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SERMONS

1814

ON

SEVERAL OCCASIONS.

BY

THE REV. R. SHEPHERD, D.D.

ARCHDEACON OF BEDFORD.

LONDON:

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1803.

Handwritten notes at the top of the page, including the number '1' and some illegible scribbles.

THE HISTORY OF THE

REIGN OF KING

CHARLES THE FIRST

BY

JOHN BURNET

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

IN TWO VOLUMES

THE SECOND VOLUME

LONDON

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1704

dispensation; or to enforce by exhortation the observance of its practical duties.

Of that religion it hath by the Word of Truth been declared, that **KINGS SHOULD BE ITS NURSING FATHERS, AND QUEENS ITS NURSING MOTHERS:** and in various instances the prediction hath been amply fulfilled. Nor, since miracles ceased, and God hath seen fit to conduct and support it by second causes, doth History furnish a period when the fostering hand of Virtue, Influence, and Power, was more apparently necessary, as instruments in the hand of Providence for that purpose, than in the present disjointed state of civil order and religious truth throughout the Christian world. And were I at
large

large to fix on a character, under whose protection I might be most ambitious to place this volume; the Earl of Dartmouth would be among the first that my mind presented to me.

But I have other and additional ground for this address, the acknowledgment of personal obligations; as unmerited, as they were real and great. They were conferred; because they were wanted: the only ground, on which, personally unknown as I was to your Lordship, I could without extreme vanity place my pretensions to them; a ground so very unfashionable, that general observation, founded on general experience, knows not so great an obstacle to the receival of favours, as that
which

which your Lordship made the ground
of conferring them.

I have the honour to be,

With the greatest respect,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's most obliged

And obedient

Humble servant,

*Wetherden,
August 22, 1803.*

R. SHEPHERD.

ADVERTISEMENT.

SOME of the following Discourses have in separate Publications already appeared. About eighty copies of those on the ground and credibility of the Christian Religion were printed some years ago, and added to the lectures on the subject, which had been published, and were to that number then unfold. The Founder of the lecture having confined the number of discourses to eight, the Author was led to think in the number so prescribed he had not satisfied the subject; nor could he dispense with himself in leaving it with the public in so imperfect a state.

Those

Those on a future state were printed and addressed to an eminent and respected character; intended as a topic of consolation, to soften the shock of a domestic calamity, with which the family were at the time severely afflicted.

The discourse on a Paradisiacal State is a translation of a Latin sermon, preached before the University of Oxford, and printed at the end of the Bampton Lectures: which is so nearly connected with the subject of them, that if there never existed a state of innocence, there was no lapse from it; and if there were no lapse, there was no Redemption.



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SERMON I.

JOHN iii. 2.

*We know that thou art a teacher come from
God.*

THIS is said to our Saviour by Nicodemus, an intelligent and candid observer of his ministry. With equal, with superior conviction, may not we repeat the same acknowledgment? Nicodemus was struck with the irresistible force of the miracles presented to his view; we have, besides the ample testimony of these, an additional confirmation of divinity in the doctrine itself completely laid together, and the circumstances attending it. Let us then, extending, in an accommodated sense, the import of the text, consider the excellency of the gospel of Christ: 1st, in its contents; and 2dly, in its propagation;

B

tion;

tion; in which double view we shall find it highly perfective of human nature, and stamped with the clearest characters of divinity.

I. Respecting the contents, should a previous question arise, as to the genuineness of these scriptures, or the authenticity of the word delivered in them: it may reasonably be asked in turn, on what ground such facts can be doubted. Were not the penmen of them eye-witnesses of our Lord's actions, and ear-witnesses of his discourses? In every sect we believe the founder's professed records of doctrine and institution to be his own; and it is madness to suppose the Christians to be servants of Christ, and subjects of his laws, yet making a law of their own which he did not make. No man doubts, that the Koran is the law of Mohammed, or that the Old Testament contains the religion of the Jews: and the authority of the scriptures of the New Testament is still farther proved by all the arguments adducible in support of the religion professed by the Christian world; for all the arguments persuasive

suasive to that religion are intended solely to prove that which is held forth in those books. It may be added, that these having been for seventeen hundred years received absolutely by all Christian assemblies; whoever shall be now hardy enough to question their authenticity, must produce his reasons for it: and powerful they must be, to dislodge the disciples of Christ from that groundwork which undisturbed possession hath hitherto given them. That this cannot happen, is tolerably certain; because they have a long, immemorial, universal tradition, that these books were written in those times by the men whose names they bear; that they were accepted by all the churches on the earliest publication of them, except some few of the smaller and later epistles, which were received first by some only, but at length consented to by all; that they were acknowledged in the age of their production, and by the age immediately ensuing, for genuine; had their authority published, their words cited, and appeals made to them in all questions of religious contro-

verfy ; on the plain ground of conviction, that they were the genuine productions of their professed authors, and that the authors of them wrote nothing but what they competently knew : fo that they could not be deceived themfelves ; and a fuggestion that they would deceive, or forge a falfehood, was never fo much as plaufibly pretended by any adverfaries. That were a matter, which muft have been grounded on facts, and declared by actions, or not at all : but the actions of thefe evangelical writers are found blamelefs.

The evangelical writers do further merit belief by their illuftrious works and powers, by miracles which commanded nature, by prophecies which events verified, and laftly, by that, on which the world may not improperly rely, the wifdom, the providence, the goodnefs of God ; each of which attributes feems to be concerned in the care, that the religion, which He fo diftinguifhed and proved by mighty and miraculous figns, fhould not be loft, nor any falfe writings, inftead of true, obtruded ; in which cafe, without our fault,
obedience

obedience to his will would become impossible.

This remark premised, and the authority of the records thus in brief vindicated, let us proceed to survey their contents, or the characters of divinity legible in the general doctrine which they delivered; and we shall find it, in every point of view, a doctrine perfective of human nature. Its lessons are, to love God, and to love one another; to hurt no man, and to do good to every man. It proposes the noblest, the highest, and the completest pleasures of the world; the joys of benevolence, the wealth of beneficence, the ease of innocence, and the comfort of tranquil spirits. All, that God in the course of nature intended, it allows: excesses injurious, superfluities unbeneficial to nature, it restrains: and forbids, in speech or actions, the base, the savage, the diabolical gratification of malice, and revenge. It permits the pleasures of sense, where they minister to health or society, to the intercourse of families, and to the honour of communities. It teaches men to be

faithful to their word, that they may be secured in all their just interests; and to assist others with kind offices, that they may receive assistance in return. It forbids them to despoil or circumvent one another, that they may not destroy and make each other unhappy; and it commands obedience to legitimate authority, that societies may not be ruined by disorder and confusion. It cements and compacts government, confirms all good laws, and endeavours to diffuse peace. It inculcates a religion, which is life and spirit; not consisting in ceremonies and amusive externals, but in the services of the heart, as well as in the real devotion of the hands, and the sincere profession of the lips; that is, in good desires, good words, and good works. It commands us to do that in respect to God, which is agreeable to his excellence: to worship him in the best manner, and with a due reverence of his sovereignty. It bids us to do that in respect to our neighbour, by which he may be advantaged: it is the perfection of natural law, adapted to natural exigencies, and

2

promotive

promotive of every natural end; not destroying reason, but improving it in many points, and condescending to it in all; promising every thing which we ought to desire, yet promising nothing but what it can effect; proclaiming war against all vices, and generally commanding every virtue; enabling to mortify, without difficulty, those affections which reason durst scarcely reprehend, because she hath not adequate strength to conquer them; and teaching many virtues which reason herself never discovered, and when known could never sufficiently enforce. It is also a doctrine, in which nothing is superfluous or burdensome; nor yet any thing wanting by which mankind may attain happiness, or by which God may be glorified. And if wisdom, justice, and mercy, if simplicity, holiness, and purity, if meekness, contentment, and charity, be abstracts of God's attributes and rays of divinity; then that doctrine, in which all these excellencies shine so conspicuously, without the mixture of one dissimilar ingredient, must necessarily be from heaven.

Such briefly delineated is the Christian religion in its contents. How far this little sketch I have drawn of the doctrines of it accords with exact truth, it is with every Christian to determine; it requires no other proof, than a candid perusal of the gospel. How far these doctrines display its divinity, it is with human reason to decide.

But the doctrine of Jesus Christ yields an additional proof of divine origin, it was secondly observed, in its propagation; in its instruments, and its success, not less wonderful than its contents: as I proceed next to illustrate.

II. Whoever intends to effect a purpose, must have means of his own proportionate to it; without which he must fail: or else he must derive proportionate means from a superior power. Let us consider, then, with what instruments the Divine Author of our religion sets out on his great enterprise of enlightening the world. Twelve men of low birth and obscure situation, of mean occupations and contemptible quality, without erudition, without address,

dress, are sent amidst the learned and wise, to put a period to the rites of Moses, and the religion of the temple, of which the Jews were inveterately and irritably tenacious; to dispute, not only against the Jewish doctors, but the most renowned sages of Greece; to counteract all the learning of Athens, to countermine all the oratory of Rome. The leader, dying by a cruel ignominious death, left those twelve weak instruments to effect a work, for which they possessed not a single qualification. They were mean in birth, they were poor in circumstances, and so timid in disposition, that on their master's first apprehension, "they all forsook him and fled:" yet were these men appointed to usher into a newly-settled empire, which would be impatient of innovation, a change, which must destroy all the temples, or at least remove thence all their gods; a change against which all the zeal of the world, all the passions, and all the specious pretences contrivable by invention, must arm in violent opposition; a change which introduced new laws, with
a reversal

a reversal of the old; a change which superseded, among the Romans, that religion under which their fathers long prospered, and under which their state obtained so much grandeur, for another religion, in appearance simple and humble, meek and peaceable, not indeed apt to do harm, but at that era frequently exposing to harm its votaries; inculcating pacific forbearance, untying, as it were, the military girdle of the foldier, making, if generally received, the pride of arms insignificant, and *turning the warriors' swords into pruning hooks.*

Nor was this a slight and easy change from one religious foppery to another; the new one perhaps adding splendor to their Pantheon by the introduction of new deities, and introducing pomp and parade, accommodated to dazzle the eye, and captivate the fancy. The object of substitution was a religion contradicting the common reasons of state, erecting a new judicature, and in its consequences tending to spread silence through the Roman courts by preventing injuries, and thereby precluding
private

private litigation: a religion at variance with many maxims of worldly policy; giving countenance to the poor, and consequence to the lowly, this too at a time when wealth was adored, ambition esteemed magnanimity, and pleasure courted as supreme good; and offering no peculiar blessing to the opulent or powerful, but by humiliating their dispositions: a religion, yet farther, not only altering the face of things, but piercing into the secrets of the soul; unravelling the intrigues of hearts, correcting all evil manners, and breaking vile habits into submission, into a detestation and dereliction of them.

Now that such a religion, preached at such a period, by such persons, should triumph over philosophical wisdom, over the arguments of the subtle, the harangues of the eloquent, the dominion of princes, the imaginary interest of states, the inclinations of nature, the blindness of zeal, the habits of education, the force of custom, and the pleasures of sin; that is, over wit, authority, and money, over establishments, empire, pertinacy, and fame, over the impetuosity of passion, and the inveigle-
ments

ments of vice, which are all the influences in the world capable of rendering such a scheme impracticable; could not have been effected by the personal powers of the instruments employed in the conduct of it, but by some superadded assistance equal to the mighty effect. That with all these disadvantages, this religion contrary to the general fate of novelties, which, however profitable or good, incur reproach, and seldom prevail, unless they commence at a fortunate time, and with strong prejudices in their favour, should flourish by pressure, grow glorious by opposition, and become less and less disputable by objections; must be resolved into a higher cause than any visible one, or in other words, into divine agency. Admit the intervention of this agency, and the whole difficulty, otherwise inexplicable, vanishes. By this the Apostles were completely taught the scriptures, and instructed in languages; by this they were made wise to direct souls, bold to adventure, skilful to counsel, intelligent to convince opponents, and powerful to work miracles. Without learning, the
champions

champions of the gospel could not have confuted the learned world; God therefore became their teacher: without ability, they could not have withstood or broken the powerful resistance they had to encounter; God therefore was their support: without courage, they could not have successfully contested against all the violence of the Jews and Gentiles; God therefore animated them with fortitude, and inspired them with zeal: without great forecast and great caution, they could not have avoided the snares of crafty persecutors; God therefore was their monitor, instructor, and guide.

And their success was answerable. The fame of Jesus soon diffused itself. His religion spread with incredible rapidity over the face of the habitable world. On the day of Pentecost, when the gift of tongues was displayed, three thousand souls were instantly converted to it. It filled immediately afterwards all Asia; it passed next to Europe; and then, at no remote period, to the farthest Africans. In spite of tortures, in defiance of terrors, amidst ten thousand

thousand obstacles, apparently insuperable, the promulgers of the Gospel perseveringly told their artless tale: whatever was favourable to them made the religion they preached grow; whatever was adverse to them still made the same religion flourish. If they enjoyed peace, the religion was prosperous; if they suffered persecution, it was prosperous likewise. If Sovereigns countenanced them, the world came in, because Christians lived holily; if Sovereigns were incensed against them, the world came in, because Christians died resolutely: and not only the poor, but the dignified, not only the weak, but the wise, præfects, judges, pleaders, scholars, became their disciples. Now what rational account can be given of such success, without the supposition of authority delegated, and succour supplied from heaven? Without a known commission thus supported, can common sense conceive that the agents themselves would engage in the undertaking?

The incitement of fame may perhaps be insinuated, but sure most inadmissibly: no
trace

trace of ostentation appearing in their actions, as there was no likelihood of ambition in their situation. Or if otherwise, if notwithstanding appearances and situation, they might anticipate and desire the distinction of fame; still, as an acquisition of their own efforts, it must in consequence be very uncertain: very unlikely indeed, on the supposition of imposture, which infamy would follow, with a probability proportionate to that of detection. Or, apart from such probability, the fame, if any acquired by them, must be consequently inconsiderable; and at the same time of little value to those who were estranged from all ideas of it by education: who made no personal advantage of it in fact, who rejected it in pretension, and who constantly referred what they said or did to the glory of a leader in the ministry of God: a leader, whom the persons, they were then addressing, had put to an ignominious death. God knows, here was poor ground to build fame or reputation upon; and, what was still worse, this poor
ground,

ground, on supposition, rested on a falsehood too.

Fame then set aside, much less probably could dignity or emolument be their object. They were innocent plain men; who had no bad ends to serve, who could look for no advancement in this life from the project, who were told by their master to expect, not crowns and scepters, not possessions or favour, not power and ease; but, after a voluntary renunciation of secular concerns for the purpose of strict attention on their ministry, poverty and prisons, hardship and vexation, labour and persecution, scourgings and exile, bonds, imprisonment, and death: this severe doom too, for a reward not to be enjoyed in their earthly state, but in futurity; on a day which they should never know, till it arrived; and in consequence of a promise, for the accomplishment of which they were to rely solely on a crucified master's veracity. To authenticate their mission still more credibly, they sealed their report of it with their blood, they gave their life for a testimony.

testimony. And what satisfactory return can any person hope to obtain, if he resign his life for a lie? Who shall make him recompence, or what should tempt him to commit such an action knowingly; apprehending, as he must do, the infinite hazard, indeed the certainty, of divine vengeance awaiting to punish it?

Let us however suppose the great advocates, the first planters of Christianity, to combine in the support of its cause, against all the rules of common sense, without conviction; what shall we say of the conversions which they effected? Can we suppose in these also the same influence of the same delusion? Can we imagine all the world, or so great a part of it, so many thinking beings of different ranks, abilities and tempers, to consent by chance to embrace such instructors, and adopt such changes for nothing, or in short, on any grounds less than certainty? If any accession of strength were still wanting to complete the argument, it occurs in the prophecies so exactly fulfilled in our Lord;

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and those of our Lord, afterwards fulfilled, and fulfilling every day.

You are now, I would hope, furnished with sufficient evidence, that the author of our religion was, "a Teacher come from God." What remains, but that we bring home to attention what He taught; receive it with reverence, examine it with care, apply it with improvement, admit its authority in faith, and its regulation in practice; that we may secure what it promises in the perfect bliss of an immortal life, through him our Mediator, to whom, &c.

S E R M O N II.

JOHN v. 36.

But I have a greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.

OUR Saviour, in this chapter, demonstrates himself to be the Christ, the Son of God, by four different testimonies; by that of John the Baptist, by that of Moses and the Scriptures, by that of God the Father speaking from Heaven, and by his own miracles. The words, which I have read to you, contain the great commanding argument from miracles only. Though John the Baptist was a witness, deserving on many accounts the greatest credit, and

the declaration of our Lord, that he had a greater witness, was not intended to supersede or weaken John's testimony; yet were his own works stronger means of conviction in two respects.

Ist. With respect to the Jews, who were accustomed to judge of the extraordinary vocation of their prophets by these credentials, and ready accordingly on every occasion to demand signs of those who pretended to a divine commission; amongst whom miracles had for some time ceased, amongst whom even the Baptist had wrought none, amongst whom therefore the display of this illustrious privilege by our Saviour might presumably leave no room for a doubt of his superior character.

IIdly. Stronger and more irresistible evidence of a divine commission was displayed in the privilege itself. The attestation of a forerunner, however high in repute, was at best an external and human evidence; but miracles carried with them an internal proof of Divinity, or the sign of the Almighty in the exercise of such extraordinary

dinary power. Whence the obvious remark of Nicodemus, that “none could do the works which Jesus did, except God were with him.”

And 1st, I have supposed, in what has been premised, that the works, to which our blessed Lord refers as his vouchers, are his miracles; though in truth the other performances of his ministry, his preaching, his services of mercy, his offices of piety, his sufferings and death, are all likewise “works which his Father gave him to finish.” But as some of these were not then accomplished, and none of them were so affectingly and satisfactorily proofs of a divine mission, as his miracles; we may conclude, that by works in this place, his miracles alone are meant: which he often calls by that appellation, as in the 10th chapter of this Gospel. “*If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not; but if I do, though you believe not me, believe the works.*” And again, in the 15th chapter, “*If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: that is, the sin of infidelity: those di-*

vine works having been sufficient for their conviction; and, as they had not this effect, leaving them without excuse.

