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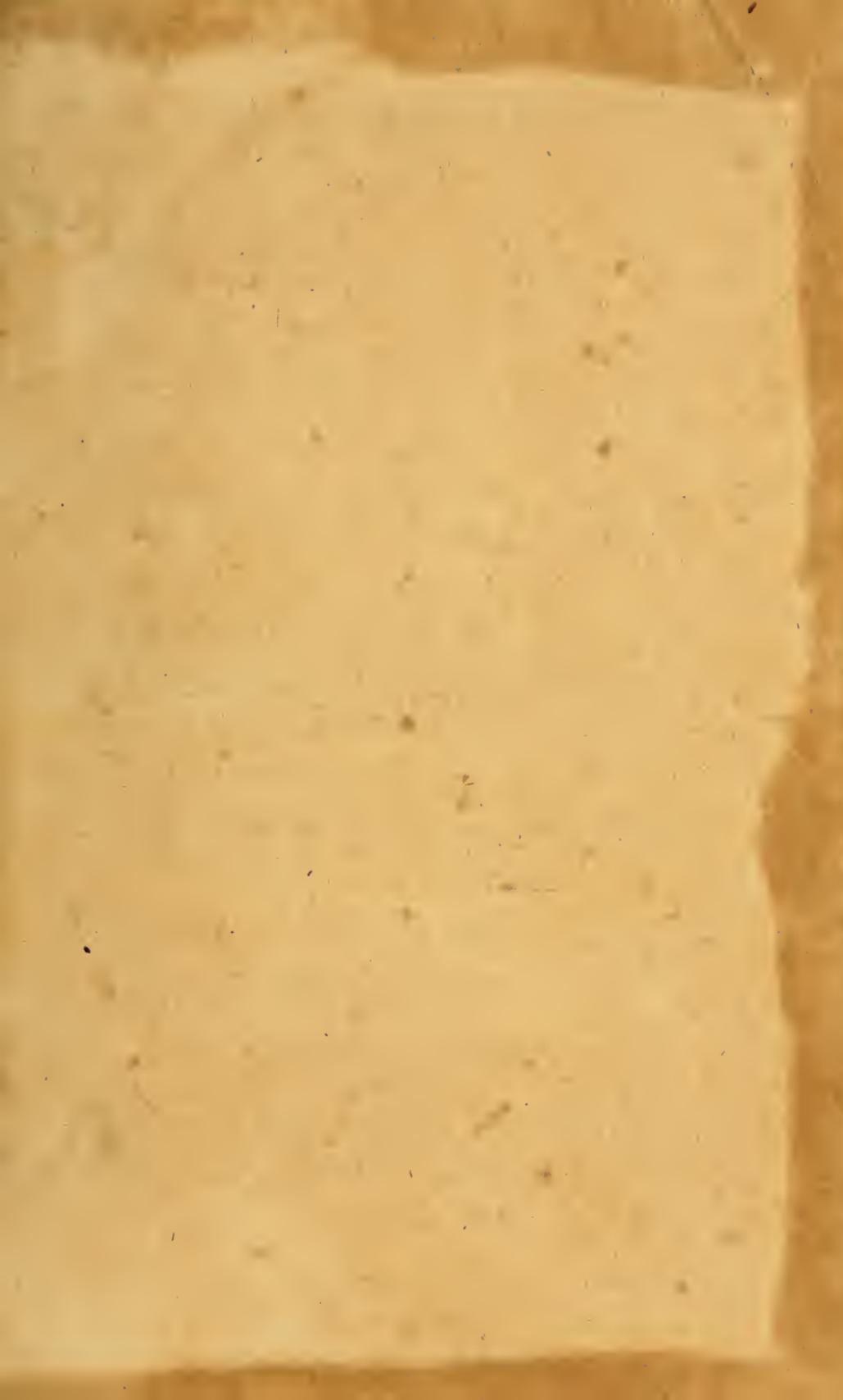


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S E R M O N  
AND  
DISCOURS<sup>ES</sup>  
ON SEVERAL  
SUBJECTS  
AND  
OCCASIONS.

BY  
FRANCIS ATTERBURY, D.D.  
Late Lord Bishop of ROCHESTER,  
and Dean of WESTMINSTER.

Published from the Originals  
By THOMAS MOORE, D.D.  
His LORDSHIP'S Chaplain,

V O L. III.

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MDCCLXI,

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The PUBLISHER'S  
P R E F A C E.

**T**HE following Sermons being the Genuine Works of that Great, but Unfortunate Prelate, whose Name they bear (as I assure the World, bating the Errors of the *Press*, they all of them are, and as the inimitable *Style* in which they are written, proves them to be) there needs no Apology for the Publication of them : That they are *His* is sufficient to justify their Appearance in *Print* ; and to recommend them likewise to the

## P R E F A C E.

*Reader* : For his Enemies and Friends seem all to agree in *this* Part of his Character, That he was as Judicious, Instructive, Convincing Persuasive, and Delightful a *Preacher*, as ever *England* bred.

The only Excuse therefore, that I think myself obliged to make on this Occasion, is, for not *Publishing* more of them, than what are contained in these *two* posthumous Volumes ; for every one will naturally conclude, that he left a great *many* more behind him, having been a *constant* Preacher for about Twenty Years, and an *occasional* one a great deal longer.

The true Reason of my not doing it then is this : He burnt a  
good

## P R E F A C E.

good many of them himself at *Paris*, and, by a Writing found among what were left, signified, that *these* were the only ones fit to be printed; so that without acting contrary to the Bishop's Opinion of his own Performances, of which he was certainly the best Judge, no more *could*, and therefore no more *ought* to be Published: And it being from thence resolved, that no more *should*, the only effectual Way of preventing it, was, to commit the rest to the Flames. Which was accordingly done, in my Presence, by *William Morice*, Esq; his Dutiful and Worthy Son-in-Law, and Executor. To whom I take this Opportunity of Acknowledging myself much obliged for several considerable Acts of Friendship; but particularly for the Benefit of Publish-

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## P R E F A C E.

ing these pious Remains of my dear Friend and Patron, whom I greatly Admired, Loved, and Reverenced; and to whose Memory I therefore Dedicate them, with a Heart full of Gratitude and Respect.

THO. MOORE.

THE

THE  
C O N T E N T S  
OF THE  
Third V O L U M E.

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S E R M O N I.

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

*SINCE the Printing of these Volumes, I find the Name of Atterbury so injuriously and scurrilously treated in an History just now published, that, to obviate all ill Impressions of him; which the Reader may possibly receive from thence, I judge it not amiss to give him a true Notion of the Historian's Character, taken out of the Preface to Dr. Hicckes's three Treatises published in 1709, where it is thus said of him:—He was famous for his great Freedom in censuring the Clergy; insomuch, that when he pretended sometimes to commend a few of the best, and brightest of them, who were esteemed the Ornaments of the Church, he was observed to do it with so many Butts, and Exceptions, that, like the Adjuncts, which destroy their Subject, they nulled the Praises he pretended to give, and turned them almost into perfect Disgrace. And the same Author, after giving us a Specimen of the Historian's Ill-will in general towards the Clergy, by reciting a Passage out of the first Volume of this very*  
History,

## ADVERTISEMENT.

History, then shewn him in Manuscript (which I think too gross to repeat) concludes his Account of him with this stinging Reflexion:—Were I so vain, as to desire to live in History, it should be in *this*, upon Condition the Writer of it would not speak *well* of me, but *ill*: For the Defamations of such Historians are certain Signs of Merit; the Dishonourable Characters of such vile Pens, are true Marks of Honour; and their Praises and Penegyrics, like the Pillory, are Infamy, Scandal, and Disgrace. So will jealous and inquisitive Posterity think of the Characters in this *Anecdote*; they will interpret them all, whether good or bad, by the *Rule of Contrary*; they will believe nothing upon the bare Report of the Author, but be apt to think ill of those, of whom he speaks well, and well of all, of whom he speaks ill.

*I shall add no Reflexions of my own on this Occasion, for I think there needs none, but leave the World to judge, how far Dr. Hickes's Words are verified in Burnet's History, and the Reputation it bears.*

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*The GOSPEL openly published.*

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A

S E R M O N

Preached at

*Westminster-Abbey,*

November 1, 1718.

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A C T S xxvi. 26.

*This Thing was not done in a Corner.*

**I**T might be hoped, that, in a Coun- S E R M O N  
try, where the Religion of *Christ* is I.  
not only publicly professed, but inter-  
woven into the Civil Frame, and esta-  
blished by a Law, the Truth of Christi-  
VOL. III. B anity

S E R M. anity might, at all times, be taken for  
 I. granted; and that the Ministers of *Christ*  
 — might have nothing to do, but to build  
 on that Foundation, and be ever employ-  
 ed in exciting Men to a Practice suitable  
 Tit. ii. 10. to their Profession, and to *adorn the*  
*Doctrine of our God and Saviour in all*  
*things.* But, alas! the frequent and dar-  
 ing Attempts of *Infidelity* that interrupt  
 us in our Course, make it necessary for  
 Heb. vi. 1. us to *lay again the Foundation* (as the A-  
 postle speaks) and to apologize for Christi-  
 anity, just as if it were now in its infant  
 State, and newly setting forth in the  
 World.

God forgive *Them*, who put us upon  
 this unwelcome Task!— In the mean  
 time *We*, I'm sure, were not to be for-  
 given, should we appear less solicitous to  
 support and vindicate that Faith, into which  
 we were baptized, and to the Preaching  
 of which we are peculiarly dedicated,  
 than some Men are to undermine and  
 destroy it. And of *All* the Circumstances  
 which add a particular Strength to  
 the Evidence given for the Truth of the  
 I Gospel,

Gospel, there is none more advantageous S E R M.  
to it, than the Consideration of that *Fair*, I.  
*Open*, and *Illustrious* Manner, wherein it —————  
was proved, and propagated by *Christ*  
and his Apostles. There was no Af-  
fectionation of *Privacy* in what they said,  
or did; their Doctrines were preached,  
and their Miracles wrought in broad  
Day-light, and in the Face of the World;  
in the most frequented Places, before  
thousands, and ten thousands of Witnesses:  
*This thing*, says St. Paul, in his admirable  
Apology before *Agrippa* and *Festus*, was  
*not done in a Corner.*

I shall briefly open and *illustrate* this  
Truth, in order to (what I chiefly intend)  
the drawing from thence some useful *Ob-*  
*servations* and *Improvements* which it will  
naturally afford us.

*First*, When our Saviour began to pub- I.  
lish the Gospel of his Kingdom, he did not,  
as Deceivers use to do, vent his new Doc-  
trines, or pretend to perform his Won-  
ders (the Evidence of his divine Mission)  
in Places where there was no body fit to

S. E. R. M. oppose the One, or to disprove the Other.

I. From the first Moment he entered upon  
 — his Office, he appeared *publicly*, he taught, he conversed, he did Miracles *publicly* [not gaining upon Mankind by *Stealth*, not opening his Pretences *Darkly* at first, and to a *Few*, and then, by their Means, drawing in Others, and going on thus *under-hand* to form an Interest, and to establish a party, which, as soon as he should make his Public Claim, might immediately come in to him, support, and own him. No] he broke out upon the World *all at once*, came into the midst of Men without any Partisans, or Followers, presently opened his Commission, and took upon himself the Character of an Ambassador from Heaven.

Throughout the whole Course of his Ministry, he addressed himself constantly to *Multitudes*, lived chiefly in great *Towns* and *Cities*, and in the most *frequented* Parts of them, the *Streets*, the *Market-places*, the *Temple*, and the *Synagogues*; where his Life and Doctrine,  
 and

and Miracles might, by his professed S E R M.  
Enemies, be narrowly Observed and Ex- I.  
amined. And if at any time he with-  
drew into the Desert, and did Wonders  
there, it was not in order to fly the Eyes  
of Men, but that he might have *Room*,  
by that means, to manifest his divine  
Power, and preach his Heavenly Truths  
to yet greater Numbers. [Accordingly  
we find with him in the Wilderness  
three thousand Witnesses of a Miracle,  
at One time, and even five thousand at  
Another.] And therefore, when the  
High Priest questioned him concerning  
his Disciples and his Doctrine, he made  
this Reply; *I spake openly to the World, I  
ever taught in the Synagogue, and in the  
Temple whither the Jews always resort;  
and in Secret have I said nothing: Why  
askest thou me? Ask them which heard me,  
What I have said unto them; behold, they  
know what I said.*

The Beginning of Miracles that Jesus  
did, was before much Company, at a  
Marriage Feast; and the last he wrought  
were in the midst of *Jerusalem*, where

SERM. the whole Nation of the *Jews* were *then*  
 I. assembled to celebrate the Passover. And  
 — whenever he manifested his Divine Mis-  
 sion by the chief Seal and Evidence of  
 it, his raising any one from the Dead,  
 he took care at that time especially to be  
 surrounded with numbers.

He pitched upon such Persons for the  
 Subjects of his miraculous Cures, whose  
 Infirmities and Diseases were notorious,  
 and of a long standing; One, who had  
 been blind from his very Birth; another  
 diseased with an Issue of Blood twelve  
 Years; and a Third, troubled with a  
 Palsy for thirty-eight Years; so that  
 there could be no possible Confederacy  
 in a Case, where the Person cured was  
 known to have laboured under that Dis-  
 temper, some Years before our Saviour  
 was born.

He so ordered the matter, that some  
 of those he healed should immediately  
 repair to the *Pharisees* and *Priests*, his  
 inveterate and Powerful Enemies, and  
 give *them* an Opportunity of detecting  
 the Fraud, if there were any; That  
 others

others should be soon after called before the Sanhedrin itself, and strictly questioned about the Reality of their Cure, that so these Facts might have the Earliest and Strongest Confirmation possible from the fruitless Enquiry and Opposition of those, who were most loth to believe them. At least, when he healed any Person in private, without thus directing him to notify the Cure, he then enjoined Secrecy to him, on purpose to obviate all possible Suspicions of Art and Contrivance.

As he had *Lived*, so he *Died* in *Public*; Expired upon a Cross, in the Top of an Eminence near *Jerusalem*. When Buried, he had a public Guard set upon his Grave, and he Arose from thence in the Presence of that very Guard, and to their Astonishment. He appeared afterwards to five hundred Brethren at once, to the twelve Disciples frequently; Eat, Drank, and Conversed with them for forty Days, and was at last taken up, into Heaven in their Sight, by a Slow and Leisurely Ascent.

S E R M. In all Respects and Circumstances the

I. Gospel of *Christ* shewed itself to proceed from the great *Father of Lights*, in whom is no *Darkness* at all; it was established upon Proofs, as Authentic, Public, and Solemn, as can well be imagined; Bright, Evident, and Powerful, as the Sun at Noon Day. As its Founder once appealed to his Disciples, and said, *Handle me, and see; for a Spirit hath not Flesh and Bones, as ye see me have*; so may the Doctrine itself make a like Challenge to its Enemies, and say; “Handle me, and see; for Delusion and Imposture hath not such Substantial Evidences, so Open, Ocular and Sensible a Demonstration to boast of, as I have.”—*This Thing was not done in a Corner.*

Luk.xxiv.  
39.

II. *Secondly*, Having thus briefly Explained and Illustrated the Truth contained in these Words, I shall now apply myself to (what I chiefly intended) the drawing from thence those several Useful *Observations* and *Improvements* with which it will furnish us. And the

1. *First*

I. *First* Use I will make of it, shall be, to shew from thence, how great an Advantage the Christian Religion hath, on this Account, over all other Religions, whether true or false! not excepting even the Dispensation of *Moses*.

S E R M.

I.

'Tis true, scarce any Religion ever set up in the World, without pretending, sooner or later, to derive its Authority from Miracles. But then, either those Miracles (as they are called) have been acted confessedly in Secret; or, if they are said to have been done in Public, yet the Account, which was given of them, came too late to deserve Credit; or to leave room for a Disproof. And in *Both* these Cases the Pretence to them is very suspicious.

Thus, in the first Instance, *Numa's* Nightly Conferences with a Goddess, was a Figment, for which the People of *Rome* had His Word only; the Truth of the whole Transaction was resolved into his single Testimony. And such was *Mahomet's* vain Boast of his receiving several Chapters of his *Alcoran* from  
the

SERM. the Angel *Gabriel*; for he wrought no  
 I. *public* Miracle to enforce this *private*  
 — one; nor did he, that we can learn, pretend to the Power of working any. On the contrary, when Miracles were demanded of him, he at first (as his Followers have done ever since) appealed to the *Alcoran* itself, as to the greatest and most convincing Miracle; which was written (he said) in such a manner, as to carry upon it the plain Stamp and Evidence of its own Divine Authority. And this was the only way in which he could make out his intercourse with the Angel *Gabriel*.

Thus again, the several Idolatrous Religions in the *East* and *West-Indies*, are said to have received their Sanction from Miracles done by the first Authors and Founders of them: But then the Reporters of these Facts are so much later than the Facts themselves, that 'tis impossible to have any Rational Assurance concerning the Reality of them: [Their *Mangocopal*, *Amida*, *Brama*, and *Zaca* are supposed to have atchieved Wonders] at a  
 time

time when there was no way of transmitting Accounts of them to Posterity, but by Memory alone, and some thousands of Years before there could be any written Monuments of them. Now this, I say, is to build the Proof of Divine Truths upon the *Certainty* of some Accounts, whereof Men can *never be certain*; it is to establish the Belief of a Revelation upon *Things done*, or said to be done, *in a Corner*, and which require a *new* Revelation to make *them* Credible.

The *Jewish* Religion was indeed published by God in a very open and solemn Manner, before a whole Nation, with Thunders and Lightnings, and the Sound of Heavenly Trumpets, on the Top of Mount *Sinai*. Yet still Infidelity finds room to object, that the Truth of this Revelation depends upon the Testimony of Friends only; and that the Scene of it is laid in a Place, where nobody *could* be present, but the Persons concerned to support the Account whether True or False. And should any of these Persons have been inclined to contradict it, yet they

S E R M.

I.

17

SERM. they could not ; because the whole Race  
 1. of them perished in the Wilderness, ere  
 ————— a Correspondence was as yet opened be-  
 tween them, and any Other People.

Such Objections, 'tis true, are of no Weight, laid in the Balance with the Evidence given for the Truth of those Facts ; yet it is some Advantage to the Proof of Gospel Miracles, not to be liable even to these little Exceptions, and on no side to lie open to any Doubts or Suspicions whatsoever. And from hence we may take Occasion to consider also in the

2. *Second* place, how inexcusable They are, who, notwithstanding that open, Incontestable manner in which the Divine Authority of the Gospel was manifested, continue still to stand out against it ; to resist and even to Deride the Utmost Efforts made by an Omnipotent Arm towards asserting the Mission of *Jesus* ; to parallel them with the Mock Wonders of Satan, and the Impostures of False Prophets ; and to insinuate, as if they were all equally done by Collu-  
 sion.

tion. Such was He, whose *Name* ought S E R M.  
not to be mentioned without Reproach, I.  
and whom *therefore* I shall not mention ;  
but his *Words* are these : “ If we look  
“ (says he) upon the Impostures wrought  
“ by Confederacy, there is nothing, how  
“ impossible soever to be done, that is  
“ impossible to be believed. For Two  
“ Men conspiring, the one to seem *Lame*,  
“ the other to cure him with a *Charm*,  
“ will deceive Many ; but Many con-  
“ spiring, One to seem *Lame*, Another  
“ to Cure him, and all the rest to bear  
“ Witness, will deceive more.” Which  
was intended to suggest, that the Mira-  
culous Cures recorded in the Gospel, were  
not really *Cures*, but *Cheats*, and con-  
certed between the seeming Objects and  
Authors of them ; though the Relation  
of several of those Cures be, as I shewed  
before, so circumstanced, as to make this  
Account of them not only Ridiculous,  
but Impossible. He might as well have  
pretended to explain the Miracle of our  
Saviour’s giving Eyes to the Blind, by  
reasoning on the Medicinal Virtues of the  
Clay

SERM. Clay and the Spittle employed on that  
I. Occasion.

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The Men who talk at this rate (as, I fear, many Men now do, and that Openly, and *not in a Corner*) who can bring themselves thus to confound the plainest Marks of Truth and Falshood, Reality and Imposture; and to impute the most Clear and Demonstrative Proofs that ever were given of a Divine Power, to Confederacy and a Juggle; such Men, I say, are *inexcusable* upon all the Accounts of right Reason and good Sense; and *incurable* by all further Methods of Proof that can possibly be addressed to them. They are Infidels, not because they want sufficient Grounds of Conviction, but because they resolve not to be otherwise. To no purpose is it to dispute with them about these *Foundations* of our Faith; to no purpose is it to Exhort, Beseech, Persuade, or Reprove them: *Their Eyes are shut, that they cannot see; and their Ears stopped, that they cannot hear; and their Hearts hard as the Nether Mill-stone.* Our Reasonings of this kind may indeed be  
of

of some Use, in respect of *Those*, who are yet untainted with the Principles of Infidelity; and may serve to keep such free from the Infection: But, to suppose that any Good can be done by them upon *Those*, who pretend to have weighed the Evidence of the Gospel in a Balance, and to have found it light; is a Supposition, fit only for those to make, who have not tried it. A

3. *Third* thing, which we learn from the Doctrine of the Text, is, to satisfy ourselves of the Vanity of those Pretences which are made to Miracles in the *Romish* Communion. The Members of it boast very much of mighty Signs and Wonders wrought by some Canonized, and some Uncanonized Saints; their Legends, their Sermons are full of them; even their great Advocate lays such a Stress upon the Number and Kinds of them, as to make the *Glory of Miracles* One of the fifteen *Notes*, by which that Church may be discerned to be the only true Church of *Christ*. But now, as Confidently, and Publicly, as they make these

S E R M. these Boasts of Miracles, we may observe, that the Miracles themselves are  
 I. — said to have been done very *Privately* in Religious Houses, and Places of Secrecy and Retirement; in Remote Regions of the World, whither nobody will go to disprove them; in superstitious Countries, where no Man hath a Mind, or Leave to examine them. And these are Circumstances, which smell strongly of Imposture and Contrivance; for why should Things designed for public Use and Influence, be thus transacted in the Dark, without Witnesses? A *Miracle* is, in the Nature of it, somewhat done for the Conversion of Infidels; it is a *Sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not*: And yet it so happens, that Popish Miracles are generally done at *Home*, before Believers, where there is little or no Need of them, or Doubts concerning them: Or if *Abroad*, yet they are placed at such a convenient Distance, as not to lie within reach of Confutation. In *China* and *Japan* these Wonder-workers may pretend to have done as many Miracles

1 Corin.  
xiv. 22.

cles as they please, without the Fear of a S E R M.  
Discovery; in *Spain* and *Italy* they may I.  
venture, now and then, to set up for them, —————

where there are so many always ready to favour their Pretences, and to run into any Pious Fraud that can be contrived for them. But in Heretical Countries (as they term Ours) they are very shy, and sparing of their Talent this way; and still, the more Heresy there is in a Country, the fewer Miracles are heard of there.

How can a Man choose but suspect these Odd Stories, told under such suspicious Circumstances? How can he be blamed for not entertaining them? For, as our Saviour's Brethren once reasoned with him (and they Reasoned right, though they Applied it wrong) so may we with One of these Pretenders to Miracles:

*There is no Man doth any thing in Secret* John vii.  
*and He himself seeketh to be known openly;* <sup>4</sup>

*if Thou do these Things, shew thyself to the World.* And whoever totally declines this Trial, must not expect to have any Credit given, either to the Miracles he

SERM. pretends to have done, or to the Message  
I. he brings.

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But the most absurd Pretence of this kind, and the most opposite to the Doctrine delivered, is, that famous Miracle of the corporal Presence in the Eucharist; which is done so much in the dark, that nobody ever *did* or *can* see it, either *before*, or *after* it was done, or even *while* it is doing; no, not the Doer himself, as loudly as he may boast of it. The Miracles of the Gospel are so many Appeals to the *Senses* of Men; but this is a strange *New* kind of Miracle, which is perfectly *invisible*. To say, that it must be received by Faith, that we must *believe* it to be a Miracle; is to destroy the very End and Design of Miracles; which are Works done, in order to procure the Belief of somewhat else; and are not therefore themselves to be believed, and taken for granted. In a word, it is a Miracle, the doing of which is so utterly a Secret, that it wants another Miracle to prove it to be one. And yet of all things in the World, it is  
the

the most incapable of being proved this way; for Miracles being, as I said, Appeals to our Senses, and Transubstantiation a plain Contradiction to them; the Calling in of a Miracle to evince the Truth of this Doctrine would be (as One very justly reasons) “to prove to a Man by what he sees, that he doth not see what he sees.” Either therefore the pretended corporal Presence is no Miracle; or, if it be one, we are still Excusable in not admitting it, since it comes to us in a way so very Singular, and demands our Assent against the Testimony of Sense, upon the Reports of which all other Miracles are founded. Again,

4. *Fourthly*, the Doctrine discoursed of teaches us likewise to reject all Presences to the Spirit, to private Visions, and inward Illuminations, by which Enthusiastical or designing Men endeavour to establish their own particular Opinions, and to give them a sacred Authority. *Should* these strange things they tell us, be true; yet they are transacted *privately*

SECT. II. *vately*, between God and their Own  
 I. Souls, and cannot therefore reasonably  
 ————— be made a Foundation for the Public  
 Reception of any Doctrine, or Opinion :  
 [For whenever God intends to establish  
 any thing openly, he gives Open Proof  
 and Evidence of it ; his Notice reaches  
 always as far as he designs to extend his  
 Revelation ; and They therefore, who  
 have no Sure Sign or Notice, that a Truth  
 is revealed, cannot, in reason, be obliged  
 to entertain it. Thus it would be, I  
 say, supposing these Visions, and Re-  
 velations alledged, were really *true* ;  
 whereas we have indeed the best ground  
 in the World for suspecting them to be  
*false* ;] since it is evidently contrary to  
 all the Divine Methods of acting, with  
 which we are acquainted, that God  
 should give a Man a Commission to pu-  
 blish a new Doctrine, and not give him  
 wherewithal to manifest the Authority  
 of his Commission to Others. *If I bear*  
 John ii. *witness of myself, my Witness is not true,*  
 31. *says our Saviour ; it is probably not*  
*true in itself, it is certainly not necessa-*

ry to be embraced *as true*, by those to whom I propose it; and therefore it follows, *The Works that I do, they bear witness of Me, that the Father hath sent me.* The Miracles which a Man performs, are the only convincing Arguments of his being inspired; and his Own Affirmation in this Case, when divested of these Proofs, let it be never so Peremptory, cannot reasonably induce a Belief of what he affirms.

Thus (for instance) when the Dispute was in the Church of *Rome* between the Two Orders of *Franciscans* and *Dominicans*, about the Immaculate Conception; One Side had Visions and Revelations *for* it, and the Other Side had Visions and Revelations *against* it; but Neither Side thought themselves obliged to take the Word of the Other; and the rest of the World, that stood by, did not think themselves obliged to take the Word of Either; but believed, or disbelieved the Immaculate Conception, according as Reason, Scripture, and the Authority of Tradition seemed to determine them,

S E R M.  
I.  
Ver. 36.

SERM. and not according to the Proportion of  
 I. Visions and Revelations, vouched *for*, or  
 ——— *against* it.

5. It will be yet a *Fifth* Improvement of what hath been laid down, to Observe from hence, how it comes to pass, that Miracles have been so long discontinued, and do rarely, very rarely, appear in these Latter Ages of the World. They were performed at first in so Conspicuous, Exuberant, and Convincing a Manner, as to render a continual Repetition of the same Proofs utterly needless. Had indeed these *first* Evidences of a Divine Power been displayed before a *Few* only, or before *Many*, but *Suspected* Witnesses, it might have been requisite perhaps to repeat them often in succeeding Times; (as often perhaps as any single Convert to Christianity was to be made :) But being originally wrought, as you have heard, in the Face of the Sun, before a whole Nation of Witnesses, and those Witnesses Enemies; the Certainty of them was so well established, and transmitted to After-Ages; as that no  
 Fair,

Fair, Impartial Considerer should be able S E R M.  
to doubt of it; and such an one, having I.  
no Reason to dispute the Truth of *Former* ———  
*Miracles*, could have no Reason, no Oc-  
casion to demand *New* ones. God go-  
verns the *Moral* World, as he doth the  
*Natural*. He made it indeed and order-  
ed it, at first, by Miracle; but he steers  
and conducts the Affairs of it ever since,  
by standing Rules and Laws, and by the  
Ordinary Ministry of Second Causes.  
And thus he established the Truth of his  
Revelation, at the Beginning, by Mira-  
cle; But, that being once done, he suf-  
fers things now to go on in their Regu-  
lar Course without offering every Day  
Motives of the same Kind to Men, but  
appealing to those which he hath pro-  
posed already; which he knows to be  
sufficient, and knows also, that if they do  
not suffice, no others will; according to  
that Remarkable Decision of our Lord's,  
That such as *hear not Moses and the Pro-* Luke xvi.  
*phets* (i. e. reject a Revelation already 31.  
well attested by Miracles) *would not be*

S E R M. *persuaded, though one arose from the Dead.*

I. Further,

6. *Sixthly*, from the *General Drift* and *Tenor* of the *Argument* we have been handling, it may be justly collected, that the more any *Doctrine* affects *Secrecy*, and declines *Trials* of any Sort, the more *Reason* we have to *Suspect*, and to Ex-

amine it: *Beloved, believe not every Spirit* (says *St. John*) *but try the Spirits, whether they be of God*; and most particularly, those *Spirits*, which desire to be believed without being tried: For this looks, as if they were afraid of being brought to the *Test*, and *Fear* generally arises from a *Consciousness* of *Guilt*, as the same *Apostle*, in this very Case, argues: *Every one* (says he) *that doth Evil, hateth the Light, neither cometh to the Light, lest his Deeds should be reprov'd; but he that doth the Truth, cometh to the Light, that his Deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.*

John iii.  
20, 21.

This *Reflexion* cannot but once again put us in mind of those *Articles* of the *Roman Catholic Faith*, by which it stands distin-

distinguished from the Faith of all other Christians. We are not allowed to doubt

S E R M.

I.

of them, or to reason upon them. They are to be received implicitly, without any particular Discussion and Enquiry: From the great Doctrine of Infallibility they proceed, and into that they are finally resolved: *As the Rivers run into the Sea, into the Place from whence the Rivers come, thither do they return again:* And how can That which hath the Stamp of unerring Authority upon it, become the proper Subject of any Man's private Debates and Reasonings? Now this is the greatest Préjudice imaginable against the Truth of the Doctrines of any Church, or the Sincerity of its Pretences: For if what it proposeth to us, be True and Reasonable, why should it decline the Examination and Judgment of Reason? If all be pure Gold, without Alloy, how comes it thus to fly the Touchstone? 'Tis the Property of Error only to sculk and hide its Head; but Truth, we know, is open and barefaced; like our first Parents, in the State of Innocence and Happiness,  
*Naked,*

SERM. *Naked, but not ashamed.* And therefore,  
 I. though it be very unreasonable in the  
 ——— Church of *Rome* to impose her Doctrines  
 upon us, without allowing us to examine  
 them; yet it is not unreasonable in Us to  
 reject these Doctrines, thus proposed,  
 even without Examination.

The same may be said of those Wild  
 Opinions set up by Fanaticks and En-  
 thusiasts, as Dictates of the Spirit, and  
 which they will suffer to be tried by the  
 Spirit only; not by the dead Letter of  
 Scripture, or by Carnal Reasoning. There  
 needs no more than this very Confide-  
 ration; to convince us of the Absurdity of  
 their Pretences; for if *Scripture* and *Rea-  
 son* were for them, They would not be  
*against Scripture* and *Reason*: Men do  
 not use to decline the Arbitration of their  
 Friends.

Far different from this is the Conduct  
 of that excellent Church, to which we  
 belong. She deals openly and fairly,  
 brings all her Doctrines to the Light, and  
 invites all her Members to search and en-  
 quire into them. She desires nothing  
 more,

more, than to be tried at the Bar of *un-* S E R M.  
*biassed* Reason, and to be concluded by I.  
its Sentence: *She knows, that her Testi-*  
*mony is true,* and that the Truth of it  
will appear the more, the more it is sift-  
ed. Even in those Mysteries, which She  
proposes as Objects of Faith, divinely re-  
vealed, She pretends not to shut out the  
Use of Reason, but only cautions us to  
exercise it Soberly and Discreetly, and to  
keep it within its due Bounds: Not to  
reject a Divine Truth, because we are ig-  
norant of the particular *Manner* in which  
it may be made out; Not to reason from  
the Properties of Finite to those of In-  
finite Beings; Not to pretend to find  
Contradictions in Points, the Depth of  
which we cannot Fathom or Compre-  
hend. Under these Restraints, She en-  
courages us to use our Reason, in the  
Discussion of Mysteries, as freely as we  
please; and She questions not, but that  
the more freely we use it, the more Rea-  
son we shall find to believe those Myste-  
ries, and to revere them.

Would

SERM. Would to God, All Men dealt as fairly with Her, as She deals with all Men!

I. She would not *then*, by Ill Tongues and Pens, be traduced, as guilty of Pious Cheats and Priestcraft; Things, which She detests utterly, and hath done more toward Exposing them, where they are practised, than any of Those who make the Loudest Noise with them. She would not *then* have those Accusations of Imposture and Design, laid at her Door, which She herself hath so often and justly charged on the Church of *Rome*; Accusations stolen, by Her Adversaries, from Her matchless Writings against that Church, and applied to Her, without Ground or Colour, without Sense or Reason. But our Comfort is, That our Case, in this respect, is like that of good *David*, when he appealed to God, and said,

Psal. lxi. *The Reproaches of Them that Reproached Thee are fallen upon Me.* These Enemies of our Church are equally Enemies of all other Churches, and all Religions; only Ours happens to be the fairest Mark, because it is Uppermost; for were any other

set

set up in the room of it, still the same S E R M.  
Cry of Holy Frauds and Priestcraft would I.  
be heard against *that* also from the Mouths  
of Profligate Persons, in Licentious Times.  
To cut off all Occasion, as much as can  
be, from those who seek Occasion, let us  
be sure, all of Us, who are Members of  
this Excellent Church; Let us be sure, I  
say, which is

7. The *Last* thing I have to recommend  
to you from the Text, to make our Prac-  
tice of the Gospel, like the first Proofs of  
it, Conspicuous and Plain; and endea-  
vour, with all our Power, to recommend  
the Doctrine we embrace, to the *Hearts*  
of Men, as Openly, and Powerfully by  
our good Lives and Actions, as the first  
Planters of it did, by their Miraculous  
Performances. So shall we best put to  
Silence the Ignorance of Foolish Men;  
and be able, in the most convincing, and  
effectual manner, to make an Answer to  
our Blasphemers.

The *Profession* of the true and pure doc-  
trine of *Christ*, and a *Practice* suitable to  
that Profession, are both often, in the *New*  
*Testament*,

S E R M. *Testament, compared to Light. Like That,*

I. they display their bright Beams, and diffuse their quickening Influence; Enlightening and Enlivening all that is near, and far off; Dissipating the Mists of Vice and Ignorance, and Discovering the Hidden things of Darkness. As to our *Profession* of the pure Doctrine of the Gospel, that it sufficiently resembles Light, is manifest and notorious: Let us resemble it also in as illustrious and distinguishing a

Ephes. iv. *Practice, and by walking worthy, every*  
1. *way, of that Vocation wherewith we are called.* Let us resolve to be (as I trust we are) the Purest Church upon Earth, for our *Manners*, as well as for our *Doctrine*;

Matth. v. in One respect as well as the Other, a  
14, &c. *Light placed on a Candlestick, and not under a Bushel; a City set upon an Hill, that cannot be hid.* In a word, *Let Our Light so shine before Men, that They, seeing our good Works, may glorify our Father which is in Heaven.*

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*The Baptist's Message to Jesus, and  
Jesus's Answer explained.*

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A

S E R M O N

Preached at the

R O L L S,

December 24, 1710.

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M A T T H. xi. 3.

*Art Thou He that should come? or do we  
look for another?*

**A**T this time of *Advent*, particularly S E R M.  
dedicated by the Church to a De- II.  
vout Commemoration of our Saviour's  
Coming in the Flesh, and set apart to pre-  
pare

S E R M. pare us for a worthy Celebration of the  
 II. approaching Feast of his Nativity; it may  
 — be no Unfuitable Entertainment to your  
 Thoughts, to suggest to you some Re-  
 flexions on this Passage of Scripture, and  
 those others which introduce, accompany,  
 and explain it.

*When John had heard in Prison (says the Evangelist) the Works of Christ, he sent Two of his Disciples, and said unto him, Art thou He that should come? or do we look for another? That is, Art Thou the Messiah, the great Redeemer of Israel, whose Coming was foretold by the Prophets, and is now expected with great Impatience by the whole Body of the Jews, and before whom I am sent, as his Forerunner and Harbinger? Jesus answered, and said unto them, Go, and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see. The Blind receive their Sight, the Lame walk, the Lepers are cleansed, and the Deaf hear, the Dead are raised up, and the Poor have the Gospel preached unto them. And Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me! As if he had*

I

said

said, " Judge Ye yourselves, by the Works S E R M.  
 " which I now perform, whether I am II.  
 " the Messiah or not, or what Reason  
 " there can be to doubt of my Divine  
 " Mission and Authority."

