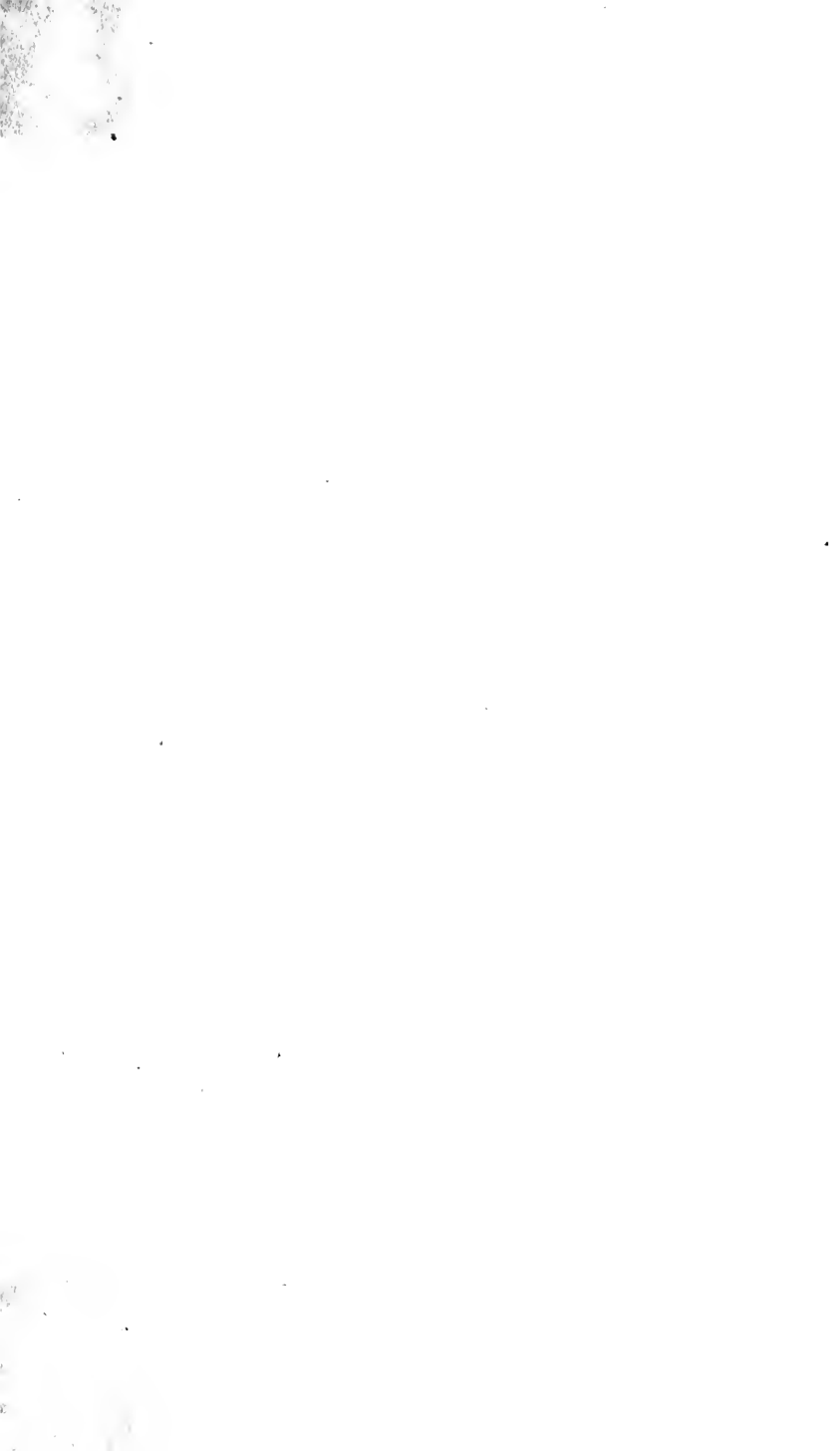


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✓
Religious Errors.

THE

Sam. Miller

RIGHTS OF GOD.

By THOMAS SCOTT,

CHAPLAIN OF THE LOCK HOSPITAL.

“ Produce your cause, saith the LORD ; bring forth
“ your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob.

ISAIAH, C. XLI. V. 21.

“ Be still, and know that I am GOD : I will be exalted
“ among the heathen : I will be exalted in the earth.

PSAL. XLVI. V. 10.

L O N D O N :

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PREFACE.

“THE Rights of Man” have of late engrossed much of the public attention: and though, by transgression, man hath forfeited all his rights, in respect of God, except to the wages of sin; yet in reference to his fellow creatures, he has many, and valuable rights, of which he cannot without injustice be abridged. He has a right, with some restrictions, to enjoy the produce of his own labour and ingenuity, to leave it to his children or friends, and to possess what others have left to him: He has a right to think and judge for himself, and to follow his own inclinations; provided he be not inclined to injure, or molest other men: and he has a right to liberty of conscience; unless his conscience should excite him to disturb the peace and good order of the community.

Many other rights of man might be mentioned, which are unequivocal, intelligible, and indisputable, if we consider him in society: for an absolute state of nature must be universal hostility, in which every man would be his own defender and avenger; and all would be prompted by their selfish passions to annoy each other, except as they were restrained by fear, conscience, or attachment to a few individuals.

However, justice is still the same, and power is in every case distinct from right: and though we must give up many things, to which we should otherwise be entitled, in order to possess the immense advantages of civilized society; yet laws should certainly be so made and executed, that all may enjoy as much liberty as can con-
sist

sist with the existence, energy, and maintenance of government.

But as in the present state of the world, every man sometimes takes the liberty to do what he has no right to do; so it cannot be wonderful, if, in every society, men are in some respects unduly restricted. Imperfection pervades all human affairs: and hitherto it hath been found impracticable to restrain men from doing wrong, without sometimes debarring them of the liberty to do what would otherwise not be wrong. Though perhaps the latter hath been better guarded against in Britain, than in any other nation, from the beginning of the world to this day: and posterity will be most competent to judge of modern improvements.

But some things are at present insisted on, as “the Rights of Man,” which, as far as I can judge, after some consideration of the subject, are not well understood, and are incapable of a precise and determinate definition. Whatever they may seem in theory, they are absolutely impracticable in the present condition of human nature; and every attempt to establish them will probably produce confusion and mischief.

This is not, however, my principal objection to these speculations: Let the men of the world try what they can do to mend their present condition; whilst the disciples of Him, whose kingdom is not of this world, may be contented to take matters as they find them, and peaceably to keep on their way to a better and more enduring inheritance. But the most affecting circumstance in this matter seems to be, that whilst warm disputes about the Rights of Man occupy the attention of multitudes, THE

RIGHTS

RIGHTS OF GOD are proportionably disregarded. The eager disputants on both sides of the question too much overlook them; but many on one side most outrageously trample upon, and even blaspheme, them: as if the great Creator alone had no rights! Or as if it were one of the rights of man to despise and defy him, in whom he lives, moves, and exists!

It will not, therefore, I trust, be deemed unseasonable at this juncture, if an advocate, (though a feeble one,) venture forth to plead in behalf of the Rights of God; as “he is the Creator, providential Benefactor, and moral Governor of the universe;” and “in respect of his dealings with those creatures which have rebelled against him.” Such is the intention, and plan of the ensuing treatise; by which I would endeavour, in this day of scepticism and infidelity, to establish the faith of believers, and to assist them in “giving a reason of the hope that is in them:” and to obviate some specious objections which philosophizing deists or sceptics have started against revelation, or some of the doctrines, commandments, or transactions contained in it: And at the same time I shall attempt to lead men’s attention to religion, as true and practical wisdom, and their grand interest both here and hereafter. Since, therefore, our subject is of the greatest importance to every man, I would intreat the reader to consider it with patient and serious application, as well as with candour and impartiality; nor can it justly be censured as irrational, if he be reminded to accompany the perusal with prayer to the Father of lights, and the Giver of every good gift, to
bestow

bestow upon him that wisdom which comes from above, and which guides the humble and teachable in the way to everlasting felicity.

N.B. Since this treatise was begun, a small pamphlet fell in the Author's way, which had the same title, written by the Rev. Mr. Riand, Rector of Sutton Coldfield, Warwickshire. But as that tract did not in the least interfere with the plan of, or preclude the occasion for, this publication; and as he could not devise a more suitable title; so he did not think that circumstance alone sufficient to induce him to alter his original intentions.

THE RIGHTS OF GOD.

INTRODUCTION.

IT would be a waste of time to offer many arguments in proof of the existence of a God: for though many avow themselves atheists, or insinuate doubts on this head; yet their hearts are more disordered than their understandings. “The fool hath said in his heart—no God; they are corrupt, they have done abominable works,” (Ps. xiv. v. 1.) Therefore, they wish that there were no God to controul or punish them; then they hope and try to believe that there is none; this induces them to search for objections and sophistical arguments against the truth; and thus, through Satan’s delusions, and in the righteous judgment of God, they become converts to atheism, or a scepticism bordering on it; and then to elude conviction and to keep themselves in countenance, they commence advocates for, and apostles of, their impious opinions. But in reality the existence of the creation, or indeed of any creature, is a sufficient proof that there is a God who made all things; as the most acute reasoners have shewn, especially the celebrated Mr. Locke: and he, that lives, moves, thinks, and acts, must be left without excuse, if he deny or forget God, or refuse to honour, and be thankful to him. Reason and common sense confirm this verdict of inspiration: and the man who

withstands the evidence of this argument, is not likely to be convinced by rational deductions; but will probably continue an infidel, (unless his heart be changed by divine grace,) till he is convinced of his fatal mistake by experiencing the indignation of that God whom he hath denied.

The unity of the Godhead is also allowed to be equally the doctrine of reason and of revelation, being inseparable from our ideas of *infinite* perfection. But we have the less occasion to labour this point at present; because they who profess to believe that there is a God, and yet speculatively or practically deny his Rights; are in general strenuous advocates for the divine unity, and often contend for it, as the doctrine of reason, in opposition to those mysteries, which have long been deemed an essential part of revelation.

Yet even among those, who, in words at least, thus far assent to our principles, there are great numbers, who seem to exclude the Creator from the government of the world, and from any right to the obedience or worship of mankind. Some speak ambiguously about creation, and try to account for every thing by the operation of second causes, instead of resolving the whole into the Omnipotent *Fiat* of the first great cause of all things. Others argue, as if God had constituted the universe at first in such perfection, that the laws of nature alone were sufficient to preserve its regular order without his immediate interposition. They seem to think, that it would be dishonourable to
 God,

God, to exert his omnipotence continually for the preservation of his own work ; or, that it is incompatible with his dignity and felicity thus to interpose in all the concerns of his creatures. Thus they confound the idea of *absolute perfection*, the incommunicable attribute of God, with that of *relative perfection* as bestowed by Him on his creatures ; and by false notions of dignity and happiness, they represent the Creator as finite and imperfect, whilst they deify his works as independent and self-sufficient.

Such sophistry, however, is entirely calculated to lead men from thinking of their accountableness to their Creator, and of their immense obligations to him ; and thus to pacify their consciences in neglecting his worship and service, and in being utterly destitute of all love, gratitude, or other holy affections towards him : so that these sentiments, though not so opprobrious as direct atheism, answer the purposes of a carnal ungodly heart altogether as well : and a man, who hates religion, may willingly admit the being of a God, (which he often will find it convenient to do, in order to elude the believer's arguments, and escape his attacks ;) provided he may live as if there were no God, without apprehension of terrible consequences.

But when this bias is withdrawn, there is no rational ground for a moment's hesitation, previous to the admission of the scripture doctrine, that the great Creator upholds all things by his omnipotence, manages them in his wisdom and goodness, and

governs them in justice, truth, and holiness; that “not a sparrow falls to the ground without Him,” that “even the hairs of our head are all numbered;” and that all second causes derive their origin, permanency, and efficacy from Him alone.

The deviations from the ordinary course of nature in those miraculous events, which have been unanswerably attested; the surprising accomplishment of many explicit prophecies, through successive generations; the extraordinary deliverances, beyond all probability, which some persons have experienced; and the uniform answers which pious Christians receive to their prayers, will have a vast weight with the impartial enquirer, when seriously employed in considering this subject. The doctrine in question is established by every external and internal proof of the divine original of the scriptures, and cannot be denied without virtually rejecting them: and, even if they were wholly passed over in the argument, the contrary tenets might easily be shewn to be so irrational, and unphilosophical, that nothing but aversion to the character and government of God could induce any reflecting person to espouse and adhere to them.

They, who thus far coincide with me in opinion, (and I do not expect a candid perusal of what follows from those who do not,) will readily perceive that the great Creator, Benefactor, and Governor of the universe has *Rights*. Indeed He only has rights *essentially, originally, and indescizably*; and all the rights of creatures are derived from the powers he
hath

hath given them, the relations to Him and each other, which he hath constituted, and his express appointments; and therefore they are dependent, and liable to be forfeited and lost. What these Rights of God are, I proceed to shew, by adducing some of them for a specimen: at the same time I would observe, that every Right of God implies correspondent duties, which his rational creatures are bound to perform, or are inexcusable in neglecting.

PART THE FIRST.

Containing the Rights of God, as the Creator, providential Benefactor, and moral Governor of the World.

WHETHER we contemplate the glorious perfections of the infinite and eternal God; or whether we consider what he hath done for, and continually bestows on, his creatures; we must be convinced that he hath an unalienable right to universal dominion, honour, worship, love, submission, and obedience; and that “His is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever—” In particular—

I. The Lord hath a right to propose the display of his own glory, as his ultimate end, in all his works, (Prov. c. xvi. v. 4. Rom. c. xi. v. 36). From eternity he was essentially glorious, but the perfections of his nature could only be manifested through the medium of creation, and could only be known, admired, and adored by those creatures, whom

whom he was pleased to form capable of such contemplations and affections. If such rational beings continued obedient to their Creator, they could not but enjoy the most complete felicity, in beholding his glory, possessing his love, and celebrating his praises: but it was meet, that the First Cause of all things should propose his own glory, as his principal end; and that the happiness of derived, dependent, and obedient creatures should be only a subordinate end, inseparably connected with it. For it is an article in the creed of sound reason, as well as the doctrine of the bible, that all creatures are as nothing, in comparison of the infinite Creator, (Isaiah, c. xl. v. 12, 17.) It is therefore most unreasonable to conclude, with many reputed philosophers, that the happiness of the creatures is the ultimate end of God, in all his dispensations; seeing the glory of his own name is an object of infinitely greater importance.

