hot, so then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold or hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth." Rev. iii. 15, 16.

I should as easily be convinced that there was no Holy Ghost, as that he was not present with my soul when I read this passage, and the whole of what Mr. Venn has written

upon the subject. It came to my heart with such power, conviction, and demonstration of the Spirit, that it lifted me up above the world, and produced that victory which faith alone can give; and that liberty, which uniformly attends the presence of the Spirit of the Lord. I became at once ashamed of my base ingratitude and foolish fears; and was filled with such consolation, and rejoicing even in the prospect of sacrificing my character, and running the risk of infamy and contempt, as made me entirely satisfied on that head; and, some few unbelieving seasons excepted, I have ever since been very little troubled about being accounted an enthusiast, or a Methodist.

But still I remained as much, and am now more afraid of enthusiasm itself, than ever; and the nearer I verged to what I had ignorantly supposed to be enthusiasm, the more apprehensive I became, lest my earnestness in such interesting inquiries, and the warmth of my natural spirit, thus occasionally increased, should put me off my guard, and betray me into delusions and

mistakes. From this danger I could obtain no security, but by keeping close to the study of the word of God; and by being earnest and particular in praying to be preserved from enthusiasm, and to be enabled to distinguish between the pure revelations of the Holy Spirit, and the inventions of men, or the delusions of the spirit of lies.

The doctrine of a trinity of co-equal persons in the Unity of the Godhead, had been hitherto no part of my creed. I had long been accustomed to despise this great mystery of godliness: I had quarrelled with the articles of the established church about this doctrine: I had been very positive and open in my declarations against it; and my unhumbled reason still retained objections to it. But about June, 1777, I began to be troubled with doubts about it, and to suspect the truth of Dr. Clarke's hypothesis. I had just read Mr. Lindsey's Apology and Sequel. Before I saw them, I had made a jest of those who thought of confuting him on the orthodox scheme, and was not without thoughts of maintaining Dr. Clarke's system

against him. But when I understood that he claimed Dr. Clarke as a Socinian, I was surprised, and engaged in much anxious consideration of the subject. The more I studied, the more I was dissatisfied ; many things now first occurred to me, as strong objections against my own sentiments upon that head : and being perplexed, and unable to make out a scheme for myself, I easily perceived that I was not qualified to dispute with another person. My pride and my convictions struggled hard for the victory ; I was very unwilling to become a Trinitarian in the strict sense of the word, though in my own sense I had for some time pretended to be one ; and yet the more I considered it, the more I was dissatisfied with all other systems. My esteem for Mr. —, was also now very much increased ; and though I had hitherto concealed this part of my sentiments from him, yet I knew his to be very different ; and though I was not willing to be taught by him in other matters, yet in this respect, finding his opinion the same which in all former ages of the church hath been

accounted orthodox, while that which I held had all along been branded as heretical, my fears of a mistake were thereby exceedingly increased. In this perplexity I applied to the Lord and besought him to lead me to a settled conclusion what was the truth. After much meditation upon this subject, together with a careful examination of all the Scriptures which I then understood to relate thereto, accompanied with a hearty prayer for divine teaching, I was at length constrained to renounce, as utterly indefensible, all my former sentiments, and to accede to that doctrine which I had so long despised. I saw, and could no longer avoid seeing, that the offices and works attributed in Scripture to the Son and Holy Ghost, are such as none but the infinite God could perform; that it is a contradiction to believe the real, and consequently infinite satisfaction to divine justice made by the death of Christ, without believing him to be very God of very God: nor could the Holy Ghost give spiritual life unto, and dwell in the hearts of unbelievers at

the same time to suit his work of convincing, enlightening, teaching, strengthening, sanctifying and comforting, to the several cases of every individual, were he not the omniscient, omnipresent, infinite God. And being assured from reason, as well as from Scripture, that there is not, and cannot be more Gods than one, I was driven from my reasonings, and constrained to submit my natural understanding to divine revelation; and allowing that the incomprehensible God alone can fully know the unsearchable mysteries of his own divine nature, and manner of his own existence to adopt the doctrine of a Trinity in Unity, in order to preserve consistency in my own scheme. But it was a considerable time before I was disentangled from my embarrassments on this subject.

Hitherto my prejudices against Mr. Hervey, as a writer upon doctrinal subjects, had been very strong. I thought him a very pious man, and I had read with pleasure some parts of his meditations; but having considered him an enthusiast. I had no cu-

riosity to read any other of his writings. But about July, 1777, I providentially met with his dialogues and letters between Theron and Aspasio, and opening the book, I was much pleased with the first passage on which I cast my eye. This engaged me to read the whole with uncommon attention: nor did I, in twice perusing it, ever meet with any thing contrary to my own sentiments, without immediately beseeching the Lord to guide me to the truth. I trust the Lord heard and answered these my prayers: for though I could not but dissent from him, (as I still do,) in some few things, yet I was very much enlightened thereby, in every thing relative to our fallen, guilty, lost and helplessly miserable state by nature; and the way and manner in which the believer is accounted and accepted as righteous in the presence of a just, holy, and heart-searching, a faithful, and unchangeable God; especially his animated description and application of the stag-chase, cleared up this important matter to my mind, more

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than any thing I had hitherto met with upon the subject.

I had now acceded to most of the doctrines which at present I believe and preach; except the doctrine of personal election, and those which depend on, and are connected with it. These were still foolishness to me, and so late as August, 1777, I told my friend Mr. —, that I was sure I never should be of his sentiments on that head; to which he answered, that if I never mentioned this subject, he never should, as we were now agreed in all he judged absolutely needful; but he had not the least doubt of my very shortly becoming a Calvinist, as I should presently discover my system of doctrine to be otherwise incomplete and inconsistent with itself. And, indeed, by this time I had so repeatedly discovered myself to be mistaken where I had been very confident, that I began to suspect myself in every thing wherein I entertained sentiments different from those with whom I conversed. This did not influence me to take their opinions upon trust; but it disposed

me more particularly and attentively to consider them; and in every perplexity to have recourse to the Lord, to be preserved from error, and guided to the truth.

About the same time also, I began to have more frequent applications made to me by persons under deep concern for their souls. My heart was much engaged in this new employment; I was much troubled to see their pressing anxieties, and to hear their doubts, difficulties, and objections against themselves. Being sincerely desirous to instruct them right, and to lead them on to establishment and comfort, I felt my deficiency, and seemed to have no ground to go on, nor any counsel to give them, but what led them into greater perplexity, instead of relieving them. In this case I earnestly besought the Lord to instruct me what word in season to speak unto them.

Thus circumstanced, I read "Witsius' Economy of the Covenants," and observed what use he made of the doctrine of election for this very purpose. This convinced me that the doctrine, if true, would afford

that ground of comfort which my people wanted. It would evince, that their being awakened out of a careless state, to an earnest concern for, and anxiety about their souls, and to an hearty desire of cleaving unto the Lord; and their want of some security that they should not, through the deceitfulness of their own hearts, their own weakness, the entanglements of the world, and the temptations of Satan, fall back again into their former course of sin, was the work of the Holy Ghost. If this were wrought in consequence of the determinate purpose and foreknowledge of God respecting them, it would follow from the entire and undeserved freeness of this first gift, bestowed on them, when neither desiring nor seeking it, but being in a state of enmity and rebellion against, and neglect of God, and from his unchangeableness in his purposes, and faithfulness to his promises, that he would assuredly carry on, and complete this good work of his grace, and keep the believing soul as in a castle, through faith unto salvation.

Having now considered one use of this doctrine, which before I objected to as useless and pernicious, I began to consider how the other objections which I had been accustomed to urge against it might be answered. 'Tis true that I began to consider this whole matter as a mystery not to be comprehended, nor yet too curiously searched into by man's natural reason, but humbly received by faith, just as far as it is plainly revealed in God's unerring word. Many objections, therefore, I was constrained to leave unanswered, resolving them into the incomprehensible nature of God, whose judgments, and still more his counsels, are, as the great deep, unfathomable; and into the sovereignty of God, who does what he will with his own, and gives no account of any of his matters, let who will presume to find fault: and into his declarations, that his thoughts and ways are as far above our thoughts and ways, as the heavens are above the earth. Here I left this matter, conscious at length, that such knowledge was too high for me. and that if God

had said it, it was not my place to cavil against it. I acknowledge this way of answering objections is not very satisfactory to man's proud curiosity, who would be as God, and know all that God knows, and even dares to dispute with him; and there are some times when I can hardly acquiesce in such a solution: but surely it is highly becoming the dependent state, and limited understanding of the creature, to submit the decision of all such high points implicitly to the award of the infinitely wise Creator. And the Christian religion expressly requires it of us, for our Lord declares, that "Except we receive the kingdom of God," (not as a disputing philosopher, but) "as a little child, we shall in no wise enter therein." The day is coming, when we shall be able to answer all objections. Here we are to walk by faith, and see in part, and as through a glass darkly; hereafter we shall see face to face, and know even as we are known.