This Transaction is extremely remarkable, and will afford much useful Matter to our Reflexions, in relation both to the *Enquiry* made by the *Baptist*, and the *Answer* returned by our Lord to that *Enquiry*.

And *First*, as to the *Enquiry* itself, it I.  
 may be matter of just Surprize to us, that the *Baptist* should, so long after he had continued discharging the office of *Christ's* Harbinger, put such a Question as this to our Saviour, *Art Thou He that should come? or do we look for another?* For could *John* be Ignorant of our Saviour's Character? Could he entertain the least Doubt of it? He, who had formerly Baptized *Christ*, had seen the Spirit descend on him in the Form of a Dove, and heard the Voice from Heaven thus testifying concerning him, *This is my well-beloved Son, in whom I am well*  
VOL. III. D pleased?

S E R M. *pleased? He, who had borne Record of*  
 II. our Lord more than once, that he was

*the Son of God, the Lamb of God, that*  
 Joh. i. 34.  
 Ver. 29. *taketh away the Sins of the World? Could*  
*He possibly afterwards be under any De-*  
*gree of Hesitancy or Doubt, in relation*  
*to our Saviour's Character? Certainly he*  
*could not; and therefore we must look*  
*out for some other Reason of his send-*  
*ing this Message, besides the Desire of sa-*  
*tisfying himself; and that plainly was*  
*the procuring Satisfaction to those by*  
*whom the Message was sent, his Disci-*  
*ples and Followers, who, notwithstand-*  
*ing all the Affeверations of John to this*  
*purpose, continued still Incredulous;—*  
*We may suppose, for these Reasons:*

I. Because they saw their Master im-  
 prisoned, and now likely to be put to  
 Death, for preaching up the Kingdom  
 of God, and the Coming of the Messiah;  
 and could not apprehend, that, had Je-  
 sus been that Messiah, he should have  
 wanted Power, or Will to employ that  
 Power for the *Baptist's* Deliverance.  
 And yet so far was this from being the  
 Case,

Case, that our Saviour doth not appear S E R M.  
 once to have made an honorable Men- II.  
 tion of *John*, till after the Disciples, who  
 came upon this Errand, had left him.

*Then* indeed, and not *before*, the Evange- Matt. ix.]  
 list tells us, *Jesus began to say unto the* 7.

*Multitudes, What went ye out into the Wil-  
 derness to see?* and to take that Occasion  
 of enlarging on the *Baptist's* Character,  
 and the Dignity of his Office.

2. They might have observed, that  
 our Saviour had not himself hitherto  
 asserted his Right to that Title, but de-  
 clined all Occasions that had been given  
 him, of directly and openly owning him-  
 self to be the Messiah; which Conduct,  
 though necessary, in order to carry on,  
 and complete his Ministry, without In-  
 terruption from the *Roman* Powers, was  
 yet what the Disciples of *John*, who  
 had heard their Master preaching up the  
 Kingdom of the Messiah without any  
 Disguise, could not understand; nor ac-  
 count for any otherwise, than by suppos-  
 ing that *Jesus* arrogated not that Honour  
 to himself, as being conscious, that it did

S E R M. not belong to him. And these Suspi-

II. cions might be raised, by their observing

3. The manner of our Saviour's Life and Conversation, which was so very different from that of their Master's, and had so much less an outward Appearance of Sanctity in it. The *One came neither Eating nor Drinking*, delighted in Solitude, and lived in the Practice of the highest Rigours and Austerities; The *Other came Eating and Drinking*, lived in the World, and according to all the innocent Customs of it; conversing freely and promiscuously with all Sorts of Men, even with Publicans and Sinners. And therefore they were tempted to think, that He, who was so far beneath their Master in what *they* called Perfection and Holiness, could not be so far above him in his Character and Office, as, if he were the Messiah, he must have been.

Matt. xi.  
18.

These Doubts, it is probable, that *John* had very often endeavoured to remove: But finding that they still stuck with his Followers, he took the last and best

best way of satisfying them, by sending them on this Message to *Jesus* himself, and giving them, by that means, an Opportunity of being Eye and Ear Witnesses of his Works, and of his Doctrine, which, he knew, would effectually convince them. SERM. II.

Thus much concerning the *Enquiry*: We are now to consider,

*Secondly*, The *Reply* which our Saviour made to it. In which Reply there are Two Things observable; the *Manner*, and the *Matter* of it. II.

As to the *Manner* of it, we see, it is not *Direct* and *Positive*; but so ordered only, as to give them an Occasion of answering that *Question* themselves, which they had proposed to our blessed Saviour. This Method, as it was agreeable to his Conduct in Other Cases, and requisite to secure him from the Accusations of those who watched his Words, whenever he taught in publick, so had it this further Use in it; that it imprinted a Conviction on the Enquirers, after the

SERM. most gentle, reasonable, and winning  
 II. way, without commanding and export-  
 ——— ing their Assent by an Authoritative De-  
 claration of the Truth, which he thus  
 invited them to receive. The Proper  
 Motives and Evidences only were laid  
 before them; and they afterwards were  
 left to frame the Conclusion from thence;  
 that so their Faith, which was to entitle  
 them to such Glorious Privileges, might  
 be a Free and Voluntary Act, and the  
 Test of an Ingenuous and Well-disposed  
 Mind.

As to the *Matter* of our Saviour's  
 Answer, *Three* things there are which de-  
 serve to be weighed by us:---The re-  
 markable *Gradation* and *Rise* there is in  
 the Particulars there mentioned: The  
*Appositeness* of it in relation to the En-  
 quirers: And the *General* Force and  
 Evidence of the Argument contained  
 in it.

1. To begin with the first of these: *Go  
 and shew John again, says our Saviour,  
 those things which Ye do bear and see;*  
 and then he particularly mentions the  
 Bodily

Bodily Cures he wrought on the Deaf and Blind, the Lame and the Lepers. He adds beyond this a yet plainer Instance of a Miraculous and Divine Power,---  
*the Dead are raised up*; and he seems to advance still somewhat further, when he says, that even *the Poor have the Gospel preached unto them*. An Instance of Goodness and Condescension, with which the *Jews* had before been but little acquainted! The Prophets of that Nation had been sent always to great and mighty Persons to reclaim their Princes and Rulers, and to reprove Exemplary Wickedness in high Places; and, to manifest the Authority of their Commission to them, were sometimes armed with the Power of Miracles. But nothing could be more wonderful, than to see a Prophet in *Jewry* preaching to the Poor and Meek; addressing himself to the Lowest and Meanest of Men; exhorting them to Virtue, removing their Prejudices, and rectifying their Errors! Such Applications amidst that People were so unusual, and exceeding rare, that our

S E R M. Saviour thought fit to conclude the Enumeration of the several Proofs of his Mission with these two Particulars, *The Dead are raised up*, says he, *and the Poor have the Gospel preached unto them.*

2. The *Appositeness* of our Saviour's Answer, in relation to the Persons who made the Enquiry, is what we are next to consider. And here

*First*, we may observe, what a *Natural* Occasion he takes of resolving their Doubts, from what he was even then saying and doing in their Presence, *Go, and shew John again, those things which Ye do hear and see*: That is, you come to learn of Me, whether I am the Messiah: Your Master hath often told you, that I am; but ye will not believe him. To *Him* you should have given Ear, who is my professed Harbinger and Herald; to *Me* it belongs not so properly to proclaim my own Titles, and assert my own Authority. For

Joh. v. 31. *if I bear Witness of myself, my Witness is not true.* It is liable to Suspicion, and likely to be of little Weight and Authority

rity with You. If Ye suspect your *Ma-* S E R M.  
*ster's* Testimony of me, much more will II.  
 ye suspect that which I give of myself. ———  
 Behold therefore the Testimony of God!  
 for *the Works which I do* (which ye now Joh. v. 36.  
 see done before your Eyes, they) *bear*  
*Witness of me, that the Father hath sent*  
*me.* If ye still doubt, who I am, why  
 ask ye Me? ask the Works, which you  
 cannot doubt whether I do, or not; and  
 they shall tell you.

*Secondly,* Nothing could be better con-  
 trived to satisfy these Enquirers, of our  
 Saviour's Preeminence over the *Baptist*,  
 than these Wonders which they saw him  
 perform, and heard him now appeal to;  
 since they knew very well, that their Ma-  
 ster had not the Gift of Miracles, nor  
 pretended to the Power of doing them;  
 and could not therefore but see, that his  
 Ministry was inferior to that of *Christ*, and  
 subordinate to it; especially since from  
 the *Baptist's* own Mouth they had learnt,  
 that the *doing of Miracles* should be  
*one* illustrious and discriminating Mark  
 of the Messiah; for so much, I think,  
 4 that

S E R M. that Passage in the Gospel of St. *John*  
 II. sufficiently implies,—*Many who resorted*  
 —————  
 Joh. x. 41. *unto Jesus, said, John did no Miracles;*  
*but all things which John spake of this*  
*Man, were true; that is, though he did*  
*none himself, yet he prophesied that Je-*  
*sus should do them; and when his Di-*  
*sciples therefore saw that Prediction ful-*  
*filled, they were able themselves to an-*  
*swer their Own Question.—Art Thou*  
*He that should come? or do we look for*  
*Another? Further,*

*Thirdly, The Particular Facts, which*  
 our Saviour here mentions, in order to  
 insinuate his Preeminence over the *Bap-*  
*tist*, are extremely well suited to that  
 Purpose. They are all Acts of Bene-  
 ficence and Kindness, wrought for the  
 Service and Benefit of Men, either for  
 the Instruction of their Minds, or the  
 Healing of their Bodies. And this, he  
 tacitly suggests to them, was a far no-  
 bler Employment, and carried in it a  
 much greater Degree of Perfection and  
 Use, than the Solitary Life and Rigid Au-  
 sterities of the *Baptist*, for which his Dis-  
 ciples

ciples held him in such high Veneration. S E R M.  
 He hints to them the Reasons, for which II.  
 he lived and conversed thus publickly  
 and familiarly, and applied himself to  
 Men in the most Humane, Easy, and  
 Affable Manner, without distinguishing  
 himself from Others by any rough and  
 frightening Appearances, any thing Ex-  
 traordinary and Singular, either in his  
 Look, Attire, or Behaviour (for which  
 the *Baptist* was remarkable) and he leaves  
 them (even in *this* respect) to consider,  
 whether his Character was not superior  
 to that of their Master, and his Admini-  
 stration ordained to more Excellent Pur-  
 poses; and therefore he concludes his  
 Reply with Words, which have an Eye  
 to those Prejudices they had entertained  
 against him on this Account; *Blessed are*  
*They, who are not offended in Me!*

Beyond all this, it is, in the

*Fourth* place, extremely remarkable,  
 that the Answer of our Lord to these  
 Enquiring Disciples is expressed in  
 Words taken from a Prophecy of *Isaiab*  
 concerning the Messiah. And *Isaiab*  
 was,

SERM. was, of all the Prophets, *He*, in whose

II. Writings the *Baptist's* Followers were  
 ——— the most conversant, and for whom they had the greatest Esteem and Reverence ; inasmuch as their Master was there more particularly pointed out, the Person and Office of this Cryer in the Wilderness was there more exactly described, than in any other Part of the sacred Volume. And therefore what *this* Prophet testified concerning the Messiah, was best suited to work those into a Reception of him, who had been led by his Testimony to discern even their Master himself, and to become his Followers.

Now the Places here referred to in *Isaiab*, are these, *chap. lxi. 1. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord hath appointed me to preach good Tidings to the Meek.* Εὐαγγελίσασθαι τοῖς πτωχοῖς, as it is in the Translation of the Septuagint ; and the very same Phrase is employed here in the Text, πτωχοὶ εὐαγγελίζονται, *The Poor have the Gospel preached unto them.* The rest of the Particulars may be almost entirely supplied from another

other Passage in the xxxv<sup>th</sup> of the same S E R M.  
Prophet, ver. 4, 5, 6. *Behold, your God* II.  
*will come with Vengeance, even God with*  
*a Recompence; he will come and save*  
*you. Then the Eyes of the Blind shall be*  
*opened, and the Ears of the Deaf shall be*  
*unstopped: Then shall the lame Man leap as*  
*an Hart, and the Tongue of the Dumb shall*  
*sing.*

It is very probable that the *Baptist* himself might have an Eye to this Passage, when he sent his doubting Disciples with this Question to our Saviour, *Art thou he that should come?* Since we find there a Promise, within the Compass of a few Words, twice repeated, that God *would come, would come* to save his People; and therefore our Saviour, very appositely sent them back again to the same Prophet in his Reply, and taught them by that means to understand the true Drift and Meaning of their Master's Question. It is as if he had said, You believe not the *Baptist's* Testimony, that I am *He who should come*; yet surely *Isaiab*, upon whose Authority ye have received the

S E R M. the *Baptist* himself, will find Credit with  
 II. you; and *He* hath thus prophesied of  
 ——— me.

Every way, we see the Answer of our Blessed Redeemer was so wisely and graciously contrived, as to meet with all the Prejudices, and dispel all the Doubts of these Enquirers, and to lead them into an Acknowledgment that they had found the Messiah whom they sought, *Him who was to come*, and were no longer to look for another.

3. Nay, these Words carry in them (as I in the Third place observed) an Argument of more general Use and Influence, and propose to us all the Chief Marks and Characters of such Miracles, as are sufficient to confirm the Authority of any Person pretending to be sent by God; and all of which concurred in the Miracles done by our Messiah; as any unprejudiced Person, who compares them together, may easily perceive. I shall but just mention them as they are hinted to us in the Words of our Saviour's Reply, and leave the further Consideration of them

them to your private Meditations. Now SERM.  
the II.

1. Mark and Character of such a Miracle, as can be the proper Evidence of a Divine Mission, is, that it be above the Known Powers of all Natural Causes: And such were all the Instantaneous Cures here mentioned; and particularly the raising Men from the Dead.

2. A Second Character is, that they be done publicly and in the Face of the World, that there may be no room to suspect Artifice and Collusion. And such were the Wonders to which our Lord appealed. ---- *Go tell John again,* says he, *those Things which ye do hear and see;* which are done here before your Eyes, and in the midst of a Great Multitude.

3. A third Thing requisite is, that the Doctrine which they are brought to vouch be every way worthy of God, and fit thus to be Sealed and Attested by him. *The Gospel is preached,* says our Lord; the most perfect Scheme of Morality that ever Mankind was acquainted with.

4. It

SERM. 4. It is yet a further Recommendation of such Miracles, If they carry in them Marks not only of an Astonishing Power, but of Good Will also, and Beneficence to Men; as the Healing of the Blind, the Lepers, and the Lame, here in the Text, manifestly did.

5. If the very doing of them was foretold, and the Time and Person declared by the Spirit of Prophecy; for so I have shewn that our Saviour, in his Account of the mighty Works here done, referred himself to the Predictions of *Isaiab.*

6. If there be no Appearances of Self-interest and Design in the Worker of such Miracles; and this Objection our Lord also removes, where he says, that the *Poor had the Gospel preached unto them*; the *Poor*, to whom no Man would apply, who proposed to himself Temporal Views and Aims, which *They* (alas!) could no ways forward.

Thus have I endeavoured to open to you, very largely, the Significancy of each Word in this Important Passage;  
and

and particularly the wonderful Address S E R M.  
of our Lord, in applying himself to II.

---

those who resorted to him for Instruction, and in reasoning them into Conviction by Arguments and Suggestions peculiarly accommodated to the Notions and Apprehensions they were under. — Our Chief Business indeed, from such Places as these, is, to inculcate into the Minds of *Christians* the *Practical* Lessons of Piety contained in the Gospel; to convince them of the Reasonableness, Beauty, and Usefulness of those Precepts; and to inflame them with ardent Desires of excelling therein. However, such *Speculative* Enquiries as these have also their Use, and may sometimes deserve a Place in your Minds; as contributing to raise your Attention in perusing the several Parts of Holy Writ, and to improve and quicken you in your Manner of meditating upon them; and as assisting you towards a Discovery of those Inestimable Treasures of Divine Wisdom, which are hidden in that Sacred Volume. We generally, I fear,

SERM. consult the Scriptures too negligently,  
 II. and reflect on them too superficially,  
 — with no greater Degree of Attention  
 and Care, than we employ in perusing  
 mere Human Composures (and I would  
 to God we employed always as much in  
 the One Case as in the Other!) We do  
 not sufficiently consider, *Who* it is that  
 speaks to us there, nor *What* it is that he  
 says: What Weight, What Fulness of  
 Sense, What Excellent Variety of Mat-  
 ter, and Wonderful Depth of Thought  
 there must needs be in Words dictated  
 by, or at least spoken under, the over-  
 ruling Influence of Infinite Wisdom.  
 And therefore, though the Scriptures are  
 read every Day in our Churches (and  
 sometimes perhaps consulted in our Clo-  
 sets) yet we make but slow Proficiency  
 towards a True Taste, and a Clear Dis-  
 cernment of those high Truths which  
 are contained in them. We dwell on  
 the Letter only, on what offers itself to  
 us at the first View; but we do not make  
 ourselves acquainted with the Life and  
 Spirit of them. And yet for this Rea-  
 son,

son, among Others, these Holy Writ-  
ings were left us by God, that we might,  
as good *David* speaks, *exercise ourselves*  
*in them Day and Night*, have perpetual  
Matter for our Enquiries into, and Im-  
provements in, the Knowledge of things  
Divine, and drink always of these Wa-  
ters of Life, without either allaying our  
Thirst, or exhausting the Spring from  
whence they flow.

The Difference between the Holy  
Scriptures, and other Writings, is much  
the same, as that between the Works of  
Art and Nature. The Works of Art  
appear to most Advantage at first; but  
will not bear a Nice and Repeated Ex-  
amination: The more curiously we pry  
into them, the less we shall admire  
them. But the Works of Nature will  
bear a thousand Views, and Reviews,  
and yet still be Instructive, and still  
Wonderful. In like manner the Writ-  
ings of mere Men, though never so excel-  
lent in their Kind, yet strike and surprize  
us most upon our first Perusal of them;  
and then flatten upon our Taste by de-

S E R M.  
II.

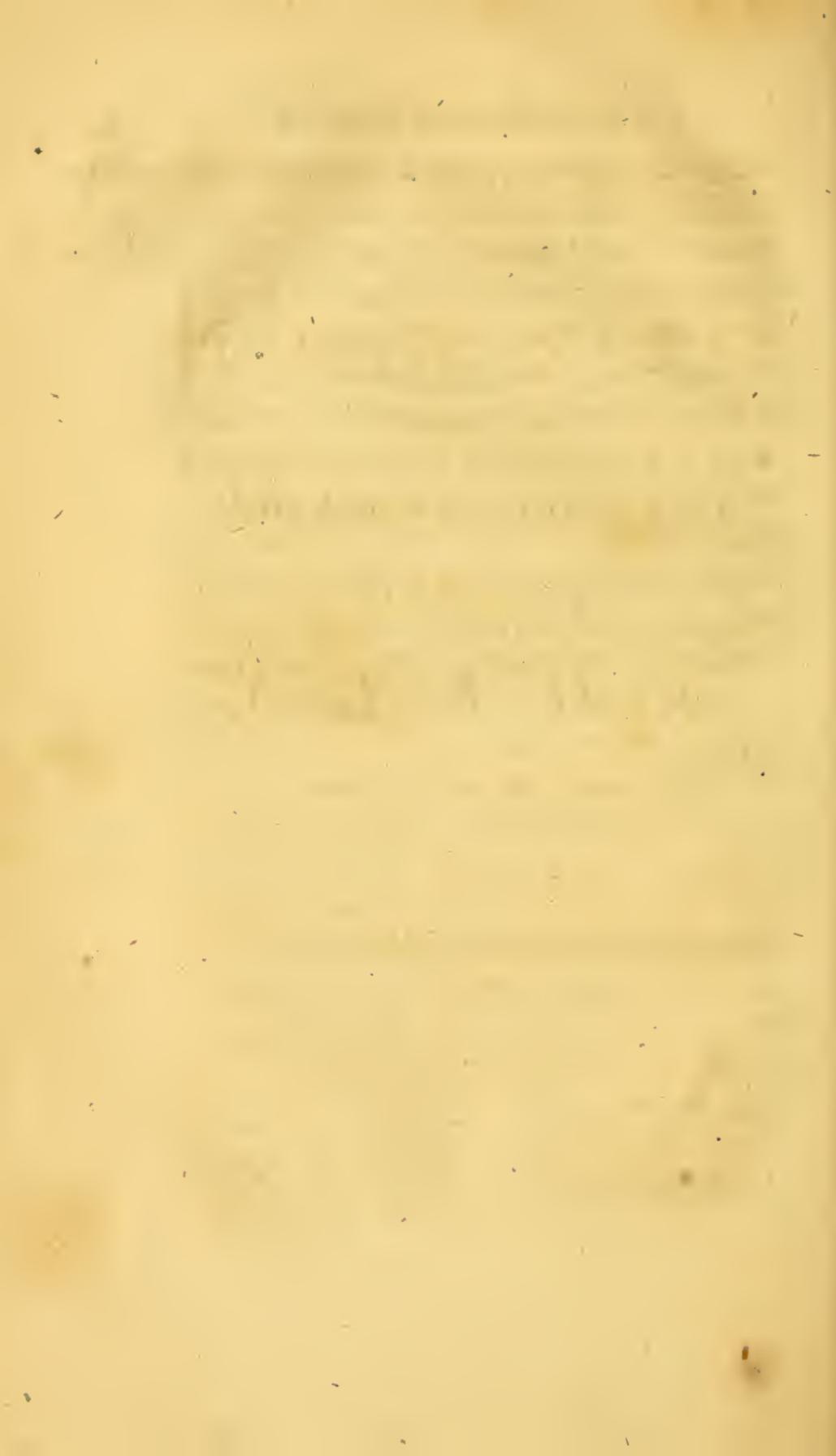
S E R M. grees, as our Familiarity with them in-  
 II. creases. Whereas the Word of Revela-  
 ——— tion is like its Author, of an Endless and  
 Unsearchable Perfection; and the more  
 we look into it, and revolve it in our  
 Minds, the more Reason still shall we  
 find to admire and adore the Wisdom of  
 the Great Revealer of it.

I have therefore hinted to you some  
 Thoughts concerning the Drift of our  
 Saviour's Reasoning, and the peculiar  
 Appositeness of it in relation to the Per-  
 sons who made the Enquiry in the Text;  
 that I might excite you from thence to  
 meditate in like manner on the Other  
 Parts of the Book of God, which are  
 equally *profitable for Doctrine, and able to*  
*make us Wise unto Salvation, through Faith*  
*which is in Christ Jesus.*

2 Tim.  
 iii. 15.

Wherefore, *search the Scriptures*, for as  
*in Them ye have Eternal Life*, so have ye  
 room also for an Eternal Growth and  
 Improvement in that Knowledge, which  
 leads to it; in that Knowledge, which  
 we can here attain unto in Part only,  
 but shall hereafter, when the Veil of this  
 Flesh

Flesh is done away, more perfectly com- S E R M.  
prehend; and the more earnestly we aspire II.  
after it, and labour for it in this State of  
Imperfection, the more Exalted a Degree  
of it shall we possess in Another World.  
And do Thou, “ Blessed Lord, who hast  
“ caused All Holy Scriptures to be written  
“ for our Instruction, grant that we may  
“ in such wise read, mark, learn, and in-  
“ wardly digest them, that by Patience  
“ and Comfort of thy Holy Word we may  
“ embrace and ever hold fast the blessed  
“ Hope of Everlasting Life, which thou  
“ hast given us in our Saviour *Jesus*  
“ *Christ.*”



A

S E R M O N

ON THE

Incarnation of our Lord.

Preached at the

R O L L S,

On *Christmas-Day*, 1710.

---

MATTH. xi. 6.

*Blessed is He whosever shall not be offended  
in Me.*

**A**ND can any Man then be offend- SERM.  
ed in Thee, blessed *Jesu!* Who III.  
hast undertaken, and done, and suffered  
so much for all Men! Who willingly  
E 4 emptiedst

---

S E R M. emptiedst thyself of all thy Glory, left-  
 III. est Heaven and the Bosom of thy Father,  
 — for our Sakes; and, when thou tookest  
 upon thee to deliver Man, didst not (as  
 at this time) abhor the Virgin's Womb!  
 Can a Design of so much Goodness ever  
 miscarry by the Folly of those, on whose  
 very Account it was undertaken! Can  
 such a Message of Love (of a Love asto-  
 nishing and infinite) be rejected!— Canst  
 Thou thyself, the great Messenger, be re-  
 ceived any otherwise, than with the open  
 Arms and Hearts of all thy Creatures,  
 for whose Redemption thou wert thus  
 made Flesh, and dweltst among Us!—  
 Is it possible for any *One* of them to be  
 any ways offended in Thee!

Yet so it is, Blessed Lord! that from  
 thy first Coming in the Flesh to this time,  
 there have been unreasonable Men all  
 along, that have taken Offence at Thee!  
 —And there will not fail to be such  
 within the Pale of Christianity itself, even  
 till thy second Coming to judge the World.  
 —Thy Doctrines have been complained  
 of, as laying too great a Restraint on Hu-  
 man

man Nature, as hard and unpracticable SERM.  
 Sayings!—Thy Mysteries have been III.  
 doubted of, disputed against, and ridiculed by Men of perverse and proud Minds, who are resolved to believe nothing farther than they can thoroughly and clearly comprehend it!—Thy Person itself, the Circumstances and Way of thy Coming have been an Offence unto Many!—*To the Jews a Stumbling-block,* 1 Cor. i.  
*and to the Greeks Foolishness!* A constant 23.  
 Occasion of Falling to all Godless and Sinful Men, whose high Minds are not brought into Captivity to the Obedience of Faith, nor made fit for the Reception of the Truth, as it is in *Jesus!*—But blessed are all they (have thy Holy Lips pronounced) who, in none of these Ways, are offended in Thee!

As to the two former Ways of being offended in *Christ*, on the Account of the Difficulty of practising those Duties he has enjoined, and believing those Articles of Faith he hath proposed, I shall not at present enter into the Consideration of them. The Festival we are now celebrating, determines

S E R M. termines me rather to point my Reflexions

III. on the Offence which has been taken at

— the *Person* of Christ, the *Method*, and *Manner* of his Coming amongst Us.— The Objections of which Kind I shall briefly propose, and answer; that so having rooted and grounded ourselves in a firm Belief of the Doctrine, we may, with the more Assurance, make those several Improvements of it, which will be profitable unto Godliness.

It hath formerly by *Porphyrus* and *Celsus*, and ever since by their Successors, the open or hidden Enemies of Christianity, been thus argued:

That the Doctrine of the Incarnation of the Son of God is *Unreasonable* and *Incredible*; inconsistent with the clear Notions we have of the unlimited Perfections of God, and the finite Properties of Man; between which there is so Wide and Eternal a Difference, as seems to render them incapable of being joined together in one and the same Person or Subject. For how can Wisdom, Perfection, and Happiness itself be mixed  
with

with Folly, Infirmity, and Misery? S E R M.  
What Union can there be between what III.  
is Finite, and that which is Infinite? 

---

But were it conceivable, how the Divine and Human Nature could be United into *One Person*; yet is it not (say they) *reasonable* to believe that such a *Method* was actually taken? For surely there were *other* ways, besides this, of Restoring lapsed Man to the Favour of God, and that Happiness which he had forfeited, and of taking away the Sins of the World: The unlimited Mercy of the Divine Nature was of itself sufficient to compass this End, and forgive this Debt, without requiring any Ransom; and unless a *God Incarnate* were *absolutely and indispensably* requisite to free mankind from the Guilt and Dominion of their Sins, it is no ways reasonable to think, that Recourse was had to so extraordinary a Remedy.

Now, as to the first Part of the Objection, the *impossibility* of an Union between God and Man in the same Person or Subject, 'tis a bold, and a presumptuous

SERM. ous Plea. For who is he, among the  
 III. Reasoners of this World, that is able  
 ——— precisely to determine, in such obscure  
 Points as these, what is *possible* or *impos-*  
*sible* to be accomplished by Almighty  
 Wisdom and Power? Are our Notions  
 of these two Beings, *God* and *Man*, so  
 full every way, and distinct and clear,  
 as to satisfy us, that such an Union is in  
 itself repugnant, and altogether impossi-  
 ble? Would we impartially consider,  
 what passes within our Minds, when we  
 employ them in such nice Disquisitions  
 as these, we should find, that all that  
 passes there is Darkness and Confusion;  
 and that we can discern too little of ei-  
 ther of these Natures, to be able to pro-  
 nounce, with any Assurance, that it is  
*impossible* for them to be joined together  
 in One Person.

We have no just Idea indeed of the  
*Manner*, in which such an Union may  
 be effected; but so neither have we of  
 the *Manner* of that Union, which is  
 between our Souls and Bodies. An  
 Union, which we can as little explain,

or

or comprehend, as even that of the De- S E R M.  
 ity with the Humanity; and which yet III.  
 we can no more doubt of, than we can  
 of our own Being and Subsistence. Will  
 the most Keen and Piercing Wit among  
 the Sons of Men say, that he perceives  
 plainly, how a *Corporeal* can be joined  
 to an *Incorporeal* Being; and what are those  
 common Ties and Ligaments that hold  
 them: how they act upon each other;  
 move, and are moved by Turns; and  
 what kind of Contact that is, by which  
 such Motions are mutually communi-  
 cated? No; these are Secrets, which  
 we can no ways, by any Strength of  
 Thought, fathom; and which perhaps  
 we should have been apt to imagine  
 inconsistent and impossible Speculati-  
 ons, had not *Experience* taught us,  
 that Things *are* really so, though we  
 cannot possibly find out *how* they *should*  
 be so.

Had the Spirits of Men been once  
 unbodied, and had God revealed to  
 them in that State of Separation, that  
 he designed them for another Station in

SERM. a Lower World; and, in order to it;  
 III. would clothe them with gross and sensible *Matter*, and make them act continually in Concert with fleshly Organs, and with Dependence upon them, No doubt but one of these *Forward Reasoners* would have concluded immediately, that the Thing proposed was *Unphilosophical* and *Absurd*. --- And therefore, that either the Revelation did not really come from God, or that this could not be the Sense of it. --- For how could Body and Spirit, Things so totally different, any ways meet together and compose one entire Subject? Or how could they, when thus met, have any possible Influence on each other?

These therefore are immodest and unjustifiable Ways of Reasoning, which would persuade us to reject Truths, on the Account of some *Supposed Impossibilities*, of which it is *manifestly impossible* that we should have any clear and adequate Conception. And therefore in all such Cases, it becomes not us to say, what can, or cannot be done,

or

or what the nature of Things will, or S E R M.  
 will not admit of. The Short and only III.  
 Sure Point, upon which Controversies  
 of this kind must turn, is, to see what  
 God, in his Holy Word, has assured us  
 concerning them.

As to the second Part of the Objec-  
 tion, That there were *Other* Ways of  
 bringing about the Pardon of Sin, and  
 the Salvation of Man; far be it from us  
 to prescribe to God, or to say—That  
 Infinite Goodness and Wisdom itself  
*could* have found out *no Other* Expedi-  
 ent. But since *this*, and *no other*, was  
 made use of by God, we must needs  
 think it the *most proper* of *Any*, and the  
 best proportioned to those Ends and Pur-  
 poses, for which He designed it. And  
 though it becomes us rather implicitly to  
 adore the Divine Wisdom, than curi-  
 ously to enquire into the Reasons, and  
 boldly to sound the Depths of it; yet is  
 there some Light afforded us in Scripture,  
 whereby we may discover a mighty *Fit-*  
*ness* and *Congruity* between the *Method*  
 that

SERM. that was used, and the *End* that was  
 III. brought about by it.

— Guiding ourselves therefore by the Discoveries made to us on this Head in Holy Writ, we may safely venture to say — It was fit and requisite, that our Redeemer should be *God*, that, by the Infinite Dignity of his Person, the Value of the Sacrifice, which he made of himself in the Flesh, might be so far enhanced, as to become a sufficient Atonement for the Sins of the whole World: That the *Laws* which he should publish, might carry in them the utmost Obligation and Force: That his *Doctrine* might have the highest Authority: That we being assured of his absolute Security from Sin, might look up to his *Example*, as to a *perfect Pattern* of Holiness; and in all things, without *Doubt*, or *Fear*, implicitly follow his Steps.

It was fit he should be *God*, that he might give an Instance of *Infinite Condescension* and *Love* toward us, and might from thence engage us to *Love* and *Obey* him also, *without Bounds*: That he might be

be enabled in our behalf to Vanquish *Satan*, and all the Powers of Hell, and erect a Spiritual Kingdom in the Hearts of Men, by triumphing first over all the Strength, and Cunning, and Malice of our Spiritual Enemies.

It was highly Expedient also, that he should be *Man*, that our Offences might be repaired in that *Nature* which committed them: And as by one Man's Disobedience, Many were made Sinners; so by the Obedience of One Man, Many might be made Righteous.

That he might be Qualified from thence, to be a *Merciful and Faithful High Priest in Things pertaining to God*, and a proper *Intercessor* with him for Man, whose Infirmities he had tried, whose Needs he had been sensible of; and, having himself suffered and been tempted, might be able and willing to succour Those that are tempted.

Lastly, That by appearing in Human Form, he might make a Difference between the rigorous and astonishing Dispensation of the *Law*, and that milder

S E R M. one of *Grace*: Coming to us in the most familiar and winning way: Instructing us in our Duty like one of us: And proposing to us a lively and full Example of what he taught, in what he did and suffered for us.

These are some of the Accounts which God has hinted to us in Scripture, why his Infinite Wisdom was pleased to pitch upon this Way, rather than any other, of reconciling Man to himself. And yet, after all the Accounts we can give ourselves of it, we cannot but confess it to be an Abyss of Mercy, which neither *We* nor *Angels* are able to pry into; and which God alone who contrived it, can fully explain and comprehend.

Let us forbear therefore to wade farther into the Depth of this great Mystery of *God manifest in the Flesh*; and let us satisfy ourselves with believing it, as God has revealed it, without indulging our Curiosity in an unprofitable Search after the Reasons, which induced God to order the Stupendous Work of our Redemption in so inconceivable a Manner:

And let us proceed to draw from thence S E R M.  
 those plain practical Improvements, which III.  
 may render it profitable unto Godliness, ———  
 and with which it will readily furnish us.

And the first, and most natural Use we are to make of it, is, to raise to ourselves from thence Matter of *Thankfulness and Spiritual Joy*. *Behold, I bring you,* Luk. ii.  
 said the Angel to the Shepherds, good *Tid-* 10, 11.  
*ings of great Joy which shall be to all Peo-*  
*ple: For unto you is born this Day in the*  
*City of David a Saviour, which is Christ*  
*the Lord.* And these indeed are the best  
 Tidings that ever God sent, or the World  
 received: Tidings of no less than Free-  
 dom from the Guilt and Punishment of  
 Sin; of a Way opened to Repentance,  
 and the Favour of God; to Peace of  
 Conscience in this World, and Everlast-  
 ing Happiness in the next.

Before the Coming of *Christ*, all the  
 Account we could have of these things  
 from the Light of Nature, went no far-  
 ther than this.—That the Breach of any  
 of God's Laws brought Guilt along with  
 it; and that Guilt made us liable to Pu-  
 nishment.

S E R M. nishment.—Whether God, upon any Con-  
 III. siderations, would ever remit this Punish-  
 ——— ment, was more than mere Reason could  
 possibly tell us. For the Justice of God  
 certainly required, that Sin should be fol-  
 lowed with Punishment: Nor was this in-  
 consistent with the Goodness of God,  
 which was otherwise sufficiently mani-  
 fested to us. Under this kind of Dark  
 and Uncomfortable Reasonings were we  
 left, till Christ *the Sun of Righteousness*  
*arose with Healing in his Wings*, and pub-  
 lished the Gospel of Repentance, and Re-  
 mission of Sins. All Thanks and Praise  
 therefore be given to him, that our  
 Tongues can possibly express, or our  
 Hearts conceive! *Abraham*, at a mighty  
 Distance, and upon a very Dim and Im-  
 perfect View of it, *rejoiced to see this Day*:  
 The Angels, who themselves had no In-  
 terest in this Deliverance, yet were highly  
 pleased with the Prospect of those Bles-  
 sings it derived on their Fellow-Creature,  
 Man; and therefore sang that Hymn on  
 this Occasion, which the Evangelist has  
 recorded.—*Glory be to God on High, on*  
*Earth*

Mal. iv.  
2.

Joh. viii.  
56.

Luke ii.  
14.

*Earth Peace, Good-will towards Men.* And shall not *We*, for whose Sake this Peace was sent on Earth, and to whom all this Good-will was meant, shall not *We* also give Glory to God on high, and rejoice before him with Reverence? Surely this is News, at which (as *Isaiab* prophesies of the Miraculous Effects that should take place in the Kingdom of the Messiah) *the Lame Man should leap as an Hart, and the Tongue of the Dumb should sing.*

S E R M.

III.

Isa. xxxv.  
6.

A second Improvement that should be made of this Doctrine, is, to raise our Love to God from hence, to all the Degrees of which it is capable.

For Love surely deserves Returns of Love; and the highest Instances of Love, the highest Returns of it. Now *in this* was manifested the Love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the World, that we might live through him. Herein is Love (as St. *John* continues his Argument) Not that *We* loved God (that is, loved God first, and, by that means, drew down his Love upon us) but that *He* loved us (antecedently, freely) and

1 Joh. iv.  
9, 10.

SERM. sent his Son to be the Propitiation for our  
III. Sins.