Indeed the Lord would not appear completely glorious, did he not render his obedient subjects happy, according to their respective capacities of enjoyment: and they all will certainly consider it as their highest privilege and honour, to subserve the manifestation of his glory: so that in respect of them there can be no possible competition. But the reasonings of many on this subject principally relate to the happiness of *men*, who are disobedient creatures: and surely it is most absurd to suppose, that the holy God prefers the happiness of sinners to his own glory; and that he will dishonour himself,
and

and act contrary to his own perfections, rather than leave them to the just punishment, and consequences of their crimes! For who would not deem it most unreasonable, that the welfare of criminals should be considered as the great end of civil government, even in preference to the honour of the prince, and the security of his loyal subjects? It must, therefore, be manifest, that the Lord has a right to prefer his own glory to the happiness of his creatures, when their disobedience hath introduced a competition between them.

And if this be admitted; it will also follow, that all rational creatures should recognize this right of God; and that they should propose to themselves the same end in all their works, and attempt nothing contrary to it by word or deed, otherwise they do not render him the glory due to his name; for all objections to this doctrine are a sacrilegious attempt to rob God of his rights, by asserting claims that are incompatible with them.

II. The Lord from eternity possessed an unalienable right to create what orders of beings he saw good, and to arrange them in the universe according to his own plan. Many persons discourse about the several orders of creatures, which are known or supposed to exist, as if they comprehended the whole of the Lord's designs, and were competent and authorized to decide on the propriety of them. "But who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?" (Isaiah, c. xl. v. 13, 14. Rom. c. xi. v. 34—36). So that every objection

to any part of the creation absurdly supposes, that we fully understand all the purposes which every creature can possibly answer! Indeed matters might perhaps have been ordered more suitable to our defective and contracted views, than they now are: but pride and ignorance alone can put them in competition with the counsels of Omnipotence! It would be a presumption unspeakably less reprehensible, for the most illiterate person on earth to find fault with the *apparatus* of an eminent philosopher, as unsuitable to his purpose; than for the most exalted of creatures to censure in the slightest degree any one of the works of the great Creator. He has a right to exercise his omnipotence “according to the counsels of his own will;” and our indispensable duty must be, to acknowledge this right, to ascribe to him the glory of his manifested perfections, when we can discern it; and to give him credit, (so to speak,) for his wisdom, justice, and goodness, when we find ourselves incompetent to discover them.

Had not the Lord seen good to exert his creating power, there had been none to find fault: had he not formed *us* rational creatures, *our* objections would have been precluded: and did he indeed give us existence, and endue us with understanding, that we might be capable of quarrelling with his works? or shall the thing formed say to his Creator, why hast thou made me thus? Surely this must be as inconsistent with reason as with piety! And adoring gratitude, fervent praises, and humble acquiescence
in

in the wisdom and will of God must far better become *us*, who have received such benefits from Him, and know so little of his eternal counsels, and the immensity of his works.

III. The Lord hath a right to dispose of every part of the creation, as he pleases. He is the great proprietor of the whole, and “ is it not lawful for him to do what he will with his own ?” His absolute sovereignty indeed is inseparable from his most perfect wisdom, justice, goodness, and truth: “ He cannot deny himself,” but “ is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works:” so that all the objections to the right of God thus to dispose of all his creatures, which involve in them the impossible supposition of his making a wrong use of his power, are manifestly erroneous and absurd, and border on blasphemy. He may do things, which appear to us to be wrong: but our judgment is not always according to truth and rectitude; nor are we impartial or infallible in all possible cases. It cannot, therefore, be unreasonable, if we be required to confess ourselves mistaken, when the divine conduct does not appear to us perfectly holy, just, and good.

We allow that there is an essential difference in the nature of actions antecedent to the consideration of the agent: but then wisdom, justice, truth, and goodness are no other than conformity to the eternal and immutable perfections of God. His absolute sovereignty, therefore, cannot resemble in any degree the arbitrary power, which men often

exercise, with oppression and cruelty, under the influence of passion and caprice, and in egregious folly: on the contrary it is unlimited authority, invariably exercised in the most perfect manner that it possibly can be; and this must be advantageous in the highest degree to all creatures; a part only of those excepted, whose crimes have excluded them from the common benefit.

Instead, therefore, of venturing to argue against the sovereign right of God thus to dispose of all his creatures; or to adopt the misrepresentations of error or impiety on this abstruse subject; it behoves us to say, “such knowledge is too wonderful for us, we cannot attain unto it!” We ought rather to adore the depths we cannot fathom; and to conclude, that “though clouds and darkness are round about him; yet justice and judgment are the basis of his throne.” We act after this manner, in respect to our fellow creatures: for when a man’s general conduct is manifestly distinguished by prudence, integrity, and generosity; we give him a measure of credit for them in any particular action that has a contrary appearance, and suppose him to be influenced by motives with which we are unacquainted. But how much more reasonable is it to proceed in this manner, when He is concerned, “whose judgments are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out!”

The only limitation, therefore, which can be assigned to the right of the Lord in this respect, is that of his own perfections; if such an expression
may

may be allowable: and it is our duty especially to recognize it, with reference to ourselves and all our concerns; and not to utter a word, or harbour a thought that implies the least degree of dissatisfaction with his dealings towards us, or any of his creatures: In particular, “The earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness of it:” and “He hath given it to the children of men,” as it seemed good in his sight. The different proportions, in which its produce is distributed amongst them, result from an almost infinite variety of second causes, operating and combining their energy, through successive generations: But, though the good; or bad conduct of every individual, and that of his predecessors or cotemporaries, concur in assigning him his situation in the community, and dividing to him a more scanty or abundant provision: yet the Lord ought to be acknowledged as the first cause in the whole distribution. Talents, health, industry, and success are his gifts: He permits, restrains, directs, counteracts, or prospers men’s activity, as he sees good: he is the original source of the difference in climates, soils, and seasons: and whatever be the immediately discriminating event, it is the Lord “who maketh rich, and maketh poor; who lifteth up and casteth down:” and the vast inequality, which subsists in men’s rank and station, must be resolved into his sovereign appointment by all who consistently acknowledge his providence, whether they believe his word, or no.

He hath wise and holy reasons for those dispensations,

tions, by which the wicked prosper, and the more inoffensive are impoverished and oppressed: as well as for famines, earthquakes, and pestilences, by which numbers suffer without any exact discrimination of character. We may indeed use proper means of averting such calamities: and thus restraints may be imposed on the selfishness of mankind; encouragement and protection may be given to honest industry and ingenuity; and an enlarged beneficence may prevent the miseries which spring from too great an inequality in men's circumstances: (for a moderate inequality is a common benefit, and even essential to a well regulated community). But after all, the Lord has a right to defeat such endeavours, as far as he sees good: and he gives, and takes away, whatever means or instruments he employs.

He will, however, require of every man an account of the methods by which he obtained his possessions, and of the manner in which he conducts himself in his peculiar situation. We should, therefore, consider our present condition as God's express appointment *for us*, acquiesce in his wisdom, justice, and goodness in respect of it; accommodate ourselves to the duties of it, as those that must give account, and use no unjustifiable means of changing it: We ought not to repine, or envy, when we see others more prosperous than ourselves: we are not allowed to *covet* any thing belonging to another man: much less then may we attempt by violence, or fraud, or by disturbing the public tranquillity to seize on those possessions, which the
great

great Proprietor of the world hath seen good to bestow on others.

IV. The Lord has a right to exercise dominion over all his creatures, and to be the Lawgiver and Judge of all rational agents. He governs the inanimate and irrational creation, by that constitution of their powers and properties, their order, and relation to each other, and that connection of causes and effects, which are called "the laws of nature:" But beings endued with the capacity of reflection, of knowing their Maker's will, and of obeying or disobeying it, require another kind of government, and are properly considered as accountable for their actions. It is reasonable to suppose, that they would have rules prescribed to them for their conduct; and that the consequences of observing, or neglecting them would be set before them; that they might perform their part in the universe, not by external coercion, or an instinct which could admit of no deviation; but from rational motives, and a voluntary choice.

If then such laws and sanctions were requisite, to whom could the right of promulgating them belong, but to the Lord himself? The wisdom and knowledge of finite beings could not have sufficed to have formed them *perfectly* suited to the condition, relations, and obligations of all those who were to be governed by them. The authority of God alone could give them adequate validity, and demand absolute obedience to them from every individual: and his omnipotence, omniscience, and perfect justice,

justice, truth, and goodness were requisite, in order to the distribution of rewards, and punishments, in a manner which none could resist, object to, or elude.

Indeed the laws of God, and the sanctions annexed to them, must accord to all the perfections of his nature: yet it may reasonably be expected, that many things will appear to us in another light, both as we are short sighted creatures, and as we are sinners. We are utterly incompetent to determine what becomes the infinite God, in the government of his universal and everlasting kingdom; or what his own glory, and the best interests of his creatures at large may require. We might reasonably suppose, that holy creatures, who were made acquainted with our state and character, would expect, that God's laws would appear *to us* too strict and spiritual, his denunciations too dreadful, and his judgments extremely severe. Self-love alone suffices in this case to warp the judgment: those vicious affections which prompt us to disobey the holy precept, will dispose us to desire impunity in transgression; and to prefer our own indulgence and security to the honour of God and the good of the universe: and he, who is unacquainted with the influence of our *desires* upon our *reasonings* and *conclusions*, where we ourselves are concerned, has not so much as begun to understand the history of the human species, or to know his own heart.

What legislator consults the man, who prefers a life of plunder and self-indulgence to honest industry and the welfare of the community, about re-
pealing

pealing or altering the laws, and regulating the administration of justice? Though such men are often superior in natural, or acquired abilities to their more conscientious fellow citizens: yet a proposal of this sort would be deemed an outrage on the common sense of mankind. The objections of criminals to the strictness of the laws, and the severe vigilance of the magistrates, are deemed their best encomium; as they shew what mischief they would otherwise do: and we can scarce admit of a doubt, but that holy creatures consider the objections of sinners to the laws and government of God, in exactly the same light.

We are, perhaps, apt to over-rate the inhabitants of our earth, in comparison with the whole intelligent creation, through eternal ages: for it is probable, that the numbers immured in prison, or put to death, under the best regulated human governments, bear as large a proportion to the whole nation, as men, and fallen angels too, bear to all the rational creatures which have been, or shall be brought into existence. Yet the exemption from *deserved* punishment of comparatively a small part of the community, is not thought an object worthy to be put in competition with the public welfare.

All the laws of God, contained in the scriptures, are wise and righteous; as they were suited to the purpose for which they were given: and it may easily be shewn, that those which were intended for mankind in general are most equitable in their nature, and beneficial in their tendency. As the
 Lord

Lord himself is the perfection and source of all beauty and excellency; and as he is the author of our existence, and the bountiful giver of all that we enjoy or hope for: so it is most reasonable, that we should love him with our whole hearts, and serve him with all our powers, and in the use of all his gifts. He must have an undeniable right to demand all this of us; and we must be guilty of injustice as well as ingratitude, if we do not thus love and serve him. We ought supremely to admire and love all the excellencies of his most glorious nature; to reverence his majesty and authority; to desire, and delight in, his favour above all things; to receive all his benefits with most entire and lively gratitude; to devote ourselves wholly to his service; and to make his glory the great end of all our actions. Who can reasonably find fault with one article in this compendium of the first table of the law? who can urge a single objection to it, without pleading in behalf of some degree of ingratitude, of aversion to infinite excellency, or disaffection to the authority of consummate wisdom, justice, truth, and love?

The substance of the second table is equally consonant to the decisions of sober reason; as we must perceive, if we could but divest ourselves of the bias which results from our inordinate self-love. The happiness of any other of our species is, in itself, as important as our own: it is therefore reasonable, that we should “love our neighbour as ourselves;” and that we should judge and act, in all the various concerns and relations of life, with an undeviating

undeviating regard to this equitable rule. This would produce an habitual attention to the life, health, reputation, liberty, ease, peace, domestic comfort, and purity of every other person, similar to that, with which wise and rational self-love would desire that they should regard our's. We should never, in this case, pursue our own interest, or indulge our own passions, to the injury of any other person: we should recede from our own advantages, and thwart our own inclinations in lesser matters; whenever we could, by these means, promote the greater good of any man, though a perfect stranger, or an injurious adversary: and we should uniformly practise perfect equity, sincerity, veracity, fidelity, candour, compassion, kindness, and forgiveness; and connect universal philanthropy with the unfailing performance of every relative duty. If all men acted in this manner, fraud, slander, malice, envy, discord, wars, seditions, massacres, oppressions, slavery, licentiousness, and the long train of dire evils, which waste and harass the human species, would be finally terminated; and earth would resemble heaven in felicity as well as purity: for all confusion and misery spring from the transgression of the law, and its inseparable consequences.

If we could not so clearly discern the excellency of the divine law; it would nevertheless be reasonable for us to acknowledge the right of the great Lawgiver, and to submit to his authority as Judge of the world. But when it is demonstrable, that his "law is holy, just, and good," and calculated to

make all his obedient subjects completely happy; they must be left without excuse, who not only break his commandments; but speak and act as if he had no right to command, or as if they were under no obligations to obey him.

Moreover, when we seriously reflect upon the miseries which have arisen from transgression, in every part of the creation, which it hath pervaded; as well as on the rebellion, contempt, ingratitude, and enmity against God, which are contained in every wilful sin: can we confidently say, that we are capable of determining what degree or duration of punishment it deserves? Shall we not rather keep silence on a subject, in which we are too deeply interested to be impartial, and too short-sighted to be competent judges? Surely it is more reasonable to leave this matter to the decision of infinite wisdom and justice, to submit to the award of our Creator, and to betake ourselves to his mercy, as our only refuge from his righteous indignation! This must be one of the rights of God, and of our duties: and perhaps human folly, impiety, and presumption have seldom appeared more complicated, than when sinners argue that God will not fulfil the threatenings of his authenticated word, because they venture to assert, that it would be contrary to his justice and goodness so to do! and when, encouraged by this groundless hope of impunity, they continue to neglect his great salvation, and to add to the number of their crimes! “ Canst thou by searching find
“ out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty to
“ perfection?”