The expediency of this sort of proof was peculiarly adapted to the temper and expectations of the Jewish nation; it had been the ordinary distinction of preceding missionaries. “*The Jews require a sign,*” saith St. Paul, “*and the Greeks seek after wisdom.*” These latter loved sophistical subtleties, and philosophical reasonings. The former would be persuaded by nothing but prodigies and wonders, the astonishing effects of the extraordinary power of the Deity; with which having formerly been frequently favoured, they as importunately, as unseasonably, often exacted them. “*If ye see not signs and wonders,*” saith Christ to them, “*ye will not believe.*” And it was a current opinion among them, that the Messias would display in his manifestation many miracles; as appears, amongst other passages, from the reasonings of that people with one another. “*When Christ cometh,*” say they, “*will he do more miracles than this man hath done?*”

done ?” It was proper therefore to accommodate himself to the genius of those to whom he was sent; and to shew them that they had, according to their own principles, a sufficient confirmation of his pretensions.

I may further add, it was the ordinary method of Divine Providence, well known to the Jews, to ground in miracles, on special and important exigents, the authority of those who were delegated to offices of so high importance. Thus it was, that the mission of Moses, and several subsequent prophets, was authenticated: and since the Almighty was now about to establish the authority of a missionary infinitely superior to all his predecessors, it was reasonable to expect, that he would not do less in his favour, and in support of his character, than he had done for Moses and the other prophets.

Besides these circumstances, the contents of the revelation which our Saviour delivered to his followers, and that degree of faith with which it was to be embraced, required likewise that he should prove the

truth of it by miracles. The doctrinal part was in several points what the mind of man could not reach by the investigation of reason; the moral part was so opposite to the prejudices, the passions, the prevailing dispositions of men, that nothing less than the clearest evidence could procure for it a favourable reception: yet the whole was to be admitted, not with a doubtful acquiescence, as a probability only; but with full faith, with such a determined assurance, that even death was to be preferred to the denial of it: and men were laid under the obligation of practising, with this strength of faith, that perfection of morals, by the severest penalties. These are therefore further reasons why the great Prophet, who thus taught, should produce the most unexceptionable credentials of a divine embassy.

And not only the things he was to teach, but those also which he was to accomplish, made the exertion of a miraculous power necessary to support the authority with which he declared himself invested. He came to abolish the great Mosaic ritual; which,

which, as it had been originally sanctioned by miracles, could not presumably be abolished without them. He came also to destroy the works of the great enemy of mankind; which he could not do, but by works of greater power. He came to verify the ancient prophecies concerning himself; and would therefore have wanted one of the most illustrious signatures, by which the prophets had pointed him out, had he wrought no miracles.

II. So much for the expediency of miracles to authenticate the divinity of his mission to the Jews. The next question is, how our Saviour's miracles answered in general this important purpose; or in other words, how "the works that he did, sufficiently and effectually bare witness of him, that the Father had sent him." For the illustration of this point, it may be proper to define what a miracle is; by which I understand a sensible effect, exceeding the known powers of nature. Now as we are utterly ignorant how far the powers of beings good or bad in superior classes of intelligence may extend; and

and therefore cannot be certain but that some phenomena, which appear, and are really, to us miraculous, have resulted from their agency, which is indeed confirmed by several intimations of scripture; it follows, that miracles are not separately, and in themselves, proofs that the workers of them are the messengers of God. And as it is highly repugnant to all our natural notions of the divine goodness, to suppose that He can leave men, who sincerely desire to know and follow truth, destitute of the necessary means of discriminating it from falsehood; it follows, that there must be ever some discernable traits and adjuncts, which mark and manifest his interposition. And the characters, which distinguish true religion from deceptions of any and every kind, are, I conceive, illustrated by plain peculiarities in their nature, manner, or tendency.

We are it is confessed, ignorant how far the power of evil spirits may extend, but we know how far it does not extend; we know that it is infinitely inferior to that of God. Upon this principle, reason accordingly

ingly concurs with scripture in appropriating some wonderful acts of a particular kind to God himself; as the prediction of distant contingencies depending upon the wills of free agents, the unerring knowledge of human thoughts, and the revival of the dead. The manner also of some wonderful acts, or the peculiar circumstances with which they are wrought, constitute another proof of their immediate procedure from God. As when they are public for instance, performed openly before great numbers; when they are instantaneous and complete; and when the result of them is a notoriously permanent effect: these are, if not equally infallible marks of the finger of God, yet corroborating proofs amongst others, that they proceed from divine power; that they are at least, true and real miracles, and not like many of those ascribed to magicians and the pagan oracles, the illusions of artifice, or the pretences of falsehood.

The tendency of these wonderful acts, is likewise a farther test of their divinity. A miracle, that tends to no purpose, or to a bad

bad one, is on that very account suspicious. If the all-wise and good God ever alter or suspend the established course of nature, it must be for some wise and good reason; for some important end which could not otherwise be obtained. It must be immediately, or ultimately, for the removal of some pernicious and spreading errors, or the confirmation of some momentous truths, in order to make mankind wiser and better. When therefore we are convinced that miracles bear the characters above described, are also attended with the peculiarities and distinctions just mentioned, and that the ends, which in this enumeration of circumstantial evidence I have specified, are intended by them, we may be assured that they are from God; most certainly not from wicked spirits, such efficiency being beyond their power, as it is also contrary to their nature to promote good.

Let us now briefly try the miracles of Christ, those declared vouchers, "that the Father had sent him," by the preceding characteristics.

And,

And first, with respect to the extraordinary abilities displayed in the miracles of Christ, examine them, and they will appear far surpassing the power of any created being; such as God hath reserved to himself, or such as he alone can communicate. That our Saviour could foretell the contingencies of futurity, and that futurity verified his predictions, we find in the several instances, of the fall of Peter, the destruction of Jerusalem, his own resurrection, the descent of the Holy Ghost, the persecuted state of his immediate followers, and the success of his gospel. That he could see into the heart appears by his frequent mention, both to the Pharisees, and to his own disciples, of what they thought; and that he could animate the dead, is unquestionable from no less than four instances on record; that of the ruler's daughter, that of the widow of Nain's son, that of Lazarus, who had lain in the grave, till putrefaction must have ensued, and which is more wonderful still, his own resumption of life after death, evinced for forty days together by many
infallible

infallible tokens to many unexceptionable judges.

The manner also, in which these and his other miracles were wrought, was such as added a strong corroborating argument to prove them both real and divine. They were not performed in secret, they were not performed before a few credulous or interested witnesses, a circumstance which might have left them liable to the suspicion of imposture; but openly, before a multitude of enemies, as well as friends, at the most public festivals, and in the most frequented places of resort. They were performed also with the same sort of action with which Almighty God created the world; by a FIAT, by a bare word or intimation of his will, without gradual process, or visible means or instruments. In appeasing a violent tempest, he says only, *peace, be still*: immediately the obedient winds hearken to his voice, and the agitated sea subsides. In curing an inveterate leprosy, he says no more than, *I will, be thou clean*: and the leper is suddenly cleansed. No sooner does he say to the
deaf

deaf and dumb man, *Ephphatha, be opened*; than his ears are opened, and the string of his tongue loosed. He restores also to life both the widow's son, and Lazarus, by saying, to the one, *arise*, to the other, *come forth*. Once or twice indeed, he employs natural means in his operations, but they were manifestly so ineffectual in their nature to the purposes for which they were employed, and designedly so; as conducted only to magnify the power of the performer: who in those acts communicated to certain forms of matter, by an efficiency nothing short of divine, powers and qualities, which in their own nature they did not possess. Add to the whole this finishing circumstance, that his miracles produced always a durable and permanent effect. If the ears of the deaf, or the eyes of the blind, are opened; they continue afterwards clearly and perfectly to hear, or see. If the dead are raised, they continue to perform all the functions of life; and remain incontestibly, standing witnesses to the reality of what was done in their favour.

But

But lastly divine agency appears in the miracles of Christ from their design and tendency. They were held out for the sanction and propagation of doctrines and precepts most worthy of God, and most beneficial to mankind; to enlighten and reform, to promote the interests of piety and virtue. Now, as it is impossible that God should favour a lie; and equally incredible, that any wicked or malevolent being should lend an aid to the confirmation of truth, or that he should strive to set up God's authority, only to pull down his own: it follows, that since the Christian system hath a plain tendency to advance the honour, and enforce the service of the true God, with the true good of mankind; the miracles wrought in attestation of it must have the great Sovereign of nature for their author; and not any inferior spirit, except with his concurrence, and by his delegation. Suitable to this conclusion is the answer of our blessed Lord to the absurd calumny of the pharisees, that he cast out devils through Beelzebub. *“ Every kingdom divided against
 ... 2 itself*

itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself cannot stand. If Satan cast out Satan he is divided against himself, how then shall his kingdom stand? But if I by the spirit of God cast out devils, then the kingdom of God is come unto you :''
 i. e. the expected kingdom of the Messiah; and this amongst other arguments demonstrates me the Messiah.

You have now laid before you, as amply as the time, and as briefly as the subject, would allow, the chief characters of distinction, which give credit and consequence to the miracles of Christ, as testimonies of his heavenly descent. And if, according to the representation I have offered, our religion has been thus established by mighty signs and wonders, which though not seen by us, have been handed down to us by vouchers of the best authority, who confirmed likewise what they vouched by many undoubted miracles, and sealed the important truth with their blood; we have surely the greatest reason to stand fast in the faith which we avow, and to evidence by our own works the truth,

or at least our sincerity in the profession, of it.

We are not taught to expect an unremitting series of miracles for the conviction of unbelievers. Works of extraordinary power, when occasion required it, have been performed, and to the abundant satisfaction of honest and unprejudiced enquirers; who can resort to the authentic records of those facts, by which Christianity at first commanded attention, and which are sufficient to uphold it where it is, as well as to procure for it admission where it is not. We are in these our days called to a faith grounded on rational conviction; and to works of piety, justice, and charity connected with it. These are works for every age of the church, for every professor of the Christian faith; and more acceptable to God, as well as more beneficial to ourselves, than the greatest miracles at this matured period of Christianity would be; and therefore we are no longer enabled to perform them. We have not that faith which works by wonders; but we may have that
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eminent virtue; how will such examples shame and condemn us, whom the Son of God came purposely from heaven to warn and instruct; if under such powerful means of goodness our improvements be less than some of theirs, under the lessons of Socrates, or even the dispensation of Moses. The great end of all the miracles wrought for the establishment of the gospel was, that men might be brought by faith to obedience, that by believing the truth of revelation, be led to live conformably to its moral dictates. They therefore frustrate the main purpose of God in their favour, and are inexcusably guilty, if they do not so regulate their conduct. "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; at first begun to be spoken of by the Lord, and confirmed afterwards by those who heard him: God also bearing them witness with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will." God grant that we may not frustrate this important purpose! but believe, and be saved through Jesus Christ our Lord, &c. &c.

SERMON III.

ACTS v. 42.

*And daily in the temple, and in every house,
they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus
Christ.*

IN my last discourse I considered the nature of miracles, as proper and satisfactory vouchers for a divine commission. Let us next examine the character, and note the zeal of those, to whom such commission was entrusted. When they were convened before the Jewish council, to be questioned concerning their faith, and warned with an authoritative interdict against the propagation of it; they were enjoined silence, but refused to obey men, in contradiction to God, counteracting his purpose and commands. They were beaten, but they persisted; they were

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threatened,

threatened, but not deterred. They even rejoiced, that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name of their Master. What could actuate, what could sustain, this inflexibility of resolution? Not surely the spirit of deception: Mankind usually balance the chances of gain with those of loss; and, before they embark in an undertaking, satisfy themselves that it is feasible. If therefore the Apostles were deceivers, they must presumably have projected some advantage of superior counterbalance to their pains; otherwise they would have acted without common sense: and without that it would surpass every degree of credibility, to suppose them capable of deluding many of the wisest men in the world. But as the state of things was at that time, considering the treatment they received, what counterbalance of advantage could they propose; what had they to anticipate? Disappointment, alienation of friends, and all the evils which malevolence, armed with power, could inflict. If therefore deceivers, they were deceivers of a strange cast; contrivers
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of a project without temptation, which exposed them to inconveniences without an equivalent. And as this is not credible, it remains to account for their behaviour, from the zeal of conscious honesty in the cause of truth.

The contrary I know hath been insinuated; it hath been imagined, that they might find their account in imposture. But let us give this point a fair examination.

It must be allowed reasonable to think, that their religion could externally yield them in prospect no satisfactory recompence of profit or advantage; that they could not even live at ease in the profession of it, unless they could reconcile to it, among those to whom they preached it, the generality, or a majority, or at least a number sufficiently considerable, to secure them from ill-will. Let us consider therefore with candour the probability of their success to this amount.

The world, at the time when Christianity appeared, was, in a religious view, divided into Jews and Gentiles, or Heathens. From the Jews the Apostles could

expect nothing but the worst of usage; as their principles obliged them to speak in the best manner of that person, who had been treated by them as a malefactor, and whose crucifixion had been instrumentally procured by the Jewish rulers. Reflecting, therefore, upon the proceedings of the Jewish government, they could not but think that they should expose themselves to its utmost displeasure; especially were they to tell the people, as Peter did, that their governors were either so weak or so wicked, as to have plotted the death of a holy personage, sent by God to be their Saviour. Yet the Apostles spoke thus plainly, and in a public manner, as we find it in the records of their acts. The chief priests and elders, the Jewish rulers, therefore must hence have perceived, that there was no way of supporting their own authority, but by silencing the Apostles; and the Apostles must perceive, that no exertion would be spared to stop the progress of their testimony. They could not but know also, that a people so tenaciously attached to the ceremonies of their religion,

gion, as by the general testimony of history the Jews were, would never endure any, who offered to depreciate the importance, or draw men off from the reverence, of those ceremonies. They might therefore reasonably fear the accomplishment of their master's prediction; *That those, who killed them, would think that they did God good service.*

Nor could these holy teachers expect better treatment in the quarters of Gentilism; especially if endeavouring to gain from it profelytes. They must foresee, that they should be hated for the profession of a religion, differing from, and contradicting that protected by the laws, and sanctioned by antiquity; as they saw their own countrymen the Jews universally detested for the same reasons: and they might therefore conclude, that policy, as well as devotion, would induce every Heathen government to suppress, if possible, the opponents of an established idolatry; and to take away the lives or liberties of such opponents, as, for endeavouring to carry off votaries from its worship, might
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be judgèd by them disturbers of the state. It is plain therefore that, whilst this aversion lasted, there could be no presumptive hope of ease in the profession, much less of security in the propagation, of Christianity.

Admitting this aversion therefore to the Apostles' principles and doctrine, which both the Jews and Gentiles we find must have been led to entertain, and the consequences with which it must have been attended, let us consider next what chance there might be of conversions sufficiently speedy and numerous, to support them against it.

Now the great improbability of these will easily appear on a fair view of what they taught, its nature, and its evidence: by its nature, I mean the maxims and demands of their religion; and by its evidence, the purport and process of their pretensions in the miracles they asserted and wrought; which, if supposititious, were as unlikely, as unentitled, to obtain credit.

Every one knows the difficulty of persuading numbers of men to renounce their
religious

religious opinions, however weak and indefensible; if they have for a long time been the professed opinions of their country. Every one knows too, that the difficulty will be greater, if the religion introduced to convert them, hold out no flattery to vice: and the difficulty still increases, when the persons to be converted are notoriously vicious. If this be a true representation, and if it were the actual state of things when the Apostles set out in their ministry; it must be allowed, that supposing them to have common understanding, they could not naturally flatter themselves with the hope of many converts. That the doctrine, they preached, such as we have it in the Gospels, it's authentic records, does not indulge any irregular behaviour, however solicited by passion and appetite; that it requires the practice of every thing deserving the name of virtue; cannot be denied by the most superficial reader. It allows no fantastic relaxation of its precepts, no reserve of venial corruption, no commutations for internal goodness by external performances. It
proposes

proposes to no person any advantage, on any other condition, than that of improving in moral habits, with strict vigilance against every assault of temptation; than that of pleasing God by obedience, or propitiating him by penitence. With this purity, evident in the doctrine of the Apostles, taking into consideration at the same time the general state and condition of the Jews, whom we shall find so attached to the exterior of their religion, that they had almost lost the spirit of it; there will not appear the smallest hope of persuading them to part with their ceremonial observances, the only cloak by which they could cover, or the only oblation by which they could expiate, their wickedness, for a religion that required sincere and unaffected goodness.

We shall find again, as little hope of success among the Greeks and Romans; for all the historians who have left any account of that period, give such a character of the corruptions then commonly observable amongst them, as must excite the detestation of all, who retained the least
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remains of virtue. A religion, enjoining its followers to moderate their secular and sensual desires, would never suit the taste of such an age. The voluptuous, the ambitious, or the avaricious, would never bear the restraints imposed by the gospel: and the Apostles therefore, could not expect to acquire on a sudden many proselytes among people of such a cast.

But it may be replied, that they trusted not solely to their doctrine, but to the impressions of those astonishing facts which they ascribed to its author or first publisher. Might they not accordingly hope to make their way by forging these, by reporting fictitious miracles; considering especially the aptitude of mankind, to be affected by prodigies and marvellous relations?

To answer this suggestion, let us note fairly the circumstances, I. Of those who were to conduct the supposed forgery. II. Of those who were to be deluded by it.