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Had God sent the meanest Attendant in the Court of Heaven, to publish abroad the good Tidings of his free and voluntary Pardon of Sin, should we not have entertained it as a Message of unspeakable Love! How much more, when he sends his Son, his only begotten Son, on this Errand! When he sends him to partake of our Nature, and of all the Infirmities, Miseries, Shame, and Pain that attend it; and at last to be made a Sacrifice for our Sins by the very Hands of those Men, for whose Sake he left Heaven! This raises the Motive so high, that our *Lips are fain when we speak of it*; and our Heart melts away almost under the Sense of that excessive Burthen of Love which lies upon us.

But how strangely is the Force of this Motive weakened by those who make *Christ a mere Man*, not the Eternal Son of God, sent out to us from the Bosom of his Father! For at this rate the *Love of God* toward us abates very  
much;

much; and then, I am afraid, *Ours* toward Him will proportionably abate with it. For the higher Apprehensions we have of God's Antecedent Love to Man, the stronger will our Endeavours still be to raise our Affections up to a Pitch some way suitable to those Apprehensions.

S E R M.

III.

So that, whether these Men have, by this Expedient, lessened the Difficulties of their *Faith*, or not (which is Matter of Dispute) sure we are, that they have evidently lessened the Argument for their *Love* by it.

Another plain Use we are to make of this Doctrine is, to give us an *high Sense* of the *Dignity of our Nature*, and an hearty *Displeasure* at those Sins which debase and dishonour it.

Behold now, as the Apostle to the *Hebrews* argues, is that Prophecy of the *Psalmist* concerning *Man* fulfilled in your Ears.—*Thou hast crowned him with* Heb. ii. 7.  
*Glory and Honour, and hast set him over the Works of thine Hands: Thou hast put all Things in Subjection under his Feet; that*

SERM. is, The *Human Nature*, by its Assumption  
 III. to the *Divine*, is now advanced far above  
 ——— Principalities and Powers, and every created  
 Being: Nay, it is, in the *Person of Christ*,  
 become an *Object of Adoration*, even to  
 Spirits of the first Rank and Order. For,  
 as the same Apostle interprets another  
 Heb. i. 6, Passage of the *Psalmist*, *When God brought*  
*his first begotten Son into the World, he*  
*saith, Let all the Angels of God worship*  
*him.*

Should not such a Reflexion as this  
 make us resolve to do nothing beneath  
 that Nature, which God has so highly  
 honoured? Not to pollute it with vile  
 Affections and Lusts; Not to set it upon  
 mean and unworthy Pursuits, and on  
 Phil. iii. *mindng Earthly Things*; but to have  
 19, 20, 21. *our Conversation in Heaven*; *from whence*  
*also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus*  
*Christ, who shall change our Vile Body, that*  
*it may be fashioned like unto his Glorious*  
*Body?*

A Sense of Birth and Noble Blood  
 will often keep Men from doing things  
 beneath themselves, when no other Mo-  
 tive

five can restrain them: And shall it not S E R M.  
 be sufficient to preserve us from every III.  
 Evil and defiling Work, to consider our  
 near *Alliance* with *God* himself, by the  
 Intervention of the *Man Christ Jesus*?  
 Surely such a Consideration should en-  
 gage us, after the most powerful Manner,  
 to *purify our Natures, even as his is pure*; 2 Cor. vii.  
 and to *cleanse ourselves from all Filthiness of*<sup>1.</sup>  
*Flesh and Spirit.*

And as *God's* assuming our Nature  
 should make us reflect often on the Dig-  
 nity and Worth of it, and resolve not  
 to defile *That* with base and brutish  
 Enjoyments which *Christ* hath thus En-  
 nobled and Sanctified; so, on the other  
 hand,

The *Condescension* also of the Son of  
*God*, in this *Mysterious Work* of our  
*Redemption*, should infuse into us a Spirit  
 of *Universal Humility*, Since He, *who was* Heb. i. 3.  
*the Brightness of his Father's Glory, and the*  
*express Image of his Person*, emptied him-  
 self willingly of all that *Glory*, to become  
 a Vile and Miserable Creature for the Sal-  
 vation of Men; what a deep Lowliness  
 of

SERM. of Mind ought *We* (in Imitation of him)

III. to carry about us, through the several

— Stages of Life, and the different Administrations of Providence? How willing should it make us to undertake any Work, to be seen in any Office, though never so mean and low, that tends any way to the Good and Welfare of Mankind? It is the Great Apostle's Argument, *Let nothing* Phil. ii. *be done*, says he, *through Strife, or Vain-glory; but in Lowliness of Mind, let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every Man on his own things, but every Man also on the Things of others. Let this Mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus; Who being in the Form of God, thought it not Robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no Reputation, and took upon him the Form of a Servant: And being found in Fashion as a Man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto Death, even the Death of the Cross.*

A Fifth thing I would recommend to you, from considering the Incarnation of *Christ*, is, that we would take care to trace all the Steps of that *Example* which

which he set us in the Flesh; and which S E R M.  
 that he might set us, was one great III.  
 End of his taking our Nature upon —————  
 him. And, Oh! let not *this End* be  
 frustrated, by our neglecting to look up  
 to that admirable Pattern of all Virtue  
 and Holiness in the *Life* of the Immacu-  
 late *Jesus*, which the four Gospels have  
 afforded us! A *Life*, as useful to be  
 handed down to us in all its Circum-  
 stances, as his very *Precepts* themselves.  
 For in *that* he exemplified his Precepts,  
 and gave an Instance of the Practicable-  
 ness, the Beauty, and the Power of  
 them. Such an Instance, as charms the  
 Eyes, and engages the Hearts of all  
 that behold it; and will, if well attend-  
 ed to, have the same Influence upon *us*,  
 that the enjoying the immediate View  
 of God, Face to Face, once had upon  
*Moses*: It will make us shine with Part  
 of that Lustre we are looking upon, and  
 transform us into some Kind of Resem-  
 blance with it. *We all with open Face, be-* 2 Cor. iii.  
*holding as in a Glass the Glory of the Lord,* 18.  
 that is, viewing carefully the Image of  
 our

SERM. our Lord's Life, as it is drawn to us in  
 III. the Glass, of the Evangelists, and study-  
 ——— ing to express it in ourselves, *we shall  
 be changed (as it follows) into the same  
 Image from Glory to Glory; from one  
 Degree of Virtue and Perfection to an-*  
 Ephes. iv. *other, till at last we arrive at the very*  
 13. *Measure of the Stature of the Fulness of  
 Christ.*

I shall mention but one Improvement more of the Doctrine of the Day, and then conclude.—And that is, that we should take Occasion from hence, highly to esteem and reverence the Evangelical Dispensation: To value and prize that Everlasting Gospel, which *Christ* sealed to us with his Blood, above all other Books, Religions, and Philosophies; above all other Methods of Living and Dying that have been ever taught, or practised in the World.

Were there nothing contained in it  
 1 Tim. i. but that one *faithful Saying, worthy of*  
 15. *all Acceptation, that Christ Jesus came  
 into the World to save Sinners: even that  
 should recommend it more to us, and  
 make*

make us take greater Delight in perusing S E R M.  
 it, than turning over all the Volumes of III.  
 Wit and Reason, all the Discourses of  
 Moral Virtue, all the Treatises of Arts  
 and Sciences, which the Learned Part of  
 Mankind among the *Gentiles* have af-  
 forded us : We should count them all but  
 Dross and *Dung*, in comparison of the  
*Excellency of the Knowledge of Christ* Phil. iii.  
*Jesus.* 8.

But the best Expression of our Reve-  
 rence towards this Gospel, is, to comply  
 with the Terms of it. Let us remem-  
 ber, that the last Scope of the whole *My-*  
*stery of Godliness*, is, to oblige Mankind to  
 be good and virtuous ; and to lead Lives  
 answerable to such bright Discoveries and  
 Motives, as Revelation has proposed to us.  
 And therefore let me exhort and beseech  
 every one of you this Day, as ye would  
 not (as far as in you lies) frustrate the De-  
 sign of our Saviour's Birth ; as ye would  
 not baffle the Truth of those Prophecies  
 concerning the Innocence and Purity of  
 the Lives of Men under the Reign of the  
*Messiah* ; and as ye would not *hereafter*  
 wish,

SERM. wish, that your Saviour had never been  
III. born, nor you yourselves neither; to be  

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careful for your Parts to answer the great  
End of his Incarnation, and to live as be-  
comes a People, that have been thus Re-  
deemed of the Lord.

*For how shall ye escape, if ye neglect so  
great Salvation?*

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*Temptations not Irresistible.*

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A

S E R M O N

Preached at

St. JAMES'S Chapel,

February 16, 1710-11.

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I COR. x. 13.

*God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the Temptation also make a Way to escape.*

**A** MONG the various Methods SERM.  
made use of by Men, to justify IV.  
or extenuate their Sinful Compliances, —  
there

SERM. there is no Plea more common in the

IV. Mouths of Libertines, than This; That,

— considering the Weakness of Human Nature, and the Strength of some Temptations, 'tis not to be expected that we should get the better of them. The strict Rules of Virtue are indeed enjoined us: But in this State of Frailty and Infirmary, we must (say they) be sometimes allowed to deviate from them. We are solicited so powerfully by Evil Objects *without*, and pushed on so violently by Evil Inclinations *within*, that 'tis impossible but that *both* these should now and then prevail, against the best Reasons, and the strongest Resolutions. This is an Opinion with which Sensual Men usually flatter themselves; wish true first, and believe true afterwards. But how Vain and Groundless an Opinion it is, the Determination of the Apostle, in the Words of the Text, may inform us. *God is faithful, &c.*

The plain Purport of which Words is, “ That God adjusts always, and  
 “ proportions the Strength of Tempta-  
 “ tions

“ tions to our Power of resisting them, SERM.  
“ and never lays a greater Burthen upon IV.  
“ us, than he either *finds*, or *makes* us able —  
“ to bear.”

A very Important and Comfortable Truth! of great Use to support the Truly *Good and Pious* under the various Evils of Life, and Allurements of Sense, which surround them; and to reclaim the *Bad*, who indulge themselves in Vice, upon the supposed Impossibility of being entirely Virtuous and Blameless, from their False and Carnal Reasonings.

In order therefore to Strengthen and Encourage the *One*, and to Convince and Undeceive the *Other*, I shall make it my Business in what follows :

*First*, To *Explain* and *State* this Truth. **I.**

*Secondly*, To *Confirm* it by sundry **II.**  
Ways of *Proof*, with which *Experience*,  
*Reason*, and *Revelation* will furnish us.  
And then,

S E R M. III. *Thirdly*, To Apply it, in a few plain  
 IV. Words of *Exhortation* and *Reproof*, such  
 ——— as the *Argument* naturally suggests, and  
 the *Time* will permit me to make use of.

I. *First*, I shall Explain and State this  
 Truth.

And in order to it, I observe

1. That the Apostle is not speaking of the Powers of *mere* Human Nature, but of Human Nature *Divinely assisted and supported*. He says not, that a Man, of *himself*, hath Strength enough to resist all Inducements to Sin, and to stand his Ground (as the *Pelagians* afterwards vainly talked) but that he shall be *enabled* to do this, in virtue of a *Superior* Principle, and by the Help of *Divine Grace*; which, in such Exigencies, shall surely be bestowed on him. *God* (he says) *will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able.*—Intimating, that we *should* be tempted above what we are able, if *God* did not interpose and help us. And again, *God will,*  
*with*

*with the Temptation also, make a Way to* SERM.  
*escape; Which implies, that we often* IV.  
*could not escape, unless God made a Way*  
*for us.—I observe*

2. From the Subject of the Apostle's Discourse, that neither is it his Intention to affirm, that we shall, by any Measure of Divine Grace imparted to us in this Life, be so far enabled to baffle all *manner* of Temptations, as to live *perfectly Spotless and Sinless*; but only, that we shall be preserved from falling into *Great and Heinous, into deliberate and Presumptuous Sins*; such as; when Committed, throw us out of the Favour of God, lay waste the Conscience, and require a particular and solemn Repentance, to render us capable of Salvation. For such was that Sin, which the *Corinthians*, at this time, were in danger of Committing, a Compliance with Idolaters, in partaking of their Idol Feasts. Alas! it cannot be otherwise, but that, in the very best of Men, Sins of Omission and Infirmary should abound. Let us stand never so much upon our Guard, there

S E R M. *will* be Lapses, there *will* be Inadvertencies, there *will* be Surprizes: All therefore that we can in this State of Imperfection depend on, is, That through the Grace of God we shall be preserved from such Enormous Offences, as are Inconsistent with a Sincere Piety, and Habitual Holiness; not that we shall be totally freed from Human Frailties and Failings.—Further

3. This *Supernatural* Assistance, which enables us to resist Temptations, *supposes* our Use of *Natural* Means, and our *Concurrence* with it to the best of our Power. 'Tis a *Co-operating* Cause, which acts only in *proportion* to our own Endeavours; but imparts not its *Extraordinary* sustaining Strength and Virtue, unless where we exert and make use of that *ordinary* Strength we have. Temptations therefore to the most Gross and Grievous Sins may, in *some* Circumstances, be *Irresistible*; if it were Originally our *own* Fault, that we were brought into *those* Circumstances; if, for want of that due Vigilance and Care,  
which

which we were *obliged* and *able* to employ, the Temptation overtook us. SERM.  
IV.

For Instance; If a Man of resolved Sobriety, should be so far at any time off his Guard, as to indulge himself in any unjustifiable Degree of Excess, he may, by that means, be inevitably betrayed into some of the Ill Consequences of Intemperance. If a Person, by Nature warm and passionate, shall mix in high Disputes, or engage in Games of Chance, 'tis not to be expected that he should preserve himself free from Offence. His Passions will, of Course, be agitated, and inflamed; his *Heart* will now and then *think*, and his Mouth *utter perverse things*. But there is no Objection from these, and such Instances as these, against the Doctrine laid down, which affirms all Temptations to be Conquerable. For this is to be understood only of *such* as we Unavoidably fall into, not of *such* as we Voluntarily seek. It is not supposed, that we should have Power always to *Resist*, unless we before-hand do what is in our Power to *Shun* Temptation. Pro. xxiii.  
33.

S E R M. These are the several Restrictions, under which the *Truth* implied in the Text  
 IV. must be understood. Which having thus *Explained* and *Stated*, I go on now, in the

II. *Second Place*, to *Confirm* by Various Ways of Proof, such as *Experience*, *Reason*, or *Revelation* will suggest to us.

And the first Way of proving it, shall be by *Experience*.

In vain do Libertines pretend, that Human Nature is too weak and frail to resist what we have Authentic Proof, that, as weak and as frail as it is, it *both* oftentimes resisted. There is no Temptation, either of Desire, or Fear of Pleasure, or Pain, nothing that can either *Allure* us to Sin, or *Scare* us from our Duty, but what *both* been actually withstood and baffled by those Holy Men and Women that have gone before us: And what *both* been already done, *may* be repeated; unless Human Nature be  
 a dif-

a different thing *now*, from what is was S E R M.  
*then*; which no one, I suppose, will IV.  
pretend.

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Can a Man look up to the Examples of the Primitive *Christians*? Can he reflect on the Lives and Deaths of the Saints, Martyrs, and Confessors of old; on what they *did*, and what they *suffered*; and pretend to say, after this, that any Solicitations of Sense are irresistible, any Part of Virtue is impracticable?

Were they not Men of the *same* Passions and Infirmities as we are? Had they not the *same* Sense of Pleasure and Pain? Were they not surrounded with the *same* tempting Objects? And had they *any* Assistances, in order to stand their Ground, but from that *Holy Spirit*, who will assist *Us* also? And why then should *We* be forced to yield to those Difficulties, over which *They* triumphed?

Let us consider some few of those many plain Instances of this Kind, which are recorded in the Holy Story. The Temptation of *Example* and Reign-

SERM. ing *Custom*, is one of the strongest that  
 IV. beset Human Nature; and yet it hath  
 ——— been resisted and defied, in the *utmost*  
 Degree of Strength, wherein it is pos-  
 sible for us to imagine it.

*Lot* lived in a *Great* and *Filtby* City; so *Filtby*, that, as *Great* as it was, *Ten* Good Men could not be found there, to rescue it from Destruction. And yet, amidst all that bad *Company*, He continued untainted, and preserved his Innocence. *Noah* lived, not only in a *City*, but in a *World* entirely debauched; when

Gen. vi.  
13.

*All Flesh had corrupted its Ways*, and there were but *Seven* Persons (besides himself) left, Servants of God, and Lovers of Righteousness. And yet, notwithstanding this Universal Depravation of Manners, behold, how untouched he stood, and what a Character he bore!

Ver. 9.

*Noah was a just Man, and perfect in his Generations, and Noah walked with God!* Will any Man, after this, pretend, that it is impossible to withstand the Influence of *Ill Example*; and to live up to strict Principles of Religion and  
 Virtue,

Virtue, among Thousands, and Ten times S E R M.  
 Ten thousands, that neglect and deride IV.  
 them? 

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The Temptations that arise from *Worldly Interest and Honour*, cannot possibly press harder upon any Man, than they did upon *Moses*. He might have lived in all the Splendor and Luxury of the *Ægyptian* Court, and enjoyed all the Advantages of it, would he but have complied with the Religion and Manners of the Place, and forgotten his Relation to a poor persecuted People: but he resolutely withstood all these Charms, and, when he was come of Years, refused to be Heb. xi. called the Son of Pharaoh's Daughter; 24. choosing rather to suffer Affliction with the People of God, than to enjoy the Pleasures of Sin for a Season: esteeming the Reproach of Christ greater Riches than the Treasures of *Ægypt*.

*Ye have heard of the Patience of Job!* James v.  
 No Man was ever tempted more sorely, 11.  
 than He, to distrust and deny Divine Providence, and to throw off all Thoughts of Religion. No Man, that we know  
 of,

S E R M. of, except our Blessed Saviour, at once  
 IV. suffered so much, and deserved so little: yet hear, how, on his Dunghill, when despoiled of every thing, of his Health, his Possessions, his Servants, his Sons and Daughters, and Friends; hear, I say, how he expresses his entire Reliance on God, and his Absolute Resignation to him! *Till I die* (saies he) *will I not remove my Integrity from me. Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him. Naked came I out of my Mother's Womb, and Naked shall I return thither. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the Name of the Lord!*

Job xxvii.  
 5. xiii. 15.  
 1. 21.

To these several *Scripture Instances*, I crave leave to add yet *one* more, relating to the Passion of *Revenge*; one of the most Importunate and Violent, that are incident to Human Nature; which yet we are sure is conquerable, under all the strongest Temptations to it, that can well be conceived, from the Account of Good *David*. He had *Saul*, his great Enemy, at his Mercy; an Enemy, that had

had often fought his Life, in the basest, S E R M.  
 and most unmanly Methods, that had IV.  
*bunted* him (as his own Expression is) 

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*like a Partridge upon the Mountains:* I Sam. xxvi. 20,  
 an Enemy that stood between him and  
 a Throne; so that nothing was want-  
 ed, but the taking off *Saul*, in order to  
*David's* Reigning. This Enemy, I say,  
 he had an Opportunity of removing:  
 The Followers of his Fortune proffered  
 themselves to be the ready Ministers of  
 his Revenge; and upon *Them* he might  
 have laid the Blame of the Deed, and  
 have been himself (to all Appearance)  
 Innocent and Ignorant of it. This was  
 a Temptation, which some Men would  
 have called insuperable; and yet *He*,  
 we find, actually withstood it, with so  
 Resolute a Virtue, as the Eloquent Pen  
 of *St. Chrysoftom* is never more Eloquent,  
 than when he describes it; particularly in  
 that Homily, which is designed to shew,  
 that *David's* Conquest of himself, in  
 this Instance, was more great and glo-  
 rious, than his Victory over *Goliath*. For  
 in vain did that Son of Violence *Abishai*  
 push

S E R M. push him on, by saying; *God hath delivered thine Enemy into thine Hand this*  
 IV. *Day: now therefore let me smite him, I*  
 ——— *pray thee, with the Spear, even to the Earth,*  
 1 Sam. *at once, and I will not smite a Second*  
 xxvi. 8, *Time.* His Honourable and Pious Re-  
 &c. *turn to this base Counsel was—As the*  
*Lord liveth, the Lord shall smite him, or*  
*his Day shall come to die, or he shall descend*  
*into Battle, and perish: but destroy Thou*  
*him not: for who can stretch forth his Hand*  
*against the Lord's Anointed, and be Guilt-*  
*less?*

From Unquestionable Accounts therefore it appears, that all the forest Trials of Virtue, which can any ways happen, have been withstood and baffled by Men of like Passions with us, and may therefore be withstood and baffled still, with Equal Resolution and Innocence.

But because it may be said, that *Instances* do not conclude *Universally*: it is certain indeed, that whatever hath once been done, may be done again, by Persons endued with like Degrees of Holy Fortitude and Firmness; but it doth

doth not therefore follow, that I am capable of doing it, whose Infirmity perhaps may be greater than *Other Mens*, in *This Particular* : SERM.  
IV.

Because such Pretences may, I say, be made, I shall therefore proceed (further) to Confirm the Truth laid down, by some General Reasonings, drawn from the *Nature*, either of *Temptation* itself, or of that *Gospel Grace*, which is to support us under it; or of *Man*, the Subject of that *Grace*; or of *God*, the Bestower of it.

They who say, *any* Temptation is not to be conquered, did they consider what they said, would find, that they speak absurdly, and inconsistently. For a *Temptation* is only another Word for an *Experiment*, or *Tryal*; a Tryal, whether we will do, or forbear such a thing; whether we will comply with, or reject such a Proposal: and therefore it supposes it to be in our Power to do, or forbear; to yield, or not to yield; else it were *no* Temptation, *no* Tryal of us. We are not said to *Try*, *which* way a thing

SERM. thing will act, that is necessarily deter-  
 IV. mined to act *One* way beforehand.—To  
 ——— say therefore, as Sensualists do, that  
*Some* Temptations are *not* resistible, is  
 when that Expression is examined, real-  
 ly to say, That *some* Temptations are  
*not* Temptations; for if they *are*, their  
 very being *such* implies, that it is possible  
 to withstand them.

What is *Grace*; but an Extraordinary  
 Supply of Ability and Strength to resist  
 Temptations, given us on purpose to  
 make up the Deficiency of our Natural  
 Strength to do it? And therefore, if  
 our Natural Strength, together with  
 this Divine Supply, be not now equal  
 to every Temptation; the Grace of God  
 may *thus* far be said to have been given  
 us in *Vain*; in as much as it doth not,  
 and cannot reach the *End* for which it is  
 bestowed.

Is not *Man*, by Nature, a *Free* Agent?  
 Hath he not Liberty and Will? The  
 great Difference between him and Brutes,  
 doth it not lie in this, That *they* are un-  
 avoidably constrained to act *One* way,  
 while

while *He* hath always the Power of de- S E R M.  
termining himself on *this* Side, or on I V.  
*that*, of Choosing or Refusing? But ———  
now, if there be any such things as *In-*  
*ducements* to Sin, that are altogether *in-*  
*superable*, there is an End of his boasted  
*Freedom*; for in *those* Instances, he acts  
as necessarily, as mechanically, as *the*  
*Beast that perish*. The great *End* of P f. xlix.  
Man is, to Glorify God, by Living ac- 12.  
cording to the *perfect* Rule of right Rea-  
son and Virtue; and yet impossible it is,  
that he should ever attain *this* End, while  
he converses with Temptations, which  
he cannot surmount. Now all *Other*  
Beings (Animate; or Inanimate) have  
Powers, that enable them to fulfil the  
*Design* of their Creation: Is *Man* alone  
utterly destitute of these Powers? Is  
the Noblest Creature on Earth framed  
to *No End*? or (which is all one) un-  
der an utter Incapacity of reaching *that*  
*End*? Is *He* only incapable of arriving  
at any Degree of Perfection in *his* way,  
for whose Use and Service all those *other*  
Creatures were made, which are confes-  
sedly

S E R M. sedly perfect in *Theirs*? If This be so, he  
 IV. is so far from being the Pride and Glory of  
 ——— the Visible Creation, that he is the Meanest, most Imperfect, and Contemptible of Beings.

Once more. Let us consider the *Nature and Perfections of God*. He *is*, and *must* be Holy, Just, and True: And yet He neither *is*, nor *can* be Holy, Just, or True, if He places us under *Irresistible Temptations*.

How can He be *Holy*, who is the Author of Sin? And how can He *but* be the Author of Sin, who (according to the Libertines Scheme) hath so adapted the Frame of our Mind *within*, to the Impression of Evil Objects from *without*, that it is utterly *impossible* for us to withstand the Force of them? Is not this to have a direct Influence and Efficiency in producing Sin, so to order and dispose Second Causes, as that they cannot miss producing it? Now an Holiness that *permits* Sin to be in the World, and *bates* all the while what it permits, we are able to conceive: But an Holiness, which  
 directly

directly *occasions* Sin, is utterly incon- S E R M.  
ceivable. IV.

Nor is the *Justice* of God less ble-  
mished by this Pretence, than his *Holi-  
ness*. For how can *He* be said to be *Just*,  
who (as these Men tell us) places us un-  
der *Irresistible* Temptations; and yet (as  
He himself assures us) will punish us  
for *not* resisting them; that is, makes us  
unavoidably obnoxious to Sin first, and  
then animadverts upon us for the Com-  
mission of it afterwards? Let any Man  
say worse than this of *Injustice* and *Cruelty*,  
if he can.

The Last Divine Perfection, concern-  
ed in this Dispute, is his *Truth*:—  
Which cannot be maintained, if the Li-  
bertines Plea in this Case be true. The  
Promises of God made to us in Scrip-  
ture are most Express and Full; That he  
*will perfect his Strength in our Weakness*; 2 Cor. xii.  
that *his Grace shall be sufficient for us*; Rom. viii.  
that he *will make us more than Conquer-* 37.  
*ors in all Temptations*; and, here in the  
Text, that he *will not suffer us to be  
tempted, above what we are able*. And

S E R M. *he is not a Man that he should lye, or as  
IV. the Son of Man, that he should repent.*

— Numb. xxiii. 19. *And yet as Man, and as the Son of Man*  
is he made by the Favourers of this Loose Scheme; which is at the Bottom, built on a secret Distrust, that God will not, in some sharp and pressing Instances, be as good as his Word; but will leave us to be worsted, where he has promised to assist and strengthen us. Nothing can be plainer, than that he commands us, throughout his Gospel, to reject Temptations; to Live above *the Lusts of the Flesh, the Lusts of the Eye, and the Pride of Life*; to be *perfect, even as he is perfect, and pure, even as he is pure.* To this Point all the Various Applications there made to our Hopes and Fears, all his Threatenings and Encouragements tend.

But now, if at the Time that he lays, and thus earnestly presses these Precepts upon us, he knows it is not in our Power to obey them: if he invites, if he woos, and beseeches us to do that, which he hath before-hand so contrived

us,

us, as to make it utterly impossible for S E R M.  
us to do, he deals not as sincerely, and IV.  
fairly with *Us*, as he hath obliged us, un-  
der the Penalty of Eternal Wrath, to  
deal *One with Another*. *That be far*  
*from Thee*, O Lord; that be far from  
Thee to *do*; and *as far* from any of *Us*  
to think, or to say! No; *God* is not *in-*  
*sincere*, when he commands, urges, per-  
suades, us not to comply with sinful Soli-  
citations; *Man* only is *insincere*, when he  
pretends he hath not Strength enough to  
master them.

Let us therefore place the Odious Re-  
proach, where it ought to lie.—Let us  
give Honour to the *Divine* Truth and  
Uprightness in laying these Commands  
upon us, by confessing *our own* Insin-  
cerity and Falseness, in endeavouring to  
palliate and excuse our Deviations from  
them. *Let God be true, and every Man* Rom. iii.  
*a Lyar.* 4.

Thus much for the *Confirmation* of  
this Truth. It remains that I should,

SERM. III. *Thirdly*, Apply it, in a few plain  
 IV. Words of *Exhortation* and *Reproof*, such  
 ——— as the *Argument* naturally suggests, and  
 the *Time* will permit me to make use  
 of.

And *first*, there is Matter of mighty  
*Comfort* and *Encouragement* arising from  
 hence to the Sincerely Good and Virtu-  
 ous; who may now walk on chearfully  
 in the Paths of Virtue, under these Re-  
 flexions and Assurances; satisfied, that no  
 Conflict shall happen to them in the  
 Course of their Spiritual Warfare, in  
 which their great Adversary shall be too  
 hard for them; and, on that Account,  
 easy, and at Rest in their Mind, with re-  
 gard to the Various Trials and Evils of  
 Life, that *may*, or *may not* befall them.

Pf. cxii. 7. *They shall not be afraid of Evil Tidings,*  
*nor dejected at the Thought of approaching*  
 Ver. 8. *Dangers: Their Heart is stablished, and*  
*shall not shrink; it standeth fast, and be-*  
*lieveth in the Lord.*

Many

Many are frightened from a brave and resolute Practice of their Duty, by considering before-hand, that such and such Inconveniences may possibly attend it, which they know not whether they shall be able to grapple with. But *why are ye fearful, O ye of little Faith!* Is not He that is *with* You, stronger than He that is *against* You? And hath he not promised, that his Strength shall be employed to support Your Weakness? *Hath he said it, and shall he not make it good!* Therefore, *why are ye troubled! O ye of little Faith!* Were we all thoroughly persuaded of this important Truth, that *God will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able;* were our Minds constantly possessed with a Lively and Vigorous Apprehension of it, there are no Circumstances of Life so sad, no Evils so frightful, no Trials so sharp, but that we might look down upon them with Indifference, and in the midst of what either we expect or endure, of felt or fancied Dangers, take to ourselves Words of Holy

S E R M.  
IV.

Matt. viii.  
36.

Numb.  
xxiii. 19.

S E R M. Assurance with the *Psalmist*, and say, I  
 IV. will not be afraid for Ten thousands of  
 ———— *Temptations*, that have set themselves against  
 Pf. viii. 6. me round about: Yea, though I walk through  
 Pf. xxiii. the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I will  
 4. fear no Evil: for thou art with me; Thy  
 Rod and Thy Staff comfort me.

Secondly, Here is ample Matter of Re-  
 proof also to the *Hypocrite*, and the *Pro-  
 fane Person*: both which, from a Princi-  
 ple opposite to the great Truth of the  
 Text, would fain justify, or extenuate  
 their sinful Compliances. Let not the  
*Hypocrite* then allow himself in a favou-  
 2 Kings v. rite Sin with the slight Hope, that in this  
 18. thing the Lord will pardon his Servant,  
 and that one small Fault will be over-  
 looked among a Crowd of other good  
 Qualities. Let him not pretend *Impo-  
 tence*, in a particular Case, and expect to  
 be believed when he says it, because he  
 doth his Duty sincerely, and stands his  
 Ground firmly upon other Occasions.  
 This is all but *Pretence*: God, who can-  
 not lie, hath assured us, that no Tempt-  
 ation should overtake us, but what we  
 should

should be enabled to bear: and when he said *no* Temptation, he made no Allowance for a *darling* Infirmity.

S E R M.  
IV.

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Let the *Profane* and *Dissolute* Person cease to affront God and Man by his Impious and Absurd Reasonings! Let it be enough, that he resolve, at any rate, to be *Impure* and *Lawless*; but let him not go on to *defend* his *Impurities*, by reproaching and vilifying Human Nature, and under That, the Wise Author and Contriver of it! If he is determined to live a Life of Sense, and to obey his Lusts, yet let him not boldly and openly justify it, by saying, that it is *necessary* for him to act as he does; and that All Men are in *many* Points, though not perhaps in the very *same*, just as *He is*; as impotent every whit, and utterly disabled. For this is defending One Sin with another, and a much greater than the first. It is a malicious Design of representing *Every* body to be *Wicked*, that *He* may appear *Innocent*. The Persons that reason thus, sometimes pretend to have an high Regard for the Li-

SERM. berties and Just Freedoms of Human  
 IV. Nature in *Civil* Matters, and are mighty  
 ————— uneasy, and impatient under any Re-  
 straint of them. If they are such *Friends*  
 to Freedom, in God's Name, let them  
 assert it there, where it will be of most  
 Importance to them, in the Cause of Vir-  
 tue and Religion. Let them remember  
 themselves to be, not only freeborn *Eng-  
 lishmen*, but freeborn *Christians*: Let  
 them be Jealous of their *Spiritual* Liberty,  
 as well as their *Temporal*; and not tye  
 their own Hands, and deliver themselves  
 up (as it were) bound and fettered to the  
 Imperious Sway of their Lusts and Pas-  
 sions. This is to make Man a Slave,  
 and God a Tyrant; and is by no means  
 of a Piece with their Scheme, nor be-  
 coming those who plead for the Rights  
 and Liberties of Human Nature.

Wherefore laying aside these Shifts  
 and Excuses, let us *All* set ourselves in  
 good earnest to resist all manner of  
 Temptations: let us put out all the  
 Strength which we naturally *have* to this  
 Purpose, and beg of God Supernatural-  
 ly

ly to supply us with what we *have not*. SERM.  
Especially at this Solemn Time, set a- IV.  
part to Commemorate the great Conflict  
of our Saviour with the Tempter in the  
Wilderness, and to prepare and qualify  
Us for such Spiritual Encounters. Let  
us look up to the Example of *Christ*,  
and remember how Victorious he was  
over those fierce Assaults of *Satan*; and  
what Assurance he hath given us, that  
They who tread in his Steps, and reso-  
lutely fight the good Fight, shall be a-  
like Victorious. And whilst we resist,  
as he did, let us be sure to use the same  
Means of Resistance, that he used, *Fast-*  
*ing and Prayer*: For there is *no Kind* of  
Temptation, but may, by the Joint  
Force of *These*, be *cast out*.

To these therefore let us fly, These  
let us lay hold of, bending our Knees of-  
ten in private, during this Season of De-  
votion, and applying ourselves to the  
Throne of Grace, in those Excellent  
Words of the Church, which compre-  
hend in short whatever hath in this Dis-  
course been more largely delivered.

O God,

SERM. O God, who knowest us to be set in the  
IV. midst of so many and great Dangers, that  
— by reason of the Frailty of our Natures we  
cannot stand upright; Grant to us such  
Strength and Protection, as may support  
us in all Dangers, and carry us through  
all Temptations, through Jesus Christ our  
Lord. To whom, &c.

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*The Horrid Imprecation of the Jews, and  
the Justice and Wisdom of God in fulfilling  
it upon them, displayed.*

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I N A

S E R M O N

Preached at

St. JAMES'S Chapel,

On Good-Friday, 1715.

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MATTH. xxvii. 25.

*Then answered all the People, and said, His  
Blood be on Us, and on our Children!*

**T**HE History of the *Jewish Nation* SERM.  
is the History of *Divine Provi-* V.  
*dence*, from whence, if we peruse it with  
Attention, and Diligence, we may learn  
what

S E R M. what are the usual Methods of God's  
 v. dealing with a People, of his raising or  
 ——— depressing, his rewarding or punishing  
 them, in proportion to their Moral and  
 Religious Deserts or Demerits. And there  
 is no Branch of that History, which will  
 furnish us with clearer Instructions of this  
 kind, than the Account of what befell the  
*Jews* upon their Crucifying the Lord of  
 Life, and fastening the Guilt of that fla-  
 gitious Act upon Themselves and their  
 Posterity; when *all the People answered,*  
*and said, His Blood be on Us, and on our*  
*Children!*

The Reflexions which I intend to make  
 on these Words, shall be offered to your  
 Thoughts in this Order.

I. I will consider their Connexion with  
 the preceding Circumstances of the  
 Evangelist's Account; by which it  
 will appear, with what Solemnity  
 and Deliberation, and how inveterate  
 a Malice and Obstinacy they were  
 uttered.

II. I will

II. I will shew, in how wonderful a S E R M.  
Manner this Imprecation was fulfilled V.  
on the *Jews*, and is still to this day —  
fulfilling upon them.

III. I will suggest some Reflexions  
tending to vindicate the Justice and  
Wisdom of God, in dealing thus  
severely with this People; his *Ju-*  
*stice*, in respect of the Sufferers  
themselves; his *Wisdom*, with re-  
gard to the great Ends and Designs  
he proposed to himself in their  
Sufferings. From which I shall in  
the

*Last* place, deduce some Useful and  
Concerning Inferences.

As to the First of these, we may ob-  
serve, that the Imprecation of the Text  
was an Act, not of sudden Rage, but  
of deliberate and unrelenting Malice.  
They who uttered it, were no Strangers  
to the Person and Character of *Christ*;

SERM. had been Eye-witnesses of his spotless  
 v. Life and Conversation; had often heard  
 — the Heavenly Doctrine he preached, and  
 seen the matchless Wonders he performed, to confirm the Truth of it; knew the Types and Prophecies, that pointed him out as the *Messiah*, and were, at that very time, in full Expectation of their Accomplishment: And yet resisted all this Light and Conviction; and, because their Interest and Authority with the People declined by his Means, *took Counsel to slay him.*

The Chief Priests, the Scribes, and Elders, assembled in *Sanhedrim*, condemned him over Night; slept upon their unrighteous Judgment, without Remorse; and, when the Morning was come, led him away to *Pilate* the Roman Governor, to whom the Power of Life and Death appertained. *Pilate*, upon Examination, publicly declared, that he found no Fault in him; and, when they insisted on his Execution, sent them to *Herod* the Tetrarch of *Galilee*, within whose Territory some  
 Part

Part of our Saviour's Life had been spent ; but He also acquitted him. Glad of *Herod's* concurring Judgment, *Pilate* addresses himself again to the *Jews*, expostulates with them upon their groundless Prosecution of *Jesus*, and labours to divert them from it. When they continued still deaf to all his Intreaties, he tried yet one Experiment more ; gave our Saviour up to the Soldiers to be *scourged*, hoping, that *Sight* would mitigate the Fury, and move the Compassion of his Accusers ; and then proposes him as the man he was by Custom to release at the Passover ; and, that he might be sure to determine their Choice to him, names *Barabbas*, a notorious Robber and Murderer, in Competition with him. Even this Infamous Person is thought a fitter Object of Mercy, than *Jesus* : And now, impatient of Delay, and unsoftened by all these Applications, they cry out, more vehemently than ever, *Crucify him, crucify him*. When he saw therefore that he could prevail nothing (says the Evangelist) he took Water, and washed his

his

S E R M.  
V.