“ perfection ? It is higher than heaven, what canst thou do ? It is deeper than hell, what canst thou know ? But to man he saith, behold, the fear of the Lord that is wisdom ; and to depart from evil that is understanding,” (Job, c. xi. v. 7, 8, c. xxviii. v. 28.)

V. The Lord has a right to appoint the ordinances of his own worship, and all things relative to the prayers, praises, and thanksgivings of his rational creatures. This implies, that he has a right to the adorations of all those whom he hath formed capable of this reasonable service, and that they rob him of his due who do not worship him ; whether they give his glory to those, “ who by nature are no gods ;” or whether they be wholly irreligious. But he alone can perfectly know in what manner it best becomes his creatures to worship him ; and they must learn it by revelation from him, through whatever medium it be communicated : for it is reasonable to suppose, that the adorations of angels are conducted according to discoveries made to them of their Creator’s will ; and that they are not left to follow the mere dictates of their own minds, in this momentous concern.

Every thing, essentially connected with our religious worship, should, therefore, be regulated according to the revealed will of God : who no doubt has a right to the use of all our time, abilities, and possessions, which should, in one way or other, be employed in his service, and devoted to his glory ;
and,

and, consequently, he may require us to appropriate to religious duties whatever part of them he pleases.

The institution of the sabbath, or of one day in seven, to be kept holy to the Lord, may be adduced as an instance, on this part of our subject. The mention of the day of sacred rest immediately after the account of man's creation; the attention to it, which was required of Israel, previous to the giving of the law, (Exod. c. xvi. v. 5, 22—30;) and the form of the fourth commandment, “Remember that thou keep holy the seventh day,” concur in proving the appointment to have been coeval with the human race; and this is further confirmed by the general custom, in all parts of the world, from the beginning, of computing time by weeks; which cannot be so well accounted for in any other way, as by concluding that it was the effect of tradition, derived from Adam and Noah, and retained when the reason of it was forgotten.

The circumstances of mankind have been greatly altered, since our first parents were created *very good*; and the Lord hath dealt with his church according to different dispensations: yet the same proportion of consecrated time hath invariably been adhered to. For Jesus Christ, “the Lord of the sabbath day,” hath manifestly established its obligation on his disciples: as his allowance of works of piety, mercy, and real necessity, implies a full confirmation of the prohibitions, contained in the law, of all other kinds of labour. But the example and writings of his apostles prove, that, by his authority,

thority, the first day of the week, (on which he arose from the dead,) was set apart instead of the seventh; though the change was silently and gradually made, that the prejudices of the Jews might not be needlessly excited. On this day "the Lord of the sabbath," after his resurrection, repeatedly met his disciples, and spake peace to them: on this day the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them, subsequent to his ascension; they were afterwards accustomed on it, to meet together to break bread, to preach and hear the gospel, to collect or dispense their alms, and for other religious purposes: and the custom of the Christian church from the primitive times sufficiently proves the observance of it to be an essential part of our holy religion. It is also emphatically called "the Lord's Day," (Rev. c. i. v. 10,) or the day of Christ, the Lord of the sabbath, which he claims as his own, and requires his disciples to dedicate to religious services, as far as they have the opportunity and power so to do.

The strict observance of his holy day, by suspending all kinds of labour (except such as have been mentioned;) by avoiding all worldly pleasures and avocations; by employing it in the devotions of the closet, the family, and the public congregation; in the pious instruction of children and servants, and in religious meditation and conversation; forms a badge of distinction, a bond of union, and a means of communion with each other, among true Christians; it tends greatly to promote the glory of God, and it provides in the most important manner
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for the propagation of real christianity, and the edification of the church. Indeed such an institution seems to be indispensably necessary to the maintenance of pure religion among men; the strictest regard to it does not in the least interfere with the advantageous management of agriculture, manufactures, or commerce; whilst it exceedingly subserves the interests of civilization, morality, and genuine liberty, political and personal. Whereas the profanation of this returning season of sacred rest, proportionably tends to the increase of impiety, profligacy, and every kind of vice.

It would probably be found, upon a careful scrutiny, that the progress of irreligion and wickedness, in this land, hath kept pace with the neglect and contempt with which the Lord's day hath more and more been treated: and that no great regard is paid to equity, truth, or good morals, (except as reputation, interest, and fashion are concerned,) by those numbers of every rank, who, in different ways, profane this consecrated time, by spending it in business, journeying, feasting, polite dissipation, or gross excesses, as their habits and inclinations lead them.

Some indeed argue, that as we ought to keep every day holy, so we need not distinguish the Lord's day from the rest of the week: but what is this more than a mere play of words, employed to justify disobedience to God, and dislike to religious duties? Six days of the week may be spent in an holy manner, by a conscientious attention to the employments
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of our several stations in the community ; by regulating all our undertakings and enjoyments in justice, temperance, truth, and love; and being careful that they be sanctified by the word of God and prayer. But obedience to one divine command cannot authorize disobedience to another. The Lord's day is set apart and consecrated by his authority to the great concerns of religious worship: it is therefore profaned by those actions, which on other days are a part of a man's duty: because being done at an improper season, they rob the Lord of his due, and violate his command. Through the imperfection of language, the same word often conveys different ideas, according to its connexion: and thus the term *holy* signifies consecration to God, and his immediate worship, when used concerning the sabbath; but it signifies conformity to any of his precepts, or to his image in justice, purity, truth, and goodness, when used in respect of our general conduct. Indeed they, who argue in this manner, may be willing to deal honestly, and to be decent in their lives, from inferior motives: but they keep none of their days *holy*, that is, in obedience to God, from a regard to his authority, love to his Name, delight in his service, and zeal for his glory; and they only want a pretence for neglecting religion, and following their beloved worldly pursuits, as entirely on the Lord's day, as they do on other days; but in something a different manner.

Whilst a remnant amongst us continue to hallow the day of God, not doing our own works, nor
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seeking our own pleasure during that sacred time, but counting it honourable and delightful thus to anticipate the worship and rest of heaven ; it will constitute such a testimony for God and religion in the midst of the land, as may encourage a hope, that our iniquity is not yet full. But when there shall be only a few exceptions to the too general example already set, not only by the lower orders, but by legislators, magistrates, and other honourable, nay sacred characters among us, of making the Lord's own day a season for business, recreation, sloth, or indulgence; then it may be apprehended, we shall be ripe for national judgments. For if it be the right of God to appoint what proportion of our time shall be sanctified ; if he have reserved this day for himself ; and if we, as a nation, professing to be his people, unite in refusing to comply with his appointment; what can we expect, but to be given up to our own delusions, till we become monuments of his awful vengeance ?

It may be proper, under this head, to mention public worship more particularly : as the indolence of the carnal mind, and its aversion to religion, have lately been soothed by an attempt to prove that it is no part of a christian's duty. It has been here taken for granted, or rather inferred from the scriptures that relate to the hallowing of the Lord's day, that one design of the institution is, to give all men, (as far as it is regarded,) leisure to attend on public worship, and the preaching of the gospel. Many persons are able to avail themselves of such oppor-

opportunities at other times; and it is a good thing to be so employed, when not prevented by duties of another kind. But if the Lord's day were duly sanctified, all who had health, might, at some times, have these advantages. Indeed secret devotion is absolutely requisite to maintain the life of piety in the soul, and ought to be repeatedly engaged in every day: but public religion peculiarly honours God, and keeps up in the world the remembrance of his authority, perfections, and works; and of our relations and obligations to him: it is the grand means of diffusing piety more widely; it constitutes that tribute of adoration and gratitude, which the Lord requires of us, in the presence of our fellow-creatures: and as we are social beings susceptible of sympathy, so the view of numbers apparently animated with devout affections, has a powerful tendency to excite and invigorate them in our own hearts, and the example of esteemed characters has extensive good effects: whilst what passes in public worship gives the judicious parent, or head of a family, the occasion and subject of instructing his household also.

In every way, therefore, "the assembling of ourselves together," to hear the word of God, and to unite in adoring his glorious name, is necessary to the existence of true piety in the world: and were this entirely laid aside, (as it is at present to an alarming degree,) we might confidently prognosticate the universal prevalence of ignorance, impiety, infidelity, and vice.

form or other, hath in every age constituted a part of the religion of God's people; which might easily be proved by the most undeniable evidence: but surely, the man must be conscious of having undertaken a desperate cause, who demands, in the first instance, that the whole Old Testament, and a large proportion of the New, should be given up, as of no validity in the argument. Nevertheless, we might easily prove this duty to be enjoined in scripture, after making such large concessions: but it is not necessary; for they, who can believe that any man at present understands christianity better than the inspired apostles and evangelists, and the churches founded by them, did, would not pay any great attention to what could be urged in this place. Indeed, the writer* who advanced, and contended for, this opinion, seems to be in some degree sensible of his mistake: yet it is not improper to give this caution against it; as a book may communicate bad principles, when the author, however desirous of doing it, may be utterly unable to counteract or eradicate them.

It will doubtless be found reasonable by all serious and impartial enquirers, that the Lord should demand our public adorations, as well as our private acknowledgments; and that we should delight in meeting together for this important end. They, therefore, who refuse to join stately with his congregations, in rendering him the tribute, which he justly claims; and they who draw nigh to him with

* Rev. Gilbert Wakefield.

their lips, when their hearts are far from him, are alike guilty of robbing him of the glory due unto him.

VI. The Sovereign of the universe has a right to appoint his own vicegerents. He uses two principal means in governing mankind. His spiritual law has authority over the conscience, and takes cognizance of the thoughts and intentions of the heart, as well as of many parts of the outward conduct, which human laws cannot reach; and its sanctions chiefly relate to the future and eternal world: but civil government, and human laws, have authority over the outward conduct, in those things that relate to the welfare of society: and their sanctions are wholly of a temporal kind.

Whether we study the book of reason, or that of revelation, we must allow that civil government is the ordinance of God, for the punishment of evil doers, and the protection and praise of those that do well: and when we duly reflect how he accomplishes his purposes by instruments and second causes, as well as by an immediate interposition, we shall perceive, that the existing government, and the persons actually established in authority in any country, are as really appointed by him, as they were in Israel, when Moses, Joshua, or Samuel were the rulers, or when the kingdom was conferred on David and his family. The manner in which the choice is notified differs, but the same great Sovereign still selects his own vicegerents.

An inconceivable variety of circumstances and events have concurred, through many generations, in bringing every man to his particular situation in the community, antecedent to his own choice and conduct. Thus some find themselves called to govern, and are invested with authority, not through their own usurpation or circumvention, but in the regular course of human affairs, which cannot be altered without violent convulsions: and, unless the state of things be very bad indeed, such changes rarely conduce to the common benefit. But if we also remember that the Lord directs, and determines all these contingencies; we shall readily perceive that rulers, in every settled form of government, (however it were at first established,) are appointed by, and accountable to him.

It is indeed allowable and proper, by equitable precautions, to restrain men from abusing authority, on the same principle by which we obviate the danger of a famine or a pestilence: and when such prudent limitations become a part of the established form of government, they are to be considered as “the ordinance of God,” equally with the other constitutions to which they are united. Yet the Lord has a right to defeat the attempts of those who aim to exclude exorbitant power, and the exercise of tyranny; and to appoint his own vicegerents, either in mercy or judgment, as he sees good: and, in all ordinary cases at least, we are bound to submit to *his* authority, by obeying *them* for his sake; and to honour *him*, by shewing *them* all civil respect according

According to his word. This will become easy and pleasant to us, in proportion to the degree in which we reverence, love, and adore him, as our Sovereign Lord, and most liberal Benefactor, to whom we are bound, by every obligation, to be obedient and submissive in all things.

The same reasoning is equally conclusive, in respect of all the other subordinations in society, in domestic life, and in the church of God. Superiors, seniors, parents, husbands, masters, persons of eminent wisdom and piety, and faithful ministers, are entrusted with different proportions of the Lord's authority: *He* is obeyed, and honoured, when a scriptural deference, submission, and respect is rendered to *them*; the contrary conduct, in the inferior relation, is rebellion against both his providence and his commandment: and those speculations, which militate against this regular subordination, tend directly to "confusion and every evil work,"

VII. The Lord has a right to superintend, alter, or suspend, as he sees good, those "laws of nature," which arise from the general operations of second causes. Many frivolous objections have been made to the scripture doctrine of providence, and of the efficacy of prayer, in such things as depend on an established and supposed inviolable connexion of causes and effects. But is it not most unreasonable to consider this general course of things, as *necessary* and *immutable*? No doubt the Creator communicated, and continues to every part of his work, its peculiar powers, properties, and situation in the system;

system; and superintends the whole with infinite wisdom and omnipotent energy.

No miracle is required, in order to determine the efficacy of second causes, in any particular manner, according to the wants and prayers of pious persons. It is not commonly thought to be any deviation from the general laws of nature, when one region is fertilized by moderate showers, another wasted with inundations, and a third visited with drought: yet will any rational man pretend, that such events are not appointed and effected by the sovereign will and powerful operation of God himself? The same holds equally good, in respect of earthquakes, pestilential diseases, hurricanes, &c: and even those events which may seem to be of less importance, are regulated by the divine superintendency, in entire consistency with the laws of nature: medicines are effectual, or unavailing; abundant increase rewards the husbandman's toil, or his crop and hopes are blasted together; and ten thousand similar cases occur, on which life, or death, prosperity, or adversity, comforts, or corrections, deliverances, or judgments, entirely depend; yet in none of them can we either perceive any miraculous interposition, or reasonably refuse to resolve them into the sovereign appointment and powerful operation of the Lord.