I. The parties destined to conduct the supposed forgery were no less than twelve
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in number. If they were to be employed as vouchers of a fact, we would not desire fewer; but if they were to be entrusted with a secret, they were too many. Madmen only would embark in such a design with such a number, and with a belief that a secret could be kept by so many, when any one of them might make his fortune by betraying it; and every one had reason to fear the utmost severities of persecution by keeping it. And should even one be tempted by promises or threats to disclose this secret, the design would be ruined beyond recovery, and all the hope of making converts extinguished. The apostles therefore must have been very weak men, instead of being, as the suggestion supposes them, very crafty men; had they built their ideas of success on such a foundation: especially if we consider their character, as well as their number. By the accounts which they give of themselves, and, as it is to their own disadvantage, who will dispute it; they were men, who, before they had seen the crowning evidence of Christianity in the resurrection, had all forsaken their

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their Master, when the Jewish government seized him. Even he, who appeared to possess most courage, and most love for his Master, when he found him charged with capital guilt, from apprehension of suffering with him denied that he knew him. Can then those, who were not resolute enough to maintain a truth, be supposed fit instruments for the management of a fiction? Would they not in all probability confess the contrivance, as soon as their lives were in danger? Or may we not allowably conclude, that they never could have confided in one another, after so notorious a proof of unfaithfulness to their Leader?

Such were the circumstances of the Apostles. But to throw a probable air of illusion on the miracles of Christ and his Apostles, we are often told of the forged miracles of subsequent ages. The circumstances however of those, who counterfeited miracles in subsequent times, are entirely dissimilar. If they had the ill-luck to be discovered, they incurred no hazard
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of life or fortune. The Christian religion had, at the time those forged miracles were pretended, the support and encouragement of the civil government: hence, whatever was done in favour of it, might be deemed a pious zeal for the service of God and of Christ. There would be little reason to apprehend, that those who were concerned in the deception, whatever might be their numbers, should betray it; because no worldly motives could prompt the discovery: for, if the miracle succeeded, they might hope to be gainers by it. And if it was detected, they had nothing worse to fear, than the incidental reproach, that they had more zeal than understanding. The suspicion therefore raised from the counterfeit miracles of the sixth and following centuries, to discredit the miracles of our Saviour and his Apostles, is ill-grounded and ill-applied.

II. But more strikingly to evince conviction, let us remark farther, the dissimilarity of circumstances in the persons who were to believe the accounts reported by
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the Apostles, and the persons who were to believe the accounts reported by subsequent impostors:

The former, those who were to believe the Apostles, were enemies to the Christian religion: and, as such, would with a prejudiced eye behold, and, instead of befriending, be hardly brought to admit, the miracles, which were to give that religion support and reputation. The Apostles consequently, well knowing that nothing but the force of evidence could be successfully effective against the opposition threatening them, would have little reason to hope that their miracles, if counterfeit, should pass the examination of such prejudiced judges. Whereas the latter, those who in some particular ages of the church boasted of miracles, affected to work them among such as were friends to Christianity; among such as might wish to have it dignified in their times with the same evidence, which had distinguished it in the times of the Apostles. On such persons therefore, moulded and tempered as it were for the purpose by a favourable

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prepossession, there would be little difficulty in imposing forged miracles. It must be known that such persons would wish, for the honour of the religion to which they were attached, that the pretended miracles were true; and consequently, curiosity would not be too minute in its scrutiny, lest a favourite wish should be disappointed.

The Apostles would lie under another disadvantage in the contrivance of counterfeit miracles. They lived not only in an age which admitted immediate recourse to the scene of their story, to extant memorials and accessible witnesses of what they asserted; but also in a discerning and inquisitive age: which would not take things on trust, because well able to distinguish truth from fiction. When they first began to preach the gospel, most parts of learning were advanced to a culture and perfection as great as they had ever reached. The enquiries into nature, and its several powers, were carried to an extraordinary height in comparison with the attainments of some succeeding ages, and the
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the world consequently was much better qualified for distinguishing the natural from the marvellous. They could not therefore; considering their education, hope to deceive the judgement of the world; at such an advantageous height of discernment. Or, had they been vain enough to hazard the attempt, they must have soon experienced the defeat and the disgrace of detection:

Perhaps, however; we may be told, with the revived charge of an ancient unbeliever, that they began with the lower orders of men; and drew their disciples at first from those; who were remarkably ignorant. This is misrepresentation; but suffering it to pass for truth; can we conceive, that those of higher rank, the superiors or superintendants of communities, would sit idle, in arbitrary governments at least, and permit the allurements of converts from the established worship, had they been able to convict them of fraud? We find by Pliny's celebrated Letter to Trajan, that the great and powerful spared neither cost nor pains, neither promises or

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threats,

threats, to extort from the Christians a confession or avowal of imposture. If therefore the Apostles had possessed so much cunning as the allegation in question implies; they would have been discouraged from undertaking an imposture at a period so unseasonable. The proper season for imposture is the reign of ignorance, when any thing unusual may be magnified into a miracle; when persons are ready to believe any strange relation, and the more unlikely the relation, the more forward in believing it. Such, is the seed-time of spurious miracles; at such a time were introduced those counterfeit miracles which deform the page of ecclesiastical history, and which, as ignorance increased, multiplied proportionably.

Though therefore latter ages might carry on with success a scheme of delusion, it does not follow that the Apostles could hope to do so: or because some of the successors of St. Peter might make the people believe, they wrought miracles when they did not; that St. Peter himself in his age, an illumined and critical era,
could

could have made the world believe the resurrection, or other miraculous acts of Christ, had no such events in reality happened.

From this investigation mark then the consequences, which characterize the credulity of those affecters of incredulity, who believe every thing that is absurd in rejecting the truth of the gospel. They must believe that twelve persons united in propagating a falsehood ; from whence, if it succeeded to their wish, they could derive no advantage, if it failed they had every thing to fear, and even the attempt was attended with ignominy and misery ; and that not one of them could be prevailed on to betray the secret, and discover the cheat, which successfully prospered in their hands : while every one of them lived miserably, and died miserably, in confirmation of this strange imposture. They sealed their attestation of this lie with their blood in cruel and ignominious deaths ; and launched into eternity, if it were a lie, with no possible expectation but to suffer for it hereafter. Apart from

metaphysical subtleties, and ironical declamation, this is in brief the Deist's creed: and if such a creed as this will obtain the title to wisdom in this world, the title is easily earned: and the Lord have mercy on his pretensions to happiness in the next.

Let us conclude then with a natural reflection in the emphatic words of an Apostle, "*How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him!*" Supported as our holy religion stands by such vouchers, with such security against guile in the attestation of it, to reject its truths, to exclude its benefits, to brave its terrors, without at least a serious examination, is as inexcusable, as want of decency, want of candour, want of self-love can render affectation and levity. That this may not be our reproach, &c.

SERMON IV.

 2 COR. vi. 8.

By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report, as deceivers, and yet true.

ST. Paul speaks this of himself and his coadjutors in the promulgation of the gospel. Truth was their boast, distrust was their lot. Without regard to the inconsistency of dishonesty in such a cause as they were engaged in, without the ends or arts of craft, against profession, against interest, against ease, they are to be supposed capable of projecting and prosecuting an imposture. The fact however, not the supposition, their real, not their reputed character, is our concern. We will make the assertion of the text a question; and before we admit the truth of their re-

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port,

port, enquire into the credentials of their veracity.

I. The first is, that they report visible incidents, with the highest evidence of which they are capable, personal observation. This is the firmest foundation of assent to testimony: for though we conceive reason to suspect the truth of a narrative, whilst conveyed only in a general way by fame from uncertain tradition; yet when it comes to be attested by a sufficient number of credible persons, who profess themselves to have been eye-witnesses of the fact, it is held no longer reasonable to distrust the truth of it; especially in two cases: as first, if they vouch a matter which they might easily and clearly perceive; and secondly, if many of them exactly agree in the same declaration.

And first, as to the possible and easy perception of the matter in question, the person and actions of Jesus Christ; it was a common object of sense: and those, who were about him, had as great evidence that they conversed with him in the flesh, after his resurrection; as we can have that we converse

verse with one another. His miracles were all real, visible and permanent; no illusive operations on sight, or fancy. The cure of the man born blind was as notorious as his malady; the revival of the dead man at Nain was performed before much people; the call of Lazarus from the grave, in the presence of numerous spectators after a known interment for four days, left no room for imagination of artifice or error. And his own passion particularly was a plain object of sight, with public manifestation in the presence of his greatest adversaries. His death the very soldiers witnessed, by sparing him when they came to break his bones, *because they saw he was already dead.* At his resurrection, the stone was rolled away from the sepulchre, and no body found in it; though it was watched by centinels, and fear had dispersed his disciples. In the same manner, after his resurrection, he satisfied not only the distrustful Thomas, but the other doubting Apostles, with respect to the re-animation of his own crucified body; by permitting every sceptical trial, and accumulating every sensible

sensible proof of it. Now the more suspicious the Apostles themselves at first were, the greater is the evidence, how far they were from any design of abusing the world in their subsequent ministry; and what strong conviction there must have been in the thing itself, which was able to satisfy such scrupulous incredulity, such diffident and timid vouchers.

Secondly, If again many witnesses concur in the same declaration; disbelief is still less reasonable. Nothing can more disparage the truth of a testimony, than the discordant representations of such as were present at the same occurrences. But when all the witnesses fully agree not only in the substance, but in all material circumstances of the relation; what ground or reason can there be to suspect it of forgery or design: especially when the relators cannot be brought to vary in it from each other by terrors, pains, and tortures! And thus it is in the present case. We find no real dissent mentioned as to the birth, miracles, life, death, or resurrection of Jesus Christ. All the witnesses deliver
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the same attestation; though writing in different places, and on different occasions. No disavowal of the account, no alteration in any incident of it, from any dastardly view of displeasing, from any obsequious view of gratifying any persons, whom the exposure of it might interest or affect. And most of his miracles, not only his Apostles, but the people at large, and his very enemies, witnessed; whose posterity to this day will not deny, that he displayed such illustrious performances. And in regard to his resurrection, had it not been demonstrated with the greatest certainty, it would be strange indeed that five hundred persons should all agree in the same tale, the greatest part of whom were living when the Apostle's appeal * was made to them; and that neither torture nor death could work in any one of them a disavowal of it.

A testimony thus given by eye-witnesses there can be no reason to reject; without some appearance of deficiency in their

* 1 Cor. xv. 6.

knowledge of the things reported, or some suspicion of their fidelity in reporting them. But, the witnesses of Christ were men intimately conversant with his actions, as well as his person; men who had been selected and trained for that very end, to attend the one, and announce the other. They had accordingly followed him wherever he went; were with him in his solitudes and retirements, some of them in his transfiguration, others in his agony, in which they heard the expressions that came from his mouth; had indeed on all occasions sufficient opportunities and particular motives to know his acts, and note his virtues. Their means of information therefore are unsuspecting.

The fidelity of their report is not less so. For, they parted with all their worldly accommodations in the delivery of it. Whether they were opulent or not, or how much they parted with, is of little import: they had a subsistence, they found comforts, and they wanted not hopes; all which they freely and even cheerfully resigned, not for enjoyment, but for trouble;

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not for emolument, but for disgraces, persecutions, nay death itself, in the propagation of the gospel. Is not this conduct an ample proof of their veracity? It would have been folly to have deceived themselves in a matter of so great moment; it would have been folly to have lied for the sake of a religion, which tells them that liars will not receive its reward; it would have been folly to expose themselves to continual hazards for the sake of a fiction, and to be as they declared they were, “of all men most miserable, if the present life were the boundary of their prospects.” There must have been therefore, to excite their alacrity, and to sustain the resolute industry of their undertaking, something more attractive in what they embraced, than what they resigned; and something more powerful in what they published, than in the sufferings they incurred; which could be only the conviction of truth.

Their fidelity is farther apparent from some striking characters of their testimony; as also from their peculiar manner
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of expressing themselves in the communication of it, which bears the strongest marks of impartiality.

They did not seek admiration for rare discoveries; they did not declare what was glorious or pleasing only, concealing what might be mocked and derided; they did not in general terms discourse of divine goodness and its qualities or designs, nor did they adapt themselves to the Heathen philosophers of their day by imitation, or competition in inventions or improvements of sublime or curious speculations; but they *preached Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block, to the Greeks foolishness*. They inculcated the vanity of human wisdom without his doctrine, and the gift of heavenly mercy communicated wholly and solely by his mediation; together with the necessity of a general faith in his mission for the purpose of a happy immortality; and they omitted not a single passage of his life or death, which might be deemed derogatory to that high character he professed himself: a strong
evidence,

evidence, that they understood clearly, and believed fully, both the truth and the importance of their report.

An additional mark of impartiality grounds on the plainness and simplicity of speech, which characterises their representations. Imposture generally hides its deformity under a visor. The pretender to inspiration, as we find in the conductors of the ancient oracles, wraps himself in mystery, or provides himself a subterfuge in the turnings and windings of ambiguity. The fabricator of a false story is obscure, or perplexed and inaccurate. The sophist affects subtlety; and in general those, who seek praise or esteem for fame or interest, have recourse either to the profound deduction and technical phrase, which is accounted science; or to ornamental flourishes, flattering insinuations, and measured cadences of periods, which we call eloquence: delighting to draw the gaze of wonder by flights above ordinary apprehensions, or feats beyond ordinary performances; and never thinking themselves better recompensed for
their

their pains, than when they are most admired and least understood. But the heralds of Christ disown and reject these trite and mean artifices. In proclaiming facts, they heeded not rhetoric ; in giving a deposition, they needed not elaborate expression ; in converting souls, for which purpose they must apply intelligibly to capacities, and work upon understandings, refinement would have been suspicious, obscurity absurd. They speak accordingly, not like men who endeavour to obtain belief of what they do not believe themselves : but, as confident of their own honesty, they declare themselves explicitly, gravely, simply, under the impression of truth, and with the candour becoming it ; by the authority of the divine spirit, and with the artless dignity, characteristic of it.

The next probable note of their veracity is their undaunted freedom of spirit. They did not give out one thing to the world, and another to their private disciples ; but with great boldness declared their doctrine in the most public places, and before their
greatest

greatest enemies. They neither feared the skill of the Jews in the law, nor the acuteness of the Greeks in sophistry. St. Paul preached Christ openly in the synagogues amongst his own countrymen; nor less openly encountered he the Epicureans and Stoics among the Athenians: Had the Apostles been deceivers; in their account of Christ, they would certainly not have spoken with so much confidence concerning him, in the presence of those who had been his murderers; to whom we see they appealed for the notoriety of his acts and his resurrection; and this too, after betraying on a very urgent occasion a considerable degree of timidity; for on the apprehension of him, "*they all forsook him, and fled.*" Now, what could render adherents, once so fearful, afterwards so resolute; but some more than ordinary influence, convincing and encouraging them?

Add lastly, as a further illustration of their testimony, they deliver it in all its circumstances with the greatest particularity. On several examinations before several persons, they enumerate those cir-

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cumstances

cumstances without change or alteration; agreeing uniformly in consistence with themselves, and harmony with each other. With respect to indifferent matters, we find them yielding and condescending; but with regard to every thing which concerned their attestation, resolved and constant. Now, had the gospel been some cunningly contrived fancy; it had been impossible, but that so many different persons in such different places, and under different circumstances, would have varied in some material article of it; or would have been wise enough to deliver it in general terms only. They would not have insisted much on minute particulars, which might have been easily, and would undoubtedly have been disproved; related, and repeated, as they must have been amongst so many jealous adversaries, both Jews and Heathens; who, with ample opportunities and strong incentives, from prejudice, curiosity, and interest, to search into the complex and precise details laid before them, could not be supposed capable of suffering relations so strange to pass unnoticed,

ticed, or, if false, to gain credit with the world, and remain unrefuted.

To set aside a testimony so distinguished, so supported, there can be admitted no possible counterforce; except the express contradiction of opponents, whose knowledge should appear more competent, and their fidelity more manifest; but of such satisfactory contradiction there is no trace, nor indeed on several accounts could there be.

As first, the Apostles witnessed the affirmative, which is in general more capable of proof than any negative can be. They must also have been more conversant with Christ, than any other persons; being chosen by him for the very purpose of being constantly with him. Who therefore so capable of knowing accurately all the particulars respecting him? And they must be more free from design than any counter-witness at that time could be: for they had not, as we have seen, any possible motive to actuate their testimony, except clear conviction.

There exists however no particular specific, counter-testimony of any kind, against that which they have given. And as to the general opposition which the Scribes and Pharisees discovered to the testimony of the Apostles, it will bear little weight against it in the fair balance of reason. To what amount can be admitted the testimony of those, who possessed the high authority they did, and which they were likely to lose by the prevalence of the Christian faith; against that of the Apostles, who parted with all for the sake of that faith, and ventured an encounter with every risk and every difficulty, upon the truth of it?

The inducement actuating the Jewish rulers of that period to a general denial of what the Apostles asserted admits a natural explanation, in their policy to uphold their repute with the people; as well as in their zeal to retain their traditions, their hopes of a temporal deliverer, and their avowed personal hatred to Christ. The conduct of the Apostles involves difficulties,

ties, which can only be solved, by the acknowledgment of their veracity.

I am led by the latter hint to observe yet farther, that none ever did so much in asserting the negative, as the Apostles did in establishing the affirmative. Had there been a timely discovery of any sufficient counter-evidence, we cannot conceive they would have persisted in announcing the person and actions of their Master with such continual hazards. If they were guilty of abusing the world; did any ever adventure a toil or pain to undeceive it?

An individual or two, writing at ease, and aiming at popular applause, might be found to enter the lists of controversy against the growing fame of an unpopular religion. We have the names of such on record: but a short time swept away all but what their adversaries preserved of their ephemeral labours. The emperor Julian, as in power, so in zeal for paganism, was the most determined and most formidable opposer of the Christian faith. But he ended his career of life with, “*vi-*

cisti me, O Galilæe * :” thereby establishing, as far as the test of his opposition went, the truth of Christianity.