S E R M. *his Hands before the Multitude, saying, I*  
 v. *am innocent of the Blood of this Just Per-*  
 ——— *son; see Ye to it. Then answered All the*  
*People, and said, His Blood be on us, and on*  
*our Children!*

*All the People!* Not only those of mean and base condition, who are usually the most forward in such Popular Clamours; but the Chief Priests, the Scribes and Elders themselves, who then stood before the Tribunal of *Pilate*; not only the Inhabitants of *Jerusalem*, but the whole Nation of the *Jews*, who were then assembled to celebrate the Paschal Solemnity; *All the People*, in the utmost Force and Fulness of that Expression, *answered and said, His Blood be on Us, and on our Children!*

Never sure was any sinful Wish expressed with so much Solemnity, Unanimity, and Warmth, or attended every way with such high and horrid Circumstances of Aggravation; and no wonder, therefore, if it received its Accomplishment after so remarkable a manner, as can, in no other Account of Men, or Times,

Times, be paralleled. Which is what I, SERM  
in the V.

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Second place, proposed to consider and II.  
explain.

*Blood* (i. e. Innocent Blood) *defileth* Numb:  
*the Land* (saith their Law) *and the Land* xxxv. 33<sup>d</sup>  
*cannot be cleansed of the Blood that is*  
*shed therein, but by the Blood of him that*  
*shed it.* This Rule held even of Com-  
mon Blood, spilt by a private Hand;  
and how then was the Land to be clean-  
sed of the Blood of the *Messiah*, the Son  
of God, which that whole Nation  
spilt, and made themselves answerable  
for the Guilt of it? How, but by the  
Blood of that whole Nation, by their  
utter Ruin and Excision? Which accord-  
ingly happened soon afterwards, when  
the Armies of *Vespasian* encompassed *Je-*  
*rusalem*. The Calamities they under-  
went in that Siege, were such as never  
befell any other City or Nation. The  
Account we have of them is astonishing,  
and would have surpassed all Belief, had

SERM. it not been given us by One, who was  
 v. himself an Eye-witness of them, and a  
 Sharer in them; and who tells us, that  
 no less than eleven hundred Thousand  
*Jews* fell at that time, either by Sword,  
 or Famine.

It may be worth our while to observe from that Historian some Circumstances, which shew, how strict a Correspondence there was between their Crime and their Punishment; an Historian that had nothing less in his View, than to prove, that the One was adapted to the Other, and a just Consequence of it.

The Nation, collected in a Body to celebrate that Passover, had committed this crying Sin; and the Vengeance of God overtook them at another Paschal Season, when they were again thus embodied, when all the *Jews* were shut up in *Jerusalem*, as Beasts in a Slaughter-house, and none could escape the Sword of the *Romans*.

The Rejection of the true *Messiah* was their Crime, and their hearkening to many false *Messiahs* afterwards was the  
 I Source

Source of their Calamities; their frequent Revolts on that Account being the true Cause of the Resolution that was taken to extirpate and destroy them. SERM.  
V.

They pursued our Saviour to the Cross, that they might not be suspected of setting up a Rival Title to that of *Cæsar*; lest (said they) *the Romans come, and take away our Place and Nation.* John xxi  
48.

What they endeavoured to avoid by this Wickedness, befell them on the Account of it: The *Romans* came, and took away their Place and Nation so entirely, that, after the second Attempt made upon them by *Titus*, they never had the least Shadow of Magistracy and Government amongst them, and after their final Destruction by *Adrian*, they were not allowed, so much as to live in *Jewry*, no not upon Terms of the lowest, and most abject Slavery.

Nor did the Vengeance of God stop here, but hath pursued and doth still pursue them into all the Corners of the Earth, whither they have been driven; in all which, their Circumstances are so

SERM. singular, so unlike those of Other Ex-  
 v. iles and Captives, and so different from  
 ————— what befell them in their former Disper-  
 sions, that no Account can be given of  
 their thus Suffering beyond Example,  
 but from their Sinning beyond Example  
 in the Crucifixion of our Saviour.

To what else can we ascribe that Uni-  
 versal Contempt and Abhorrence they  
 have undergone from *Christians* of all  
 sorts, nay even from *Turks* and *Hea-*  
*thens*; so as to become, in the Prophetic  
 Expressions of *Moses*, an *Astonishment*, a  
*Proverb*, and a *By-word among all Nations*,  
*whither the Lord hath led them?*

To what else can be imputed their  
 Exclusion from Offices and Honours eve-  
 ry where, and even from the Common  
 Benefits of Strangers? The frequent  
 Oppressions and Exactions, under which  
 they have groaned, the various Expulsions  
 and Massacres that have befallen them?  
 Wherever they came, *they have* (as the Pen  
 of the same Prophet describes their Case)  
 Deut. *found no Ease, neither hath the Sole of*  
 xxviii. 65. *their Foot had Rest; but the Lord hath*  
*given*

and the Justice of God, displayed.

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given them a Trembling Heart, and Failing of Eyes, and Sorrow of Mind. SERM.  
V.

( In their other Deportations, they had often the Favour of their Conquerors; were permitted by them freely and publicly to exercise their Religion, and even to make Profelytes, to live under their own Laws and Customs, and to retain some Shadow of their Domestic Polity and Government. But in this Last, they have had none of these Privileges, or Encouragements; none secured to them by Law, but indulged only by a Secret, and Precarious Conivance; which has been limited and withdrawn, according to the Will and Pleasure of their Masters.

Finally, whereas the longest of their Captivities, after they settled in *Canaan*, lasted but seventy Years; *This* has endured for above Sixteen hundred; that is, for a greater Tract of Time than intervened, from the first building of their Temple by *Solomon*, to its final Destruction by *Titus*. Thus long have they been no Nation, but so

SERM. many scattered Herds of Vagabonds,  
 V. without any Temple-worship, or Sacri-  
 fices (the chief Part of their Religion)  
 and without any reasonable Hope, or  
 Prospect of enjoining them. All the At-  
 tempts, that have been made towards re-  
 building their Holy Place, or even to-  
 wards recovering their Country out of  
 the Hands of Infidels, have been defeat-  
 ed, and blasted by God in so remarka-  
 ble a manner, as if he were jealous of  
 every Event, which might seem to open  
 a Way home to this wretched People,  
 and give them the least Glymψε of a  
 Deliverance from their Bondage.

And all this while (which is the most  
 strange and singular Circumstance of  
 their Punishment) they have continued  
 unmixed, unincorporated with any of  
 the Nations of the Earth, amidst whom  
 they dwelt; their Preservation in which  
 Separate State is more wonderful, than  
 their Total Dispersion; and could not  
 have happened for so long a time, so uni-  
 formly, every where, without the Im-  
 mediate Interposition of God's Provi-  
 dence,

dence, to prevent a Coalition; in order to render them, by that means, Standing and Illustrious Monuments of his Vengeance, to all Nations and Ages. The Justice and Wisdom of which Severe Proceeding, I shall now in the

S E R M.

v.

*Third* place, briefly open to you : The Justice of God, in respect to the Sufferers themselves; and his Wisdom, with regard to the great Ends and Designs he proposed to himself in their Sufferings.

III.

The Justice of God is manifest, in thus punishing that Race of Men, which actually spilt the Blood of Christ, and made themselves, by a dire Imprecation, responsible for it. And as to the Consequences of this Punishment on their Children and Descendants, it must be considered, that they reach only to those of their Posterity, who abet their Forefathers Crime, and continue in their Infidelity; for to those of them, who abhor it, who acknowledge Christ to be the Messiah, entertain his Doctrine, and

S E R M. throw themselves into the Arms of his  
 v. Mercy, an Exclusion from the *Earthly*  
 — *Canaan*, and its Privileges can be  
 thought no grievous Punishment, when  
 that Loss is so amply recompensed by  
 Heb. xi. their gaining Admission to a *better, an*  
 16. *Heavenly Country*, even a Citizenship of  
 Ver. 10. that *new Jerusalem, which is from above,*  
*and whose Builder is God.*

And if the *Justice* of God be free from  
 all Imputation in this great Event, his  
*Wisdom*, I am sure, is highly illustrated  
 by it. For the Destruction of the *Jew-*  
*ish Polity and Nation* was so ordered by  
 him, in all the Steps and Methods of its  
 Accomplishment, as to confirm the Truth,  
 and spread the Interests of Christi-  
 anity.

Could there be a plainer, and more  
 irrefragable Proof of the Divine Mis-  
 sion of our Lord, than the fulfilling of  
 this Curse on his Murderers? Who,  
 that saw their wide Dispersions, and sad  
 Sufferings, could forbear arguing after  
 this manner? No Nation, from the Be-  
 ginning of the World, was ever punished

as this Nation; and therefore, if the Punishment of Nations be for their Sins, some Heinous Act must have been done by them, which never was done by any other Nation: And what could that be, but the Effusion of the Blood of *Jesus*? That Blood therefore, the Guilt of which pursues them, was the Blood of an Innocent Person, and not of an Impostor, the Seal of the Doctrine which he published, and the Evidence of his being what he affirmed himself to be, the *Son of God*.

S E R M.

V.

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Indeed this way of Reasoning was so Obvious and Cogent, that many, even among the *Jews* themselves, acknowledged the Force of it. And as for those who obstinately persisted in the Sin of their Forefathers, after *Jerusalem* was destroyed, even they themselves unwillingly contributed to the Advancement of Christianity.

The Dispersed *Jews* carried along with them into all Quarters of the Earth, the Oracles of God, those Ancient Prophecies of their Nation, which described  
the

SERM. the Person and Character of the *Messiah*,  
 v. foretold the Time of his Appearance,  
 ——— and the Circumstances of his Death and  
 Sufferings. And these Prophecies, when  
 duly attended to, were sufficient for the  
 Conviction of any Men, who did not lie,  
 as those *Jews* did, under a Judicial In-  
 fatuation and Blindness. They were the  
 great Enemies of the Gospel, and yet the  
 chief Promoters of it, by the Attestation  
 which they gave to the Integrity of those  
 Books, from whence the Proof of its Di-  
 vine Original was most clearly derived.  
 A Testimony of unsuspected Credit!  
 since the *Jews* would not, if they could,  
 have corrupted those Books, in favour of  
*Christians*; and could not have corrupted  
 them, if they would, by reason of their  
 manifold and wide Dispersions. During  
 which, God, I have said, has kept them  
 in a Separate State, not suffering them to  
 incorporate with any other Nation, in or-  
 der, by this means, to render the Tri-  
 umphs of his Justice more conspicuous,  
 and in order also to preserve them ready  
 for that gracious Call, which, we piously  
 believe,

believe, shall one Day summon them from all Parts of the Earth, and gather together the Outcasts of Israel.—That so We and They may become One Fold, under One Shepherd, Christ the Righteous! O the Depth of the Riches both of the Wisdom and Knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his Judgments, and his Ways past finding out! However,

S E R M.

v.

Rom. xi.

33.

These we may humbly presume to have been some of those Many Wise Ends, to which Divine Providence directed this Wonderful Dispensation. Others might be added: But I forbear;—and shall choose rather to spend the remaining Part of my Time, in deducing (as I proposed) from the Whole, some Useful and Concerning Inferences.

I. His Blood be on Us, and on our Children! and it happened to them, even according to their Wishes. Let us learn from hence, to abstain from all such rash and horrid Imprecations, which the Ears of sober Heathens would tingle at; but which are more unbecoming, and more heinous (as, I fear, they are more familiar)  
in

SERM. in the Mouths of *Christians*. For the  
 v. Vengeance of God will find us out, not  
 ——— only for the Evil Deeds we commit, but  
 for the profane Folly (so frequent among  
 us) of wishing that Damnation to our-  
 selves, which we otherways but too well  
 deserve. They, who thus add to the  
 Guilt of their Sins the binding Power of  
 a Curse, are doubly unpardonable; they  
 consent to their Punishment, as they be-  
 fore consented to their Crime; and *their*  
*Damnation* therefore is every way *just*.

Matt. xii.  
 36. *Every Idle Word, that we speak, we shall  
 give an Account thereof at the Day of Judg-  
 ment,* says our Saviour. How much more  
 shall we be accountable for those (not  
 idle, empty Forms of Speech, but) solemn  
 and significant Imprecations, by which  
 we anticipate our Judgment, and give  
 Sentence against ourselves. Let such an  
 Iniquity be far from all those that name  
 the Name of *Christ*! To whom Simpli-  
 city of Speech is as strictly enjoined, as  
 even Sincerity of Heart, or Integrity of  
 Manners.

2. The Completion of this Curse, and the Vengeance taken on that whole Nation, in consequence of it, will lead us to admire the inscrutable Methods of God's Providence, in bringing about the Salvation of Sinners. By the Scandal of the Cross, and the several mean Circumstances of our Saviour's Humiliation, the Wise, the Noble, and the Mighty Men of the Earth, were kept back from embracing the Faith of *Christ*. But that Prejudice against Christianity soon turned to its Advantage: When they saw his Murderers punished in so remarkable, and astonishing a manner; then they began to discern the surpassing *Dignity* of the Person suffering, and the Infinite *Merit* of his Sufferings; to discover some of the *Reasons*, to admire the *Wisdom*, and lay hold of the *Benefits* of that humble and mysterious Dispensation, *God manifest in the Flesh*, dying on the Cross, *to destroy the Works of the Devil*.

A Subject always highly deserving, but on this Day more particularly challenging our devout Reflexions; which it will

S E R M.

v.

3 ERM. will to the utmost both exercise and im-  
 v. prove. A Subject full of Wonders, not  
 Eph. iii. to be exhausted! Inasmuch as it contains  
 18. the *Breadth, and Length, and Depth, and  
 Height* (even the whole Extent and Com-  
 pass) of the *Love of God towards Mankind  
 in Christ Jesus.*

*It is good for us to be here,* to dwell on  
 the Contemplation of this delightful, this  
 amazing Mystery; which even *Angels  
 desire to look into,* but cannot fully com-  
 prehend.

Let us determine, with *St. Paul,* to  
 count every thing but *Dross and Dung,*  
 in comparison of the *Excellency of this  
 Knowledge of Christ crucified;* to the *Jews,*  
 indeed, a *Stumbling Block,* and to the  
 Phil. iii. *Greeks Foolishness;* but to those who are  
 8. called, both *Jews and Greeks,* *Christ the  
 1 Cor. i. Power of God, and Christ the Wisdom of  
 23. God.*

3. It may be a third Improvement of  
 what has been discoursed, if we take Oc-  
 casion from thence, to account for the In-  
 fidelity of those Men, who live where the  
 Gospel of *Christ* is professed, and yet shut  
 their

their Eyes against the Light of it. Can we wonder, this should happen now and then to *particular* Persons, when it is the Case of so great a *Body* of Men, as the *Jews*; such a Nation of hardened Infidels, who though they have smarted under the Rod of *God*, during Sixteen Ages; for spilling the Blood, and rejecting the Doctrine of *Christ*, continue still insensible, both of the Guilt of the One, and the Evidence of the Other? When such an Effect happens, we must not impute it to any Sett of Natural, or Moral Causes; the Hand of God is in it, and some Degree of a Judicial Induration. Could we look to the Bottom of such Men's Unbelief, we should find, that it is generally owing to some high and flagrant Act of Wickedness, which provoked God to withdraw his Grace from them, after they had long resisted the Power of it, and leave them to walk in the Ways of their own Heart, and in the Sight of their own Eyes, without Check or Controul. And in such a Case, though they may be Men of great Acuteness and Sagacity, in discerning

SERM.  
V.

3 ERM. cerning and pursuing the Advantages of  
v. this Life, as the *Jews* themselves are:

— Yet, in respect of Divine Truth, they  
may be altogether inapprehensive and  
2 Cor. iv. stupid. *If the Gospel be hid, it is hid to*  
4. *them which are lost, in whom the God of this*  
*World hath blinded the Minds of them which*  
*believe not, lest the Light of the Glorious Gos-*  
*pel of Christ, who is the Image of God, should*  
*shine unto them.*

4. The Reflexions which have been  
advanced, do also (in the fourth Place)  
suggest to us Matter of holy Caution and  
Fear. If the most beloved Nation on  
Earth, and chosen People of God; They,  
Rom. ix. *to whom pertained the Adoption, and the Law,*  
4. *and the Covenants of God, and the Promises;*  
*if They could sin away all these Privileges,*  
*and utterly forfeit the Divine Protection*  
*and Favour, What Security have We,*  
*that, abusing and despising the same Mer-*  
*cies, we shall not smart under the same*  
*Judgments? that the Kingdom of God, of*  
Matt. xxi. *which we are unworthy, shall not be taken*  
43. *away from us, and given to a Nation bring-*  
*ing forth the Fruits thereof? The In-*  
*ference*

ference is St. Paul's!—Well! (says he) S E R M.  
*because of Unbelief, they were broken off; and* V.  
*Thou standest by Faith: Be not high-minded,*  
*but fear. For if God spared not the Natural* Rom. xi.  
*Branches, take heed lest he also spare not* 20, 21.  
*Thee.*

In order therefore, to avoid their Fate, let us avoid any Resemblance of their Guilt, and keep ourselves at as great a Distance as we can from that Sin of the Jews, which drew these Calamities upon them, and in which even We, who live so long after it was committed, may yet be, to some Degree, involved; if we are professed Enemies of Goodness, if we slander *Christ's* Word, blaspheme his Person, and despise his Messengers; if we privately bring in dangerous Heresies, destructive of Christian Faith and Christian Practice; for of such Persons St. Peter and St. Paul have pronounced, that *they deny the Lord who bought them, crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open Shame.* 2 Pet. ii. 1. Heb. vi. 6.

In order to stand clear of this Imputation, let it not be thought enough by us,

S E R M. that we *do not* run into any of these Ex-  
 v. cesses ourselves, while we abet, or con-  
 ——— nive at those *who do*: But let us set our-  
 selves, in our several Places and Stations,  
 to discountenance Infidelity, and to rebuke  
 that Spirit of Profaneness, which hath for  
 many Years past appeared open and bare-  
 faced with Impunity (I had almost said,  
 with Applause) amongst us, to the great  
 Offence of sober Minds, to the Prejudice  
 of all good Order and Government, the  
 Disgrace of our Religion, and the Peril of  
 Souls! It is high Time that these daring  
 Attempts against the Honour of *Christ* and  
 his Gospel should be effectually checked  
 and suppressed, that the Civil Magistrate's  
 Authority should be employed, and the  
 Spiritual Sword of Excommunication un-  
 sheathed against such Impious Offenders.

Heb. x.  
 28, 29.

*He that despised Moses's Law, died with-  
 out Mercy* (I speak the Words of the Apo-  
 stle to the *Hebrews*, and which are applied  
 by him to this very purpose.) *Of how  
 much sorer Punishment, suppose ye, shall They  
 be thought worthy, who have trodden under  
 Foot the Son of God, and have counted the  
 Blood*

*and the Justice of God, displayed.*

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*Blood of the Covenant, wherewith they were sanctified, an unholy thing?*

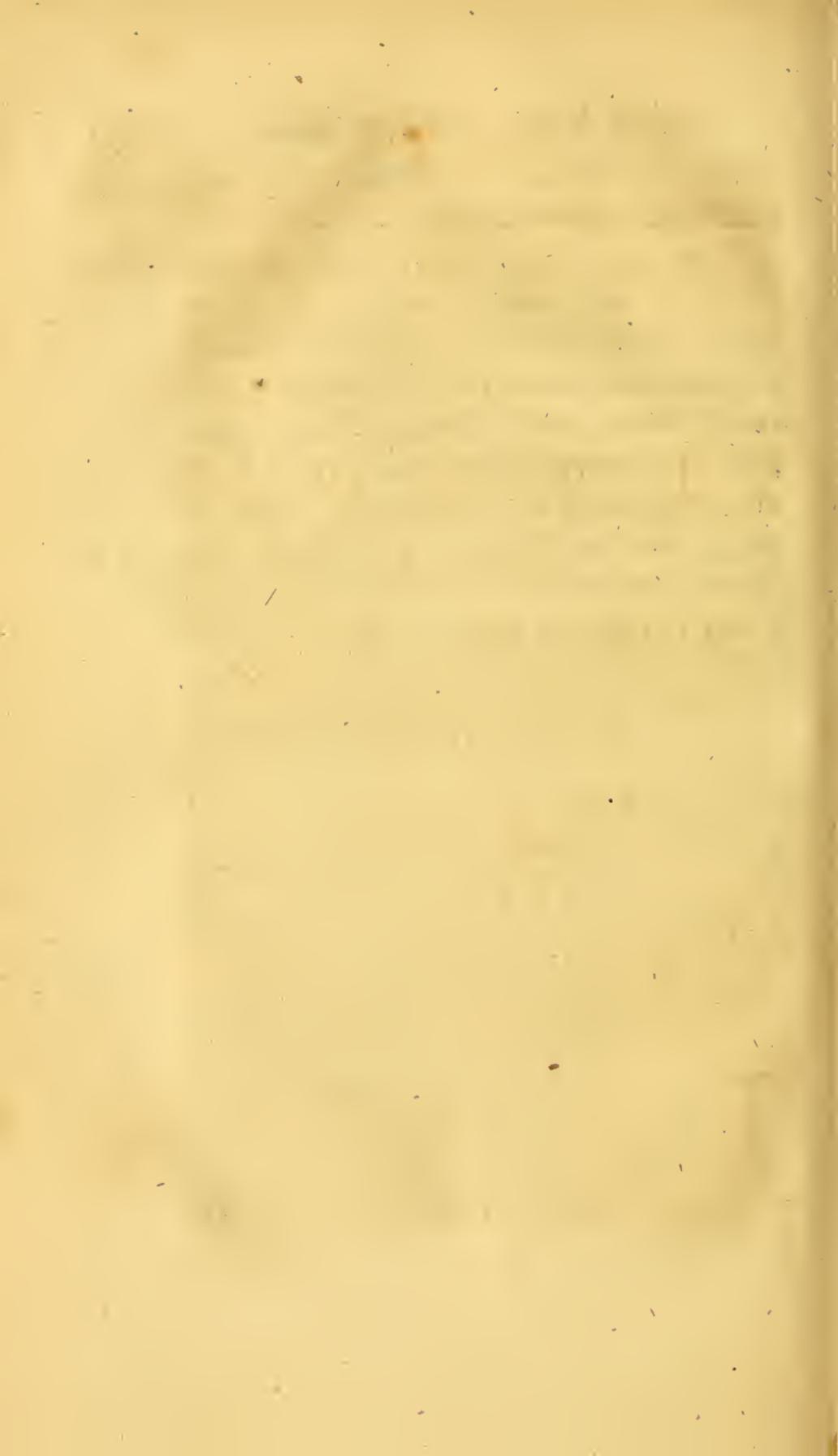
S E R M.

V.

May the all-sufficient Merit of that  
Blood though undervalued *by* them, be  
yet extended *to* them; purge their Con-  
sciences from Dead Works, and enlighten  
their Minds with saving Knowledge!  
And if they will not repent, but resolve  
still to go on in their Impieties, let us be  
sure to *have no Fellowship with* them, but  
*depart from the Tents of these wicked Men,*  
*lest we be consumed in their Sins!*

Num. xvi.

26.



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*The Christian State, a State of Suffering.*

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A

S E R M O N

Preached at

*Westminster-Abbey,*

November 1, 1717.

Being *All-Saints Day.*

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I P E T. ii. 21.

*Even hereunto were ye called; because Christ  
also suffered for us, leaving us an Exam-  
ple, that ye should follow his Steps.*

**T**HE Duty, and the Perfection of S E R M.  
a Christian consists in the Imita- VI.  
tion of *Christ*; in the Imitation of every  
Part of the Spotless Example, of the

SERM. Passive as well, as Active Graces, in  
 VI. which he abounded. Both Sides of his  
 ——— Character are highly useful and instructive to us; Both, at different Times, and for different Ends, alike necessary to be attentively considered, and closely followed by us. But *some* Occasions, *some* Times there are, when that Part of *Christ's* Example, which relates to the sad Sufferings he underwent, and the Heroic Manner in which he bore them, is principally to be regarded by *Christians*. *Such* was the Season, at which *St. Peter* wrote this Epistle to his Brethren of the Dispersion, then every where oppressed, afflicted, persecuted: And *such* is this particular Day in the *Kalendar* of our Church; sacred to the Memory of those Saints, Confessors and Martyrs of old, who, being exercised in Afflictions,

2 Tim. iv.

7.

and trained up to Sufferings, *fought the good Fight, and finished their Course*, and obtained the Crown, which was laid up for them by the Author and Finisher of their Faith, the great Pattern and Rewarder of their Sufferings, *Christ Jesus!*

*Even*

Even hereunto they were called, and in this SERM.  
 their Saintship chiefly consisted; the VI.  
 Imitation of *Him who suffered for Us, leav-*  
*ing Us an Example, that We should follow his*  
*Steps.*

The chief design of *St. Peter*, throughout this Epistle, is, to fortify the new Converts against those Disgraces and Afflictions, which had befallen, or were ready to befall them, on the Account of their Religion; and the Argument, by which he persuades them here in the Text to Equanimity and Patience, is, we see, that *even hereunto they were called*; that they felt no more now, than what, from their very Entrance on Christianity, they had reason to expect; that these were the Terms, on which they embraced the Faith; that such Sufferings are the proper Lot and Portion of *Christians*; because (as he adds) *Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an Example that ye should follow his Steps.* If the Cap-Heb. ii  
*tain of our Salvation was made perfect* 10.  
*through Sufferings*, how should any Man who marches under his Ensigns, ever

S E R M. hope to exempt himself from them? He  
 VI. not only gave us Precepts, which we  
 ——— are to obey, but a Pattern also to direct,  
 and facilitate our Obedience. They  
 I John ii. therefore, *who say, they abide in him,*  
 6. *ought themselves also to walk, even as he*  
*walked;* and consequently (if the Will  
 of God so be) to Suffer, as He Suffered,  
 with a becoming Meekness and Patience,  
 with Fortitude and Firmness: Especially  
 if it be considered, that He *Suffered for*  
*Us*, i. e. on our Account, and for our  
 Advantage: And why then should we  
 think it hard and unreasonable to Suffer  
 for ourselves? or be forward and uneasy  
 under any Affliction of Life that befalls  
 us? He took out the Sting, and Expiated  
 the Guilt of our Sins by his Sufferings;  
 but so as to leave us still under an Ar-  
 rear of Punishment, which We ourselves  
 are to discharge, and, by that means (as  
 Col. i. 24. St. Paul emphatically speaks) to *fill up*  
*what is behind of the Afflictions of Christ*  
*in our Flesh.* Even hereunto were We called;  
*because Christ also suffered for us, leaving*  
 us

*us an Example, that We should follow his Steps.* S E R M. VI.

The Words, you see, will give me a proper Occasion of explaining two great Truths, always fit to be inculcated to *Christians*, and always present to the Minds, and exemplified in the Actions of those Holy Men and Women, whom we this Day profess to Commemorate.

The two Points are these:

*First*, That the *Christian* State, however willing some *Christians* may be to mistake the Nature of it, is certainly a *State of Suffering*. I.

*Secondly*, That the Sufferings of *Christ* afford us a plain *Argument*, why *We* also should expect our share of Sufferings; and withal a powerful *Motive* to support us under them. And II.

*First*, I am to shew, that the *Christian* State is a State of Suffering. I.

*This*

S E R M. *This is an hard Saying, which will not*  
 VI. *easily gain Admittance with the Great,*  
 Luke xvi. *the Rich, and the Prosperous; with*  
 19. *those who are clothed in Purple and fine*  
*Linen, and fare sumptuously every Day.*  
 And yet, as unwelcome as the Doctrine  
 may be, it is very clear and certain.  
 We can scarce open a Page of the Gospel,  
 without finding it either laid down in  
 the Express Words of *Christ* and his  
 Apostles, or recommended by their  
 I Thes. Practice, *Even hereunto are we called,* says  
 iii. 3. *St. Peter in the Text; We are thereunto*  
*appointed, 'Εἰς τὸτο κείμεθα,* says *St. Paul,*  
 where he is professedly treating of this  
 2 Tim. iii. Subject. And in another Place, *All that*  
 12. *will live Godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer*  
 Acts xiv. *Persecution.* And again, *We must, through*  
 22. *much Tribulation, enter into the Kingdom of*  
*God.*

'Tis true, these, and many other Pas-  
 sages of like Import in the *New Testa-*  
*ment,* are chiefly, and in their utmost Ex-  
 tent, to be understood of the Times  
 when they were first uttered, the Infant  
 Age of Christianity; when the Standard  
 of

of the Cross being set up, all they, who re- SER M.  
 paired to it, were engaged in a continual VI.  
 Opposition to the Powers of this World ;  
 and Persecutions, Afflictions, Distresses  
 attended them in every Step of their Con-  
 flict ; when the Sufferings of *Christians*  
 were designed to promote the Reception  
 of the Faith of *Christ*, and the Seed of  
 the Word sown was to be watered, and  
 made fruitful by the Blood of Martyrs.  
 Then indeed was it most remarkably,  
 most eminently true, that the *Christian*  
*State* and Profession was a State of Suf-  
 fering. However, though this be not at  
 present the General Lot of *Christians*,  
 although the Instances be now rare, in  
 which we are thus called upon to wit- 1 Tim. vi.  
 ness a good Confession, and to resist even 13.  
 to Blood ; yet still, I say, there is a Sense 4.  
 of the Assertion in which it holds good,  
 and will hold good to the End of the  
 World ; still the Doctrine of the Gospel  
 is *Λόγος σταυρῆς*, the Doctrine of the Cross ;  
 and He, who would be a true Disciple of  
*Christ*, must even now deny himself, and  
 take up his Cross, and follow him.

Can

SERM. Can we doubt of this Truth, if we  
 VI. consider the Solemn Engagements, into  
 ————— which we entered, when we were first  
 listed in his Service at our Baptism, That  
 we would *manifestly fight under his Ban-*  
*ner, against Sin, the World and the De-*  
*vil, and continue Christ's faithful Soldiers*  
*and Servants to our Lives End?* Are  
 these Enemies so weak, and contempti-  
 ble, as that we should hope to resist them  
 with Ease? Can this Combat be main-  
 tained, this Warfare be accomplished by  
 us, without great Difficulties and Trou-  
 bles?

The good *Christian* is not of this  
 World, even while he lives *in it*; and  
 therefore the Man of this World, whose  
 Life is not like his, whose Ways are of  
 another Fashion, will be sure to malign,  
 and traduce, and perhaps despise him.

1 Pet. iv. Because *he runs not with them to the same*  
 4. *Excess of Riot*, they will charge him with  
 Affectation and Singularity at least, if  
 not with downright Hypocrisy; they  
 will *daily mistake his Sayings*, misconstrue  
 all his best Actions, misrepresent his  
 brightest

brightest Virtues: His Humility and Lowliness of Mind shall be called Meanness of Spirit; his Patience under Injuries and Affronts, Insensibility and Folly; his Exactness in the Performance of Religious Duties, his Conscientious Abstinence from whatever has the Appearance of Evil, his holy Severities and Mortifications shall furnish ample Matter for their ungodly Disdain: *The Proud will have him exceedingly in Derision; he will be as a Tabret unto them; a Byword of the People, and the Song of the Drunkards.*

S E R M.  
VI.

Pf. cxix.  
5<sup>1</sup>.  
Job xvii.  
6.  
Pf. lxxix.  
12.

And can a Man so treated and vilified, be said to be in an unsuffering State? I am sure, these are reckoned among the bitter Ingredients of our Saviour's Sufferings; so that even where he is said to have *endured the Cross, and despised the Shame*, it is added also, in the next Verse, that he *endured the Contradiction of Sinners* — As if that Circumstance added some Degree of Weight and Sharpness to his Other Afflictions.

The

SERM. VI. The Sincere Christian cannot deny or dissemble the Truth, when a proper Occasion bids him stand forth and own it; he cannot flatter *Wickedness in high Places*, fall in with false and prevailing Opinions, or *follow a Multitude to do Evil*; and He, who cannot bend himself to a Compliance in such Cases, must expect, not to continue unmolested, but to reap the proper Fruits of his Stubbornness. Or should the Course of this World, in which he lives, run smoothly on; should he be ruffled and discomposed by no Enemies, no Accidents from without; yet still there are Inward Anxieties and Sorrows, Perplexities and Troubles, that attend him.

Rom. vii. 23. *He finds (for St. Paul himself owns that he found) a Law in his Members warring against the Law of his Mind, and bringing him, or endeavouring to bring him, into Captivity to the Law of Sin.* He has unruly Appetites to mortify, strong Passions to tame: and the Struggle with these, even after they seem vanquished, must sometimes be renewed, and such a

Struggle is no ways *Joyous, but Grievous.* S E R M.  
The Fear he has of offending, keeps VI.  
him under a perpetual Alarm; the  
Sense he has of Guilt is quick and pun-  
gent, and subjects him, whenever he  
falls, to great Remorse and Uneasiness.  
What Sighs, what Groans, what Floods  
of Tears does it occasion? What Ri-  
gour, what Revenges on himself does it  
produce? How doth *his own Wickedness* Jer. ii. 19.  
(nay, how doth his very Errors and In-  
firmities) *correct him, and his Backslidings*  
*reprove him?*

Or *could* we suppose him to have *no*  
Occasion thus to suffer for his *Own* Sins,  
yet will he never want *one* of suffering  
for the Sins of *Others*. The good *Christi-*  
*an* cannot be an unconcerned Specta-  
tor of any great Degree of Wicked-  
ness, even while he himself stands free  
from the Infection of it. His tender  
Regard for God's Honour, for the Inter-  
ests of Piety, and the Good of Souls,  
makes him lay to heart the crying Ini-  
quities of that People, amidst whom he  
dwells, and grieve for those, who do  
not

SERM. not (and the rather, because they do  
 VI. not) grieve for themselves. When he  
 ——— observes the Scandalous Progress of Infi-  
 delity, the open Growth of Profaneness;  
 the Emulation and Strife, the Oppression  
 and Injustice, the Hatred and Cruel-  
 ty, that abound in the World through  
 Lust; in a word, when he sees the most  
 immoral Practices and Pollutions of the  
 Heathens reigning among those *who*  
*name the Name of Christ*, though *in their*  
*Works they deny him*; such a Scene of  
 Sin and Misery wounds him to the  
 Quick, and fills his Soul with unspeak-  
 able Sorrow. *Rivers of Waters run*  
 Pf. cxix. *down his Eyes, because Men keep not God's*  
 136. *Law.*

'Tis true, his Mind is not always em-  
 ployed in this melancholy manner; he  
 has also the Inward Joys and Consola-  
 tions, arising from the Testimony of a  
 good Conscience, from the Assurances  
 of God's Favour, and the Refreshing  
 Influences of his good Spirit; but even  
*These*, either for the Punishment of his  
 Misuse of them, or for a Trial of his  
 Faith,

Faith, are sometimes withdrawn; and then his *Soul is sorrowful even unto Death; Fearfulness and Trembling come upon him, and his Heart within him is even like melted Wax.* And this State of Dereliction is what the most Experienced Saints and Servants of God have felt, and complained of: And no wonder; since something not unlike it happened even to the Son of God himself.

S E R M.  
VI.  
—————  
Matth. 1  
xxvi. 38.  
Pf. lv. 5.  
Pf. xxii.  
14.

Add to this that even the best of Men, and those who are advanced nearest toward Perfection, have often some peculiar Infirmary of Body or Mind, which sticks close to them, gives them great Interruptions in the Course of their Duty, and great Trouble and Uneasiness in the Performance of it; and this is permitted by God, in order to keep them Vigilant, Humble, Dependent; even to St. Paul there was given a Thorn *in the Flesh, a Messenger of Satan to buffet him.*

The *Christian State* then (even setting aside the Extraordinary Case of Persecution for the Name of *Christ*) is certainly

SERM. ly a *State of Suffering*; *Hereunto are we*  
 VI. *called*, as many of us as have vowed O-  
 ——— bedience to *Christ*, and profess to be-  
 lieve, and to live, as he hath taught us.  
 And if so, let us all lay our Hands up-  
 on our Hearts, and examine ourselves,  
 whether, and how far we may be said  
 to be in such a State, to have fulfilled  
 the Duties, and undergone the Hard-  
 ships, which entitle us to the Privileges  
 of it.

