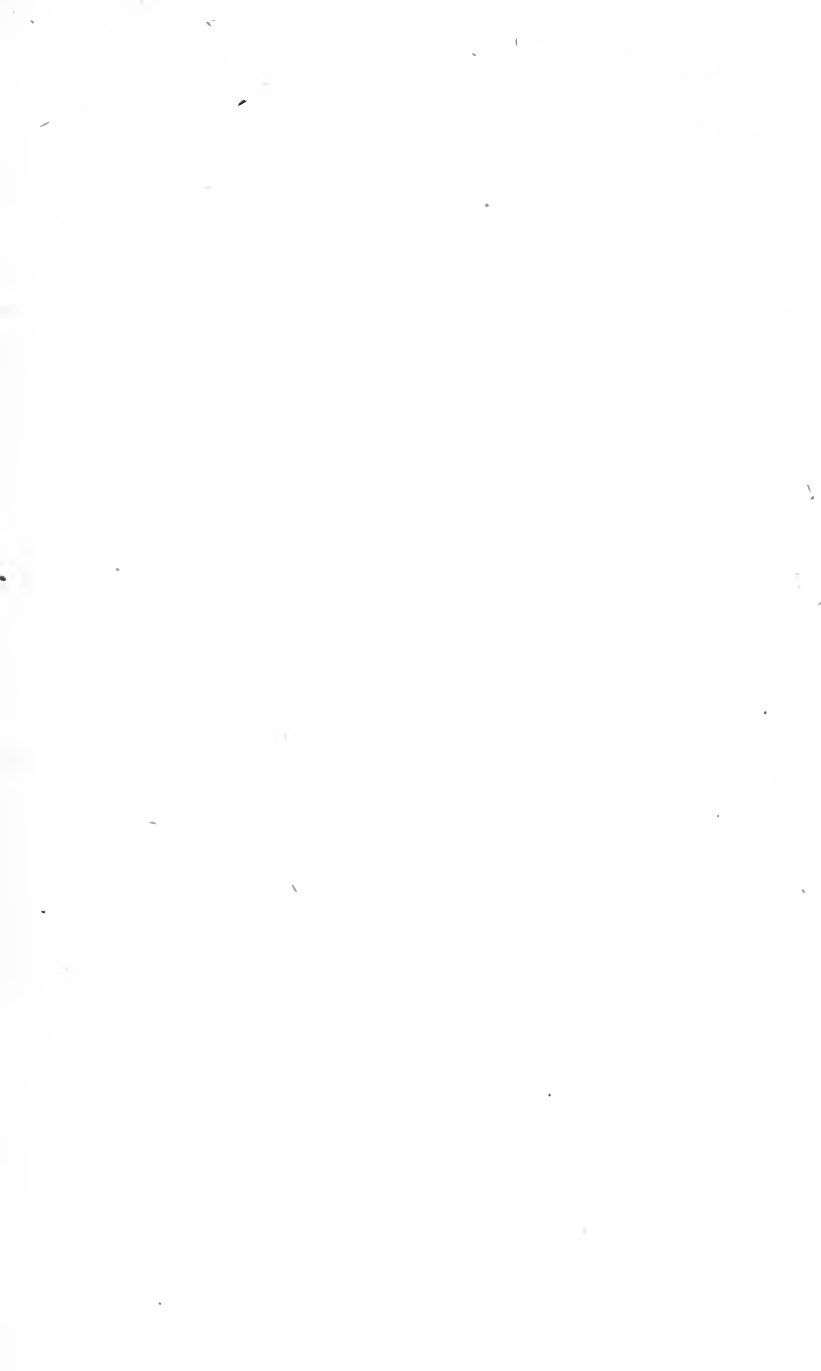


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CHRISTIANITY

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ARGUMENT;

AND THE

TRUE PRINCIPLE

OF

GOSPEL-EVIDENCE

ASSIGNED:

In a LETTER to a young Gentleman at Oxford.

PSAL. CXVI. 10. *I believed, and therefore spake.*

Ut vinum Ægrotis, quia prodest raro, nocet sæpissime, melius est non adhibere omnino quam spe dubiæ salutis in apertam perniciem incurrere: Sic haud scio an melius fuerit Humano Generi motum istum celerem cogitationis—quem rationem vocamus, quoniam pestifera sit multis, admodum paucis salutaris, non dari omnino, quam tam munificè & tam largè dari.

Cicero de Natur. Deor.

The THIRD EDITION.



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ARGUMENT, &c.

S I R,

I Little imagined I should ever have found Cause of Regret from any Conversation with you. On every Subject that occurred to our Consideration you acquitted yourself always, as I thought, so judiciously, and so greatly to my Satisfaction, as made me promise myself the most comfortable Enjoyment of your growing Genius. But these flattering Presages have been much check'd of late, and receiv'd a very melancholy Alloy from the Subject of our last Meeting: The Subject of the World where it is the most material to *think right*, where it is indeed of the most tremendous Consequence to be mistaken. What are all your ingenious Discoveries of speculative Truths, which at best serve but to entertain and amuse the Imagination, if, in the main Point, in the *one Essential Truth* you are still to seek? There only it is that Ignorance and Error are fatal, and Knowledge truly of Importance. And had you besides erred in any Branch of human Science, your penetrating Reason would, in all Probability, have recovered and set you right again; but here, be assured, it

Seeker's
vain Pre-
tensions.

will have no such effect, as proudly as you insist upon its admired All-sufficiency. For you told me, (your Words made too sad an Impression for me easily to forget them) That “ your own Reason was the only Guide you could depend upon to come at the Knowledge of every Thing your Maker design’d you should know ; that they, who pretended to vote this Principle unsecure, reflected highly on the Wisdom and Equity of its Author; that, for your own Part, you had not that impious Notion of the Supreme Being, to distrust the Consequence of your sincere Endeavours to please him, or to imagine, that you might innocently tamper with your Reason to the Prejudice of your eternal Happiness; that *if our own Hearts did not condemn us, we must needs have a just Confidence towards God*; ——— that a Man could evidently never be jealous enough of Opinions contracted by Education, and made sacred by Habit; that he could never be too industrious in improving his Suspicions of Things his own Reason had no Share in introducing; accordingly, that to shake Hands fairly with all we had been taught, was the first Step to be taken if ever we meant to be fixed on any Rational Persuasion, since every one’s Tutor could not be in the right; and there was no Mark of Distinction possibly to be found without taking Matters into our own Hands, beginning Things entirely again, and boldly setting up for ourselves.” — A Romantick Sally of Youth, and Flourish of Philosophy! or in the sacred Phrase, *Profane and Vain Babbling!*

It is but too easy, my Friend, to see your Meaning, when you triumph thus in an entire Release from the Prejudices of Education; this has been the common plausible Style of the more modest

modest Professors of Infidelity through all Ages, and is a Language generally well understood. If this therefore be the Card you design to steer by, you must not depend too certainly upon the Assistance of Faith to conduct you, or making Heaven your assured Port.

If once you allow yourself in Doubting, I will take upon me to answer for the Consequence, that you never will well believe ; if once you come fairly to your proposed Situation for *proving all Things*, be assured, that you will never *hold fast* any Thing. To offer to sit down to examine, seems to me to be absolutely giving up the Cause of Religion, and desiring me to dispute, to be begging the Question. For, is it not most absurd to require a Belief, if previous Examination be requisite? If Scepticism be this necessary Qualification for the obtaining of a true Faith, how can we ever be secure that it shall not improve into direct Unbelief? If Doubting be at all admitted, Conviction can never, sure, with any Propriety, be insisted on. Conviction is a dubious and uncertain Consequence wherever there is Ground for Debate, and therefore not to be promised for, any more than any other Contingency. If I am once left free to examine, I can by no means be tied up in the Issue. It is in its own Nature a necessary and independent Event, under no Influence of mine, where I have no Power to interpose to direct its Course or Operations, or any farther Interest or Concern, than merely as a Looker-on.

Forgive the Freedom of my Zeal, when I tell you plainly, that *you know not what manner of Spirit you are of*. There is no Medium betwixt believing and not believing. If, as I apprehend you, you do indeed intend to wave all Religion 'till your Reason is satisfied about it,

Disputes, if allowable, no ensuring Conviction.

*All Suf-
pence of
Faith A-
postacy in
one bapti-
zed.*

know, that from the very Moment of that Resolution, so long you actually apostatize from Christianity, and renounce your Baptifmal-Vow: A strange Method this ! to turn one's Back upon Religion in order to meet it, to discard it as a means to commence Acquaintance. Alas ! Sir, to have your Mind thus *in Equilibrio* is rank Infidelity. Our Saviour has expressly assured us, that he looks upon a Seeker as Anti-christ profess, and that *he that is not with him, is against him.*

By this Time your Philosophical Zeal is alarmed, and you are earnest to interrupt me with a thousand plausible Queries to stop my Career. You have another pompous Lecture, no doubt, ready prepared upon the Occasion to enforce your first Sentiment, to insist strenuously still upon the Justice of your Examining-Scheme, and the Necessity of coming indifferent to a fair Trial. Be patient, however, for one Moment, and it is possible I may give you all the Satisfaction you can desire in that Article, without any of your Interposition ; 'tis possible I may anticipate the Substance of the very Argument you propose, and become myself your unexpected Advocate on the Point. For never believe but I am convinced, as well as you, that Opinions founded on Prejudice and Ignorance, are not that Truth which the Gospel requires at our Hands ; that the Tales of our Nurses (to use your own Stile) are by no means that Kind of *Knowledge wherein standeth eternal Life.* Is it yet farther evident to me, that where Reason is to determine the Cause, she must be left to herself to determine fairly ; that it is the greatest Injustice and Mockery to invite her to give Sentence, where there have been Practices before-hand, and are Practices still continued to obstruct or limit her Influence. Thus far it seems then I readily agree with you

in

in all your Preliminaries in behalf of Reason and her Rights, but you will defer building too much upon the Concession, 'till you hear the Ground I profess for this Agreement ; which is, my looking upon the Subject before us to be absolutely out of her Jurisdiction. I am fully persuaded, that the judging at all of religious Matters is not the proper Province of Reason, or indeed an Affair where she has any Concern. This is the great Point in which at present we differ, and wherein I would, if possible, obtain your Concurrence. Your boasted *rational Faith* is what I would fain shew you to be a false, unwarranted Notion of your own, and without the least Ground to support it, either in Nature or Revelation. I mean, that your Assent to Revealed Truths should be founded upon the Conviction of your Understanding. That Work once happily effected, and the Way, if it may be, well cleared in your Mind by the Detection of its mistaken Principles, I should make it my next earnest Business, as due, to endeavour the supplying of the Deficiency, and providing you some better Account of the Matter, some fitter and more effectual Principle of saving Knowledge in its Stead. For the attaining of which Purpose, I can think of no readier Method, than by attempting to shew you,

Reason cannot be the Principle of Faith.

First, That Reason, or the intellectual Faculty, could not possibly, both from its own Nature and that of Religion, be the Principle intended by God to lead us into a true Faith.

Secondly, That neither is it so in Fact from the plain Account given us of it in Holy Scripture.

And, *Thirdly*, By tracing plainly from the same indisputable Authority what it positively is, and by ascertaining the proper and prescribed

Means to come at the Knowledge of Divine Truths.

*Because
required to
think all
alike.*

In the first Place, then, Can it be by the Exercise of their Reason that Men can be required to *think all alike*? The youngest Pupil of Philosophy would start at the Proposition, and therefore I should not on any other Occasion offer to propose such a Question to you. You understand too well what the Principle of Reason is to expect any such Consequence from it; nay, not to be certain of its producing a direct contrary Effect. A Thinker of a much lower Degree of Proficiency would disdain, very justly, to bestow a second Thought upon so preposterous a Scheme, as that of Unity in Opinion proposed to be effected by Reasoning. He sees readily at first View, that the different Light Things appear in to different Men, must necessarily create a different Sense of Things; that an Infinity of *Seets* (as they are called) is but the natural and unavoidable Consequence of every Man's thinking for himself; that from the very Notion of speculative Enquiry, and the immense Variety of human Understandings, Private Judgments must of course run into the greatest Latitude.

*Threatned
into Confe-
quences pre-
scribed.*

In the next Place, with what Regard, with what Patience rather, can one of this Class be supposed to attend to Questions propounded to him, *under the Restraints of Threats and Authority*, to be talked to of Danger in his Decisions, and have the Rod held out with the Lesson, to have Propositions tendered to his Reason with Penalties annexed? His Reason, ever necessitated to determine just as she does of herself, and by her Nature incapable either of paying Compliments, or giving Offence. He is conscious all the while that he has no such free Vote to dispose of, and therefore disdains, with all Justice, an Attempt

tempt equally weak and unjust, of frightening him into a Compliance out of his Power.

These would be all so many gross and palpable Absurdities upon the Face of such a Commission, I say, if Application were intended to be made by it to the Understanding. For that it is not I shall endeavour yet farther to evince by looking a little into Life and Practice upon the Occasion, by tracing this Faith to it's known Original, and pointing directly to the great Root whence all our religious Impressions notoriously spring. By asking you farther, ——— *Can a Man be baptized* Ordered to be baptized into it. *into a rational Religion?* Where is Reason concerned when Babes accept the Terms of Salvation by Deputy, and are entitled to all the Privileges of the most extensive Faith by another's Act? By the Baptismal Ceremony, they commence true Believers at once, and are made Heirs of Heaven, you know, by the Faith of their Bondsmen, whilst as yet they have not the least Share or Symptom of Understanding themselves, and may in all Possibility never live to attain one; and which, if they had at the Time, I know not yet how they could well give a rational Assent by Proxy. Yet such is the Pleasure and Ordinance of God himself in this Point. And would he, is it probable, have ever laid a Foundation of Belief for us, and at the same time have made it our Duty to subvert it? For the very first Lesson of Philosophy, the first Step towards the Use of our Reason, is to explode (as you contend, and very deservedly) under the Name of Prejudice, all the Effect of our Education, which it is now, on the contrary, the Command of our holy Religion, that we should industriously cultivate and improve; cultivate, in a Method conformable exactly to that of its implanting, by Application to Heaven, and not to the Schools; by the Use
of

To pray
for it.

of Prayer, not of Reason. A fresh Instance from the manner of its Culture, that Reason was to have originally no Share in making the Graft, *We are to pray for Encrease of our Faith.* —

Had we been expected to have contributed to its Establishment by any Endeavours or Pains of our own, we might have had Cause to suspect yet farther, that the Ground-word too was to be something wherein we were to be ourselves Accessaries. But if *Prayer* be the effectual Means proposed for the attaining the Perfection of our Faith, there is a strong Presumption too that our Labours of every other Kind were to be spared throughout the whole Progress; and that it was to be introduced after a like manner by Methods *purely Divine*, and without any of our Assistance. That we are to address ourselves to Heaven to inculcate the full Complement of our Belief, will help us to a just and uniform Account of its whole Nature, whilst it points readily back to its Source of Baptism; our being to look upwards for the Completion of the Blessing, must serve sufficiently to ascertain its Original, and convince us, that its first Seeds can be of no human Extraction. For is it possible that we can conceive how *Reason* can ever found such a Faith as *Grace* can second or add to? *Encrease of Evidence* is the only Accession to be made to rational Persuasion. What a consistent Prayer!

“ Give us, O Lord, *from Heaven*, by thy particular Assistance, a larger Degree of that Faith,
 “ which we have already attained in part from the
 “ *natural and ordinary Means* of Conviction, and
 “ the Consideration of the Evidence.

It is impossible, surely, when we consider to whom we must ascribe them, that any such absurd Schemes can any longer be supposed, that we can ever imagine, that the great *Author and Finisher*

Finisher of our Faith should have contrived us an irrational one, to be afterwards superseded, or even confirmed by a rational one.

In what Light must a Rationalist again regard all Application by *Prayer* for the confirming and continuing us *steadfast in the Faith*, and the disavowing, in the Fulness of our Conviction, all future Use of Reason for our Security? What is all this Practice in your Sense, but plainly the wilfully soliciting our favourite Prejudices? What is all this meritorious Perseverance which we so earnestly affect, but *a blind and foolish Obstinacy to a present Notion*, if we have no better an Authority than that of our own Reason to fix us? And, in Fact, so strictly is this irrevocable Constancy in our Profession, this utter Deafness to all farther Solicitation for Discipleship, required of all Christians, that we are warned, though even *an Angel from Heaven* were to preach any *new Doctrine* to us, to give not the least Heed or Credit to his Pretensions. And yet what is there in the utmost of Reason's Assurances to falsify or confront such a Preacher? What is there that the Nature of any external Evidence can possibly afford us, that has not more than a Balance in such an Authority? Had God indeed design'd that Reason should beat all employed upon these Occasions, he would never, we may depend on it, have thus enjoin'd Things which he knew must absolutely destroy the Effect of it. If the Assent he required were to be a rational one, it would be highly wicked and unjust to prepossess Mens tender Minds in any Manner before they came to the full Use of their rational Faculties. But now that we are actually commanded with early Diligence to re-^{To be taught it}tain our Children as so many sure Votaries to the ^{in our}Cause we profess ourselves, it is plain that a rational Assent is by no Means calculated for, or expected ^{Childhood.}

pected at our Hands. For, sure, you will never say a Man has still the Use of his Reason improving upon him to assist him afterwards in the ratifying or reversing of his Parents Instructions as he shall judge fit, when those very Instructions have all along taken Care (or else they have been doing nothing) to represent all future Discoveries and Alterations as something beyond Measure heinous and detestable. And what a perverse Apostate would he in Fact be looked upon, who, upon Notice from his Sureties of the Conditions they had engaged him in, should ever think of appealing, or making any farther Search for *the Certainty of that Knowledge in which he had been instructed*, and positively refuse to stand to what they had done in his Name, till they had laid the *Grounds and Reasons* of their Proceedings before him to his Satisfaction? And yet there is not certainly, as you say, one single Argument from Reason why a Man should not return of course to Neutrality the first Moment he begins to think for himself. Neutrality! a Term ever of the justest Horror and Detestation in the Ears of the true Believer, in whose Account all Suspence and Questioning upon the Subject amount to a peremptory and impious Denial. And yet nothing is more evident in itself, or more readily by all allowed than what you assert, that no Party is qualified to be a Judge, and that to examine fairly, we must come unprejudiced and indifferent to the Examination. Examination, in the very Term implies a Suspence of Conviction; and therefore if Religion admits at all of Examination, it must necessarily admit likewise of (at least a temporary) Disbelief. The rational Christian, whoever he be, must of course have originally set out a Sceptic, and hesitated for a Time, even whether that Gospel were true or false. Tell me

*Examining allows
Doubting.*

me then, I beseech you, you that contend so earnestly for a rational Belief, since the first Motions of Doubt are, it seems, but necessary Preparatives in your Scheme, and therefore not in themselves criminal, by what Authority (if the Evidence happens never to take the Effect) can a Man *be obliged ever to be resolved*? If a Man may, nay must, disbelieve a while for Information's sake, why may he not even disbelieve for ever on for want of due Information? If Doubting be indeed one Moment allowable, who shall ascertain the precise Time for summing up the Evidence, and pronouncing Sentence? Who shall take upon him to settle the last lawful Point of Hesitation, making the proper Indulgence to the tardy Apprehension, and exacting a more ready Decision from the more capable? For all this reasonable Allotment of Time in Proportion to their several Abilities, Men must innocently take who are to *work out their Salvation* by the Use of their Reason: They must be permitted to acquaint themselves fully and perfectly with the Merits of the Cause, before they can be expected to form maturely, and give in their important Determinations upon it; and the more fair and severe the Scrutiny, the more Time it must necessarily cost them: The very Integrity of the Examiner will be the natural Impediment to his Dispatch.

*Settling of
Doubts
precarious,*

*and likely
to take up
too much
Time.*

Now if this be the Case, that a Man must *go thus long without* his religious Determinations, it will, I think, be something very difficult to prove them necessary at all; since 'tis probable, *they may now come too late to answer the End* for which they were designed. For let us ask our selves, What is the proposed Use and Purpose of this Faith required? Is it not *to influence our Actions, and direct our Conduct through Life*? And when

*Rational
Faith may
not come
Time e-
nough to
regulate
our Prac-
tice.*

have

have we more Occasion for such a Monitor than at the Crisis when our Passions are most prevalent, in those early Years when Reason is least able to form her Judgments in our Assistance? The Use of Faith is to enable us *to overcome the World*. But what shall become of this promised Victory, if the Contest must be so long depending; and if we must be so long taken up with *sitting on our Armour*? Mean time the Powers of Darkness, and our own Corrupt Dispositions, will be fatally gaining Ground upon us every Day, long before this boasted Ally can have raised her Forces to come in to our Protection, or be qualified in any Degree to deal with them. Our Passions will be beforehand with our Reason, in spite of all her Pretensions. The Habits of Vice will be taking deep Root the while, let her Preparations be never so expeditious, or her Motions never so watchful to oppose them; they must needs have got the Start in their Advances, before she can, by her Nature, have made any considerable Progress in those salutary Discoveries, which are to regulate or subdue them. Now for want of this timely Notice, and the Secret of distinguishing, we may more than probably have embark'd in wrong Measures at setting out, and be lost in the Power of Habit beyond Recovery, before we know where we are. Unprovided of all restraining Considerations, and at a Loss for a better Guide, we shall, of course, give up ourselves wholly to our natural Bias, and the Law of Inclination; and when we have lived the best Part of our Lives thus at Adventure, and strayed so far without the Lessons of this sage Counsellor, they will go near, when they arrive, to find us actually engaged already, and beyond the Power of Precept, to retrieve. For want of the early Intelligence, we may be innocently involved in

the

the most horrible Degrees of Guilt before we can be better informed ; so that if we have not the Benefit of these Instructions *at first*, it will be to very little Purpose to have them at all. As long as we are *debating the Genuineness* of our Rule, we have no Tie upon us to respect its Authority, no Inducement to pay it any Degree of Obedience or Conformity in our Practice, till it has gained a sufficient Establishment and Root in our Opinion. Our Actions, if our acquired Faith be to prescribe to them, can be under no Direction or Restraint till the Proceedings of Reason have settled the Standard for Conscience, and satisfied her what her Obligations are in those Points. Now what a random Conduct this must produce with regard to any *standing Principle*, or regular Scheme of Morality, is very evident. Whilst I am myself in Search after just Notions of right and wrong, and attempting to learn by speculative Discoveries what they are, 'tis not much to be expected that any one else shall find them in my Conduct. And the Misfortune is, that in our present Situation there is no standing still to look about us, even so much as to find out the Way. We must be running on ourselves in Life, let our Systems proceed never so heavily.