Many bold objections have also been urged against the credibility of some events, recorded in scripture; because they cannot be explained, or accounted for, in consistency with these idolized laws of nature: whereas they are evidently mentioned, as miraculous
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deviations from that settled course, effected by Omnipotence, for the most important purposes. “Why then should it be deemed incredible, that God should raise the dead,” or why should we question his power to deluge the whole earth? He, who gave to matter those inexplicable powers, that we call attraction and gravitation, by which the whole mass of water is supposed to be retained in the ocean; could suspend them, in what measure he saw good, when he determined thus to execute vengeance on a rebellious race. I do not say, that the deluge was effected in this way, for I expect not to comprehend how God performs his sovereign purposes; but this may suffice to shew that he can with infinite ease do those things, which proud men have asserted to be impossible. The same may be said, concerning any other miracle recorded in scripture; for unless the fact attested, did really involve an undeniable contradiction, its contrariety to the known laws of nature only proves, that the interposition of the God of nature was requisite to effect it; which cannot at all invalidate its credibility, when properly authenticated, and when the end proposed by it was worthy of such an interference.

Perhaps some readers may think, that what I am about to add, might have been spared: but whatever serves as a pretext for disregarding the scriptures, constitutes a poison congenial to our nature, and suited to our vitiated taste: and it is not amiss sometimes to shew the absurdity of the most able men, when they reject the oracles of God. In an
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age, therefore, in which sceptical and infidel objections of every kind, are widely circulated in numerous pamphlets, retailed in almost all companies; and greedily imbibed by the inexperienced in every rank in the community, I trust I shall at least be excused for introducing such a subject.

Some sceptics have gone so far as to affirm, that miracles, instead of proving doctrines to be from God, are themselves absolutely incredible on any evidence whatsoever! Perhaps the ignorant presumption, and pride of man never yet produced any thing more extraordinary than this assertion! For in what part of the book of nature or of reason is it written in legible characters, that the great Creator cannot, or will not make any alteration in the established course of nature? The argument they adduce is briefly this: most men never saw miracles performed; therefore, those persons, that say they have seen them, are not to be credited, however unexceptionable their testimony in other respects may be. By such a mode of reasoning we may prove, that there is no such country as China, and no such city as Constantinople; or that there never existed such a sceptic as Mr Hume: for the most of men never saw them. To argue thus, in these latter instances, would only prove a man's folly, or self-conceit. What then does it prove in the other case? It is indeed pretended, that miracles are contrary to universal experience and observation: but this can mean no more than the universal experience and observation of all those, who never experienced and observed

ferred them. Thus the congelation of water into a solid mass of ice is contrary to the universal observation of all those inhabitants of Africa, who never witnessed such a transmutation: and accordingly some of them, (with a wisdom and modesty similar to those of European sceptics,) have declared, that the persons, who attested the congelation of lakes, rivers, and seas in northern countries, were unworthy of the least credence.

Such ridiculous objections to scripture would never have been thought of, or published; nor could they ever have imposed on, or been endured by any reasonable being; if a secret aversion to revealed religion did not predispose the heart to entertain them favourably. In reality, miracles are extraordinary events, that have been often counterfeited, (which evinces that some are real;) and, therefore, they require to be authenticated by clear and indisputable testimony: when this is done, they are equally credible with other past transactions, or with any other facts: for many things, which have no immediate connexion with religion, (though sufficiently attested,) can no more be satisfactorily accounted for, than the miraculous events recorded in scripture.

Having shewn, that the Lord has an undoubted right to superintend, alter, or suspend the operation of second causes: it must be added, that it is our duty to consider them as altogether under his direction; to be thankful for, or submit to, all the effects of them without exception, as his sovereign appointment; and to receive as the testimony of God every

part of that revelation, which is found to have been authenticated by miracles, and by various other incontestable proofs. For

VIII. It must be allowed that the Lord hath a right to reveal himself, and his truth or will, to his rational creatures, whensoever he pleases, and in his own manner. The creation, and the ordinary course of providence contain a revelation of God to us: and we might thence learn a great deal concerning his perfections, and our obligations to him, if we were duly attentive and teachable. But it may be proper for us to know more of his incomprehensible nature, and of those things that relate to his moral government, than could be discovered through this medium. To superior intelligences the Lord may perhaps reveal himself immediately, and they may intuitively apprehend his instructions: but he does not teach us in that manner. Yet it is exceedingly desirable that we should be more fully acquainted with him and his will concerning us; and it might reasonably be expected that he would thus instruct us, if he intended to shew us any favour, or accept any worship or obedience at our hands.

But in case the Lord saw good to communicate instruction to mankind, through the intervention of select persons, to whom he imparted the message they were to deliver in his name; it must be reasonable to suppose they would be enabled to authenticate their mission in a decisive manner. Indeed the internal evidence of revelation, its coincidence with the state of mankind, and its excellent nature and tendency,

dency, constitute one grand demonstration of its divinity : but much reflection and some experience are requisite to enable a man to perceive the full force of this argument. In order, therefore, to arrest the attention of a careless or prejudiced world, to *new* discoveries of God, and heavenly things ; evident miracles, which could not be counterfeited, or effected but by omnipotence, openly performed in the presence of opposers, and challenging the fullest investigation, formed a proper attestation to the messengers of God : and the evident accomplishment of prophecies, contained in the records of this revelation, when connected with other evidence, is *now* a suitable means of drawing men's attention to the written word, and to the instructions of those, who appeal to it as their authority.

The Lord hath also a right to demand our entire credence, confidence, and obedience, in respect of his authenticated revelation. It is our duty, with diligent care and seriousness, according to our opportunity and ability, to examine the grounds on which it claims our attention, as the word of God, and to seek after a more complete acquaintance with every part of its contents : by which means our assurance of its divinity will increase continually, if we prosecute the study, in a teachable, humble, and obedient spirit. But it should also be remembered, that we are bound *implicitly* to believe “ the testimony of God, (which is sure and giveth wisdom to the simple,)” in decided preference to our own preconceived opinions and reasonings, and to the

decisions of the most renowned and admired philosophers. The Lord has a right to demand such unreserved credit from all his rational creatures, whenever he speaks to them: nor does the mysteriousness of his instruction form any ground of exception; for they must have a mysterious religion, who worship an incomprehensible God. But mystery is very distinct from absurdity, or self-contradiction: and a doctrine is not *unreasonable*, because it is above the reach of our limited powers; if it be not plainly contrary to any of those truths, which we *know certainly by intuition or demonstration*: for *probable*, or *conjectural* conclusions may be false, however confidently they are maintained, or advanced into the rank of undisputed principles.

The *external* evidence of revelation resolves itself wholly into the proof afforded us, that certain events actually took place, in time and manner, as recorded in the scriptures. If the facts be established by sufficient testimony; the doctrines connected with them are proved to be “the word of God,” and must not be treated as disputable opinions, like the sentiments of human authors; on the contrary they should be received, with reverent and humble submission of the understanding, as divine and infallible instructions. What then can be more unreasonable, than for men to demand *demonstrative* proof of the doctrine of *revelation*? If the facts be properly authenticated, the doctrines are evinced to be the dictates of infinite wisdom and truth, which is the highest possible demonstration. But *testimony* is the only *direct* way
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of proving *facts*, to those who were not present when they took place; and it would not be deemed more absurd for a student to attempt the proof of a geometrical axiom by testimony, than for a judge to try causes by mathematical deductions. The application of any kind of reasoning or evidence to those things, to which it is in its own nature inapplicable, has often been exposed, in other matters, as ridiculous in the extreme: but it can never be more absurd, and must always be less mischievous, than when it is introduced into religious enquiries. Yet this is frequently done by men, who are considered as the greatest masters of reasoning in the world; and who speak of those, that deem it rational implicitly to believe the testimony of God, as a weak, and deluded set of people. But I shall close this part of my subject, by observing, that, until all the internal and external evidences of the divine original of the scriptures be solidly and completely answered, it is most unreasonable and exceedingly unfair, to start objections against particular facts or doctrines contained in them; as they must be truth, if the book that contains them be the word of God: yet this is the grand weapon of modern scepticism and infidelity; and it is doubtless well suited to the purpose of those, who would unsettle the unwary, and impose upon the indolent and ignorant, by infusing prejudices into their minds against the holy religion of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

PART THE SECOND.

*Containing the Rights of God, in respect of his Dealings
with sinful Creatures.*

AN attentive and impartial consideration of what hath been advanced, (concerning the rights of God, as our Creator, Benefactor, and Governor, and our correspondent duties,) must convince us, that we have withheld from him that worship, gratitude, love, and obedience, which were justly his due. Whether we review our own conduct, and inspect the state of our hearts; or whether we study the history of our species, and observe the course of the world around us; we shall be compelled to acknowledge, that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” If we, therefore, argue concerning the divine government, according to the regulations established in human society, we must conclude, from reason as well as from revelation, that “by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in the sight of God.” For by what law of man, can that person be justified, who hath in one instance wilfully broken it? The prince may indeed pardon the transgressor; but the law can do no other than condemn him. Alleviating circumstances, or obedience in other instances, may be inducements to clemency: but the law respects simply the question, “hath he transgressed, or hath he not?” If he be
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found guilty, the sentence must be condemnation; and, unless mercy intervene, the appointed penalty must be inflicted; nay indeed, every exercise of mercy to those, who merit punishment, is a relaxation of justice which weakens the authority of the administration.

We have already shewn, that the Lord hath a right to determine what punishment shall be inflicted on his rebellious subjects; as indeed he alone is competent to estimate the desert of every transgressor; and the more we investigate the matter with seriousness and impartiality, the less we shall be disposed to object against the solemn language of scripture on this alarming subject.

If it had been possible for us to have reasoned *a priori* on the event of our situation in this world; we should probably have concluded, that the Lord would not have inflicted the sentence of temporal death, with so many humiliating and agonizing circumstances, on the whole human race, without exception: but undeniable facts exclude such vain reasonings, or bold conjectures; and the bodies of all men return to their original dust, though they are only the instruments of unrighteousness, by which the soul accomplishes its sinful purposes. How then can we know, or from what premises can we conclude, that the Lord will not inflict the penalty of final misery upon the soul, the great agent in rebellion? All our inferences, from what we think right, to what infinite wisdom will do, must be inconclusive, if not presumptuous. Our reason, if not instructed by revelation,

lation, can in this point afford us no certain intelligence; and conjecture must involve terror, in proportion as we know God, and our relations and obligations to him. His sure testimony, therefore, can alone give us any information, on which we may safely depend; and that invariably declares, that the everlasting misery of body and soul in hell will be the righteous punishment of the wicked in another world.

But vain man would be wise: and some persons may perhaps imagine, that the Omnipotent God would have done better, had he prevented the entrance of sin, and the necessity of punishment: or in other words, they may object to the right of God to permit his creatures to sin, and then to punish them for their crimes. Such insinuations, (for men do not generally speak out on this subject,) involve the most awful blasphemy; and the apostle hath already given them their proper answer; “Nay
 “but, O man, who art thou, that repliest against
 “God: shall the thing formed say to him that
 “formed it, why hast thou made me thus?” We may, however, also remind the objector, that the wisdom of God is infinite, as well as his power. Omnipotence could have prevented the entrance of evil; or at once have annihilated it when it began to exist: but facts prove, that the Lord did not deem this consistent with his designs of ordering all things, in subserviency to the display of his own glorious perfections: and, indeed, we may perceive, that an omnipotent exclusion of sin and misery could
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never have consisted with the exercise of dominion over rational agents: the idea implies a denial of his right to govern the world; for if it be incumbent on him to exert his power, in restraining every rational creature from evil, all commands, sanctions, and accountableness must become a nullity. We may also discern, even in our present state of comparative darkness, that if sin had never entered, the infinite holiness of the divine nature, and the perfect justice of the divine government, could not have been so fully manifested, as they now are; whilst the pardoning mercy and love to sinners, which the Lord exhibits by the gospel as his peculiar riches and glory, could never have been known, imagined, or adored by any of his creatures.

Much more might be adduced on this head, with reference to the Person and redemption of Christ: but it does not behove us to dwell long on such a mysterious subject; for indeed all our thoughts and reasonings are, as it were, swallowed up in it. But then, it is a mystery, which equally belongs to every system of religion: for it is an undeniable fact, that God hath permitted sin and misery to invade the creation: he could have prevented their entrance, and we should *a priori* have concluded that he would. We must therefore allow, that this permission of evil consists with the divine perfections; or we shall be forced to take refuge in atheism; unless we prefer the Manichean absurdity of two independent beings, one good and the other evil, engaged in perpetual hostility against each

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other. It is vain, therefore, on this ground, to object to revelation, or any particular doctrines contained in it; for the mind must be pressed with the same difficulty, from undeniable facts, whether it acquiesce in the scripture account of this matter, or endeavour to obtain satisfaction some other way; except all serious regard to religion, or rational ideas of the one living and true God be given up, in order to get rid of it. But, as I apprehend, that we are not warranted to go a step beyond the scripture, on this incomprehensible subject, I shall digress no further; but proceed, without further delay, to specify some of the “Rights of God,” in respect of those creatures, which have sinned, and merited punishment, whether in this world, or in the next.

I. The Lord hath a right to execute deserved vengeance on guilty nations, or individuals, by whatever means and instruments he sees good.

Having denounced the sentence on fallen man, “Dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return;” he executes it, through successive generations, on persons of every rank, age, character, and description, by a variety of wasting and painful diseases: but, as we are accustomed to this procedure, we express little surprise; nor is it generally objected to as unjust, because it is undeniable fact, and second causes are more noticed in it than the appointment of God. Yet infants, women, and the most inoffensive persons, are thus cut off among others, without any discrimination; and they frequently endure far sharper and more lingering agonies, than those
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which accompany most kinds of violent death, Sometimes the Lord employs famines, earthquakes, pestilences, hurricanes, &c, to execute his righteous decree upon vast numbers of our apostate race; and these events excite more astonishment: but men do not in general doubt of his right to deal thus with his creatures. And when nations are desolated by civil contests, massacres, or cruel oppressions; or by hostile invasions and destructive wars, in the ordinary course of human affairs; the wickedness of the executioners sometimes fixes the attention of multitudes; whilst the justice of God, who works by them, is either overlooked, or tacitly acknowledged.