Have we then lived according to the  
 Flesh, or according to the Spirit? Have  
 we exercised ourselves in the severe and  
 rugged Parts of our Duty? or have we  
 chosen for our Lot, the Gratifications  
 of Sense, and vain Pleasures which  
 did not profit us? Have we called our-  
 selves often to account for our Miscarri-  
 ages, and made a serious, a strict, and  
 impartial Scrutiny into our past Lives  
 and Actions? Have we felt the Spirit of  
 Compunction and Contrition moving  
 in our Hearts, and condemning us for  
 our Transgressions? Have we deplored  
 them? Have we prayed, and striven a-  
 gainst

against them, and applied those harsh, S E R M.  
but wholesome Remedies, which the VI.  
Christian Religion prescribes for the  
Cure of such Diseases; Fasting, and  
Self-denial, and Mortification? Have  
we experienced the afflicting Hand of  
God, laying hold of us, when we  
transgressed, and gently leading us back  
into the Paths of Virtue, from whence  
we had swerved, by seasonable and mer-  
ciful Chastisements? If this be our Case,  
we have some Reason to hope, that we  
are in such a State and Condition of  
Mind, as becomes a good *Christian*,  
such as God will accept, and improve,  
and reward.

But now, on the other side, what if  
the Vanities of Life, and the Enjoy-  
ments of Sense have engrossed all our  
Thoughts and Affections? What, if we  
have been so far from *crucifying* our  
Lusts, that we have *indulged* them to the  
utmost? from *mourning* for our Sins,  
that we have even *boasted* of them?  
from humbling ourselves in private, by  
*voluntary* Austerities, that we have not  
L 2 regarded,

SERM. regarded as we ought to do, even the  
 VI. *stated* Times of Public and Solemn  
 ——— Humiliations? What if our *Diversions*  
 have been pursued in prejudice to our  
*Devotions*? have taken up the *Room*,  
 and eaten out the *Life* of them? Can  
 such Inclinations, such Practices be re-  
 conciled to the Spirit of the Gospel? Is  
 this the Work, the Employment, *where-*  
*unto we are called*? Is this Temper of  
 Mind agreeable to the Character of a  
 Serious and Sincere *Christian*?

Believe it, a Life of uninterrupted Jol-  
 lity and Mirth, of perpetual Pleasure  
 and Amusement, is not, cannot be the  
 Life of a true Disciple of *Christ*. These  
 things we may taste, but we are not to  
 rest in them; they are our Refreshments  
 on the way, not the End and Design of  
 our Journey. He that pretends to be  
 a *Christian indeed* (as *St. Paul* speaks of  
 a *Widow indeed*) and liveth in Pleasure,  
 is dead while he liveth; he savoureth not  
 the things that be of God, hath no Relish  
 of the Chief Duties and Offices of the  
 Christian Life; and though he may put

1 Tim. v.  
 6.  
 Matt. xvi.  
 23.

on some of the Outward *Forms* and Appearances of Godliness, is a Stranger to the Inward Life and *Power* of it. *That* is only to be attained by his fixing his Eye on the Example, and following the Steps of a Suffering, Crucified Saviour. And therefore, I shall, as I proposed in the *next* place,

S E R M.  
VI.

*Secondly*, Consider how the Sufferings of *Christ* afford us a *plain Argument*, why *We* also should expect *Our Share* of Sufferings, and withal, a *powerful Motive* to support us under them. And it is well they afford us *both* these; for the *one*, without the *other*, would be an Uncomfortable Consideration. II.

The Apostle, we see, proposes the Example of *Christ* on the *Suffering Side* of it; as if *that* were the *Chief View* we were to take of it, *that* the great End and Design of his being made an Example to us. The most difficult Part of our Duty is to suffer well; and there-

SERM. fore we stood *most* in need of a Perfect  
 VI. Pattern in *this* respect, to direct and en-  
 courage us; and what we wanted *most*,  
 Christ, who came to make good all our  
 Defects, and to heal all our Infirmities,  
 took *most* Care to supply us with: and  
 therefore from his Birth throughout his  
 Life, to his Death, this is the Character,  
 under which he appears to us. His Suf-  
 ferings indeed were finished on the Cross;  
 but they began, when he first entered on  
 his State of Humiliation; when empty-  
 ing himself of all his Glory, *he took up-*  
*on him to deliver Man*, and, in order to  
 it, *did not abhor the Virgin's Womb*.

Under this View if we consider him,  
 and withal consider, that 'tis our Duty,  
 and our Happiness to resemble him;  
 what Hopes can we have to escape the  
 Sufferings of this Life? Nay what Rea-  
 son totally to decline them? How can  
 we possibly, *without Suffering*, be like  
 Him, who himself *did nothing but suffer*?

The Infinite Dignity of his Person  
 (for he was the Son of God, and God  
 the Son) hindered him not from tak-  
 ing

ing our Nature upon him, with all its SERM.  
meanest Circumstances, and with all its VI.  
most afflicting Accidents: and who is ———  
there then among the Sons of Men, so  
distinguished from the rest by his Great-  
ness, or Pre-eminence, as that it should  
misbecome him to learn this great Les-  
son of Humility? Who, that should be  
ashamed to practise it?

He was of unblemished Purity, of  
perfect Sanctity and Innocence; and  
therefore the Calamities he underwent,  
were no ways necessary, either for the  
Trial or Improvement of his Virtue; and  
yet he chose to undergo them. How then  
should the very Best of us (who ought,  
God knows, to be much Better, and yet,  
without such Tryals, are in danger of  
growing much Worse, than we are) ex-  
pect or even desire to be free from them?

Certainly we judge not aright of our  
Spiritual Wants and Necessities, of our  
Carnal Infirmities and Failures, if we  
wish to live always in perfect Ease, and  
think it a Mark of God's Favour, when  
nothing happens to deject, or disturb us.

- SERM. Nay, but *then* is the Time, when we  
 VI. have *most* Reason to suspect ourselves.  
 — There is a *Wo*, we know, denounced on  
 Luke vi. *Christians, when all Men shall speak well of*  
 20. *them; for so did they not of Christ him-*  
 Rom. viii. *self; and we are predestinate to be conformed*  
 29. *to his Image; and therefore, as far as we*  
 deviate from that Original, so far we fall  
 Heb. xii. short of Perfection and Happiness. *If we*  
 7. *endure Chastning, God dealeth with us as*  
 Sons; even as he dealt with him, of whom  
 Matt. iii. he said; *This is my beloved Son, in whom I*  
 17. *am pleased.*
- 1Pet. iv. 1. *Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for*  
*us in the Flesh, let us arm ourselves with the*  
*same Mind; with a Resolution to imitate*  
*him in his perfect Submission and Re-*  
*signation of himself to the Divine Will*  
*and Pleasure; in his Contempt of all the*  
*Enjoyments of Sense, of all the Vanities*  
*of this World, its Allurements and Ter-*  
*rors; in his Practice of Religious Seve-*  
*rities; in his Love of Religious Retire-*  
*ment; in his making it his Meat and his*  
*Drink, his only Study and Delight, to*  
 Joh. ix. 4. *work the Work of him that sent him; in*  
 his

his choosing, for that End (*when that End* SERM. could not otherwise be attained) Want VI. — before Abundance, Shame before Honour, Pain before Pleasure, Death before Life; and in his preferring *always* a laborious uninterrupted Practice of Virtue, to a Life of Rest, and Ease, and Indolence. *Let the same Mind*, in all these respects, *be in us, which was in Christ Jesus, who suffered for us, leaving us an Example, that we should follow his Steps.* The Task indeed is hard to Flesh and Blood; the Difficulties that lie in our Way, are exceeding great, and would be altogether insuperable, had not He, who set us an Example, so far above the Level and Pitch of human Nature, enabled, as well as commanded us to follow it.

But, Thanks be to God, *That* is not our Case. *Christ*, by the Merit of those *very Sufferings*, which he proposes to our Imitation, has purchased for us all such Extraordinary Aids and Assistances, as are requisite to support us under them. By what he underwent for our Sakes in his Life, and at his Death, he obtained of  
God,

- S E R M. God, not only a Release from the Punish-  
 VI. ment of our Sins, but new Powers to qua-  
 ——— lify us for a further Increase in Virtue; not  
 only the Pardoning, but Sanctifying Grace  
 of his Spirit; by the Means of which we  
 Gal. v. 24. can now *crucify the Flesh, with the Af-*  
*fections and Lusts*; mortify and subdue all  
 our irregular Passions, undervalue Plea-  
 sures, rejoice in Afflictions, and *walk even*  
*as he walked*, in Humility and Patience,  
 in Purity and Holiness. Weak and Im-  
 2 Cor. xii. potent we are, but *his Grace is sufficient*  
 9. *for us*: We can do nothing of ourselves,  
 Phil. iv. but *We can do all things through Christ that*  
 13. *strengtheneth us*; and, in Confidence of  
 this Assistance, we may venture to take  
 to ourselves the Words of his fervent  
 Rom. viii. Apostle, and say, *Who shall separate us*  
 35. *from the Love of Christ*? Who, or what  
 shall hinder us from obeying his Precepts,  
 Ver. 37. and from transcribing his Practice? *Shall*  
*Tribulation, or Distress, or Persecution, or*  
*Famine, or Nakedness, or Peril, or Sword?*  
*Nay, but in all these things we are more than*  
*Conquerors, through Christ that loved us.*

*If*

If I am lifted up from the Earth (said he, speaking of the powerful Efficacy of his Cross and Sufferings) *I will draw all Men after me*: I will lift them also up above their earthly Affections and Pursuits, and raise them into the Participation of a Divine and Heavenly Nature.—Look down then upon us from thy Cross, Blessed *Jesu!* Draw us, and we will run after thee, not only with willing, but Cheerful Minds; with Alacrity, and with Pleasure. We will trace all thy Steps from *Bethlehem* to *Calvary*; we will imitate thee, to the best of our Power, in all the Stages and Conditions of thy Life, in what thou didst, and in what thou sufferedst; we will set thee before us in every Case, and say, Would my Saviour have thus, or thus behaved himself in these Circumstances? Would he have yielded to such a Temptation? or declined such a Conflict? Would he have resented such an Injury; or felt the least Discomposure of Mind, upon such an Affront? Would he have been elated upon such a Success; have sunk under such a Pressure; or consulted with

Flesh

S E R M.

VI.

John xiii.

32.

Cant. i. 4.

S E R M. Flesh and Blood on such an Occasion?

VI. Why then should I, who have his Example to guide, his Promise of an exceeding Reward to encourage, and his Grace to sustain me? Nay, but *draw us*, Blessed Jesu, and *we will run after thee! we will follow thee*, O thou Lamb of God, *whithersoever thou goest!* Particularly we will often resort to that lively affecting Representation of thy Death and Sufferings, the Sacrament of thy Body and Blood, which thou hast instituted for us. *There* we will inure ourselves to the Contemplation of *Christ* crucified, and to the Contempt of all the vain Glories of this World, which were, together with thee, nailed to thy Cross; of all the bewitching, but empty Pleasures of Life, with which we are surrounded. *There* we will endeavour to instruct ourselves in those holy Lessons of Resignation, Humility, Patience, and Perseverance unto Death, which thou, in thy Gospel, hast taught us; and to furnish ourselves with such Spiritual Supplies of Grace, as may enable us to trace the suffering Example, which thou hast set us;

that

that so resembling thee in Meekness, SERM.  
Piety, and Purity *here*, we may also re- VI.  
semble thee in Happiness and Glory *here-*  
*after!*

*Now unto him that loved us, and washed* Rev. i. 5,  
*us from our Sins in his own Blood, and hath* 6.  
*made us Kings and Priests unto God, and*  
*his Father; to Him be all Glory and Honour*  
*ascribed in all Assemblies of the Saints!*  
Amen.

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*Some Reasons assigned for our Saviour's appearing chiefly to his Apostles after his Resurrection; and his Manner of conversing with them, represented:*

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I N A  
S E R M O N

Preached at

*Westminster-Abbey,*

On *Easter-Day*, 1718.

---

ACTS i. 3.

*To whom also he shewed himself alive after his Passion by many infallible Proofs, being seen of them forty Days, and speaking of the Things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.*

**T**IS a just Observation of St. Chry- SERM.  
*ostom*, that, though the Apostles VII.  
 were allowed to be present with our  
 Lord,

SERM. Lord, and to behold him, when ascending  
 VII. up into Heaven, yet they were not  
 ————— permitted to see him in the Act of arising  
 from the Dead ; because their Testimony  
 was requisite in the one Case, to establish  
 our Faith, but not in the other. It was  
 fit they should be Eye-witnesses of his  
 Ascent ; else, they had not been able to  
 attest the Truth of that Matter of Fact,  
 the Knowledge of which they could not  
 afterwards have attained otherwise than  
 by Revelation ; but it was no ways neces-  
 sary that they should see him, when he  
 broke loose from the *Grave*, in order to  
 their bearing witness of his Resurrection ;  
 since it was sufficient to that Purpose, if  
 they saw, and conversed with him, *after*  
 he was risen. And that they did so, all  
 the Evangelists inform us, particulatly St.  
*Luke*, in the Words of the Text: *To*  
*whom also* [i. e. *unto the Apostles, whom he*  
*had chosen*, which are the concluding Words  
 of the next preceding Verse] *he shewed him-*  
*self alive after his Passion by many infallible*  
*Proofs, being seen of them forty Days, and*  
*speaking*

speaking of the Things pertaining to the Kingdom of God. SERM. VII.

The Observations I intend to suggest from these Words, may be reduced under the three following Heads:

*First*, Our Saviour's continuing forty Days upon Earth, after he arose. I.

*Secondly*, His appearing throughout that time chiefly to his Apostles. And, II.

*Thirdly*, The Manner of his spending his Time with them. Two Accounts are given of it in the Text; That by *many infallible Proofs* he convinced them of his being returned to Life, and that he discoursed to them of *things pertaining to the Kingdom of God*. III.

The *First* Point that may deserve your Attention is, our Saviour's Continuance upon Earth for forty Days after he arose. I.

That he did so continue, is certain; and as certain, that, for many wise Reasons, known to God alone, and as un-

S E R M. necessary, as they are impossible to be  
 VII. by us discovered, it was requisite that he  
 ————— should so continue: but those, which  
 the Scripture hath pointed out to us,  
 we may warrantably assign. And from  
 thence it appears, that his Stay here upon  
 Earth, after his Resurrection, was in-  
 tended for the Good of his Church, which  
 he was about to establish, and for the In-  
 struction of his Apostles in all things re-  
 lating to the great Work, in which he  
 was about to employ them.

They doubted of the Truth of his  
 Resurrection; and therefore he stayed to  
 give them such convincing Proofs, and  
 Assurances of it, as might enable them  
 to convince others, and become Au-  
 thentic Witnesses of that great Matter of  
 Fact, upon which, as upon a chief Corner-  
 Stone, the whole Frame of his Religion  
 was to be founded.

They laboured under great Prejudi-  
 ces, in relation to his Character and  
 Sufferings, and expected that, by Him,  
 the Kingdom should have been restored  
 to *Israel*. These Prejudices he himself  
 resolved

resolved to remove, and dispel; to in-  
 form them of the Spiritual Nature of  
 his Kingdom, of the Ends for which,  
 and the Methods by which, it was to be  
 erected and propagated.

Sorrow had overwhelmed their Hearts  
 upon the Loss of him; and therefore,  
 upon his return to Life, he stayed some  
 time with them, to comfort and cheer  
 them. They were, by Degrees, to be  
 Weaned from their Fondness for his  
 Person, and their Desire of his Bodily  
 Presence; and to this end it was requi-  
 site that he should not withdraw him-  
 self from their Sight at once, but ap-  
 pear, and disappear to them at fit In-  
 tervals; discontinuing, and resuming his  
 Conversation with them in such a man-  
 ner, as might best dispose them to be wil-  
 ling entirely to part with him.

He was leisurely to satisfy them, that  
 it was *expedient for him to go away*, since  
*if he went not away, the Comforter would*<sup>7.</sup>  
*not come; but if he departed, he would*  
*send him unto them; and that when He,*  
*the Spirit of Truth, was come, he would*<sup>13.</sup>

SERM. *guide them into all Truth, bring all things*  
 VII. *to their Remembrance, and shew them*

— *things to come*; would impart to them all Spiritual Powers, Gifts, and Graces, and fill them with all Consolation and Joy in believing, and, by that means, make an Amends to them for his own Bodily Absence. For the Reception of this Comforter, for the Entertainment of this Heavenly Guest he was to prepare, and qualify them, that, when he arrived, he might find them meet to be Partakers of his blessed Influences and Illuminations.

These Accounts of our Saviour's Continuance upon Earth for some time after he arose, are plainly enough asserted, or intimated in holy Writ; and therefore we may build upon them with Assurance. And may we not also, without Presumption, although with less Certainty, venture to say, That he intended, by this means, to add one yet further Proof to those he had already given, of his exceeding Love to his Spouse, the Church, of his great and disinterested  
 Concern

Concern for the Good of Souls? For S E R M.  
though, from the Moment of his Resur- VII.  
rection, he was entitled to that Glory, ———  
which his Humiliation had purchased,  
yet would he not immediately enter in-  
to it: He snatched not at the Reward,  
the high Reward of his Sufferings, with  
Eagerness and Haste; but delayed for  
some time his solemn Inauguration to  
the Regal Office; his taking Possession of  
the Joys of Heaven, and sitting on the  
Right Hand of God, while there was  
any thing yet left undone for his Church,  
and his Elect, which it was requisite for  
him to transact here in Person. A no-  
ble Instance of Self-denial! which seems  
to have wrought mightily in his Apo-  
stles, and to have produced excellent  
Fruits; particularly in *St. Paul*, who,  
though he earnestly desired to be *absent*  
*from the Body, and present with the Lord,*  
*to depart and be with Christ*; yet, for  
the Sake of his Flock here below, re-  
pressed those Desires, and was content-  
ed to want, what he so earnestly long-  
ed after: *To abide in the Flesh* (said he Phil. i. 24.

S E R M. to them) *is more needful for You*; and on  
 VII. that Account, and that only, he chose  
 ————— to abide in it.

Expedient therefore it was for the Disciples of *Christ*, that he should tarry *some time* with them after he arose: And *that time* was, it seems, *forty Days*; a Circumstance, not to be neglected by us, since the Pen of St. *Luke* hath thought fit to record it; probably, for this Reason,—Because *Moses*, and *Elijah*, the Types of *Christ*, on two very solemn Occasions, and *Christ* himself, just before he publicly exercised his Ministry, had, for the same Number of Days, retired into the Wilderness. Our Lord therefore having, in Conformity with these Types, taken forty Days to prepare himself for the Discharge of his Prophetic Offices on Earth, did in like manner retire, as it were, and separate himself for forty Days also, ere he entered upon his Regal and Mediatorial Offices in Heaven, and there sat at the Right-hand of Power, making Intercession to God for us.

But

But I proceed to what I have to offer S E R M.  
to you on the VII.

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*Second Particular, Our Saviour's appearing, throughout this time, chiefly to his Apostles.*

There are indeed two Instances of his appearing to others than the Apostles, *i. e.* to the Women at the Sepulchre, and to the Five hundred Brethren mentioned by *St. Paul*: To which some add a third, his appearing to two Disciples on the way towards *Emmaus*: The Relation of *St. Luke* (as they apprehend) leaving it doubtful, whether these were of the Number of the Eleven, or only Disciples at large. But these Instances were rare, and little Stress therefore is laid upon them by the holy Writers; who generally place the whole Proof of the Resurrection of *Christ*, upon the Apostles Testimony, because they saw him most frequently, and conversed most familiarly with him: And therefore he is said here, by *St. Luke*, to have *shewed himself alive to the Apostles* Acts x.  
M 4 *whom* 40, 41.

SERM. *whom he had chosen; and by St. Peter, to*  
 VII. *have shewed himself openly, not to all the*  
 ——— *People, but unto Witnesses chosen before of*  
*God, even to Us [i. e. to Us, the Apostles]*  
*who did eat and drink with him after he*  
*arose from the Dead.*

Now the Reasons of his appearing chiefly to the Apostles, are manifest: They have been already, in some measure, suggested; and there may be Occasion, in what follows, further to explain them. But, why he appeared not to *Others*, besides the Apostles, why not to such as were averse to his Person and Doctrine, to the *Sanhedrim* itself, or even to *all the People*, the whole Body of the *Jews* then assembled at the Passover, is a Question, that may seem to require and deserve a particular Answer: Since Infidelity on this Head finds room to object, That the most effectual Way of proving his *Resurrection*, had been, to have made his *Enemies* his *Witnesses*; whereas our Saviour manifested himself only to his *Friends* and *Followers*.

He did so; and with very good Reason. For, SERM.  
VII.

I. It was no ways fit, that such a Favour should be indulged to his Murderers; to those, who had treated this Messenger, and his Message; with Scorn and Blasphemy, had resisted the Evidence of all his Miracles, and, notwithstanding the Sanctity of his Life and Doctrine, had pursued him to his Cross with such a Complication of Obstinacy, Malice, and Cruelty, as can, in no other Instance, be paralleled. Had *Christ* appeared, after he arose, to Men of so flagitious a Character, his Conduct, in that Case, would have been so far from promoting the Interests of his Gospel (which is the Doctrine of Holiness) that it would have given a great, and dangerous Encouragement to Wickedness, to Men's *continuing* and *abounding in Sin, that so Grace might abound.* So far was our Lord from being obliged to afford those who crucified him, such an extraordinary Proof of his Resurrection, that he might, with great Justice, have denied them any Evidence at all of it,

SERM. it, and not have suffered even the Testi-  
 VII. mony of his Apostles concerning it to have  
 ——— reached them. But,

2. The only Reason assignable, why God should have tried such an Experiment as this, is, a Probability of converting the whole *Jewish* Nation by the Means of it. But Experience, on our Lord's express Decision in the Case, assure us, that this End would not have been attained by it. Had he appeared at Mid-day to *all the People*, yet *all the People* would not have believed in him. The sincere and honest-hearted *Jews* would have surrendered to such an Evidence, as they did afterwards to that which was given by the Apostles; but the malicious and obstinate would have found out Colours and Excuses, to evade the Force of it. What! (might one of them have said) though there has been an Apparition in the Likeness of *Jesus*, whom we crucified, must we necessarily from thence conclude, that he is really alive? No such matter! This is no new thing; Sorcery hath often effected it: *Samuel* was dead, and in his  
 Grave,

Grave, even then, when the Witch of S E R M.  
*Endor* made his Likeness appear before VII.  
*Saul*. Thus would they have reasoned  
 against their own Reason, and their very  
 Senses, and have kept their Infidelity, in  
 spite of such a Demonstration; according  
 to that Saying of our Lord, which he ut-  
 tered, not perhaps without an Eye to this  
 very Supposition: *If they hear not Moses* Luke xvi.  
*and the Prophets, neither will they be per-* 31.  
*suaded, though one rose* (and appeared to  
 them) *from the Dead*.

In Fact, the Resurrection of *Lazarus*,  
 and their conversing with him afterwards  
 had not convinced them; and we may be  
 sure, that they, who could impute this  
 great Miracle, and the others wrought by  
 our Saviour, while alive, to the Power of  
 Magic, and a Confederacy with *Beelzebub*,  
 would have found out a Way of arguing  
 themselves out of the Certainty of our  
 Lord's Resurrection, though they them-  
 selves had had an Ocular Assurance con-  
 cerning it. However,

3. Should we suppose, that such a glar-  
 ing Proof of his Resurrection could not  
 have

S E R M. have been resisted by them, yet it ought  
 VII. not to have been indulged to them for  
 ——— this very Reason; because it was *irresistible*. God never intended to *compel*, but only to *persuade*, us into a Reception of Divine Truth; and we are properly said to be persuaded, when we close with such Motives and Arguments as are sufficient indeed to convince us, but such however, by which we need not be convinced, unless we please. All beyond this is Force, not Persuasion; and is very unfit therefore to be applied to Creatures endued with Liberty and Reason, and who are to be rewarded, or punished, according as they employ it. The Belief of the Gospel was designed to be the Test of sincere and ingenuous Minds, and as such, was to be attended with mighty Blessings and Benefits; for *blessed are they which have not seen, and yet have believed*. But what Reason, what room is there for blessing those, who shall on that Account alone *believe* the Gospel, because they are surrounded every Way with so much Light and Conviction, that it is absolutely impossible

possible for them *not* to believe it? Such a Faith can have no Degree of Desert in it, and is therefore absolutely incapable of any Reward. SERM.  
VII.

The true Question in this Case is, Whether the Proof of *Christ's* Resurrection, by the Testimony of the Apostles, be not satisfactory and full, abundantly full to all the Purposes of Conviction? If it be, are we not very unreasonable, and absurd in complaining, that a Fact was not attested with ten times more Evidence than was needful? *Nay, but who art thou, O Man, who,* whilst thou acknowledgest the Wisdom and Goodness of God to be sufficiently justified in his own Method, wilt yet prescribe to him the Use of thine, because it seems to thee more fit and convenient? At this rate, how many things are there, which we (full of our own Wisdom and Schemes) should think fit to have been done, which yet God hath not thought fit to do for us? We perhaps may think it very convenient, that we should at first have been made impeccable,

S E R M. cable, and secured from falling: We,  
 VII. upon a view of the several Heresies that  
 ————— have sprung from the Misinterpretation  
 of Holy Writ, may judge, it would  
 have been much better for the Church,  
 if the Scripture had been so clear in  
 every Point, that no well-meaning Man  
 could have mistaken the Sense of it: at  
 least, we might be apt to imagine it  
 highly expedient, that God should have  
 appointed some Infallible Judge, to  
 whom we might have resorted for the  
 clearing up of all Difficulties, and end-  
 ing all Controversies. But in all these  
 1 Cor. iii. Cases *the Wisdom of Man is Foolishness*  
 19. *with God*; for he hath ordered things  
 quite otherwise. He placed us indeed  
 in such a State at first, from which we  
 could not fall, without the utmost Folly  
 and Weakness; but from which how-  
 ever fall we did, as soon almost as we  
 were possessed of that Happiness. He  
 gave us a Rule of Faith and Manners,  
 easy enough to be understood by honest  
 humble Minds; but capable of being  
 strained, perverted, and abused to ill  
 Purposes

Purposes by proud opinionative Readers. He left every Man to judge for himself in Matters of Religion; and yet so, as to leave him without Excuse also, if he made an ill Use of that Judgment. And in like manner hath he dealt with us, in relation to those great Matters of Fact, upon which the Truth of our Religion is founded: He hath built the Belief of them upon such Proofs, as cannot fail of convincing those, who are sincere, and willing to be informed; and yet such as leave room for little Exceptions and Cavils to Men of perverse and disputative Tempers, who will not allow of any Evidence, in behalf of Christianity, how strong and irrefragable soever, if they can but imagine to themselves any Circumstance, whereby it might possibly have been made yet somewhat stronger; and do, therefore, pretend to doubt of the Truth of *Christ's* Resurrection, because he did not appear to all the People, to his very Persecutors and Murderers, I have proved, that it was highly improper, unnecessary, and

S E R M.

VII.

SERM. unreasonable, that he should so have appeared; and that it was expedient, highly expedient (because in all respects sufficient) that he should appear only to his Friends and Followers, and, amongst them, *chiefly* to his Apostles, upon the single Credit of whose Testimony the Belief of this great Article was to depend. It remains that I should, in the

III. *Third* and last place, consider, How our Saviour spent his time with them.

The Text tells us, that he employed it, partly in giving them *many infallible Proofs* of his being returned to Life, and partly in discoursing *to them of things pertaining to the Kingdom of God*. By the *one* he enabled them to prove the Divine Authority of his Mission, and by the *other* he instructed them in all the Parts of his heavenly Doctrine, and by *both* together he qualified them for a successful Propagation of Christianity.

I. He shewed himself alive to them *ἐν πολλοῖς τεκμηρίοις*, by many clear Signs and

and Tokens, *many infallible Proofs* (as S E R M. our Translation renders it.) And such VII. indeed they were in every respect. For ————— he appeared to them, not *once* only, but *often*; not only to *some* of them, when separated from the rest, but to *all* of them, when assembled together, and when they were capable of satisfying each other by Enquiries made at the same time into the Truth of the same Fact, and consequently of giving an united Testimony to it. He appeared to them not in the Dark, as Spectres do, but in broad Day-light; sometimes at Places where he had before appointed to meet them; sometimes occasionally, as they were travelling on the Way, or sitting at Meat, when their Minds were freest from the Clouds of Melancholy, and their Imaginations least apt to be imposed upon. He conversed with them at such times in the most easy and familiar Manner: He eat and drank with them, and gave them, by that means, Leisure to recover themselves from that Surprise, and those Fears, which the first

SERM. Sight of him might occasion, and with  
 VII. composed Minds to hearken to all he  
 ——— should say to them. He not only re-  
 peated these Conversations often, he con-  
 tinued them long; as appears from the  
 Subject of some of them, particularly of  
 Luke That, where he is said to have *begun at*  
 xxiv. 27. *Moses, and all the Prophets, and to have ex-*  
*pounded to them in all the Scriptures, the*  
*things concerning himself.* And, that no-  
 thing might be wanting to satisfy them to  
 the uttermost, he was contented, not only  
 to be seen and heard, but even handled  
 by them: *Reach hither,* said he to one of  
 them in the Presence of the rest, *thy*  
 John xx. *Finger, and behold my Hands, and reach*  
 27. *hither thy Hand, and thrust it into my Side,*  
*and be not faithless, but believing.* Is it pos-  
 sible for Scepticism itself to indulge its  
 wild Suspicions so far, as to think, the  
 Apostles might all this time be in a  
 Dream, or under a strong and continued  
 Delusion? They who think, or speak  
 thus, seem to be under a Judicial Infatu-  
 ation themselves: For they might, with  
 as much Probability and Colour of Rea-  
 son,

son, affirm, that all the Facts, recorded in SERM.  
 the graveſt and moſt authentic Writers, VII.  
 are Figments, and the mere Inventions of  
 wanton Pens: That there is no way of  
 diſtinguiſhing between Reality and Ap-  
 pearance, even in the common Occur-  
 rences of Life, and conſequently no Dif-  
 ference between a Romance and an Hiſto-  
 ry. Certain it is, that, unleſs the Apo-  
 ſtles be admitted as good Witneſſes in ſuch  
 a Caſe as this, and the Truth of what they  
 relate be allowed, there is an End of the  
 Credibility of all Human Teſtimony.

2. But as our Saviour, during his forty  
 Days Stay on Earth, fully enabled his  
 Apoſtles to atteſt his Reſurrection, ſo  
 did he qualify them duly to preach his  
 Doctrines; for he taught them τὰ περὶ τῆς  
 βασιλείας τοῦ Θεοῦ, *the Things pertaining to*  
*the Kingdom of God*, i. e. to the Goſpel  
 Diſpenſation, of which they were to be  
 the Miniſters, and to his Church, which  
 they were to gather, conſtitute, and go-  
 vern. Of theſe things the Apoſtles were  
 then very ignorant; and though for their  
 full and final Inſtruction, our Lord refer-

SERM. VII. red them to the Comforter, yet he himself was willing previously to instruct and comfort them; to teach them the first Rudiments of Christian Knowledge, and to fill their Hearts with longing Expectations of those further Degrees of Light and Joy, with which they were afterwards to be blessed. This Promise he had made them the very Night before his Passion. *I will not leave you comfortless,* said he, even for so long a time, as till the promised Comforter shall come; *I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the World seeth me no more; but ye see me.—At that Day (the Day of my Return to you) You shall know that I am in my Father, and You in Me.* Ye shall understand somewhat of that Mystical Union that is between my Father and Me, and between Me and my Church, the Society of Christian Believers. Without all Question, what he then promised, he now performed; and therefore, we may be sure, discoursed to them concerning the great Articles of our Faith, the high Mysteries of Christianity.

John xiv.  
18, &c.

The

The Scripture Accounts of these things are short: However, even from these short Accounts we learn, that he commanded them to make Profelytes in all Nations, and to *baptize them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*: And we cannot doubt but that, when he directed this Form, he made some Discovery to them concerning the Nature and Offices of these Three Persons of the ever blessed Trinity, in whose Names they were to baptize.

S E R M.

VII.

Matth.  
xxviii.  
19.

He told them, that *all Power was given him, in Heaven, and in Earth*; and in virtue of that Power, he gave them also Power, not of baptizing only, but of remitting and retaining Sins. He *sent them, as he was sent by the Father*; and sufficiently directed them to send others, as they were sent, who were, in like manner, to continue that Mission, by the Promise he made to *be with them always, even to the End of the World*.

Matth.  
xxviii. 18.

Matth.  
xxviii. 20.

The Sacrament of his Body and Blood he had instituted, while living; and now therefore he celebrated it together with

SERM. them: *For he took Bread, and blessed it, VII. and brake it, and gave unto them, and was known of them in thus breaking of Bread:*  
 Luke a Phrase, which in the *Acts* manifestly re-  
 xxiv. 30, 35. fers to the Eucharist; and may justly therefore be understood of it here, in the Story of our Saviour.

Matth. In a word, *he opened their Understandings, xxviii. 20. that they might understand the Scriptures, and all the Prophecies concerning himself; and he had them teach all Nations to observe all things that he had commanded them:* Which two Passages comprize the Knowledge of what relates both to the Doctrine and Discipline of the Church, both to the Faith and Practice of a *Christian*.

But the chief Way of our Saviour's spending his Time with the Apostles, after he arose from the Dead, was, by affording them these Illustrious, these Infallible Proofs of the Truth of his Resurrection. And God be thanked that he did so! since by thus settling his wavering Disciples in an unshaken Belief of this Truth, he enabled them, with the utmost Firmness and Constancy, to propagate their Belief of it,  
 and

and even to seal their Testimony with their Blood ; and hath by that means extended the Efficacy and Influence of those Infallible Proofs to *us* also, who live near Seventeen Ages, after they were given. Our Conviction depended upon *Theirs*, is derived from it, and proportioned to it. And in virtue therefore of the Evidence indulged to them (not for their Sakes alone, but for the Sake of all succeeding *Christians*) do we meet here this Day, with Joy and Thankfulness to celebrate this Festival, and to profess our Faith in Him, that *was dead, but is alive ; was crucified, but is risen ; and now sitteth at the Right-hand of the Father.*

Blessed indeed, in many Respects, beyond us, blessed were the Eyes that saw these Things, and the Ears that heard them, for they saw, and heard, and believed ; but blessed also are *We*, who receive their Testimony, blessed even beyond them, in this respect, if *not seeing we do yet believe.* The Lips of Truth have assured us, that in this Case there is one Beatitude more reserved for Us, than be-

SERM. longed even to the Apostles themselves, if  
 VII. we believe the Resurrection of *Christ* upon  
 — their Report; whereas They believed it  
 only, upon the Testimony of their Senses.

—Having therefore these Promises, dear-  
 I Pet. i. ly beloved, wait with Patience, *that the*  
 7, 8. *Trial of your Faith* (as St. Peter speaks)  
*may be found unto Praise and Honour and*  
*Glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ! whom*  
*having not seen, I trust, ye love; in whom,*  
*though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye*  
*rejoice with Joy unspeakable, and full of*  
*Glory; receiving, in his due time, the End*  
*of your Faith, even the Salvation of your*  
*Souls.*

Rom. xv. *And may the God of Hope fill you with all*  
 13. *Joy and Peace in believing, that you may*  
*abound in Hope, through the Power of the*  
*Holy Ghost.*

I cannot dismiss this Reflexion, with-  
 out applying it to the blessed Sacrament,  
 of which we are going to partake; and by  
 partaking of which, we profess, in a most  
 especial Manner, to exercise our Faith in  
 an invisible *Jesus*. He is there really,  
 effectually, though Spiritually, present;  
 the

the Eye of Faith can behold him, though that of Sense cannot: for *his Flesh is Meat indeed, and his Blood is Drink indeed.* That Bread, and that Wine which he there imparts to us, shall become his very Body and Blood, in such a Sense, as he intended it, to every worthy, and faithful Receiver: It shall convey to us all the Benefits of his Body broken, and his Blood poured out on the Cross; and unite us to him in our Bodies and Souls, after such a Wonderful Manner, as none but they, who feel it, can conceive, and even they, who conceive it, cannot express. Let us look then through the outward Symbols or Signs, to the Thing signified by them; and carry in our Ears, as we approach the Holy Table, that Voice of our Saviour to his doubting Disciple, *Be not faithless, but believing.* Blessed and Happy is He, who, in this Instance also, though he doth not see, yet doth believe; he shall be vitally nourished, and cherished by the Food of this Paschal Lamb, and his Soul shall be made Joyful in the Strength of this new Wine.

S E R M.  
VII.John vi.  
55.

To

SERM. To that *Lamb of God, without Spot, or*  
VII. *Blémish*, whose Sacrifice we are now about  
to commemorate, and represent, even the  
Lamb that was *slain for our Sins, and*  
*raised again for our Justification*, as on  
this Day, together with the Father, and  
the Divine Spirit, be ascribed all Honour,  
Might, Adoration, and Praise, now and  
evermore.

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*Miracles the most proper Way of proving the  
Divine Authority of any Religion.*

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A

S E R M O N

Preached at

*Westminster-Abbey,*

On *Whitsunday*, 1716.

---

MARK xvi. 20.