Leaving, therefore, all difficulties of a metaphysical nature to be cleared up in that

world of light and knowledge, I began to consider the abuses of this doctrine, which I had always looked upon as being a very formidable objection against it. But I soon discovered, that though ungodly men, who make profession of religion, will turn the grace of God into licentiousness; yet that we might so explain and guard these doctrines, that none could thus abuse them, without being conscious that they did so, and detecting their own hypocrisy. It still, indeed, appeared probable to me, that the preaching of them might occasion some trouble of mind at first to a few well-disposed persons; but I considered that by a cautious declaration of them, and contrasting them with the general promises of the gospel to all who believe, this might in a great measure be prevented; and at the worst, a little personal conversation with such persons, would seldom, if ever, fail to satisfy their minds, and even enable them in general to derive encouragement from them; while the unsettling of the minds of such persons, as are carelessly living in an uncon-

verted state, is the great end of all our preaching to them ; and therefore we need not fear any bad effect of this doctrine in that respect. The great question therefore was, “are these doctrines in the Bible, or no ?” Hitherto I had wilfully passed over, and neglected, or endeavoured to put some other construction upon all those scriptures which directly speak of them : but now I began to consider, meditate, and pray over them ; and I soon found that I could not support my former interpretation of them. They would teach predestination, election, final perseverance and assurance, in spite of all my twisting and expounding. It also occurred to me that though now in disgrace, they were universally believed and maintained by our venerable reformers ; that they were admitted, at the beginning of the reformation, into the creeds, catechisms, or articles of every one of the Protestant churches ; that our articles and homilies expressly maintained them : and consequently, that a vast number of wise and sober-minded men, who, in their days, were

burning and shining lights, upon mature deliberation, had agreed, not only that they were true, but that they ought to be admitted as useful, or even as necessary articles of faith by every one, who deemed himself called to take upon him the office of a Christian minister.

In the course of this inquiry, I perceived that my system of doctrine was incomplete without them. I believed, that men, by nature born in sin, and the children of wrath, by wicked works the enemies of God, being in themselves ungodly, and without strength, were saved of free mercy and grace, without having done any thing, more or less, to deserve it, through the Redeemer's righteousness and atonement, received by faith, the gift, and operation of God ; and accompanied with a new birth of the Spirit, a new creation unto good works, and to the divine image, by the power of the Holy Ghost : and now, therefore, it occurred to me, to inquire from what source these precious blessings, thus freely flowing through the channel of redemption to poor worthless

sinner, could originally spring? In this inquiry, my mind being carried back from the consideration of the effects, to the consideration of their causes; and from the promises made to fallen man, to the counsels and purposes of God, which induced him to give those promises; and meditating on the divine perfections, his omniscience, unchangeableness, and eternity, and the end which the all-sufficient God had in view, in all his works, even the manifestation of the glory of his own perfections; I at length perceived, that this great work of redemption, as planned by God, to whom were known all his works from before the foundation of the world, must be the result of his eternal purpose, of displaying the glory of his mercy and grace in harmonious consistency with his most awful justice, and glorious holiness; and thereby manifesting the inexhaustible resources of his manifold wisdom, in thus reconciling, and at one time, and in one work, unitedly glorifying these his attributes, which, considered as *perfect*, seem, to created understanding,

irreconcilable to each other. Especially, I was convinced of this, when I discovered, that until the fall of man made way for, and the redemption had manifested the attribute of mercy to sinners, it had, as far as we can learn, been unexercised, and undisplayed, and consequently unknown to any but God himself from all eternity; nor could he have the glory of it, but must have been considered as so perfect in justice and holiness, as to be incapable of exercising mercy, had he not chosen some objects on whom to exercise it, and devised some way wherein to exercise it, in consistency with his other perfections. Thus I perceived redemption to be the effect of a settled design formed in God's eternal councils, of manifesting himself to his reasonable creatures to be complete, and full orb'd in all conceivable perfections; that the merciful and gracious nature of God, the fountain of goodness, alone mov'd him to choose any transgressors of his law, as objects of his favourable regard; that his unconstrained will and pleasure are the only assignable

causes of his choosing one, rather than another; that the objections are as strong against this being understood of nations, or collective bodies, as of individuals: that the whole work being his own; his wisdom having devised the means, his love and all-sufficiency having, in the person, offices, and work of Christ, made all things ready; his providence directing absolutely to whom the word of invitation should be sent; and his Holy Spirit alone inclining, and enabling the soul to embrace it by faith: therefore, that God, who knoweth the end from the beginning, and is a sovereign, and when none have deserved any thing, may do as he will with his own, did actually "choose every individual believer in Christ, before the foundation of the world, that we *should* be holy and without blame before him in love; having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will; to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved." (Eph. i. 4—6.)

In short, though my objections were many, my anxiety great, and my resistance long, yet, by the evidence which, both from the word of God, and from my own meditation, crowded upon my mind, I was at length constrained to submit, and God knoweth, with fear and trembling, to allow these formerly despised doctrines a place in my creed: and accordingly, about Christmas, 1777, I began cautiously to establish the truth of them, and to make use of them for the consolation of poor, distressed, and fearful believers. This was the only use I then knew of them, though I now see their influence into every part of gospel truth.

However, I would observe, that though I assuredly believe these doctrines, as far as here expressed; (for I am not willing to trace them any higher by reasonings or consequences into the unrevealed things of God,) and though I exceedingly need them in my view of religion, both for my own consolation and security against the consequences of my own deceitful heart, an ensnaring world, and a subtle tempter; as al-

so for the due exercise of my pastoral office ; yet I would not be understood to place the acknowledgment of them upon a level with a belief of the doctrines, that have before been spoken of. I can readily conceive the character of an humble, pious, spiritual Christian, who either is an utter stranger to these Calvinistical doctrines, or through misapprehension, or fear of abuse, cannot receive them. But I own that I find a difficulty in conceiving an humble, pious, spiritual Christian, who is a stranger to his own utterly lost condition, to the deceitfulness and depravity of his heart, to the *natural* alienation of his affections from God, and to the defilements of his best duties ; who trusts either in whole or in part, *allowedly*, to any thing for pardon and justification, but the blood and righteousness of a crucified Saviour, who is God manifested in the flesh ; or who expects to be made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, in any other way, than by being born again, new created, converted, and sanctified by the divine power of the Holy Ghost.

Some time in November, 1777, I was by a then unknown friend, furnished with a considerable number of books, written in general by the old divines both of the church of England, and of the Dissenters. And to my no small surprise, I found, that those doctrines, which are now deemed novel inventions, and are called Methodistical, are in these books every where discoursed of as known and allowed truths; and that that system, which, despising to be taught by men, and unacquainted with such authors, I had for near three years together been hammering out of myself with no small labour and anxiety, was to be found ready made to my hands, in every book I opened.

I make no wonder, that the members of the church of England are generally prejudiced against the writing of Dissenters; for I have been so myself to an excess; we imbibe this prejudice with the first rudiments of instruction, and are taught by our whole education to consider it as meritorious;—though no doubt it is a prejudice, of which

every sincere inquirer after truth ought to be afraid, and every pretended inquirer ashamed; for how can we determine on which side truth lies, if we will not examine both sides? And indeed it is well known to all those, who are acquainted with the church histories of those times, that until the reign of James the First there were no controversies between the church established, and the Puritans, concerning doctrine; both parties being in all matters of importance of the same sentiments; they only contended about discipline and ceremonies, until the introduction of Arminianism gave occasion to the Calvinists being denominated Doctrinal Puritans. Unto this period all our church writers were Calvinistical in doctrine, and even after that time, many might be mentioned who were allowed friends of the church of England, who opposed these innovations, and agreed in doctrine with every thing that hath been mentioned. Let it suffice, out of many, to recommend Bishop Hall's works, especially his "Contemplations on the Life of Jesus,"

a book not easily too highly prized: and Dr. Reynolds' works. To these, no true friend to the church of England can reasonably object. And in general I believe, and teach nothing, but what they plainly taught before me, as I could easily prove, but that I have been too tedious already.

I had now got the outlines of my scheme of doctrine marked out; but I had been so taken up with these doctrinal inquiries, that hitherto I was very much a stranger to the workings of my own heart, and had little experience in my own soul, of the power of these truths. The pride of reasoning, and the conceit of my superior discernment, had all along accompanied me; and though somewhat broken, had yet considerable influence. Hitherto therefore, I had not thought of hearing any person preach, because I did not know that any person in the circle of my acquaintance, was capable of informing me in any thing deserving attention of which I was ignorant. But at length perceiving, that in the whole matter Mr. — had been right and that I had been mista-

ken, it occurred to me, that having preached these doctrines so long, he must understand many things concerning them, to which I was a stranger. Now, therefore, though not without much remaining prejudice, and not less in the character of a judge than of a scholar, I condescended to be his hearer, and occasionally to attend his preaching, and that of some other ministers. I soon perceived the benefit of this; for, from time to time, I found the secrets of my heart discovered to me, far beyond what I had hitherto noticed myself; and seldom returned from hearing a sermon, without having conceived a meaner opinion of myself! without having attained to a farther acquaintance with my deficiencies, my weakness, my corruptions, and wants; and without being supplied with fresh matter for prayer, and directed to greater watchfulness. Moreover I learned the use of experience in preaching, and was convinced that the ready way to come at other people's hearts and consciences, was to speak from my own. In short, I gradually saw more

and more of my need of instruction, and was brought to consider myself as a very novice in religious matters. I began experimentally to perceive our Lord's meaning, when he says, "Except ye receive the kingdom of heaven as a little child, ye shall in no wise enter therein." For though my proud heart is continually rebelling, and would fain build up again the former Babel of self conceit: yet I trust from this time, in my settled judgment, I have desired, and prayed to be enabled, to consider myself as a little child, who ought simply to sit at the master's feet, to hear his words with profound submission, and wait his teaching with earnest desire and patient attention. And from this time I have been enabled to consider those persons, whose knowledge has been ripened by years, experience, and observation, as fathers and instructors, to take pleasure in their company, value their counsels, and love to attend their preaching.