But on one grand occasion, in order to shew his abhorrence of iniquity, and to display the justice of his providential government, it pleased God to commission Israel to inflict his vengeance on the Amalekites, Canaanites, &c, by military executions: and though he sealed their commission by most signal miracles, and took effectual care that their conduct should not, in any ordinary circumstances, be pleaded as a precedent: yet the dispensation has been most vehemently exclaimed against; as if it were so contrary to essential justice and goodness, that no evidence could suffice to prove those persons to be sent of God, who executed such orders, or gave a sanction to them!

If, however, it consist with the divine perfections, to terminate, with much suffering, the lives of men, women, and children indiscriminately, by fevers, pestilences, famines, or earthquakes: and if many

thousands every day are put to death by one means or other: what injustice could there be in the Lord's commanding his people to execute a similar sentence on guilty nations, by the sword of war? If they deserved death, it could not be unjust to cut them off in this, or any other manner: and if it could be shewn to be an act of injustice to destroy them at all, the pains and fatal effects of a pestilence would have been equally liable to exception. Will any reasonable man dare to affirm explicitly, that the Lord had no right to order such an execution? Such an affirmation would involve the most complicated blasphemy against every part of God's providential dealings with our race: yet if it be allowed that he had this right; it must follow, that he had also a right to appoint the executioners: his express command fully authorized whatever was done in obedience to it; and the humanity, required in other cases, would at least have been as criminal in the Israelites, as it is when exercised in sheltering a wilful murderer from justice.

Had they cut off vast multitudes with undistinguishing slaughter, to gratify their own ambition, avarice, cruelty, or revenge; their conduct would have been most atrocious: or if they had *imagined* that such sacrifices would be pleasing to God, though he had never required them; no man, that duly reverences the scripture, would have attempted to justify them. One of these must be the case with all, who in succeeding ages, and in ordinary circumstances, have pretended to copy their example.

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But the same records, that inform us of the fact, contain also the Lord's express commission, ratified by the most undeniable and multiplied miracles; the authenticity of these books is evinced by the most unanswerable arguments; and the fulfilment of prophecies contained in them, (especially in the present state of the Jews, as connected with the coming of Christ, and the establishment of his religion,) concurs with many other infallible arguments to prove that they were penned by "holy men of God, who spake and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Thus the conduct of Israel is fully justified: for He, who gave us our lives, which we have forfeited by sin, has a right to take them away, in that manner which he sees most conducive to the display of his own glory.

The shedding of human blood becomes an act of public justice, yea, a required sacrifice to the honour of the divine command, when it is the blood of a wilful murderer; and in like manner those actions, which would be unjust, cruel, and horrid, if done by men to gratify their own passions, become acceptable and holy services, when done in obedience to God. For *we* have no right to take away the life of our neighbour, or in any way to injure him; even though he deserves death: but God has a right to punish every transgressor; "to him vengeance belongeth;" he commissions whom he pleases to inflict it: in ordinary circumstances the civil magistrate is the authorized "minister of God; a revenger to execute wrath upon evil doers:" and he was pleased

pleased to appoint the Israelites to a similar office, in respect of the Canaanites, with an extraordinary commission, sealed and ratified by his own miraculous interposition in their behalf.

As, therefore, the sheriff, that should permit the murderer to escape, whose execution had been entrusted to him, would be very criminal; nor would the plea of compassion and humanity exculpate him, for thus obstructing the course of public justice, and violating the duty of his office: so the Israelites were not culpable for putting the Canaanites, &c, to death, without mercy; but for sparing from selfish motives those whom God had devoted to destruction, in disobedience to his express command.

The objections, therefore, which have on this ground been made to the history of the Old Testament, are irrational, as well as presumptuous. But the instances before us are too instructive to be dismissed, without making some practical deductions from them. They were doubtless intended to stand upon record, as an affecting exhibition of the awful justice of God, and the odious nature and terrible effects of sin; and to lead men to consider his powerful indignation as the real cause of all the calamities, which fill the earth in more ordinary circumstances. We should *a priori* have thought, that the Lord would never give orders for such terrible executions: yet it is an authenticated fact that he did; and that he sharply rebuked and punished those, who failed in obeying them; as if they would pretend to be more merciful than He. Hence we learn that we
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are not competent to determine, what it becomes Him to do ; and that he will deal far more severely with the wicked in another world, than our proud, ignorant, and partial reasonings would lead us to suppose. And if these considerations have any influence in warning us to flee from the wrath to come, in exciting us to value, and seek for, the salvation of the gospel, and in teaching us to repent of, dread, hate, forsake, and watch against every sin : we shall then “ have a witness in ourselves,” that there was abundant goodness and mercy connected with the Lord’s righteous severity towards the devoted nations of Canaan.

II. The Lord has a right to shew mercy on whom he will, and to leave as many as he pleases under merited condemnation ; without assigning any reason for his conduct. Mercy to criminals, who deserve vengeance, cannot be a debt which justice requires to be paid ; but it must be a favour, which may either be conferred, or withheld, according to the good pleasure of our offended Sovereign : and yet it must be asserted, that he is bound to pardon sinners indiscriminately, at least all of certain descriptions ; and would deny them justice, if he did not : or else it must be allowed, that he has a sovereign right “ to have mercy on whom he will have “ mercy,” and to leave all the rest to the consequences and punishment of their crimes.

Indeed, having revealed a way in which he is pleased to pardon and bless sinners, his declarations and engagements have rendered it indispensably necessary,

cessary, for the honour of his name, that he should save all who comply with his plan, and come according to his appointment. But this whole design is the result of the richest love and mercy: and if it be found that some further interposition is absolutely requisite, previous to any *sinner's willingness to apply sincerely for all the blessings of salvation, in his prescribed way; to wait for them in the patient and serious use of all his instituted means; and to make every needful sacrifice, for the sake of obtaining them:* it will follow, that the Lord hath a right to interpose with his power to produce this willing mind, in such instances as he chuses, and to leave others to be hardened by the pride and lusts of their own hearts. He does not indeed make one to differ from another, without wise, righteous, and holy reasons: but they may be such as we cannot discover, or are incapable of comprehending: and he has a right to conceal them from us, if he sees good.

These rights the Lord exercised, when he spared not the angels that sinned; and when he revealed salvation to fallen men. He does the same, when he sends the gospel to one land and not to another: even as he blesses one country with plenty, and visits another with famine. And he acts as a Sovereign also, when he "quickens some who were dead in sin," and leaves others enslaved to their lusts, and entangled in their beloved delusions. If any have first given to him, it shall be recompensed to them: none will be punished who do not deserve it, or above their deservings: but if all have, in different
degrees,

degrees, merited punishment; and if none can expiate his own guilt, or advance any claim to forgiveness or eternal life, as justly due to him; then surely the Lord has a right to bestow them on whom he sees good, to the exclusion of all others.

We are indeed most graciously assured, that “every one that asketh, receiveth, &c.,” and as “God is no respecter of persons;” so “in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness,” (as all penitent believers do,) meets acceptance with him. But if men cast off his fear, and work wickedness, as all do who are left to themselves; he may either triumph over their obstinacy by the power of his converting grace, as he did in respect of Saul of Tarsus; or he may give them over to a strong delusion, as he did others who hated his truth. He has a right to do this, and we have no right to find fault: on the other hand, we should submit to his righteousness in adoring silence, and supplicate his mercy as our only refuge from deserved vengeance. This is our duty and wisdom as to ourselves: and we have nothing to do with the case of others; but to rest satisfied, that “the Judge of all the earth will do right;” and when called to it, “in meekness to instruct those that oppose themselves, if God, peradventure, will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.” (2 Tim. c. ii. v. 25, 26.)

III. The Lord has a right to appoint the way in which he will shew mercy, and to exclude all those who will not apply for it accordingly. As pardoning mercy, and the blessings connected with it, are an unmerited favour, which he may confer on whom he pleases; so he must have a right to prescribe the terms on which it shall be granted. It is deemed reasonable in the affairs of men, for the offended ruler to declare in what way he will receive his rebellious subjects to favour; and if they reject his conditions, and insist on their own terms, they are still considered as obstinate rebels, who entertain hopes of prevailing in the contest. Moreover, when a prince hath so crushed his factious subjects, that he hath them entirely in his power: if he be disposed to spare them, he will devise to do it in that manner which may best evince the equity of his administration, support his authority, honour the laws, and manifest the unreasonableness of their crimes, and the greatness of his clemency. But if the criminals might prescribe the terms of reconciliation, they would naturally be disposed to palliate their guilt, avoid any great humiliation, and secure themselves at all events. This must, therefore, be inadmissible. Yet in opposition to all the maxims of justice and sound policy, men reason, object, propose, and act, as if every sinner might demand forgiveness in his own way! and as if the principal enquiry were, about the most plausible, flattering, and agreeable method of salvation! Whereas, in common sense, we ought to ask this question, and

to use every method of obtaining a satisfactory answer to it, “ What way hath our offended Sovereign revealed, according to which he will shew mercy to sinners?” and this is the more necessary, as he has repeatedly declared, that there is no other way of being saved. (John, c. xiv. v. 6. Acts, c. iv. v. 12.)

All the methods, which men have devised, of obtaining acceptance with God, are calculated to secure the offender from shame and fear, to excuse his crimes, to cherish self-preference, or self-complacency, and to diminish his sense of the hatefulnes and desert of sin: whilst the honour of the divine law and justice, the interests of holiness, and the peace of God’s universal and everlasting kingdom, are disregarded, in comparison of the gratification of his irregular and enormous self-love. But the method which God hath revealed is arranged after another manner; and it is manifestly designed, to display the excellent glory of his own justice and mercy, to provide for the honour of his law and government; and to cover the pardoned rebel with shame and confusion, whilst it raises him from the depths of guilt and misery to the height of dignity and felicity. It is not then at all wonderful, that such a plan should fail of meeting with the cordial approbation of rebellious creatures, who are extremely prone to glory in their own wisdom, abilities, attainments, and performances. Pride and ambition, as well as other evil dispositions, will resist those assaults which threaten their destruction:

and a humbling holy salvation can never suit the taste of a lofty carnal mind. The preaching of the cross has, therefore, always been foolishness to those that perish: and they, who now reason against, deride, or revile it, only tread in the steps of ancient scribes and philosophers. But “where is the scribe? “where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God “at all times made foolish their boasted wisdom,” whenever “it exalted itself against the knowledge “of Christ?” For, after all that hath been, or can be objected, it will appear reasonable to all holy creatures, and to all true penitents, that the Lord should secure the honour of his own name and government, whilst he pardons and saves sinners; that he should insist upon it, that they should plead guilty, suppress every vain excuse, sue for the blessing as an unmerited favour, receive it with unfeigned gratitude, abhor their former crimes, and thus learn to love fervently, and serve with alacrity, their reconciled God and Father. This is the design and tendency of the gospel: and all holy affections, spiritual worship, devoted zealous obedience, watchfulness, patience, meekness, humility, self-denial, compassion, &c, spring from an intelligent and cordial reception of it: nor can they be produced by any other doctrine; though some of them may be plausibly counterfeited; and on the other hand men may hold the truth in unrighteousness.

The intervention of a mediator is very common in the affairs of men: and at the instance of some person, whose rank, character, or services, entitle
him

him to regard, favour is shewn to those, who themselves have no claim to it. This also accords with the divinely appointed method of shewing mercy to sinners. It is evident from facts, that men are often brought into difficult circumstances, through the misconduct of their progenitors, who in some sense represent and act for them: and the only authentic account, that hath been given of the manner, in which the human race was reduced to its present wretched condition, states, that Adam was the representative and surety of his posterity; and that we all fell in and with him, as the branches with the tree from which they spring. If then a recovery should ever be effected, it is consonant to reason to suppose that it would be the result of a similar arrangement; by “a second Adam,” another appointed representative, the surety of a new covenant. Such a Mediator, being related to us as one of the same race, and rendering honourable obedience to God for our benefit, might properly interpose in our behalf, that favour might be shewn to us for his sake. But as sin hath not only forfeited our title to the reward of righteousness, but also brought us under condemnation: so it might reasonably be expected, that the appointed Mediator should also honour the sanction of the divine law, by submitting voluntarily to such sufferings, as might render it suitable for a God of perfect purity and justice to exempt sinners from punishment, through his intercession for them.

If we suppose the constitution of such a Mediator, the completion of his stipulated services and sufferings, and his admission to the exercise of his office: we may then enquire, who are to receive the benefit of his mediation? Is it reasonable, that they should share the advantage, who reject his offered interposition, in proud self-confidence or infidel self-wisdom, or through carelessness, aversion to religion, and love of this present world? Who will venture to say, that such persons have any reason to expect to be saved by him? On the other hand, they who believe the testimony of God respecting his appointed Mediator, and, being humbly conscious that they need such a salvation, apply by faith for an interest in it, may reasonably be considered as exclusively partaking of it. These alone stand related to the Mediator, as his dependents and disciples; faith in Him being the sole bond of their union with or relation to him: therefore, they are justified and saved by faith alone, whilst others, not standing thus related to him, continue under the condemnation due to their sins, which is aggravated by neglecting so great salvation. However, whilst we affirm that faith in Christ is the sole recipient of salvation; we allow, that this faith is evidently distinguishable by its practical effects, from a mere assent, or a presumptuous confidence; which are not connected with repentance, and cannot work by love, purify the heart, and overcome the world; according to the scriptural declarations concerning that faith, which justifies us in the sight of God.

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But Who is there, in earth or in heaven, that is able thus to interpose between our offended Sovereign, and his rebellious subjects? Who can take their part, without seeming at least to oppose his authority and glory? Who is competent so to magnify the divine law and justice, by his single obedience and temporary sufferings, as to counterbalance the dishonour done them by the innumerable crimes of so many millions of transgressors, and to render their exemption from deserved eternal punishment, and their admission to eternal felicity conducive to the glory of God? In short, Who and What is He, whose Person and services are of such excellency and dignity, as to render his interposition in behalf of condemned criminals, worthy of the regard of the infinite Jehovah? All mere men are sinners, in their dispositions and actions; which must wholly disqualify them for such an interference. Holy angels, or other pure created intelligences, cannot possibly do more than make suitable returns of love, adoration, and grateful obedience, for benefits already received; and thus ensure the continuance of them: compared with the Lord even *they* are as nothing: had any of them undertaken the sinner's cause, they would have seemed to be accomplices in his rebellion: nor could there be a dignity or worth in their services, in any degree adequate to the high character of Mediator between God and his disobedient subjects: whilst a self-appointed mediator, or one chosen by the offending party, could

could not have had a proper admission to the exercise of such an office.