*And they went forth and preached every  
where; the Lord working with them,  
and confirming the Word with Signs  
following.*

**I**N these Words, which shut up the SERM.  
Gospel of *St. Mark*, we have an Ac- VIII.  
count of the Means, by which the Preach-  
ing

SERM. ing of the Apostles became so wonder-  
 VIII. fully Operative and Successful. —It was  
 — not from any mighty Talent of Persuasion,  
 any extraordinary Faculty of Reasoning,  
 with which they were endued; it was not  
 by any intrinsic Evidences of Truth, which  
 the distinguishing Doctrines they preach-  
 ed carried with them; nor by any other  
 Method purely Human and Natural; but  
 by a Divine Power and Assistance, which  
 accompanied them in every Step they  
 took, and miraculously blessed their En-  
 deavours. *The Lord worked with them,  
 and confirmed the Word with Signs follow-  
 ing.*

By *Signs*, in Holy Writ, are meant all  
 such wonderful Operations, as are above  
 the Skill of Man to contrive, above the  
 Power of any thing in Nature, any thing  
 but the God of Nature himself, or some  
 Agent by him specially commissioned and  
 empowered, to perform. Such as speak-  
 ing strange Languages on the sudden, the  
 Miracle of this Day; curing inveterate  
 Diseases in an Instant, by a Word only;  
 giving Life to the Dead, or Eyes to one  
 that

that was born blind. These things being done to signify who are appointed by God, as the Messengers of his Will to Men, are, on that Account, fitly termed *Signs*; and of these the Holy Scripture every where speaks, as the most proper and full Evidences of a Divine Mission and Authority. S E R M.  
VIII.

When *Moses* was sent by God to the Children of *Israel*, he desires some Credentials, by which it might appear, that God had sent him; and God, in Answer to his Request, arms him with the Power of Miracles: *Cast thy Rod upon the Ground*, Exod. iv. says he, *and it shall become a Serpent.*—3, 5.  
*That they may believe that the Lord God of their Fathers hath appeared unto thee.*

Our *Saviour* constantly appeals to his Miracles, as to a clear and sufficient Proof of his Doctrine: *The Works that I do*, says he, *They bear Witness of me.* Joh. v. 36.  
And he carries the Argument so far, as to make the whole Guilt of Men's Infidelity turn singly on this Article.---*If I had not done among them*, says he, *the Works* John xv.  
24.  
*which*

SERM. *which none other Man did, they had not had*  
VIII. *Sin.*

---

And thus also reasoned his *Apostles* and *Evangelists*. *Jesus of Nazareth*, says St. *Peter*, a Man approved of God, among you by *Miracles, and Wonders, and Signs, which God did by him in the midst of you.* The *Lord gave Testimony*, says St. *Luke*, to the *Word of his Grace, and granted Signs and Wonders to be done by the Apostles Hands.* And here in the Text, *They went forth*, says St. *Mark*, and *preached every where; the Lord working with them, and confirming the Word with Signs following.*

*Miracles* therefore being the Foundation, upon which both the *Mosaic* and *Christian Revelations* stand; it may be of use to shew, how properly they were pitched upon by God for this purpose. And this will appear, if we consider

- I. *First*, The common Sense and Opinion of Mankind on this Head.
- II. *Secondly*, The *General Nature* of this Sort of Evidence. And  
*Thirdly*,

III. *Thirdly*, Some *peculiar Properties* and *Characters* of it.

SERM.

VIII.

*First*, What the Common Sense and Reasoning of Mankind has been on this Head, will appear from this single Reflexion; That all Religions, whether true or false, not only those of *Moses* and *Christ*, but even the Heathenish Superstitions of every kind have, at their first setting out, endeavoured to countenance themselves by Real, or Pretended Miracles. *Numa* at *Rome*, *Aimda* and *Brama* in the *East*, and *Mango Copal* in *Peru*, did, as History informs us, thus go about to persuade their Followers into a Belief of those Religious Opinions, which they introduced, and into the Practice of their several Sacred Rites and Ceremonies. Even *Mahomet* himself is said to have made some faint Attempts this Way, though, when he missed of Success, he retreated to the great and standing Miracle of the *Alcoran*, which was, he said, sent immediately from

I.

SERM. from Heaven to him by the Angel *Gabriel*.—So that Miracles have been secretly and unanimously agreed upon by all Men, as the proper Medium of proving any Religion to be of Divine Appointment; else, the Founders of all Religions would not thus indifferently have appealed to them; nor would they, who embraced those Religions, have so universally surrendered themselves up to their Authority.

I know, this Argument is, by the Enemies of Revelation, turned another Way, and made use of to prove, that since *All* Religions have, at their first Rise, equally pretended to Miracles, and *Most* of them without Grounds; therefore the *rest* have done so too: at least, that this Way of Proof, which hath so often deceived Men, can never, with any Certainty, be relied upon. But this surely is a very unreasonable Way of arguing; since, at the same rate, it might be proved, that there is no such thing as Truth, or Reason in the World: for all Men on all sides lay claim to it; and yet  
the

the far greater Part of Mankind must needs be deceived. The proper Inference in this Case is, not that, because most Men, who would be thought Masters of Truth, are not, therefore there is no such thing as Truth; but on the contrary, that Truth is somewhere to be found, else all Men every where would not equally lay claim to it. SERM.  
VIII.

There are many Empiricks in the World, who pretend to infallible Methods of curing all Patients. Because these are Cheats and Impostors, does it follow, that there are no able and skilful Physicians, no healing Virtues in Herbs and Minerals? Or rather, may it not from hence be strongly concluded, that there must certainly be an Art of Medicine, built upon true Principles, and founded in the Nature of things; because so many Men every Day advance groundless Claims to it, and so many others give in to their Frauds and Delusions? Were there no Real and True Remedies, there would be no Foundation for such Men to amuse

SERM. the World with false ones; but they  
 VIII. would, as soon as they appeared, be im-  
 ——— immediately exploded.

In like Manner, if no true Miracles had ever been done in Proof of a Divine Revelation, it is impossible to conceive, how so many false Religions should have been supported by the Pretence of them, or how the Argument from Miracles should at all times have had so strong an Influence upon the Minds of Men. But

II. *Secondly*, As the *Common Sense and Opinion* of Mankind favours this sort of Proof; so will it appear to be in itself highly *Reasonable and Necessary*, if we consider the *General Nature* of it.

When any Person pretends a Divine Commission to publish a New Doctrine; in order to procure its Reception, 'tis requisite he should be furnished with some competent Motives of Credibility; he must, by some Infallible Sign or Token, shew, that he was really sent on  
 that

that Errand, and not expect to be be- SERM.  
lieved on his own bare Word and Af- VIII.  
firmation. Now this Sign or Token, —————  
what can it be, but his doing somewhat  
which it is on all Hands confessed,  
that no one, but God, can do? that is,  
in other Terms, how can a Man prove  
his Mission, but by a Miracle? Will it  
be said, that the Doctrine he brings,  
may be so pure and holy, and every  
way worthy of God, as to carry the  
Stamp and Evidence of its own Divine  
Original; that the very Nature of the  
Message may clearly and fully evince,  
from whence the Messenger came? I  
see not how this can well be. A Doc-  
trine may be very Holy and Good, and  
every way agreeable to the Conceptions  
we have of God, and yet not be of Di-  
vine Revelation. The Philosophers  
among the Heathens uttered many such  
Truths, as might have become them,  
had they been really Inspired; and yet  
we believe not, for this Reason, that  
they *were* Inspired, but that they spake  
merely from the Dictates of their own  
O 2 Reason,

S E R M. Reason, and from the General Consent  
 VIII. of the Wisest Part of Mankind : and so  
 ————— may any other Man also, let the Do-  
 ctine he teaches be never so just and ho-  
 ly, unless he produces somewhat be-  
 side the Doctrine itself, to prove that it  
 was revealed to him. For though the  
 Badness of any Doctrine, and its Dis-  
 agreeableness to the Eternal Rules of  
 Right Reason, be a certain Sign that it  
 did *not* come from God, yet the Goodness  
 of it can be no infallible Proof that it *did*.  
 Indeed when a good Man publishes a good  
 Doctrine, and affirms that he had it from  
 God, we may, for his own Sake, and for  
 his Doctrine's Sake, be disposed to give  
 Credit to him; we may be inclined, per-  
 haps, rather to be of Opinion, that the  
 Thing is as he says, than that it is not;  
 but we cannot be wrought up into a firm  
 Belief, an unshaken Assurance concerning  
 it, merely by his Affirmation. He may,  
 at the Bottom, not be so good a Man as  
 he seems to be; and may therefore (it is  
 possible) intend to deceive me; or he may  
 have been himself deceived, and mistaken  
 a Dream,

a Dream, or strong Imagination, for a Reality. Such things have sometimes happened, and such things may therefore happen again; and, while I have these Doubts and Possibilities before my Eyes, 'tis impossible I should embrace his Authority with the full and entire Assent of my Mind. But if to his own solemn Affirmation he adds the Performance of some Work, which, all things considered, I have the utmost Reason to think he could not perform, without immediate Divine Assistance; that indeed, and nothing less than that, is a Proof, which I ought not, and am not able to withstand.

It will, perhaps, be further objected, that, if the Doctrine taught appears to be in itself good, and reasonable, 'tis no matter whether it is proved to be of immediately Divine Authority. For a good Man will receive a Doctrine evidently good and reasonable, whether any one be divinely Inspired to preach it, or not; and a Doctrine evidently evil and absurd, he will not receive, on the Account of what-

S E R M.  
VIII.

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SERM. ever pretended Inspiration. And there-  
VIII. fore, what need of Miracles to make way  
— for an Opinion, which, if agreeable to  
Reason, will make its own Way without  
their Assistance; and if contrary to Rea-  
son, can never be entertained by a reason-  
able Creature, though it should have ten  
thousand Miracles to support it?

Now it must be confessed, that this  
Objection is so far of Force, as it relates to  
*Moral* Truths, and to whatever is disco-  
verable by the Light of Natural Reason.  
There is indeed no Necessity for Miracles  
to induce a Belief of *These*; nor is it pre-  
tended, that God ever employed them to  
this Purpose, to convince Men either of  
his Being, or Providence, or of the Eternal  
Differences of Good and Evil; because  
*These* Truths were of themselves suffici-  
ently obvious and plain, and needed not a  
Divine Testimony to make them plainer.  
But the Truths, which are necessary in this  
Manner to be attested, are those, which  
are of Positive Institution; those, which  
if God had not pleased to reveal them,  
Human Reason could not have discovered;  
and

and those, which, even now they are revealed, Human Reason cannot fully account for, and perfectly comprehend. Such, for Example, are the Doctrines of Baptism and the Supper of the Lord, of the Resurrection of the same Body, of the Distinction of Persons in the Unity of the Divine Essence, and of the Salvation of Mankind by the Blood and Intercession of *Jesus*. It is this kind of Truth that God is properly said to reveal; Truths, of which, unless revealed, we should have always continued ignorant; and 'tis in order only to prove these Truths to have been really revealed, that we affirm Miracles to be Necessary. And though in the Body of the Revelation itself, known and unknown Truths may be mixed, Doctrines Evident by the Light of Nature, with such as we receive only by Inspiration; yet 'tis for the Sake of the Latter of these, that Miracles must be done, not at all on the Account of the Former. So that Reason being no Competent Judge of those Doctrines, to the confirmation of which Miracles are specially adapted, can-

S E R M.  
VIII.

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SERM. not, I say, by examining into the Nature  
 VIII. of such Doctrines, determine, that a Proof  
 — of them, by Miracles, is needless.

Hitherto I have only considered the General Nature of Miracles, as they are Acts of Supernatural Power, necessarily attendant on Revealed Doctrines, in order to promote their Reception.

*Thirdly*, I proceed now, in the last place, to shew, how well they are suited to this Purpose, by reason of some *Peculiar Characters and Properties* that belong to them. For, *First*, They are extremely fit to awaken Men's Attention. — *Secondly*, They are the shortest and most Expeditious way of Proof.—And, *Thirdly*, They are an Argument of the most Universal Force and Efficacy, equally reaching all Capacities and Understandings.

1. In order to the Propagation of a New Doctrine, the first thing requisite is, To create Attention, and rouse the Minds of Men, possessed with Prejudices, immersed in Pleasures, or Business,

ness, into an impartial Consideration of what is proposed. And this is best effected by Miracles; which being strange and unusual Events, cannot fail of drawing Mens Eyes towards the Doer of them, and of commanding their Attention and Observance. Curiosity is the first Step towards Conviction; and when once Men are possessed with a due Regard for the Messenger, they will be sure to listen carefully to the Message he brings. The Fathers of the Eastern Mission knew this well, and being therefore destitute of the Power of Miracles, which might excite Men to inquire after their Opinions, and infuse a Reverence for their Persons, endeavoured to make up this Disadvantage another way, and gain Admission into the Presence of the Princes and great Men of the East, by some Curious and Surprising Works of Art. And having in this manner raised an Opinion of themselves first, they preached the Gospel with some Degree of Success afterwards: Their Performances in Mechanics and Astronomy

S E R M.  
VIII.

SERM. nomy being instead of Miracles to them,  
 VIII. by which they procured a favourable  
 ——— Hearing of the Doctrines they afterwards delivered.

2. 'Tis another great Advantage, which belongs to Miracles, that they are the shortest and most Expeditious Way of Proof. All other Ways of evincing the Divine Original of any Doctrine (supposing there were any such) must needs be long and laborious; such as it will take up much Time fully to explain and clear; and such therefore, as must operate but slowly, and can make no great Advances, in any one Man's Life, towards converting the World. For Instance, suppose the Truth and Credibility of a Revealed Doctrine could be made out, by shewing its Connection with, and Dependence upon, other Truths, and by a regular Deduction of it, through a long Train of Consequences, from known and avowed Principles of Reason; yet would this be a very tedious and irksome Task, and would, in a long Time, gain but a little  
 Ground

Ground upon an opinionative and disputing World. Had this been the Method made use of to propagate Christianity at first, how would the Course of it have been retarded? How impossible had it been for the Apostles to have obeyed their great Master's Commands, and to have preached the Gospel to all Nations? At this rate, it is probable, that, instead of traversing the several Parts of the Earth, and reducing Multitudes of every Nation and Climate to the Obedience of *Christ*, they had stuck in that very Spot, where they first entered upon their Ministry, and begun and finished all their Labours within the short Limits of *Palestine*. But by the Help of *Miracles*, they were enabled effectually to discharge their high Office: *these* were Engines fitted and proportioned to the Work assigned to them. One Dead Man raised, or Blind Man restored to Sight, who saw the thing done; and ten Thousands came in afterwards, upon the Report of it. Other kinds of Proofs were fitted only leisurely to loosen  
the

SERM.  
VIII.

SERM. the Knots, which the Disputers of this  
 VIII. World tied, in order to give the Apo-  
 ——— stles Disturbance in the Execution of  
 their Ministry. But Miracles, like the  
 Hero's Sword, divided these Entanglings  
 at a Stroke, and at once made their Way  
 through them.

3. The Third and last Advantage of  
 this Way of Proof is, its *Universal Force*  
*and Efficacy*, as being equally adapted  
 to all Capacities and Understandings.—  
 Rational and Discursive Methods are fit  
 only to be made use of upon Philoso-  
 phers, Men of deep Reason and im-  
 proved Minds; the generality of Man-  
 kind would be utterly insensible of their  
 Force. The Lower, that is, the far  
 greater Part of the World, are too much  
 taken up in providing the Necessaries of  
 Life, to be at Leisure to consider long  
 Consequences, and weigh Arguments.  
 Or had they Opportunities for such a  
 Search, yet have they not the Abilities  
 requisite to pursue it. To them there-  
 fore some plainer, and more sensible  
 Proof must be addressed; somewhat  
 2 that

that lies level to their Capacities, and of which they understand the Force at the first Proposal: and such a sort of Argument is that, which is drawn from Miracles. There is no Man of so rude and unpolished a Mind, no Man so stupid and insensible, but can carry his Reasoning thus far; That, whoever does such things, as he could not do, unless God were with him, if at the same time he affirms, that he received such and such Doctrines from God, we ought to believe him. There is no Subtlety, no Reach of Thought requisite, to make this Reflexion; and this single Reflexion is sufficient to make a Man a *Christian*. Whereas, if the World must have been convinced of old, as the Men, who doubt of every thing, and disbelieve every thing, expect we should convince them now, by strict Demonstrations, and long intricate Reasonings; it is certain, that the greatest Part of Mankind had lain under an inevitable Necessity of continuing Infidels.

We

SERM. We see then, that *the Foundation of*  
 VIII. *God standeth sure*, that the Proof of the  
 ——— Christian Faith by Miracles is found and  
 satisfactory. Let us adhere to it steddi-  
 ly, and devoutly adore the divine Wis-  
 dom and Goodness, which contrived it  
 for our Sakes! Let us not be moved by  
 the little Cavils, and exceptions, with  
 which perverse and unreasonable Men  
 are used to encounter it; but let us re-  
 member, that in this State of Imper-  
 fection, there is scarce any Truth so  
 bright and clear, but that an Industrious  
 Stirrer up of Doubts may do somewhat  
 towards clouding and darkening it. Let  
 us not *sit in the Seat, nor stand in the*  
*Way, nor walk in the Council of these*  
*Ungodly*; who studiously undermine  
 Principles, and delight to affront the  
 Common Sense of Mankind; who set  
 up for a Repute by disbelieving every  
 thing, and are resolved to pay a Regard  
 to nothing, but their own deep Penetra-  
 tion and Prudence. Let us preserve our-  
 selves free from that sort of Caution and  
 Reserve, which, lest it should be im-  
 posed

posed upon by false Motives of Credibility, will close with none; and for very Fear of being deceived, takes the unavoidable Way towards being deceived, by equally suspecting every thing. God defend us from such a kind of Wariness as this! and grant that we may foolishly entertain some falshood together with Truth, rather than be Wise to that Degree, as to esteem every thing a Falshood! that we may be weak enough to believe several Doctrines in Religion, that are Eroneous and Vain, rather than be so backward and hardy as to believe nothing at all! For certainly, as downright Credulity and Weakness has much the Advantage of Infidelity, with regard to the Ease and Peace of Mind it affords us in *This* World, so it is more likely, if it errs to be overlooked and pardoned by God in *Another*. I had rather be the most easy, tame, and resigned Believer in the most Gross and imposing Church in the World (I mean that of *Rome*) than one of those Great and Philosophical Minds, who

SERM. who stand upon their Terms with God,  
VIII. and study to hold out as long as they can,  
— against the Doctrines of the Gospel, and  
the Arguments that are brought to prove  
them.

To that God, who *alone doth wondrous Things*, and is alone able to bring some proud Reasoners to acknowledge, that he *has done* them, be ascribed all Honour, Praise, and Power, now and for ever!

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*The difficult Passages of Scripture vindicated  
from such Objections as are usually made  
to them; and proper Directions given,  
how we are to use them:*

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IN THREE

S E R M O N S

Preached at the

R O L L S,

In the Year 1711.

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2 P E T. iii. 16.

*In which are some things hard to be Under-  
stood, which they that are Unlearned and  
Unstable, wrest, as they do also the other  
Scriptures, unto their own Destruction.*

**S**T. Peter, in this Chapter, employs S E R M.  
his Pen, in fortifying the Minds of IX.  
those Christians, to whom he writes, —  
VOL. III. P against

SERM. against that Scorn and Mockery they  
 IX. met with from some Profane Men, who  
 ———— disputed the Certainty of this World's  
 Dissolution, and of *Christ's* coming to  
 Judgment; and derided the Eager Ex-  
 pectations of the first Believers concern-

Ver. 4. *Where, said they, is the Promise of  
 his Coming? for, since the Fathers fell asleep,  
 all things continue, as they were from the Be-  
 ginning of the Creation.* Against the At-  
 tempts of these Scoffers the Apostle arms  
 them throughout this whole Chapter;  
 assures them of the Reality of their Hopes,  
 and of the Truth of the Divine Promises;  
 and exhorts them to wait with Patience  
 and Humility for their Accomplishment.

Ver. 9. *The Lord, saith he, is not slack concerning  
 his Promise (as some Men count Slackness)  
 but is Long-suffering to us-ward, not willing  
 that any should perish, but that all should come  
 to Repentance.*

Where he intimates the True Reason  
 of *Christ's* delaying his Coming, to be,  
 that he may give Room and Space to  
 all Men every where to repent, and  
 embrace his Gospel. *Wherefore, beloved,*

Ver. 14,  
 &c.

says he a little afterwards, *account that* S E R M.  
*the Long-suffering of our Lord is Salva-* IX.  
*tion; even as our beloved Brother Paul also,*  
*according to the Wisdom given unto him, hath*  
*written unto you: As also in all his Epistles,*  
*speaking in them of these things; in which*  
*are some things hard to be understood, which*  
*they that are unlearned and unstable, wrest, as*  
*they do also the other Scriptures, to their own*  
*Destruction.*

He seems purposely to have made mention of *St. Paul* in this Place, not only because he concurred with him in his Testimony concerning the End and Design of God's Long-sufferance, but because his Writings also had been objected against by those very Scoffers, as *obscure* and *unintelligible*. And therefore he took an Occasion of mentioning *one* Passage out of them, that he might have an Opportunity of Vindicating the *Whole* from these Men's scornful Exceptions. *Account*, says he, *that the Long-suffering of the Lord is Salvation; even as our beloved Brother Paul also, according to the Wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you.* The

S E R M. Place of St. Paul referred to, seems to be

IX. that in the Epistle to the *Romans*, Chap. ii.

—— Ver. 4. *Despiseſt thou the Riches of his Goodneſs, and Forbearance, and Long-ſuffering; not knowing that the Goodneſs of God leadeth thee to Repentance?* From which Parallel Text thus produced from St. Paul, he takes Occaſion to ſpeak of *All* his Writings, and of the Imputation which in general lay upon them. *As alſo in all his Epistles* (continues he) *ſpeaking in them of theſe things; in which* (i. e.) in which Epistles [I explain it ſo, notwithstanding a Criticiſm taken from the *Greek*, which would make the Words, in which, belong to the *Things* ſpoken of in the Epistles, and not to the *Epistles* themſelves, which Criticiſm I ſhall not now trouble you with] I ſay therefore, in which Epistles, are ſome things hard to be underſtood, which they that are unlearned and unſtable (that are *Unlearned*, i. e. Unſkilled, and Unverſed in Divine things; and *Unſtable*, i. e. of light, deſultory, unbalanced Minds) *wreſt, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own Deſtruction.*

Having

Having thus cleared the Connection of the Text; I shall discourse on it after the following Manner :

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*First*, By enlarging a little on the Proposition itself, which it contains : That there *are* in St. Paul's Writings, and in the *other* Scriptures also, Things hard to be understood. I.

*Secondly*, By giving some Account how, and for *what* Reason it has come to pass, that the Scriptures are, and *must* be, in some measure *Obscure* : How *necessary* and *unavoidable* it was, that there should be some Passages in them *dark* and *difficult* even to *Those*, who lived at the Time when they were written, and yet more so to *Us*, who live at this *Distance* from the Age of the Apostles. II.

*Thirdly*, By shewing you, that this carries no Reflexion at all in it upon the Divine Goodness or Wisdom. And then in the III.

S E R M. *Fourth*, and last place, By-raising some  
 IX. Observations from what has been said,  
 ——— and preventing the Ill Uses that may be  
 made of it.

I. *First*, this Proposition is evidently laid down in the Text, That there are in *St. Paul's* Writings, *Things hard to be understood*: And it is plainly intimated, that there are such things in the *Other* Parts of Holy Writ also; inasmuch as they, who *wrest these* Difficult Passages of *St. Paul*, are said to *wrest the other Scriptures also*.

It is indeed an undoubted Truth, and what no good *Christian* is, I think, in the least concerned to deny, that the Books, both of the Old and New Testament, are not every where equally clear and intelligible. They have, like Other Books, a Mixture of that which is Easy, with that which is Hard to be understood; a Great Deal that is Plain and Obvious, and somewhat also that is Obscure and Difficult. Notwithstanding  
 ing

ing they were designed to contain a Re-S E R M.  
 velation of God's Will to Men, yet was I X.  
 not that Revelation designed to partake  
 every where alike of the Nature of its  
 Great Author and Revealer, who is (in  
 the Phrase of St. *John*) *Light, and in* John i.  
*whom there is no Darknefs at all.* 5.

Sometimes the Things spoken of are  
 so Myfterious and Sublime, that our  
 Limited and Weak Apprehenfions can  
 hardly reach them. Sometimes the Man-  
 ner of fpeaking, even concerning Com-  
 mon things, is dark and dubious. The  
*Apocalypfe* is received into the Canon, to-  
 gether with the other Parts of Scripture;  
 the Sense of it has been much fought and  
 fearched after by pious and inquisitive Men  
 in all Ages of the Church; and yet we  
 have reason to believe, that it has never  
 yet been thoroughly underftood by any  
 Man.

The Beginning of St. *John's* Gospel is  
 fo far Intelligible, as that it plainly  
 enough eftablifhes the Divinity of our  
 Lord, and his Co-eternity with God the  
 Father; but yet nobody, I think, will fay,

S E R M. that the Sense of every Term in that  
 IX. Chapter is so clear and easy, as that no  
 ——— *Christian*, of whatever Rank or Degree,  
 can, upon perusing, and attentively con-  
 sidering the Whole, miss the Meaning of  
 it

Even the Discourses of our Blessed  
 Lord are somewhat dark and intricate in  
 John iii. some Parts of them. That with *Nicode-*  
*mus* about Regeneration; and that with  
 the Men of *Capernaum* about Eating his  
 John vi. Body and Blood, have in them what will  
 command and exercise our Utmost At-  
 tention. And his Account of the De-  
 Matth. struction of *Jerusalem*, in St. *Matthew*,  
 xxiv. is so interwoven with that of the Day  
 of Judgment, that it is very difficult to  
 distinguish exactly, what Expressions  
 belong to the One, and what to the  
 Other.

And then, as to St. *Paul* in particular,  
 Gal. ii. 6. his Doctrines of Justification by *Faith*,  
 and not by *Works*; of *Election* and *Re-*  
*probation*; his Description of the Strug-  
 Rom. vii. gle between *Sin* and *the Law* in the  
 Natural Man, as yet unassisted by *Grace*;  
 and

and his Account of the *Spiritual Body*, S E R M.  
 with which we are to rise at the Last IX.  
 Day, are sufficient Instances of the Truth 1 Cor. xv.  
 of St. *Peter's* Assertion, That in him  
 particularly *are some Things hard to be*  
*understood.*

This Truth therefore being supposed,  
 I proceed now, in the

*Second Place*, to give some Account, II.  
 how These obscure Passages came to have  
 a Place in Scripture: How it could *not*  
 otherwise be but that the Holy Writ-  
 ings *should*, in *some* Parts of them, be  
*dark and difficult*, even to Those, who  
 lived at the Time when they were writ-  
 ten, and yet more so to Us, who live at  
 this Distance from the Age of the Apo-  
 stles.

And the plain Account of this Matter  
 is, that, though the Scripture was writ-  
 ten by Men under the immediate In-  
 spiration and Guidance of the Holy  
 Ghost; yet were those Men, at the Time  
 of this Inspiration, left to the free Use  
 of their own Natural Faculties and  
 Powers,

SERM. Powers, and to express themselves,  
 IX. every one after their particular Fashion  
 ——— and Manner: The Holy Ghost, though  
 it presided over the Minds and Pens of  
 the Apostles, so far as to preserve them  
 from Error, yet doth not seem to have  
 dictated to them, what they were to  
 say, Word by Word, but in that to have  
 left them, in good Measure, if not al-  
 together, to themselves. Which appears  
 plainly from hence, in that we find the  
 Several Writers of the New Testament  
 always in their several Proper and Pec-  
 liar Characters; and as different in their  
 Styles, almost, as One Human Author is  
 from another.

For what is left to Men to express,  
 placed only under an Over-ruling Pow-  
 er, which necessitates them to speak no-  
 thing but Truth, must need be ex-  
 pressed, though always Truly, yet, af-  
 ter the unequal, imperfect Manner of  
 Men, sometimes, more darkly, and some-  
 times more clearly. I say therefore,  
 that the Apostles and Evangelists, mak-  
 ing use of their Natural Faculties and  
 Ways

Ways of Speech, in committing to Writing the Truths delivered to them, it could not be expected, that they should speak always with the same Degree of Perspicuity; because no other Writer does so.

Further, the Nature of some Things they delivered was such, so high and heavenly, so obscure and altogether unknown to Men, that the Language of Men could not but fail under them, when they were to express them: They were of Necessity sometimes to fall short, in what they said, of what they Imagined and Conceived; and, for want of fit and adequate Terms, to clothe their Thoughts in unequal and improper ones. Particularly as to *St. Paul*, who had been in the Third Heaven, and there heard things unutterable; was it to be expected, that, when he came down from thence, he should have spoke of those Mysteries, after a clear and satisfactory Manner? No, those, to whom he spake, must have been in the Third Heaven too,

S E R M.  
IX.

SERM. too, thoroughly to have understood his  
IX. Meaning.

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It is no Wonder therefore, that there should be Passages in Scripture of a doubtful and uncertain Meaning, even to *Those*, who lived at the Time *when* that Scripture was penned. It is yet less a Wonder, that there should be many more such with regard to *Us*, who live at this *Distance* from the Age of the Apostles.

For consider we with ourselves, what manner of Men the Apostles were, in their Birth and Education; what Country they lived in; what Language they wrote in; and we shall find it rather Wonderful, that there are so few, than that there are so many Things, that we are at a Loss to understand. They were Men (all except *St. Paul*) meanly born and bred, and uninstructed utterly in the Arts of Speaking and Writing. All the Language they were Masters of was purely what was Necessary to express themselves upon the Common Affairs of Life, and in Matters of Intercourse  
with

with Men of their own Rank and Profession. When they came therefore to talk of the Great Doctrines of the Cross, to preach up the Astonishing Truths of the Gospel; they brought to be sure their Old Idiotisms, and Plainness of Speech along with them. And is it strange then, that the deep Things of God should not always be expressed by them in Words of the greatest Propriety and Clearness?

The *Eastern* Manner of Thinking and Speaking, at that time especially, when the Scripture was wrote, was widely different from *Ours*, who live in This Age, and This Quarter of the World. The Language of the *East* speaks of nothing simply, but in the boldest, and most lofty Figures, and in the longest and most strained Allegories. Its Transitions from One thing to Another are Irregular and Sudden, without the least Notice given. Its Manner of expressing things is wonderfully short and comprehensive, so as to leave much more to be understood than is plainly and directly spoken.

S E R M.  
IX.

S E R M. spoken. And this also cannot but con-

IX. tribute to make the Holy Writings seem,

— in some Parts of them, Obscure to such as are used to throw their Thoughts and their Words into a quite different Mold.

Beyond all this, We, at this Distance, cannot be exactly acquainted with the Occasions, upon which some Parts of Scripture were written; which nevertheless are the true and proper Keys that open the Meaning of them. We see not the frequent Allusions to Customs then known, and in use. We are in the dark to many of the Objections made to the Apostles Doctrine, which are tacitly obviated and answered by them in their Epistles, without being mentioned. Under these, and many other Disadvantages, the Holy Scriptures must needs lie, with regard to the Obviousness of their Sense and Meaning, to Us at this Distance: And it can be no Blemish to them therefore, if that Meaning be not always obvious.

I might, with Truth, add one thing more upon his Head, That, where the  
Inter-

Interpretation of Scripture has any Difficulty, that Difficulty is often, in good measure, owing to the preposterous Endeavours used by some Men to explain and clear it. The Multiplicity of Comments written upon Scripture, and the Variety of all the *Possible* Senses of any Text, started by those Writers, have been so far from reaching the End aimed at, the Dissipating all Doubts and Difficulties, that they have cast a Mist over many Places, which of themselves were plain and clear; and have rendered some, that were really a little obscure, yet more unintelligible.

Numberless Volumes have been written on Scripture, in every Age almost, since it was published; and still the Later Writers have generally striven to distinguish themselves from the Elder, by some New Guess, by saying somewhat that hath not been said before. And thus the Mind of an honest Enquirer is perplexed and confounded, and, in the Midst of a Thousand *false* Meanings, easily loses Sight of the *true* one.

But

SERM.

IX. But still it will be said, that these are only *Rational* Accounts, *how* Scripture comes in *some* Places to be Obscure, not at all *Justifications* of its *being* so. God, who inspired the Apostles to write the Holy Scripture, might, if he had pleased, have suggested to them the very Words also, in which it was to be written; and, by that Means, have made it *All* clear and easy, and took away all Occasion of Doubts, and Disputes concerning it. And since he could have done so, why was it not done, if so be Scripture were designed for a Rule of Faith and Manners? For can a Rule be too certain? Can a Man know too plainly what he is to Do, and what he is to Believe?

In Answer to this therefore, I shall shew, as I proposed in the

III. *Third* Place, That it carries no Reflexion upon the Divine *Goodness* or *Wisdom*, that the Scripture is not in every Part *as* plain and clear, as it was *possible* to have been made.

For

For *First*, the *Goodness* of God is by S E R M.  
 no means obliged to do every thing for IX.  
 us that is *possible* to be done, but only  
 that which is *sitting* and *sufficient*, in or-  
 der to the *End* it designs. Now the  
*End* proposed by God, in causing the  
 Scripture to be written, is, to afford us  
 a Complete Rule and Measure of what-  
 ever is to be believed, or done by us.  
 If therefore, in all Points of Faith and  
 Practice, Scripture is *sufficiently* plain  
 and clear, it is *as* plain and clear as it  
*need* to be; and it can be no Reflection  
 on the Divine *Goodness*, not to have made  
 it plainer.

But now, that whatever is requisite to  
 be believed, or done by us, is *sufficiently*  
 Evident in Scripture, will appear from  
 these Two Considerations.

I. The Darkness of Scripture in some  
*particular* Places does not hinder its be-  
 ing *generally* plain and clear. Its hav-  
 ing *some* things in it *hard to be under-*  
*stood*, implies, that it has *but* some; and  
 that *most* things in it are easy to be un-  
 derstood, lye open and level to the mean-

S E R M. est Understandings. The Truth is, what-  
 IX. ever Difficulties there are in Scripture,  
 ————— they are few and little, in comparison of  
 what is plain and intelligible there. Take  
 it altogether, and it well deserves the  
 Character Holy *David* bestows on it.  
 Pf. cxix. That it is a *Lantern unto his Feet and a*  
 105. *Light unto his Paths*: That *the Testimony*  
 Ver. 130. *of the Lord is sure, and giveth Wisdom*  
 Pf. xix. 8. *unto the Simple*: That *the Commandment*  
*of the Lord is pure, and giveth Light un-*  
*to the Eyes.* And if in general, and for  
 the most part, Scripture be perspicuous  
 and clear, we have Reason to think there  
 is *enough* of it clear, to instruct us in the  
*Whole* of our Duty; and make us suffici-  
 ently *Wise unto Salvation.* Especially  
 since, in the

2<sup>d</sup> Place, Nothing there, that is *hard*  
 to be *understood*, is *necessary* to be *under-*  
*stood* by us: And therefore, whatever  
 Truth is contained in any obscure Place  
 of Scripture, we may satisfy ourselves,  
 that the Knowledge, or Practice of it  
 shall never be required at our Hands,  
 upon

upon the Account of its being contained there. SERM.  
IX.

I say, upon the Account of its being contained there: For a necessary Doctrine, that is delivered obscurely in *one* Place, may yet be Revealed clearly in *another*. And wherever it is clearly Revealed, we are obliged to take Notice of it. But whatever Doctrine is contained in *one* or *more* obscure Texts of Scripture, and no where else clearly expressed, is not necessary to be embraced and believed by us; nor shall we be Condemned for not receiving it.

The *Goodness* of God is sufficiently justified, in proposing the Scripture as a Rule of Faith to us: For though it be not equally perspicuous and clear throughout, yet it is in the main, and for the most part so; and whatever is hard to be understood, is on that very Account *not necessary* to be understood. But

*Secondly*, Neither is there any Reflexion by this Means cast on the *Wisdom* of God. For though it may be said,

Q 2

if

SERM. if these hard Places are not capable of

IX. being understood, why were they writ-

ten? why were they made Parts of the

Revelation of God's Will to Men, if

we are still as much in the Dark to them,

as if they had never been Revealed? Yet,

to this it may, in the

*First* place, be answered, that there

is no Part of Scripture so obscure, as

to be *utterly* unintelligible. St. Peter

says only, there are *some things hard*,

but he says not, that there are *any im-*

*possible* to be understood. It is difficult

indeed in some Places to reach the Sense

of the inspired Writers: But still it is

not so difficult, but that it *may* be done,

if, with Care, and Attention, we study

the Holy Scripture; if we free ourselves

from Prepossessions and Prejudices; if

we take in all proper Helps, and make

use of all proper Means, and, above

all, if we ardently beg of God the

Assistance of his Good Spirit, to teach,

and enlighten us, and lead us into all

Truth. I say there is no Difficulty *so*

great in Scripture, but that, by the Su-

pernatural Illuminations of God's Spirit concurring with our Natural Endeavours, it is *possible* to be Mastered; and therefore God did not inspire the Holy Writers, to write any thing altogether in vain and to no purpose; for nothing written by them is perfectly *incapable* of being understood; only *some* things lie readier to our Sight, upon the Surface as it were of the Text, and *others* lie deeper, and we are forced therefore (in the Words of *Solomon*) to Prov. ii. 4. *dig for them, as for hidden Treasures.* But,

*Secondly*, The *Wisdom* of God is further justified, in leaving these hard Passages, inasmuch as there are several *Wise Ends* which it serves by it, and several *Weighty Reasons*, which it has for so doing.