But were it possible still that our doubting Disciple should not be in the mean Time at this supposed Loss for his Duty on any Occasion, let his natural Obligations, as he may pretend, be never so obvious and self-evident, and his Practice never so strictly conformable ; what if without this previous Acquisition and devout Temper I contend for, the best of Lives is no Circumstance to recommend or qualify us for any Regard from the Throne of Grace? *Good Works done before Faith*, and without the especial Influence of this sanctifying Principle, are so far from being ac-

Plain Morality of no Esteem or Acceptance without the Influence of Faith.

cepted

cepted in themselves as the Terms of a complete Obedience, that they do not so much as put Men into a nearer State for Favour, or a Capacity of being the sooner enlightned; they do not, as our Church expresses it, make Men *meet to receive Grace*. The exactest Observer of moral Laws is a vile and wretched Sinner in God's Account, as long as he proceeds by human Lights and Motives, and upon the Strength of mere Ethicks only. Nay, even his most virtuous Actions themselves are highly criminal and displeasing to God, as long as he continues in such a Disposition of Mind, as they are undoubtedly of a Nature corrupted and unregenerate. For *whatsoever is not of Faith is Sin*. Without some particular Acknowledgments first made, there is not in all our Endeavours the least room to hope for Acceptance at his Hands. *He that cometh to God, must believe that he is*; that he has graciously revealed his holy Will to Mankind, and granted them Pardon of Sins by the Mediation of his Son, and must act only in Consequence of such Persuasion. The unquiet Essays of Reasoning, curious Disquisitions upon his Being and Attributes, and the Truth and Authenticness of Revelation, are Practices utterly inconsistent with the Pretensions of all such as *call themselves Christians*, or expect any Benefit from the Gospel-Covenant, to which they are always presumed Parties. We must be provided of our Creed before we are warranted to pray so much as for Faith itself. We must not *lift up our Hands to Heaven with doubting*.

If beyond these Uses assigned, the Discovery of our Rule of Action, or the purifying and stamping a Value upon the Fruits of common Morality, there be still farther something abstractedly of a necessary Qualification in a true Faith,

Faith, something of a meritorious Nature in the Thing itself, considered merely as a proper Test of our Obedience.—We must yet, if Reason be the allotted Guide, be obliged to wait at least till that Reason can bring us her Report. Mean time in this infidel Interim should Death surprize us, what shall now become of our Hopes without this necessary Preparative for our Introduction? You will examine, you say.—*Thou Fool! this Night shall thy Soul be required of thee.*—*ry.*

When Death has once overtaken us unfurnished of our Passport, what a kind of Apology to trust to will it be to say (in such express Contradiction to the Provision so peremptorily enjoined us) that we were intending to look into Things; that we were looking out to procure a *Wedding-Garment*, at a Time when we ought to be *ready dressed to attend the Bridegroom*, and actually to make our Appearance in the Habit? And is it now any unwarrantable Conclusion from all these Considerations, to infer, that Religion therefore *can never be a Thing to be taught*, that it must needs be something that *does not require Time to attain*, like other common Lessons and Sciences, which are indifferent in their Consequences? Since the very same Reasons that make it *necessary at all*, make it *equally so every Moment of our Lives*.

A true Faith equally necessary at all Seasons of our Life.

To leave Mankind a disputable Subject to exercise their Judgments upon, and at the same time to require us all, at the Peril of our Souls, to be in the right,—Demonstration itself is not Ground sufficient to exact such an Assent, unless it be self-evident too, and if there be the least of Induction or Inference in the Case. For the Generality of Apprehensions extend not beyond a simple Proposition; and are thrown out at once at the very Mention of introducing a Medium. The Souls of the Multitude are lodged in their

Few Men qualified for Reasoning at all.

B

Hands,

Hands, and that for the wisest Purposes. They are formed entirely with a View to active Life, wherein the true Interests of Society are much more effectually consulted, than in their being calculated for making the most ingenious Discussions in the unfruitful Province of Argument and Speculation. And what an injurious Representation, what an arbitrary Image is this then of our wise and good Creator! requiring a just Judgment of Things, and not giving Abilities to judge at all; making Salvation a Matter of blind Chance and Guess-work, and setting our precious Souls upon the Hazard of a random Conjecture; and all this too, where the determining either right or wrong must in itself be equally meritorious. For the Nature of the Evidence of Religion, in your rational Way, being founded entirely on the Credit and Authenticness of History, a very critical Point to pronounce upon it is impossible, without a good natural Turn for Reasoning, and even some very considerable Acquisitions of Learning superadded, to give any rational Decision at all in the Case. Whereas how few are there, I say, that Nature has endowed with these proper Talents; and how much fewer whom their Education has adapted for any such Task? A Consideration that has often excited my Wonder, to see Mr. *Addison*, in behalf of Religion, insisting so strenuously upon the Force of it's external Proofs, and the Authenticness of Facts, evincing, as he certainly does, beyond all Contradiction, the Veracity of the Sacred Writings and Mission, as an undoubted and unexceptionable Claim to universal Discipleship. Whereas in my humble Sense, *the Truth of the History itself* is by no means the Matter in Question, but *my Obligation to assent to it*. It is one thing whether a Proposition be indeed true in itself, and

The Reasonableness therefore of religion in Speculation nothing to the Purpose.

another whether a Man be bound to apprehend and believe it. A Distinction, I cannot but think, not sufficiently attended to on this Subject. For that absolute and certain Truth of the Gospel, which shines out indeed so conspicuously upon a proper Discussion and Acquaintance, does yet not at all hinder, but that it may very possibly *appear otherwise* to the rude and short-sighted Understandings of many, that cannot enter sufficiently into the Argument to become apprized of its Merits. It is still a speculative Truth, whose Explanation and whole Force depends upon a just Apprehension of moral Proofs, and is to be learnt only by Reasoning; and therefore must from its Nature be liable to be often *misconceived*, and have its Opponents, so far necessitated, and therefore innocent, in their Opposition, without some farther Cause and Principle of Offence to justify their being damned for mistaking. Demonstrative, doubtless, it is; but what is that to me, who have not the Talents requisite for entering into Demonstrations? It is by no means sufficient that your Argument be indeed *conclusive in itself*, unless you can adapt it effectually to my Understanding too, and make it *conclusive to me*. It must be upon such a Connexion only that all my Duty in the Case can possibly be grounded. For in what Relation can any thing stand to me, of which I have no Perception? Your Musick may possibly be just in its Kind to the most critical Exactness, but as long as I am naturally *deaf or untuned to the Voice of the Charmer, charm he never so wisely* and expertly, it is impossible for you to expect that I should ever pronounce from my own Knowledge that he does so, or express any Marks of my Approbation or Applause upon the Occasion. It must be one that hath *Ears to hear*, and be properly affected by it; one, who

by having cultivated a Taste for Harmony and Concords, is become *able to receive it*, that must give it its due Testimony. For me, under my unluckly *Impediment*, it can be no Affront to the Justness of the Composition, or any just Ground of Offence to the Performer, that I have really nothing to say to it. That the Historical Facts of the Gospel are most highly credible and convincing to such as have the Capacity to look into them, we both readily agree; but to such as have not, I assert that they are properly neither true nor false; they are not chargeable with any Verdict about them, one way or the other. The Reasoners on the other Side say, "This is true, and therefore all Men must believe it." I say, "it is true, but all Men cannot believe it, or frame any reasonable Notion about it." The Difference betwixt us is evidently not the Truth of Christianity; that main Point we both unanimously allow: The Connexion and Justice of the Inference, that because it is true, therefore all Men are bound to believe it, is the Circumstance I so justly except against.

For the same Reason, all the ingenious Applications of mysterious Prophecies, and their References, are in my Opinion never to be mentioned as Arguments and Means of Conviction, in behalf of a Truth *destined to be universally received*. The learned and profound Calculation of *Daniel's Weeks*, if religious Faith were a Matter of mere Speculation, would go far to tempt me perhaps into a favourable Opinion of the Criticism and Justness of the Conjecture. The excellent *Analogy of Reason and Revelation*, lately communicated, might induce me yet more powerfully to acknowledge at least a very great and specious Appearance of Truth in its traced Connexions and Inferences, if the Subject were *in-*
different

different in its Consequences, and I were left to myself to pronounce freely what occurred naturally to my Mind from the Consideration of it. But when I consider all these enlightening Lucubrations as Proofs actually insisted on, and whose Force I am *bound to admit*, as calculated for the general and ready *Use of all* those to whom the Precept of Believing is address'd; or, in short, as that which any Part of the Evidence of Christianity is to stand upon, or depend for its Support; however I may honour the sagacious Authors of these *new Lights* for their particular Discoveries, I cannot but draw to myself very different Consequences from those they seem to expect from their Proposal of them. Instead of availing to convince my Reason of the Truth of any particular religious System, they have a just contrary Effect, and suggest strongly to me, that such a Position can never be *That necessary Truth*, which stands in need of any such far-fetched Apologies, and *laboured Accounts*, to reconcile and explain it. I consider all these as, in Truth they are, *Inventions of late Date*, and therefore at best superfluous towards the main Design, since Religion must needs, to my thinking, have been equally evident, and well-established, long before ever these new Defences were so happily thought of. Whenever I reflect with myself upon the general Importance and End of Religion, I cannot find its Evidence by any means on any *Complication* of Circumstances *to be traced out* by Industry or Address, for the Illustration of its Authority. I cannot but form to myself some more *simple Characteristick* of full Sufficiency always accompanying it. I cannot but conclude in my Mind, that the whole Force of its Evidence must have been *co-temporary with the original Institution* itself, and have been entirely complete

for the Purpose ever since its first Publication ; that necessary Truths were not revealed by halves, and left to be perfected afterwards at Leisure by the Efforts of human Wit ; that the Evidence of the Gospel must have this one Property of its Great Author to be the *same Yesterday to Day, and for ever* ; and consequently must have been equally plain and affecting to such as never lived to be in the Way of these *supplemental Revelations*, and who never heard a Syllable in their Lives of *Weeks or Analogies*.

There might still be some faint Shew of Foundation or Pretence perhaps for our endeavouring to multiply this Kind of improved Hints and speculative Refinements upon the Subject, if the Candidates for Heaven were all Philosophers and Scholars. But we are to remember always that the Terms of Salvation are equally calculated for the Benefit of such as cannot so much as read ; as they were chiefly published to the World by Men actually under that Incapacity themselves. In Fact, it is notorious that the most, and I might add, the best, of every religious Profession do never concern themselves the least in any argumentative Tasks, or would indeed be ever the wiser for it, if they did. And those few who pretend, or perhaps flatter themselves that they are indeed *rationally convinced* in the Point, may yet recollect, if they will fairly own the Truth, that they were equally *convinced before* the Trial, or, at least, had strong Presages beforehand, on which Side the Truth lay, and *intended*, in some Measure, *to be convinced* at setting out.

For granting yet farther every Man living to be naturally as capable as you please of judging in these Points, that in Consequence of such Capacity, his Reason, duly exerted, must needs lead him to embrace Christianity, in Preference to all
the

the other religious Professions in the World, and to distinguish still farther our established Church in particular, as the Mode the most conformable to that divine Plan ; I ask still, where is the Man living in the Situation requisite for the Execution of such an Attempt, and qualified, even upon the Supposition, to make the Trial? Prejudice, ever earlier than the Essays of Reason, is as absolute a Disqualification for such a Task as the greatest natural Incapacity. A thousand strong Impressions already sunk deep into his Mind, a thousand natural Attachments to Customs, Persons and Things, have long e'er this Time put it absolutely out of his Power to be able to make equitable Decisions in Cases where the Interests of any of these Favourites are concerned. An innocent Partiality contracted for particular Objects, and Notions familiarized to us by long Acquaintance, an honest and natural Fondness for our old Friends, will never permit us now to exert our Judgments disinterestedly, where They may possibly be affected by the Event, or dispose us to afford this Exactness of fair Play to new Comers. As long as Men are subject to the Influence of Passions as well as Reason, such a calm and Stoical Conduct is not to be expected ; or that the Cause of the Stranger should have all this rigid Justice and strict Regard that looks so becoming in Theory, paid to its Pretensions and Merit, when once the Judge's Affections have been so deeply pre-engaged, and have unwarily taken their Part in the Debate.

The ablest and best of Men disqualified for fair Reasoning by their natural Prejudices.

Now it is to be remembered all along, and carried carefully with us through all these Considerations, that the *great Command to believe, is peremptory and absolute* ; no Conditions in the Case that we shall believe if we have *Time*, if we have

Abilities ; or if preceding *Prejudices* have not first taken too fast Hold to prevent us.

Rational Faith, when attain'd, would not answer the Ends.

To pass over all these presumptive Obstacles in the Way, let us however suppose, that our rational Enquirer has happily laboured through all Impediments to his Wish; that he is crowned with all imaginable Success in his Undertaking, and confirmed at last beyond all Remains of Doubt and Scruple in his religious Persuasions: Let us consider him for the present as having attain'd to the highest Degree of Satisfaction in the Point that Reason can possibly help him to; will a Faith, thus built upon Syllogisms, ever furnish out any of those miraculous Effects, which are described to attend a just and finished Belief? Can this be the Faith whose promised Influence was to *supersede the Powers of second Causes*, and triumph over the whole Course of Nature in its Operations? Can this be the Faith whose Efficacy was to *remove Mountains*, and make Men *walk upon the Water*? Or will it even serve to produce any of those more known and ordinary Characteristicks that are given us to distinguish the true Believer? For Instance, will such a Faith ever produce that lively and active *Spirit of Zeal* in the Cause, which is every where so strongly recommended to all Professors of the Gospel? The calm Votary of Reason's Dictates will not so readily be brought to express all that sanguine Concern for his Opinions, which is required of a Disciple of Christ. He will be apt to be very much wanting in that laudable Warmth with which religious Truths are to be asserted and promoted. He will never be solicitous enough about the Success of his Inferences, or resent with a becoming Ardour the Contradiction of his Doctrines and Hypotheses. The glimmering Ray, that

Would prove too cold.

that conducts his Understanding, will never have Strength enough to light up such a potent Fire as that of Zeal; a *Zeal according to Knowledge* will scarce ever deserve the Name. He that has once experienced all the Difficulties and Uncertainties, that attend a Course of Reasoning, will never dare to abet any of his Discoveries with Warmth. He will have seen enough to make him very tender in taking upon him to dictate, or communicate absolute Lessons of Instruction, and nothing to authorize his insisting vehemently, or *contending earnestly*, in Behalf of a Faith wherein he was his own Master; since the best Warrant of human Reason can never give such Assurance of the Truth, but that we *may possibly be mistaken*; and if we may, it is Madness of Partiality to attack another's Principles with Vehemence, as if we were the only Persons not liable to Error. He considers himself not only as not infallible, but frequently not consistent with himself; that he has found, even in himself, very different Sentiments, at different Seasons, upon the same Subject. Or if possibly he has not actually remarked already any Thing of the Kind, can he ever be sure from any Degree of Conviction which he feels at present that the Vibration of his Judgment is entirely over, and fixed inviolably to that one Point? Can he at any Time be able to promise himself riveted for Life in Opinion, and be certain that his Understanding shall never revoke her past Sentence? And if he cannot indeed be thus secure of his own Constancy and lasting Attachment, it will but ill become him to require too zealously of others their steadfast Adherence to Principles, which he knows not but he may possibly live one Day to change and contradict himself. It is, he is sensible, but a very unpromising

sing Dependance for Disciples where the Guide himself is liable to alter his Mind, which must ever be the necessary Situation of every Teacher, who derives his Authority from no higher a Principle or stronger Light than that of his own Reason. If he deal ingenuously in his Researches, and prosecute Truth with that Honesty and Vigour which he ought, he must be unavoidably liable to Recantation every Moment of his Life without Remedy. For the Decrees of a human Understanding can, in their Nature, have no Pretension to be irreversible. The clearest Εὐρημα That can help us to, must ever leave Room for * Φροῦνίδες Ὑστεραι to supersede it.

And this is another very singular and essential Defect of a rational Faith, that it must *always be* *so very precarious.* For what Reason first established, it is evident the same Reason must ever have the Power to repeal. Hence a rational Faith will ever be *subject to Change*, and the most fixed Resolves and mature Determinations that Reason can make, must be always ready to be *turned about with every Wind of Doctrine*, as the Evidence shall shift to another Point. The Philosopher, after his strongest Conclusions, speaks however very diffidently of their Continuance. Such, he says, are his present Sentiments upon the Subject; but that they will be always so, is what he can by no means answer for or ensure; since it is not impossible but some new Evidence may still succeed of Weight to turn the Scale, and set Things again in a quite different Light from that in which they have hitherto appeared to him. And Reason can never, with any Show

*Too change-
able.*

* The Author is supposed here to allude to a Book of that Title, written, as I think, by the famous Dr. *Whitby*, in his later Years, and wherein he recanted some more Orthodox Opinion, which he had before laudably abetted.

of Justice, be so absurdly partial and tenacious, as for the Sake of any Conclusions already made, to turn a deaf Ear to all future Suggestions, which may offer in the Cause, and which must have still an equal Right to Audience with their favourite Predecessors, if the Sentence of our past Judgment cannot claim to be absolutely definitive and infallible : Whereas it is the religious Man's Resolution, as it is his Duty, to persist in the Faith he has once espoused to his Life's End. Convinced of the Truth of his adopted Gospel, he disclaims henceforth all farther Trial, and triumphs forthwith in such a supposed Certainty, that he piously implores the Protection of Heaven to preserve him firm in his present Situation, against the dangerous Power of any Innovation whatsoever, and all new Principles that might possibly alter and corrupt him.—It is impossible for me to suggest, or indeed for Nature to furnish out a stronger Picture of that cool and moderate Temper of a Rationalist which I have been describing, than that which our daily Experience presents us with in the Case of *Converts* from one Religion to another. The Case of the World, where Reason is ever supposed to be the most eminently and visibly concerned, and professed to be indeed the sole Principle in the Proceeding. Reduce a Man once by Argument from his original Prejudices, however gross and absurd, and that to the most just and well-grounded Persuasion in Nature, and see the Consequence. Will the Attachment of such a Profelyte to his new Light bear any Degree of Proportion ever after to that he once expressed for those occult and mysterious Articles, which he had derived without a Syllable of Controversy from the Lessons of his Parents? The setting him once to arguing for himself, has spoiled him for ever for any second

Attachment

Attachment of the Kind. The Reverential Part of our Adherence, which takes its Rise from a supposed sacred Authority, being once removed, it is impossible we should ever after be brought back again to pay the same profound and religious Deference to our own uncertain Reasonings, and Discoveries of our own making. The just Horror of venturing at all upon such a Question, where the Truth of Religion is concerned, and where a Possibility of its Falshood is actually supposed, is the best and only Security of our proper Veneration for the Subject. When once these important Out-works are demolished, when once we are come so far as to make no Scruple of examining freely for ourselves, the main Hold upon our religious Engagements is then broke through, and farewell for ever all the true Spirit of Discipleship. The very presuming that we have a Right to call these Matters to a Re-hearing, and Abilities to decide in them for ourselves, is an effectual Step taken towards the throwing off for the future all that obsequious Awe, and Dependance, which is the Life of this Cause. When once we have made a Practice of traversing with so much Freedom the Avenues and Approaches of the Sanctuary, when once we have presumptuously inured ourselves to the *stamping* thus boldly and *familiarly over holy Ground*, we shall with Difficulty be recovered to a tender Sense of the Reverence and Devotion due to the Place, to the pious Posture of humble Supplicants, and Prostration. Accordingly we may ever observe in our Profelyte, that once turned adrift into Speculation, however he may anchor accidentally for a Time, his contracted Propensity to Motion and Fluctuating will still stick fast to him in all Stations. That however fixed and satisfied he may imagine or profess himself, his Constancy and Allegiance

Allegiance are no longer secure, than till a new Master shall offer to his better Liking. That amidst all his Illumination professed, he is yet no desperate Subject for a fresh Application. He continues still supine in his Devotion, and discovers no violent Partiality and Passion for the Cause. His Affections are but half enlisted, and by his Posture, he is yet listening out for farther Intelligence. In short, he wears his Persuasion all the while like one, who is always ready and disposed to be *converted again*, whenever he shall meet with any thing that may appear more worthy his Attention or Engagement.

So far we may see is Reason in its Effects from contributing to the making of *one Flock and one Fold*, that it will but ill serve so much as to ensure *one straggling Sheep*, that it has by Chance helped in thither.