Thus I trust the old building, that I had purposed to repair, was pulled down to the ground, and the foundation of the new build-

ing of God laid aright; old things were passed away, behold all things were become new. What things were gain to me, those I have counted loss for Christ; my boasted reason I discover to be a blind guide, until humbled, enlightened, and sanctified by the Spirit of God; my former wisdom I now know to have been foolishness, and that when I thought I knew much, I knew nothing as I ought to know. Since this period, every thing I have experienced in my own heart, every thing I have heard and read, every thing I observe around me, confirms and establishes me in the assured belief of those truths, which I have received; nor do I in general any more doubt their being from God, than I doubt whether the sun shines when I see its light, and am warmed with its refreshing beams. I see the powerful effects of them continually among those to whom I preach: experience the power of them daily in my own soul; and while by meditating on, and rejoicing in the cross of Christ, I find the world crucified unto me, and I unto the world; by preach-

ing Jesus Christ, and him crucified, I see notoriously immoral persons influenced to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, being an example to such as before they were a scandal to.

And now by this change, the consequences of which I so much dreaded, what have I lost even in respect of this present world? Indeed, I have lost some degree of favour, and escape not pity, censure, scorn, and opposition; but the Lord is introducing me to a new, and far more desirable acquaintance; even to that of those, whom the Holy Ghost hath denominated the excellent of the earth; nay, the Lord the Spirit condescends to be my comforter. In general I enjoy an established peace of conscience, through the blood of sprinkling, and continual application to the heavenly Advocate; with a sweet content, and that peace of God, which passeth all understanding, in casting all my cares upon him, who careth for me. And I am not utterly left without experience of that joy, which is un-

speakable and full of glory. These the world could not give me, were I in favour with it; of these it cannot deprive me by its frowns. My desire henceforth, God knoweth, is to live to his glory, and by my whole conduct and conversation to adorn the doctrine of God my Saviour, and to show forth his praise, who hath called me out of darkness into his marvellous light; to be in some way or other useful to his believing people; and to invite poor sinners, who are walking in a vain shadow, and disquieting themselves in vain, to taste and see how gracious the Lord is, and how blessed they are, who put their trust in him.

Now would I tell to sinners round,
What a dear Saviour I have found;
Would point to his redeeming blood,
And cry, behold the way to God!

Thus hath the Lord led me, a poor, blind sinner, in a way that I knew not; he hath made darkness light before me, crooked things straight, and hard things easy, and hath brought me to a place, of which I little thought when I set out; and having

done these things for me, I believe, yea, I am undoubtedly sure, he will never leave me nor forsake me. To him be the glory of his undeserved, long resisted grace; to me be the shame, not only of all my other sins, but also of my proud and perverse opposition to his purposes of love toward me. But all this was permitted, that my high spirit and stout heart being at length humbled and subdued, I might remember, and be confounded, and never open my mouth more, because of my shame, now that the Lord is pacified to me for all that I have done.

And now, as in the presence of the heart-searching God, I have given without one wilful misrepresentation, addition, or material omission, an history of the great things God hath done for my soul; or if that suit not your view of it; an history of that change which hath recently taken place in my religious sentiments and conduct, to the surprise of some, and perhaps displeasure of others of my former friends. The doctrines which I have now received, are indeed charged with being destructive of moral

practice, and tending to licentiousness ; but though I know that my best righteousnesses are as filthy rags, yet I trust I may return thanks to God, that by his grace he hath so upheld me, since this change took place, that I have not been permitted to disgrace the cause in which I have embarked, by any immoral conduct ; my rejoicing, in this respect, is this, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, I have my conversation in the world. And sincerely I may avow, that the belief of these doctrines, hath a quite contrary effect upon me. I most heartily desire, aim, endeavour, and pray to be enabled to love God and keep his commandments, without partiality and without hypocrisy, and so to demean myself, as by well doing to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. That I fall so very far short in every thing is not the effect of my new doctrines, but of my old depraved nature, and deceitful heart. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me !

PART III.

CONTAINING

OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

FOREGOING NARRATIVE.

My design in writing this account of myself, and my religious inquiries, and change of sentiments, was as follows: I considered myself a singular instance of a very unlikely person, in an uncommon manner, being led on from one thing to another to embrace a system of doctrine which he once heartily despised. And as I do assuredly believe that this change hath been effected under the guidance and teaching of the Holy Ghost; so I verily hoped that a circumstantial relation of it might be an encouragement and comfort to those who know and love the Lord, and from them levy a tribute of gratitude and praise, to our gracious, wonder-working God: and that it also might

be instrumental, by the convincing Spirit, to awaken others to a serious review of their religious sentiments; to put them upon the same earnest inquiry after the truth, as it is in Jesus; and to influence them to the diligent use of the same blessed means, in which the Lord directed me to be found. In order to forward this effect, I would offer a few observations upon what has been related, to the attentive and impartial consideration of the reader; and may the Lord guide both the writer and reader of these sheets to the saving knowledge of himself, and of the ways of truth and peace!

Now, I. I think it must be evident to every unprejudiced reader of this narrative, that at the time this change commenced, I was, humanly speaking, a most unlikely person to embrace this system of doctrine. This will appear from the following considerations:

1. By reason of my religious opinions at that time, which had been for many years directly contrary thereto. Being always of a reflecting turn, I had exeeding high no-

tions of the powers of human reason, and a very favourable opinion of my own understanding: and I had, upon reasoning principles, embraced a system of religion, which, while it soothed my conscience, flattered this self-conceit. After some trivial alterations, I seemed to myself, upon mature deliberation, to have come to a settled determination, and had bestowed considerable pains in making myself acquainted with those arguments and interpretations of Scripture wherewith that system is usually defended; and I had raked together many of those plausible objections, and high charges, which are, by reasoning men, brought against the doctrines, and persons of the Calvinists. But on the other hand, I was, in a great measure, a stranger to what the Calvinists could say for themselves; because I thought the matter too plain to bear an argument, and therefore did not think their answers worth reading. In short, I was fallen so very low, that very few have ever been recovered from that abyss of error. into which I had been permitted to

sink. Full of confidence in my cause, and in the arguments with which I was preparing myself, and with the most sanguine expectation of success, I was eager to engage in controversy with the Calvinists. In this confidence I frequently harranged against them from the pulpit, and spared not to charge upon them consequences both absurd shocking. And yet, at length, after much, very much, anxious, diligent inquiry, I have embraced, as the sacred truths of God's unerring word, every doctrine of this despised system.

2. From my natural spirit and temper, I was a most unlikely person thus to change. Few persons were ever more self sufficient and positive in their opinions, than I was. Fond to excess of entering into argument, I never failed on these occasions to betray this peculiarity of my character. I seldom acknowledged or suspected myself mistaken; and scarce ever dropped any argument, until either my reasonings, or obstinacy, had silenced my opponent. A certain person once said of me, that I was like a stone

rolling down the hill, which could neither be stopped, nor turned; this witness was true; but those things which are impossible with man, are easy with God: I am evidently both stopped, and turned; man, I am persuaded, could not have done it; but this hath God wrought—and I am not more a wonder to others than to myself. Indeed, I carried the same obstinate, positive temper into my religious inquiries: for I never gave up one tittle of my sentiments, till I could defend them no longer, nor even submitted to conviction, till I could make no longer resistance. The strong man armed with my natural pride, and obstinacy; and having with my vain imaginations, and reasonings, and high thoughts, built himself many strong holds, kept his castle in my heart: and thus garrisoned, when the stronger than he came against him, he stood a long siege; till, being by superior force driven from one to another, and all his armour wherein he trusted, being at length taken from him, he was constrained to recede. And the Lord having made me willing in the day of his

power, I was forced to confess ; “ O Lord, thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed.”

3. My situation in life rendered such a change improbable. I had an increasing family, no private fortune, a narrow, precarious income, and no expectations, except from such friends, as my conduct might procure, or continue to me. I had unexpectedly contracted an acquaintance with some of those whose favour goes a great way toward a man's advancement in life ; nor was I insensible to the advantages to be hoped for, from cultivating, by a compliant behaviour, their kind and friendly regard to me ; at the same time I was no stranger to the opinion, which the world entertains of those who preach these disreputable doctrines ; and could not but conclude, that embracing this system of religion was a probable way of depriving myself of this prospect of preferment. Had I not, therefore, as the result of my diligent inquiries, been assuredly convinced that it was my indispensable duty to embrace, and preach them, and that by so doing alone. I could

ensure to myself the favour of a better friend, than any here below ; I should have been destitute even of common sense, to have had any thing to do with them. And yet being aware all along, how unfavourable, *according to human probability*, it will prove, to my worldly interests, at length I have deliberately embraced them.