He left them on purpose to humble the Presumption and Pride of Man, to Confound *the Wisdom of the Wise* of this 1 Cor. i. World, and to give us an Instance of 19. the mighty Power of God, in making those plain Men, the Apostles, utter such great and sublime Truths, as those of the

S E R M. most improved Understandings among  
 IX. the Heathens, by the mere Light of Na-  
 ———— ture, never did, nor could do.

He left them on purpose to Create an awful Reverence of Mind in us towards Holy Truths; which, had they been all Easy of Access, would, in a little time, have grown familiar, and cheap to us also.

To secure the Majesty of Religion therefore he wrapped up some of the great Mysteries of it in Obscurity.—

Pf. xviii.  
 11.

*He made (as the Psalmist speaks) Darkness his Secret Place; his Pavilion round about him with dark Water, and thick Clouds to cover him.*

Further, He left them also, to Exercise our Industry, and to Engage our Attention. He designed the Holy Book to be such, as that we might make it always our Companion and our Study: That our *Delight* might continually be  
 Pf. i. 2. (as *David's* was) *in the Law of the Lord,* and *in that* we might *meditate Day and Night.* In order to which, it was requisite, that the Sense of Every thing,  
 Every

Every where, should not be too plain, S E R M.  
 and obvious. For how then could we IX.  
 have found always fresh Matter for our  
 Thoughts and Enquiries? No, the Trea-  
 sure of Divine Knowledge was necessa-  
 rily *so* to be hid, in these sacred Volumes,  
 as not soon to be exhausted; so as con-  
 tinually to provoke our Searches, and to  
 feed our Mind with ever fresh Discove-  
 ries; so as that, how long soever we  
 meditate upon it, we may have still Room  
 left for further Meditations. Were all  
 plain, were all open there, the Mind  
 would quickly droop, and the Attention  
 languish, upon the repeated Views of  
 that, which it was so well acquainted with,  
 and knew so thoroughly.

*Again*, God mixed together obscure  
 with plain things, deep with common  
 Truths in Scripture, that what was Ad-  
 dressed to *All* might be Adapted to *Eve-*  
*ry* one's Capacity, The *Babes* in *Christ*,  
 as well as *Grown* Saints, the *Weak* pro-  
 miscuously, and the *Strong*, were to  
 read the Holy Scriptures. And there-  
 fore fit it was, that there should be Food

SERM. in it proportioned to both; *Milk* for the  
IX. one, and *strong Meat* for the other.

— Yet further, These Dark Doctrines and Puzzling Passages were inserted, to be the Test of Ingenuous, of sincere and well-disposed Minds; to see, whether, when we were once satisfied that a Book came from God, we would acquiesce in every thing contained in it, and submit ourselves (without Disputes or Cavils) as well to those Parts of it, which *Shocked*, as to those which *Enlightened* our Minds; or whether we would not (as many have done) lay hold of every obscure Passage to the Prejudice of Scripture, though we had otherwise never so many Arguments for the Divine Original of it; and Reject the Authority of *all* that which is plain and clear there, for the sake of *something* which we do not Comprehend.

Finally, God left these Obscurities in Holy Writ, on purpose to give us a *Taste* and *Glympse*, as it were, of those great and glorious Truths, which shall hereafter fully be discovered to us in another  
World,

World, but which *now are*, in some S E R M.  
 measure, *hidden from our Eyes*; on pur- IX.  
 pose to make us earnestly aspire after, and 

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 long for that Blessed State and Time,  
 when all Doubts shall be cleared, and the  
 Veil taken off from all Mysteries: When  
*the Book*, that is now in some measure  
*shut*, shall be *opened*, and every one of Rev. v. 5.  
*the seven Seals thereof loosed*: When that which 1 Cor. xiii.  
*is perfect shall come*, and that which is in 10.  
*Part shall be done away*: When we shall  
 exchange Faith for Sight, Hope for En-  
 joyment, Reasoning for Intuition, and shall  
 not (as we do now) *see through a Glass*  
*darkly*, but *know, even as we are known.* Ver. 12.

To that blessed State God of his In-  
 finite Mercy bring us all, &c.



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SECOND  
 S E R M O N  
 ON THE  
 SAME SUBJECT.

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2 PET. iii. 16.

*In which are some things hard to be understood, &c.*

**I**N my former Discourse I shewed SERM.  
 you, that these Words of St. Peter X.  
 relate directly to the Writings of St. Paul; —  
 in which he owns, *there are some things  
 hard to be Understood*; and that *They,  
 who were Unlearned, and Unstable, wrest-  
 ed them, as they did the other Scriptures,  
 to their own Destruction.* Whereby he  
 intimates,

SERM. intimates, that there are also in the *other*  
 x. Parts of Scripture, as well as in the  
 ——— Writings of St. Paul, Obscure Passages,  
 liable to be misunderstood, wrested, and  
 perverted by unlearned, and unstable  
 Readers.

I have therefore taken an Occasion from  
 hence, to discourse to you at large con-  
 cerning the *Difficult* Parts of Holy Writ,  
 so as to take in the *General* Argument;  
 and yet to keep my Eye more particular-  
 ly all along, upon the Books of the *New*  
*Testament*, to which St. Peter's Words  
 chiefly refer.

I propos'd to treat of this Subject un-  
 der the *Four* following Heads.

- I. *First*, By enlarging a little on the Pro-  
 position, allowed and laid down in the  
 Text, That there *are* in St. Paul's Writ-  
 ings, and in the *other* Scriptures also,  
 Things hard to be understood.
- II. *Secondly*, By giving some Account  
 how, and for *what* Reason it hath come  
 to pass, that the Scriptures *are* and  
 must

must be, in some measure *Obscure*: How S E R M.  
*necessary* and *unavoidable* it was, that X.  
 there should be *some* Passages in them  
*dark* and *difficult* even to *Those*, who  
 lived at the Time when they were writ-  
 ten, and yet more so to *Us*, who live at  
 this *Distance* from the Age of the Apo-  
 stles.

*Thirdly*, By shewing you, that this car-  
 ries in it no Reflexion, either upon the  
*Goodness*, or *Wisdom* of God: Not on his  
*Goodness*; because though he has left  
*some things* in Holy Writ *hard to be under-*  
*stood*, yet he has left *enough* there *easy* and  
*plain*; enough to inform us clearly of the  
 whole compass of what we are *bound* to  
 believe, and to practise. Not on his  
*Wisdom*; because these *dark* Parts of Holy  
 Writ have their *Uses*, as well as the *clear*  
 ones; there being many *Wise Ends*, and  
*Weighty Reasons* for inserting them; se-  
 veral of which I reckoned up to you in  
 my last Discourse.

*Fourthly*,

SERM. *Fourthly*, and *lastly*, I was to raise  
 x. some Observations from what hath been  
 ——— said; to prevent the *wrong* Uses that  
*might*, and to point out the *true* and  
*only* Use that *ought* to be made of  
 it.

The *Two first* of these Heads have been fully spoken to. The *Third* has been entered upon, and in some measure cleared; and what remains behind of it, will fall into the *Fourth* and *Last* General Head, the enlarging on which shall be the Business of this *present* Discourse.

And the First thing I shall observe, from what has been said on this Subject, shall be, The Folly and Unreasonableness of those Men, who endeavour, from the Obscurity of *some* Parts of Scripture, *entirely* to destroy the *Authority* of it.

For thus they argue: The Bible, say they, is a Book ordered by God to be written for the Information of Man-  
 kind

kind in what they are to Believe and S E R M.  
 to Do. And can we think that such a X.  
 Book from such an Author, should  
 have any Defects in it? Can it be ima-  
 gined, that God would speak to Man;  
 and yet not speak so as in every Case to  
 be understood by him? Is he either not  
 able, or not willing to express himself  
 clearly? If neither of these can be sup-  
 posed without Blasphemy, how comes it  
 to pass that this Volume is so full of Dif-  
 ficulties and Mysteries? That this Reve-  
 lation of his Will wants a yet further Re-  
 velation, to give us a plain Account of its  
 Meaning?

Thus do the *Ungodly reason with them-* Wisd. ii. 1.  
*selves, but not aright*; as will appear from  
 these following Considerations.

It is a strange Sort of Argument,  
 surely, that a Book, which comes from  
 God, must have nothing in it *Obscure*,  
 and *Hard to be Understood*. On the  
 contrary, I think, it were much to be  
 suspected, that *such* a Book as this was  
*not* of Divine Authority, if it *should* be  
 found to lie ready and open to the most  
 ordinary

S E R M. ordinary Apprehensions, in *Every* Part  
 x. and Passage of it. It is given to us, on  
 purpose, to open to us some Discoveries  
 concerning the Divine Nature, its Ef-  
 sence, and ineffable Perfections; to in-  
 form us of mysterious Truths, the Secrets  
 of Heaven, hid from Natural Reason,  
 and from former Ages. And can a  
 Book, do we think, that speaks of these  
 Deep Things of God, with which the  
 Natural Man is utterly unacquainted,  
 speak so, as not to give us the least Trou-  
 ble in understanding it? Can that, like  
 1 Cor. ii. 9. which *our Eyes never saw, nor our Ears*  
*heard, nor hath it entered into the Heart*  
*to conceive any thing before, be told us*  
*in Words as easy to be apprehended, as*  
*those, by which we express the most*  
*Common things, that we every Day con-*  
*verse with? It is not so when we first*  
*set ourselves to learn any Human Art or*  
*Science. The Terms, the Principles,*  
*the Propositions of it are all at first*  
*Sight strange and uncouth, and make*  
*no bright Impression upon the Mind.*  
 They

They Amaze, they Puzzle, but they do not Enlighten us; till, by repeated Views, we have made them familiar and easy to us. And why then should we expect, that Divine Mysteries, and the Things of another World should more easily be taught and learnt, than Human Arts and Sciences? The Obscurity of the Subject, whatever it be, must needs cause a proportionable Obscurity in the Expression of it; and no Wonder then, if Scripture be dark in some Places, where it speaks of things so remote from Human Knowledge and Apprehension.

Dark it must needs be, unless God, who miraculously enlightened the Minds of the Prophets and Apostles, when they were to write it, should miraculously also open the Understanding of every one that comes to read it. So that the Difficulties occurring in some Passages of a Divine Revelation, are so far from being an Argument against its coming from God, that, on the contrary, it were not reasonable to think it to be

S E R M. a Divine Revelation, if there were *nothing* Abstruse and Difficult in it.

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Should it be further objected, that the Design of Scripture is, to Reveal God's Nature and Will to Mankind, to be a sure Guide, and an easy Rule of our Belief and Practice; and it ought therefore, in order to the Attainment of this End, to be in every respect plain and clear; for to no purpose would it be given us by God as a Guide and a Rule, if it be Obscurely and Doubtfully expressed.

To this the Answer is ready: That the Scripture, being intended by God, as a Rule of Faith and Manners, must needs be, and certainly is, *so far* clear, as to reach the *End* it is intended for; so far, as to enlighten our Minds in all necessary saving Truths, and to afford us, in plain intelligible Terms, all that Knowledge, that is requisite to carry us to Heaven. And *thus far* we affirm the Scripture to be clear and easy. But it follows not, that it ought, on this Account,

count, to be plain and clear in every Part S E R M.  
 and Passage of it. If there be enough in X:  
 it easy to be apprehended, it sufficiently  
 answers the End, for which it was de-  
 signed, though there be some things in  
 it, which are *not* so. And therefore  
 the Objection fails in this, That it sup-  
 poses Scripture to be written perfectly  
 for *this* End, and for *no* other, the af-  
 fording us an easy, familiar Rule of Faith  
 and Manners. This indeed was the *chief*,  
 but it was not the *only* End, proposed in  
 writing it.

Besides this, it was intended (as you  
 have heard) *so* to be written, as to hum-  
 ble the Pride of Men, and confound *the*  
*Wisdom of the Wise*; so as to try our  
 Probity, and to exercise our strictest  
 Attention, and to employ our Industry;  
 so as to create a Reverence and Awe in  
 us of the Divine Revealer; and to give  
 us an Instance of the mighty Power of  
 God, in making those plain Men, the  
 Apostles, utter such great and sublime  
 Truths, as those of the most improved

SERM. Understandings among the Heathen, by  
 x. the mere Light of Nature, never did,  
 ——— nor could do. In a word, so as to give  
 us a light Taste and Glympse only of  
 those Truths; that were fully to be Re-  
 vealed to us in another World; and,  
 by that Means, to make us the more  
 earnestly reach out our Thoughts to,  
 aspire after, and long for the future and  
 full Enjoyment of them. And, in or-  
 der to attain these Ends, it was fit and  
 requisite, that *some* Parts of it should be  
 involved in Obscurity; as I discoursed  
 to you the last Opportunity. And  
 therefore it must not be argued, that  
 the written Word of God, being de-  
 signed for a Rule of Faith and Action,  
 must be perspicuous *throughout*; because  
 there were *Other* Ends besides this, *to*  
*which some* Parts of it were designed;  
 and to the attaining which, the Dark  
 and Difficult Places in Holy Writ con-  
 tribute as much, as the plain and most  
 intelligible Passages do, towards build-  
 ing us up in those Doctrines that are ne-  
 cessary to Salvation.

But

But then it is further Objected, That S E R M.  
 this Way of accounting for the Obscu- X.  
 rity of Holy Writ in *some* things, sup-  
 poseth it to be evident in *all* things ne-  
 cessary to Salvation: A Supposition  
 which will not easily be granted by those  
 we have to deal with. For, say they,  
 are not the Doctrines of the Divinity of  
*Christ*, and the Holy Ghost, and those  
 of the same Rank with these, necessary  
 to Salvation? And yet they are not  
 plainly and clearly contained in Scri-  
 pture; for then reasonable Men, upon  
 reading Scripture could not have *doubt-*  
*ed*, whether they were contained there,  
 or not; much less in good Earnest *be-*  
*lieved*, that they were not contained  
 there.

Now the true Account of this Matter  
 is this :

*First*, It is not pretended, that these  
 Doctrines are plainly contained in *every*  
 Text of Scripture, which speaks of  
 them; but only that in *some one* Text  
 or *more* they are proposed to us con-  
 vincingly,

SERM. x.vincingly, and clearly; and if a Truth  
 x. be *once* delivered so clearly, as to leave  
 ————— no doubt, 'tis the same thing to us,  
 who acknowledge the Divine Authority  
 of all Parts of Scripture, as if it were  
*many* times there repeated. For Exam-  
 ple, were there *no* other Text for the  
 Proof of the Doctrine of the Holy Tri-  
 nity, in the Sense, in which the Church  
 of God hath always professed to believe  
 it, but *that* only where our Saviour com-  
 mands his Disciples to *Baptize in the*  
 Matth. *Name of the Father, the Son, and the*  
 xxviii. 19. *Holy Ghost*: Or that where St. *John*  
 1 John v. *speaks of the Three Witnesses in Heaven*;  
 7. either of these Texts would be sufficient  
 to make that Doctrine an *Evident* Part  
 of Scripture, though in all the *other* Pas-  
 sages usually produced for it, it should  
 be allowed to be expressed obscurely.

Again, neither is it pretended, that  
 these Doctrines are any where, through-  
 out the whole Bible, expressed with the  
*utmost* Degree of Evidence and Clear-  
 ness, which Words are any ways pos-  
 sibly

sibly capable of: But only that they are S E R M.  
*so expressed*, that an honest impartial X.  
Mind cannot *well* miss the Sense of them. —————  
It might have been said indeed, in so many Words, that *Christ*, and the Holy Spirit were, from all Eternity, distinct from the Father, and, together with him, one God blessed for Ever; and equally the Objects of our Religious Worship and Service. But though this be not said there in so many Terms, it is said however in such, as an unbiaſſed well-meaning Man cannot mistake; and he that is not so, though it should have been said in these very Terms, would perhaps have found a Way to have mistaken, or rather wilfully to have perverted the Sense of them.

The Truth is, God never designed to give us an Account of the Mysteries of Christianity in Expressions every way so bright and clear, as should prevent all possible Wrestings and Misconstructions. For this had been to do too great Force to our Assent, which ought to be free and voluntary. This had been to rob us of

S E R M. the Rewards due to Believing, and to take  
 x. away the proper Test and Trial of Sincere  
 — and Ingenuous Minds.

Besides, had all Points of Doctrine been delivered with such a Degree of Exactness, been so minutely explained, so strictly and cautiously guarded on all Sides, as to shut out the Possibility of any mistaken Meaning, the Bible had been too Voluminous, and too subtle a Book for common Use. And though to some few distinguishing Heads, it might have given better Satisfaction, yet to the most, that is, to the Unlettered part of Mankind, it would have been ten times more Obscure, and Unintelligible, than even now it is represented to be. So that upon the whole, it was extremely fit and proper, that these Doctrines should be delivered with that Degree of Clearness, as to be *easily* understood; not so, as to be perfectly *incapable* of being misunderstood. It was requisite, that they should be asserted shortly and plainly, not that they should be fenced about with all those nice Distinctions, which

which could any way guard them from S E R M.  
 the Attempts of the most Captious and X.  
 Unreasonable. 

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And with *this* Degree of Clearness we affirm, that all *necessary* Truths *are* delivered in Scripture, *i. e.* with *such* a Degree of Clearness, as is *necessary*. Nor does it weaken the Strength of this Assertion to say, that the Sense of those Passages in Scripture, which We think plain to this Purpose, is disputed by some, and absolutely denied by others; and therefore is not so plain as we imagine. For at this rate, there would, perhaps, be never a plain Text left in the whole Book of God. Since what Text almost is there, that has not been the Subject of different Interpretations and Opinions?

There is scarce any thing so absurd, says an Ancient, in *Nature* or *Morality*, but some Philosopher or other has held it. And there is scarce any thing so extravagant in *Divinity* (may we say) but that some obstinate, opinionative Man or other has maintained it, and made a  
 wretched

S E R M. wretched Shift to countenance his Opinion by the Authority of Scripture, miserably wrested and perverted to his Purpose. But what then? This makes no more against the Perspicuity of the Holy Writings, in all necessary Doctrines, than the Wild Opinion of that Old Philosopher, who affirmed Snow to be black, disproves the Clearness and Certainty of those Informations, which proceed from the Senses.

Let not a Man therefore say, that the Scripture is *not* plain in those things, in which we pretend it *is*, because in those very things the Church of God hath understood it one way, and *Arius*, *Socinus*, or some such Broacher of Heresy, another. For this proves nothing, but that there have been Men hardy enough to deny somewhat, which all the World before them allowed: but it is by no means an Argument of the Obscurity of Scripture Expression, unless we could know certainly, that these Men were honest and upright in their Searches, acted with no By-designs, had no Vain End, which

which they proposed to themselves, of heading a Party, or baffling received Opinions; came to search these Books without Biass, Prejudice, or any Pre-engagements to some Opinions of their own, which they were willing and resolved to find there. Without all this, and a great deal more, be proved (which indeed is not capable of Proof) the Scriptures may be clear, though Men of clear Reason in other things do not, or will not understand them.

Well then, the Obscurity of Scripture carries no Objection at all in it, either against the *Goodness*, or *Wisdom* of God; for in all things *necessary* to be understood, it is obvious and plain; and in what is *unnecessary* to be understood, there are many good and wise Reasons, why it should *not* be plain. In the mean time, let Those, who reject Scripture, be pleased to find us out a System of Religion delivered by God, without any of these Difficulties in it. We desire no more of them, but to leave us in Possession of our Bibles, till they can

S E R M. can shew us a clearer Revelation, and more  
 x. worthy of the Divine Revealer.

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If to this they shall say (as many in our Own Times do say) What need of any Revelation at all? *Reason* is clear, and by *that* we may guide Ourselves; God has implanted a *Light* in every one, *sufficient* to shew him the Way to Heaven: We must ask them, Whether *Natural Religion* speaks so plainly in any *one* Point of Religion, but that *some* perverse Man or other has contradicted it? And then, by their own Rule concerning the Obscurity of Scripture, *that* Point is not plain from Reason, because Rational Thinking Men have denied its Plainness; so that a Man, who, on the Account of the Obscurity of Holy Writ, shall pretend to reject the *Christian Religion*, and turn *Deist*, must, upon the same Account, reject *Deism* too, and turn *Atheist*. For there are a great many Things in the Notion of a God, and of that Worship, which *Natural Religion* directs us to pay him, that he can never satisfy himself about, nor thoroughly

understand. Nay, he must not stay at S E R M.  
*Atheism* neither, for the very same Reason X.  
 son; since no System of *that* kind can  
 be contrived, which is not, in many  
 Parts of it, obscure and unintelligible.  
 A great Instance of which we have in  
 the Writings of that Modern *Atheist*,  
*SPINOSA*. In a Word, he must *be* no-  
 thing, *believe* nothing, be of no Opini-  
 on, but live under an *Indifference* to all  
 Truths and Falshoods, in a pendulous  
 State of Mind; *necessitated* to act conti-  
 nually in order to some End *supposed* to  
 be true, and yet *doubting*, whether there  
 be any such thing as *Truth*, or no; living  
 under all the Agonies and Torments of a  
 Rooted Scepticism.

Thus have I *considered largely*, and in  
 some measure endeavoured, to remove  
 the *First* Ill Use that is made of the  
 Doctrine of the Text, by those Perverse  
 and Unreasonable Men, who take an  
 Advantage, from the Confessed Obscurity  
 of some Parts of Scripture, to dispute the  
 Authority of it.

I now

SERM. I now hasten to mention some *Other*

x. Ill Uses that are made of what is owned here in the Text, that there are in the Inspired Writings *Things hard to be understood.*

And indeed, after what has been already discoursed, I need do little more than mention them; for to represent them, will be to disprove them.

*Secondly*, therefore, I observe, That it follows not from thence, as the *Romanists* would infer, that, because of these *Obscure Passages* in Scripture, there is absolute Need of a supreme Judge in Controversies, who should determine the Sense of every Text, and, among many *false* Meanings of it, infallibly guide us into the only *true* one. I say, it by no means follows from hence, that such a Judge is necessary, for this plain Reason: Because, as we have heard, none of those Points, that are any ways obscure and doubtful, are necessary to be determined. In these every Man may abound in his own Sense, and have his own Opinions to himself; and

and if he does but maintain those Opinions S E R M.  
 with Sobriety and Modesty, without rend- X.  
 ing the Unity, or disturbing the Peace of  
 the Church, though he may be under an  
 Error, yet that Error shall not be rig-  
 orously imputed to him.

Much less does it follow from hence,

*Thirdly*, That because of These Ob-  
 scurities in Scripture, therefore the Book  
 itself should be taken out of the Peo-  
 ple's Hands. For though there are *some*  
 Things in it *hard* to be Understood,  
 yet *many*, nay *most* Things there are *easy*  
 to be understood, as that very Expres-  
 sion in *St. Peter* intimates. And how  
 unreasonable therefore is it, to make *some*  
 dark Passages in Holy Writ a Pretence of  
 Locking up *all* at once, without Dis-  
 tinction, from the Generality of *Christi-*  
*ans*; because there are a *few* things there,  
 which they cannot understand, therefore  
 to let them understand *nothing* at all?  
 And this is so much the harder, because  
 (as we have heard) all that is necessary to  
 be understood, is evidently contained in  
 Scripture. So that to deprive a Man of  
 that

S E R M. that which he *can* understand, and which  
 x. also it is necessary he *should* understand,  
 ——— for the sake of somewhat contained in  
 the same Book, which he *cannot* under-  
 stand and which it is no matter whether  
 he *doth* understand or no, is an unreason-  
 able Piece of Cruelty.

I will be bold to say, that, upon the  
 same Grounds that the *Roman* Church de-  
 nies the People the Liberty of Reading  
 Scripture, she might have debarred them  
 also of the Privilege of our Saviour's Con-  
 versation, while he lived upon Earth.  
 For there were *several Things* in the  
 Course of his Instructions, *hard to be un-*  
*derstood*; and therefore, for fear of mis-  
 interpreting those Things, it was con-  
 venient, might she have said, that all Ig-  
 norant, Unskilful Men should utterly ab-  
 stain from his Company. But our Savi-  
 our did not deter the *Common* People from  
 approaching him, because now and then  
 he spake a *dark* Parable. And therefore  
 neither ought they to be with-held from  
 reading his Gospel, though there be some  
 hard

hard things there, which, perhaps, they will read without understanding.

S E R M.

X.

But *Fourthly*, and *lastly*, These Ill Uses of the Doctrine of the Text being removed, the Truest, and most Proper Use we can make of it, is, from a Sense of these *things hard to be understood* in Scripture, to form ourselves into a deep Humility, and Lowliness of Mind, in the perusing them; to read that Sacred Volume, with a Wise Jealousy, and a Wary Distrust of our own selves; not with a Conceited Opinion of our own Gifts and Parts, as if *we* alone were able to fathom all Depths, and to grasp all Mysteries. Except ye receive my Gospel as a little Child, said our Saviour, *Ye cannot enter into the* Mark x. *Kingdom of Heaven.* And except ye read <sup>15</sup> my Gospel, as a little Child, may he be as well supposed to say, with such an humble, and teachable Temper, with such a Freedom from Vanity, Prepossession, and Prejudices, as belongs to that Infant State, ye cannot enter into the deep things of it; those things which are expressly said to

S E R M. be revealed to Babes, but hiddden from the  
 X. *Wife.*

Matth. xi.  
 25.

Let us therefore weigh and consider what we read as well as we can; but let us not too much indulge our private Reasonings upon, and fanciful Expositions of Scripture. When we stick any where, let us modestly consult those who should know better than we, and whose particular Business it is to understand and explain this sacred Volume. Let us enquire what has been the Interpretation generally received in the Church of *Christ* in the Purest Ages of it. Or, if that be hard to come at, what is the Opinion of our *own* Church, that particular Member of the Mystical Body of *Christ*, into which it has pleased the Divine Providence to engraft us. When we have found it, let us resolve not lightly to vary from it; not without strong Reasons, and clear Convictions to the contrary; and even then to do it with Modesty, and be content to enjoy our own Private Opinions, without endeavouring to make Profelytes, or troubling the Peace of the Church, for the  
 sake

sake of them. Let us pay a due De- SER M.  
ference, though not a blind Obedience, to  
so great an Authority. And let us not  
reverence Her *Decisions* only, but make  
use of Her Admirable *Words* also, which  
she puts into the Mouth of every One,  
who desires to grow in the Knowledge of  
Scripture.

X.

*Blessed Lord, who hast caused all Holy  
Scripture to be written for our Learning,  
Grant, that we may in such wise hear  
them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest  
them, that by Patience and Comfort of thy  
Holy Word, we may Embrace, and ever hold  
fast, the blessed Hope of Everlasting Life,  
which thou hast given us through Jesus Christ  
our Lord.*

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T H I R D

S E R M O N

O N T H E

S A M E S U B J E C T.

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2 P E T. iii. 16.

*Which they that are Unlearned, and Unstable,  
wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures,  
unto their own Destruction.*

**F**ROM the former Part of the Verse S E R M.  
I have already taken Occasion to X I.  
Discourse to you largely concerning the  
Obscurity of Holy Writ. In the latter  
Part of it, which I have propos'd now  
to handle, St. *Peter* gives us an Account  
of the Ill Impressions that these Difficult

SERM. Parts of Scripture make often on the  
 XI. Minds of ~~Weak Christians~~; they are  
 ——— *wrested* by them (he tells us) *to their own  
 Destruction.*

By *Unlearned Men*, the Apostle means not such as wanted that which we commonly call *Learning*, but such as were not well skilled in *Divine Things*. By *Unstable*, such as, not being well grounded in the Faith, were, upon that Account, easy to be drawn aside into pernicious Opinions and Destructive Errors. Such, he says, as These, *wrest*, i. e. misunderstand, misapply, and pervert the Writings of St. Paul, and the other Scriptures: And This They do, *to their own Destruction*: That is, to their Eternal Ruin in another World: So that the Meaning of this whole Passage is, That some Men, not being firmly rooted and grounded in the true Faith of *Christ*, and being by Consequence of an Uncertain and Wavering Judgment in Matters of Religion, were apt to make an Ill Use of the Difficult Places of Scripture, and to turn them to such a  
 Sense

Sense as destroyed Christianity; and such therefore as could not but end in the Destruction of Those who asserted and maintained it. SERM.  
XI.

This at first Sight perhaps may seem an *hard Saying*. What! will some Men say, shall a Man be ruined Eternally for a misunderstood Place of Scripture? Shall They who own the Divine Authority of the Holy Writ (as 'tis plain these Persons did) and who are studious to know and Embrace the true Sense of it every where, if in some Obscure Passages they should mistake it, be answerable for that Mistake, at the Hazard of their Salvation?

Better, at this rate, had it been, that the Bible should never have been given Men, if it be so very fatal a thing to make a Wrong Exposition, even of the most Doubtful and Intricate Parts of it.

I shall endeavour to give an Answer to this Complaint, by stating the Just Bounds, and shewing the Great Reasonableness of St. *Peter's* Assertion; and shall then make use of the Truth of the

SERM. Text, thus *Explained* and *Justified*, in some  
 XI. *Observations* and *Inferences*, that it will  
 afford us.

In order to state the Bounds of the Assertion, it will be fit to consider, more particularly,

- I. *First*, What is strictly to be *Understood* here by *Wresting* of Scripture.
  - II. *Secondly*, What *kind* of Passages in Scripture they were, that are said to have been thus *wrested*.
- I. As to the *First* of these, it must be considered, That, to *Wrest* Scripture, doth, in Strictness of Speech, signify, not only to misinterpret, and misunderstand it, out of Weakness and Ignorance, as any *Christian* may blamelessly do, but with some Degree of Perversity and Wilfulness to force an Unnatural and false Construction upon it, in order to make it fall in with our Corrupt Opinions and Prejudices, which we have before-hand entertained, and resolved not  
 to

to part with. Thus much is intimated S E R M.  
 by the Original Word  $\epsilon\rho\epsilon\lambda\tilde{\alpha}\nu$  which sig- XI.  
 nifies, either to detort or turn away, or  
 to torment, and put to the Question. In  
 the *First* of these Senses, when applied  
 to Scripture, it implies, that these  
*Wresters* of it Bent and Warped the  
 straight Line and Measure of their Du-  
 ty, on purpose to make it suit with their  
 own Crooked Opinions. In the *Second*,  
 (which comes to much the same) that  
 They did as it were Torment and Vex it,  
 till it spake according to their Minds.

*Secondly*, We are to observe, what *kind* II.  
 of Passages in Scripture they were, which  
 these Men are said to have *Wrested*. They  
 were such as were *hard to be understood* (so  
 the preceding Words speak) and such as,  
 for that very reason, there was no Necess-  
 sity that they *should* Understand, and yet  
 these Men would pretend to Understand  
 them, and to be very positive also, and per-  
 emptory in their Opinions concerning  
 them. Further it appears, that these Places  
 treated not of slight Indifferent Points of  
 Doctrine,

SERM. Doctrine, but of such as were of the  
 XI. utmost Concern and Moment; such as  
 — were the Foundations of the *Christian*  
 Faith, and the very Pillars that support-  
 ed the whole Frame of Religion. I  
 say, it appears, that they treated of such  
 Points as these, from the foregoing Parts  
 of this Chapter, where St. *Peter* dis-  
 courses of the Day of Judgment, of  
 its Certainty, and of the Wise Reasons  
 for which God was pleased to delay it;  
 and represents some Men as *Scoffing* at  
 Ver. 4. these Doctrines, and saying, *Where is*  
*the Promise of his Coming? For since the*  
*Fathers fell asleep, all things continue as*  
*they were.* To convince these Scoffers,  
 he urges the Authority of St. *Paul* to  
 them; who in his Epistles had maintain-  
 ed the same Assertions, not always how-  
 ever expressed with such a Degree of  
 Evidence and Clearness, as might be  
 thought necessary to prevent all Mistakes  
 from whence Ill Men had taken an Oc-  
 casion to abuse his Words to a quite dif-  
 ferent Sense, and to pervert his Mean-  
 ing. So that the Points of Doctrine, to  
 which

which these Wrested Texts referred, were S. E. R. M.  
 Great and Fundamental ones; and which XI.  
 it was of the last Importance to be rightly  
 instructed in. And to this we may add  
 also a

*Third Remark*, That this forced Interpretation of Obscure Passages was in Opposition to other Plain and Evident Texts: For since (as I have already Discoursed to you) there is no Point of Moment, but what is somewhere or other plainly and perspicuously delivered in Scripture, and since these Wrested Places of Scripture, which *St. Peter* speaks of, related, as you have heard, to Points of Moment; it follows, that they who Wrested them, did it in Contradiction to other Plain and Perspicuous Parts of Holy Writ.

The full Import of the Text, therefore, under these several Explications, will be, that They who, being misled by Pride, and Vanity, or any other Lust and Passion, perverted the Sense of Scripture, in order to make it suit with their own wicked Practices, or justify their  
 ill

SERM. ill Opinions; who Vexed and Tortured

XI. Texts, in order to make them speak such

Language as was for their Purpose; who did this in Passages very *hard to be understood*, and therefore not *necessary* to be understood, and in Points of Doctrine which were of the utmost Concern and Importance, and Interpreted these Passages, in relation to these Points, quite contrary to other plain and express Places of Scripture; these Men, I say, are very justly and reasonably said, *to have wrested the Scriptures to their own Destruction*. For surely there was such a Complication of Insincerity, Pride, and Obstinacy in this *Manner* of wresting Scripture, as deserved such a Condemnation.

And therefore to that Question, Shall a Man be Eternally ruined for a misunderstood Place of Scripture? We answer, yes, doubtless, under those Circumstances which we have before Explained, if it be a *Fundamental* Point, about which he is mistaken, and be much his *own Fault*, that he is mistaken.

A mis-

A misunderstood Place of Scripture S E R M.  
 may overthrow One of the Prime Arti- XI.  
 cles of Faith, which God has made ne-  
 cessary to be believed in order to Salva-  
 tion: Or it may destroy the Morality of  
 the Gospel, by introducing a Loose Opi-  
 nion concerning Life and Manners. By  
 wresting *One* single Passage of Holy  
 Writ, a Man may either *deny the Lord* 2 Pet. ii. 1.  
*who bought him, or turn the Grace of*  
*God into Lasciviousness.* And he that Jude 4:  
 does either of these, cannot be said to be  
 severely dealt with, though he be cut  
 off from the Mercies of the Gospel.  
 For a Life led in Opposition to the Plain  
*Practical* Rules of Christianity, or with-  
 out that *Faith*, which Christianity re-  
 quires, are *either* of them a sufficient  
*Cause* of our Condemnation. And there-  
 fore such a Wilful Wreſting of Scrip-  
 ture, as occasions either of these, must,  
 in its Consequence, be Damnable, and  
 excuse God in pronouncing this Sen-  
 tence, from all manner of Severity or  
 Rigour in his Dealings with us. This  
 is the Account of the true Meaning of  
 St.

SERM. St. *Peter's* Assertion in the Text, and of  
 XI. the Justness also, and Reasonableness of  
 ——— it. Which Points being thus Stated and  
 Cleared, I come now, as I proposed, to  
 make *use* of them, in some *Observations*  
 and *Inferences* that they afford us. And  
*First*, It may be Observed, that the  
 Scriptures were perverted, and turned  
 by Ill Men to Ill Purposes, in the *Times*  
 of the Apostles themselves; that they  
 were no *sooner* Written, but they were  
*Wrested*. From whence we may learn  
 these Two Things.

1<sup>st</sup>, That if this happened in the *Apostles*  
 Day, then well might it happen in *After-*  
*times*; especially in *this* Age, which is at  
 so great a Distance from the Time of the  
 Apostles Writing. We may cease to  
 wonder, how it has come to pass, that so  
 many Controversies have been started  
 about the Sense of Scripture, that it has  
 been urged to so many wrong and dif-  
 ferent Purposes, and brought to support  
 and countenance so many Heretical Opi-  
 nions in *Latter* Days, when we find that  
 during the *Lives* of St. *Paul* and St. *Peter*  
 4 them-

themselves, it was thus insincerely and unfairly dealt with. The Ink was hardly dry, which fell from the Apostles Pens, but Men began to dispute about the Words that were wrote in it; to misconstrue, and misapply them, every one to such Doctrines as pleased him best; and to draw from the Inspired Writings things destructive of Faith and Salvation, in the Face of the Inspired Authors of them, without asking, or at least, without taking their Opinions in the Point; who surely had been the properest Men to have given an Account of their own Meaning, And if these things were so *then*, what Wonder is it, if ever *since*, and especially *now*, in these Dregs of Time, there be Wilful Men found, who will oppose their own Vain Fancies and Novelties to the General Sense of the whole Body of *Christians*, and not submit themselves to such a Concurrent Testimony in the Exposition of Scripture, as though of the Utmost Moment towards determining our As-

sent,

SERM.

XI.

SERM. sent, yet falls far short of Infallibility and  
 XI. Inspiration.

From the same Observation also we may learn, in the

2<sup>d</sup> Place, That an Unerring Expounder of Scripture is not so Useful and Necessary, as some Men would make us believe it is; because if there were such an One, and he were known and acknowledged to be such by all Men, yet would not that secure all Men from misinterpreting Scripture, as is plain from the Instance of the Text. The Apostles were certainly Unexceptionable Interpreters of their own Writings, and infallible Judges of all Controversies that could arise from them; and yet, notwithstanding this, their Writings were in their own Time perverted, to countenance Erroneous and Heretical Doctrines; and so doubtless would they be now, though there were an Infallible Judge upon Earth still. And Vain therefore is the Pretence of our Adversaries of the Church of *Rome*, that such an Infallible Judge is necessary, to assure us of the True Sense  
 of

of Scripture, and put an End to all Con- S E R M.  
troverfies concerning it; fince plain it is, XI.  
that, when there was fuch an Infallible  
Judge, he did not put an End to all Con-  
troverfies of this kind: There were ftill  
a great many Proud, Pertinacious, and  
Opinionative Men left, that would not be  
concluded by him.