Once more, as the rational Believer can never take upon him to pronounce himself inviolably secure in his Adherence to the Cause he has espoused, so neither can he promise himself *that Complacency and Satisfaction of Mind*, resulting from the Consciousness of such a Faith, which is the blessed Fruit of that true and genuine Faith I contend for. For let your common Experience determine whether that Person does not enjoy his Belief with much greater Tranquillity and Confidence of Spirit, who never asked himself one single Question about it, than he, who by the most elaborate Discussions, and busiest Search, has attained to the utmost Degree of moral Assurance in the Matter. The Philosophical Believer, who built his Faith originally on the Force of Arguments, may possibly find those Arguments not so readily occur to his Memory in those gloomy Hours, when he has the most Occasion for their Support, and consequently will be liable

*Would not
minister
that Spirit
of Comfort
in the Re-
fection.*

at every Turn to his Misgivings and Distrusts about the Sufficiency of those Reasonings he cannot for the present so well recollect ; whilst he, that has once arrived at the full and lasting Assurance of a just and heavenly Faith, can never be to seek at any Time for the Grounds and Motives of his first Conviction and Dependance : Having never, for his Part, dealt at all in the Evidence of Reason, he can never possibly have the Stress of his Conclusions diminished or obscured by a Review, or be at any Loss to recover all their original Force at Pleasure ; but must always have the same Basis of his Hopes alike established, and therefore must to the End be secure of enjoying all that Peace of Mind which *the World* and carnal Intelligence *cannot give*, without any the least Interruption from the Caprice of Thought or Complexion.

Not of Force sufficient to command our Passions.

In the last Place, no Conviction drawn from Reasoning can ever have *Force enough to make us virtuous against our Inclinations* ; the highest Degree of moral Assurance will never be a sufficient Balance for present Temptations. The mortifying all our most beloved Affections, and restraining all the strongest Propensities of our Nature, (in which our Obedience to religious Rules consists) is too substantial a Sacrifice to be made to the most specious Suggestions of our own fallacious Reasonings. We may well conclude, that he who framed the human mechanism, and consequently understands so thoroughly the necessary Influences of all its various Springs, will always take Care to proportion the Evidence of the Reward proposed to the Difficulty of the Duty required. A Command, that expects us to give up all the Demands of our dearest Passions to its Authority, must be introduced to us, at least, by no doubtful Account or Testimony at all liable to be controverted.

ed. Venerable Tradition and Historical Records, though never so plausible and well attested, under all the most favourable Circumstances that the severest Malice of an exceptious Critic can demand, or the most provident Invention of a subtle Impostor frame, can yet never, with all its boasted Pretensions, be a sufficient Basis for a Belief, which is to produce a new Course of Life, and an absolute Mastery of our Passions, in Opposition to all the importunate Solicitations of Sense, and the violent Appetites of depraved Nature. It is still all but *human Testimony* this, in its Nature ever liable to Error, as depending only on fallible Authors. And however forcibly such an Evidence may operate for the present upon our Judgment whilst actually under Consultation, however it may induce us at our speculative Hours to pronounce peremptorily in Behalf of its full Sufficiency, and of the absolute Certainty of the Points it conveys; we shall see all its true Amount and Weight in a juster Light at those Seasons when we expect to make Use of it, and feel its Influence, and shall be apt to remember involuntarily when we come to Action, and some darling Passion crossed by it puts the Question in good earnest home to us, that it is nothing more than *the precarious Conjecture of a fallible Judge, upon the traditional Testimony of a fallible Witness*: A slender Foundation for a Principle, which is to have such vital and heroic Efficacy through the Conduct of our whole Lives! Can a Scheme, thus vouched and ascertained, be ever expected to gain that prevailing Ascendency over our Minds, as to change thus wonderfully all our obvious and palpable Interests, and take off all our Regard from Objects present and familiar to our Desires, to bring us to depend confidently on distant Expectations and

Promises

Promises for our Compensation? I will very readily grant you all the moral Certainty in these Proofs that you can desire; and farther, that this is indeed the highest Degree of rational Evidence that the Nature of the Subject can possibly admit. What I contend for is, that it *must be something still greater*, and more absolutely conclusive and satisfactory, *to answer the Purpose of enforcing a holy Life*, and to weigh in the Scale against demonstrative Good; that we shall hardly be induced to quit what we actually *feel*, for any less Consideration than something which we actually *know*; that nothing less than a thorough Conviction can effectually secure a thorough Reformation. To deter Men from taking up with an Enjoyment already in their Power, they must have the clearest Prospect of something better to succeed in its Room. Things present have all the Advantage on their Side in bidding to our Senses, and the most valuable Reversions are but of small Regard in Competition with what is before us. Nor can we be justly blamed for this Conduct. Our Reason bids us make sure of something, and not part with the Good we have to trust too far to Futurity for Amends, if there be the least Possibility of our being disappointed in our Security. And therefore it is by no means sufficient to say that there is a great Appearance of Probability, and that Truth seems to lye on this Side of the Question. *The defending Sword must play full in Sight, or the delicious Apple will infallibly be snatched at for Want of a Dissuasive of equal Force to restrain us.*—And if this rational Faith will not, as I have hitherto shewed, serve us even defensively, and on common Emergencies, so much as to make a good living Christian, much less will it still to *produce a faithful Martyr* upon Occasion, if ever so severe

*Much less
to make us
suffer Mar-
tyrdom.*

an Exercise of it be demanded at our Hands. Here is yet a more conspicuous Instance of that absolute Certainty which there ought to be in our Faith for such a Purpose, since the strongest Operations of our Reason can never point out Truth to us in a Light glaring and forcible enough to furnish such an Experiment. The glorious and undaunted Confessors that have encountred this last terrible Consequence, and actually triumphed over this fiery Trial of their Persuasion, proceeded upon a much higher and surer Principle to bear them out in all their heroic Sufferings, otherwise I must be free to think that *Abner's* Elegy would have suited the bravest of them, "*Died he as a Fool dieth.*" Such Degrees of Fortitude are no Effects for ordinary Conviction to produce, the strongest moral Assurance is not that cordial Reflection and Dependance that can inspire all this amazing Constancy and Resolution into Men expiring under the last Extremity of Torture, nor the most flattering *Likelihoods* a Match for the present and certain Pangs of agonizing upon the Rack. The Philosopher thus pressed would be apt, with a very natural Casuistry, to distinguish betwixt *Opinions* and *Principles*, and to remit much of his Tenaciousness under such Circumstances. Rational Conviction will readily be distrusted when Matters come to such a Crisis, though perhaps never before suspected in a State of indolent Toleration, and the smooth Calms of Life. Men at such a Season will naturally be alarmed to enquire more nearly what Grounds they stand upon in the Point, when once they find that they must indeed put all to the Hazard to retain it, and be compelled to seal their Professions, if they will abide by them, with their Blood. Such a Prospect will rouse them in good earnest to a different kind of Examination from

what has hitherto entered into their Thoughts, to know for certain what they have to trust to, or determine in the Case ; so near a Concern will immediately engage their best Attention, and the Service of all their Faculties in the Cause ; it will put them upon computing with the most impartial Exactness the Advantage and Loss attending each important Alternative, and making the strictest prudential Estimate upon the Matter. They will then be solicitous to know, by all possible Means of Scrutiny, the full Worth and Merits of a Cause that is likely to prove so expensive to them. Their Prejudices and Punctilios they will be disposed to lay but small Stress on under such Disadvantages, and will, it is probable, not be over-forward to give, even to the Appearance of Reason herself, any thing more than what it will well and strictly bear. In fine, will it be any thing very uncharitable to suppose, that a modest Diffidence of our own Determinations may prove the Result of our maturer Thoughts in this Dilemma ; that the chief of our Discoveries will be in the End the great Duty of Self-preservation in Uncertainties ; and that both Nature and Reason should unite their Voices to determine us anew to lower our Flag of Defiance, and not to venture to *die for our Deductions* ? The Rationalist may indeed, in his Retirement, be wonderfully affected with the abstracted Contemplation of his Discoveries, and his formed Resolutions of constantly persisting in them ; but when once he is called upon to exert its promised Influence, and put it to a Test like this, he will soon be convinced, that he must call in much greater Aid than that of plausible Hypotheses, to confirm him stedfast amidst the Rage and Cruelty of malicious Murderers, and enable him to be faithful to the last to a persecuted Religion, and

that nothing, but a fixed and well-grounded Confidence of being happy for ever in another World, can effectually prevail on him to renounce all his Hopes and Interests in this. Where we are to act up to such an exalted Height as to *strive unto Blood*, we must have some very substantial and visible Inducement before us to keep up our Spirits in the Conflict; *the exceeding Weight of Glory* will have but little Weight with us, till it be first *fully revealed*, we must have this *Heaven* actually *opened to our View*, and *behold the Son of Man standing plainly before our Eyes*, (not through the dim and obscure *Perspectives* of History and Tradition) to support and reward us.

Thus far the many obvious Difficulties that arise merely from the very Face of the Matter itself, when we consider religious Faith as a Thing to be determined by our Reason, and what naturally and readily occurs to us in reflecting from such a Supposition.

My next Proof proposed was, That *Reflection and common Sense were seconded and confirmed in this Point by the Divine Word itself*, and that it was plain from Scripture, that no such Appeal to the Understanding was actually ever made or intended.

It is indeed but Justice due to the Glorious and Heaven-concerted Scheme of our Salvation, to shew, that no such absurd and preposterous Project was ever offered to be set on Foot in the Cause; that the *Fountain of all Wisdom* did indeed never form or amuse us with any such strange Proposal, as, — “ Judge whether you
“ have Time or not; judge whether you are
“ Judges or not; judge all for yourselves, and
“ yet judge all alike:

Now this Part of my Assertion would, I think, demand of me only a small Degree of my In-

dustry for its Justification. I should, I apprehend, have little more than merely to collect and range for the Purpose, all those Expressions, both literal and figurative, that treat of the Nature of Faith, or have any Relation to the Subject. Such as, — Lest they should *understand with their Hearts*; — Their foolish *Heart* was darkned; — Purified their *Hearts* by Faith. Expressions, applicable with no Propriety to the intellectual Faculty, but evidently descriptive of the Will only.

But, as Quotations in Behalf of doctrinal Points are many Times liable to have their Application disputed, and it is perhaps often difficult enough to ascertain critically their just Sense and Meaning against all the specious Exceptions of prejudiced Wit, I shall chuse rather, for the present, to enlarge upon a Particular, which appears to me entirely uncontrovertible; and that is, the plain narrative Part of that History, as far as it relates to the Business of planting the Gospel, and the Manner by which it was attempted; of which we have, happily for my Purpose, so exact and distinct an Account there given us. On this Circumstance, therefore, I shall chiefly rest my Appeal, and doubt not to make good my promised Proof, by producing only to you a short Review of the Course of Proceedings taken by the blessed Apostles and their Master, as we find it recounted by themselves, in that Undertaking.

Christ did not propose his Doctrines to Examination.

Did our Saviour himself, then, lay the Arguments and Proofs of his Mission frankly before his Disciples, and then give them Time to consider calmly of their Force, and Liberty to determine thereon, as their Reason should direct them? Or did they, when thoroughly persuaded, ever take any such Course themselves amongst their intended Profelytes? — No such Matter.

Matter. For his Part, *he taught them, as one having Authority.* He considered himself as the Person he was, as one who derived from Heaven the Instructions he was communicating, and therefore taught them very justly, as a Master who had a Right to dictate, and prescribe to his Pupils without Reply. And, alas! if he had taken the other Method, they knew nothing of Reasoning; it was a Matter quite out of their Element; they had had their Education on the Water; and though they understood their Trade, so far as to be well vers'd in the Use of their own Nets, would go near, it is likely, to be soon entangled themselves, when they had to do with the figurative ones of Sophistry or Syllogism. That he did but ill approve the being called on upon any Occasion to explain, will readily appear, when we observe, how cautious and reserved those who were best acquainted with his Manner were in that Particular; how *fearful* at every Turn of giving Offence, and *incurring Reproof* by any farther Enquiry, even at Times when they did not really apprehend his Meaning. With what strong Circumstances of Approbation and Applause is a ready Acquiescence always recorded for our Imitation? What Matter of greater Merit do we meet with than this of an *extempore* Subscription? Whereas Reason is naturally a slow, distrustful, exceptionous Scholar, ever backward to give any great Confidence as long as she can find the least Room to start new Difficulties. “*We will hear thee again of this Matter,* is the true adjourning Spirit and Style of the Academic: Whereas the Language of the Gospel is at once, “*Believe you that I am able to do this?* The Conviction, you see, was to precede the Evidence, as the Terms of the Favour to be consequently conferred. *The Pharisees,* it is said,

tempting him, asked a Sign; that is, some Testimonial of the Truth of his declared Mission: And what did this Request produce? Why, he *sighed deeply* at their Perverseness, who were so hard to be convinced, and stiled them a *foolish and adulterous Generation* for their Presumption. Now, this desiring a rational Evidence for their Discipleship, the *seeking after a Sign*, as the Scripture terms it, had, if he had indeed appealed to their Understandings, been so far from any Thing criminal or blame-worthy, that it had been in all Reason their indispensable Duty; whereas it was, it seems, in Faith an unwarrantable, presumptuous, and wanton Curiosity. In like manner, there was nothing to be said to the inquisitive and sitting Humour of the *Greeks*, since nothing would pass with them but the strictest Reasonings, to which they were so strongly addicted, that it was justly expected, they would not have scrupled to have demanded peremptorily his Credentials, even of their Saviour, and put their daring Interrogatories to the Holy Spirit himself.

*Nor his
Apostles.*

The Successors in the Ministry we find continuing the same Method of Practice exactly in their Turn, and treading punctually in their Master's Steps in the Execution of their Office, insisting constantly on the ready Acknowledgment of their Doctrines, without any Concessions of Time for Doubt or Deliberation. Of the Terms of the Covenant, one Declaration was often thought sufficient; not to accept them then was to reject them, and the least standing-off gave up the Unbeliever to Reprobation. Nor could it possibly be otherwise, if we consider the Situation of the Preacher in the Infancy of Revelation, and what an extensive Province he had to run through with his Intelligence. He must of course be always in haste to get on, and
could

*Had not
Leisure
for such a
Method.*

could have no Time to spare, if he were so disposed. His Commission required him to keep stirring. *The Harvest was plenteous* upon his Hands, and That alone must oblige his Hearers to come in at short Warning, to snatch the critical Opportunity, or fairly expect to stand to the Loss. Itinerants could not afford to attend impertinent Queries, and lose their precious Moments in Controversies. To believe, or not, was at every one's own Choice; those that are obstinate, let them look to it. *The Dust was to be forthwith shaken off against them, and the Doom pronounced.* Their Office was only to circulate their Creeds; they were not sent to dispute, but to preach; not to wrangle, but instruct. It was Qualification enough, in such a Case, for a Missionary to be furnished with his Manifesto; Arguments could evidently be of no Service to Persons who could make no longer Stay in a Place. And therefore we see it was absolutely requisite, as was remarked, from their Circumstances, that their Disciples should be thus expeditious in their Motions, and comply without the least Hesitation. And accordingly, we find that whole Congregations were often gained over at a Hearing, and Thousands at a Time actually convinced by a single Lecture. *So mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed.* Such a one was the Eunuch we read of, the Profelyte of a short Stage, instructed one Hour, and baptized the next. Sufficient Proofs that there was no standing to make Exceptions in the Case; if they had a Right to do that, they must have had a farther Right too to multiply their Replies at Discretion, and, in fine, to have held to their own Opinions, and not be convinced at last.

Nor were indeed these Instructors in themselves *Nor Qualifications.* qualified to go through with any such regular Way

of Attack, if the Nature of their Commission had admitted it. They wanted as much the Skill and Address to manage a Controversy, as the Leisure to attend it. They were no Proficients in any Science, but, on the contrary, the most artless and illiterate Persons living. A shrewd Intimation, as it is so often justly represented to us, that such were purposely chosen out to be the Instruments to convey this Knowledge to us, that there might not be the least seeming Room for any mistaken Notion of the Kind; that we might not possibly be tempted to attribute to Reason's Force, or impute to any personal Art or Acquisition of their own, an Effect which was to be the sole and immediate Act of the Divinity, and wherein the *Power of God* was in a particular Manner to be glorified. For the same Reason the single Person amongst them, who was possessed of the supposed Advantages of human Learning, resolves, we see, immediately from the first Moment of his commencing Apostle, to leave it all behind him, and absolutely to disclaim all farther Acquaintance with it. He was determined to *know nothing else* amongst his Disciples *but Christ crucified*, nor to make any Use of *the Wisdom of Words*, lest *the Cross of Christ should be made of none Effect*. Even the Followers of the Impostor *Mahomet* are so sensible of the Advantage of such a Presumption in their Favour, and enter so deeply into this Way of Reasoning, that we hear them boasting at every Turn when they desire to do the greatest Honour to their Prophet, and as a most undoubted Mark of his Divinity, *that he could neither write, nor read*. And as the original and first Negotiators both received and practised themselves according to this constant Rule, in the very same Style again run all their pastoral Charges and Instructions

structions continued to their deputed Successors when they are issuing out new Commissions of Apostleship, and giving Directions for the Treatment of a Novice, who might happen to be not yet quite so thoroughly in the Persuasion.—
 “ *Him that is weak in the Faith receive.*” Yes;— but how? why, to instruct him better;—not by any means to confute or argue with him, — *not to doubtful Disputations.*

On the contrary, how wild a Supposition this of their proposing to proceed by Reasoning in such an Undertaking, how repugnant to every Notion of common Sense all Expectation or Possibility of the Kind, will readily appear, by considering but for one Moment what must have been the necessary Consequences of such a Mission, where the Understandings of the whole Audience were to be singly appealed to for Approbation. Why, the Consequence, doubtless, of such a Proceeding would have been, that very many would have found themselves intirely at a loss to form any Judgment at all of the Matter; many would have subscribed absolutely to its Demands, and gone away fully satisfied of its Veracity; and others again, as strongly decrying its Authority, and deriding all Notion of its Pretensions. Ever in all such Cases the Report must naturally be the same which we find of the great Apostle’s Success amongst his Philosophical Audience, *Some believed the Things which were spoken, and some believed not.* How is it possible in the Nature of the Thing it should be otherwise? The best of Arguments are liable to have greater or less Effects, and operate in very different Degrees, according to the different Hands they happen to fall into. Much more, if we consider on what critical and abstracted Kind of Topics such a Course of Proofs as was to be introductory

*The very
Supposition
evidently
preposterous
from the
Nature of
the Thing.*

ductory of a new and perfective Revelation must chiefly have been supposed to turn. *Eternal Relations, moral Differences of Things,* and a precise Delineation of *the Religion of Nature and its Obligations*, seem readily to occur, all as so many indispensable preliminary Articles to be treated of in the Way, and inculcated as the Foundation of such an intended Superstructure. And are these, however certain in themselves, such obvious Truths as can never possibly appear otherwise, and from which it is not to be supposed any one can ever possibly deviate, or one Moment withhold his Assent? Rather may they not be reasonably expected to be found often producing an Effect something short of such total and absolute Conviction, sufficient indeed to make the Cause appear very plausible and promising, yet not to the entire Exclusion of all Colour of remaining Scruple upon the Subject? But alas! the drawing different or partial Conclusions; the affecting of Re-hearings, and desiring to take Time to consider, are Concessions no way compatible with the Demands of an Apostle, who brings with him Doctrines of *instant and universal Use*, and therefore expects very justly to make his Converts with a Word's speaking. The begging Leave to suspend our Decision, and be excused the pronouncing Sentence, is a Language favouring of very little Acquaintance with these Matters, and such as would by no means be endured upon the Occasion. The thinking to evade the Consequence, by commencing an indifferent Stander-by, is a Scheme that will very ill answer the Ends of a Preacher of the Gospel; a Proposition of no ordinary Import, and which must be taken to be either absolutely received, or obstinately rejected, wherever it is once proposed, admits of no assenting by halves, or being with *Agrippa, almost per-*

persuaded to be a Christian. A divided Verdict, or the bare Acknowledgment of its Probability, will never serve for a satisfactory Account, where Souls are depending; or answer the Purposes of a Gospel instituted to the Intent, that *all should believe on his holy Name.* To secure such a Consequence as this, all these Kinds of Proofs that fall under the Cognizance of Reason, must ever be short and insufficient, which the Magnifiers of its rational and moral Evidence seem not to be aware of, nor to remember all the while that all this boasted Demonstration, in which they so much confide and triumph, does, with all its undeniable Force, unfortunately still require one equal Degree of Capacity to apprehend, and give them a proper Hold and Influence, and can therefore never possibly be accounted those cogent and effective Means, which an all-wise Designer could purpose to rely on, for the *drawing all Men to himself.* That it is certainly in Strictness discoverable by *Telescopes*, and the nice and accurate Observations of *the Curious*, is by no means a suitable Character and Property of *that Light which was prepared* (undoubtedly to shine out) *before the Face of all People.* It was not surely for such an Instructor to propose Problems to our Consideration, either indifferent in their Nature, or uncertain in their Consequence; to be concerning himself in the stating Cases whose Determination might be dispensed with, and in which he must very often expect to be losing his Labour. But those, who are for submitting it to every one's Examination, say no more of Christianity, than that it is indeed a good useful Sort of Scheme for those that it happens to suit, and that such as can relish it, and find themselves *able to receive it*, do for their Parts do well to receive it. And was it in Truth, can we suppose, for the
Sake

Sake of any such Conclusion, and to enforce such a Persuasion about his Errand, that the only Son of God, and Partner of the Divinity, could demean this exalted Nature, to struggle through a long Course of human Passions and Temptations, and be content to expire at last under such accumulated Circumstances of Anguish and Horror upon the accursed Tree, and all, as it seems, by this Account, to recommend his Doctrines only to the Opinion of a few Men of Parts, who were happily formed with Faculties to conceive his Proofs? However useful they might in the Event prove to their warmest Votaries on such Terms for their Influence, as a well-concerted System; such a Dispensation, and so loose a Tie, must evidently forfeit, at first View, all manner of Pretensions to any divine Foundation, or universal Jurisdiction, and be absolutely destructive of all Notion of *a one Thing necessary* in the Case. If a Man is to be held only by his own Reasonings in the Point, what is this but directly licensing a Dissent from the Gospel, wherever its Evidence may happen not to obtain; and stamping an equal Mark of necessary Truth upon a thousand opposite Opinions? Now if the Case of invincible Ignorance, which these Moderators pronounce so tenderly upon, be indeed a Plea to be ever tolerated, and uncovenanted Mercy lies still open to such as, from some natural Instinct and Impediment, are constrained to refuse the Tender of a Saviour's Name and Mediation, what are become, in the mean Time, of all the Privileges of *the Pale*? Where are the mighty Advantages arising from the inlisting in the chosen Flock, if this Heaven be once presumed thus equally capable of admitting Outlyers upon the same footing, and allowed a common Receptacle for the Partizans on both Sides of the Question? But how preposterous to

Ima-

imagination to conceive, that at the taking the
 last solemn and general Account of the Friends
 and Retainers of Christ, that when proper Re-
 wards come to be dispensed as due amongst his
 Followers, and *the Mark of the Lamb* called for
 to be produced as the Characteristic and Claim of
 the Elect, that the great Judge of Hearts should
 then actually declare in Favour likewise of the
 just Exceptions of sincere Unbelievers, and (at
 the same Time that he is giving the severest Sen-
 tence against the wilfully obstinate and disobedi-
 ent) admit this strange Distinction, and that with
 regard to this dissenting Class; they were not in-
 deed included in the general Precept, nor the
 Terms of the Gospel calculated at all for their Use
 or Apprehension; that they, on the contrary,
 laboured under the insuperable Incapacity of a
 particular Infidel-Make, and Antichristian Com-
 plexion; and therefore could not, with any Co-
 lour of Reason, be expected to join in giving an
 Assent, which was, by no Default of theirs, en-
 tirely out of their Power. That he must there-
 fore still do them the Justice to acknowledge their
equal Merit in their Opposition, and invite them
 of course to take their Places amongst the Saints,
 and sit down with *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,*
 and all the prime Martyrs and Confessors for the
 Cause, in the Kingdom of Heaven. “ *Well done*
 “ *good, though unfaithful, Servant; thou hast*
 “ *disbelieved me from Prejudices which I myself*
 “ *gave thee; enter thou, however, into the Joy*
 “ *of thy Lord.*” How much more agreeable ra-
 ther to Equity and Expectation, is the promised
 Course of Proceeding with such a principled Pro-
 tester, and the *denying him,* in his Turn, *before*
the holy Angels, who has dared, upon whatever
 fancied Grounds, to *deny his Judge before Men.*
 If this were not indeed the Case, there had been
 very

very little Need of the Expence of a Miracle for the reducing of St. *Paul* to the State of Christianity and Apostleship, who might, according to this Account, have succeeded just as well in the Quality of *Saul the Persecutor*; since that first Zeal of his was certainly, so consider'd, in itself equally meritorious; when, as he testifies of himself, *he verily thought that he ought to do many Things contrary to the Name of Jesus of Nazareth.*

*Miracles
not meant
as Arguments;*

But here again, I have, I am very sensible, been holding you for some Time past in the highest Impatience of Zeal to interpose and remind me, that if these Founders of Christianity did not indeed make their Appeals to Men's reasoning Faculty, it was because they were endowed with a readier and more decisive Means of Conviction in its Stead; one more suitable both to the Capacities of their Audience, and their own necessary Course of Dispatch, which I have been describing; and this, by an immediate Appeal to their Senses, by performing Works before their Faces, in Attestation of those Doctrines, which it was confessedly not within the Reach of any human Power to produce.