The grand effort for its extirpation was reserved for these our times, in the combination of power, wit, and sophistry, aided and encouraged by a systematic plan of profligacy in principle and practice. But even these have failed: and after an exile of a few years, religion hath been restored, and in the heart of infidelity hath planted the banner of the cross. Whether the authority, that recalled the celestial cherub to her shrine, acted from motives of policy, or under a higher influence, is not an object of present enquiry. Christianity still triumphs; *and the gates of hell have not been suffered to prevail against it.*

It has returned: and the same powerful and invisible arm, that brought it back, can there revive it in all the purity of native beauty: can shew it as it is, and not garbed in error as human devices have

* Thou hast conquered me, O Galilæan.

dressed

dressed it: and can impress on the mind of the vain philosopher the credulity and folly of infidelity. Christianity was introduced into the world by a display of miraculous powers: but of those miracles reason was then the judge. Time can not impair the truth and reality of them: and of their force reason is now as competent to form a right judgment as ever. And there are a few plain aphorisms, which, in appeal to reason, will demonstrate the verity of that religion in characters clear and bright, as with a sun beam written. Such, for instance, as the following.

All men act from motives either of interest or pleasure in this world, or expectancies of happiness in the next. But the Apostles of Christ if colluding in a fraud, acted contrary to the motives that universally influence mankind. They acted contrary to motives of interest or pleasure in this world: for the sure consequence of their conduct was insults, poverty, pain, persecution, imprisonment, death. And on their own principles, they had nothing but misery and sufferings to

look to in the next ; where they preached and taught that fraud and falshood would be feverely punished. They were therefore monfters in nature ; or their testimony was true.

Look to their religion : was ever a fyftem of morals framed, fo perfect and fo pure ? Could ignorant and illiterate men frame it ? Look at the men ; by birth and education could any be found more illiterate, than they were ? Could bad men at the facrifice of their eafe, their comforts, their every enjoyment of life, traverfe lands and feas to propagate a religion, that denounced punifhment on every fpecies of wickednefs. Could good men unite in promoting it by means of fraud and delufion ? To fuch a train of inconfiftencies confeffions could not be made, without the facrifice of common fenfe, without abandoning every document of reafon.

To fuppose that twelve men of any defcription could be found to unite in a project fo big with inconfiftencies, improbabilities, impoffibilities, exceeds all bounds
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of credulity. And, what crowns all, this project, with all its absurdities and contradictions, succeeded: and in a few years the religion pervaded almost every country in the known world. If then these suppositions will not reconcile fact and experience with reason; what will? Nothing but the acknowledgment that Christ's mission was divine, that all he did bore the stamp of divinity on it, that all he taught was divinely true. But if the means of accounting for a plain matter of fact and experience, be on one train of assumptions big with absurdities, contradictions, impossibilities, and on another reconcileable with sense and reason, the plain result of accountable effects from known causes; which are the real and true means, it requires no sagacity to determine.

These religious aphorisms, as I have ventured to term them, are close and plain deductions from the reasoning I have used, and the topics, which in the preceding pages I have endeavoured to illustrate: and thus concentrated evince, with how strong conviction the revelation of Christ

is “ confirmed unto us by them that heard him.” An evidence so cogent who will resist? A revelation so authoritative who will disobey? Let thankfulness then be its tribute, obedience its effect; an obedience, like its intended benefit, unreserved. Neglect of it is unjust, partial observance of it inconsistent. If it be false, why should it influence at all; if true, why should it not influence universally? God grant, therefore, that his word in the gospel may lead with full efficacy in proper progression from truth to goodness, from goodness to happiness, a happiness perfect and immortal, through Jesus Christ, &c.

DISCOURSES
ON A
FUTURE EXISTENCE, &c.

SERMON V.

I COR. XV. 55.

O death, where is thy sting?

O grave, where is thy victory?

IN a Christian country little might we have supposed to see the ETERNAL HOUSE* of the antient disciples of Epicurus revived, not by a few individuals only, but by a public avowal of the doctrine †.

Great God! and shall that yawning

* DOMUS ETERNA. So the Epicureans, as appears by many of their inscriptions, used to stile their burying grounds.

† On the portal of a great national cemetery at Paris is inscribed "AU SOMMEIL ETERNEL."

grave

grave bury in eternal darkness all that was once most dear to me? Shall that reach of mind on which with rapt attention I have so often hung, that glow of love and friendship which once entranced the congenial soul, shall all that virtue too, which in the dear object of my affection exalted human nature, there moulder in eternal dust? Is this the comfort, vain philosophy, thou bringest a mind drooping under affliction's heaviest bolt? Oh, no: the language of true philosophy speaks better things. Let us then under its guidance endeavour to read that language; as we find it written in the fair page of REASON. Let us hear what arguments of consolation it holds out in support of the hope with which it cheers me; the soothing hope, that the friend of my bosom, though for a moment torn from it, still lives and is happy, looks down superior on the anguish that wrings the heart of sensibility, and whispering consolation suggests, he has only changed his residence, and taken the destined journey a little before me. And if it be not to intrude too far into
hidden

hidden mysteries, while we are on this subject, we will a little further extend our investigation; and enquire whether it supplies us with a ray of hope, that we shall ever meet again.

I. And first, looking into the state of my own mind at this moment, do I not feel conviction of the truth of what I am endeavouring to prove? Why do I possess such a degree of intellectual faculty, as enables me to argue about a future state, if it have no existence? Why, in this case, do the powers of the mind extend beyond the limits of the world, with which I am only concerned: and why extend thus, only to deceive me? Why in pursuit of this meteor blaze is my attention diverted from more useful, more interesting, more necessary objects? If this world be the sum of all to me; hath it not sufficient attractions, solely to engage the mind so bounded by it? It holds out pleasures, that may profitably occupy me in devising schemes for the enjoyment of them. It presents a vast growth of troubles, which reason would be sufficiently and pertinently

nently employed in devising means to shun. Foolish Epicurean, that on your own principles stand convicted of inconsistency! Why waste your hours, and consume your mind, in thinking and arguing on subjects uninteresting to you as the soul's immortality, and a future state: those precious hours which nature allowed you, when you *chanced* to burst into existence, for purposes in common with your fellow-brute more near and dear to you, and more congenial to your soul? You trifle, when you urge they are the amusements of the mind, whose strong pinion often takes excursive flights into ideal realms. The argument is still unanswered: the mind hath not a movement, on your own principles, so foreign to it: the God of nature formed it with no volitions illusory or vain. If this world furnishes us with every object of pursuit necessary to a being, that is concerned with nothing beyond it; would not the understanding have served the purposes of life best, by being confined to those pursuits? And in that case would
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not the author of nature have confined it to them?

But strange, and difficult to be accounted for, on the supposition of man being a mere ephemeris of the world; this faculty of reason, in the extent in which he possesses it, expatiates with supreme delight on subjects no wise necessary to the body, nor allied to temporary or earthly objects. It extends itself to high and speculative subjects; and while it experiences its powers not sufficiently capacious for those great attainments to which it at present aspires, feels the flattery of hope that it shall hereafter be capable even of greater. The inference therefore from those extensive powers of the mind is, that its concerns are co-extensive with its powers. The mole that is formed to delve in the earth, is not endowed with the powers of vision. And why should we have faculties that rap the soul to visions of future bliss; if we were formed only to grovel in this world, our sole objects of concern, the good it supplies, and the evil it produces? On this supposition, the art of living would
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be contracted within a narrow compass; regarding only provision for the subsistence of the body and the gratification of the senses, and the avoidance of what might impede the one and destroy the other. Every operation of mind above what was necessary to those concerns would be a superfluous provision in nature: for instinct, that directs the brute, would for these purposes be sufficient to inform mankind. What need of the notion of a future state; if we be to have no concern in it? What need of all abstracted speculations, if we have nothing to do, but to sport in this world, like the Leviathan in the deep; to eat, and drink, take our pastime in it, and die? Indeed the idea of a post-existence would in this case not only be a superfluous principle in the mind of man, and foreign to his nature; but it would be injurious too. Conferred on him for the purpose of exalting man above the brute creation, and rendering him happier than them, it would have the very opposite effect. It rudely breaks in upon the pleasurable hour, as with a false writ of enquiry;

quiry; and menaces him with imaginary evils, when in reality he has nothing to fear.

And the truth of this reflection experience evinces, not only in the heart-sickening checks, vice receives from such internal monitions; but in the mind's most elevated exercise of those high powers, which disqualify it both for the pleasures and business of common life. Habits of intense thinking diminish the force of bodily powers; and the mind absorbed in elevated speculations becomes averse to the busy pursuits of life, and loses its relish for the satisfactions those pursuits might otherwise afford. The exercise of reason so directed narrows the gratifications resulting from the intercourse of the world, and flattens the edge of enjoyments derived from the senses. As therefore the great enjoyments of this world are the pleasures of sense, and the general means of acquiring the command of those pleasures is by a steady and confined pursuit of our worldly interests; those, who most cultivate the mind, do thereby lessen their opportunities of procuring the satisfactions of life, as

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well as blunt their relish for those that may be in their possession. And hence follows the flat contradiction; that the wiser a man is, the greater folly he discovers. Hence too the best men are in the worst condition; in losing their equal share of common pleasures, not by a criminal abuse of those pleasures, but by living above them. But if with infinite rectitude providence conduct the affairs of this world; that faculty of reason, which distinguishes man, and exalts him above the brute creation, conferred on him for the purpose of rendering him wiser, must render him happier too: wiser and happier in the degree in which he respectively employs it; if not here, certainly in some other state of existence: a period wherein it will be more satisfactorily employed, and in which it will be gloriously rewarded; if therefore the wiser he is, he be not in this world the happier too; there must be another world, in which his wisdom will with happiness be rewarded.

II. Somewhat akin to this argument, in evidence that this life is not the final period

riod of our existence, our appetites and desires afford another proof. These are ever on the stretch, yet never satisfied: ever pursuing some fancied good, but never satisfied with the fruition of it. No gratification in life is absolute. It only leads to a new wish, and another want. Our whole life in respect to our whole existence is a state of infancy: adapted to each period of it, we have toys to engage us; of which tired in turn, we fling them away, and continue ever grasping at something, which is ever out of our reach.

Now what does this dissatisfaction even with the enjoyments of life teach; but that we are not yet at the place of rest, where the great Author of our nature designed us to be; that we are not made solely for this world, nor chiefly for it. For as far as we can perceive and judge, all capacities are satisfied with their surrounding objects: and every thing finds rest and satisfaction in its own element. The restlessness therefore of men, their dissatisfaction with all enjoyments present, and their longings after some future fancied good,

are plain indications that there is some good before them, some future state of acquiescence.

And this argument derived from the dissatisfaction which wise and good men experience in the ordinary pursuits and common business, as well as in the pleasures, of life, proportionably greater in the degree a man is wiser and better, will receive additional weight, in evidence that man is made for some more exalted station, if we advert particularly to God's conduct in his moral government of the world. For if a man be dissatisfied with the world; it is because he feels himself unhappy in it: and if the good and virtuous be more apt to be dissatisfied with it, that is, more unhappy in it, than the dissolute and wicked, if virtue in a single instance be found united with misery, supposing there is no future state to look to; where shall we look for providential goodness in this? On that supposition, the administration of this world appearing the effect of ill-design, or at best the work of chance, what becomes of divine wisdom?

If the affairs of this world be so involved and intricate, that such unequal distribution of good and evil *must* sometimes necessarily take place; how shall we ascertain the infinitude of divine power? These general observations we will in the sequel proceed more distinctly to illustrate.

III. That Almighty Being, which first created the universe, continues, as we observe in the course of nature ever providentially supported, to govern and direct it by certain general laws. The planets have their stated revolutions, the *sun knoweth his going down*, and even to the wandering comets their course is prescribed: so that notwithstanding the rapid, various, and continual movements of the heavenly bodies, nothing is thereby hurt or endangered; but the great harmony we see ever providentially maintained. He maketh the rivers to flow within their banks, and hath set bounds to the ocean. Flowers, herbs, and trees rise and vegetate, and observe their general laws. By his support the animal world subsists, taught by instinctive knowledge to pursue what is

agreeable to their respective natures, and to avoid what would disadvantage and hurt them. Man is assumed a compound Being, consisting of spirit and matter. And since all bodies are regulated and governed by certain established laws; with regard to this other part of human nature which we term spirit, and which is the noblest part of man, there must be some law given, whereby its actions may be regulated, and whereto they are to be referred. And this law is that innate sense of right and wrong, of virtue and vice, which every man carries in his own bosom. This is that principle, which distinguishes him from the brute creation: and thus he stands in the chain of nature; a Being subject to passions, but endowed with reason to govern them, furnished with a sense of what is right and wrong, but necessarily determined to neither, being endowed with a freedom of will and action. And as reason was given him to direct his will, so likewise does he possess a principle, termed conscience; which watches over, and superintends his reason. Thus furnished
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with these two principles of reason and conscience, he is appointed the tacit judge and censor of his own actions. In the silence of darkness, in his most obscure retreats from the eyes and ears of his fellow creatures, even in his hours of gaiety, there is still something within, which puts his soul upon its trial; and never fails to pronounce, as he willingly obeys, or disobey his reason. And as these impressions operating on the mind of man bespeak a law written on his heart; so doth such law demonstrate a judgment hanging over his head.

But if against this consequence it be argued, that in order to influence the conduct of mankind, though it might be expedient to impress their minds with the belief of a world to come, yet it was by no means necessary that there should be one; as the secret approbation accompanying a good action, and the tacit condemnation of ourselves on the commission of a bad one, would in either case be the same: it is obvious to observe, that to admit the supposition of such a principle implanted in

the human mind, on the ideal apprehension of what is never to happen, is to attribute to the God of truth an act of deception.

And the same observation will apply in obviating another argument, which hath been often employed to invalidate the doctrine of a future state, viz. that it was the coinage of legislators and politicians; who discerning the efficacy of it, in enforcing obedience to the laws, in exciting to virtue, and restraining from vice, made it an engine of state, and hired priests to confirm and propagate the delusion. Is it then really acknowledged, that such a belief has such an effect? We avail ourselves of the concession, and ask in reply whether our Creator left any motive, consistent with man's freedom of will and action, that might conduce to virtue and deter from vice, unimpressed on the human mind; any thing uneffected to the future discovery of legislators and politicians. And if for such wise purpose he did impress on it so powerful a principle, as the apprehension of a world to come; would
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He found a motive to virtue on fiction's base, when He could effect his purpose by a truth: a truth, displaying infinite goodness, and consistent with all his wise decrees? Greater even than the folly of such a supposition is the impiety of it.

IV. But farther, as this secret sense of right and wrong, for wise purposes so deeply implanted by our Creator on the human mind, has the nature, force, and effect of a law; it must possess more than a mere menace, it must, in common with all other laws, have its sanction too: that is, the violation of it must be attended with more pain than pleasure; and the observance of it with greater pleasure, than pain. Such sanction is essential to a law, in order to guard and enforce it: and the wisdom of the legislator is concerned in the annexment of it. Let us then look round and see, how in the instance of this law the sanction operates; let us question ourselves, whether in the present constitution of things more satisfactions might not be acquired by wickedness, for instance by sensual pleasures, by fraud,

fraud, by oppression, than by a strict and rigid adherence to virtue. And this acknowledged, as in truth it must be, since the sanctions do not operate here, we must look farther for them; even to that future state, with a perception of which our Creator hath impressed us.

And in this view of the argument, as we have already observed the goodness of the Deity to be abridged, his wisdom impeached, and his power narrowed, by the denial of a future state; so shall we also find his attribute of justice affected. In the ordinary dispensations of providence there is no discernible distinction of persons: the sun riseth "equally on the just and on the unjust." In the divine distribution of temporal advantages, even the undeserving often seem to be objects of his regard, and partakers of divine bounty: while the humble votary of religion is as frequently overwhelmed with troubles and affliction, and pines perhaps under the oppression of injustice and ignominious penury. Or, to place the argument in a still stronger light, do we not frequently see virtuous men suffering

fering hardships even on account of their virtue, and vicious men enjoying all the satisfactions of life, as if in reward of, and by means of their vices? Here then we find the Almighty has given mankind a general law; and, that part of mankind, which observes such law, we see on that very account miserable: while those, who disobey their Creator's commands and break his law, still continue to enjoy the greatest marks of his favour. Is God, as the apostle argues, *unjust*? Or, as the psalmist exclaims, *hath He forgotten to be gracious*? That is a contradiction in terms: for the Being, whom we stile God, we suppose infinite in all perfections; and therefore infinitely just, and good. No way indeed of accounting for those temporary dispensations of providence, which is consistent with the notions of divine justice, doth reason supply, except this one; the acknowledgment of a future state. The riddle is then resolved, all the numerous difficulties are removed, and the truth fully cleared up: while, on the strongest ground of conviction, we embrace

brace the certainty of a future state from the necessity of it. The mysterious plan of God's dispensations in regard to this life, considered in this view, begins to clear; but we may expect will be more fully illustrated hereafter: the little inequalities between the respective prosperity and adversity of men will then be made up, we shall at that period of retribution see unfolded the wisdom that directed virtue's sufferings, and the triumphs of vice; and all the gracious ways of God will be justified to man.

V. From this view of suffering virtue and triumphant vice, respecting individuals, if we turn our eyes on the world at large, and contemplate man in the aggregate; in whatever condition we regard him, we see a great deal of real misery, and of unalloyed happiness not a single instance. Prosperity tempts him to wantonness and excess: Adversity to murmuring and impatience: riches are productive of care and anxiety; and poverty is complicated misery. Labour is painful; and idleness is irksome. Wisdom points out to

us a deeper sense of the evils we encounter; and folly exposes us to the edge of cross events. *To increase knowledge, said the wisest of men, is to increase trouble: and yet, adds he, the soul without is not good.* Our enjoyments soon pass upon us; our disappointments and inquietudes sit heavy, and last long. We are devoured by eager appetites, and racked by the conflicts of contending passions.