Now if the Inferring the Neceffity of  
God's acting in fuch, or fuch a Manner,  
from the Convenience that would re-  
dound to Mankind from his fo acting,  
be no very good Argument in Divinity,  
even when that Convenience is allowed;  
what a Kind of Argument muft that be,  
which would prove the Neceffity of an  
Infallible Judge, from the great Expedi-  
ence of it towards Determining all Con-  
troverfies, when even that Expedience  
itself (as we have feen) wants to be  
proved?

But to go on. We may obferve from  
St. *Peter's* Affertion in the Text,

*Secondly*, What Temper of Mind, what  
Precautions, what Degree of Knowledge  
are requifite, in order to make our En-

SERM. quires into the Obscure Parts of Scripture  
 XI. Innocent and Useful to us. It is plain,  
 ————— that this is an Attempt of some Hazard,  
 and that it may happen to cost us dear,  
 as it did those in the Text, if we do not  
 fitly prepare and guard our Minds against  
 the Danger of it. Which may be  
 done, if we manage our Searches of  
 this Kind by these following Rules and  
 Directions.

1<sup>st</sup>, We must take care that the End  
 we propose to ourselves in these Enqui-  
 ries be Good and Laudable. They must  
 not be Entered upon out of mere Curi-  
 osity and Wantonness, not out of a vain  
 and fruitless Desire of Knowledge, nor  
 out of a Design of being more Skilful  
 and Learned than other Men, and of ap-  
 pearing to understand every thing; but  
 the End of all our Searches in this Case  
 ought to be, that we may improve in the  
 Skill of those Divine Truths which were  
 on purpose committed to Writing, that  
 there might be Matter in Holy Writ, fit  
 always to employ our repeated Medita-  
 tions, and to exercise our strictest Atten-  
 tion;

tion: That we may, by such Searches, gain to ourselves higher and more enlarged Apprehensions of God, a truer and clearer Sense of the deep Wisdom of all his Myfterious Dispensations; and may thus raise up our Minds into greater Degrees of holy Admiration, Reverence, and Awe. SERM.  
XI.

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We must intend to qualify ourselves by these Searches for the removing the Objections raised by those who are no Friends to Scripture, for the Justifying the darkest, as well as the brightest Parts of it, and making out to fair unprejudiced Men the beautiful Harmony of all the different, but agreeing Branches of the Divine Revelation.

2<sup>dly</sup>, We must come to this Work, as with a right Intention, so with a Mind rightly disposed and qualified to pursue that Intention; not presuming on our own Strength, not with an high Opinion and Conceit of our particular Gifts, Abilities, or Advantages, as if we alone were able to clear up all Difficulties, and to go to the Bottom of all Mysteries, and that nothing were too hard for

SERM. us. This is not a Temper of Mind, either naturally fitted for such a Work, or  
 XI. which God delights to bless with supernatural Assistances and Discoveries. No, if ever we hope to make our Enquiries of this Kind successful and profitable to us, we must be sure to conduct them with great Modesty, with a becoming Diffidence and Distrust of ourselves, humbly and chiefly relying upon God for his Gracious Help and Assistance; and in order to it, putting up frequent and fervent Petitions to that good Spirit, which indited the Holy Scriptures, that he would please to enlighten us with the Knowledge of all the deep Mysteries contained there. 'Tis Humility and Devotion that principally qualify us for such Searches as these; and will do more by themselves towards giving a Man a true understanding of Scripture, than all the Gifts and Parts in the world will do, when separated from them. For it is true in this Instance, as well as in many others, That *God resisteth the Proud, and giveth Grace to the Lowly.*

James iv.  
6.

And

And as a good Way to keep alive and S E R M.  
improve this Humility of Mind in us, let us XI.  
be sure,

3<sup>dly</sup>, In our Searches of this Kind, ever to carry this Truth along with us (a Truth I have largely explained, and proved to you in a former Discourse) that there is no Place of Holy Writ *hard* to be Understood, that is *needful* to be understood by us. If we maintain this Reflexion constantly upon our Minds, it will teach us not to lay too great Strefs upon these Difficulties, nor to employ too much of our Time upon them, so as to be in the least taken off from considering what is more plain and profitable in Scripture, what can more easily and usefully be understood, and is indeed more necessary to be understood by us. Some Men pore so much, and so long upon Passages of a disputed Meaning, as if they thought it indispensably requisite to determine themselves of one Side or other of the Question; as if the Whole of Religion were concerned in such difficult Enquiries; they are so bu-

S E R M. fy in opening and explaining *hard* Places,  
 XI. that they forget to meditate upon *plain*  
 ————— ones, and to govern their Lives under a  
 lively and vigorous Sense of the Do-  
 ctrines contained in them: Which is do-  
 Luke xi. ing just as the *Pharisees* did, *Tything*  
 42. *Mint and Rue, and all Manner of Herbs*  
*and passing over Judgment and the Love*  
*of God.* Whereas (as our Saviour in  
 that Case decides) *These ought they to have*  
*done, and not to have left the Other un-*  
*done.* A due Reflexion therefore upon  
 this Truth, that the Understanding the  
 Obscure Places of Scripture, is not a  
 thing strictly required of us, or need-  
 ful for us, will be of use to moderate  
 our too great Eagerness in the Pursuit of  
 such kind of Knowledge; to render us  
 less impatient and uneasy under what  
 we *do not* understand of it, and less po-  
 sitive and dogmatical in what we *do.*  
 And thus the Two greatest Temptations  
 towards perverting Scripture will be  
 removed, an Excessive *Curiosity* in Search-  
 es of this Kind, and an Over-weening  
*Fondness*

Fondness for our own private Interpretations and Opinions. SERM.  
XI.

4<sup>thly</sup>, If we would not wrest the *hard Places in Scripture*, we must be sure to make that an inviolable Rule and Law to ourselves, never to expound them so as to *oppose Perspicuous and Clear ones*; but so to order our Interpretation of Doubtful Points, as to make them fall in with the clear and intelligible Parts of the same Revelation; so as together with them to make up one Complete Body of Truths, perfectly agreeing with each other.

The best Way of knowing whether a Line be Crooked or not, is to apply it to One, that is confessedly straight; and the surest Way of not Erring in Obscure Passages, is to make Plain Texts the Measure and Judge of them. The greatest Part of the Abuses and Misinterpretations of Scripture have arisen from a contrary Management; from Men's giving obscure Texts a new and particular Sense of their own *first*, and then growing fond of that Invention *after-*  
T 4
*wards,*

S E R M. *wards*, and resolving to bring all the plain-  
 XI. est Passages in Scripture, whether they  
 ————— will or no, to Countenance and Comply  
 with it.

That we may carry ourselves after a quite different manner in our Searches, it is fit for us to observe,

5<sup>thly</sup>, and *Lastly*, That the safest and securest Way of looking into these *δυσνόητα* of *St. Paul*, and the other Holy Writers, is, to postpone the Consideration of them, till we have mastered what is sure and easy in Scripture, till we have rooted and grounded ourselves in those Points of Doctrine that lie obvious and open; and when we have done that, there will be no Danger of looking into any thing else, let it be never so hard, and never so obscure. For either we shall hit upon the right Interpretation of it; or, if we do not, the Wrong one shall not hurt us. A Man that holds all that is plainly contained in Scripture, and all that is necessary to be held by him, may in that which is not plain, and not necessary, innocently abound in his own Sense. For though  
 he

he should in these Matters mistake in his S E R M.  
 Opinions, and mistake the Sense of Scrip- XI.  
 ture, upon which he grounds those Opi-  
 nions; yet those Mistakes cannot be fa-  
 tal, because not fundamental. He can  
 never maintain any thing *Directly repug-*  
*nant to the Catholic Faith, and Evidently*  
*destructive* of it; and while he *does not*;  
 he may maintain what else he pleases;  
 and so he does it with Sobriety and Mo-  
 desty, and a due Deference to the Opi-  
 nion of those, who have a Right to be  
 listened to in these things, his Error (if it  
 be one) shall never prove dangerous, or be  
 imputed to him. And this Remark is  
 what is plainly suggested to us by the  
 Words of the Text, where St. *Peter* tells  
 us, that those which wrested the hard  
 Places in St. *Paul's* Writings, and the other  
 Scriptures, were *the Unlearned and Un-*  
*stable*, that is (as I told you) those who,  
 being not well grounded in the Faith,  
 were Easy to be drawn aside into pernici-  
 ous Opinions and destructive Errors.  
 From whence it follows, that the best  
 Way to secure ourselves from thus per-  
 verting

S E R M. verting what is obscure in Scripture is,

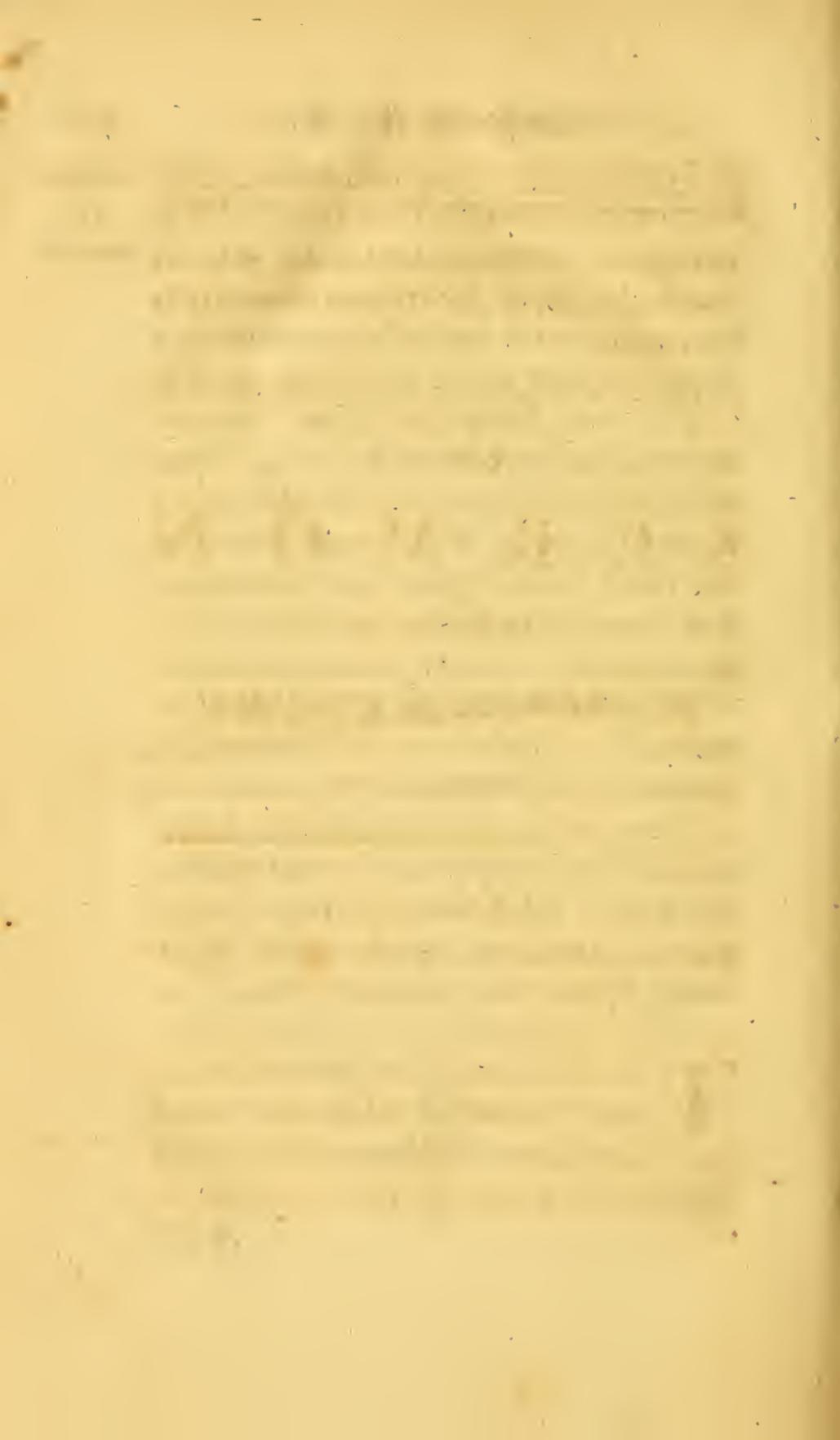
XI. *first*, to render ourselves *Learned and Stable* in what is plain; and fixing that as our Center, from whence we are not to be removed, we may extend our Thoughts and Opinions to what Circumference we please. That Faith which we keep *pure and undefiled* in Fundamentals, shall either enable us to find out those Truths of lesser Moment, that perfectly agree with it, or shall excuse us before God, if we should miss of them. There will be a Probability from hence of our Understanding Obscure Texts rightly; or if we do not, yet there will be a Certainty of our not incurring the Guilt of *Wresting Scripture to Our own Destruction*.

Thus have I dispatched the Second general Observation, which I raised from the Text, (*viz.*) to consider from thence, what Temper and Qualifications of Mind, what Precaution and Degrees of Knowledge are requisite, in order to make our Enquiries into the Obscure Parts of Holy Writ Innocent and Useful to us.

I might

I might observe also from hence, in the S E R M.  
 3<sup>d</sup> Place, That if Perverting *Obscure* XI.  
 Passages of Scripture be a thing in itself —  
 damnable, as *St. Peter* assures us, it is;  
 how much more certainly damnable is it  
 to pervert *plain* ones? And then infer,

4<sup>thly</sup>, and *Lastly* also, That if such a  
 Sentence be pronounced upon those,  
 who *Wrest* Scripture; then surely a much  
 higher Degree of Punishment is reserved  
 for those, who *Affront* and *Ridicule* it.  
 But because the *First* of these Points has  
 been already in some measure intimated  
 in the preceding Discourse, and there oc-  
 casionally explained; and because the  
*Second* is of too extensive and concerning  
 a Nature to be now considered; I shall  
 therefore at present insist upon Neither  
 of them. They may perhaps employ  
 our Reflexions on some other Oppor-  
 tunity.



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*A Discourse on Religious Sincerity, wherein  
the true Marks and Tests of it are fully  
set forth :*

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I N A  
S E R M O N

Preached at

*HAMPTON COURT,*

*October 15, 1710.*

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2 COR. xiii. 5.

*Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the  
Faith ; prove your own selves.*

**T**HERE are three several Ranks S E R M.  
and Orders of Men, into which XII.  
those that Name the Name of Christ, and 2 Tim. ii.  
profess his Religion, may be divided. 15:  
Some

SERM. Some have nothing more than the mere

XII. Name and Profession of Christianity, for  
 \_\_\_\_\_ in their Works they deny it; *being ali-*  
 Ephes. iv. *enated from the Life of Christ*, and paying  
 18. no manner of Obedience to his Laws; but living in the Open and Avowed Practice of all Kind of Pollutions. Others there are, who as manifestly adorn the Doctrine they embrace, and live up to the Rule which they profess, so far as Human Infirmary will suffer them. They have, by the Grace of God concurring with their Sincere Endeavours, subdued the Power of their Corrupt Lusts and Affections, so that little or no Disturbance doth from thence arise to them; but they go on in the Paths of Virtue, and the Duties of Piety, evenly and regularly; Glorifying God, and Benefiting Men, and *shining more and more unto a perfect Day*. And to each of these the State and Condition of their Own Souls is known certainly and clearly. A strong Conviction of Guilt terrifies the one, without any Offer of Excuse, or Hope of Pardon; and the Conscience of the Other bears Witness to their  
 their

Prov. iv.  
 18.

their Uprightness, without Doubts, or SERM.  
Misgivings. Between these there is a XII.  
Middle State of Men, who are neither  
notoriously Evil, nor yet remarkably  
Virtuous; neither entirely given over to  
work Wickedness, nor yet thoroughly  
confirmed in Goodness; but in a Doubt-  
ful, Uncertain Way of Living, and  
Thinking; sometimes standing firm in  
Virtue, and sometimes failing; some-  
times sinning, and sometimes repenting;  
sometimes hoping, and sometimes de-  
sponding.

To such as these the Exhortation of  
the Apostle in my Text is directed:  
*Examine yourselves, whether you be in the  
Faith; prove your own selves:* That is,  
Consider your Condition impartially and  
thoroughly, try it by the Rules of the  
Gospel; satisfy yourselves once for all,  
whether you be true sincere Believers,  
such as God will accept. If you find  
that you *are*, resolve, by his Grace, to  
*continue* such to your Lives End; if you  
find you *are not*, resolve to make your-  
selves

SERM. selves such, as soon as is possible. For  
 XII. nothing can be of more Moment to  
 ——— You, than this Knowledge, and these  
 Resolutions. *Examine yourselves whe-*  
*ther ye be in the Faith; prove your own*  
*selves.*

In order to assist you in this Enquiry,  
 it shall be the Business of my present  
 Discourse to propose some few plain  
*Marks, or Tests,* by which every Man,  
 who entertains any Doubts of this kind  
 (as very good Men sometimes do) may, if  
 he pleases, Try his own Sincerity, and  
 fully satisfy himself, whether he be an  
 hearty Believer, and a sound Member of  
 that Body, of which *Christ Jesus* is the  
 Head: Whether, and how far he hath  
 obtained the great Christian Perfection,  
 which is to recommend all the rest, I  
 mean, that of *Sincerity.*

- I. And, *First,* The most obvious, and  
 therefore the most satisfying Mark of  
*Religious Sincerity* is, if a Man, upon a  
 Review of his own Thoughts, finds, that  
 his

his Resolutions of Obedience are *Universal* and *Unlimited*; without a Reserve

SERM.  
XII.

for any Favourite Sin, without excepting any particular Instance of Duty, wherein he desires to be excused. *Then* (says the good Psalmist) *shall I not be ashamed*, i. e. *Then* may I safely confide in my Own Innocence and Uprightness, *when I have Respect unto thy all Commandments*; when I find myself equally determined to Obey every Divine Precept, and resolved to allow myself in no Practice whatsoever, which the Law of God doth not allow of. And where this is not the Case, there can be no true Christian Sincerity; which consists in a true Bent and Inclination of the Will towards God; and the *Will* is never *Truly*, but when it is *totally* inclined towards him; when it is lost, and swallowed up in the *Divine Will*; implicitly likes or dislikes, chuses or refuses, what God hath before-hand approved or disapproved by his Holy Precepts, or Prohibitions. Is a Man said to be sincere to his Friend, who betrays

SERM. him in any One Important Secret, com-  
 XII. mitted to his Trust, though he should be  
 ——— faithful in many others? Is a Servant said  
 to be sincere to his Master, who hath any  
 Reserved Cases, wherein he resolves not  
 to consult his Honour, or Interest? No  
 more can a Man be reckoned sincere to-  
 wards God, who sets up any single Lust,  
 Inclination, or Thought, against what he  
 knows to be the Divine Will and Plea-  
 sure. And this is evidently the Reason  
 of that Determination in St. James; *Who-*  
*soever shall keep the whole Law, and yet*  
*offend in One Point, he is Guilty of All.*  
 For (as it there follows) *he that said, Do*  
*not Commit Adultery, said also, Do not*  
*Kill.* Now, *if thou Commit not Adultery,*  
*yet if thou Kill, thou art become a Trans-*  
*gressor of the Law; i. e. If thou neglect-*  
*est to observe any One Divine Command,*  
*knowing it to be One, Thou art in that*  
*Instance as open, and declared a Re-*  
*bel to the Authority Enacting it, as*  
*if thou shookest off thy Obedience to*  
*All.*

James ii.  
 10, 11.

If

If then, upon a Careful Survey of SERM.  
ourselves, we find, that we are, from XII.  
the Bottom of our Souls, disposed, and  
resolved to comply with *All* the Terms  
of Duty (whether Grateful, or Un-  
grateful to Flesh and Blood) which the  
Gospel proposeth to us; that it is our  
fixt Intent not to do, in any Case,  
what God had forbidden, nor to neg-  
lect what he hath enjoined; and that  
there is no Appetite, Desire, or De-  
sign so dear to us, but we are ready to  
part with it, as soon as its Opposition to  
a Divine Command shall be made out;  
if this, upon Examination, prove to  
be our Case, we have great Reason to  
think well of ourselves, and to Con-  
clude, that we are in such a State of  
Mind, as God will Accept, and Re-  
ward. A

*Second, and sure Proof of Religious* II.  
*Sincerity* may be drawn from a *General*  
View of the *Common* Course of our  
Lives, and Actions. If there be an *Even*  
*Tenor* of Goodness visible in our Con-  
duct,

SERM. duct, a *Regular and Steddy* Pursuit of  
 XII. Virtue, without any Gross and Notori-  
 ous Failures in Scandalous Instances,  
 and Flagrant Acts of Wickedness; if,  
 whenever we happen to fall by some  
 great Temptation, we continue not long  
 and quietly under the Guilt of it, but  
 recover our Ground forthwith, and re-  
 turn to our Duty; proceeding on in the  
 Paths of Obedience and an Holy Life  
 habitually, and discharging our Oblig-  
 ations to God and Man pretty Evenly  
 and Uniformly; then may we, from  
 hence also, make a Comfortable Guess  
 at the Goodness of our Condition in  
 this World, and nourish very Promising  
 Hopes to ourselves of being happy in  
 Another. 'Tis not to be expected,  
 that while we are in the Body, we  
 should live altogether free from the  
 Stains and Infirmities of it. In the ve-  
 ry Best of Men, their Passions will  
 sometimes prevail over their Reason,  
 and the strongest Sense of their Duty  
 will give way to a Present Temptation.  
 A Pious Man may, now and then, be  
 very

very Cold and Languid in the Perform- SER M.  
ance of his Devotions, and very full XII.  
of Distractions and Wanderings. A  
Meek and Good Man, by some unfore-  
seen Accident, and by several Conspir-  
ing Circumstances, may be raised up  
into an Unbecoming Pitch of Anger  
and Resentment. A Temperate Man  
may, through Importunity, or for want  
of a due Guard over himself, be gra-  
dually and insensibly betrayed into some  
Degree of Excess. But then, in all  
these Cases, the Person falling, quickly  
comes to himself again; the Fit is short  
and soon over, and is succeeded imme-  
diately by Shame, and Remorse, by  
New Resolutions, and more Vigorous  
Endeavours. Consider the Man altoge-  
ther, and you will find, that the Gene-  
ral Current of his Behaviour bears wit-  
ness to his Integrity, though he fail now  
and then in particular Instances. And  
God, who sees all our Actions at once,  
will Judge us upon the whole View,  
and not single out our Worst Qualities,  
without any Regard to our Best, in or-

SERM. der to exercise his Severity upon us.  
XII. Let no Man therefore too hastily, and  
— too severely condemn himself for frequent Infirmities, Slips, and Neglects; let no Man, who would judge aright of his Spiritual Estate, fix his Eye too intently on some particular Blemishes and Failings, of which, perhaps, he is conscious; but let him look rather to the main Scope and Drift of his Thoughts, Words, and Actions; and by that let him try himself, as by the Justest Measure and Standard of Sincere Goodness. How contrary to this is the Conduct of some Good and Pious Souls! How usual is it for Persons, well advanced in Piety, when they are making such Enquiries as these, to dwell altogether on their Defects and Miscarriages, without regarding the Regular Course of a Virtuous and Well-ordered Life; and to condemn themselves, as False and Insincere, because they are not perfect and Sinless? God forbid, that These should be the Terms, upon which we are to be dealt with! For where then would be  
the

the Man upon Earth, who could under- S E R M.  
go the Scrutiny? *If thou, Lord, shouldst XII.*  
*be extreme to mark what is done amiss, O* —————  
*Lord, who may abide it? A* Pf. cxxx.  
3.

*Third Sign and Test of Sincerity is, if III.*  
a Man be not content with any determin-  
ed Proportion of Goodness, nor willing  
to sit down at such a Point of Virtue,  
as he hath already attained, without  
aiming at a further Degree of Increase  
and Proficiency. For *the Path of the* Prov. iv.  
*Just is as the shining Light, says the Wise* 18.  
*Man, shining more and more unto a per-*  
*fect Day: That is, the truly Good are*  
always aiming to be better, and how  
far soever they have run in the Race of  
Virtue, still urge on-ward incessantly,  
and eagerly; *forgetting those things which* Phil. iii.  
*are behind, and reaching forth unto those* 12.  
*things which are before, they press towards*  
*the Mark for the Prize of the High-call-*  
*ing of God in Christ Jesus.* A Soul tru-  
ly touched with the Sense of its own  
Sins and Unworthiness, and of the In-  
finite Mercies and Condescensions of

SERM. God towards us, will never Stint and  
 XII. Bound itself in its Returns; but will  
 ——— endeavour to Love as much, and to O-  
 bey as far as is possible. Let its Attain-  
 ments be what they will, yet it knows,  
 that they are short, extremely short of  
 its Obligations; that the Measures of  
 Grace, which we arrive at here, are on-  
 ly Earnests, and Spurs, and Helps to-  
 wards larger Communications, and  
 higher Improvements; and, therefore,  
 that a Man is never so good as he *ought*  
 to be, who doth not heartily desire and  
 design to be as good as he *can* be; and  
 breathe and pant after Perfection itself,  
 even in *this* Life, though he be satisfied,  
 that it is not fully attainable, but in *an-*  
*other*; since withal he is satisfied, that the  
 more uniformly and vigorously he presses  
 towards the Mark of Perfection in this  
 Life, the nearer still shall he approach  
 to it, though he shall never reach it;  
 and the nearer he is towards reaching  
 it here, the more glorious shall be his  
 Crown, and the more exalted his State  
 of Perfection hereafter. And therefore,  
 if

if any one find himself inclined to circumscribe his Practice within such or such Limits of Duty beyond which he never intends, nor expects to go; to hold fast the Pleasures of Life, and to enjoy as much of them as ever he can consistently with the Principles of Religion; arguing always for the Utmost Extent of his Christian Liberty, and desiring to make his Obligations as Narrow as may be; such an one hath Reason to conclude, that he is as yet short of those Qualifications, which are necessary to recommend him to the Judge of all Hearts, and Discerner of Spirits.

A *Fourth* Mark or Test by which a Man may discover, whether he be *sincerely Religious*, or not, is, to Examine himself whether he be as inclinable to exercise the Graces and Virtues of the Christian Life in Private, as in Public; without doing any thing merely for the Applause, or Fear of Men; but under a conscientious Regard to Him, that

SERM.  
XII.

IV.

SERM. that *seeth in secret*, and under an Expectation that He, who *seeth in Secret*, will, at the great Day of Account, reward him Openly. For Example, let a Man consider, whether he be as punctual and exact in performing his *Closet*-devotions, as in repairing to the *Public* Offices of the Church, and as Uneasy under the Omission of the *One*, as the *Other*; and when he prays in private, whether he be as Composed, and Reverent, and Devout in his Behaviour, as he is, when the Eyes of a great Assembly are upon him. Again, as to Points of Mercy, Generosity, and Justice, let him reflect, whether he be as ready to give Alms in *Private*, as in the *Streets*; to defend the Cause of the Injured and Oppressed, and to support a good Man's Reputation, in such Circumstances, when he is sure never to hear of it again, as he would be, if all the World heard, and observed him. Finally, whether he be as loth to defraud his Neighbour in a great Matter, or a small, when he might do it securely, without Fear of a Discovery;

very; as he should be, if he were sure S E R M.  
to be arraigned in a Court of Judicature XII.  
for it. He that can truly answer these  
Questions to his Own Satisfaction, hath no  
great Reason to distrust his Sincerity; and  
He who cannot, hath as little Reason to  
depend upon it.

Hypocrisy, when in Perfection, will  
act real Goodness so well, and put on  
the Shape and Disguise of it so exactly,  
as to deceive even Him who plays the  
Part, as well as those who look on, and  
create a Belief in him that he is what he  
seems to be; till he compares himself  
with himself, his Private with his Public  
Conduct: And that Touchstone never  
fails to distinguish true from Counter-  
feit Piety; for the surest indications of  
Mens Characters are those Actions and  
Discourses which flow from them, when  
they are off their Guard, and under  
no Awe, or Restraint from the Eyes and  
Observations of others.

A *Fifth* Thing, by which *Sincerity* in V.  
Religion manifests itself, is, when a Man  
appears to act, not out of Bye-aims,  
and

SERM. and a Private Interest, but out of a true

XII. Zeal for the Honour of God, the Interest of Virtue, and the good of Mankind.

Would you satisfy yourself, whether you sincerely love such a Relation, such an Acquaintance, such a Friend? Consider, do you, on all Occasions, design to promote what is for their Service and Reputation? do you heartily desire and endeavour Their good, without having an Immediate Eye on your own Advantage in it? If you do, 'tis certain that your Friendship and Affection are Sincere; for no Man can give better Proofs and Assurances of it. And the Case is the same with respect to God and Religion. If a Man feels himself inwardly warmed and acted by a true Concern for the Glory of God, for the Honour of his Name, and of his Worship; if he be apt to undervalue Worldly Regards, and petty private Views, in Comparison of this great End; if in Evil Days, when the Manners of Men are extremely corrupted, he is not ashamed to act up to strict Principles of Virtue,

which

which are not in Fashion, nor is remis S E R M.  
in the Practice of those Duties, which XII.  
he foresees, will scarcely turn to account; ———  
espousing firmly and unalterably the  
Cause of God, and Goodness, even  
when Hundreds on his Right Hand have  
gone off, and Thousands have revolted  
on his Left: In a word, when a Man  
can be Loose and Sceptical, with the  
General Applause of the World, and  
cannot be otherwise, without being de-  
spised, and pitied; and yet is so far  
from being tempted to a Compliance;  
that he doth what he can to stem the  
Torrent of Impiety, and to make his  
Virtue as Conspicuous, as other Men's  
Vices: When a Man, I say, doth, upon  
Reflexion, find himself thus resolved  
and qualified; he hath great Reason to  
be pleased with his Condition and to  
conclude, that it is well pleasing to  
God also: For there is no surer Mark of  
Integrity, than a Courageous Adherence  
to Virtue, in the midst of a General  
and scandalous Apostasy. Which is  
the Reason that *Noah* and *Abraham*,

*Lot*

SERM. *Lot* and *Daniel* have so high an Encomium bestowed on them in Scripture, and are recommended as Patterns of a strict, uncomplying Uprightness, to all succeeding Ages. Further,

VI. *Sixthly*, It is no slight Token of our *Sincerity* in Religion, if we are apt to suspect it, on the Account of *little* things; which is often the Case of very Devout *Christians*, and who have really the least Occasion to mistrust themselves, of any Men. Persons of a Nice and Tender Conscience, very careful to please God, and very fearful of offending him, are, for that very Reason, prone to imagine that they fall infinitely short of their Duty, if they do not, in every respect, exactly discharge it; and to disquiet themselves on this Account, with many Groundless Scruples and Terrors. Sometimes, the Principle, from whence their Repentance sprang, gives them great Uneasiness; for they remember, that the Reformation of Heart and Life, in which they are now  
I well

well advanced, began at first, not from SERM.  
a true and ardent Love of God; but XII.  
from the mere Dread of Punishment. —

Sometimes their Unequal Performance of Religious Duties dejects, and dispirits them; they find themselves cold, and unmoved, when they are upon their Knees; in the most Solemn and Raising Parts of the Service, and even at the Reception of the Blessed Sacrament itself, they do not feel an holy Warmth kindling in their Hearts, nor their Mind melting under the Impressions that are then made upon it: And they conclude therefore, that there is a Vein of Hypocrisy running through all these Performances, which makes them Worthless, and Unacceptable. Now these, and such as these, I say, are, for the most part, the Doubts and Misgivings of the sincerely Good and Pious; for they are such as seldom trouble the Consciences of Men of a different Character: And therefore those very Scruples, which disturb good *Christians* so much, would, if rightly understood, give them Mat-  
ter

SERM. ter of sound Comfort and Encourage-  
 XII. ment; their very *Doubts* concerning the  
 ——— Goodness of their State, are, if they  
 had but the Heart to think so, a sure  
 Reason why they should not doubt of it.  
 Let not then the true Saints and Servants  
 of God perplex and afflict themselves  
 with such Difficulties; let them not give  
 up Religion, by their Means, to the  
 Laughter and Scorn of Profane Men,  
 who, from a few such Instances as these,  
 take Pleasure to represent it, as residing  
 only in weak Brains, as the Employment  
 of Melancholy, and Diseas'd Minds; and  
 who stick not, in the Gaiety of their  
 Hearts, to say, that a strict Piety is good for  
 nothing, but to make the Owners of it  
 troublesome to themselves, and useles to  
 the rest of the World. O! let not any  
 one, who wishes well to Goodness, disserve  
 the Interest of it more, by his unreasonable  
 Scruples, than he promotes it, by his Ex-  
 emplary Practice! But let him resolve to  
 summon up all his Reasoning Powers,  
 and to set them in Array against these in-  
 significant

significant Phantasms and Illusions, which would certainly retire before this single Reflexion (had a Man but the Courage to make and to believe it) that such Niceties dwell usually there, where there is least Need of them, and are a real Sign of that *Sincere Piety*, the Want of which those, who thus unhappily suffer under them, deplore.

S E R M.  
XII.

*Seventhly*, Another sure Token of our *Sincerity* in Religion, is, when we delight to read the Holy Scriptures, and have a savory Taste and Relish of them; when we find somewhat more in them than in mere Human Writings, and are apt to settle into a Pious Composure of Mind while we are perusing them. When we come to them with Satisfaction and Eagerness, and are uneasy under any long Discontinuance of our Conversation with them. This is the Token and Character, by which the experienced Psalmist teaches us to know a good Man. *His Delight* (saith he) *is in the Law of the Lord, and in that Law doth*

VII.

Pf. i. 2]

SERM. *he meditate Day and Night.* 'Tis true,

XII. it may sometimes happen, that a Person

of a sound and sincere Piety shall read the Holy Scriptures, without being much warmed, or affected with them.

He may be under an Indisposition and Languor of Mind; the Business, or Pleasures of Life, and Wordly Objects may now and then take Possession of his Heart, and shut the Door against Spiritual Impressions; but then this is not a Common and every Day's Case; he is for the most part well disposed and affected towards this Divine Employment; his Appetite is generally awakened, and his Taste very good; *and he rejoyceth in*

Pf. cxix.

162.

*God's Word, as one that findeth great Spoils. Did not our Hearts Burn within us (said the good Disciples) while he*

Lukexxiv.

32.

*talked with us by the Way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?* But if a Man can frequently peruse those sacred Pages, without any Degree of sensible Emotion and Concern, without being touched any ways by the Matter of them, or awed by the Majestic Man-

ner of Expression, which distinguishes S E R M.  
them from all other Writings; this is XII.  
as sure an Indication of a Sick Soul, as  
a Palate, which does not relish the  
most Savory Meats, is of a Diseas'd  
Body. *The Fining Pot is for Silver, and* Prov. xvii.  
*the Furnace for Gold; but the Word of* 3.  
*God trieth the Hearts: And it is Quick*  
*and Powerful (saith the Author to the*  
*Hebrews) and sharper than any two-edged* Heb. iv.  
*Sword; piercing even to the Dividing* 12.  
*asunder of Soul and Spirit, and of the*  
*Joints and Marrow, and is a Discerner*  
*of the Thoughts and Intents of the Heart.*  
And needs must that Heart be very hard  
and callous, and almost past Feeling,  
upon which so pungent and searching a  
Medicine doth not operate.

These are the several Marks or Tests,  
by which we may Examine ourselves,  
whether we are in the Faith, whether we  
are possessed of that truly *Christian Sin-*  
*cerity* which God above all things re-  
quires. Let us do it honestly and im-  
partially; let us apply the Rules which  
have been given, and take an Estimate

SERM. of the True State and Condition of our  
 XII. Souls, by the means of them. If, upon  
 a strict Enquiry, we find that our Hearts  
 are Right with God, let us give him  
 the Praise, and resolve by his Grace and  
 Blessing, to keep them so, *all the while*  
 Job xxvii. *our Breath is in us, and the Spirit of God*  
 3. *is in our Nostrils;* and endeavour to  
 grow in this Faith, and to increase in  
 this Grace, more and more, *till we come*  
 Ephes. iv. *in the Unity of the Faith, and of the*  
 13. *Knowledge of the Son of God, unto a*  
*perfect Man, unto the Measure of the*  
*Stature of the Fulness of Christ.* But if,  
 after a Serious Review of our Lives and  
 Consciences, it appears, that they are  
 not such as will strictly bear the Test;  
 let us form immediate Resolutions of  
 working ourselves up into those De-  
 grees of Sincerity which we want, and  
 of being as *Holy and Blameless*, as we  
 ought to be, *in all Manner of Conversa-*  
 tion.

1 Pet. i. 5.

May we every one of us so resolve, SERM.  
and be blessed in God's good Time, XII.  
with an happy and comfortable Effect —  
of our Resolutions, through the mighty  
Assistances of his Holy Spirit, purchased  
for us by the Blood of his Dear Son!  
To which Eternal Three be for ever a-  
scribed all Honour, Adoration, and Praise.  
*Amen.*

F I N I S.

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