4. Nor was my regard to my character a trifling security against such a change of sentiment. I was ambitiously and excessively fond of that honour which cometh from man ; and considered the desire of praise as allowable, nay laudable. By this motive was I urged on to a very diligent prosecution of my studies, even beyond what my natural inclination led me to ; and my whole conduct was influenced by, my whole conversation tinged with, this vainglorious aim. On the other hand, with approbation and self complacency, I had been accustomed to hear the most contemptuous and opprobrious epithets liberally added to the names of those persons to whom I have now joined myself ; and all

along, as I verged nearer and nearer to Methodism, I was painfully sensible, that I was drawing upon myself the same mortifying distinctions. I have been a vainglorious candidate for human applause; but I renounce such pretensions, and willingly submit to be considered by the world, under the mortifying character of a silly, half-witted, crack-brained enthusiast. These epithets, I am sensible, are now bestowed upon me, behind my back, and very often to my face; I bless God this doth not move me, but I can heartily thank him that I am counted worthy to suffer shame for his sake. But when I saw this trial approaching, it appeared very formidable; and I can truly affirm, that nothing but the fullest conviction, that the cause in which I was embarking was the cause of God; nothing, but not daring to act contrary to the plain dictates of my conscience, could have influenced me to make this sacrifice of my character, and bring myself under so much contempt and scorn.

But, 5. To reason with our despisers up-

on their own principles : upon supposition that I am now fallen into enthusiasm, mistake, and strong delusion, I certainly was, when I first set out in this inquiry, a very unlikely person so to do. My leading resolve was to search for the truth diligently, and to embrace it wherever I found it, whatever it might cost ; no sooner had I begun this inquiry, than I was called upon to give proof of the sincerity of this resolution ; and, from a principle of conscience, though a mistaken one, I renounced my only prospect of preferment ; and it would be unreasonable to question my sincerity, after it had been thus evidenced. Since that time I have also deliberately sacrificed my character, and hazarded the loss of all my former friends. Giving these proofs of my integrity, I set off in dependence on those plain promises, which I have mentioned ; I have sought for this desired knowledge of the truth mainly in reading the Holy Scriptures, and by prayer for the promised teaching of the Holy Ghost, after that manner which had been related ; and am now led to

conclusions diametrically opposite, to what I expected. Now, lay all these things together, attentively consider them, and then let your own conscience determine how far it is probable, that a person, in this manner seeking for the truth, should be given over to a strong delusion to believe a pernicious lie. “Would any of you that is a father, if his son asked bread, give him a stone; or if he asked a fish, give him a serpent? If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall our Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” Can any man suppose, that after such repeated and continued pleadings of the express promises of the Lord to this effect, in earnest prayer, according to his appointment, I should be likely to be delivered up to the teaching of the father of lies? Can any one make this conclusion without insinuating that God hath broken his promises, which is shocking to think of? In short, you may make a jest of these things; you may throw by the book without giving any attention to an ar-

gument of this kind ; or you may say, what you never can prove, that it is all a contrived story ; or you may argue, that these promises, though contained in the Bible, are not to be depended on by us : which is to give up the Scriptures to be scoffed at by infidels and atheists, and to render them useless to the humble, anxious inquirer after truth and salvation ; but by no other means, I am assured, can you account for this single circumstance, without allowing, that the substance of those doctrines that I have now embraced, is indeed contained in the word of God ; that they comprise the truth as it is in Jesus, and are not corrupted with any such delusion, as can hazard the salvation of my soul, or the souls of those who, by my ministry, receive them. On this supposition all difficulties vanish. The Lord had given me a sincere desire, to know the saving doctrine of the Gospel ; and though I was exceedingly ignorant, obstinate, and prejudiced ; yet this desire, having by his providential direction led me to the word of God, and influenced me to seek his teach-

ing by prayer ; God was faithful to his own promises, and it was an example of his own words ; “ that every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth.” My sincerity in seeking the truth, evidenced by the sacrifice I made to my conscience, was sufficient to convince any person, who is conversant and experienced in the things of God, that, as my friend foretold, thither would all my inquiries lead me, in that would they all finally centre. And could I be assured, beloved reader, whoever thou art, that thou wast as sincerely desirous to know the truth, as I then was, and as heartily resolved to embrace it wherever thou didst find it, and whatever it should cost thee ; had I also assurance, that in a believing dependence on these promises, thou wast diligently, and from day to day, in the study of the word of God, and by prayer, seeking the accomplishment thereof unto thy soul ; I would as confidently foretel, that, as to those things which I now regard as essential to salvation, and, if thou hast the souls of others committed to thee, as to what is need-

ful for thy usefulness in the ministry, thou wouldst be brought in time to the same conclusions, whatever thy present religious sentiments may be. May the Lord give thee true sincerity, and incline thine heart to try the experiment!

I am aware that many will object to what I have urged under this head, as being too confident, and as urged by men of contrary religious sentiments, each in behalf of his own system; and as I would neither wish by vain controversy to be detained from more profitable employments, nor yet to have any material, and plausible objection in force against what I have asserted, I hope the reader will excuse my obviating this beforehand. In answer, therefore, to those who may deem me too confident in this argument, I would only entreat them impartially and carefully to consider the limitations with which, on every hand, it is guarded; and then to inquire, whether in any other way, than that which hath been mentioned, he can account for this circumstance: that is, supposing this narrative true, for which

the appeal is to the heart-searching God ; and supposing the promises mentioned, to be proposed to us, that we might embrace, depend on, and plead them in prayer ; considering the glory of the divine veracity as concerned in their accomplishment to every believer, and then try, whether you possibly can evade one of the following conclusions : 1. Either God hath failed of his promise ; or, 2. God hath in the main, and as far as is expressed, led the author by his Holy Spirit to the knowledge and belief of the truth. To the second argument, taken from experience, I answer, 1. That it is not fact ; many pretenders to sincerity and candour, will, without hesitation, condemn as enthusiastical, such a reliance on, and confidence in these promises, and this way of searching for truth ; and it is plain they do not seek truth in that manner, which they condemn in others. Many others, perhaps, slightly mention these matters, but they will not endure to be closely questioned ; they are conscious that they have not sought the truth in this manner, and

therefore they evade such discourse as personal. 2. I answer that the writings of many pretended inquirers after truth, evidently show, that they expect to find it, not by trusting the Lord with all their heart, asking wisdom of him, or seeking in the word of God and by prayer, to be taught of him: but by leaning to their own understanding, by resting the argument on philosophical reasonings, by backing it with the authority of this, or that renowned name, and supporting their conclusions by bold, and perplexing criticism, and interpretations of Scripture. Hence so many daring appeals from revelation, to reason and philosophy; hence such and so many objections brought against doctrines plainly revealed in God's word; (if language hath any determinate meaning;) and so many consequences charged upon these doctrines, with a design to invalidate their divine authority; as if being made by every art of ingenuity, to have the show of unreasonableness, was sufficient to prove the plainest revelation of God's Holy Spirit a falsehood:

hence such liberty, in interpretation and criticism, taken with the word of God, as the learned would never endure in interpreting, or criticising upon Horace or Virgil. These things prove, that such persons are strangers to that earnest, hearty, sincere desire to know the truth, which brings the inquirer to an humble willingness to be taught of God, and in submission of understanding to seek wisdom from his word and Spirit. And 3. It is evident, that many pretenders to this sincere desire to know the truth, are not troubled with suspicions that they are, or can be wrong. They have made up their minds before they begin their inquiries; and therefore you will not find them willing to make the least concession, but, in the management of the controversy, resolved to vindicate, and contend for every tittle, wading through thick and thin, (as it is said,) to make good their cause: and where arguments fail, to make use of the other arts of controversy, with which skill in the management of their weapons, and anger against their opponents,

can supply them. Where a cause is maintained in this manner, you may easily understand, that there is none of that earnest desire of learning the truth, and that anxious fear of mistaking it, or of that distrust of self, and those doubts concerning our present knowledge and belief, which constitute that sincerity, that leads the inquirer to the word and Spirit of God for direction and teaching. Lay these things together, and they will on scriptural grounds, cut off many confident pretenders to sincerity from their claims as entirely as they exclude Annas and Caiaphas, and the chief Priests, Scribes, and Pharisees, from being sincere inquirers into the truth of the Old Testament; when in support of their own authority and reputation, and influenced by pride and anger, they, under colour of their law, put to death him, of whom Moses and the prophets did write, even Jesus of Nazareth the Son of God. And as to men of another spirit, who appear sincere, humble, and willing to be taught of God, in their inquiry after truth; but do not entirely

agree with what has been laid down as my view of the truth, I would only wish them to observe the distinction established between some and others of these doctrines. Such persons do not, I dare say, materially differ from that which has been mentioned as necessary to salvation; and, therefore, as I allow that they may have been in the main taught of God; so I only require the same allowance; and that it may be supposed that the same God, who according to his promise hath led both, as far as is needful to salvation, in the same way, has in other things left us to differ, for the mutual exercise of candour and forbearance, till that time when we shall know even as we are known.

Lay these things impartially together; consider my former sentiments on religious subjects; my self-sufficiency and positiveness in my opinions; my worldly interest and character, both, to appearance, at stake; my sincerity in my religious inquiries thus evidenced; and then suppose my present sentiments to be enthusiasm, and pernicious

delusion, and will it not be evident to your own consciences, that I was a most unlikely person to fall into them ?