Nor are our bodies better secured against the bolts of pain and trouble, than our minds. Disease waits for us in a thousand shapes, ever ready to seize and unharmourise our frail frames, and rob us of the little ease we might otherwise enjoy. These and numberless other evils, to which mortality is heir, and which whether we experience ourselves, or observe in others, the common ties of humanity in part make our own, furnish us with strong grounds of confidence, that, as our Creator did not make us only for this world, which if there be more misery than happiness in it would have been to create us for misery, though our first state of general existence
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be, like our first entrance into the world, with tears and cries, our progress will be brighter. For our reason and the common notions of mankind teach us concerning God, that He is infinitely good and powerful; the fountain of benignity and perfection. And therefore we conclude from infinite goodness and perfection, that since misery prevails here, He hath made other provision for us, and that we may be happy hereafter.

VI. How do our longings fix on that **HEREAFTER**! How do we anticipate it in our solicitude to grave the record of ourselves here! All means are used to perpetuate mens' names and memories. Houses, cities, and lands we call by our own names. Books are written, exploits are performed from the same principle. For this the lump of dust is embalmed, the proud column rises, and the flattering monument is framed. And for this so general propensity to a future memory, as the minds of all men indicate, how shall we account; except by supposing the Author of nature originally impressed it on the human mind?

mind? But can we, dare we suppose, the God of truth would have given us those false longings after an ideal existence; if we were never to enjoy a real one? Can we admit the probability, I had almost said the possibility, of an idea so general, so apparently innate, so rootedly implanted on the human mind, as that of a future state, to be the baseless coinage of the imagination; a notion fictitious, false, and vain? If, when we quit this evanescent state of existence, all existence cease: what could be so nugatory, as the desire to be thought of, talked of, heard of hereafter? Why so anxious for a precarious Being in a mere name and memory, if we are never to possess a real one? No matter: nugatory, unaccountable, superfluous as this propensity to a posthumous memory may appear; still we possess it, we possess it universally, and therefore naturally. But as nature, or the God of nature hath implanted in the human mind nothing nugatory, or superfluous; what shall we conclude, but that He has given us the perception

ception of what we shall hereafter in reality enjoy?

VII. It may be said, this notion so soothing and flattering is the offspring of pride. And I could grant, it might be so; if it were the dogma only of a few philosophers. But all the world is not run mad with pride. Yet this notion is adopted by all mankind. And here is another argument in proof of the truth of the doctrine, grounding on the universality of it. It is not the peculiar notion of this, or that country; or of any particular age: it extends backwards in point of antiquity, as far as history will carry us, its progress in unbroken chain reaching to the present hour. All nations own it, all nations profit by it: in civilised and polished, as well as in the more barbarous states, it enforces national duties, and is the cement of society. And considering man as by his Creator formed a social Being, whatever principle he may possess universally impressed on the mind, and contributing to support society, must be referred to his Creator too.

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If all nations were governed by the same laws; who would hesitate to ascribe those laws to a tablet written by the Deity on the human heart? If all nations entertained on any one point one general opinion; would it not be reasonable to refer it to the same cause? And is not this exactly the case, respecting the doctrine of a future state? Amidst the vast variety of nations and people, they who are strangers to each other's laws and customs, and as different in their manners, as they are distant in situation, all concur in the common belief of a future existence. The opinion is as general as light, and extends as far as the empire of reason.

Thus stands the proof of a future state on principles of reason: and if these arguments, taken singly, be not sufficient to carry conviction with them: added together they approach very near to demonstration. We Christians, however, have clearer evidence of the truth of this doctrine. Christ our Lord in his discourses expressly declared it; and evidenced it in his resurrection. His apostles, and disci-

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ples, and numbers of the primitive Christians, ere Christianity became established, lived miserably, and died miserably, in full confidence of this interesting truth. If we believe it, and we see what abundant reason we have to believe it, we shall be necessarily led to avail ourselves of it; and secure to ourselves a portion of that happiness in another world, which from the state and condition of human affairs is unattainable in this: Happiness unalloyed in quality; unbounded in duration. Of which that we may all be hereafter partakers, &c.

SERMON VI.

2 SAM. xii. 23.

I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.

IT has been objected to the Jewish religion, that it taught nothing concerning another, and a better life *; which objection was by an eminent writer admitted, and ingeniously converted into an argument in proof of the divinity of it †. But the objection seems to have been unfounded; and the theory built on the admission of it, with whatever learning and ability maintained, must of course fall to the ground. Though the doctrine of a future state may not be directly held out in the

* Lord Bolingbrooke.

† Bishop Warburton.

books of the law, as an encouragement to the observance of it; in the prophetic writings, and even in the historical parts of the Old Testament, there appears so strong evidence of it having been at every period of their history the general belief of the people; that nothing but powerful prejudice in favour of a system, and great ingenuity, could support the opposite opinion. There was indeed a small sect among the Jews, who denied the doctrine: but as they were distinguished for their singularity, the peculiar tenet of the Sadducees serves only to confirm the truth of the contrary opinion being the received and general one.

The passage, which is the subject of my present discourse, is capable of two very opposite interpretations. It may signify, "my son is gone everlastingly to mingle with the dust, which must be my fate too:" or, "my son is gone to another world; and there I again shall meet him." According to the first interpretation, the reflection is the language of despair; admitted in the latter sense, of consolation.

consolation. The context will beyond a doubt evince, which is the proper signification. And from thence it appears, that upon this consideration, “ though his son “ should not return to him, he should go “ to his son,” he arose from the bed of affliction, *he washed and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the Lord, and worshipped; then he came to his own house,* and administered consolation to his afflicted family. The implication of the passage therefore is unquestionably consolatory: and the reflection is indeed matter of the greatest consolation, that in such a case of affliction can be administered; it was the natural result too of a serious and devout mind, such as David possessed. And under the authority of the passage so understood, I proceed further to consider the subject of my last discourse.

The arguments that reason supplies in evidence of the reality of a future state, I presumed in that discourse to approach very near to demonstration; I noticed the objections to those arguments, as in the

course of them they arose; and, to give full weight to the truth of the doctrine, the force of two general difficulties that doubt and curiosity have suggested, I will in the sequel examine; which, of little weight in themselves, will lead to some interesting reflections.

I. If this doctrine, saith the Sceptic, so important in itself, and so conducive to the comforts of the human mind, be true; why is it so faintly delineated: why shaded to us in the dark ground of conjecture, rather than painted in the glowing colours of incontrovertible truth?

II. And why, it is farther urged, hath even Christianity, whose boast is to have brought truth and immortality to light, afforded us no information of the nature of such a state.

I. As to the first exception, the arguments advanced in the preceding discourse prove it I think to be not sufficiently founded; I do not conceive the doctrine of a future state to be faintly adumbrated. The arguments indeed, which reason supplies in evidence of this truth, may some

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of them be of such a nature, as the gross of mankind, unused to abstruse speculations, are not able to comprehend or pursue. But without those arguments, the doctrine is generally admitted. Nations unrefined by science, untrained to the subtleties of argumentation, especially as employed on abstract subjects, with universal consent acknowledge it. It is an opinion natural, congenial to the human mind; no matter whether with philosophic acuteness unlearned men can give reasons, why it must be so: God is their Teacher, He wrote it on the mind of man, and the lesson must be true.

It might indeed have been more evidently declared: and to give full weight to the objection, let us for a moment suppose it had been so, and consider the consequences. Supposing our Creator had confirmed it to us in a stronger and a clearer manner, supposing he had made it a subject of demonstration, had given us assurance of it by a continued train of messengers from another world, and that the object of their mission had been to pic-

ture to us the endless pleasures of that world; let us consider what effect it would have on us, as inhabitants of this. Man is by his Creator placed in this world, as an active and social being; he has many relations in life assigned him, he has many duties to fulfil. The world exhibits to him a busy stage, and calls forth his best exertions in the performance of the part, that is cast for him. He has his own wants to satisfy; and, according to his station, those of others to provide for. He has difficulties to encounter; and to cheer and support him in the discharge of such his painful labours, consistent gratifications are allowed him. But shew him in full blaze the felicities of another life; and what a cloud would they cast on this? He would lose his relish for the comparatively poor, and contemptible pleasures, which his gracious Creator hath holden out to him here, as sweetners of his cares, and incitements to duty. The business of life would stagnate; and as the incitements to it ceased to stimulate, the duties themselves would be disregarded. In vain
aspirings

aspirings after that future happiness which is placed before his eyes, he would overlook the purposes for which he was stationed here: every concern of life would be a burthen to him; and, in the near view of the happiness before him, he would be in danger of losing it, by neglecting the means appointed as the qualification for its attainment. For this world is a state of trial and probation, which calls forth our best exertions in the discharge of active duties. It exacts the practice of many virtues; and a successful conflict with many temptations. The mind must be tried and purified; before it be exalted.

These considerations may suffice to convince the futility of the exception to the truth of a future state, from the defect of a more absolute assurance of the reality of it, than our Creator hath been pleased to grant us. They will also demonstrate the wisdom of the Deity, in not superseding the duties of this life by giving a more explicit assurance of another, than He has been pleased to grant us: and the arguments,

ments, that have been already urged in evidence of the reality of that other, will illustrate the Divine Goodness in indulging us with such perception of it; as is sufficient to afford us the strongest motives to perform our duty here, in order to render ourselves worthy of that happiness which is announced to us hereafter.

II. As to the next exception, it constitutes a question of curiosity. If we have sufficient assurance that we shall exist hereafter, happy or miserable, as by our conduct in this life we may deserve to be; an unreasonable solicitude to know the nature of that happiness or misery would be presumptuous, and therefore neither the light of nature or revelation have specifically declared it. And unreasonable and rash would be the inference; that because the nature of future happiness is not specified, therefore the existence of it is a doctrine that does not claim our belief. This would be a long stride to a false conclusion. The various opinions on the subject that various nations have adopted, like copies in painting which passing for the original of
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some eminent artist serve to prove the reality of an original, confirm the general truth. And reason, that, as we have seen, assures us of the real existence of such a state, though it furnish us with few particulars respecting the nature of it, represents it in general to be to the good a state of reward. As such we assume it, and so instructed suppose our nature will be exalted; and may reasonably infer, the happiness, we shall then be destined to enjoy, will be such as we are now incapable of perfectly comprehending. Yet from what reason enables us to collect, and the hints which revelation occasionally affords, the subject we shall find not left altogether in impenetrable darkness. And as it is an interesting one, assisted with the light, which these two guides afford, we will in the sequel pursue it: as it is also veiled in mystery, we will pursue it with diffidence and caution.

The subject presents a vast field of conjecture. Some have supposed the soul to possess certain latent qualities; which, when it is disencumbered of its material clog,

clog, will be displayed, and open new sources of untasted pleasures.

Others have conceived, that if the same soul and body be reunited, they will possess the same qualities they had before they were separated, those qualities respectively improved and enlarged.

Others again have thought that the separated soul shall have a new and glorified body, endowed with other faculties than those it now possesses, and capable of greater pleasures, than those which in its present state it enjoys. And this opinion hath some support in scripture; and particularly in St. Paul's reasoning on the resurrection.

I leave those particular points of opinion, to consider some general ones more interesting to us; and in the discussion of which we shall receive more assistance from the light of reason, and the clearer evidence of revelation.

1. And first, respecting future happiness, Reason seems to instruct us, that, it cannot consist in sensual pleasures: because all bodily gratifications have their plenary indulgence here. All appetences,

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as derived from the senses, find their corresponding objects in this world; here fix, and satiate. But the improvement of the mind, and our advances in knowledge, seem in progressive state; and neither satiate, nor satisfy. In those pursuits one acquisition only excites to the desire of another; the mind's vast grasp ever reaching forward, ever gaining, and something farther ever in view: like a traveller, whose course lies over a long ridge of lofty mountains, who, one summit surmounted, has another in view, and, that gained, serves only to lead his steps to another. These unsatisfied desires in the pursuit of knowledge afford fair ground of argument, that those longings of the mind shall some time or other be fully gratified, and that future happiness shall in great measure consist in the enlargement of the intellectual powers.

In our further enquiry, how far and in what respect the intellectual powers shall be enlarged, reason affords no aid; there even imagination fails us. Revelation however will help us a little: on this point the scriptures reflect some light.
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They inform us that our happiness shall consist in a permissible approach to God, and a distant resemblance of Him in his imitable perfections: that, after death has closed our eyes, *we shall awake up after the likeness of God, and be satisfied with it*: and again, that *we shall see Him, as he is*. How that adorable Being will then communicate himself to his creatures, we cannot now either explain, or conceive, for *we know but in part, and see through a glass, darkly*. But we may satisfy ourselves with the assurance, that He will do it in a manner suitable to the nature of rational beings; and we may conceive it to be in a communication by knowledge, love, and likeness. And according to this idea, imperfect as it is, we may collect, that to see God, will be to know Him; and to know Him, must be to enjoy Him; for the more we know Him, such is His greatness, the more we shall admire Him; and such is His goodness, the more we shall love Him. And the more we know Him, admire Him, and love Him; the more we shall be led to imitate, and be raised to resemble Him.

2. Secondly,

2. Secondly, as the soul shall in the next state of existence be advanced in knowledge; we are also instructed, that it shall receive an increase of positive happiness too. If amidst all the fascinations of this life a superior understanding and elevated turn of mind afford a kind of pleasure, which the world can neither take away, nor give; how may we reasonably suppose those pleasures to be increased, when the inveiglements with which the world fascinates, and the evils with which it torments, shall no longer involve and perplex us! The body itself, to which the soul is individually united, involves it in many evils; and the world, like a vast prison-house full of noxious diseases, diffuses widely round many evils more. And therefore those pure and unmixed delights, the soul shall enjoy after it is freed from the dreggy particles of matter with which the body bends and ties it down, have been a general subject of exultation with all the philosophers in the heathen world, who admitted the immortality of it. And consistent with the whispers of Reason on this point, distinctly

tinctly and clearly speaks the language of scripture. *God himself, saith the divine Apostle, shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away* *. The former,—that is, all those evils, troubles, and calamities, which they saw and suffered in this world, shall for ever vanish and disappear; there shall be left no pain to torment the body, no care to distress the mind, no vestige of those crosses and vexations, which infest the terrestrial state of man †.

3. Thirdly,

* Rev. xxi. 4.

† Profane as well as sacred history represents the original state of human nature to have been of very superior excellence to that which man at present possesses. And the implications of scripture give room to suppose, that had man continued in a state of duty and obedience to his maker, he would not have experienced death, but have passed in a regular gradation to a state of greater happiness and perfection. Death therefore having broken the original chain of nature, and interrupted the continuation of human happiness; the state destined for those, who have exercised themselves in virtuous habits and are qualified for the participation of happiness in the world to come, it is no improbable supposition will

3. Thirdly, as the doctrine of the world to come hath in all ages obtained the unforced assent of all mankind; various, as might be supposed, have been the conceits about the locality of it. Some have placed it in the centre of the earth: nor have there been wanting those, who have fixed it in the sun. Others have confined the departed soul to the regions of surrounding air*. And others again have consigned it to some or other of the planets. But all the satisfaction on this point that reason or revelation affords, is, that good

will be, immediately after death, and before the general resurrection, a restoration to that state of felicity, human nature enjoyed before sin and death had effected the breach in it. And accordingly our Saviour with exactest truth told the repentant malefactor, that he should that day be with him in *Paradise*; using the very name affixed to that region of happiness in which mankind were originally placed: and with the name may we not believe the Word of Truth pronounced the thing?

* Hence the old Celtic doctrine, which we find expressed in some of the fragments of the ancient Bards and Druids: wherein their heroes are represented as addressing the shades of their departed ancestors, whom they suppose enthroned on clouds to inhabit the vast expanse above us, sometimes in invocations to assist them, sometimes to look down on their glorious labours.

men will hereafter be finally happy in a place stiled, in scripture language, Heaven; and the wicked miserable in a place, termed Gehenna, or Hell. Cicero hails with ecstasy the glorious day, when he shall join the blest society of the great and good *. But not a word doth the great philosopher in any part of his writings suggest respecting the place. And yet because reason doth not afford us ground whereon to build even the probability of a conjecture on the subject, and revelation is silent about it; let us not be alarmed: Omnipotence is the architect of the world, which He hath assured to us; and His is the immensity of space, wherein to build it.

4. Thus uninformed as we are of the particular locality of the world to come, the object, that seems next to present itself to our consideration, is the society we shall there enjoy. And on this point of enquiry, which is much more interesting to us than the place, reason we shall find will

in the world to

* De Senectute.

afford us some light, and revelation will contribute more. There is no property of man, that more distinguishes him from the rest of the animal creation, than his social character. Those fond relations of parent, child, husband, brother, friend, are the sinews of society which tie men to each other by a compact, not dissolving as soon as the mutual wants of each other cease, but continuing to bind them closer and closer, as time lengthens the connection. Hence the chain that often confines us to a spot, where surrounded by those tender relatives, we prefer the struggle with care, poverty, and distress; rather than migrate to a distant soil, where perhaps those evils might be avoided, and every opposite good, honour, affluence, and ease might be procured and enjoyed. Hence too the aggravated pangs of death, that rend the heart on leaving, when we are summoned hence, our near and dear relatives behind us. So formed by our Creator for society, that social appetite so interwoven with our nature, why should we suppose that we shall not carry about

us, through every mode of existence, as long as we continue to exist? Without it we should not be human beings: and in the larger degree those relations extend, the larger share of happiness, other circumstances permitting, it is observable we generally possess: and on the contrary, to be unsocial, is, in synonymous terms, to be unhappy*. This principle therefore, so characteristic of human nature, so congenial to the soul of man, so conducive to his happiness even in this life, reason instructs us to conclude will be continued to him in the next state of existence; and probably with increased satisfactions, and in a more extensive degree.