If then it had been revealed, that the Most High God was willing to treat with transgressors, through a mediator ; and to receive *them* to favour, in consideration of an obedience, connected with sufferings, to be voluntarily accomplished by *Him* : still no one could have been found intrepid and loving enough to undertake, competent to sustain, or authorized to assume, the arduous office ; and the whole must have come to nothing, if the Lord himself had not further interposed.

But it was his right to nominate the Mediator, and to prescribe the terms on which he should be admitted to that exalted station : and in his infinite wisdom and love he has appointed his only begotten Son, “ by whom also he made the worlds.” He is “ the second Adam, the Lord from heaven,” even “ Jehovah our Righteousness ;” who voluntarily assuming our nature into personal union with his Deity, became capable of obedience and suffering, and of infinitely honouring the law and justice of the Father, by fulfilling all righteousness as our Surety, and by offering himself a sacrifice for our sins. Having thus finished his mediatory humiliation, he arose a glorious conqueror over Satan, sin, and death : and ascending into heaven, “ to appear in “ the presence of God for us,” “ he became the “ author of eternal salvation to all them *that obey* “ *him* :” But to none else ; for he is not a Mediator in behalf of those, who reject his mediation.

“ Without

“ Without controverfy, great is the myſtery of “ godlineſs, God was manifeſt in the fleſh:” and the myſteries, which this ſtupendous plan implies, conſtitute the only ſpecious objection, which can be brought againſt it, on the ground of calm reaſoning and argument: (for pride and worldly luſts have many inſuperable objections to a ſyſtem, which tends to their utter deſtruction.) But why ſhould myſteries be thought inconfiſtent with the doctrines of *revealed religion*? when no religion can be without them, that owns an incomprehenſible God, the exiſtence of ſpirits, or the diſtinction of ſoul and body: and when even the nature and powers of material ſubſtances are inexplicably myſterious!

The doctrine which we are conſidering cannot be propoſed and explained with precision, unleſs we ſpeak of diſtinct perſons in the Unity of the Godhead. For the Father who ſent his only begotten Son; the Son who was ſent, and the Holy Ghoſt who teſtifies to, and glorifies the Son, muſt be in ſome reſpects diſtinct from each other: and we uſe the word *perſons*, as moſt conveniently expreſſing that diſtinction, and not as if it conveyed to us any adequate idea of ſo incomprehenſible a ſubject. The plan of redemption is of ſuch a nature, that we could not have known any thing of it, except by revelation: and it hath been argued with great force, that the whole deſign is ſo foreign to every conception of the human mind, and yet ſo perfectly ſuited to manifeſt the divine glory, in our ſalvation, that its very myſteriouſneſs proves it to be, (no human
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device, but) the contrivance of the only wise God, who originally declared it to mankind: for “ Eye “ hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God “ hath prepared for them that love him: but God “ hath revealed them to us by his Spirit,” (1 Cor. c. ii. v. 9—11.)

We can, therefore, do no more than appropriate by faith the information which God hath given us; and if the scriptures speak of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as standing in certain relations to each other, and sustaining distinct parts in man’s salvation; if they are represented as *willing*, and *acting distinctly*, though in perfect harmony; and if the powers, attributes, and operations ascribed to each of them be peculiar to Deity, and incommunicable to a finite being, (as omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, &c:) then we have sufficient authority for asserting, that there are three Persons in the unity of that God, into whose one Name all Christians are or ought to be baptized, (Matt. c. xxviii. v. 19.) The opposers of this mystery, therefore, should either prove that such things are not contained in the scripture, or that the scripture is not the word of God: for ’till one of these be completely performed; they only argue in a circle, and beg the question, when they assert the doctrine to be irrational, and therefore false. Indeed we know so little of being in general, that where an evident contradiction is not implied, it only proves a man’s arrogance, and rash presumption,

tion, to say that it is impossible for a substance to have such or such powers and properties, because he cannot conceive how it can possess them. What then must it be to affirm roundly, that the one living and true God cannot possibly subsist in three distinct co-equal Persons; (that is, that he cannot be three in one respect, and one in another :) though it hath often been proved, and cannot be disproved, that he hath revealed this concerning himself? It is impossible fully to explain, or clearly to conceive of such mysteries; but it is very reasonable to believe them on the Lord's own authenticated testimony: for though the subject be out of the reach of our rational powers, and therefore out of their province; it does not thence follow, that it is *contrary* to any of their sober and warranted decisions: as we do not mean that the Deity is *three* in the same respect in which he is *one*. It does not, therefore, accord with some men's self-voted applause for candour and liberality of sentiment, to censure or ridicule, as irrational, superstitious, or enthusiastical bigots, the whole remnant that in this respect adhere to the doctrine of scripture.

The apostle allowed, that his doctrine concerning Christ, as "God manifest in the flesh," was "without conotverfy a great mystery:" nay, he gloried in it "as the great mystery of *Godliness!*" From a spiritual and believing apprehension of this fundamental truth, all proper dispositions and affections, in the hearts of fallen men, are derived; all godliness results from, connects with, and centres in it: and

facts evince, that where it is opposed, explained away, or greatly kept out of sight, religion gradually dwindles into a lifeless form, or a heartless task; one truth of revelation is given up after another; and the progress is often very rapid to open impiety, infidelity, or even atheism itself. Whereas vital piety, in its most pure, genuine, and ennobling exercises, hath uniformly most flourished, where this doctrine hath been most fully preached, embraced and attended to. Indeed what can the great enemy of all good devise more effectual entirely to destroy godliness from among men, than to set them against "the great mystery of godliness?" But the church is built on this rock; and neither the power and rage of persecutors, nor the sagacity of heretical teachers, will ever be able to subvert it. Yet the vigorous efforts of the gates of hell, in the present age, beyond the example of former times, should excite the friends of truth, "to contend earnestly for the faith, which was once delivered to the saints."

A reflecting man will indeed make a pause, before he embrace so wonderful a doctrine, as an article in his creed, That he, who made and upholds all worlds, and *for* whom they were all created, who is truly God, equal to and one with the Father, should "become flesh and dwell among us," in order that he might obey, suffer, and die in our nature and for our salvation, is such a stupendous instance of condescension, compassion, and love, that we cannot attain to any adequate conception of

it! And even the size of our globe, and the insignificancy of the human race compared with the whole creation, will startle our minds, whenever we deeply think on this subject. But when we consider, that the earth was, as it were, the chosen theatre, on which the Lord was pleased to make himself known in all his harmonious perfections, to his rational creatures; that the whole was devised and accomplished, “to the praise of his glory;” that the meanness and vileness of those, on whom his mercy and grace were bestowed, proportionably recommended them as most illustrious and adorable; and that all holy intelligences through eternal ages will admire and celebrate that display of the divine character, which was made by the cross of Emmanuel: such reflections, I say, will satisfy the humble enquirer; and, whilst he is filled with astonishment at this “love of Christ which passeth knowledge,” he will by no means deem it incredible. For an adequate reason being assigned, why such a plan should be formed in the eternal counsels of God, even “for the praise of his own glory,” in man’s salvation; and sufficient evidence being given, that it is indeed the word of God, “who cannot lie;” his doubts and hesitation, like those of the incredulous apostle, will vanish; or rather be exchanged for adoring wonder, joy, and gratitude; and he will no longer delay to address the incarnate Saviour as “his Lord and his God.”

It is also the uniform doctrine of scripture, that “without shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins:” and where the Mosaic law appointed no sacrifice, the transgressor was left to bear his own iniquity. In common language an atonement implies the idea of compensation: he, who is pardoned, has not made atonement, though a pacification have taken place; but he, that hath borne the punishment due to his crimes, has atoned for them, though no pacification follow. In a lax way of speaking, repentance is sometimes said to atone for a slight offence: but generally, in more important matters, some service, or suffering, which reinstates the law in its honour, is supposed to be required: so that the language of scripture, on this subject, coincides with that of the more exact reasoners on the affairs of human government.

The institution of sacrifices represented the imputation of guilt to the innocent, by translation from the sinner to the devoted and spotless animal; so that the latter suffered death, and was either wholly or in part consumed on the altar by fire, the emblem of the divine vengeance; whilst the former escaped deserved punishment: and every one would allow, that no more injustice was done to those animals, which were offered for sacrifice, than to such as were slaughtered for food. “But it was impossible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin.” If it were enquired, for what reason it could not? no answer can be given but this; because such sacrifices were no adequate
display

display of the divine justice, or the desert of sin; nor could they reinstate the law of God in its pristine honour and dignity. The same reason is equally valid, against the sufficiency and efficacy of every sacrifice, which any mere creature could offer: and, therefore, the only begotten of the Father interposed and said, “ Lo, I come, to do thy will O God:” and as his obedience unto death was, strictly speaking, of infinite value and efficacy; so it was most honourable for God to pardon and bless believing sinners on the account of it. But how, say some persons, can it consist with justice to punish the innocent and holy instead of the guilty? This question hath often been asked, and as often solidly answered; and yet it is frequently alluded to, as if it contained an insuperable objection to the doctrine of redemption by the blood of Christ. Let us, however, be careful not to mistake confidence for demonstration; and not to imagine, that the hasty conclusions of our partial uninformed understandings must needs accord with the decisions of infinite wisdom.

Human sacrifices were never appointed by the Lord, but were always the objects of his peculiar abhorrence: yet, I apprehend, this did not imply, that it would have been inconsistent with his justice, to order the death of any man, in any way that he pleased. But as every man deserves death for his own sins; so none could expiate the guilt of others, or properly typify the spotless Lamb of God: and since he was not pleased to institute
such

such oblations, it would have been a combination of the most impious presumption with the most atrocious murder, for men of their own minds to have presented them.

But indeed, the life and soul of man are not so much his own, to be disposed of at his own pleasure, as they are the property of the Creator to be made subservient to his will. If then any man could be found who had never sinned, and he could be willing to devote himself to death and destruction, in order to expiate the crimes of another, he would have no right to do it: and even could this be admitted and accepted, it would be no more than an adequate display of the divine justice, in the salvation of a single person, who had deserved the final wrath of God. Nor can any reason be assigned, why the blood of an innocent animal could not take away sin, which will not also prove, that the *temporal* death of a mere man, even if he were perfectly holy, would be utterly insufficient to expiate the guilt of a single transgressor, or to rescue him from *eternal* condemnation: much less then could it atone for the multiplied and heinous sins of unnumbered millions.

But if we admit the “great mystery of godliness,” we then behold a divine Person, dwelling in our nature, as his holy temple; and possessing such a right in his body and soul, as no other man could possibly acquire. He voluntarily assumed his humanity, in sovereign wisdom and love, for this very purpose, with the concurring appointment

ment of the Father, and the omnipotent operation of the Divine Spirit, by whom it was produced and preserved perfectly holy. Having, therefore, honoured the law by an obedience of more value, than that of all mere creatures, he magnified its awful sanction, by enduring it in his willing submission to the agonizing and ignominious death of the cross. Thus the justice of God was infinitely displayed; and every purpose was completely answered; though he was subject to no more than a temporal curse to redeem us from one that would have been eternal: and it became honourable to all the divine perfections, that being risen, and ascended into heaven, he should be exalted to the mediatorial throne, and exercise sovereign authority and almighty power, as dwelling in human nature, for the salvation of all those who believe in him.

The law, of "loving our neighbour as ourselves," implies, that we ought willingly to bear a less suffering, when we can by so doing preserve another from greater misery. The man Christ Jesus was under this law: and being able, through the union of his humanity with the Godhead, to rescue an innumerable multitude of the human race from eternal punishment, and to bring them to eternal felicity, by enduring temporal agonies and death for their sakes; it was essential to the perfection of his obedience, that he should thus suffer for their salvation. He was their voluntary Surety, who had undertaken to make payment for them;

and he was able to do it without impoverishing himself: so that he attained to his mediatorial glory, the perfections and law of God were honoured, and man's salvation was effected, "by his "one oblation of himself."

What then was there in this transaction inconsistent even with our ideas of justice? The creditor does not scruple to receive payment from the surety, when the original debtor is insolvent: his voluntary engagement makes him in that case the debtor; and, provided the payment do not much impoverish him, the requisition of it is not deemed censurable, even on the ground of humanity. Thus payment "was exacted of our Surety, and he "became answerable." Even if a man should willingly submit to a less loss or suffering, (as a large fine, or tedious imprisonment,) in order to rescue another from capital punishment; provided the vigour of the administration could be thus supported, it would not be deemed inconsistent with justice, that the innocent should suffer instead of the guilty, for "*volenti non fit injuria.*"* A father hath been known to offer so large a sum, to ransom the life of a son condemned for treason, that had it been accepted, he must have suffered exceeding great degradation: but the refusal in such cases is not grounded on the injustice of the innocent willingly suffering for the guilty; but on the insufficiency of such a compensation to the violated peace of the community.

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* No wrong is done to him, who suffers willingly.

Who then can deny that the Lord had a right to provide in this manner for the honour of his own name, in pardoning and saving his rebellious creatures: however humiliating it might be to their hearts, or contrary to their vain reasonings and imaginations? or that he has a right finally to exclude from his favour all those, without exception, who persist in opposing or rejecting his method of salvation? But the allowance of these "rights of God" is intimately connected with the reception of two doctrines, which are of principal importance in christianity, viz, that of "a real atonement for sin, being made by the vicarious sufferings and death of Christ, who is God manifest in the flesh;" and that of "justification before God by faith in Christ alone, and not by any of our own works." These are indeed necessary to distinguish living faith, from that which is dead and unprofitable, and for other important purposes; but they can do nothing towards the sinner's justification: for if he be a true believer, he is *already* "justified by faith:" and if he be an unbeliever, "the wrath of God abideth on him," and none of his own works can avail him any thing *for justification*, so long as he continues in unbelief.