II. In the second place, I would observe, that this change in my sentiments, was very gradual.

When any person suddenly changes his religious opinions, for others, very different from them, it is no inconsiderable evidence of a changeable and fickle disposition: it gives cause to suspect that he was not well established in his former sentiments ; that he had taken them upon trust, and was a stranger to the arguments wherewith they might be defended, and to the objections, which might be urged against them. If worldly interest, reputation, or conveniency, seem to favour the change, there is room for a presumption, that these had an undue influence upon him ; if not, it may be insinuated, that he was deluded with specious appearances, that he did not allow himself time to weigh the arguments pro and con ; that he had only changed one set of notions for another, without having duly considered

either side. Such objections may reasonably be made, and the consequences of such precipitate changes too often justify them. But though I was always, and still am, of an headstrong, impetuous spirit in other things, and when once I have purposed, can have no rest from incessant agitation of mind, till I have accomplished ; yet, in this particular, I acted contrary to my natural temper. Indeed, at first, I did in some instances too much betray my impetuosity ; but at that time I acted not in the character of an inquirer, but in full confidence that it was pleading the cause of truth, and had no more thought of becoming what the world calls a Methodist, than of turning Mahometan ; and after that first hurry was over, though commonly in earnest, and sometimes in considerable perturbation of mind, I was outwardly calm and satisfied ; being generally enabled to believe, that if I were in any thing at present mistaken, I should some time be guided to the truth. My determination to set about this inquiry proceeded not so much from anxious fears about my

own soul, as from a deep sense impressed upon my heart, of the importance of the ministry, and the worth of souls committed to my charge, and of the awful account to be given of them; and as I all along bestowed some pains in instructing them in what I believed to be the truth; I was preserved thereby from any discomposing fears, or undue disquietude of mind. I sat down very coolly to search for the truth; I proceeded very gradually, and with extreme caution: I took up no one opinion upon trust; I gave up none of my sentiments, until the arguments wherewith I had learned to defend them, were convincingly answered; nor did I admit any new articles into my creed, till either every objection was obviated, or I was pressed on the other hand with others, still more unanswerable. Much, very much, prayer and meditation preceded every change of sentiment; and I was near three years from the beginning of my inquiry, before I came to a determination, what was the truth. So long, deliberately, and step by step, I examined the premises, be-

fore I finally proceeded to draw my conclusion. I perceive much cause to be ashamed of my unteachable temper; for with such opportunities as were afforded me, if I had improved them, I might have been led to the knowledge and belief of the same truths, in much less time. But the Lord, I trust, led me in this way, and left me thus far to my own natural pride of heart; that it might more evidently appear, that I received not my doctrines from man, but that, indeed, in the first instance, I learned them from the word and Spirit of God.

III. Thirdly, I would observe, that as I changed my religious views deliberately, so I did it without any teaching from the persons to whose sentiments I have now acceded. For a considerable time after the commencement of my inquiries, I would not so much as read what they had to urge in their own behalf. I entered, indeed, into a correspondence with Mr. —; but my intention was, not to learn from him, but to dispute with him, which, when he waived, I dropped the correspondence, and utterly

neglected his letters, as not considering them worth a reperusal. From that time I avoided his company, and all the time I would not hear him preach. I would not be understood to insinuate, that Mr. — hath not been useful to me : he hath been, and continues to be, eminently so ; and I continually see great cause to bless God for giving me such a friend, to be so near at hand on all occasions. But this I assuredly believe, that had I never seen him after the time that his example had put me upon considering my conduct, I should have arrived at the same views of gospel truth which I now have. His usefulness to me hath, all along, been in those matters wherein we were in some measure agreed, not in those wherein we differed ; for in these my proud heart scorned to have him for a teacher.

At the same time, though I had the offer of several books written by Dissenters and Methodists, I declined them ; and did not for near two years, peruse any of them with sufficient attention, to recollect any thing of consequence in them. I say not this, as

slighting these books: justice requires me to acknowledge, that many of them which then I ignorantly despised, contain as solid and judicious, and excellent divinity, as hath been penned since the apostles' days. But I did not get my system from them; for that was nearly completed, before I was prevailed upon to read them. My studies, beside the Bible, were mainly confined to authors of allowed reputation in the church of England, several of which I have mentioned. Wherein they differed from each other, (as certainly Tillotson and Hooker, Jortin and Beveridge, Bull and Hall, do differ very much indeed,) I endeavoured to judge for myself, comparing all of them with the word of God, and with the articles, homilies, and liturgy of the church of England; and from such authors, thus compared, as far as the writings of uninspired men have been instrumental to this change, I have received the greatest part of my present opinions.

But let it be observed, that the farther these streams are traced upward, toward

the fountain of the blessed reformation, the purer they flow, according to my present judgment; and I have no doubt but I could, were I to go about it, with proper helps, prove undeniably, that there is nothing material preached by me, under the scandal of methodistical, which was not preached by those excellent persons, who, having laid the foundation of our church establishment, gave their bodies to be burned, in confirmation of the truths they taught. It is much to be wished, that their lives and discourses, living and dying, and their remaining writings, were more generally known amongst us, and did not remain locked up from the world in large folios, in the learned languages, or in books out of print, or exceeding scarce: the effect of which is, that the members of our national church are in general utterly ignorant of its standard doctrines, and ignorantly brand those as Methodists and enthusiasts, who preach zealously the very doctrines of the first reformers.

IV. In the fourth place, I would observe

the great influence which the study of the Scriptures had in producing this change.

We are too apt, without careful examination, to take things for granted; and to collect our scheme of divinity from other authors, and only to fetch a few detached texts from the Scripture, which appear to countenance our preconceived opinions; neglecting, or very slightly considering such parts of the word of God, as seem incapable of being made use of to our purpose: we are too prone in availing ourselves of the labours of critics and expositors, to resign up ourselves implicitly to their guidance, and to imagine that we have proof enough of our doctrines, if we can produce the sanction of some great name, which hath espoused and maintained them; without carefully examining whether they be right or wrong: but this is to pay that difference to the human interpretation, which is only due to the divine book commented upon. We ministers especially, though at ordination we solemnly promise to turn all our studies, as much as may be, into this channel, are very

apt to suffer our time and thoughts to be engrossed with such studies and employments as are foreign thereto, interfere therewith, and leave at most but a secondary attention for the study of the word of God. Hence it comes to pass, that frequently we do not bestow so much pains in meditating upon the Bible, and in comparing spiritual things with spiritual, one Scripture with another, with what we experience in our own hearts, and what we hear and see in the world around us, as we do about matters of far less consequence. So that probably should we at any time sit down to a diligent examination of the whole word of God, we should find it a very different book from what we expected: thus at least it hath been with me, and possibly it may be so with others.

The word of God informs us, that true wisdom, the saving, practical, and experimental knowledge of divine things, is not to be acquired without earnest and diligent seeking, (Prov. ii. 1, 6.) “My son, if thou
“wilt receive my words, and hide my com-
“mandments with thee; so that thou in-

“cline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply
“thine heart to understanding: yea, if
“thou criest after knowledge, and lifteth up
“thy voice for understanding; if thou seek-
“est her as silver, and searchest for her, as
“for hid treasures: then shalt thou under-
“stand the fear of the Lord, and find the
“knowledge of God.” If then our wisdom
has been acquired without any of that eager
desire after, and painful diligence in seeking
it, with which the covetous man desires,
and seeks for his riches; it is a shrewd con-
jecture, that it is not of the genuine sort.
Once I had in my own esteem a sort of wis-
dom, which seemed to offer itself to me spon-
taneously, and to be found with little seeking.
But now I am persuaded it was but a counter-
feit; a fair seeming, pernicious foolishness.

But that which I now esteem to be true
wisdom, if I could but attain unto it, is not
to be acquired in so easy a manner. When
I first began to desire and seek after this
wisdom, I set out with the assurance, that it
was to be found in the Holy Scriptures, and
nowhere else, these alone being able to

make us wise unto salvation. I therefore considered myself engaged to make them my study; and as the whole was given by inspiration from God, and was all declared to be profitable for some purpose or other, according to the various ends for which the Holy Spirit designed therein; so I made the whole my study without picking and choosing. Thus I learned to look upon the Bible as my book of instructions, given me along with my ministerial trust by my Lord and Master; that from thence I was to draw all my doctrines, instructions, and admonitions, warnings, examples, rules of duty, motives to duty, and encouragement therein: and I also considered it to be the believer's charter of privileges, containing exceeding great and precious promises, and the whole of that which God saw fit to reveal, concerning those unspeakable and inconceivable good things, which he hath of his infinite mercy prepared for them that love him. In order, therefore, faithfully to declare my message from the Lord Almighty to the souls of men, I found it indi-

pensably needful to be well acquainted with every part, and to take the word of God myself, as well as propose it to others, as the lantern of my feet, and the light of my paths. And not only to attend to the letter, but also to the true meaning of the Spirit of God therein. This I found to be a work that required much time, great diligence, mature consideration, and an unbiassed, unprejudiced mind.