5. And having such ground to believe that the social appetites, we enjoy here, shall be indulged us in the next state of our existence, we find ourselves a great way advanced in our farther inquiry, who in that future state will be our associates. In this investigation if we attend to the

*. On this idea is founded the punishment, lately introduced in this country for malefactors, of condemnation to separate cells.

feelings

feelings which nature impresses; they instruct us, that to render us happy in the society to which we may be introduced, it must consist of Beings possessing dispositions, inclinations, desires similar to our own. As therefore to the good the next state will be a state of happiness; the blessed inhabitants of the world, to which they are called, we infer, shall be distinguished for their goodness too. It would be a heavy drawback from the happiness of the next world, if the pure of heart and votary of virtue should be consigned to the society of spirits stained and polluted by the practice of vice. Similitude of tempers and manners is a chief ingredient in the satisfactions of society, which we experience here: it is so essential to the happiness of a human being; that shut up a strictly virtuous person in a house devoted to profligacy and riot; and, with the command of every thing conducive to the plenary enjoyment of happiness, amidst a profusion of gratifications, he would be miserable. Accordingly, as the happiness of the next life is assumed to be an increase

of happiness; whatever, derogates from it in this, it is reasonably inferred, will find no place there. In the next world therefore reason gives us assurance of finding a society good as ourselves, like ourselves, and qualified to conduce with us to mutual happiness.

Thus far reason goes in our information: let us next consult revelation on the point. Scripture informs us, that the wicked shall go to a place of everlasting punishment, *prepared for the Devil and his Angels*. And there are some passages in scripture which impliedly afford us the converse instruction; that the good shall be translated to those realms of bliss which the good angels inhabit. When our Lord says, in the next world *they shall be as the Angels of God**: If in manners, and habits, and

* I will not, with the “cunning commentators” of Dr. Donne †, who slip over a passage because it is difficult or may seem to contradict a favourite opinion, pass this text unnoticed. *In the resurrection, saith our Lord; they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God* ‡. And the declaration hath by some been thought to

† See Donne's Satires.

‡ Matthew, xxiii. 30.

and customs men shall in the succeeding state of existence become like the Angels; so qualified for their society, fitted for it by a resemblance of them, why may they not cherish the hopes that they shall be

militate against the supposed knowledge of each other in a future state: which has no such direct, nor, as I conceive, even implied signification. The words were addressed in answer to a question of the Sadducees, urged with an affected quaintness against the existence of a future state. And the plain and obvious signification of the passage is, that in the resurrection, that is, in a future state, the sensual pleasures will not attach to our renovated nature: that as there shall then be no more death, neither will marriage, instituted to supply the waste of mortality, be any longer necessary, and of course have place any longer. But to infer from thence, that all knowledge of each other shall be blotted out from memory, is neither a necessary conclusion, nor a just one. Before this can be made good, it must be proved that in the next state we shall lose all consciousness of what we were in this. And when that is evinced, another and more difficult question will present itself: which is, "What is the principle that shall constitute our identity?" If it be again replied, that *all* our consciousness will not be effaced, but only a part of it: it still remains to be resolved, where we shall draw the line between the portion of consciousness that will be retained, and that which will have no place in memory. We must afford some reason for any part that we may suppose blotted out: and it would be difficult, I conceive, to assign a satisfactory one for the erasure of the knowledge, the innocent, the delightful knowledge of each other.

admitted into their fellowship and communion? When a sinner repents, the Angels are represented as being so interested for his happiness, as to rejoice in his conversion. And how shall we better account for that joy; than by supposing that they thereby gain a companion, a friend, one associate more? *Father, saith our Lord, I will that they, whom thou hast given me be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me* *. And where doth he reside, but in his kingdom: where legions of Angels, as himself informs us, are at his command? If therefore he willed that his immediate disciples should be with him; all his faithful followers we may conclude will join the blessed assemblage, one fold under one shepherd, happy in his presence, and united in community with each other. In words still clearer doth the apostle to the Hebrews express himself respecting their admission into the society of blessed spirits. *Ye are come, says he,—to an innumerable*

* John xvii. 24.

company of Angels, to the general assembly of the church of the first-born which are written in Heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect *. This declaration in the society of Angels directly includes *the spirits of just men made perfect*: those who have perfected and finished their course; who have escaped all the dangers and temptations of the present world. With the above passage, though others might be cited to the same purport, I will conclude my citations from scripture, enforcing the suggestions of reason; in proof that the society, with which the good shall in the next world be united, will consist of beings of dispositions virtuous, wise, and happy; angels, and purified spirits of the just and good.

We have now gone a great way under the guidance of reason and revelation, in preparing for the question, which, on the loss of a near and dear friend, interested affection with earnestness and solicitude to its own heart addresses; “ shall we here-

* Hebr. xii. 22, 23.

“ after

“ after ever meet, and recognise each other, again ?” The hope of that is real consolation ; it is among the first pleasures anticipation supplies : let us enquire, what ground we have to entertain it.

6. We have already assumed man a sociable being, with relations, not ceasing with the instinctive wants that produced them, but strengthening by continuance, and clinging closer and closer to the heart. When the child's wants of a parent's fostering hand no longer exist ; filial and parental affection still continues, time not extinguishing, but increasing it. Husband and wife, when instinctive passion has subsided, feel an affection, more permanent than it, still tying their hearts with mutual fondness to each other. What shall we say of friendship ; an affection founded not on want, or any sensual instinct ? How does the mutual attachment of congenial minds increase by time and converse ; each feeling himself only half of the other, and only, when together, perfectly and completely one ! Shall we suppose these near and dear connections, increasing in strength

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as by time united, if this world be but the beginning of our existence, and there be another to succeed it, can we conceive these fond attachments, scarcely formed before they are dissolved, never again to be united? This world, as the beginning of our existence, is the beginning of all our virtuous habits, of all our opening attachments: and if, growing and increasing as we proceed in life, they be by death suddenly and everlastingly dissolved; they might seem to be begun, only that we may be left disconsolate and afflicted for the loss of them. But why should they be dissolved? If there be a world to come, where the good and virtuous, *the just made perfect*, shall again exist; why shall it not be given them in that world to meet, and mutually recognise the near and dear objects of their former affection? Let conjecture, if it can, produce a reason why it should not. If conjecture can not take such ground; reasons not being wanting to support the opinion, that it will, we must admit the truth of it.

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We with reason believe that our capacity of knowledge shall in the next world be gloriously improved: and what reason is there to conjecture, that we shall lose a single ray of any beneficial knowledge which we now possess? No such loss can be included in a gradation towards perfection. When therefore the souls of good men hereafter meet and are made perfect; we must suppose they retain all their former knowledge, and likewise have a large portion of additional knowledge communicated to them. And that knowledge, with the happiness attached to it, which we leave with most regret; expectation flatters us we shall again enjoy, in the renewal of our virtuous affections for kindred and congenial souls. It is the only kind of future knowledge, and of happiness from thence resulting, of which we can form any possible comprehension: and therefore, indulged with the hopes of it, we trust those hopes will not deceive us.

Where shall we fix the extent of consciousness? If it be necessary to constitute
identity;

identity; why should it not extend to circumstances in our former existence most interesting and affecting? Shall consciousness just so far serve us, as to suggest, we once existed; and, as to every particular in that existence, shall memory be blotted out? What is consciousness of past-existence; but consciousness of deeds, good or bad, in that existence committed? And how shall we, or why should we, separate deeds from persons; implicated and involved as they are with one another?

Considering further this world as a school of discipline, and the next as a state of retribution, our station in that other will we must suppose be respectively assigned according to our particular merits in this; and may not unreasonably conceive, that we shall consequently retain marks of distinction, and powers of discrimination; some individual characters of our former existence and condition. And so appointed, and so characterized, it is not likely that we should want either propensities to search for, or powers to discover, our friends and relations in a state

state of prior existence. All this is probable; and I contend no farther for the general theory, than as it contributes to place in a view conciliatory of rational assent the special point of mutual recognition; supported as it is by other arguments, and the stronger implication of Revelation.

When we reflect how largely, according to our present apprehension of things, a knowledge of each other in that state, of whatever nature it may be, we are destined hereafter to enjoy, would contribute to our happiness in it; even that consideration, which heightens the beauty of the prospect, tends also to strengthen the expectation, that what we now anticipate will be hereafter in reality indulged us. After our heart-rending separation, to recognise one another in a better world, what ecstasy of joy would it impart! How would it heighten the pleasure of that *conversation which is in Heaven*, to enjoy it with an old and dearly loved friend; with those, whom we had formed to virtue, or to whose forming hand perhaps we owed
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our own ; with those, by whom supported, or whom with mutual aid supporting, we had safely passed through the stormy paths of life, never again to sigh or sorrow more ! And as every consistent degree of happiness, consistent according to God's decree with the nature of man, will we humbly conceive be indulged him ; this large addition of happiness, we hope and trust on the best argument that can be produced, the infinite goodness of the Almighty, will not be withheld.

But it may against this supposition be urged, that if we be indulged in the knowledge of those friends that are happy ; we must also know, by not finding others in those realms of happiness, that they are miserable : and if the former knowledge would increase our happiness, the latter would proportionably derogate from it, and tend to render us miserable. But this does not follow ; it is not an inference, that because we know the happiness of happy friends, we must also know the misery of those that fail of happiness. Those may not only be struck out of the book of the
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the living, but out of the memory also of those who are there enrolled. Our knowledge, all our knowledge, we trust, in the next world will be improved; all but the knowledge of sin and misery; and with that state, Revelation instructs us, sorrow is incompatible*.

In further confirmation of this pleasing doctrine, let us advert to the general reception it has among all nations obtained; an assent almost as universal, as the doctrine of a future state itself. The poets of Greece and Rome inculcated it; and some of the best men, and greatest philosophers, of those polished nations both believed and taught it. “O glorious day,” says one of the greatest of them, “when I shall leave
 “*this sink of profligacy and vice* † behind me,
 “and join my beloved Cato in the assembly of the great and good.” When the wretched African is torn from his family and friends, and sold to a savage master in a distant quarter of the globe; we know his comfort, his consolation, his

* Revelation xxi. 4.

† Ex hac Turba et Colluvione.—Cic.

confidence

confidence is in the hopes of meeting in unmolested realms of happiness his beloved friends again. This in foreign lands is his song of rapture, when the heart is exhilarated; this is his theme of consolation, when he sits down by the waters of captivity and weeps. The untutored inhabitant of remote islands in the South seas, as modern travellers inform us, when with voluntary incisions she hath flucied her blood in agonies of grief for the loss of a husband, a parent, or a child, throws away the instrument of desperation, and calms her troubled mind, in the prospect of meeting again. Nay, and even when the expiring Christian bids the friend of his bosom, the object of his affection, or the partner of his cares and joys, the long FAREWEL; how does he feel the agonizing soul supported, which sometimes expires in smiles of sweet complacency, on the hope, the belief, the confidence of meeting again!

If nature teach this; it is the God of nature that so instructs; if religion inculcate it; it is still the doctrine of God: it

is the doctrine of Him, who is the essence of goodness and the fountain of truth, of Him who can not deceive.

Turning from the volume of nature to that of revelation, the same doctrine we shall find enforced. The general tenour of the New Testament represents the good and virtuous in the next world, *living with Christ*, as composing *his kingdom*, and, as such, living of course in community with one another; *heirs and joint heirs of the same promise*. And in that mutual intercourse with each other, on what principle of reason shall we deny of each other the mutual knowledge? On Peter occasionally urging his own merit and that of his fellow apostles, in leaving all that they had and following Christ, our Saviour tells them; that, “in the regeneration [the
“renovation of things] when the son of
“man shall sit on the throne of his glory,
“they also shall sit upon twelve thrones,
“judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”
And who can conceive otherwise of that promise, than that it evidently implies, the twelve apostles so appointed would perfectly

fectly know each other? And if these judges know each other, why shall we deny the same mutual recognition to those that shall be judged? There seems nothing adducible in disproof of the cotemporaries of those tribes, on that awful occasion summoned to the solemn tribunal, being known to, and knowing, each other. And if the tribes of Israel shall then know each other, why shall not all mankind?

I have already advanced the opinion, that the stations of the good in the next world will be appointed with individual distinctions, according to their particular merits in this *: in confirmation of which opinion the prophet Daniel declares, that *they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever †*. In similar allusion, the apostle to the Corinthians expresses himself: *As one star differeth from another star in glory; so also shall it be in the resurrection ‡*. And thus individually distinguished in the next world,

* See page 125. † Dan. xii. 3. ‡ 1 Cor. xv. 42.

such distinction being in consequence of our conduct in this, some marks of discrimination that may distinguish us here, might I observed, reasoning abstractedly, attach to us hereafter: which doctrine, we hence collect, has from scripture also the same implied support.

When our Lord asserts, in confutation of the Sadducean doctrine, *the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, to be the God of the living, and not of the dead**; will it be doubted, that the Patriarchs, so eminently distinguished, as being alive, were alive to each other? And if they then lived in mutual knowledge of each other, it is a plain and obvious inference, that so also shall we.

Such was the opinion of the royal mourner, expressed in the words of the text. According to the exposition of the passage already offered, it clearly signifies, that he should meet his son, recognise him, and enjoy his society? Else where was the consolation implied? If he were never to know him after their separation

* Matt. xxii. 32.

in this world, know him as a relation, a near and dear connexion; that son was for ever lost to him. It is indeed a degree of consolation, to know that our friends, when they depart this life, are happy in the next: but it is not a consolation equal to that of going to them, meeting them, seeing them happy, participating with them in that happiness, and enjoying their society; and nothing less than this the reflection of David seems evidently to imply.

I have not yet finished my observations on this interesting subject; nor can I comprise them within the limits of this discourse: I must therefore refer them, with their proper inferences, to a future occasion. And in the mean time I leave to every one, to form his own reflections on the general truth of what I have endeavoured to illustrate and confirm. They will lead him to appreciate this world, and the next. And on a comparative view, he will easily distinguish, which claims his utmost attention, and which merits his contempt. When he considers

how little difference there is, in point of happiness, between the highest situation of life and the lowest; he will wonder at the pains he has taken, at the toils he has endured, at the cares it has cost him, to acquire a little and a little more of this world's good, to rise in it a little and a little higher. He will lament, that he has not with more earnestness exerted himself to secure an eminent station in the world to come; where every degree of eminence will be a degree of happiness. And reflections such as these cannot but influence his future conduct. Under the impression of them I therefore leave him; supplicating God, of his infinite goodness, to give efficiency to them in the attainment of everlasting happiness, through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ our blessed Lord and Saviour.

SERMON VII.

MATT. xxiii. 43.

To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.

THAT death is a change of existence, and not an annihilation of it; that it only alters our mode of being, and does not destroy our being; that it is the portal of another world, and not an everlasting sleep; we have already seen fairly written in the page of reason, and graven in deeper characters in the sacred scripture of revelation. But however general the belief of a future state, doubts have been entertained of the immediate enjoyment of it, after the precincts of this world are passed. It has been surmised, that a long sleep awaits the departed soul, even till the last trumpet rouse it to a general resurrection, for the purpose of a solemn trial, and a gene-

ral judgment. Not a comfortable doctrine this: for though the two points, death and resurrection, even if a hundred thousand years should roll between them, will apparently touch each other; the mind cannot divest itself of the sensation of a long intervening state of non-entity. It is pained at the idea, and inquisitively asks; when the soul quits the body, if it be not entirely extinct, in what mode of torpid existence the active principle of spirit reposes; where is the bed, on which it lies, held in the fetters of death's near relation * sleep? You call it sleep: but either shew me how, or inform me where, it exists; else I must think and feel it extinction †.

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* *Confanguineus leti sopor.*—VIRG.

† Though school Divinity be out of fashion, the fair and candid reasoner will attribute to an argument all the credit it deserves, whether it flow from the pen of a schoolman, or of a modern materialist. On this presumption I take occasion in this place to address to the candour of the advocate for the sleep of souls the following passage. “If the soul be not a permanent substance, but only a quality or crisis, which, when the body dies, perisheth and is extinguished with it, it is impossible that the same numerical man should rise after death;

That as soon as the soul quits the body, it exists in another state, that it is not for a moment inert and torpid, the light of nature suggested to the Heathen world: it was the opinion of the wisest men in the most polished states, those for instance of Greece and Rome; it is the opinion also of the more barbarous countries in every quarter of the globe. The sacred writers, when they speak of a future state, as in appealing to it, their general object is to excite to virtue and deter from vice, include in it the doctrine of a future judgment, and final retribution of rewards and punishments; previous to which is implied a resurrection. And as such general judgment, when Christ shall descend in awful pomp to judge the living and the

death; because the form or soul which perished, can not be numerically the same with the form or soul which is restored. "For that is numerically one, which is contained in one common term; as that is one line, which is not cut off or interrupted; and that one motion, which is not discontinued by rest. But there is no common term between that which once was and perished, and that which afterwards is produced: for non-existence came between them, and therefore they can not be numerically the same."

dead,

dead, is represented as not taking place till the consummation of all things; to that period, by a loose assumption, some have in opinion been led to defer the resurrection, as in supposed union with it. But the term resurrection, according to the original word, means no more than a re-instatement *; which, if referring to existence, may take place immediately after death, as well as at a distant and general period; and may be, and is, I conceive, as to time, distinct from the general judgment. In that period of future existence, between the resurrection and the general judgment, which is termed the intermediate state, it is intimated in scripture that the good shall enjoy a degree of happiness, and the wicked suffer misery; but it is also from thence collected, that neither shall respectively receive their full and ultimate retribution, till the general judgment.