*Because
used by Im-
postors.*

To all which one might, I think, not unplausibly, suggest in return, what has been so often urged upon the Occasion, that Miracles have, Time out of Mind, been undoubtedly performed, as well in Favour of false Doctrines, and therefore can never be singly, and of themselves alone, any certain Marks of a true. This the Scripture itself confesses, when it warns us of *lying Wonders, and false Christs*; to take the most exact Care and Caution what we give Credit to of the kind; and recommends to us the farther and more secure Trial of them, by what it calls *their Fruits*. It allows plainly, by sending us thus to trace Analogies, and consult more known Relations

tions for the Experiment, that we have no proper Ground to ascertain any Truth from these Appearances, distinctly considered, without having this Recourse to a surer Standard, and calling in the foreign Aid of moral Considerations to *confirm* their Authority. It is indeed the most I think their strongest Advocates will at present insist upon in Behalf of their Weight and Interest in the Question, that they concur only in contributing their Part jointly, with other concomitant Circumstances, towards the raising all together a full and competent Degree of Evidence for our Reliance. One might alledge yet farther, that all this wonderful and miraculous Evidence, as you regard it, was indeed, in Strictness, but the natural Effect of their Doctrine, instead of any supernatural Proof of its Veracity; which may be best learnt by considering the Nature of these extraordinary Actions, and the Occasions on which they were generally produced. For Instance, the mighty Act of *casting out Devils* does not surely necessarily imply any such Purpose in it, as the mere shewing of divine Power; the dislodging that potent and insidious Adversary of Mankind, from his usurped Seats in a human Breast, seems to carry in it manifest Reason enough of its own besides, without any such imposed Construction of it. For may it not rather be considered naturally enough, as an Act only in the Way of their Function, and absolutely never to be omitted by such as profess to plant the Gospel? The *healing of the Sick* seems in like manner to want no such laboured Account to explain it, but to speak itself sufficiently in its own beneficial Tendency. It was a suitable Instance of that universal Benevolence they were recommending, and which it would be very hard to consider apart from its Merits and Influence, as practised on an indiffer-

rent

*Especial
Care taken
not to have
them made
publick.*

rent and fruitless Occasion, merely as expressive of the Power they acted by. It must seem strange too, if our Lord had any such Meaning as *to convince* by these Works, that he should be always so remarkably upon the Reserve in that Respect, whenever he happened amongst unbelieving Company; that he should be so particularly sparing of these supposed Arguments, amongst the very Persons who seemed most to want them. More plainly still, that he had no such Intention to prove his own Truth and Character by these Instances of his Power; he often industriously avoided that accidental Consequence, and took particular Care to prevent their ever coming to publick Notice, by dismissing most of the Company and Attendants, before he began to proceed to the Operation. So far from retaining the grateful Patients as Witnesses to communicate what they had experienced, that their Mouths were by special Command shut fast from the Liberty of proclaiming the Benefits they had received, and the strictest Silence enjoined them with regard to the Author. *See thou tell no Man*, was generally the Charge. Which shews what Credit or Reputation he affected in all his good Offices, of which he was so solicitous to stifle every the least Report. So far from laying hold on any miraculous Occasion that offer'd for Matter of Proof, that when the expell'd Spirits were officious of their own Accord, and in Opposition to their own Interest, to proclaim their Knowledge of his divine Character to the World, the Discovery was by no Means permitted at their Hands, but their Tongues immediately restrained, and an Act of Omnipotence exerted to oblige them to Silence.

Among innumerable Instances of the Kind, that appear to me to favour this Consequence, let me

farther just mention to you that of *Herod*, whom we find recorded, not much to his Advantage, that he *wanted to see some Miracle done by him*; which if they had been at all calculated for the Purpose of converting, would have been surely countenanced and cultivated as a good promising Symptom and Mark of a towardly Disposition for future Discipleship. The coming desirous to canvass the Evidence, though from no other Principle perhaps, originally, than that of gratifying a light Curiosity, were, one would imagine, a Turn of Mind to be favourably entertained, and carefully cherished in a Novice, by any who was solicitous to grain Profelytes by such Means, and conscious of having any thing of the Kind to produce to him. But, on the contrary, we find our Master ever disclaiming, with the severest Resentment, all Followers of that Complexion; and no Temper check'd and discourag'd with so constant an Aversion, as this of, as it is opprobriously termed, *seeking a Sign*. There cannot be, I think, a stronger and more express Reproof to all such Notions and Constructions of his good Offices, than That he makes Use of, in Jealousy of Heart, upon being applied to for an Instance of this extraordinary Assistance in favour of the Nobleman's Child — *Unless you see Signs and Wonders, says he, you will not believe*. Indeed, so far from any View of the Kind, or with any Tendency towards the reclaiming Men's Minds to a proper Sense and Reverence for the Actor, do all these extraordinary Essays seem directed; so far from having any the least Connexion with the Thought of procuring Disciples from the Influence of the Spectacle, that a certain Degree, and that no ordinary one, of previous Confidence and Persuasion appears to have been constantly stipulated for beforehand, to entitle them to have

their Applications at all listen'd to, or regarded; and to be the sole Measure and Rule of dispensing these occasional Favours. Wherever we find them conferr'd, it was still first *perceiving that the Patient had Faith to be healed.* Wherever there was the least Room to distrust such a preparatory Provision, he seems to capitulate, and guard with especial Care, that a Miracle should not be even accidentally a Means of Conversion, by dismissing the Petitioner with a conditional Remedy, which was to take Effect only in Proportion to his present Qualifications of the Kind, and of which his Success was to be the sure Test. *According to your Faith, be it unto you,* were the Terms. As elsewhere he attributes professedly the whole Efficacy of a Miracle that had taken place, to that single Preliminary; *Thy Faith* (that of which I found thee already possess) *hath made thee whole.*

Thus much I have ventured to intimate of my own Sentiment upon this strong Hold, as it is by some esteem'd, of miraculous Evidence; and such it is, as I cannot but imagine, must needs appear sufficiently conclusive and satisfactory for the Purposes for which it is produced. But what if now, in Deference to some contrary Opinions, I am still disposed to give up all this Part of the Argument? What if I am yet content, after all, to grant you readily to the Extent of your Demand, that these Miracles were indeed displayed merely for that End you suppose, and carry with them all that invincible Demonstration you contend for? How will this yet serve the Purpose? To whom were they such Demonstration? To those only who saw them. Certainly to none else. They were Conviction enough at that Instant of Time, and upon that Spot, When and Where they were exhibited. But wherever either of these Circumstances fail, all that resistless Force of the Evidence must

must fail with it. What They saw, will serve well to convict that one Generation to which these Wonders were immediately address'd. *Sufficient to the Day is the Evidence thereof*; but no more. These *mighty Works* could be no Demonstration to any that were not actually and personally present when they were done; and, for the same evident Reason, can be none to us *Now*. All that we can possibly know of the Matter at this Distance, will amount, in the strictest Calculation, to no more than moral Appearances of Truth, and probable Attestations of the Fact.

*Antiquity
must im-
pair much
of their
Weight.*

And are we to imagine now, that God would ever leave a Matter of such Consequence upon such a Foundation? That he, who vouchsafed at first to create, and then to redeem, at so great an Expence, the Souls of all Mankind, would have sat down, after all, lightly contented to have scatter'd thus partially and accidentally his necessary Light amongst a very few, and leave all the rest of us to the Courtesy only of a few Reporters; to such a Testimony, as, if it were never so false, it were absolutely impossible we could, in our Situation and Circumstances, ever discover to be so? To such an Evidence as, though never so plausible and well established, can never, as I have observed, carry sufficient Weight with it to be a governing Principle through Life, to influence our Conduct against our Nature, and be an effectual Check and Restraint upon all our wilful and unruly Appetites. A Truth which *all Men* are so deeply concerned to know, and *act upon* the Strength of it, must needs, one would think, be something more equally and generally distributed, something more *certain* in its Nature, and more *diffusive* in its Influence. And answerable accordingly to such a Characteristic, is that Light which he hath truly *prepared before the*

Face of all People. His Mercy hath be openly shewed in the Sight of the Heathen, and all the Ends of the World have seen the Salvation of our God.

If the Church of *Rome* may be allowed of any Weight upon the Question, (and there are none that speak generally in higher Terms of this Kind of Evidence) it appears plainly enough from their own Practices what is their Sense of this Matter. That Miracles, *that ever cease*, are by no means a competent Support for the Cause, or to be produced as substantial and conclusive Testimonies for the Truth of their Religion. They shew, I say, very sufficiently how absolutely essential in their Esteem the Circumstance of *Continuance* is for any such Application, when they have Recourse to the Counterfeit of its Appearance for a Supply; when they pretend their constant and uninterrupted Succession to this Day, and actually attempt to keep false and fictitious ones on foot for the Purpose.

If Miracles were necessary in the Infancy of the Gospel, they are so still, and will be to the End of the World: Whenever they cease, the Authority of the Evidence which depended on them ceases with them. That Divine Demonstration to By-standers, the Voice of God himself, *This is my beloved Son*, has been, by one intervening Age, dwindled long since to human Tradition; God no longer bears Witness to his Son, but Men only bear Witness to God. The Date will quite change the Property of the Evidence, and really make all this Difference. We hear no more that awful Sound, but by Repetition and Echo, and all that commanding Force of the great original Attestation and Acknowledgment is sunk with us, into the uncertain Assertions of fallible Men relating it after one another. And therefore

fore the neglected Preacher can at this Time of Day (if he applies to their Reason) remonstrate against an unbelieving Audience with no severer a Charge, than that of the Prophet's, *Lord, who bath believed our Report?* For a Miracle that was ocular Proof to its Co-temporaries, to us is no more than uncertain Hearsay. A vast Disparity and Diminution of the Authority; but such as must necessarily be the Consequence of all Evidence when once it comes to be reported. It were indeed impossible in Nature to have given them such a Kind of Evidence as they could transfer, with any Degree of equal Weight, even to their most immediate Successors, and much less to us now so far removed. That *Seeing* indeed *is Believing*, has ever been allowed Reasoning; but that I am to believe a Thing because another says he saw it, and it is not in my Power to prove a Negative, and contradict him, is surely a very unprecedented and new sort of Logic. The Testimony of Sight is, by its Nature, an Evidence not to be communicated; all the Assurance in the World of another's seeing, can never have an equal Effect upon my Senses, or make me see a Thing where I was not actually present. The Light of Conviction therefore, which is thus received, can extend no farther than to the Eye-witness himself, lost and extinguished the first Moment it is offered to be imparted. Here then it commences human Authority, and, as such, becomes the proper Subject of our free Enquiry and Debate. It recurs in that Shape to the Province of Reasoning, and can now claim no longer to be treated with any other Deference than it shall appear from its own proper Merits to be entitled to. Now, whatever Degree of Credit it may, by this Means, in Time acquire in my Mind from strict Trial and Probation, this can surely never

*And reduce
their Au-
thority to
the Rate
of common
History.*

be of itself that Kind of flagrant and incontestable Evidence which God expects should work such an instant Effect on our Minds, and be accepted by us at first Mention with so much Readiness and Acquiescence. The hesitating upon the Genuineness of a particular Tradition, can never be that Offence which God has profest himself to take so heinously at our Hands, as an Affront to his Personal Veracity, (with which it has no Connexion) and giving him the Lie. *He that believeth not God hath made him a Liar, because he believeth not the Record that God gave of his Son.*

*Must be
some gene-
ral Prin-
ciple of sa-
ving Truth*

And yet that there must be somewhere still, we may be certain, (from the Consideration of his reasonable Nature who enjoined the Duty) *some general uniting Principle* in Being, which, if well attended to, will be a proper Foundation in all for this general Assent. That it cannot be human Reason, we have seen clearly on many Accounts, both from the natural Effects of Reason itself, and the known Methods by which Faith was first introduced. Perhaps then we have amongst us some visible Fountain of Truth, some universal Dictator assigned us upon the Spot, to whom we may all have Recourse in our Doubts to be resolved alike, and determined alike. Alas! the Evidence of such a Qualification is but still fresh Matter for Dispute; the Authority of this assumed Character, and Claim of Infallible, must be grounded still on some positive Warrant; and the Truth of such a Pretension is again itself a new Question, which can apply only to Reason for Decision, and must of consequence be still liable to all the Objections to our former Scheme, and to the same Variety of Persuasions about it. If the Spirit of Truth does not vouchsafe to appear in Person, we must ever have a Right to challenge his Commissioners.

Hitherto

Hitherto then, it seems, we are absolutely at a Loss for this general Standard and Principle, so much wanted, of universal Conviction. Have we no Prospect left of making the Discovery? And how then shall we reconcile the eminent Reason and Equity of our Law-giver, with the giving us thus a Command which (if there be yet no farther Expedient remaining beyond the Use of Reason) we must many of us necessarily disobey. For so it is—The God of Justice has assured us, both from our natural Idea of him, and his own positive Word, that he will require no more of any of his Creatures, than what he has given them Ability to perform.—The God of Truth has peremptorily required of us all the Belief of his Gospel under a Penalty denounced, of no less than Damnation.—The necessary Consequence is, that it must be our own Fault if we do not believe it; that it is in our Power to obey him if we will.

And how shall we then say?

One should indeed imagine, that all the numerous and glaring Absurdities that follow so manifestly from the first View of the forementioned reasoning Scheme, should have sent Men naturally to look out elsewhere for some more satisfactory Account, and better Ground to fix upon in this important Point. But much more strange is it to my Apprehension, that any Man who has ever looked into the sacred Writings to be resolved, the authentic Oracles from which alone all our Intelligence of that Kind can be drawn, could possibly overlook it, and mistake the Rule there so plainly delineated to our Hands. There we find laid down, in the first Place, in the strongest Terms, the negative Preliminary I have been advancing, and Reason ever intirely excluded the Question. We are there expressly assured,

that no Man ever attained to the Belief of revealed Truths by the Strength or Assistance of his natural Faculties, as we have at once from the same Authority the farther positive Instruction communicated, and the true Principle assigned us. Which was

The third Article I proposed mentioning, and which we have in one plain Word thus fully set forth to us, *No Man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.* Here is pointed out to us at once that great Dictator and infallible Guide we have been seeking for, and indeed the only Character we can possibly think of any way equal to such a Province. It could be nothing less than Omniscience and Omnipresence itself, nothing but this inexhaustible Fountain of all Truth that could be sufficient to such a Demand. And he it is, the promised Oracle, who *is to attend the Charge of Believers to the End of the World,* to keep alive his divine Light constantly in their Hearts; not to teach them Rudiments of Logic, but to irradiate their Souls at once with a thorough Conviction, and perform more by one secret Whisper, than a thousand clamorous Harangues from the Schools. From the Satisfaction consequent to the Mind from his Performance of this great Office it is, that he is so eminently stiled *The Comforter,* as his Operations are in another Place very strongly and significantly termed *the Power of God unto Salvation.* — *He that believeth on the Son of God bath the Witness in himself.* In this Sense it is, that we are properly stiled *the Temples of the Holy Ghost,* the consecrated Scenes of his constant Residence, there ever personally present, and dispensing his certain Intelligence to the Soul, which the Apostle calls the *Witnessing of the Spirit with our Spirit.* It were endless to recount all the innumerable Passages

Passages throughout the whole Scripture that concur in ascertaining this same super-natural and all-sufficient Source and Origin of our Faith, in Opposition to all the feeble Aids, and uncertain Advices, that Reason might possibly contribute to the Purpose. For we may observe, in mentioning the Principle of Faith, that we are always informed together both what it is, and what it is not : *By Grace ye are saved, through Faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the Gift of God. No Man can come unto me, says Christ, except it be given him of my Father.* The Motive which induces Men to receive the mysterious Truths of the Gospel, is the peculiar Grant and Munificence of Heaven, over and above the common Privileges of our Nature. It seems by the particular Negatives every where so industriously dispersed through all the Expressions that treat of this Subject, that it was apprehended, that there might possibly happen, amongst the unwary, some Mistake upon the Occasion ; and that therefore, as it was an Article of so great Concern to have a just Notion of, the greatest imaginable Care was taken, by the most precise and emphatical Terms that could be devised, purposely to guard against any such fatal Consequence. But the strongest Confirmation of all these positive and repeated Revelations in the Point, the plainest Declaration and Direction what Kind of Evidence Christians were always to trust to and rely on for the Information and Assurance of their Minds, we may find summed up in brief in their Master's last Instructions at parting. *The Spirit of Truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me. As we have both the same Person and Commission elsewhere again specified ; The Spirit, whom I shall send, shall lead you into all Truth.* But, not to stand for ever transcribing

transcribing Particulars, I refer you once more to the great Original, which will, I think, readily save us both all farther Trouble in Quotations and Comments, and abundantly evince, in Opposition to all the evasive Constructions which may be imposed on particular Passages, that he was in general *to inspire Conviction*, as well as Holiness, and *to illuminate*, as well as sanctify, our Hearts.

Now this Supposition, once suggested, let us, for a farther Trial and Confirmation, take a short View of Religion in the Light I have been representing it, of Inspiration and infused Evidence, and we shall readily find, that this Principle alone fully answers all the Ends proposed; that it concurs in every Particular with what we must naturally expect from such an Assistant, and has indeed all those requisite Qualities which Reason so manifestly wanted for the Office. It is, in the first Place, *Universal*; *That Grace which bringeth Salvation hath appeared unto all Men: This is the Light which lighteth every Man that cometh into the World*; the uniting Principle, that speaks the same Thing to all. Thus *instructed all alike*, Men may be brought to *think all alike*, which could never, as I have shewed, have possibly been affected by any other Means. This, again, is of *Authority and Force sufficient to countermand effectually against the most violent Assaults of Temptation*, as it is itself of equal Certainty with any Gratifications they can possibly propose. Since here is Feeling opposed to Feeling, Knowledge to set against Appetite, and a strong and palpable internal Sense to balance all the Motions of the internal. — Above all, it is of *immediate Influence*, and operates without Delay. Such was the happy Metamorphosis of an officious Persecutor, into as zealous an Apostle. A Conversion

Answers exactly all the Purposes of religious Faith.

Is of universal Influence.

Of proper Weight.