With this view of the matter partly obtained, and continually more and more unfolding itself to my mind, I studied the word of God, and have now for near four years employed a very considerable part of my time therein, neither rejecting, nor greatly depending upon the assistance of interpreters. I all along sincerely desired to know the truth, and for that end read the Scriptures, not as the word of man, but as the word of God. And though there have been seasons of remissness, when other employments and studies too much interfered with this main business; and though at first I was very far from an unbiassed mind; be-

ing blindly and obstinately prejudiced against those doctrines, which I now believe to be the true gospel of Jesus Christ; yet, within that space I have read the Bible several times over, in every part, with the strictest attention I was capable of. There are very few passages which relate to doctrine, that I have not repeatedly and diligently examined, comparing one with another, with all the care and consideration I could; and I seldom ever ceased meditating on any portion of Scripture, until I had attained to some satisfying conclusion concerning its true meaning, and agreement with other Scriptures. I may truly say I have filled reams of paper with religious discussions, with sermons, expositions and letters, in all which I ransacked the Bible, to bring as much scripture evidence for my direction as possible. For these last two years I have scarce opened a book except upon religious subjects, and from morning till night, nearly every day, all this while, my thoughts incessantly have been employed in meditation upon the great truths of

the gospel. Every difficulty and objection, (and difficulties and objections both from my own meditations, and in the course of my reading, continually crowded upon my mind,) sent me to the word of God, and increased my care and attention in examining and weighing every text of Scripture, respecting the point in question, before I exchanged my old opinion for a new one.

Thus I may truly say, I have sought in the word of God, (that field in which alone this precious treasure lies hid,) for wisdom, for the saving knowledge of divine things, as for silver, and searched for her, as for hidden treasures. And though I am sensible, compared with many, with whom I have personal acquaintance, and still more, whose works I read, my knowledge of the Scriptures is superficial, the knowledge of a child, of a mere novice in the school of Christ; yet, I trust that, as far as relates to the leading truths of the gospel, according to the promise, I am brought to understand the fear of the Lord, and have found the knowledge of God. And permit me, belo-

ved reader, to put thee in remembrance, that until thou hast with some good measure of this diligence, studied the whole word of God, thou runnest very great hazards in passing judgment upon the men and doctrines; be cautious in what thou doest; let these men quite alone, until thou hast imitated the conduct of the noble Bereans; and hast thoroughly, and with unbiassed mind, examined and meditated upon the whole word of God, to see whether the things they believe, and teach, be so or no. Lest otherwise it should come to pass, (as probably it will,) that in opposing and condemning them, thou shouldst be found to fight against God. And O! that the Lord would hear and grant my request, and by his Holy Spirit powerfully incline the hearts of all, who read these sheets, according to their leisure, station in life, obligations, and opportunities, thus attentively to read their Bibles; not as the word of man, but as the word of God himself, speaking from heaven, and unto them, and concerning the everlasting interest of their precious and

immortal souls. Be the adviser what he will, despised, and deserving to be despised for a Methodist, the advice is undoubtedly good: advice I shall have no occasion to repent having thus given you, at the solemn hour of death, and the awful day of judgment; advice, which, at those approaching seasons, none of you will repent having followed; though it should divert you from more amusing, and at this day more reputable studies, or engross that time, that you have been accustomed to devote to more pleasurable and fashionable employments; but which, neglected, will be an additional sting in every conscience, through all the countless ages of eternity.

And O! that they to whom the chief Shepherd hath committed the care of precious souls, and at whose hands he will assuredly require every one that perishes through their default, would take in good part this expression of the very affectionate desire of my soul, both in behalf of them, and their flocks, in dropping these hints concerning their peculiar obligations, to devote

much of their time to the attentive, unbiassed study of the word of God, that infinitely best, but often least studied of all books. What avails it, that the ministers of the everlasting Gospel should be learned classics, profound philosophers, metaphysicians, and mathematicians, expert logicians, or adorned with the knowledge of the politer sciences; if they are unacquainted, or but superficially acquainted, with the sacred Scriptures? These other branches of literature may amuse and entertain them, may procure them preferment, reputation, respect, and favour; but it is the knowledge of the Bible, which alone can enable them in such a manner to attend to themselves, and to their doctrine, as shall issue in the everlasting salvation of their own souls, and the souls committed to their care. Far be it from me to presume to lay down my opinions as the standard of doctrine, or a rule for the faith and preaching, of my brethren, in this sacred ministry. But the more obscure I am, the less objection there can reasonably be against my just hinting to them,

that if any one should find this subject manifest itself to his conscience, and make him sensible, that verily he hath been faulty in this matter, and hath been attending to other employments, and studying other books more than the word of God ; then, possibly, he may be mistaken in his sentiments concerning the doctrine of the Gospel, and, being mistaken himself, may be misleading others, to the endangering of their immortal souls ; for he cannot be certain, but that, should he employ some years in this single study, (which its importance well deserves,) he may find the Bible a very different book than he expected.

V. I would observe the influence which prayer appears to have had in effecting this change.

I am aware that the world, though called Christian, is come to such a pass, that the very mention of this subject, in many companies, is accounted ill manners, or even received with ridicule ; and that being known to live a life of prayer and communion with God, is alone sufficient to denominate any

person a Methodist. However, it is scarce needful to say, how full the word of God is, of precepts, instruction, exhortations, invitations, promises, and examples to this effect; he never read his Bible, who knows not this; nor can any man, under any pretence, make a jest of this great duty and privilege of a believer, without pouring contempt upon the Holy Scriptures, and insulting the brightest characters therein proposed to us as examples, not excepting the Lord Jesus himself. Let men, therefore, under the profession of Christianity, be as irreligious and profane as they please; I shall not be ashamed to speak upon so unfashionable a topic; for if the word of God be true, he never knew any thing as he ought to know, never believed, never repented, never performed one duty aright in his life, who hath not sought all his wisdom, knowledge, faith, repentance, and sufficiency for obedience, from God, by fervent, instant, and persevering prayer. Time was, even since I had souls committed to my care, that I lived in the neglect of this duty,

and so without God in the world ; but since, through his forbearance and mercy, I have been in earnest about the salvation of my own soul and their's, I have not been left to do so. However, it is not my intent to speak any farther on this subject, than relates to the matter on hand.

The word of God promises the Holy Spirit to them that ask him ; he is the Spirit of truth, leads into all truth, teaches all things and searches and reveals the deep things of God. The leading promise to the church is, (Isaiah, liv. 13,) "That all her children shall be taught of the Lord." (John vi. 44, 45.) Referring thereto, Christ hath declared, that none can come unto him, except he be drawn of the Father, and taught of God. And St. Paul adds, (1 Cor. ii. 14,) "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, neither can he know them ; because they are spiritually discerned." The natural man is explained in Jude, by not having the Spirit, which is evidently the Apostle's meaning in this pas-

sage ; for in the preceding verse he declares, that he preached the gospel, not “ in words, which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” On these grounds, I concluded, that man’s natural understanding could not spiritually, or profitably, receive the knowledge of revealed mysteries, unless it be enlightened by the Holy Spirit. I learned also, that our eyes may be blinded by Satan, the god and prince of this world ; and our understandings closed, and a veil upon our hearts, when we read the word of God ; in which case the letter of the Scriptures, without the Spirit, only killeth. Hence the need of our understandings being opened, to understand the Scriptures ; (for want of which the plainest discourses of our Lord to his disciples, concerning his sufferings, death, and resurrection, were hid from them, and they understood them not ;) and of the veil being taken from our hearts ; for want of which the Jews in reading the Old Testament cannot understand the plainest declarations of Moses, and the prophets.

concerning their promised Saviour. I was taught also that true wisdom was the gift of God, and to be asked of him, by every one, who would be wise unto salvation, that "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and that those who receive not the love of the truth, that they might be saved, are given over to a strong delusion to believe a lie; that they might all be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." (2 Thes. v. 10—12.)

On these grounds, and depending upon the promise and invitations so plentifully interspersed through the Scriptures; when I began to inquire after the truth, I began also to cry unto the Lord for his guidance therein; and as my mind became more and more engaged, and my difficulties, in extricating myself from the labyrinths of controversy increased, I became more and more earnest, and constant, and particular, in making my request known unto God. My constant prayer to the Lord was, to be delivered from pride and prejudice, blindness of heart, contempt of the truth. obsti-

nacy, enthusiasm, ignorance, and error. That the Lord would give me wisdom and knowledge, guide me to the truth as it is in Jesus, open my understanding, take away the veil from my heart, and make known unto me the way of salvation, which is revealed to sinners in his holy word. Thus waiting upon the Lord, according to his own appointment, depending upon, and pleading his promises from day to day, I was led from one thing to another, until my view of religious truth was totally changed. This I most firmly believe to have been by the promised teaching of the Spirit of truth, powerfully enlightening my mind, opening the Scriptures, and, by dispelling the clouds of error, and prejudices, enabling me to receive the truth therein contained.

But though I am not ashamed of declaring my desire of living a life of prayer, and communion with God; yet I have no intention in speaking thus publicly on such a subject, but to advance his glory, and forward the salvation of souls. As in his presence I declare. that I have prayed over many of the

most interesting passages of Scripture, chapter by chapter, and often verse by verse, with the most anxious apprehensions of rejecting, or mistaking the truth, or embracing a falsehood; and with the most earnest desire of knowing what that doctrine was, which Jesus and his apostles taught. In the sight of God I am sensible I have abundant cause to be humbled, and ashamed of my frequent remissness in, and the continual defilements of, my prayers; but as surely as I believe his promises to be faithful, as surely I believe him to be a God that heareth prayers; so surely do I believe that flesh and blood hath not revealed to me the doctrines I now preach, but God himself by his Holy Spirit.