Another reason, that has contributed not a little to induce some to slip over the intermediate state, appears to have been

* *Αναστασις.*

an apprehension that the doctrine in some measure countenanced the notion entertained by the church of Rome concerning purgatory. And it seems with me scarcely to admit a doubt, that the doctrine of an intermediate state was really the doctrine of the apostolical and primitive ages; and that the Romanists afterwards availed themselves of it for mercenary purposes. Hence masses for the dead, exorcisms, and the long ritual list that enriched and aggrandised that secularised church. But what is there so perfect, as not to be liable to corruption? And why should truth be rejected, because it may be abused? Let us not be induced, through a vain fear of purgatory, to relinquish the just hopes of Paradise. Reason assumes the soul an active principle, alike incapable of inertion, as decay: and supposes it, when it leaves this world, to exist in some happy and more perfect state. We will briefly enquire how far the language of scripture in this article confirms the suggestions of reason.

When,

When, on the murder of Stephen, his prayer was, *Lord Jesus, receive my Spirit*; I think it very clear, that his petition was for the immediate reception of his spirit: of which if any doubt be entertained, a declaration of St. Paul will illustrate it. *I am in a strait*, saith the Apostle to the Philippians *, *between two; having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, for it is much better: but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you.* St. Stephen's petition to Christ to *receive his soul*, and the assurance which St. Paul expresses that after he departed hence, he should be with Christ, do certainly allude to the same period: viz. the period of their *immediate* departure hence. This is clearly ascertained by the manner in which St. Paul expresses himself. *It is better*, says he, *to depart hence, and to be with Christ.* So it certainly was; if, when he departed hence, he would be with Christ. But surely he would have been much better here, an active labourer in Christ's vineyard on earth, than to be

* Phil. i. 23.

in a state of insensibility, a mere non-entity. He would certainly have judged it better, to have enjoyed existence in this world, with his friends and companions, his fellow labourers in the great cause, which brought his Lord from Heaven, than to have lain useless in the grave, lost to all good purposes in this life, and to all enjoyment of another.

Let us next examine the passage in St. Matthew's Gospel, at which we have already glanced, where our Lord declares the "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to be the God not of the dead, but of the living *." The declaration was made to confute the Sadducees, who denied the existence of a future state. But when our Lord made use of this argument, if those patriarchs had not at the time been numbered among the living, had they been then held in the bonds of death; would he with such an instance as this—indeed, on that supposition, with a false assumption would he have confronted them? The passage, to acquire propriety,

* Matt. xxii. 32.

necessarily

necessarily implies, that they were then alive; and the argument in form stands thus: “ God is the God, as you acknowledge, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; “ but He is the God, not of non-entities, “ but of living existences; therefore Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, are now living. “ They are living souls, still under the “ protection of their God, and still enjoying, perhaps in a nearer approach to “ Him, marks of his favour.”

These passages we will close with that of the text: *to day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.* We can not dispute the truth of the assurance: we must acknowledge, that the malefactor was according to our Lord’s promise that day in the enjoyment of his society, in the place of separated souls, by him denominated Paradise; unless we admit the shifts and subterfuges of certain sectarists to evade the force of this plain text; which, says a very learned and able prelate*, “ are so perfectly ridiculous, that I must make myself ridiculous,

* Bishop Bull.

“ if I should mention them, much more
“ if I should go about seriously to refute
“ them.”

One therefore of these two inferences must follow : either a miracle must have been effected on this malefactor's account, by which he escaped the common destination of mankind, and, instead of a state of insensibility, participated of the happiness of superior beings, enjoying the percipiency of existence with them in paradise : or he was removed to that state of happy existence, into which the separated souls of good men, *the spirits of the just made perfect*, after their departure from this world, are admitted ; in reward for his belief in Christ, and acknowledgement of his divinity : *Lord, remember me, when thou comest into thy kingdom.*

That the first was not the case, may I think be presumed from the following considerations. First, this malefactor does not appear to have been a character, that merited the display of such a miracle in his favour. He had, according to his own confession, been a very bad man, and suffered

ferred that severe punishment *justly*: we can scarcely therefore suppose, that he was made so eminent an exception to the common lot of humanity, as such a miracle represents him. In the next place, it was a miracle which could not be attended with the same circumstance of publicity, with which all the other miracles of Christ were accompanied; nor, through defect in that circumstance, in any degree contribute, as they did, to illustrate the divinity of his mission.

Hence it follows, that the latter inference is the proper and true one: that the malefactor, in common with other sinners, to whom we find our Lord on their repentance and belief in him had spoken pardon and peace, had obtained remission of his sins; and, in consequence of such forgiveness, passed, according to the common lot of humanity, into the paradisiacal state, the region destined to receive the departed souls of the just and good*.

Those

* I mean not to pass by a text, that has been supposed to militate against the doctrine, for which I am contending.

Those observations premised, in brief detail of what the scriptures inculcate respecting a future state, the doctrine is as follows. *Man was made perfect*: that is,

Martha says, I know my brother will rise again in the resurrection in the last day; supposing the soul would not be raised, or re-established in existence, till summoned to the general judgment at the last day. And from her declaration may clearly be inferred such her belief. But what does our Lord reply to her suggestion? *I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth on me, even though he die, shall live: and every one, that liveth and believeth on me, shall not die for ever. Believest thou this?* The question, *believest thou this*, evidently implies, that our Lord had instructed her on a point, of which she was before ignorant. Let us then consider what was the article, in which she had expressed her belief. It was *in the resurrection at the last day*. This opinion of her's our Lord corrects; and tells her, that through him is the resurrection; that to the believer in him there is no continued death; but that, *he shall pass from death unto life*.

The Instruction, which our Lord in this passage communicated to Martha, exactly corresponds with the general doctrine of scripture, viz. that death was denounced as the punishment of man's disobedience; and that Christ purchased for him redemption from the power of death, and by his own resurrection brought conviction even to the senses that he should not be holden by it; and therefore that after death has been executed on us, through Christ we are re-established in existence, and live. So that in effect, as our Lord tells Martha, *we never die*; death being no more than a door opening from one state to another.

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perfect

perfect in his nature; destined to a progressive advance in knowledge and happiness, had he continued in that state of perfect innocence, in which he was created. But becoming disobedient to his Almighty Creator's commands, he incurred the penalty of such his disobedience; which was, death: *dying thou shalt die*. And as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; so by one man also came the remission of sin, and a reinstatement in the original possession of life. The penalty of sins thus paid, and the power of death superseded, the departed soul is placed in the same state it would have enjoyed if it had observed *the righteousness of the law*, that is, remained in a state of unfinning obedience: of course, it must after death immediately exist in a state of perception, a candidate for progressive happiness and knowledge, and greater degrees of perfection, after a general judgment at the consummation of all things shall have determined its destiny.

The general doctrine of a future state we have already considered on the principles

ples of natural reason ; and have found it supported by arguments as conclusive, as any speculative point will admit. The clearer evidence of revelation, as we have also seen, affords not only a confirmation of the general doctrine, but instructs us in several important particulars respecting the nature of it. To this purpose the portion of scripture, which I have made the subject of this discourse, in an especial manner contributes. It corroborates the import of other texts, in ascertaining the existence of the soul in a state of happiness and percipiency ; and establishes the belief of such existence taking place immediately on the soul's separation from the body on its passage through the solemn portal of death. To some interesting inferences from the words of the text, thus understood, I propose to assign the sequel of this discourse.

I. And first, the locality of departed souls being fixed in Paradise, gives us the idea of their being together ; not disposed of in different planets, or dispersed in various parts of space, but assembled in one

general congress, in one and the same district, region, or clime. And this idea favours the opinion, advanced in the preceding discourse, of a mutual recognition of each other. Indeed it is not unreasonable to suppose that object may form a chief reason, why our beneficent Creator should consign all the inhabitants of this world to one common place of resort: because it was the will of infinite goodness, to make the happiness of the good in the next world as compleat, as the nature of man, and the state to which he is hereafter destined, will admit. This argument founded on the goodness of Almighty God has been already noticed: let us pursue it a little farther.

The divine goodness do not all the gracious proceedings of our Creator, in regard to man, through life demonstrate? And in none is it more conspicuous, than in the satisfaction the social sensations create to him. What though, with hand profuse of blessings, He hath scattered through the world objects of pleasure correspondent with every appetite of man;
those

those sensations are necessary to give them their true relish. The mind has so great a share in the happiness of the man; that bodily gratifications alone, though in the highest degree possessed, can not render it compleat. Honour, power, pleasure are imperfect and unsatisfactory; unless shared with those we love, and enjoyed with those in whom we delight.

They may for themselves be coveted, and without appendages may be possessed: but the relative affections are necessary to the enjoyment of them; they give to those possessions their proper zest. And even in the humbler walks of life they form a charm, that binds the social mind of man in bands so firm and close, as neither the blandishments of sense, nor the magic of ambition can dissolve,

“ It grows with our growth, and strengthens with our
“ strength.”

The sensations thence derived fix on the soul with inseparable adhesion, and become as it were a quality of it: they participate in its pleasures, and sympathize

with it in its pains : they attend it through all the vicissitudes of life, undivided from it by time or place. The mind not only experiences in these tenderest of all sensations the most refined pleasure, but, from the feelings of approving conscience, it finds impressed on them the stamp of virtue too, and as such the sanction of divine approbation. Yet in the cultivation of those connections, which carry in them the test of virtue, and the approbation of God, we are treasuring up to ourselves a fund of sorrow and incompensable grief, upon the ground of there being in the next world no renewal of them. When the fatal summons calls away the friend of our bosom, and the tender relative, we lose the best ingredient in the cup of life : and the loss leaves only dregs behind, except in the hope of meeting again. And that hope, which the God of nature suggests, illustrative of his benignity, acts with a further influence on the soul ; reconciling us to our own removal hence, and arming us against that formidable break in our existence, to which the divine denunciation

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tion had destined us *. Must we not then admit the bright, consolatory cherub, for the two-fold purpose of administering consolation, and supplying fortitude, so graciously communicated, that visits us with healing on its wings, to be the messenger of God to us for good; and, if from Him, the messenger of truth?

But further, this loss we are considering leaves generally a void in the mind; which nothing will effectually fill up. The attention of new connections may gain our esteem; but are seldom found to displace the former ones from their attached hold on our affections. The mind hankers after those it has lost; it loves to steal from assiduities, that flutter on the surface of our affection; and to devote the solitary hour of contemplation to those images, those shadowy pictures †, that still engross it. Those objects of its former affections still maintain their place in the mind, though only in idea: and what forbids, that they should again fill that vacant

* Gen. ii. 27. Dying thou shalt die.

† *Pictura pascit inani.*—VIRG.

place, which admits no substitute, in reality? They have passed the formidable portal, which we must also pass, and soon. They are gone to another world, which we must visit too. And hath God shewn us either by the light of nature, or the bright sun-beam of revelation; hath He in the still voice of reason, or in the clearer language of scripture declared, that human souls, when from this world dismissed, and assembled in another, shall never meet and recognise each other, shall in habits of social affection, sanctioned by his approbation, never be united again? The greatest sceptic on the subject we are now discussing must acknowledge, that he has made no such declaration; but on the contrary inspires the soothing hopes of a re-union. On his goodness therefore I ground an argument, in assurance that such re-union will be hereafter indulged us.

Such gratification of our virtuous hopes is consistent with the universal display of goodness, that appears in every point of view in which we contemplate the infinite

nite benignity of the divine dispensations. When we reflect on the vast train of those dispensations, every link gilt with mercies, and beaming blessings on mankind; when we pursue them through the whole economy of God's dealings with his creature man; we see both in his moral and natural government of the world nothing but instances of adorable benignity. We experience every virtuous exertion supported, we feel every worthy design promoted, often by secret causes, and unaccountable means; we trace the plan of providential goodness through the life of the individuals, and through the vast mass of the whole. And will He stop his leading hand, as soon as we pass the threshold of this world? Is He not Lord of the other world, as well as this: God of Gods, and Lord of Lords? Will those virtuous dispositions, that experienced the sanction of his favour here, droop afterwards unregarded by Him, and unsupported? Will his eye of favour be withdrawn, and his mercy gone for ever? Doth He approve and promote any one virtuous tendency; and

and will He not finally support it to its full extent? The social sensations are an ornament to the soul: and will God strip it of them, when it is ordered hence? These are questions that resolve themselves, on contemplation of the little we are permitted to see of his superintending goodness and power. And shall those habits of virtuous souls, that have strengthened each other in the mutual exercise of warm benevolence, and acts of piety, which He commanded, that have fortified each other by mutual lessons of resignation to his high will, and borne aright the trying bolts of his harsher dispensations, shall they all droop and languish here, even in their very bud; or bear their blossoms in another world, the fruits of happy union? As sure as God approves of such sympathy of soul, and its social affections here, though for a moment He suffer the union to be interrupted; so sure ground have we to conclude, He will hereafter renew and continue it: bound and knit together in firmer and more perfect ties, conducive to further purposes and a more permanent
plan,

plan, and shining with purer lustre as it advances, through boundless time and realms of boundless space.

Consider next the extraordinary efforts, which the spirit of enterprise sometimes forms in order to effect in this world a meeting with the objects of attached affection; far from whom some stroke of adverse fortune may have hurled the friend, whose life languishes in sorrow under the separation. On bare recital of such enterprise, though the parties concerned in it be unknown, the mind of sensibility takes an interested part even in the abstract act. It applauds the attempt; it attends the generous effort with the warm wishes of success. But the mind, uninfluenced by prejudice, and unseduced by passion, can not applaud a vicious action. The exertions therefore supposed bear the stamp of virtue on them, and as such the seal of God's approbation. And what He approves, to that He will also extend encouragement, and efficient support. Hence we infer, that as such impulse of mutual attachments is founded in virtue, they are
derived

derived from God, and by him encouraged: and hence have we every ground of confidence, that when without his support they can no longer operate, his training hand, that fostered, will support them; and that those, who in this world have in virtuous habits been mutually attached, whom his justice by the law of death, which he ordained, for a moment divided, his mercy will finally re-unite, and render happy.

In the representation, as above suggested, let us suppose success to attend the enterprise; and endeavour to figure to ourselves the happiness consequent of the event. What pleasure to recount temptations baffled, difficulties surmounted; and, in the warm sunshine of enjoyment, to look back on our late dwelling, the gloomy cave of despair! But if in this world, the chequered scene of changes and chances, the moment of meeting be winged with so much satisfaction; what must be the excess of delight, that will attend such a junction hereafter! This world presents no novelty of scene to engage our future converse,

converse, and employ our mutual wonder. Here is no increase of knowledge, and by consequence of happiness, to extend and employ the intellectual powers. Here open no new sources of untasted joys; here exists no shelter from the busy bolts of adversity that will still fly as usual about us. And what is worst of all, we have no security for any long possession of those joys so ardently pursued, and with so much difficulty re-obtained; subject, as before, to separation and alloy.

But of the next state mark the difference. There novelty of scene will engage our mutual admiration: while glancing into secrets of nature, here buried in impenetrable darkness, we shall be permitted in a nearer approach to pay our adoration to nature's God. And while we feel increased knowledge like a flood of light pour into our enlarged understanding, we find an increase of happiness too: new organs of delight, and new objects correspondent to them. No clouds of care there gather, and deform the bright serene of that pure Ether; no sighs of sorrow are wafted there.

And

And what crowns all, we shall be then secure against the chance of change, against the wear of time; time only counted by enjoyments, and enjoyments quickened without satiety*.

In contemplating this prospect, what motives doth it suggest, to press forward to the *high mark of such a calling!* Do we wish to converse, eternally to live with our virtuous friends and connexions again? We have only to study their lives, and imitate their examples: if we can improve upon their lives, it will be our praise, our

* A difficulty has been urged against the future recognition of each other, grounding on the supposition, that as the sociable attachments were implanted in us only for the purposes of this present state, they would of course cease with it. In satisfaction of which doubt, the writer, who in one of the public prints hath addressed it to the author of these discourses, is referred to DISCOURSE II. Sect. ii. 6. where it is contended, and shewn, that the sociable attachments extend farther than the exigencies of this life require. The inference therefore apprehended falls to the ground. The attachments of the child to the parent after he no longer wants his support, of the husband to the wife after the instinctive appetite has subsided, and particularly those of friendship, are perfectly independent of the exigencies of life: and the continuance of those attachments to the verge of the grave forms an argument for the renewal of them even beyond it.

happiness

happiness to do it. We shall meet them with greater pleasure, and they will welcome us with greater praise. For envy and every malignant quality will find no admittance there. But should we lose the great end of our existence, and forfeit the happiness of admission into that kingdom which endureth for ever, lost to our near and dear friends, as they to us, and outcasts from Paradise; conception can not form the pangs remorse will give us. On the same principle, reflecting on those dear connexions who have finished their course before us, and finished it well, who are called to enjoy the fruits of their labour, who are ready to welcome us to the house of God, where our blessed Lord hath prepared for us *many*, or more properly, *various* mansions, various as the merits of those who are called to them; we shall learn to struggle with the infirmities of nature, and to felicitate ourselves on having a near and dear friend gone before; whom, when we have received our happy dismissal, we shall find with mind elate at the sacred threshold prepared and ready to meet us. Blessed state

state of permanent felicity, happy inhabitants that have attained to it! How does every thing that is earthly sicken in the eye, that is raised up to you! What is all the tinsel here below; what are all the rubs and buffetings we can experience here, in contrast with that opening scene, to which in fair hopes God himself hath raised the mind of man? And God, it is the ground on which I rest this structure of my hopes, and therefore I repeat it, God can not deceive his humble and adoring creatures.