Of instant Effect.

version effected not by the Force of dilatory Inferences and Conclusions, but by *an irresistible Light from Heaven*, that flashed Conviction in a Moment. Thus called, we *make no tarrying to turn to the Lord, and put not off from Day to Day*, our Faith is completed in an Instant, and the most perfect and finished Creed produced at once, without the hazardous Attendance to be paid to any tedious Progress in Deductions of our own, or the capricious Adjournments of a factious and cavilling Council. By this Means all the necessary Articles are brought home safely at once to our own Breasts, and the enlightened Disciple breaks forth abruptly into this full and ample Confession, *Rabbi, thou art Christ, thou art the Son of God*. This is that *still, small Voice* that bespeaks the immediate Presence of the Divinity, and makes its Dictates, as it were, self-evident to the Mind where it is lodged. In this the Sum and Substance of all Argumentation is briefly comprized, the very Spirit and Extract of all convicting Power, of a Nature, perhaps, but little differing from that of Intuition itself. And can there be for Minds, thus instructed, any Occasion to concern themselves afterwards in unravelling any of the vain Subtleties and Conceits of Casuistry in the Point, or to apply to Libraries for a more competent Information and Discovery? What is there after this remaining in human Wit, or these suspicious Repositories of human Testimony that can now deserve our least Notice, or be thought of Consequence to engage a Moment's Attention upon this Subject? Here we have already God witnessing for God, and speaking for himself, and *what Need have we of farther Witnesses, who have heard, as we may say, from his own Mouth?* No; we stand no longer now in Need of any of the Credit of ancient Miracles,

Of absolute Certainty.

or the Genuineness of distant Records, a very slender and insufficient Ground, as I have shewn, to answer all the great Purposes, and insure all the rigid Demands of Religion. We can vouch, in its Stead, a present and a standing Miracle of our own, an Evidence that supports all the same original Authenticness which it carried with it in Ages so far remote, this living Witness and uncorrupt Commentator in our own Breasts, surviving all Changes and Successions, and equally contemporary with every one of us. It is our Security, that *he has writ his Law in our Hearts*. The indelible Characters stamped upon those living Tablets are such as are out of the Power of the Unfaithfulness or Ignorance of Transcribers to falsify or pervert. Such as no Misrepresentations can ever possibly intervene to corrupt, no succeeding Suggestions of a different Style to dispute the Preference, or shake its Authority in our Minds by any new Appearance. And, for the utter Exclusion of all future Encroachments of the Kind, our faithful Monitor and Guardian has promised to continue this Office, and *abide with us* himself (as long as our Faith is expected to last) *to the End of the World*, that we might not be left liable one Moment to a Possibility of Error and Imposition, which must unavoidably be the Case, if we were ever left to take any the least Part of our Instructions from one another. Now, what a very different Prospect this, and Ground of Security from the empty Notion of mere *manuscript* Authorities and *Paper-Revelations*? Composed thus of perishable Materials, the Original itself, though penned like that on Mount *Sinai* by the very Finger of God himself, and engraven even on Adamant instead of *Marble*, must in Time come to want *Repairs*; as for the present, it would necessarily require to be

be multiplied by *Transcripts* for immediate Communication. The very first Step therefore from this genuine Palladium into a *Copy* and Representation *at second Hand*, will, (like the Tradition of a Miracle) detract in a great Degree from its divine Authority, as this must necessarily be *the Work of Man*, and liable of Course, from a thousand Causes, to fall short and deviate from its great Exemplar. The Opposers of the Gospel say, indeed, that this is the Case; and insist strongly, that the sacred Text has been actually much adulterated. With Regard to the Truth of their Assertion, and how that Fact stands, I will not take upon me at present to determine: But this, at least, I will venture to assert in my Turn, that so far from resting the Terms of our Salvation upon a Writing that must run the common Hazards of all other Memorials of the kind, that even though a constant Miracle were to interpose upon the Occasion to exempt this important Charge in particular from all these *Changes and Chances* incident to all other Compositions; though the same Almighty Power that first indited were to continue hovering perpetually with a Guardian Hand over the sacred Depositum, and the constant Inspection of an immediate Providence concern'd to revise and keep it up in all its original Purity; — with all these especial Privileges supposed, it were still absolutely defective and insufficient for any such revealing Purpose as they would expect. The plainest Terms, in the plainest Characters that could possibly be devised (and who will say that this is our present Case with Regard to the Scriptures?) were at the best but the putting a dead Letter into our Hands, without the additional Grace of this active Interpreter to attend it. That the Proofs of every necessary Article

Such as Books could never furnish.

are

are certainly here to be traced is not Circumstance sufficient, if any Thing be left in the mean Time to the Skill of the Workman. *The Trial of the Witnesses*, for Instance, is, without Doubt, a very noble and convincing Demonstration, as it is managed, of that important Point of our Lord's Resurrection: I say as it stands now collected and reduced by that able Hand, to complete Mood and Figure for our ready Observation. But the extracting and ranging it thus advantageously, is by no Means the Province of all those whom that Lesson may concern, and who would have been but very ill provided with a proper Representation of that Matter, if they had known no other Means of conducting that Argument through all its Connexions in its fullest Force; if they had been conscious of no nearer and more opportune Recourse the while for their Satisfaction, long before ever this voluntary Apostle was pleased to engage in their Assistance, and *arose a Master in Israel*.

If either our own, or our borrowed Constructions upon holy Writ, were our only Means for *working out* the Knowledge of *our Salvation*, we might, I think, venture even to exceed the Apostle's Strain, in expressing the Deplorableness of our Situation, and assert, with the greatest Justice, that *we were of all Creatures the most miserable*. If a just Apprehension of the Authority and Sense of the Scriptures be necessary for us to attain by Reasoning, so is in the first Place, it must be granted, a good Degree of natural Understanding for the Purpose; so is, again, a competent Proportion of Skill in Language and Science on the Occasion; and of course, the Circumstance of a favourable Fortune to furnish the Opportunity of making such Acquisition; so is, farther, the Ensurance of a sufficient Allotment of Years to labour

bour through the Employment. To state properly its Merits, and clear its Meaning ; to settle first the Canon, and then the Contents, is plainly enough a Task, that no less Qualifications can at all admit our Undertaking. If a Bible therefore be once necessary for this strict and solemn Perusal, 'tis easy to see, that so are other convenient Means of Information in great Abundance to give it both Light and Sanction ; that so is *Prideaux's* Connexions, for Instance, amongst a thousand other Volumes, to illustrate and support it.

I have been very short and reasonable in the Computation of my Demands, that I might come the sooner to remark upon the Consequence, and ask in a Word, to what Purpose all these extraordinary Ingredients of Sense and Learning, and Leisure, thus almost miraculously assembled together in our supposed Examiners ? Why, to enable at last, one perhaps in ten thousand, to form something of a *plausible Conjecture* upon the Subject, and very possibly (what the most ingenious Students, who have gone that Way to work, have often had the hard Lot to fall into) a damnable one.

But, to return to my Argument, pursuant to this my Explanation of the Nature of Faith, and the Means of attaining it, we may be now able to give some Account *how the Want of it comes to be such a Crime*, and so severe a Penalty to be denounced against Unbelief, which upon no other Supposition we could possibly do. The universal Tender of this Conviction, however potent in its Influence, must yet depend greatly upon the proper Disposition of our Minds to give it Reception for its Efficacy, and so far will give Place, and afford ample Matter for Trial and Probation, and become indeed a Test of our Obedience. Whereas
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*May make
Infidelity
criminal.*

the arbitrary Determinations of Reason are well known to be Events entirely out of our Power, and consequently to leave no such Room for either our Merit or Offence. Hence, I say, can arise the only possible Connexion in Nature betwixt *Conscience and Believing*, in every other Light the most ridiculous Jargon in the World. Human Invention cannot find an equal Image to express the Absurdity of an obedient or criminal Understanding. The seeing of Sounds, or hearing of Colours, are Illustrations far short of the Nonsense of *Conscience in Opinion* upon any other Principle. The commanding Men *to believe rationally*, commanding them to have their Reason satisfied, and this with threatned Imputation of Guilt and Infliction of Punishment, is such a Scheme at first View, as no Pretence of Authority, human or divine, can command any Regard or Attention to, or indeed any Notice, but that of the Contempt due to Paradoxes, the most eminently impudent and ridiculous. On the other Hand, a rebellious Opposition of all the gracious Instances of the divine Spirit to enlighten our Hearts, the willful Repugnance to all his earnest Solicitations to accept of his saving Truths, may they not as deservedly expect all that so great an Injury calls for, or the Resentment of so great a Personage can inflict? Here Disbelieving and Guilt have *Meaning* again when put together, since the Compliance required is no longer than that of the *Understanding*, but of the *Will*, in its Nature free, and therefore accountable; and though we are not by any Means chargeable for the Effects of our Apprehension, yet there is no Reason but that we may be with all Justice called to the strictest Account for our Obstinacy, Impiety and Perverseness.

Hence again it is, that Schisms and Heresies are such just Objects of our Wonder and Resentment; which considered merely as different Opinions, and as the speculative Results of different Understandings, have certainly nothing in them either so strange or detestable, but are on the contrary, Consequences extremely natural, and no more than what was to be expected on such an Occasion: *We beseech you, Brethren, says the Apostle, that you all speak the same Thing;—that ye be all perfectly of the same Mind, and the same Judgment.* A strange Request this, 'till we come to consider the Character and Doctrine of the Speaker, and the Means by which he desired it should be effected; which is explained to us in another Place, with the Repetition of the like Demand, *the God of all Consolation grant you to be like-minded.*

From this Account alone of the Matter can we reconcile ourselves consistently to the sudden Conversion of so many upon little or no seeming Evidence, and discover both why it was expected, and why accepted at their Hands. *Follow me, says our Lord to Matthew, and immediately he left all and followed him.* It would surely seem strange, humanly considered, to see him deserting thus precipitately a beneficial Employment for he knew not whom; which must be the Case, if we suppose the Summons directed to his Reason; if he was not affected at the same Crisis by some corresponding *Call within* to influence his Motions, and warrant his Prudence: For it is either likely, if *what he had seen* before had had that good Effect upon him, as to dispose him to Discipleship, that he would have had the Merit of engaging voluntarily in the Service, without waiting for a particular Address, or else that he would never have proved so obsequious

to it on a sudden at the first Offer, as to comply at once, at the Loss of his Livelihood for a Word's speaking. In another Place it is recorded, and as a Discipleship not ill received, that *many*, who it seems had never heard of him before, *believed on him readily for the Saying of the Woman*. A notable Foundation truly for Confidence and Conviction, and perhaps Martyrdom, without some internal Assistant of superior Credit to second and make good the light Intelligence. *O Fools, and slow to believe!* — And all this can you imagine, only because *these two* poor deluded Travellers, involv'd only in a national, and humanly speaking, a very natural Mis-apprehension with Regard to the Nature of their promis'd *Deliverance*, as having never had any Notion suggested to them of any Thing more dreadful to apprehend than *Slavery* and Subjection to their Enemies, or been trained to the Ambition of a Situation beyond that of their own *Canaan* : Because Men, I say, under these Circumstances, had not, by the Dint of a peculiar Sagacity of their own, and a singularly happy Turn of Thought, been able to trace out precisely in their mysterious Records a spiritual and suffering Messiah and a *Propitiation for Sins*, in direct Opposition to the general Sense of their Country on that Point, and all the authentic Determinations and Comments of their ablest Doctors and Sanhedrims, who had been so long preparing them in the Expectation of a *triumphant Standard-Bearer* and a temporal one. Is it to be believed, that God would reproach any of his Creatures with a defective Intellect, when he was pleased to give them no better ? Rather, is it not very evident, that this Animadversion is by no Means applicable to their Understandings, or any Charge of their being dull Scholars, but a severe Reprehension justly due to a rebellious

Refusal

Refusal and Disclaim of profer'd Grace? A Mind prepared and susceptible of these Impressions, it was their Part to cultivate for the Admittance of this heavenly Guest : So reasonable and necessary a Recommendation this, that wherever this Disposition was known to be wanting, he would not be at any Pains in soliciting such, but gave them up instantly to the Hardness of their Hearts without Remedy, depriving them judicially even of the most common Advantages, and not permitting them those accidental Opportunities of seeing any of his Miracles; which might possibly have alarmed their stubborn Minds into a better State, and prompted a Desire of farther Instruction. *He did not many mighty Works there, because of their Unbelief*; which would have been the very Reason of his multiplying them, or some better Means, for their Reduction, if he had thought them Subjects the least deserving of his farther Care or Assistance. In such a Case, we might not unreasonably expect to see something more of the *long-Suffering* Character displayed in their Behalf; some more patient Degree of Attendance had, in all Probability, been indulged to a tardy Genius and innocent Scruples, if they had been the only Impediment; it might seem somewhat hard and severe to reprobate, by so short a Process, for Hesitation, those whom perhaps one additional Circumstance of Power shining upon them, had brought to a proper Temper and Obedience. We may well presume, that he who left the Bosom of his Father purely to give us this important Information, would never have so capriciously neglected an Errand that cost him thus dear to undertake; or have desisted from all Occasions to promote the gracious Scheme of our Salvation to the utmost, upon any other Account than that of our own experienced Unworthiness.

For the same Reason only it was, and for a proper Punishment upon the incredulous and stiff-necked *Jews*, that he was so particularly cautious of exposing his Person after his Resurrection to publick View ; when his taking one Turn in the Market-Place might have spared both the painful Labours and Lives of so many holy Vouchers, who *perished* merely by *the Things being done in a Corner*. No ; but if *they believe not* the inward Attestations of the Holy Spirit, neither shall they *be persuaded by one's rising from the Dead*. And therefore, *if ever our Gospel be hid it is hid delervedly to these only that are lost*, and have already wilfully forfeited all Claim to farther Grace, or any repeated Instances of Persuasion. According to the same Account we find, wherever the outward Enforcements of the Gospel did not succeed, this constant Explanation of its Want of Effect ; *The Word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with Faith in them that heard it*.

It appears then that, by this revealed and Scripture Account of the Matter, all the difficult and surprizing Phænomena that occur in the Course of our Reflection, and Review of this Subject, are consistently cleared and explained to our Satisfaction, that Men may be certainly this Way highly *culpable* before God and Man, for a Deficiency in Belief ; that they may be as equitably obliged to an *immediate* Acknowledgment of the Truth ; and that he who requires all this at their Hands, may be yet strictly justifiable in *withdrawing his Light* from such as chuse to *sit in Darknes*, and absolutely refusing the Continuance of all Means of Conviction to such, as by their Ingratitude and Neglect had rendered themselves unworthy of all farther Solicitation, and would, by their Infidelity of Spirit, render its
Opera-

Operations, if tried, of no Effect.—On the other Hand, leaving this Solution for a while out of the Question, let us now turn the Tables, and take a short View of our religious Persuasion in its Reverse, and merely as it stands upon its own Bottom; let us contemplate for a Moment the Œconomy of our Faith in no other Light than what our Understanding will afford us for the Prospect, and see what a venerable Figure it will make under such a Representation, and considered only in the Eye of strict and unassisted Reason. To take it as it naturally occurs, in its very first Step; for Instance, of Baptism. Can any Thing be more natural, upon hearing of a rational Faith, than to interrogate, with the greatest Simplicity, after our Church-Catechism?—*Why then are Infants baptized, when by Reason of their tender Age they cannot possibly pretend to know any Thing of the Matter?* To represent this whole Proceeding justly, according to the Laws of Reason, would be to give a very injurious Image of that heavenly Mystery. For they article, might the invidious Objector say, without knowing it, to believe they know not what; and this Act, which is properly no Act at all, is received as something to all Intents and Purposes complete in itself, and comprising the whole Sum and Extent of a just Persuasion. Their living longer afterwards, to be capable of being informed *what it is* they have promised to believe, may possibly endanger, but cannot add to the Terms of their contracted Happiness. The Merits of the most finished Conviction are already theirs by Imputation; their Claim to Heaven stands already allowed, and Millions are accordingly, we know, actually saved upon the Strength of the mere Ceremony, without ever having had the Capacity of exerting one single Thought upon that, or any other Subject.

The Constitution of Religion can bear no other View.

Instance in Baptism.

So far are they all the while from knowing any thing *Why*, that they do not so much as know *What* they believe, or, indeed, that they do believe any thing at all.—I could well enlarge, if Occasion were, upon this Head, and reduce the whole System, by each particular Article, to that uncouth Image, which through the false Medium of Reason, it must ever strike upon our Senses. But if you will consult the great Lord * *Bacon* upon the Subject, you will find the Application of this Test of Reason to Religion fully made already to your Hands, and carried with one continued Series and Air of Repugnancies through almost all the Mysteries of the Gospel. And yet no one will, I believe, offer to doubt his personal Persuasion of the Truth of them, on Account of the seeming Contrarieties he has there set to view, whilst he was scanning them by the inadequate Scale of mere human Reason. He knew well that all these Absurdities, as they appear to us, were so far from being Matter of any just Jealousy, or Exception to its Veracity, that they are the strongest Presumptions possible in its Favour, and the necessary Consequences of our attempting of ourselves to pronounce at all upon divine Subjects, that its not proving correspondent to, or reconcileable with, our Notions, is a Circumstance rather violently declarative of its being in Truth the genuine and undoubted Representation of his Will, who *thinketh not as Man thinketh*.

There cannot indeed be on Earth two Things more widely differing, than this same Religion humanly considered, and falling under the proper Cognizance of this supernatural and inspired Sense, when it is attempted to be weighed in the unequal Scales of human Reason, and when it

* See his Religious Paradoxes.

has its just Poize by being proved in *the Balance of the Sanctuary*. *With Men this is impossible, but with God all Things are possible*, is a Distinction no where more strongly exemplified than in this Subject: By his Almighty Influence, *the Faith of Grace* shall give us Demonstration of Things in a thousand Instances, to which *the Faith of Reason* could never have, in any Degree, reconciled us. They clash in their very first Principles, their very first Lessons are the most direct Contradictions to each other: The Foundation of Philosophy is all Doubt and Suspicion, as the Foundation of Religion is all Acquiescence and Belief. But how extremely distinct and opposite they are in their Natures and Interests, we may judge yet more certainly from their constant experienced Effects, by observing that there never was, in Fact, any right Understanding or Correspondence betwixt their several Professors; that from the very earliest Accounts, they have ran naturally into separate Parties, have manifested, on all Occasions, a hostile Disposition, and mutual Antipathy, and stood ever, in the most distant Remove, from all Possibility of amicable Terms and Reconcilement. The Philosopher insolently scoffing the Believer, and he in his Turn, as zealously proscribing the Philosopher. *The Wisdom of Man* has ever been reputed *Foolishness with God* and his Servants, and but too often the Censure has been (however vainly) retorted. A fresh Instance of the Truth of that general Doctrine which I am endeavouring through the whole to inculcate! For if this Christian System had proceeded on rational Principles, it could never certainly have laboured under all that Contempt in the Eyes of the letter'd World which it did, and which the Ministers of its Propagation were beforehand expressly assured it would do. It had

The Cultivation of Faith and Reasoning produce contrary Effects.

all the Advantage of coming on the Stage, at a Time of Day when Reason was in the highest Request and Reputation, and was sure to have the fairest Play imaginable ; Never were her Friends, the profest Searchers for Truth, more countenanced and encouraged : The World had never Ears more open ; nor was ever better disposed to attend the canvassing Things by Argument, if that had been the Ground they had gone upon. It was then, by their own Confession, the general Turn and common Employment amongst Mankind, to be industriously *looking out for Intelligence* : The Improvement of their Knowledge was that to which they had devoted all their Thoughts ; it was the undeviating Business of their whole Lives earnestly to cultivate Information by all possible Methods ; and they had succeeded accordingly in their Proficiency, and these *Children of this World were in their Generation*, at least, as *wise as the Children of Light*. This was the Situation in which they profess to have found the Audience they were to address, and a most advantageous and favourable one it was as could be wished, if they had dealt in Arguments, and had human Means of Conviction to produce. But it seems they were *not so to learn Christ*, and that Religion and Science were, as I contend, two very remote and different Subjects. How frequent is it, accordingly, to observe the Effects of the Spirit operating with the greatest Energy and Success, in Objects where, to our Perception, a very ordinary Degree of intellectual Improvement is scarce discoverable ; how much true Zeal, and Acuteness of spiritual Discernment, shining forth in Breasts unadvantaged with the minutest Portion of human Talents, or Acquirement ? On the other Hand, is any Thing again more common, than to meet with the brightest

Votaries

Votaries of the rational Class, destitute of every Glimpse of saving Knowledge, or the least Notion of such a Thing as divine Faith? *The World by Wisdom knows not God.* Nay so necessarily opposite are these two Species of Men, that their very Qualifications on both Sides are so many mutual and insuperable Impediments in their Way, to hinder even all Possibility of any Approach or Accommodation. The religious Man, for Instance, the enlightened Disciple of the Cross, who feels within all that glorious Display of the Power described, and all that demonstrative Assurance of the Truth of a Belief, by which his Salvation stands ensured, is conscious that he is possessed already of the *one Thing necessary*, and therefore contemns very justly all meaner Pursuits, which might possibly in any Measure divert his Mind from intending with all it's Powers the only Science deserving of his Application or Regard. On the other hand, the Character of the Philosopher disqualifies him again as much, for the having his Mind open to Influences, of which he has not the least Conception or Esteem; the habitual Turn of his Thoughts, his contracted Fondness for regular Argument, and inviolable Attachment to certain established Tests, will, of course, prevent his being ever affected by any thing that offers in any other Shape. His very Progress in *carnal Wisdom* has, we shall find, been but so much going backward in the School of Christ, on Account of which Effect, the Apostle so justly terms it, *earthly, sensual, devilish*. Thus prepossessed, he will hear of nothing that does not just happen to fall in exactly with what he vainly affects to call the *Laws of Nature*, which he has already irreversibly determined in his own Mind, and which engross all his Devotion. Moral Relations are with him the general Touchstone for
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the Trial of all Truths that come in his Way; and Revelation itself stands or falls in his Opinion, only so far as it agrees with that pre-conceiv'd Standard. So that you see, *a subtile Spirit and a penetrating Genius*, as you so sententiouſly affected to expreſs yourſelf, *may poſſibly blind a Man* in ſome Particulars, without all that Degree of Paradox which you would fix on ſuch a Suppoſition.