Reader, whoever thou art, if thy conscience testify, that thou hast hitherto lived in the neglect of this important duty, or in the formal, lifeless, and unmeaning performance of it with thy lips, whilst thy heart hath been disengaged, and thy thoughts allowedly wandering to the ends of the earth; if thou hast not been accustomed by fervent prayer to seek wisdom from God by his teaching Spirit:

if thou knowest not what it is to exercise faith upon the promises pointed out to thee, nor to plead them in prayer to a promise-keeping God ; if all thy knowledge of divine things hath been acquired by leaning to thy own understanding ; if in reading the Scriptures thou hast looked more to learned critics, commentators, and expositors, than to the illuminating Spirit of God, sought in humble prayer, to open thy understanding, to take the veil from thine heart, and to give thee that wisdom, which is from above ; then be as sure as the word of God is true, and we are concerned in it, that thou art in the wrong, the light that is in thee is darkness, and thou knoweth nothing yet as thou oughtest to know. May the Lord effectually incline thine heart to take a contrary course, and to seek wisdom, where alone it can be found, from the Lord, the Father of Lights, and the giver of every good and perfect gift, who hath invited thee to ask, that it may be given thee !

VI. I would observe, that there is nothing

in this Narrative, which can reasonably be condemned as enthusiasm.

It is allowed, that there is such a thing as enthusiasm ; that it is a frequent attendant on religious zeal ; that in some of its operations it is a grievous evil, (I speak of the faulty enthusiasm ;) in all, attended with many inconveniences ; and that it ought very carefully to be guarded against by every religious professor, and zealous preacher. It would also be in vain to pretend, that the late revivals of religion, which indiscriminately have been stigmatized with the name of Methodism, have been, in opinion and practice, entirely free from enthusiasm. What revivals of religion ever were free from such scandals ? Where the Lord sows his good seed, there the enemy will be sure to scatter his tares. It must be confessed, that some of the most eminent instruments in this work, whose names, when prejudice shall vanish, will be handed down with honour, as burning and shining lights, to the latest periods of the church, have, by the greatness of their zeal, through human frail-

ty, been betrayed into sentiments, expressions, and deportment, in some instances justly to be censured as enthusiastical; of which their enemies have not failed sufficiently to avail themselves. But whatever indiscretions and mistakes particular persons, who have preached these doctrines, may have fallen into, this doth not, in the judgment of candid and impartial persons, in the least affect the general cause, or prove the doctrines erroneous. We would not contend for the credit of individuals, or the interests of a party: but for the doctrines of God's word, and of the established church of England. These will continue true and important, though many of those who have zealously and successfully preached them, should have justly incurred the charge of enthusiasm. All that I would intimate is this; that a man may be led to the belief of those doctrines, which are branded as Methodistical, in a way of sober, rational inquiry; and zealously preach them without being an enthusiast.

It would be very well if some of those.

who so readily accuse whole bodies of apparently religious persons of enthusiasm, would favour us with their determinate definition of an enthusiast. In its original meaning the word has a very favourable sense, and implies, that by a *divine* influence upon the soul, a man is filled with an ardour and warmth of zeal in the cause he is engaged in. Now, it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing, and if our ardour of soul be from the Spirit of God, according to the revealed will of God, and for the glory of God, it is the noblest, most desirable, most heavenly, and most beneficial exertion of the human mind. In every thing but religion an ardour, described by the term enthusiasm, is allowed and commended : a poetical, a military, a patriotic enthusiasm, even when they carry men beyond the strict bounds of cold reasonings and exact prudence, fail not to meet with admirers. Our zeal may be fervent in every thing without censure, save when we are zealous for the glory of God, and the salvation of immortal souls. But there is

an enthusiasm of this sort, which forms the highest elevation, and the noblest effort of the human soul. Such an enthusiasm animated the apostle Paul, in all his self-denying labours and sufferings, and filled (under the guidance of the Holy Ghost) his writings with such ardent zeal for the honour of his dear Saviour, and affection for the souls of men; such an enthusiasm he expresses, when he says, 2 Cor. v. 13, 14,) “Whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God, or whether we be sober, it is for your cause; for the love of Christ constraineth us.” Of such an enthusiasm as this I wish I were far more guilty. But on the other hand there is danger of a counterfeit, pernicious enthusiasm, and about that we are now inquiring. Now, I apprehend, that in order to constitute this culpable enthusiasm, some one or more of the following things must appear; either the ardour of the soul, which is excited, must proceed from a heated imagination, or from a delusion of Satan, instead of being produced by a divine influence; or the cause, in which this ardour is em-

ployed, must be the cause of self and error, instead of the cause of God and truth; or it must exert itself in unjustifiable measures and practices. But if our ardour of mind be warranted by the word of God; if it do not tend to the dishonour of God; and if it be confined in its exercise to the rules and precepts of the word of God, how intense soever it may be, I can see no cause to censure it; unless men can be too zealous for the glory of God, and the salvation of souls.

But whatever be the distinguishing criterion of enthusiasm, I suppose it will be difficult to fix a charge of it upon any thing, for which I plead in this Narrative. I never was taught any thing by impulses, impressions, visions, dreams, or revelations; except so far as the work of the Spirit, in enlightening the understanding for the reception of those truths contained in the Holy Scriptures, is sometimes styled revelation. Other revelation I never expected or experienced, nor ever taught others to expect. Not but that the Lord is sovereign, and may do what he will with his own; and,

if he pleases may, and I suppose sometimes does, go out of the ordinary course, for the conversion of a sinner, or the guidance of a perplexed, or the comfort of a distressed soul; but I never took one step in dependence on any such extraordinary interpositions, nor encouraged any person to do so. And surely it will not be called enthusiasm, by any but avowed infidels, to believe God's word to be the rule of truth, and his promises to be faithful, and in this belief to seek for the knowledge of the doctrines of the gospel, in the manner related. In this way I have been taught no new truths, but as I believe, have been shown the meaning, use, tendency, consistency, harmony, wisdom, and glory of those truths which are contained in the sacred volume, but which before, through pride and ignorance, I perverted, neglected, reviled, and counted foolishness. Nor do I make any pretences to infallibility: God hath not, I trust, left me so unstable, as to float about in the uncertain stream of opinion, and to be tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine by the

sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lay in wait to deceive. As to the grand doctrines of the gospel, which I have endeavoured to mark out as necessary to salvation, they are neither so uncertain, nor so difficult, as men would persuade us ; their uncertainty and difficulty arise wholly from our pride, prejudice, love of sin, and inattentive ignorance of our own hearts. There is really much difficulty in bringing vain man to cease from leaning to his own understanding ; and in prevailing with him to trust in the Lord with all his heart, and to be willing, in the humble posture of a little child, to be taught of God. Nothing but a deep conviction of guilt, a fear of wrath, and a sense of our lost condition by nature and practice, can bring our minds unto this submissive frame ; but this being effected, the difficulty is over, and the way of salvation is so plain, that the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. As to the other doctrines, which I believe myself, though they seem plain enough to me, I desire not to proselyte others to them,

but am willing to leave them as matters, in which fallible men may differ without danger. And as to my sufficiency for the faithful discharge of my ministry to God's glory, and the salvation of souls, he will not, I trust, deceive my expectations, which are grounded on his promises; for the rest I mistake daily, and find myself in continual danger of mixing my own imaginations with his divine truths, and following my own spirit instead of his. Whatever I preach truly, or do wisely, to God be the glory, for I am not sufficient of myself to think a good thought; whatever I speak falsely, or do foolishly, to me be the shame, for it is the natural fruit of my own deceitful heart. If this be enthusiasm, it is an enthusiasm warranted not only by the word of God, as I have endeavoured to prove, but by the whole liturgy of our church. We all at ordination profess to be moved by the Holy Ghost, to take the ministerial office upon us, and assuredly we cannot be moved by the Holy Ghost, if we have not the Holy Ghost, nor may expect his help and guidance. We agree

to pray, that the Lord would lead in the way of truth all such as have erred and are deceived; that he would illuminate all Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, with true knowledge and understanding of his holy word; that he would cleanse our hearts by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit; that he would grant us true repentance and his Holy Spirit; and much more to this effect; and I am persuaded that such a confidence as I have expressed, cannot be censured as enthusiasm, without directly including our church establishment and continual public worship in the same charge.

VII. Lastly, I would observe, that our opposers and despisers will seldom give us the hearing. With all their pretensions to candour, reasoning, and free inquiry, they accuse and condemn us without so much as knowing, with any tolerable degree of accuracy, what our sentiments are; although they are furnished with such plentiful means of information, in those numerous publications, which are now extant upon these subjects.

Having imbibed strong prejudices against us, they frame so contemptible an opinion of our understandings and our writings, that they will not bestow so much pains, or afford so much regard, as to peruse our books; and to call an author a Methodist, is with many people a sufficient reason why they should not read his works. Hence it comes to pass, that for want of information, our doctrines are grievously misrepresented; and in general the attacks made upon us, though they make our persons odious and despised, do not in the least affect the argument in debate. What most of our adversaries know of our opinions, are only scattered fragments picked up by hearsay, wherein neither the connexion, consistency, tendency, nor application of these opinions are preserved; and therefore no wonder that we are vilified, and reproached with things to which we are utter strangers, or which we abominate and protest against from sabbath to sabbath, and against which we neglect not to fill our writings with reasonings, warnings, and cautions.