IV. The Lord hath a right to determine the qualifications requisite for those, who shall be at last received into heaven; and the manner in which they shall "be made meet to be partakers of that inheritance of the saints in light." The title to this blessedness is wholly the gift of God through

Jefus Chrift; and the meetnefs for it is an additional bounty, by which they are made capable of enjoying it.

No employment or object can give delight, without we poffefs the capacity or appetite to which it is fuited. Every animal is happy in its own element, and relifhes the pleasures fuited to its own nature: but tranfpofition produces uneafinefs, diftrefs, and at length deftruction. Some men find fatisfaction in one courfe of life; others feek their enjoyment in a contrary purfuit: and, unlefs a change could be wrought in the ftate of their minds, they would be rendered very uneasy, if their fituations and manners of life were reverfed. One man relifhes the active fcenes of public life, another loves retirement: fome delight in learning, others in diflipated or fenfual pleasures: many have a tafte for and are gratified with mufic, poetry, painting, fculpture, &c; whilft others difregard fuch ingenious elegances, and are much pleafed with plans of improvement in agriculture, mechanics, &c. This diverfity of taftes; thefe varied capacities of finding fatisfaction in purfuits, which are infipid and irkfome to others, arife from the different ftate of men's minds, by nature, or through education and habit: and he, who entirely wants that peculiar turn of mind, which pertains to any employment or purfuit, is wholly excluded from the pleasure, which other men take in it: he can have no communion with them, but is uneasy, out
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of his element, and a troublesome intruder, when he attempts to associate with them.

That regulation of the mental faculties, which the scripture calls *holiness*, is precisely the same to the soul, which health is to the body; and without it there can be no *spiritual* enjoyment. Aversion to God and the exercises of religious worship, pride, ambition, envy, hatred, avarice, sensuality, &c. are diseases of the soul, which produce uneasiness, and tend to entire misery. But the capacity of perceiving and delighting in the consummate glory and beauty of the divine character, and a disposition supremely to love, admire, and adore the excellency of God, as manifested in his works; a will submitted in sweet acquiescence to his precepts and providential appointments; united with humility, gratitude, simple dependence, holy zeal, expansive love of our brethren and neighbours, justice, purity, temperance, truth, meekness, &c. constitute a healthful state of mind. As far as these prevail we enjoy heaven; and when contrary principles have the ascendancy, we experience a misery, in a degree resembling that of hell.

The joys of heaven are, (rationally as well as scripturally,) supposed to consist in the manifested presence, and complete enjoyment of God: but as he is infinitely holy, what happiness could the beatific vision afford to the sensual, the dissipated, the covetous, the ambitious, or the profane? Unless we are previously made meet for these pure and spiritual pleasures; the society, the objects, the
employments,

employments, and the adorations, which constitute the happiness of the saints in light, would be wholly incongruous to us: we should be out of our element in the holy residence of God: every thing would weary, disgust, or distress us: even the happiness enjoyed by others would excite our envy and malignant passions: our dissatisfied minds would be tempted to wish the interruption or destruction of those joys, which we could not share: finding this impossible, our torture would be increased, and we should wish to retire from a scene which so disquieted us; nor would rebellion and blasphemous thoughts of God himself fail to arise in our disappointed hearts. So that admission into heaven (were that possible,) could not preserve unholy creatures from positive misery.

It should also be observed, that the holiness and happiness of pardoned sinners must have an intimate connexion with the remembrance of their former state and character, and the manner of their deliverance. Deep humiliation, ardent gratitude, for such unmerited mercy, and an especial regard to the condescending compassion of their great Redeemer, who shed his blood for their salvation, must be essential to that holiness to which they are recovered: and it is impossible, but that they should have a whole system of feelings, (so to speak,) peculiar to themselves, in which creatures that never sinned cannot have any communion with them. The objects of their special contemplation, the topics on which they will delight to expatiate, and
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the sources of their love, joy, gratitude, and adoration must differ from those of such rational agents, as never were in their situation, and so did not want a similar deliverance: even as a condemned traitor, who being penitent has received pardon and great preferment, must have other sensations and cause for gratitude, than those courtiers have whose loyalty has never been interrupted.

The scriptural representations, therefore, of the heaven into which pardoned sinners are admitted, peculiarly relate to their continual ascriptions of praise to God, and to the Lamb that was slain, and who redeemed them with his blood: as it might rationally have been supposed that they would. If then, it were possible for a sinner to be recovered to the favour of God, and to angelic holiness, without deep self-abasement for sin, gratitude for redemption, and a strong attachment to the Person, honour, and cause of the Redeemer: he could not join the songs of the saints in light, assist in their adorations, or participate their peculiar joys. Nay, he must either shun or be excluded from the society of angels, if he did not judge, “the Lamb that was slain,” to be worthy of all possible honour, worship, power, and love from every creature in the whole universe.

It is indeed impossible, that a sinner can be made holy, without being brought into that frame of mind which hath been described, as the indispensable qualification for heaven; a wedding garment, the want of which will ensure any man's exclusion,
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when the King shall come to see the guests. But if this could not be so undeniably proved, the Lord would nevertheless have full right to determine, that without this judgment, these affections, and this capacity for the work and worship of heaven, no man should find admission thither; and to decree irreversibly, that unless a measure of this holy state of mind be obtained on earth, the sinner's exclusion shall be final and eternal; that the "wicked shall be driven away in his wickedness," and "that his end is, that he shall be destroyed for ever."

He hath also a sovereign right to appoint the manner, in which sinners shall be made partakers of these qualifications. This part of our subject comprises the doctrine of regeneration and sanctification by the Holy Spirit, which evidently constitutes a grand peculiarity, and an essential part of revelation: nor can any man consistently allow the divine authority of the scriptures, and interpret them soberly, according to the common rules of language, without being constrained to own the necessity of a divine influence from the Spirit of God, to communicate spiritual life to those who were dead in sin, and utterly incapable of relishing the holy pleasures of communion with God, and other exercises of pure religion; and to recover the soul to the divine image, by a gradual transformation and renovation; and that without such a supernatural change, no sinner can be saved.

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This doctrine is commonly derided and vilified as irrational and enthusiastic; without any discrimination of the different ways, in which it hath been stated. Yet, if indeed the Lord be perfectly holy, and the society, employment, and joys of heaven be also holy; and if it be allowed, (what a man must be hardy to deny, since facts demonstrate it,) that we are naturally carnal, and have no relish for spiritual excellency or spiritual pleasures: then the doctrine will be seen to have as firm a ground in reason as in scripture. Such an entire internal change must take place, or men can never delight in God, or be happy in heaven. A divine Agent must produce a renovation, to which all other power is evidently inadequate, and which is energetically represented in scripture, under the metaphors of a *new birth*, a *new creation*, and a *resurrection from the death of sin* unto newness of life.

Indeed facts evince, that they, who reject this appointed method of sanctification, uniformly continue enslaved to some sinful passion, and entire strangers to that spirituality, which capacitates the soul to delight in such services on earth, as correspond in some measure with the work and worship of heaven. And surely the Lord hath a right to leave those under the power of their proud and carnal nature, who reject, and refuse to depend on, the promised influences of the Divine Spirit, to renew their souls to the image of God in righteousness and true holiness! He cannot be under any obligation to exert his omnipotence to rescue from sin and misery, such persons

sons, as deny the possibility, or reality of such a change, or who deride, despise, and revile it. If men think that they can make themselves holy, they are allowed to try what they can do: but if they persist in the vain attempt, or rest satisfied without an internal renovation; the Lord may justly leave them "to be filthy still," and exclude them as polluted from his holy inheritance.

Moreover, the Lord has a right to give the Holy Spirit, in what way he sees good: and he hath promised this inestimable blessing, through the mediation of his Son, as the purchase of his atonement, and the fruit of his intercession, to be sought by faith in his Name. But many seem to detach the work of the Spirit from redemption by the blood of Christ; and to forget that his principal office is to glorify the Saviour, in the sinner's heart, and in the church. Now, if men will seek the gift of God, not in the way of his appointing, but in one of their own devising; he has a right to withhold it from them: even though the consequence be, that they are left to mistake impressions, feelings, change of opinions, convictions, or high affections of a mere selfish kind, for a new creation unto holiness. Nor can their delusions be any impeachment of his justice, truth, and goodness.

Divine influences are absolutely needful to change a reasonable creature from carnal to spiritual: and the nature of them will best appear, by considering their effects; as they lead men to take pleasure in every part of God's worship and service, to hate,
repent

repent of, and forsake, all sin, to receive Christ as their Prophet, Priest, and King, and to produce the fruits of righteousness, from evangelical motives, in every part of their conduct; uprightly and without reserve, though not perfectly. These are “the fruits of the Spirit:” and it is not at all necessary that we should be able to answer questions, or solve difficulties, concerning the *modus operandi*, or the manner in which the divine agent produces this new creation: for we scarce know any thing of the manner, in which the process of nature in vegetation, and the communication of natural life, is conducted, in the ordinary course of things. It is more important for us to know, that if we would possess a spiritual judgment, with holy dispositions and affections, and perform any acceptable service to God; we must depend on the Holy Spirit, to illuminate, renovate, strengthen, help, and comfort us; we must seek this blessing by faith in Christ, using all appointed means, and avoiding impediments and hindrances; and we must be willing to give him the whole glory of “working in us to will and to do, according to his pleasure.” This may suffice for every practical purpose; and we should thus seek our meetness for heaven, as well as our title to it, by faith in the Lord Jesus, and his meritorious intercession for sinners.

V. The Lord has a right to appoint the means of grace, in attending on which sinners shall receive from him the blessings of salvation, and render to him the tribute of honour and gratitude,

is due to him for them. This subject coincides in good measure with a topic insisted on in the former part of this treatise*. Yet the sinner's approach to, and acceptable worship of, God; his application for the supply of all his wants from the Saviour's fulness; and the glory ascribed by him to the God of all grace, even the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, form a consideration distinct from that of the services required of holy creatures. The appointments before considered are still obligatory: but the redeemed must attend on them in some respects after a different manner, and for other purposes; whilst there are others, peculiar to the religion of a sinner. The ordinances of the New Testament suit the ends proposed by them: and whilst they ascribe glory to God our Saviour, and honour all his perfections and wonderful works; they are calculated to illuminate the mind, to affect and meliorate the heart, and to form that spiritual judgment and disposition, which hath been proved essential to true religion.

This might be distinctly shewn to be the tendency of daily and diligent searching the scriptures; in humble dependence on the teaching of the Spirit of Truth, to enable us to understand, believe, love and obey them: of prayer, secret, social, and public, united with humble confessions, adoring praises and thanksgivings, and affectionate supplications for our brethren and neighbours: of meditation on the cross of Christ, the attributes and works of God, death, judgment, and the eternal world: of the communion

* Section V.

that believers maintain with each other, in edifying conversation, and acts of worship: of baptism, (the initiatory ordinance of christianity,) in the one name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, with water, (the universal purifier,) as the outward sign of the washing away of sin; and as the profession of our reliance on the Father's mercy, through the Redemption of the Son, and by the sanctification of the Spirit; our devotedness to the service of the triune God our Saviour; and an earnest desire that our children also may share the blessings, and sustain the character of christians: And finally, of the Lord's Supper, where we unite in confessing our lost estate as sinners, in avowing our belief of gospel truth, our obligations to him who ransomed our souls with his blood, and our purpose of yielding ourselves to his service, and joining ourselves to him and his people, to walk with them in peace and holiness. All these institutions, if properly and seriously attended on, are admirably suited to produce the intended effects, and to subserve the manifestation of the divine glory and the salvation of our souls.

But if this were less evident, the Lord would nevertheless have an undeniable right to appoint for us the means of grace; and it would be our bounden duty to approach him by them. Nor can we reasonably question his right to withhold his grace and salvation from all those, who neglect these means: whether they substitute human inventions in their stead; or, confiding in their superior talents, conclude

clude that such helps are not necessary for *them*; or neglect all godliness, supposing moral decency of conduct to be sufficient; or whatever else may be the pretence of their disobedience.

When this matter shall be fully investigated, it will be found that all those who have come short of salvation, in places favoured with the light of revelation; in one way or other neglected the *due* attendance on instituted means: and that the Lord left them, in his righteous sovereignty, under the influence of pride, sloth, and ungodliness, to the fatal consequences of their own perverse choice.

Among the appointed means of rendering sinners wise unto salvation, the public preaching of the gospel has a peculiar pre-eminence; for "faith comes by hearing." The world has indeed at all times treated it with contempt, as "the foolishness of preaching:" yet every age has experienced it to be "the power of God unto salvation," because "it pleases Him by it to save them that believe:" and the prevalence of genuine piety has, at all times and in all places, borne proportion to the degree, in which the whole doctrine of Christ, our Prophet, Priest, and King, (in respect of his Person, atonement, mediation, grace, love, authority, and faithfulness; with his truths, invitations, promises, warnings, precepts and counsels;) has thus been made known to mankind: or in the emphatical words of the apostle, to the degree in which, "Christ hath been set forth as evidently crucified among them." The power of God is engaged to give efficacy

ficacy to this kind of preaching: but all other doctrines are left to their native energy, whether that be more or less. The suitableness of the institution might be shewn: but it suffices to say, that God hath prescribed it. His right to do this cannot be disputed; and our wisdom and duty consist in submitting to his authority. The minister, therefore, is required to preach the gospel of salvation faithfully and zealously, to the utmost of his ability and opportunity: and others ought to promote the preaching of it, as far as they have it in their power; and to attend on it stately and occasionally, on the Lord's day, and at other times, when no real hindrance prevents, and when other duties do not interfere.

The Lord has also a right to confine the blessing to those, who honour his appointed medium of communication; and to exclude all such as despise and neglect it. Some persons, (perhaps overrating their own abilities or attainments,) deem it beneath *them* to attend on preachers, who are considered as incompetent to give them instruction; or they think reading and study better calculated to answer the design. Others prefer those teachers, who deliver moral essays, or discuss philosophical questions, to such as preach of regeneration and redemption, with the distinguishing nature and effects of them. Others speak and act, as if joining in forms of devotion were the sole end of assembling publicly for religious purposes: and they consider the public preaching of the doctrine of Christ

to be nearly, or wholly superfluous. But if the professed minister of God, neglect this grand means of saving sinners, he will be liable to condemnation for disobeying orders, and his other services will be generally useless and often mischievous. They, in every station, who would do good to mankind by rendering them more sober, righteous, and godly; and yet do not consider the preaching of the gospel as the grand means of effecting their purpose, need not wonder to find that their endeavours are not crowned with much success: and the man who would seek the edification of his own soul, or who desires that his children should fear and serve the Lord; and yet neglects to attend on the preaching of the gospel when he has opportunity, or to bring them with him, has no reason to expect a blessing; because he sets up his own will and wisdom, in opposition to the authority and appointment of God.