So much did the impotent Policy of that deſtroyed Apoſtate *Julian* miſtake its Aim, when, in the Malice of his Heart, he prohibited the Children of Chriſtians from the Advantages, as he conceived it, of a School-Education, and being trained in Leſſons of Philoſophy, which, inſtead of contributing, as he weakly apprehended, to the forwarding of that Intereſt, and rendering their Qualifications more formidable, might, in all Probability, have produced often the ſame fatal Effects amongſt them, as it had done already on himſelf, and have diſpoſed them to give abſurdly the Preference to Paganism and Idolatry. A prudent Manager in his Place, that had well underſtood the Nature of his accuſed Project, would, in Proſecution of the ſame Scheme, have taken juſt contrary Meaſures, and ſpitefully ſet open the Schools every where for their Admiſſion; he would have earneſtly encouraged their retaining to the Profeſſion of Philoſophy, and invited them by all poſſible Arts and Privileges, to the Cultivation of a Science, that has generally been found to prove ſo deſtructive of their Principles. This had been proceeding judiciously however, and with Art as diabolical as the Deſign, by thoſe very Politicks, from which the Apoſtle very juſtly apprehended ſome Danger indeed, and againſt which his cautionary Precept is ſo ſolemnly and directly levell'd. *Beware leſt any Man ſpoil you through Philoſophy and vain Deceit, after*
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the Tradition of Men, after the Rudiments of the World and not after Christ. It had bid surely the fairest for the Accomplishment of his Purpose, that they should have contracted early a Propensity to Distrust and Contradiction, that assuming and prying Turn of Philosophers, which is so widely different from the Temper required to qualify a Candidate for the Discipleship of Christ. He has declared, that *no Man can receive the Gospel, except he receive it as a little Child* in the Impotence and Impuberty of a dutiful Understanding; in the tractable Simplicity of unpractised Reason; not with the Claims of a self-sufficient Disputant; the haughty and arrogant Spirit of a replying Academic; but with all the obsequious Submission and humble Acquiescence of a Babe, who has no other Disposition, but *to learn his Lesson.*

But for the strongest Explanation of the Truth of what I am suggesting, that *Reason* cannot possibly have any Thing to do upon these Occasions, let me recommend you only for one Moment into some Assembly of the Faithful at their Devotions. Repair, I say, but to the next Scene of religious Worship, and contemplate there in your Mind what passes in your View, and the Nature of the Proceedings; a numerous Congregation, the Votaries of an extensive District, and their strict Concurrence to the nicest Punctilio in all the doctrinal Points there uttered, and bring me ingenuously your true Judgment upon the Matter. Is it possible that you will assert, that this harmonious Flock are thus altogether really giving a *rational Assent* to all these curious Articles, and profound Theorems, when your Experience, in the mean Time, assures you, that the Generality of these unanimous Confessors have never, in their whole Lives, bestowed

*Common
Standard
Creeds no
Effect of
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Reasoning.*

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one single Thought, in a speculative Way, upon the Truth or Falshood of that long Train of Propositions they so liberally avow? You must needs readily grant the contrary, and fall of Course into my easy Account of this strange Proceeding, owning that it can be only the Effect of *the same Spirit*, that from the Lips of them all contrives to speak *the same Thing*; that, by this Means, though Men cannot be all of one Opinion, they may of one Faith, which they hold, not in Unity of Understanding, but, as our Liturgy well expresses it, *in the Bond of Peace, and Unity of Spirit*. A Distinction that can alone justify the Consistency of the Practice, which must be otherwise unavoidably liable to Reproach for its Absurdity, and render its Abettors very deservedly obnoxious to the Apostle's Censure of rearing Altars to *an unknown God*. A Distinction too which the same Apostle himself elsewhere allows; when he affirms of the Case of repeating Prayers in an unknown Tongue, that *one may pray with the Spirit, though not with the Understanding*. And what Wonder? when we consider, that this same Spirit is the sole Avenue of all these Intelligences; and that *it is not Flesh and Blood that hath revealed this unto them*, but that they are all *taught of God*; that it is he only that hath *heard and learned of the Father that cometh to Christ*.—So then plainly it is no more of him that *thinketh*, or of him that *reasoneth*, but of *God who sheweth Mercy*.

I am indeed, after all, well aware, that you are not without your Precedents in this Persuasion; that there have been very strenuous Advocates for your Side of the Question, and those too Persons of no ordinary Eminence and Reputation, both for their Abilities and religious Attachments. I have, I must confess, been myself but too often a Witness to this Kind of Language from the

Pulpit.

Pulpit. I have been often assured, from a strange Misapplication of a straggling Text, some faint Outline which seemed, they fancied, to countenance such a Notion, that " I was *to prove all Things*, (a hopeful Task!) before I believed any Thing. That I was not only left free to enquire, if I pleased, into the Truth of all Fundamentals in Religion, but that it was actually a Duty incumbent upon me to do so, and a fatal and unpardonable Neglect to omit it. That I could never answer it, either to God or myself, to be any one's Disciple, without the Warrant of that Reason he had given me to judge by, and purposely to distinguish betwixt Truth and Falshood. That it was, in short, a Qualification indispensably required at my Hands, to be always able and ready to give an intelligible and satisfactory Account of the Ground of my Faith to any that should ask me the Question, and a *Reason of the Hope that was in me.*

Now how well grounded this pompous Character is, we shall be best able to determine, by repairing once more to the great Original from whence they pretend to extract it, and date this wild and latitudinarian Commission. There we are told expressly, that *Faith is the Evidence of Things not seen.* A short and plain Definition enough, as one would apprehend. But these Men, by their Account make it only the *Evidence of Things seen*: They take upon them to reverse the authentic Precept, and bid us *walk by Sight* instead of *Faith*; whilst they are teaching us thus, that our Faith ought to be the Result of our own Reasonings, and telling their Saviour in Effects, with *Thomas*, that *seeing is believing*. And how such a Declaration may expect to be received, may be judged from the Manner of his Acceptance; " *Thomas, because thou hast seen, thou*

Error of Guides that recommend the reasoning Practice.

“ *hast believed.*” A very cold Reception of his difficult Humour and late Acknowledgment, intimating strongly, that his Pretensions to his Master’s Favour diminished in Proportion to the Degree of Evidence he had thought fit to require of him, that there was no mighty Merit in being convinced by Demonstration, and when he could no longer possibly avoid it. And which was all still more severely expressed in the Beatitude, so significantly subjoined and addressed obliquely elsewhere; *Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.* These indeed were the Votaries, and this the Kind of Attachment which he may be always observed to have particularly encouraged and affected in his Followers. A forward Propensity to assent without Lingring or Cavil, a modest and humble Disposition to receive the Tender of his Doctrines rather as Matter of Instruction, than as the State of a Case submitted to any Arbitration of our own, is the Temper Christianity has ever required at our Hands, and graced, when discovered, with the constant Marks of its highest Approbation. If any Share of the Work appears to be ever at all put into our own Hands, if any Method of Trial may seem at any Time recommended to prepare the Way for such an Acknowledgment, it will presently be reconciled, when we consider what are the Rules given us on these Occasions; that they are not such as can ever render the Consequence of our Scrutiny precarious, or admit of any Possibility of a Mistake on our Part. The Scripture-Test and Standard for finding out the Spirits of Truth is no more than this; — *Hereby ye shall know them. Every one that confesseth that Christ is come in the Flesh, is of God.* Now this is evidently what Philosophers call arguing in a Circle, and begging the Question: But
in

in Faith you see it is a necessary Preliminary; *He that cometh to Christ, must believe that he is.*

With what Severity does our Lord reprove the Sin of Infidelity in his Disciples, for imagining they were going to be drowned when their Vessel was actually sinking under them, and it had been from all Appearance a Sin against common Sense to have thought any otherwise? In like manner was *Zacharias* struck dumb on the Spot, for only hesitating upon what carried, according to the common Course of Nature, the highest Face of Impossibility.

Contrary to the whole Tenor of the Gospel.

In what Particular is it that we find the Patriarch *Abram* ever stiled with so just an Eminence *The Father of the Faithful*, and so much proposed to us at every Turn as the most laudable Pattern for our Imitation? Why because *against Hope*, i. e. contrary to all human Probability, *he believed in Hope, and considered not* (what one would imagine should have offered itself the first to his Consideration) all the natural Impediments that seemed to render the promised Event impracticable. But the Passage that most fully, and beyond all Possibility of Misconception, describes to us the true Nature of Faith in protest Opposition to that mistaken Notion of a rational one, which some had, it seems, erroneously entertained, is in the xth Chap. of the Epistle to the *Romans*, where the whole Question is discussed at large, and thus precisely determined: “ *The Righteousness which is by Faith speaketh on this wise; Say not in thy Heart, who shall ascend up into Heaven? (that is to bring Christ down from above) or who shall descend into the Deep? (that is to bring up Christ again from the Dead.)*” You need not be at all this Pains to ransack Heaven and Earth for Intelligence and Satisfaction in the Point. *But what saith it? The Word is nigh thee,*

even

even in thy Mouth, and in thy Heart; that is, the Word of Faith which we preach. For with the Heart Man believeth unto Righteousness, &c. And this Description, calculated professedly for the Instruction, and setting right of some well-meaning Devotees, of whom he had testified just before, that *they had the Zeal of God, but not according to Knowledge; and wanted only to be better informed.* If my Argument could admit, after this, of any additional Confirmation, I might mention, from the same Authority, that Simplicity which the Apostle ascertains elsewhere, as the proper Characteristic, and known Stamp of the Elect. *For you see your Calling, Brethren, i. e. the Nature of your Religion, how that not many wise Men after the Flesh, &c.* And to second this Observation by constant Experience, there are not wanting, through all Ages and Records, abundant Witnesses, from *Origen* down to our own *Tillotson*, what a Medley of a Character the Qualifications of Faith and a reasoning Turn exhibit, whenever they happen to meet Both in the same Person. And how indeed should we expect any other Consequence from them, when we may observe, that Defences of religious Tenets, proceed in a quite different Style from that of any other Logic one meets with; that such a kind of Reasoning is avowed upon this Subject, as goes directly opposite to every other Species of Argument that carries the Name. Not to confine it barely to a *Credo quia impossibile est*, and the rest of that Strain, which would have been consider'd as no ordinary Degrees of Paradox and Enthusiasm, if advanced seriously upon any other Occasion. Nay, so well and so generally is this Distinction and Dissonance understood, that nothing can be more common than to hear it, upon this very Principle, urged every Day, against the

Study

Study of the Mathematicks in particular,“ that it was frequently found to have a Tendency to the creating an infidel Turn in the Mind, by disposing it to a Disregard for any other kind of Evidence, than such as it was used to meet in that favourite Science. Whereas most religious Truths are so far from admitting of any such Test, or giving into those strict Rules of Proof, that all officious Attempts of this Kind, to illustrate them at all by Argument, have been generally found to have little other Effect, than to obscure and render them suspected. Even upon the plainest Question in Nature, the Existence of a Deity itself, the Subject of the World, where all Men, as it is owned, must needs naturally believe, if left fairly to themselves, and uninstructed, may one not venture boldly to affirm, and that without the least invidious Insinuation to the Disadvantage of that extraordinary Person, that all the laboured Productions of Dr. *Clarke* himself (ingenious as they are) in that Behalf, have rather contributed to make for the other Side of the Question, and raised a thousand new Difficulties in the Reader’s Mind, which would never else have occurred to him, where it has sent away one single Person thoroughly satisfied in the Point; or, indeed left him only in the same Degree of Persuasion it found him? And will any one declare ingenuously, that he finds himself as free from all little Doubts and Scruples, and, in effect, the same good and fast Believer, after the deliberate Perusal of these Arguments, as he was when he first took them in Hand? To say Truth, the very hearing these Subjects canvassed freely, though never so much to their Advantage in Point of Argument, is, in itself, a very dangerous Practice, and a great Weakening to all religious Attachments, which are established on so much a better Ground. The

Religion will not admit of the least Alliance with Reasoning.

Corroborations of Reason, granting that they may be had, are so far from advantaging the Interests of this Cause, that they naturally tend to lessen its Authority in Men's Minds, by debasing it too much with a Mixture of our common Conceptions, and seeming to suggest that we owe something of our divine Knowledge to the Assistance of human Means and Endeavours of our own. However it be, *the looking* presumptuously *into the Ark of God*, whatever Light and Discoveries it may happen to strike upon the Senses, has certainly ever proved a fatal Curiosity; nor is there any Instance where the proverbial Effect of *Familiarity*, and intimate Acquaintance, has been more notoriously to be remarked. It has been made a Maxim in Reproach, by some forward Spirits, who were themselves entirely ignorant of the true Principle, that an absolute Unacquaintance with these Matters, was the most effectual Security for our inviolable Adherence to them, and that *Ignorance* was, in plain Terms, *the Mother of all Devotion*. And so far, in Fact, is certain, if we look but the least into the Annals of our own Country, that there never has been seen less of Zeal and Steadiness in the Cause of Religion, than at those particular Junctures, when the Circumstances of the Times necessarily led Men to the closest *Enquiry* into its Merits. How inconsiderable has the List of Martyrs been always found, at the Test, in Comparison with all those who have made it their Principle to vary, without Scruple, every Way with the Establishment; who have run readily into every Denomination of Religion by Turns; and seem'd to hold Christ's Church, to be always the Church in Being?

And accordingly it is obvious to common Experience, that such Men as deal in Disputes, and cultivate the Dialogue-Style in their Discussions,

are never half so fixed, and to be depended upon for their Principles, as those who indulge constantly one same dictatorial Strain, and stick inviolably to one Side of the Question.

As notorious it is to Observation (and it concerns you especially to take good Notice of the Consequence) that all the Efforts of this busy Reason to refine off any fancied Dross or Superfluity, which is imagined to have mixed in Religion, have generally proved destructive in the End to the rash Adventurers; that they have found it to their Cost too tender a Subject for such rough handling, and a very difficult Point of Chymistry, to make the intended Separation, and that under the specious Notion and Pretence of eradicating Prejudices, they have, in the Event, eradicated finally all Sense of Devotion out of their Minds. The Consequence generally attending the Attempt to weed out Errors, has been that, in straining hard at the *Tares* of Superstition, they have been too apt to rend up unawares all the close-connected Roots and Seeds of Religion.

He that will allow me the Liberty of sitting and controverting it at my Pleasure, mistakes the very main End and Design of Religion, which was calculated on Purpose to restrain and compose the turbulent Spirit of Dissention, and to prevent wrangling. Religion, a pacific Institution, abhors all Disputes; not only as they call her Truth in Question, but chiefly as they are apt to gender Strifes and Parties, of which she, by a short and easy Method, a general Rule of Faith, would fain make a general Comprehension. And if we submitted, but as we ought, to this divine Information assigned us, and had the Obedience and Discretion to leave it solely to the proper Intelligencer, it would, no doubt, have the proposed Effect, and we should certainly see a blessed and

*Instituted
to prevent
Contro-
versy.*

heavenly Prospect! all Men entirely of the same Mind. But the Mischief is, Men will be officiously interfering, and imagining presumptuously to lend their Hands to help out the Schemes of Omniscience. And what better than our present Ignorance and Division, can be expected from such a Project? Instead of using with the Gratitude due the infallible Clue put into their Hands, they must be fondly making Experiments, whether they cannot contrive to find the Way themselves without it. Now what a desirable Estate such a heavenly Principle might produce amongst us, if permitted duly to engross our Attention, we may, in part, be able to conjecture, from the Effect which in our daily Notice results from an inferior Restraint of the Kind; wherever Reasoning is watchfully and effectually suppress'd, even by the civil Authority, we see none of those unhappy Divisions and hateful Animosities, which arise only from a fatal and ill-judged Indulgence to that restless Spirit of Contradiction and Confusion. I am sure there is no one Lesson that the holy Writings have taken more Care to inculcate in the strongest Terms, than this of denying our Reason to give our Faith Scope. Are we not strictly enjoined to *captive our Reason to the Obedience of Faith*? To *captive*,—to lay it under the most absolute Restraint and Prohibition, not to permit it the least Opportunity or Freedom to exert itself, or interpose on any Occasion whatever. Is not *carnal Wisdom*, viz. the Result of human Reason, every where industriously decry'd in the Affair of believing? Is not Philosophy at every Turn degraded and branded with the Name of Folly, to make Room for the more glorious Principle of Faith? And is it possible now that we can desire any Thing more positive and express for the Purpose to convince us, that this
 pure

pure and divine Institution (Mysteries that *Angels can be curious to look into*) was never meant to be made a Subject for the Challenges of Logicians, and for Schoolmen to play Prizes upon?

And nothing perhaps has ever more fatally betrayed the Cause of Religion, than the not sufficiently attending to this one plain and important Truth, by which her Champions have been sometimes inadvertently led to mistake both their Weapons and their Ground, to forego their Advantage of an *Eminence, and the Hill Country*, and prepare a Defence for her, *upon the Level*, of which she is no way capable. A Conduct which has not only given the Advantage on many Occasions to her profest Enemies, but has deprived her, by its strange Misrepresentations, of many who might, if properly introduced to her Acquaintance, have proved among the heartiest of her Friends. For it is, I am too sensible, very much owing to those false Rudiments, and the being unhappily taught and encouraged to allow themselves in doubting at first, that so many contract that profane Humour of Scepticism, and are led rashly to indulge a Habit which they can never afterwards get clear of; which I am afraid is too much at present your own Case.

From the preposterous Attempts of the same zealous Advocates, officious to reconcile these jarring Elements, and straining at every Turn to find out by human Wit, in spite of the Nature of the Thing, plausible Objects for Reason's Notice and Approbation, have sprung all the various Denominations of Heretical Chimeras and Absurdities, that have ever infested the Peace of Christ's Church with the Alarms of Faction and Controversy.

In Pursuance of this Opinion, I cannot avoid regarding, as a very principal Cause of the pre-

Boyle's
Lectures
founded on
this Mi-
stake.

Extremely
prejudicial
to Christi-
anity.

sent prevailing Disposition and Turn to Infidelity, those annual Institutions of our great Philosopher Mr. Boyle, in Favour of a *rational Religion*, by which he has attempted to square the Subject of Faith to the Capacity of our Understandings, and account for our religious Professions in the common Way of Argument, and by the narrow Rules and Measures of School-Disputation. I mention this with the greater Regret, as I am very sensible it is a Consequence of which he had himself no Apprehension, and which was the farthest from any Intention of his in the Establishment. His Design was, no doubt, in itself, something strictly laudable and pious; but give me Leave yet to repeat it, that the Scheme has in the Event proved more radically injurious to the Cause of Piety, and more fatally instrumental in the unhinging of all religious Principles, than any that the Art or Malice of Religion's worst Enemies could ever have devised. A strong Instance of that irreconcilable Repugnance in their Natures betwixt Reason and Belief, of which we were before speaking! when the greatest Masters in Knowledge and Address, retained thus on Purpose to speed this happy Coalition, can give, after all, no better Account of the Success of their Negotiation, than that the Cause goes still the backwarder for all their Labours, and that it is much easier to excite a Spirit of Enquiry, than to satisfy it!

Nor is it, perhaps, any Thing very difficult for us to trace the Ground of this Mistake, even with great Show of Apology, and whence this strange Opinion of his in this Particular unfortunately sprung. The ravished Votary had already experienced a vast Reach and Energy in human Reason to all other Purposes: He had exalted her, in his own Person, to so high a Degree

gree of Dignity and Reputation, and found her capacious Force on so many Occasions, that it is no great Wonder, if his grateful Deference to his great Benefactress grew at last into Adoration itself, and led him even to idolize the fancied Diety. Hence he might come fondly to imagine that her Power was universal, and that there was no Object that could be too great for her extensive Cognizance. A Compliment, how much too high for the Subject, and how absurd in its Consequences, will best appear, by the attending one Moment to the exact State of the Case these Preachers lay before us on the Occasion, and the Terms in which it must generally be supposed to run in one of these Exhortations.

“ Brother Christians, come hither and learn of
 “ me to be Christians; you that have been re-
 “ ligiously devoted from your Infancy by your
 “ baptismal Vow, and habitually trained all your
 “ Lives, by your Education, in the Christian
 “ Faith, come now and let your Reason deter-
 “ mine you into it. You that have been all your
 “ Lives hitherto convinced of the heinous Crime
 “ of Doubting, and the Necessity of believing al-
 “ ways one holy Gospel, in Opposition to all Im-
 “ postures, come now and look with Indifference
 “ into the Grounds on which this and all other
 “ Belief stands; enter ingenuously into a fair
 “ Comparison of their several Merits, and use
 “ your own Sense freely and impartially upon the
 “ Matter. We scorn to take Advantage of the
 “ Prejudices of your Childhood, or to offer to
 “ intrude any Thing implicitly upon your Un-
 “ derstandings, without consulting first your own
 “ Reason in the Point. In God’s Name, judge
 “ freely all of you for yourselves; but then, be
 “ sure to judge all of you just as we do, or ex-
 “ pect to stand to the Consequence, &c.”

*Absurd
 Supposition
 of a Chris-
 tian’s Exa-
 mination of
 Christia-
 nity.*

This is, in so many Words, the true Substance of such a Challenge. What a Medley of Inconsistency and Contradiction! For if, as is presumed, I am indeed already happily engaged and fixed a baptized and habitual Believer, to what Purpose should I be tempted, from my present secure Situation, to set out again afresh in a new Shape upon this hazardous and uncertain Pursuit; where, if I fail, the Consequence is fatal, and, if I succeed, my Labours are sure to be at best but superfluous? For what can Reason's Confirmation do for me here, but fix me where I am? and what can her Assistance give me in the Case more than I have already? And with what Freedom Reason will be exerted on such an Occasion, it is no difficult Matter to determine. When I know, from the very first Step, that there is a Hell on one Side of the Question, it is but natural Prudence for me to take readily to the safest Side, as indeed it were the Height of Folly and Madness to keep a Debate on such Terms long on Foot.