For my own part I freely acknowledge, that my strongest objections against this scheme of doctrine arose wholly from misapprehension and mistake. Not having read their books, my notions of the doctrines of the Methodists were received from vulgar report, and from their enemies; while my own creative imagination put the construction upon, and drew the consequences from them; so that when I preached against them, I was as one fighting with my own shadow; and in speaking evil of those things, that I knew not, I only betrayed my own ignorance and pride. No better founded are the lamentable outcries, which at this day are made against us, and our principles, as if we were endeavouring to banish reason, argument, sobermindedness, and morality out of the world; and in their stead to substitute a parcel of whimsical vagaries, which are without foundation in reason, or Scripture, and have no influence, or rather a pernicious influence, on our conduct and conversation. When such a declamation is ended. (for one would not

interrupt it,) ask the declaimer what a Methodist is? He can scarce give you an answer; inquire about their doctrines, he doth not understand them; their writings, he never hath read them!

Reader, if thou desirest to know what our opinions are, and what reason there is for these heavy charges, read our books; but read them with attention, and aim at impartiality; compare them with the word of God, and with the liturgy, articles, and homilies of the church of England; and if thou hast leisure and opportunity, with the works of our first reformers. Nor do we desire thee to renounce thy reason, but only to make this *reasonable* concession; that where thy reason would determine one way, but God hath expressly determined another way, thou wouldst allow him to understand his own mysteries better than thou dost; and that therefore thou oughtest, by faith, exercised upon the veracity of God, to receive those matters implicitly, and without reasoning, which God hath revealed, and which thy reason feels to be

far above, out of its reach, and therefore out of its providence. Whenever, on such inquiry, thou discoverest us to be mistaken, there dissent from us, yea blame us, as far as meekness and candour will permit; but do not condemn us in the gross; do not assert our whole scheme of doctrine to be enthusiastical and groundless, though some of our writers should be found to have advanced some questionable opinion. This were the way to drive all truth and certainty out of the world; for what book can be mentioned, the Bible excepted, wherein there is nothing advanced, either erroneous or questionable?

And be assured, it is no argument of a sincere desire to know the truth, to read only one side of the question, and then clamourously to adopt every childish cavil, every vague report, every scandalous falsehood; and industriously to propagate them, as if these afforded a sufficient confutation of all the arguments, authorities, and Scripture testimonies wherewith we support our sentiments. Observe; that though some

professors have been proved enthusiasts, and others detected to be hypocrites, this doth not prove that we are all enthusiasts and hypocrites. Such rash judgments hurt not us, but those that pass them.

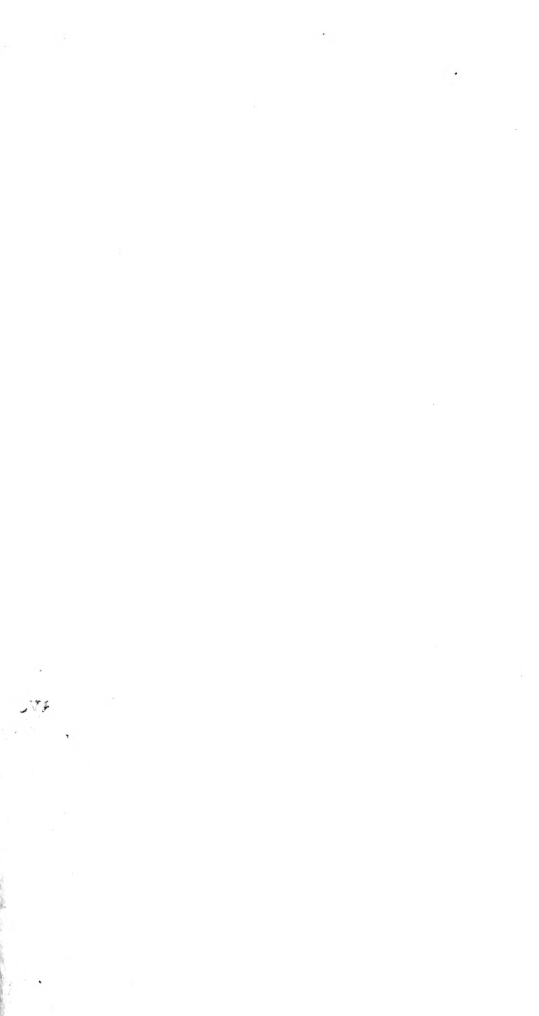
For myself, I here publicly profess, that I will, to the end of my days, acknowledge it, as the greatest obligation that any person can confer upon me, if, in the spirit of meekness, he will point out to me any error or enthusiastical delusion, into which I have fallen, and by sufficient arguments convince me of it. I trust, that my earnest desire to discover the truth, as it is in Jesus, has not abated in its influence, and that I retain the same disinterested resolution to embrace, and adhere to it, with which I set out. Still am I solicitously fearful of being betrayed by my warmth of spirit, and by the deceitfulness of my heart, into erroneous opinions. But it is not clamour and reproach, or objections and arguments brought against sentiments I detest, or consequences I allow not, and do not see to be consequent from my doctrines; it is not such reasoning as

sets one divine attribute at variance with another, and makes one part of the Bible contradict another, or exalts the human understanding upon the tribunal, and arraigns and condemns revealed mysteries at her presumptuous bar; I say, such a procedure will have no weight with me, or with any who ever knew the grace of God in truth.

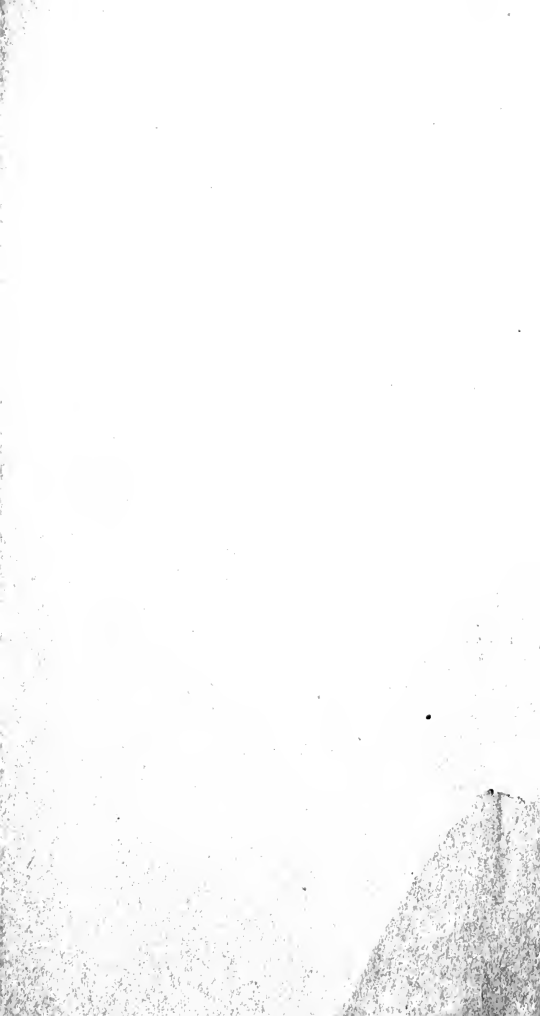
And now, beloved reader, let me conclude, with leaving it upon thy conscience to search for the truth of the Gospel in the study of God's word, accompanied by prayer, as thou wouldst search for hid treasure. I give thee this counsel, as expecting to meet thee at the day of judgment, that our meeting may be with joy, and not with grief; may the Lord incline thee to follow it, with that solemn season full in view! Time, how short! eternity, how long! life, how precarious and vanishing! death, how certain! the pursuits and employments of this present life, how vain, unsatisfying, trifling, and vexatious! God's favour and eternal life, how unspeakably precious! his wrath, the never-quenched fire, and the never-dying

worm, how dreadful! Oh! trifle not away thy span of life, in heaping up riches, which shortly must be left for ever, and which profit not in the day of wrath; in such pleasures and amusements, as will issue in eternal torments; or in seeking that glory, which shall be swallowed up in everlasting infamy. Agree but with me in this; that it is good to redeem thy precious time, to labour for the meat that endureth unto everlasting life, and to attend principally to the one thing needful; take but thy measure of truth as well as duty from the word of God: be willing to be taught of God; meditate on his word day and night; let it be the light of thy feet, and the lantern of thy paths; and in studying it, lean not to thy own understanding, trust not implicitly to expositors and commentators, but ask wisdom and teaching of God. And be not a Felix, saying, to thy serious apprehensions about thy soul; "Go thy way at this time, when I have a convenient season I will call for thee;" lest death and judgment come before that season; be not an Agrippa, an

almost Christian ; but seek to be altogether such as the primitive Christians were. I say, agree but with me in these reasonable requests, and we shall at length agree in all things ; in many in this world ; in all, when we hear the Son of God address us in these rejoicing words, “ Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” May the Lord vouchsafe unto the writer, and to every reader of this book, that wisdom which is from above ; that teaching of his Holy Spirit which guides into the ways of peace ; that faith which justifies ; that peace of God which passeth understanding ; and that measure of sanctifying and strengthening grace, which shall enable us to hold on, and hold out unto the end, always abounding in the work of the Lord, as knowing that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.



182





MAR 9 - 1974