No doubt other means are often blessed for all these purposes; and the doctrine of salvation is disseminated by the reading of the scriptures, and other good books, by letters, conversation, &c: but these are principally useful, in first exciting men's attention to divine things, when the preaching of the gospel, in its genuine purity, is not vouchsafed; not where it is *proudly, contemptuously, indolently, or timidly* neglected: for that constitutes a direct refusal to recognize the Lord's right to appoint his own means; after the example of Cain, who may be supposed to have preferred his own devices to God's express institutions.

VI. Con-

VI. Connected with this, we may observe, that the Lord has a right to nominate his own ambassadors, or messengers to mankind: as well as his vicegerents in the government of the world. The latter are the ministers of his providence; the former the ministers of his word, and the stewards of his mysteries: Thus far there is a coincidence: but one remarkable difference must be noticed. Every man who is established in authority is, *for the time*, the Lord's vicegerent. "The powers *that be* are "ordained of God;" and we are not cautioned in scripture against corrupt rulers, or required or even allowed to disregard them. But we are instructed by the same word, not to look on every man, who has an outward appointment to the ministry, "as the "messenger of the Lord of hosts: on the contrary "we are directed to distinguish between true and "false teachers; and to beware of false prophets—"for by their fruits we may know them." It should therefore, be first seriously and candidly enquired, whether the person in question be indeed the Lord's ambassador to his sinful creatures? or whether his disposition, conduct and doctrine warrant a persuasion, that he is a servant of Christ, employed in teaching men the way of salvation? When this is determined; we shall perceive that the Lord's right to appoint his own messengers implies many essential duties, obligatory upon all men: "for he that receiveth whomsoever he sends receiveth him."

There have been times, in which nominal ministers of religion, without proper discrimination of

character, were superstitiously venerated, and lavishly provided for; and too great cause has been given for exclamations against priestcraft, and spiritual encroachments or usurpations: nor can it be said, that at present, the funds, which have long been appropriated to the support of the clergy, are unexceptionably applied. But superstition seems on every side to give place to impiety and infidelity: all ministers are considered by numbers as useless or mischievous; no discrimination is made between the exemplary pastor, who labours in the word and doctrine, and men of a contrary description; no medium seems to be thought of, between superstitious veneration and profane contempt; and there is ground to apprehend, that it will, ere long, be the prevailing idea, that ministers of all kinds, sentiments, and characters, should be cashiered, left to indigence, or driven to secular employments: the consequences of which would be, a gradual, and not a very tardy, destruction of all religion.

It is, therefore, proper to enter a protest against this flagrant violation of the rights of God; as well as to call men seriously to reflect on the consequences of such a measure: and it may suffice to propose a few questions on the subject. Has not the great Proprietor of the earth a right to prescribe what rules he pleases, in respect of the use, that he would have made of that proportion, which he allots to nations or individuals? Is it not reasonable, that we should honour Him with our substance; and, that we should consecrate a portion of it to his
 immediate

immediate service, in any way he sees good to appoint? Can his worship be conducted, or can persons be qualified to lead the devotions of others, or instruct them in his truths and will, and be employed in this manner, without a considerable expence? Hath he not a right to demand a proportion of men's property for this purpose, as well as to pay tribute to support the expences of civil government; as both are his ordinances, for the benefit of mankind? Does not the whole scripture require this from the professed people of God? And is not the title of ministers to a decent subsistence inseparable from the divine authority of revelation, and confirmed by every external, and internal argument adduced in support of it? Would not then, depriving them of their maintenance by a national act amount to a national renunciation of christianity, and apostacy from God and religion? And finally, do not all those, who want, (not to regulate or alter the method of their maintenance, or to proportion it in another manner, but) to get rid of the expence of it altogether, evidently shew their aversion to religion, their contempt of God, and their idolatrous love of the world, and the things of the world? (Mal. c. iii. v. 8—10.)

But whilst such questions may very properly be proposed, in the present state of human affairs: yet the friends of religion need be under no alarm on this account. The promises, which secure the church against the assaults of every enemy, ensure also a succession of faithful witnesses: and the Lord

will most certainly provide for them, and also teach them to be well satisfied with their scanty subsistence: whilst the interests of the covetous, the ambitious, the ignorant, or profligate clergy of any denomination, are comparatively of little consequence.

We have allowed, that men should judge who are, and who are not, the Lord's ambassadors or stewards: but it must be added, that the determination must be made, by the rules of his word, and not by the maxims of a vain world. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." Many are sent and owned of Him for great usefulness, who appear very despicable to the self-confident and carnally minded. Perhaps they are deficient in learning or other admired accomplishments; they are not distinguished by superior abilities; they have manifold infirmities; or the rank in life, whence they were called, was low and obscure: and on such grounds they are slighted, as well as for the subject of their preaching. But the Lord sees good to employ such servants in his work, "that no flesh should glory in his presence," (1 Cor. c. i. v. 29—31;) and to shew that their doctrine is made effectual, not by the excellency of man's speech, but by the power of the Holy Spirit. He has a right to appoint whom he pleases to his work; and they who deride, oppose, or neglect them on that account, exclude themselves from the blessing, which more humble and teachable persons appropriate.

The ministers of God may in very many things
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be inferior to their auditors; but they must magnify their office: they are merely a voice, and the Lord is the speaker, as far as they declare his truths: and he can speak by whom he will, or edify the wisest and most learned of the human race, by the words of the meanest of all those, who ever spoke in his name. But let these hints suffice on a topic, which may be deemed improper to be insisted on, by one who is himself employed as a minister: the apostle Paul has, however, repeatedly discussed the subject; and to his epistles I refer the reader for the particulars of those duties, which are owing to the Lord's ambassadors, and of the guilt and danger that are incurred by neglecting them.

VII. The Lord has a right to order all things in his providence, for the benefit of his believing people; even when this is connected with multiplied calamities upon, or the tremendous destruction of, his enemies, how numerous soever they may be. It will hardly be disputed by a reasonable man, that God may justly prefer the happiness of such as love and obey him, to that of those who rebel against, and blaspheme him: and if, in his abundant mercy, he reconciles a number of rebels to himself, through the gospel of his Son; so that they become his friends and worshippers, whilst others persist in their enmity; he may justly arrange every providential event in subserviency to the good of the former, without any equal or comparable regard to the welfare of the latter. But if they are at length brought to repentance, and faith in Christ, they too shall have

have peace with God, and their portion among his friends.

This is evidently the doctrine of revelation; "all things," says the apostle, "are for your sakes;" "all things are your's, for ye are Christ's:" and the covenant of grace secures these blessings to believers by an irrevocable engagement. Many things, relative to this doctrine, have been strenuously opposed, and thought liable to insuperable objections; perhaps, in a degree from inattention to the subject, or from viewing it through a false medium: for the character and behaviour of the persons concerned are inseparable from their privileges; if they act inconsistent with their profession, they proportionably want evidence, that they are interested in these promises; and none who commit habitual and allowed sin, and die impenitent, will be found among this favoured company, whatever their creed or confidence may have been.

But I do not mean to discuss so controverted a subject, in this place. It is manifest that all the angels are ministering spirits unto Christ, for the benefit of his true disciples: that he is Head over all things, as their Protector and Friend; that the rise and fall of empires, and other grand events which occur in providence, as well as more ordinary dispensations, are regulated as best conduces to their advantage; that life and death, things present and things to come, are their's; that Jesus, their Brother and Friend, hath the keys of the grave, and of the unseen world; and that persecutions, tribulations,

tions, and temptations work together for their good. Thus all the circumstances of their continuance here, and removal hence, are ordered, by infinite wisdom, in entire love to their souls; the earth shall remain, till the whole company of the redeemed be gathered in, and made meet for heaven; and the resurrection of the dead, and the day of judgment with its important and eternal consequences, will subserve their final and complete felicity.

As this is the undeniable right, and determined purpose of God; we ought to be silent before him, not daring to object to any of his dealings: we should submit to his righteousness and deprecate his displeasure; and in preference to all other interests or distinctions, we should desire and seek admission into the company of his people; and then patiently endure trials, waiting the Lord's time of deliverance, in entire reliance on his wisdom, truth, and love; and in confident expectation of deriving important advantage from all those events, that now dismay or distress us.

Many other particulars might be adduced, and shewn to be the unalienable Rights of God. He allots to every man his term of probation, and preparation for a future judgment; and the measure of his religious advantages and opportunities: he determines the degree, in which he will bear with a sinner's provocations, before he gives him up to judicial hardness of heart, or cuts him off by death: he distributes to every one his measure of talents, trials, and comforts, and appoints the situation, rank, and work of every individual, in the church, and the commu-

community; and he will dispense rewards and punishments at the last, as he sees good, and without admitting of any appeal from his sovereign award. Each of these might have been made the subject of a distinct section; and the same train of reasoning, concerning the Rights of God and our duties, would have been applicable and conclusive.

Indeed the subject is almost inexhaustible: and the selection, which hath been made as a specimen, was principally suggested by the consideration of the state of society in the present age, and the peculiar methods adopted in opposing the doctrines and precepts of revealed religion; and in treating with indignant contempt whatever the Lord hath determined to honour, in his word, or by his providence.

But a serious and attentive mind is the grand requisite for making a right judgment in subjects of this nature: and if any person should cast his eye over these pages, with a disposition to turn them into ridicule; to seek objections to the mode of reasoning employed in them, through aversion to the inferences deduced from it; to give them a cursory perusal, as little interested in such discussions, or *merely* to gratify his curiosity, by examining what could be proposed to the public with such a title: I cannot entertain any sanguine expectations, that he will derive benefit from the work, nor could this have been reasonably hoped, even if it had been executed in a manner more worthy of the cause that is pleaded in it. On the other hand, the candid, diligent, humble, and obedient enquirer
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after truth, may probably derive from it some assistance in this interesting pursuit, whilst the experienced christian will perceive, that the principles, on which we proceed, are applicable to a vast variety of particulars in his own concerns; and that the Lord hath a right to lay those burdens on him, to take those comforts from him, and to require those self-denying services at his hands, which have most tempted him to despair, repine, or turn aside from the path of submissive obedience: and that he ought on such occasions to recognize the Rights of God, to rely on his wisdom, truth, and love, to humble himself under his mighty hand, and to say "it is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good."

It is manifest from what hath been stated, that the Rights of God are very little regarded, either in the reasonings or actions of men; nay that they are, in general, most shamefully neglected, questioned, or opposed: no man can deny this, without directly patronizing ingratitude, rebellion, and impiety; or avowing himself an atheist, or such a sceptic as excludes the God, he pretends to acknowledge, from all concern in the affairs of the universe. This again demonstrates that the state of the world is exactly what the Bible represents it to be; and that men want just such a remedy, as is therein revealed. So that the principles and reasonings of infidels, (as well as the irreligion and wickedness of mankind in general,) abundantly confirm the truth, suitableness, and value of that revelation, which they despise and oppose.

The serious reader will also perceive, that if all

persons paid a due regard to the Rights of God, in every part of their conduct; it would conduce far more to true liberty, peace, and happiness, than all other means united can do: that no contests about the rights of men, or forms of government &c, in what manner soever they may be adjusted, or terminate, will do any thing effectual to meliorate the condition of mankind in general, till the Rights of God be more attended to; till his gospel be embraced, his ordinances frequented, his commandments obeyed, his example imitated, his favour supremely valued, his providence submitted to and depended on, and his glory made the great object in their habitual conduct, by governors and subjects, and by men of every rank and description in society. This, and this alone, would terminate wars, massacres, oppression, slavery, faction, fraud, violence, licentiousness, and all the other crimes and mischiefs, which fill the earth with confusion and misery. So that it will at last be known, that those persons are in reality, the best friends of mankind, (though they do not here expect to be thought so,) who are most careful to render to the Lord the honour due unto his name, and most zealous and assiduous by all proper means, to bring all others within the sphere of their influence, (whether that be more circumscribed, or more extensive,) to do the same; according to the several duties of their situation, in the family, the community, and the church of God.

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In a sceptical age, when every part of divine truth is questioned, opposed, and even held up to derision, beyond the example of former times: and when mental poison is administered in pamphlets, periodical publications, and other works on various subjects, which are replete with wit, ingenuity or learning, to render it agreeable and unsuspected: it has been thought, by some friends of Evangelical Truth, that a salutary antidote might be given, by little Tracts on the most important Subjects, which could be widely dispersed at a small expence.

The author of this work, having for some time reflected on this matter, has at length determined to make such an attempt, by publishing a course of small essays, in numbers, (price 1d. each, with allowance to those who buy a quantity.) These he intends to arrange in such a manner, that every number shall conclude the subject, (unless in a few instances it be deemed expedient to extend it to two:) and yet that the whole may make a neat volume when finished. The title page, therefore, after the first number, will be omitted, or only printed on the cover: and a general title page will be given at the end of the work. The pages will also be continued throughout; except any persons wish to have some printed and paged as separate pamphlets. Thus the purchaser may either disperse them singly, or reserve them for binding. No essay will contain less than 12 pages duodecimo, close printed, with a good type, and on good paper; and, when the subject demands it, it will extend occasionally to 16, or even 20 pages; provided the encouragement given to the attempt shall enable the author to do it without loss.

The first number will be an essay on the "Divine Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures;" after which "the Importance of Truth; the Duty and Manner of searching the Scriptures; the Scripture Character of God; the Uses of the Law; a brief Exposition of the Ten Commandments; the Condition of Man as a Sinner; the Deity of Christ; the Atonement, Justification by Faith, Regeneration. Repentance, &c," will be considered. These Essays, from their size and

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