But what a Representation is this of our great Lawgiver? and what a Mockery and Insult upon Mankind? Who must be infatuated with Platonic Notions and abstracted Passion for Truth, ever to think of venturing upon impartial and fair Decisions, after such Discoveries, and under such Circumstances. And for the mighty Privilege, so generously indulged us, Freedom is the greatest Jest imaginable, when tender'd with the least Air of Authority and Restriction. The least Reserve of Condition or Proviso is enough to make void all Charters of philosophical Liberty: And what then shall we say of a Grant, where the whole Tenor runs directly opposite to the Grace professed, and whose very Terms themselves, as laid down to us, absolutely contradict the Substance of the Concession?

At the same Time, the Preacher is ever triumphing in the peculiar Openness and honest Affability of his Cause, congratulating us perpetually on the particular Advantages of our happy Situation above that of all other Disciples; whilst, in a just Abhorrence of the Slavery of Popish Politicks, and detesting the blind Obedience by them required, he nobly declares, that he will by no means *put out the Eyes of Men*, though certainly the only Method in Nature to make Men *see all alike*.

The Projectors they allude to were sensible enough of this Truth, and therefore boldly (but much more consistently) center all their Difficulties in the one notable and fundamental one of Infallibility; which, it seems, they agree so far with me in their Account, as to confess, that nothing but the constant Attendance of the Spirit can ensure. In this only we differ, in the peculiar Sphere and Dominion of judging which they would assume and circumscribe to one Set of Monopolists, in their attempting thus to confine the diffusive Grant, and render the Catholic Church too particular: Never considering that this enlightening Grace hath appeared equally unto all; and therefore you certainly *take too much upon you, ye Sons of Rome, seeing that all the Lord's People are holy*.

But would any one imagine now, that after all these frank Permissions and boasted Indulgencies, after all these high Elogiums in the Defence of Liberty and Recommendation of private Judgment, that these Exalters of Reason and all its Privileges, could still actually intend, or hope in their Hearts, to keep a strict Hand over us themselves in all these licensed Essays of our Understandings, that they could still think of retaining our profound Attention and Deference to their

*They don't
still mean
that we
should examine
freely.*

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own Dictates, and expect that all our Attempts for Information should be all the while under their Tuition and Direction? Could one believe that, with all this handsom Address, these engaging Advocates for Freedom could indeed flatter themselves with the Prospect of any farther Influence over us, that they could propose in themselves to have the inspecting and regulating of this our *free Conduct* through every Step, and would hold us in the greatest Abomination and Resentment, for taking them fairly at their Word, and protesting ever after against their Interposition and Authority? They, who by their very Profession of being themselves but the Pupils of Reason, have effectually given up all Ground for any such Pretensions, and can after this, persist with no tolerable Grace in making the Demand. Actual *Infallibility*, as I just now remarked, is the only Title whereon to ground any plausible Claim to our Discipleship, and such a Qualification Reason will not pretend to furnish. The Church of *Rome* confines, very judiciously, all the doctrinal Province of her Religion to such only as have, she insists, the Advantage of an immediate Correspondence with the holy Spirit; and then retails out their Discoveries again to the Simple on that unerring Foundation. Like true Empiricks, they flatter us with *Certainty* for our Dependance, and there's something plausible at least we must acknowledge, upon the Face of such a Profession, to invite us to undergo the Experiment: But how to undertake it with any less Degree of Self-sufficiency, is the Question. The most such a Solicitor can well say, when he offers his Service, is, that he will guess for us; which, one would think, should not go very far in recommending the Use of his Assistance, or indeed in warranting

Yet no setting up for Guides without Infallibility.

ing his Presumptuousness in making the Offer. A cold Inducement for any absolute Confidence and Reliance to profess only a good Knack at Guessing! indeed, all the most specious Authority of the most learned and venerable Councils, without this Circumstance of actual Infallibility amongst them, is but slender Foundation still for such a Demand, and amounts, in Effect, to no more than the Proverbial Advantage, that *Two Heads are better than one.*

If I am to depend upon another for my Faith, and all its Consequences, it can be but a reasonable Demand on my Side to have an infallible Dictator. This is an indispensable Circumstance, that my Situation, at first View, gives me a Right to require at his Hands. If I accept of a Man like myself, to give a peremptory and magisterial Decision of Things in my Name, such an important one as (according to his own Account of *necessary Truths*, &c.) I risque my Soul to stand to, it is manifest enough my Deputy ought to assume at least the being himself a privileged Person, and out of the Reach of all Possibility of being deceived; nothing less can qualify him for undertaking the Office, or give me a proper Security under my Submission; as long as the Guides we employ are liable to be mistaken themselves, we can never have any sufficient Foundation or Insurance for our Dependance on a safe Conduct.

And farther, with what Face then can these very Men, who have thus patronized and seduced us first with so much Diligence to the Practice, whether by enticing us with the Promise of certain Conviction, or provoking us with their clamorous and perpetual Defiances, presume to lavish their Wrath afterwards, as they do, against the very Term of *Free-thinking*, encouraging

raging us with so much officious Zeal to the Use of the Means, and then condemning, with the same Vehemence, the necessary Effect of our Compliance. Here, again, how much more consistent would it appear in these tyrannical Patrons of Liberty fairly to put on the honest Inquisitor at once, who, to do them Justice, are not apt to set about Regulations of this Kind by Halves; where the Profession of their Religion is concerned, these Pastors have but one known Principle, which they constantly avow and abide by, by which Conduct, one can never be at a Loss for the Consequence of our Opposition, and must always be able to know, at least beforehand, what one has to trust to in dissenting. They shut up, like faithful Monitors, all the Avenues of Error at the very first Step, and can never be charged (whatever other Complaints we may have against them) with having ever referred these penal Articles in any Part to any Decision of ours, or with telling us in one Breath, *you shall, and you shall not.* They do not throw Volumes of mysterious and profound Queries undecyphered into the Market-place for Opinion, and then expect that the good Company shall presently agree about the Contents, and find themselves disposed to take it all just in the *same Sense* that they would have them.

The Men of *Rome*, the most notorious of Idolaters, shall *rise up in the Judgment* (of all considering Persons) *against this Generation, and shall condemn it: For they invented but the one Absurdity of Infallibility, and behold a greater Absurdity than Infallibility is here.*

To give all Men Liberty to judge for themselves, and to expect at the same Time that they shall be all of the Preacher's Mind, is such a Scheme for Unanimity, as one would scarce imagine

imagine any one could be weak enough to devise in Speculation, and much less that any could ever be found hardy enough to avow and propose it to Practice. What? direct me first to consult the best Advocates on both Sides of the Question, and yet afterwards pretend to prescribe which of them I shall be determined by? No surely; he that offers any Subject to my impartial Consideration, *does not well to be angry* at whatever Decision happens to be the Result. His very leading me originally into this State of Enquiry, has fixed me at once independent of all future Jurisdiction to bias or restrain me, and obliged me now to stand to the necessary Consequence of my Endeavours at all Events. He that has once set me to find out the Way for myself, must naturally expect me to take my own Course in the Prosecution of it; and can blame nobody but himself, if it be my Fortune to lose it. So that if the Motives of the Credibility of Christianity may be once innocently proposed to Examination, they may possibly be innocently rejected too. Horrid Consequence this! and yet but just. For the very making it a Question, the very advising me to look into it to form a Judgment, both supposes and allows my Doubts for the Time.

Examining can't be under any Obedience.

What may be examined may be rejected.

Now, if Infidelity be indeed justifiable any one Moment of our Lives, who shall tell me what Moment it ceases to be so? Who shall take upon him to determine the critical Point, when longer Want of Conviction becomes criminal, or settle the competent Time we ought to be satisfied in? " O, says the Rationalist in Return, as long as " we are thus actually employed in the Search, " we may make ourselves perfectly easy in that " Point; God will, on his Part, never certainly " expect more of us than he enables us to perform. A sincere Desire to know and do his " Will

“ Will must supply, till his good Time, the
 “ Deficiency of the actual Knowledge:

So that, if we can disbelieve (as they term it) with a safe Conscience, we shall do as well without it, as with it. Excellent Account of the Necessity of a Doctrine, which God himself both did and suffered so much to introduce to us, and without whose *actual* Acknowledgment he has so often assured us our Offences against him can have *no Remission*. If the Allowance of our own Conscience be a sufficient Security, it must be equally so under every Profession; and then farewell to the Notion of one only true and saving Faith, and all the consequent Care to discover it. See here the constant and unavoidable Fate of every System that sets out upon an Absurdity! We are first peremptorily assured that we ought *all to think right*, by our Reason; and then, as a Salvo to qualify, or rather explain away so absurd a Position, we are told with much Moderation in the Conclusion that we ought only *to think as well as we can*. A fair Acknowledgment indeed before-hand of the Possibility that Reasoners may happen not to concur in their Resolutions, and a very equitable Determination in their Behalf upon that Supposition; but, as the Evidence of our Faith now stands, most profane and unwarrantable: Because the sincere Disbelief of one single Person were evidently incompatible with the very Nature and Currency of this our established Law, an Assent to which is so peremptorily required, under the heaviest Penalty, of all Persons whatsoever, without any Kind of Reservation or Distinction of Circumstances; which would never have been the Case, if any one could have been incapacitated, without any Default of his own for the giving such an Assent.

Strange Paradox ! that no one should believe to please God, without having first asked himself the Question, " Whether his Son be not an Impostor ? Rather, who knows if Grace may ever on any Terms be vouchsafed, after the having listen'd to such a Suggestion, or once harbour'd so blasphemous a Thought ?

But, to return to our reasoning Preachers, I must indeed do the Generality of them the Justice to acknowledge, that whatever Mistakes they may run into at their first Step, they recover themselves again very handsomly in their more advanced Stages, and the maturer Course of their Proceedings; and notwithstanding all their unauthorized Professions of Liberty they so rashly set out with, they generally take proper Care to remedy the Error very effectually before they have done; that we find them in the Issue much more consistent than they seem'd to promise, and the Latitude of the Text frequently reconciled and brought to bear, by the abundant Orthodoxy of the Comment. What they mean by inviting us to dispute upon religious Subjects, shall appear at last to imply no more than this, that we are to *dispute for, but not against them.* Now, in this Practice, it is certain enough there can be no Room to object any thing, either of Danger or Impiety. The Arguments propos'd are to be constantly all *on one Side*, and they are ready to *contend earnestly*, provided none shall contradict them in earnest. That this is indeed the utmost they mean to allow, is evident, when these very same Defenders of the Faith are every Day venting their loud Complaints against the Liberty of the Press. In which prudent Concern and Precaution, they seem however to have departed much from the Terms of their first Principle, and to testify plainly their Concurrence with me, that

Reason

Reason may chance to lead a Man wrong as well as right. And is not this Protest, the constant Burden of all their Reasonings, the Appeal they are all so ready to make at every Turn to the secular Arm, all their loud Cries and popular Charges of affronting Establishment, Innovation and flying in the Face of the Laws, &c. What are all these, I say, but so many plain and pregnant Intimations how unwilling they are to leave the whole Determination of these Affairs to the single Force of argumentative Contentions? They consider justly that all Opposition of Divine Truths, upon any Pretence whatever, is malignant *Herefy*; and, believe me, they knew what they did, they understood the Nature of their Religion well, and consulted her Interests wisely, who have constantly committed to the Flames the Pestilential Writings of Infidels, and their Persons too, whenever it has been in their Power, as a Sacrifice due to the common Safety of Souls, and to prevent any dangerous Tendency from the Communication of such Alarms. This, I say, has ever been the well-judged Practice amongst the greater and more prudential Part of the Champions for Christianity, however some daring Spirits of them have ventured unadvisedly to depart from the salutary Caution, and taken upon them, to the great Dishonour often of the Advocate, and Prejudice of the Cause, to expose themselves thus unnecessarily to all the rude Attacks of ingenious Malice, to enter the Lists unprivileged against private Reasoners, and join Issue with them in their own Way. That such Condescensions to Methods and Laws, so foreign to the Subject, must ever prove fatal to Religion, is evident enough, if what I have been all this while advancing of its Nature and Evidence has indeed the least Foundation or Support. And amidst

If Religion were rational, they would not discourage Opponents.

amidst all the Rationalist's extravagant and chimerical Notions of I know not what strict Justice in the Case, and an equal Indulgence due to the Advocates on both Sides, it is not, surely, to be seriously expected, even by his romantic self, that the well-grounded Zeal of an enlightned Preacher of the Gospel should really permit him to countenance thus equitably in his own Defiance all the vain Pretensions of these industrious Ministers of Darknes in their Turn, and not rather laudably oppose to the utmost all Establishment of blasphemous Lectures against the Truth of Religion, and the erecting of common Pulpits and Privileges for Antichrist, avowedly to communicate his Poison. All which, if Religion were indeed a rational Institution, were, it must be confessed, no more than reasonable Concessions, and the only Method for cultivating a proper Knowledge of her Pretensions and Veracity.

In Opposition to the yet remaining Deference you may possibly still think due to the united Testimony and Sanction of so many considerable Advocates, who are acknowledged to have patronized your Opinion in the Point, give me Leave, in my Turn, to produce too Abettors of no ordinary Character and Authority, as you must allow, in my Behalf. The civil magistrate, wherever the Gospel has obtained, has ever taken upon him to inculcate, by all the Means in his Power, the same particular Belief, without leaving the least Part of that Task for the Parties concerned to execute *for themselves*. A plain and sufficient Indication of their Sense of these Matters, and that they were thoroughly satisfied in themselves, that Reason was never designed to have any Share in the Office. And that such Persuasion of theirs, and their consequent Practices, were not without their ample

Magistrates would not take upon them to prescribe it.

Ground, appears yet farther, from its being likewise the concurrent Sense of our holy Church in Council assembled. We are taught, in our Liturgy, to pray, that God would give our Magistrates *Grace to maintain Truth*; which, surely, implies too a previous Grace already given to determine it. This Consciousness of their own inspired Certainty, is the only justifiable Warrant that could be in Nature for such a Proceeding. If there were the least *Possibility* of their being *mistaken* themselves, they could never answer it in any Light to God or Man, thus to discourage or restrain their Fellows from Enquiries, so essential to their forming a Belief on any just Foundation. If God had made it the Duty of all Men (and the Magistrate himself amongst the rest) to discover his Truths by the Use of their Reason, nothing could justify the gross Impiety and Tyranny of all Interposition to debar them of the freest Exercise of their own Faculties in an Interest that so highly concerned them, and a Trust, for whose faithful Discharge they might well expect to be called to the strictest Account. The Understanding, I say, of a Magistrate, has, naturally considered, no Show of Pre-eminence to plead above my own, whereon to ground any such Claim to my Discipleship; if He drew his own Tenets from no better a Foundation than that of his own Reason, he can have no manner of Pretension to expect any implicit Deference from me, or to hinder me in my Turn of the same Liberty. It is far otherwise, if we will suppose, whenever we see him exerting such an Authority, that our Prayers have taken Effect in his Behalf, and that he is ever prevented in his Choice, by the unerring Instructions of the holy Spirit. From no other Principle, doubtless, would these our *nursing Fathers* take upon them to interest themselves so

far in the Sentiments of their Wards, as to tempt them into the right Way by professed Bribes, and encourage the Faithful, by throwing the Conveniencies of Life into the Scale. The making it thus Mens temporal *Interest to be persuaded* of one particular Way, would be an unfurmoutable Obstacle in the Way of all fair Examination, and for ever fatal to the Use of Reason, if she were to be concerned. There could not, taking Things in that Light, be a more odious and flagrant Instance of absurd Partiality, Cruelty and Oppression, than the imposing of any *prescribed Opinions* as the Terms of Society ; nor could Humanity justify, in any Degree, all those wholesom Severities with which they now second the certain Awards of Heaven, but that they must appear to be most monstrously wicked and unjust, if Reason were our appointed Guide, since it might then frequently happen that Men might incur the severest Punishments by the most innocent Conduct, and for Actions absolutely out of their own Power.

To observe yet farther, in a lower, though not less important, Sphere amongst all the authorized Instructors of our Youth in their Seminaries at the very Fountain-head, whence all our religious Notions are first dispensed and derived to us at our setting out in the World. Let us recollect one Moment with ourselves, what were those first Steps there taken with our unpractised Minds, what the *Methods* regularly employed in our academic Institutions *to gain us over* to Christ's Flock, and the Conduct of our earliest Initiation into these holy Things. Was the Case then of Religion and its Fundamentals ever in earnest fairly and fully *stated* to us, the best Champions on both Sides honestly and ingenuously recommended to our Perusal and Consideration,

*Nor Universities
expect us
ready
formed in
it.*

ration, a competent Time allowed us to bring in our Determinations as the Evidence should appear to us ; and lastly, Protection and Good-will at-least assured to us, in case we should, after all, happen to dissent ? No such Matter. — On the contrary, was not our Country's Faith always supposed to be our own of Course ? Was not the simplest Candidate for the first Rudiments of Science constantly called upon to subscribe instantly to the whole Compliment of established Faith without Hesitation, as the necessary and indispensable Preliminary to his Introduction there, and presumed to come fully qualified and ready prepared for that Purpose ? Or should any one, at this Crisis, take upon him to express any thing like the least Symptom of Dissatisfaction in these Points, would it not, do you think, be very readily and pertinently demanded of him, “ What brought him thither ? ” and, once admitted, how impious was all After-reasoning on these Matters ever represented to us ? What Care to restrain us, by suppressing diligently all obnoxious Replies, from all Opportunities of consulting above one Side of the Question ? What a just Abhorrence at all Times inculcated of having any Opinions properly our own, and unauthorized by the List put into our Hands ? Lastly, What busy, active Industry and Pains to stigmatize, on all Occasions, any that should presume to step aside in the least from the prescribed Track, and avow their Doubts, to prevent their Influence and Infection ? The Truth of this Particular you will, I fear, have soon Cause to know but too certainly from your own Experience, if you continue still to persist inconsiderately in your proposed Pursuit, and retaining your present Persuasion of these Matters ; which will lead you naturally to think, in the first Place, of calling in some other

Assist-

Assistance than your own upon the Subject, and of course to propose your Scruples freely, and without Reserve, to your Fellow-Pupils for their Judgment and Opinion. The Consequence of which Application will be as naturally the alarming them with Horror and Indignation at your innocent Questions. The professing yourself at all at a Loss for Truth in your Circumstances, will be adjudged immediately as an Act of the blackest Apostasy ; and, as such, they will take hold, on all Occasions, to represent you in the most odious Colours they can frame, as one maliciously devoted to Infidelity, actually enlisted in the Devil's Service, and zealous for the Cause. They will diligently shun your Conversation, and detest and vilify your Person, by all which Treatment you will then, at your own severe Cost, come to understand too late, that *Questioning in Religion is denying* ; and that all suspending one's Judgment, (though even in order to be better informed) is, in this Case, a professed and criminal Opposition. Whereas, were Religion indeed a rational Institution, a Man might surely well dispute it without a Crime : The Disputant could by no fair Conclusion be reputed an Adversary, and prosecuted with such sanguine and inveterate Marks of Hostility. A free and amicable Correspondence might well be admitted, and the wildest Opponent received upon an equal Foot with his most orthodox and approved Antagonist. All other Methods of Proceeding bespeak plainly the Question already determined beyond all Possibility of Controversy. And so indeed it is, by that unerring Principle which I have been pointing out. Thus instructed, we can consider it no longer as Matter of Speculation and Argument, or bear with Patience under any specious Pretences to have that Saviour which *we feel*, denied in Effect,

by being called in Question. This prompts and authorizes all our just Zeal and Aversion on these Occasions, and stamps that a laudable Crusade and *holy War* against Infidels, which would else be no other than a wild and foolish Sally of blind Bigotry, the furious and mad Spirit of superstitious Phrenzy and Persecution.

Nor Parents instruct their Children in it.

As highly partial and unjust would be, even in Parents themselves, upon your Supposition, the officious Piety of what they call Education, which would then be nothing else but the *undue* Cultivation of the most notorious and palpable Prejudices. The anticipating thus unfairly the Strength of the supposed Evidence before it is produced to speak for itself, the retaining them thus powerfully of a Party before the Means of Trial are put into their Hands, and all this with such Artifices of Flattery and Terror, as must secure them effectually from all Possibility of ever recovering Truth, in Case they should chance to be mistaken, were a Practice so absurd in itself, and so fatal in its Consequences, if Men were to judge by their Reason, as instead of claiming our Gratitude for the Office, could admit of no Excuse or Gloss for the Injury. Nothing but their being infallibly assured themselves that they cannot be mistaken, and so mislead their Charge (and therefore no Conviction founded on any human Authority) could be Warrant sufficient for them to intrude thus peremptorily their own contracted Opinions upon their Children, at a Time of Day when they can have no possible Share themselves in the Determinations they are adopting, and by which they must be prevented from ever forming any future Regulations of their own upon a better Foundation.

Hitherto what I have observed to you for the Confirmation and Support of its Authority, has run

run only upon the general Practice of my supposed Allies. I have traced their Opinions, as yet, only by their Consequences; and many, perhaps, will be apt to think there can be scarce a stronger Proof. I have one, however, still in Reserve for your Consideration, who is, I think, *in Words* as express as can well be desired, and speaks out very sufficiently upon the Occasion; one who speaks the whole of my Sentiments so strongly and clearly for me, that I should be wanting to the Cause I am seeking to explain and recommend, if I were to give you them in any other Terms than his own. The Oracle I mean is, Bishop *Beveridge*; a Name, whose very Mention must ever carry its own Weight with it, without any superfluous Encomiums in its Behalf. A Name that always has, and always will be heard with the greatest Reverence and Regard, as long as true Piety and Christianity have any remaining Footsteps in the World.

The natural Man receiveth not the Things of the Bishop Beveridge's
Spirit of God, for they are Foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiri- Thoughts
tually discerned. His Comment upon the foregoing *upon the*
 Text runs thus; “Neither can he know them. Subjct.

“ There is an absolute Impossibility in it, that any
 “ one, remaining in his natural Principles, with-
 “ out the Assistance of God, should apprehend,
 “ or conceive, the Excellency of spiritual Objects.
 “ So that a Man may as soon read the Letter of
 “ the Scripture without Eyes, as understand the
 “ Mysteries of the Gospel without Grace.

If this should not seem direct enough to the Point, what follows immediately after is, if possible, a still stronger Description, and fuller Account of the Matter.

“ I believe it is a thousand times easier for a
 “ Worm, a Fly, or any other despicable Insect

“ whatsoever, to understand the Affairs of Men,
 “ than for the best of Men, in a *natural State*,
 “ *to apprehend the Things of God*. No, there is
 “ none can know God, nor, by Consequence,
 “ any thing that is really good, but only so far,
 “ as they are *Partakers of the divine Nature*. We
 “ must, in some Measure, be like to God, be-
 “ fore we can have any *true Conceptions* of him.—
 “ We must have a *spiritual Sight*, before we can
 “ behold spiritual Things. Which every natural
 “ Man being destitute of, *he can see no Comeliness*
 “ *in Christ*, why he should be desired, nor any
 “ *Amiability* in Religion, why it should be em-
 “ braced.—And hence it is, that I believe the
 “ first Work which God puts forth upon the
 “ Soul, in order to *its Conversion*, is to raise up
 “ *a spiritual Light within it, to clear up its Ap-*
 “ *prehensions about spiritual Matters.*”

In another Place, speaking of the wonderful
 Effects of the Apostle's Preaching, he remarks
 thus: “ Questionless, it was nothing else but *the*
 “ *Spirit of the most high God*, that went along
 “ with them, and accompanied the Word they
 “ preached; otherwise, *it never could have made*
 “ *such deep Impression* upon the Hearts of them
 “ that heard it.”

And lastly, to sum up the Force of all his
 Doctrine, as it were in one Word, he gives us in
 his own Person the liveliest Instance of that *su-*
pernatural and persuasive Impulse he has been de-
 scribing, whose Operation he is representing to
 our fullest View, whilst it breaks forth from him,
 like *the dying Martyr*, in a triumphant Rapture,
 expressive of a Flood of Light just obtained, and
 an actual *Display of the Beatific Vision*. “ And
 “ now, says he, methinks I begin to perceive
 “ *this divine Spirit is come upon me too*, and
 “ seems, by its powerful Influence, to be work-
 “ ing

“ing up my Heart into a thorough *Persuasion*,
 “that it is Christ, and Christ alone, I am to cast
 “my Soul upon.—Away then with your pagan-
 “ish Idolatries, your, &c.—It is the Christian
 “Religion alone that I am resolved to live and
 “die in.”

What is all this, but the being evidently, in the Apostle's own Sense, *enlightned, tasting of the heavenly Gift, and being made Partaker of the holy Ghost* ?

I may, possibly, in the Haste of my Zeal, have laid myself open to you unguardedly enough, through the Course and Prosecution of my Argument, and very considerably to my Disadvantage in Point of strict Criticism; but I will never imagine, that after all the Concern I have been all this while expressing for your particular Interest, I must be now to bespeak your Candour, to court your Courtesy, and apply for a formal Indemnity for my Inadvertencies. Besides that it is enough for my Design, if the main Drift and Scope of the Argument may be allowed to be upon the whole maintained only with some tolerable Degree of Propriety, so as to carry just the Face of something plausible and consistent, and that may appear to deserve your farther Attention. A critical Punctuality is by no Means my present Care, because I do not conceive such Exactness any Way material to the Purpose in Hand. I cannot apprehend that any sagacious Discovery, that I have possibly mistaken, or misapplied any of those particular Texts that happen'd to occur to my Memory upon this Occasion (though I am far from being conscious of having left the least Room for any such Charge) will at all avail to invalidate, and much less to overturn, what I have been endeavouring to establish; the Foundation of which does, as I am persuaded, by no Means depend
 for

for its Support upon the bare Strength of any single Quotation whatever, or indeed of any precise Number, but on the joint Tendency and Tenor of the whole.

I might, I think, even carry my Protest yet much farther upon this Head, and insist that, though I had not really been able to have produced any of all these positive Authorities at all in my Favour, that though I had not been so successful in extracting so very plausible an Account of the Sense of the holy Scriptures upon the Subject, and tracing their exact Concurrence with all that Clearness and Strength, which I flatter myself I have done ; I might have well relied however, and with all Security, upon my previous Argument alone, that *it was impossible in the Nature of Things*, without offering to go any farther. For that once well established, it seems almost superfluous for one to go about to strengthen Impossibilities so agreed, or enforce them from positive Matters of Fact, be their Authority never so sacred and uncontestable ; and when once it has been already clearly proved, that such a Thing *cannot be*, to continue proving on afterwards that the same Thing actually *is not*. If I have acquitted myself therefore beyond all Exception, in making good my first Ground, I might have ventured safely enough to abide by it, without having the least Occasion to look out for additional Confirmations from any foreign Voucher whatever. What I principally proposed from the Experiment was, the carrying on my suppos'd *Detection of a false Principle*, to a satisfactory Conclusion in the *Discovery of a true one* ; to take the Occasion for the completing of my Design, by pointing out what was really and positively the authorized Principle of Faith, in Opposition to your mistaken one ; (the Intelligence

gence of which could proceed from Revelation only in the Point) and to show at the same Time that my Assertion would stand the Test before Judges of all Denominations, and considered separately, either in the View of Reason, or Scripture; as I am thoroughly persuaded, that every Step you proceed in the Contemplation either of the one or the other, will help to second my Observations, and improve in your Opinion those few rude Hints which I have been able from a general View to suggest to you. Your own mature Reflection I readily trust and acquiesce in. I know the Honesty of your Nature will break out in Spite of the strongest Prejudices you may have conceived; and that you will disdain to be straining and racking your Invention in so plain a Case, for Matter of mere Cavil and Evasion, in Support of any favourite Notions whatever, against your better Judgment. If I thought you were so disposed, I would recommend you freely to Dr. *Stillingsfleet's Origines Sacrae* for your Assistance; where, I assure you, you may be very plentifully supplied with all the abundant Glosses for the Purpose, that the greatest Extent of human Learning and Abilities can be supposed capable of furnishing.

Least of all can I apprehend, that you will require, with *Nicodemus*, a critical and distinct Account of these Operations of the Spirit; and put me to the reminding you of the Answer given him upon the Occasion, intimating, that he might very well reconcile himself to the Belief of *the Fact*, though his Curiosity should not be fully gratified with so particular an Explanation of *the Manner*; that it was frequently the Case in the most natural Subjects, as appeared in that familiar Instance of *the Wind*, whose Effects are beyond all Contradiction palpable and obvious to the Perception

ception of our Senses, without our being able the while to trace, in any adequate Degree, either *the Cause* or Course of its Operations.

Another professed Illustration of this Subject, and which runs exactly in the same Spirit and Style with the former, we have thus delivered to us. *So is the Kingdom of God, as if a Man should put Seed in the Earth, and should sleep, and rise Night and Day, and the Seed should spring, he knoweth not how.* However he may feel the Benefit of the Increase in the Harvest of his Toils, the Progress and Method of its Advances shall still be sure to escape his nicest Observation.

And for any Thing that may at the first Mention possibly sound harsh or difficult to our Conceptions, in the Supposition of such an Expedient, we need but to recollect that very lively Specimen and Taste of it, which we have already experienced from the very first Manifestation of the *same divine Spirit*, in the Miracle of the *cloven Tongues*. A most expressive and emphatical Type of that analogous Miracle, which was then intended to be pursued through all succeeding Generations. Where *every Member of every Nation heard at the same Instant the same divine Lesson adapted exactly to his own particular Capacity, address to himself in Person, in his own proper Language, in the very Dialect most intelligible to him, and the Terms most suitable and familiar to his Apprehension.*

Once more, if we had indeed no *actual Instance* of the Kind to familiarize the Consideration to us, is there even in *the Matter itself* upon Reflection, any Thing more extraordinary or wonderful to Thought, that this same Spirit should thus miraculously *speak to us* for our Instruction, than that he should *speak for us* in the same Manner, in the Midst of popular Assemblies, for our Justification?

fication? What mighty Difference is there, I say, upon the Comparison, but that he who has engaged thus strongly to undertake and support upon Emergencies the Defence of his persecuted Servants, *without so much as a single Thought or Suggestion of their own, by Way of Forecast*, who is to pronounce a regular Series of Arguments in their Cause, and discourse extempore through their Organs, for their Vindication in a Court of Justice, may not as easily be conceived capable of dictating Sentiments in secret to our *Understandings*, as of prompting our *Lips* with Expressions of putting Belief into our Hearts, as Words into our Mouths, and giving us *what to think*, as *what to say*?

But whether any Thing I can offer thus of my own Suggestions, may appear of Force to reconcile it in any Measure to your present Notions, have shewn you already, from indisputable Authority, that *so in Fact it is*; and some other Scheme than your rational one in the Case, you must, I think, by this Time see yourself obliged to have Recourse to; upon the Supposition, I mean, that you must, upon Reflection, admit the Conclusiveness of all those obvious Exceptions which I have been raising against the Possibility of it, and which it will, I hope, upon a short Review, appear to be no such immodest Presumption to suppose. If I have, for Instance, shewn you that it is evident at first Sight *from the Nature of the Thing*, and every Consideration of its known Properties and Effects, that *Reason can never possibly be that Principle which is to make all Men of one Mind*.—That such Accomplishments as require *Time and Parts to attain*, can never be *universally necessary*, and what a reasonable Master can expect at our Hands.—That a proper Provision of Faith, both as a Qualification,

Recapitulation of the Argument.

on,

on, and for its Influence, is *equally necessary at every Period of our Lives*, and consequently, can never admit of our going through a *Course of Proofs*, though never so obvious, to give it Credit and Authority with us, but must needs be in itself a plain and authentic Map, *always at Hand*, to consult every Step we proceed.—That *as our very Virtue depends entirely upon such Belief, our Belief can never possibly depend upon our rational Conviction*, the Privilege only of a few Students and Speculatists—That even with regard to these most competent Judges, it is *impossible to conceive any the least Connexion betwixt the Notion of Duty, and assenting rationally to any Proposition, however strongly supported.*—That *Arguments are properly but Motives and Inducements submitted to our Understandings for their Influence, and that, of Course, it can be little less than a Contradiction in Terms, to talk of our being obliged to let them be conclusive.*—That wherever there is a Complication of Circumstances to be determined upon, Consequences to be regularly drawn, and a summoning of Evidence in the Case; wherever there are all these Preliminaries to be first gone through, *the Issue can never, with any Certainty, be foretold, and much less enjoin'd and prescrib'd.*—That there is a vast and very essential Difference to be taken betwixt the being of a sufficient Force to support a strong Appearance of moral Probability in the Nature of Things, and the Judgment of Men speculatively disposed, and the being sufficiently calculated to *extort an Assent from every one that hears it: Betwixt the Materials that may probably, on due Consideration had, lead a Locke or Newton into the Persuasion, and those that must have that uncontrollable Effect upon all that come within the Reach of their magnetic Impulse,*

as to compel a whole People *at once* into the Acknowledgment.—And that therefore, however plausibly Christianity may be enforced *as a Fact*, it can yet never be true, *as a Gospel*, in Virtue of any Arguments deduced from Reasoning.—That the giving *all Men Leave to determine* of the Gospel as the Matter shall appear to *their Reason*, is, if it happen to appear otherwise than true, a Liberty entirely *destructive of the very Notion of a true Faith* authorising Infidelity in Form, and setting it upon the same Footing, in Point of Conscience, with the Profession of Christianity itself.

I can never, I say, after all this expect any such Solutions from you in Return in Behalf of your reasoning Hypothesis, as I am sure you must, in your own Heart, have the justest Contempt for: such as Mens *thinking by Deputy the best they can*, when they are not qualified to think for themselves; or, what has sometimes been urged, the ingenious Contrivance of *abating a Degree of Evidence, to leave the more Room for the Merit of Voluntiers*, with the Duty of cultivating a pious Propensity to the Affirmative, the soliciting the Assent of our own Minds, and endeavouring to *help our Unbelief*. To destroy at once all the Views for which all such extraordinary Comments could ever be coined, I have insisted long ago, as a main Preclusion of all Notions of the examining Kind, that—It is evident Religion *knows no such Situation as that of a Moment's Neutrality*;—that we have no Allowance to stand neuter in Religion, even so much as whilst the Question of its Truth is in Debate; which, in the Sense of all good Christians, ought *never to be made a Question*.

And might not one now already from this short negative View of the Case, almost venture

to take upon one to pronounce boldly, upon the Authority of one's own Reason, that such a Scheme, as that of Unanimity upon this Subject, can be by no other possible Method to be effected, than that I have been contending for, of a *constant and particular Revelation imparted separately and supernaturally to every Individual?* And how much more absolutely satisfactory then must it be to a *Christian Seeker*, if upon our searching into his own Scripture Account of the Matter, there appears, to be indeed *this very Method* which we might so naturally expect, there exactly described, and set forth to us for the Purpose?

If all that I have hitherto been urging may have had the wish'd Effect to remove only the contracted Incumbrance of this one fatal and fundamental Prejudice,—*That it is by Reasoning that you are to come to the Knowledge of all necessary Truths*; my only remaining Part is to offer up my most ardent Prayers in your Behalf at the Throne of Grace, *not for Leisure* for you to consult, *or Sagacity* to apprehend all the acute Lessons of a *Hammond* or *Grotius* upon the Subject, but that God would be pleas'd *himself to illuminate* and irradiate your Mind with a perfect and thorough Conviction of the Truth of his holy Gospel; that the same holy Spirit that first dictated that divine Law, would powerfully set to his Seal, and attest its Authority in your Heart, that he would be graciously vouchsafed to renew once more his disregarded Notices, and establish in you an uncontrovertible Knowledge of its strict Veracity, such a one as that, with the enlighten'd Apostle, you may at once believe, *and be sure that Jesus was the Christ*. Such a full and home felt Persuasion, as will render superfluous all your farther Care and purpos'd Labour

Labour in the Search, by fixing you *in the happy Instant* a true, a zealous, and unalterable Disciple of Christianity.

Indeed, the sitting down to examine into the Truth of Religion at this Time of Day, cannot but appear to my Sense a very strange Kind of Language from one in your Situation. From a Native of *California* or the *Cape*, there might perhaps be nothing so extraordinary or unbecoming to hear of such a Proposal. But you disclaim, it seems, in your Philosophical Sufficiency, all the partial Advantages of Birth and Education (though many would esteem themselves not a little favour'd in the Distinction: But the Notion of *Local Merit*, as you express yourself, the being *born to particular Privileges*, and *beholden to Accident*, as you call it, *for true Opinions*, are Circumstances your rational Spirit can by no means digest, which is as much as to say, " that you are resolv-
 " ed to reap no Benefit from the Covenant of
 " Grace, except you are to have the prescribing
 " the Means yourself, and that you will be con-
 " tent to accept of Salvation only upon your own
 " Terms, and in your own Way." For tell me, you that are so industriously looking out for the Proofs of Christianity, are you not then the while a Christian? Are you not at this Instant a baptized and covenanted Christian? And is not this being indeed a Christian to all Intents and Purposes already, and in the Way that God himself has prescribed us? To what Purpose then all this mighty Bustle and Parade for holding of this solemn Trial upon the Occasion, and all for the Sake of repeating only at the best a Decision you have long since given in the Cause? *Curiositate non opus est post Christum, nec inquisitione post evangelium, quum credimus nihil desideramus ultra cre-*
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dere, says Tertullian. Or, to make Use of a still greater Authority,—*Make not thyself otherwise, why shouldst thou destroy thyself?* Why, indeed, should you affect, in Vanity of Heart, to be more a Christian than any of your honest Neighbours, or be solicitous for a different Method in your Religion from that of other People? For Heaven's Sake, are there then, in your Opinion, two Kinds of Christianity, one for the vulgar and illiterate, and another adapted to Disciples of a more refined Genius, and exalted Speculations? Does not plainly, as I observed above, *the Infant's* Belief answer as effectually all the Demands of the Gospel, as that of the first Proficient and highest *Graduate in Divinity*? And is it not accepted (if not preferred) as at least an *equal* Claim to all its Rewards with that of the best of them? And what would your proud Reason more? Be content then, in God's Name, to be e'en as good a Christian only as *your Sister*, whom you cannot doubt to be equally entitled to all the Means of Grace and Hopes of Glory with the *proudest Philosopher*, who is even *wiser than the Aged*, because a meek and humble Disciple of that true *Wisdom which cometh from above*. No, if we do but once heartily and truly believe, it is a very invidious, as well as superfluous Distinction to concern ourselves about, whether we know by the Test of our Understandings *upon what Grounds* we believe, or not. Be satisfied henceforth that there is a *Kind of Evidence* of Power beyond what Reason can ever pretend to furnish, such as brings with it that cordial Peace and Assurance of Mind to which all *Conviction by human Means* is an utter Stranger, such as you see can enable your pious Mother without any of the reputed Advantages of academic Institution to pronounce with so much peremptory

ry Justice on all religious Causes, and reprove, with so good a Grace, all the well-glossed Heresies of a letter'd *Clarke*.

To come still closer, if possible, to the Point, and speak home, once for all, to this unaccountable Project; it is a Practice of common Prudence, generally observed in our worldly Affairs, to ask ourselves beforehand, upon any Undertaking of Moment,—What Probability of Success? and what new Advantages in Prospect to arise to us, when we have succeeded? Now, according to this Rule, it should, one would imagine, be Consideration sufficient to deter your engaging in your present Enterprize, that in the first Place this Reason will, in all Probability, never have the Effect proposed of confirming our Faith; and, in the next Place, will be superfluous if it has; and that you are at present as well without it. For taking it, I say, at the best, and supposing that you should now succeed to your Wish in this Attempt, what is the mighty Advantage after all, that you can farther propose, from a Conviction of this Kind in all its imagin'd Propriety? Nay, what if even this very Caution of mine against the Attempt should chance at last to find you (as I can easily enough conceive it may) already actually convinced by Reason in Form of the Truth of all these Matters as they stand related to us? Will such an Event ensured be any Matter of Triumph in general against my Argument, which has all along supposed such a Consequence to *such an Enquirer* no impossible Thing? Or what Conclusion can you take upon you to draw from the Success you have personally found in the Experiment? Can you assure yourself, from any Authority That has help'd you to, that you shall even for your own Part certainly continue

what you are for an Hour together ? and, consequently, can it give you any Foundation or Right to be recommending farther a like Trial elsewhere ? Or, if you could indeed answer never so assuredly for your own Constancy, may not again, as I have so often reminded you, the same perspicuous Proofs, that have determined you to pronounce so confidently for their Conclusiveness, possibly take a very different Turn in different Hands, affect your next Neighbour in a quite contrary Light, and leave him as confirmed an Infidel ? The Effect you have happily experienced in your own Person, does not, however, make you by any Means the Standard, or give you any Right to expect that other People should concur in making just the same Judgments of Things which you have done ; the Reason of your Disciple will, in all Probability, prove a very different Scale from that you have been working with, and though *you*, by the particular Advantages of your Turn and Education, may be indeed able to do that Justice to the Merits of the Cause, as to trace in them all this cogent Force to the Amount of a Demonstration ; of what Significance and Weight can you expect all this to prove towards the affecting of Minds altogether unversed in the Practice of drawing Inferences and Deductions, and which must therefore necessarily continue all the while in the Dark, even amidst all those glaring Lights which your discerning Sight can discover round them ? It is not therefore by any Means my being convinced myself, no, nor even the most absolute Perspicuity I may discover in the Argument, that can authorise my promising the like Success to another in his speculative Essays ; and therefore Men should be very cautious of being instrumental in the tempting any into
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sceptical Controversies, unless they could be certain enough beforehand of their *Judges*, as well as their *Cause*, to enable them to promise peremptorily for a satisfactory Issue, there being, as I have before remarked, no Provision made, either by God or Man, for sincere Infidelity as a possible Consequence of a fair Enquiry into the Merits of Religion. *He that believeth not, shall be damned.* No Exceptions or Allowances whatsoever for any professing to have used all possible Means of Information, and remaining still dissatisfied.

But, once more, what if after all (which may likewise possibly happen to be the Case) the powerful Evidence on the Side of Religion should indeed fail in its Influence, and not appear satisfactory enough to you to enforce the Profession of it? What if, on the other hand, the specious Glosses of Infidelity should possibly happen to obtain at last even in your own Opinion upon this Scrutiny; if the plausible Pretexts of ingenious Sophistry should prove so far of Force in the Question, as unhappily to misguide your Reason by their artful Representations of the Cause of Error? Why “ the Sincerity of your Intention, *you say*, will acquit you, because you have done your best: Your just Judge, *you say*, can never expect of you to do more than is in your Power, or to be convinced sooner. *Which is as much as to say*, “ that you will either do what God commands you, or take Care to come prepared to justify your Refusal to his Satisfaction; ” never observing the while that all your Reasonings of this Stamp are grounded upon the monstrous Supposition that God would enjoin a Thing that you should be able to give solid and substantial Reasons for not complying with. Strangest

gest Delusion sure! to go directly opposite to your Maker's exprefs Command, and yet flatter yourself with Hopes of being provided with a sufficient Excuse for your Disobedience. *Behold to obey is better than Sacrifice,* and to comply than to be making Apologies.

I shall now release you from all farther Attendance, with the most cordial Admonition of one who has indeed a *Father's* Concern and Interest in all your Success. Its Meaning at least I think you must allow, whatever Exceptions you may possibly find to its Authority. *My Son, trust thou in the Lord with all thy Heart, and lean not unto thine own Understanding.*

F I N I S.