II. Let us next, as another inference, consider our subject in a different view. *Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise.* What a change of situation doth our Lord here speak to this miserable malefactor! And what a lesson doth it inculcate against despondency and despair! To satisfy ourselves that no station is so deplorable, but the mercy of God if fitly implored will visit it; that no condition of life can be so lost, but the goodness of God can with the beams of consolation clear it; that no visitation of evil can be so heavy, as the
power

power of God can not alleviate, or, if he please, remove; let us raise our eyes to the expressive picture before us. Behold a man overtaken in his wickedness, devoted to severe punishments, those punishments aggravated by a just sense of accumulated guilt. The hour arrives, and he is led to the scene of slaughter. No reprieve, no rescue; he is suspended in agonies on the fatal tree. Yet in that calamitous situation, forsaken even of the flatterer Hope, in the article of death he finds life, and experiences redemption. He acknowledges his sins, he confesses the justice of his punishment: and his heart thus prepared by penitence and contrition to receive salvation, his eyes are opened, and he beholds at his side his suffering Saviour and his God. Heaven opened to his view, the effulgence of divinity beamed on him from the cross: his soul is instantly raised above the littleness of the world, and every idea that is level with it. That world; of late the idol of his desires, now appears to him the bubble that it is; he wonders that so poor a lure could bribe him to the com-

mission of a single crime. He asks not to be indulged in the longer enjoyment of it, he supplicates not for life and liberty; his prayer was of a higher nature; *Lord, remember me, when thou comest into thy kingdom.*

And how does our Lord receive the prayer of this repentant sinner? He, whose condition was as superiour to the judge who condemned, as to the malefactor who was convicted, ever looked down superiour on the petty distinctions of worldly rank and greatness. While to contemptuous scorn he held out the hypocrisy of the chief Priests and Pharisees; graciously would he condescend to associate with, and instruct the lowly-minded and humble sinner. Such was the case in the instance before us. Our Lord did not with fastidious neglect disregard the humble petition of the suffering malefactor before him: he did not suppose it an indignity to him, with condescending attention to regard a poor forlorn criminal, suspended at his side in ignominious punishment; the punishment at that time and place

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more particularly calculated to reflect the greater shew of ignominy on himself. Low probably in his original rank of life, rendered lower by his crimes, and farther degraded by the ignominious punishment of them, the penitential suppliant notwithstanding addressed not to his Saviour his prayer in vain. He, who had so often displayed his knowledge of the human heart, saw in that of the dying malefactor unfeigned contrition, and abhorrence of his sins; saw in his renovated mind good intentions, that from the fountain of mercy might obtain forgiveness; and aspirings after perfection, that might entitle him to rewards. He raised him from despondency, he spoke peace; he spoke more, he spoke exultation and joy to his expiring soul: *to-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.*

After such an instance of unexpected deliverance from so abject a state, after such a transition from extreme misery to the summit of felicity; who shall have drank so deep of the cup of affliction, as to suffer himself to be overborn, and driven by it to the phrensy of despair? Who, after

so signal an instance of forgiveness, shall despond, if his repentance be sincere? But we must take care not to mistake sufferings for merit, not to place the mere infliction of misery to the account of desert, and a title to remuneration. Sufferings may lead to it, when they awaken us to a sense of duty; or when by a proper conduct under the pressure of them we evince resignation, patience, and fortitude. And, on the other hand, we may also suffer here, even to the end of life; and become miserable hereafter. For an instance of this, look to the other side of our crucified Lord and Master.

There behold a malefactor, his heart seared in wickedness, his body wrung with torture, his soul insensible of remorse, and touched only with concern at the unsuccessful issue of his crimes. The lure of worldly pleasure, and power, and affluence, the attainment of which was the motive to his crimes, still held the uppermost place in his dark and groveling mind. Hear him at that awful hour maligning his Redeemer, and demanding the exercise

cise of his power to restore him to a few years of longer riot in the sensual enjoyments of this poor perishable world. “ If
“ thou beest, as thou professest thyself, and
“ as thy followers proclaim thee, the son
“ of God, and as such hast heaven and
“ earth at thy command ; save thyself and
“ us : now display thy divinity, and exert
“ thy power ; liberate thyself and us from
“ the tortures we suffer ; give us to de-
“ scend from the cross, to astonish man-
“ kind, to receive the applauses of the
“ world, and enjoy the good things of it,
“ that after such an instance of godlike
“ power will then be profusely offered us.
“ Give me this world’s good, and dispose
“ of the next to those who wish it.” To
this reproachful language, he, who was all
benignity, replies in no angry retort : no
expression of resentment passes his lips :
no severe reflection, calculated to aggra-
vate the unhappy wretch’s sufferings, is
returned. He saw profligacy of mind, that
could not be reclaimed ; and with silent
pity alike regarded his situation, and
reproaches.

III. Thirdly, let us hear on this occasion the reflection of the temporising casuist, of him who with a happy dexterity would wish to unite the enjoyment of both worlds; to surfeit in the full range of pleasure, which this world holds out, and to secure that state of unchangeable happiness, which revelation, reason, and conscience, on certain conditions, assure to him in the next. Suppose, says he, this declaration of our Lord to the repentant malefactor, *to-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise*, had the effect represented; admitted, that he overlooked the pleasures and enjoyments of the world, his thoughts fixed on, and his soul full of that other world which is to come; he was at the extremity of life, on the very verge of that world to which his petitions tended: but the promise can not be supposed to have the same effect on us, who by means of youth, health, and strength may reasonably look forwards to many a year's enjoyment of this world; and therefore why throw a shade over the bright sunshine of life, by holding ever before our eyes the
dark

dark portal; we may not till perhaps at some very distant period be called to pass?

This observation, which is a very common one, involves two mistakes, that I would wish to set right. First, the summons is not so far distant, as we may be apt to suppose it. And secondly, it is not of that gloomy nature, which should deter us from contemplating it.

1. And first, our age, as contemplated by that serious observer of human nature, the royal Psalmist, in respect to the brevity of it, is said to be but *a span long*. And of that span those, who have already passed a part of it, can of the extent of the remainder form no very favourable idea. Presuming on ten, twenty, or thirty years before hand, the distance it is allowed seems great; but the appearance is fallacious. There is but one proper way of forming the estimate of it; and that all must allow to be a fair one. It is by comparing a given period, of ten years for instance, before us, with the same distance of time past. On such comparison, we may be surpris'd at its apparent short-

ness: but it is better to be so surpris'd, than deceived by an apprehension of the too great length of it.

And if in contemplating the shortness of life; we also take into our account the uncertainty of it; the promise of our Lord to the malefactor will as a general monition the more sensibly impress us. *To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.* And what security have any of us against the literal completion of this declaration? Will youth prevent the summons; or will strength elude it? If neither the one, nor the other, nor any other armour, which art, or nature's self can forge, will securely shield us against it; the only expedient that remains to us, is to be ever on our guard against it, ever prepared to meet it with becoming fortitude. And to this purpose nothing will so much, as frequent contemplation, conduce. For it is a rule, that runs through nature; the more we contemplate an object, the less forcibly it continues to affect us.

2. But secondly, another and no less common error is the opinion, that the contemplation

templation of death casts a shade upon the bright side of life. No, not on the brightest. Take, for truth, the word of truth itself; and what doth it announce? That when the good go from hence, they remove to Paradise; they go to the intermediate state of *good spirits made perfect*; even to the state, in which they would have been, had man never offended, and death never intervened. And is there any thing terrible in this prospect to a mind accustomed to look upon it? We go to the place; where our good and virtuous friends are gone before; and whither those, we leave behind, will follow us. We go *immediately* thither; no purgatory to pass through; no long sleep to bind the sluggish soul. *To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.* “As soon as ever you quit this
“state of miserable existence, depend on
“my word, and this assurance of my promise, you shall enter the assembly of the
“happy, just and good; and there see me
“your Prince and Saviour.” The promise may be conceived a general one; and as extending to all good persons. And is there
there

there any thing formidable in the thought of realising that promise, and appropriating it to ourselves? Does it cast a shade over the bright scenes of this life? Does it not rather increase the brightness of them; by promising an increase of splendour, and the continuance of it? Without permanency, the purest pleasure has a severe alloy even in the bare apprehension of losing it, by being called away, we know not how soon, and destined to we know not where. But upon this promise of our Lord, as a ground of stable and sure repose, looking not only without terror, but with joy and exultation, to that hour which shall terminate our labours; and summon us to our home, to a re-union with our friends, and family in Paradise, Fear yields its place to Hope, and *death is swallowed up in victory.*

THE
INFLUENCE OF EXAMPLE,

SERMON VIII.

EXODUS xxiii. 2.

Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.

THE features of the human countenance are scarcely more different and distinguishing, than the colours of the mind. And these, thus naturally varying, variously bias our judgment, and produce in us correspondently different habits of acting. Yet, amidst this variety of opinions, the difference of humours and inclinations, there is observable a more general uniformity of thinking and acting, than might be expected. An error propagated,
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and a scheme of action founded on it, we often see as readily embraced, and as universally followed, as truth, and truth's acknowledged and most approved results. Whence it is, that opinions and practices are so apt to be taken upon trust, and so few are found to think freely for themselves, may be an object of no useless enquiry. Is it, that we are too idle to employ our minds in the operose business of serious thinking? Or is it, that we are too diffident of ourselves, and too complaisant to the opinions of others? Or, without refining too much, may it not all be resolved into the force of example?

But here then arises another question. Who are they, that form the example? What is it, that gives it force, that has influence enough to cast the model, which others so readily bring their minds to copy, and mould their actions to an imitation of it? Is he the man of wisdom: is it virtue, that attracts our notice? No: for then we should have no reason to complain; then we should see the world much better than it is. Is it power and consequence?

quence? No: for then we should indeed experience the happy fruits of it; the most elevated characters in this kingdom beaming the most brilliant examples of moral and religious virtue. Is it an ideal kind of standard, that the pretender to reason sets up, and calls it moral rectitude, or fitness of things? No; for then we should have some kind of plea, some pretence, something at least favouring of an excuse, for following, like the brutal herd their leader, modes of thinking, though vague and vain, less void of sense, and schemes of acting from thence derived, though desultory and unfixed, less charactered with absurdity, than those which now prevail. From whence then the fashionable modes of thinking and acting, that influence the morals of this age, originate, shall be the subject of our present investigation. And when traced to their proper source, should fair discussion prove them to be the monstrous production of SUPERSTITION and INFIDELITY; numbers, perhaps, little aware of what they follow, when they see causes explained, will dis-

claim

claim the motives on which they have acted, and be induced to abandon the influence of them.

Superstition, trembling where there is nothing to fear, and hoarding up an imaginary stock of virtue in acts that cost nothing, and in reality are nothing worth, renders herself ridiculous, and her measures contemptible. Of this infidelity fails not to take advantage, with a sneer of fastidious pity points to the self-tormentor; affects the superior reach of thought, and endeavours to persuade the world, that because superstition is ridiculous, infidelity is wise. Endeavours, did I say: she does persuade the world, it is so: at least she persuades *the children of this world*, those who live in stile, and have no judgment of their own, to think so. And those are many: those are they to whom the humbler multitude look up, and follow them. And why they follow those, rather than the few men of sense and virtue, whose positions are very different, who think for themselves, and bow only to truth, I will endeavour to explain.

In the first place; in support of its pretensions, infidelity has all the indulgences of the world to offer. It has routed superstition, and, by a well pointed sneer blending religion with it, triumphs equally over both. She points to bowers of pleasure, and bids her votaries follow thither. She laughs at narrow prejudices, and says, *all these things will I give thee*. From that gay figure then turn your eyes to superstition; see her mourning over imaginary evils, behold her brooding upon fancied good, observe her admitting tenets that reason disclaims, and pursuing a conduct which nature abhors: observe religion cunningly coupled with her; an union, which some understandings cannot, and some will not separate, and distinguish between them: and then, is not the facility plain, by which inclination is captivated, reason dazzled, false prejudices are taken up, and people led *to follow a multitude to do evil*? It was this palatable principle of free indulgence, that for a time supported the absurdities of Pagan idolatry: it was this principle, that extended the religion
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of Mahomet, the impure religion of a notoriously bad man, over a third part of the globe. And as those, who promise pleasure to others, to procure credit to their engagements, must appear to enjoy it themselves; those of the description we are now considering, affect an air of gaiety, which does not belong to them, as if resulting from an approbation of their own judgment, their own superiour judgment, in the election of their practice and pursuits. With assumed consequence they launch out into the world, unshackled by restraints, that tie the vulgar down; exemplars of politeness, men of pleasure, men of wit, men of the world. Externals speak loudly in their favour. Their easy manners, accommodated to win attention, their reach of understanding, exemplified in despising common opinions, and living above common rules, their liberal contempt of every thing that is held sacred and connected with religion, are so many incentives to imitation, and win over votaries to practical infidelity. Charmed with so pleasurable a persuasion, light
minds

minds are not over nice in examining the truth of it; but take that upon trust, and think it sufficient excuse for themselves, if they be as good as their neighbours.

Now to disabuse mankind in these particulars of inveiglement, it may be sufficient to suggest, as a caution against too easy an admission of the superiour understanding of those pretenders to it; that nothing is more common, than to mistake an affectation of thinking singularly, for an ability of thinking deeply. This is a short road to a short-lived reputation; which vanity often takes, and by which superficial minds are easily imposed on. And as to the air of gaiety they assume, it may be observed, that no judgment is so fallible, as that which is formed from appearances; that the heart often beats heavily, while the countenance is blazoned over with ostentatious smiles; that nothing less than real virtue can support serenity of mind and real cheerfulness. God Almighty hath constituted so close an union between piety and cheerfulness, happiness and virtue, as all the art and
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device of man can never separate. If we be really good ; in any and every situation, we may be cheerful : if otherwise, in no situation whatever can we feel ourselves at ease.

And as the appearance of gaiety, in characters who thus affect it, may deceive others ; so in their notions of religion do they often deceive themselves. When they regard it as gloomy and melancholy, an unsatisfactory and unsociable thing ; they notoriously mistake, or wilfully misrepresent it. For from whence it may be asked, do they derive such an opinion of it ? Not from the scriptures ; for she is there represented as leading Joy and Satisfaction in her train : *her ways* are there described, as *ways of pleasantness* ; and *her paths*, as the path-way of *peace*. Not from observation, or from reason ; for she appears, and has a rational right to be cheerful, having the promise of this world, and that which is to come. And the conduct of those who on this false presumption offend, could they be brought to think as deeply as they would have it supposed they do, would they
they

they even think seriously and soberly on it, they would find it involved a degree of folly, which in matters of worldly concern would ruin their reputation of acuteness. It is, to reduce it to a kind of illustration with which every man of the world is well acquainted, a species of play they would in any other instance be ashamed of. For should the things at which they laugh, be as ridiculous as they represent them, they gain nothing; should they not be so, they lose every thing.

I will mention one cause more of no small influence in perverting the mind, and gaining profelytes to the cause of irreligion; which is the ostentation of magnanimity. True courage or fortitude, if it rank not first in the fair train of moral virtues, is perhaps of all others the most luminous and attractive. Its influence is extensive; it engages the most indifferent. We cannot see a man, however unconnected with him, grappling with adversity, struggling with superiority of power, not calling to his assistance the arts of fraud, not sacrificing at the shrine of vice,

but holding fast his integrity, and defying danger in the pursuit of what is right, (and this is true magnanimity) without admiring him, without wishing him success. And as virtue, like sterling coin, is liable to be counterfeited, so particularly is the virtue of which we are speaking. To laugh at things which wise and good men hold serious, to over-leap the bounds that virtue prescribes, and start and stop at nothing that promises self-indulgence, to confound the distinctions, which some hold sacred, between virtue and vice, right and wrong, to cut asunder the line, which confines passion within the limits of duty, to intrench upon forms, wisely calculated to preserve the substance of religion, at the first blush discovers a species of courage. The appearance of fortitude captivates, and what we admire, we are prone to imitate. We question not the ground of such pretensions; or, accompanied with all those dashing characters of fortitude, we should detect under the false colouring consummate cowardice; we should find, to carry on the allusion, a base paltry mental

tal cased or tinfelled over, to gain currency and deceive. To sacrifice the happiness of others to our own gratifications or convenience, is cruelty; and cowards only, and they always, are cruel. To endeavour to confound the distinctions of right and wrong, is to form a bad apology for depraved actions; actions which we dare not hold to public view, till by raising a cloud of error, we had perverted the public sight. This is also cowardice. To sport with sacred things, and strive to laugh religion out of door, as a mortifying, timid, dastardly thing, may be hardiness: but it is fool-hardiness; it is hardiness against God, in complaisance to man; it originates in a silly servile fear of the one, and in a brutal ignorance or stupid defiance of the other.

Having thus pointed out some of those general causes, that contribute to seduce the world from the paths of virtue and truth; I will proceed to consider some particular instances, in which they at this day observedly operate.

And first, in regard to the public worship of Almighty God, we see their effects too glaringly in the common desertion of our churches. A form of religion even those, of the description we have just noticed, hold proper enough to be kept up; and they conceive it right, that the lower orders of the people should be taught to conform to it, and frequent our churches. But men of business have other concerns, men of pleasure have other pursuits, and philosophical men have more refined speculations to engage their attention. Yet would men of business fairly estimate the concerns of this world, and of the next, would they set in competition their obligations and duties to their Creator, and their schemes of accumulating wealth; should those duties and the pursuance of those schemes at any time interfere, they would not hesitate a moment where to allow the preference; on the same principle of prudence by which they regulate all their temporal concerns, they would make the smaller gain, the less acquisition, and the shorter enjoyment of it, yield to the
greater,

greater, the more substantial, and durable good. If the man of pleasure would give an edge to pleasure, and insure it to himself, let him make in the first place the Author of all Good his friend; that Being, who with a lavish hand scattered those pleasures on the face of the earth, and called him from a state of nothingness to enjoy them. And can he secure the favour of that Almighty Being more rationally, than by taking every opportunity of paying his reverence to Him, of making a public profession of his zeal for Him, by warm effusions of gratitude, expressed in those places more immediately set apart for his worship? And as to the refined speculations to which men of philosophical minds may pretend, can they find a more elevated subject, on which to employ their thoughts, than their Creator? And can they more profitably employ them on Him, than in joining with their fellow creatures in direct acts of adoration, praise, and thanksgiving? Will their most elevated speculations more acceptably express their duty to Him, or be more likely

to please Him? And so infinitely is He removed from our limited conceptions; what our endeavours should chiefly aim at respecting Him, is to express our duty to, and please Him.

But they can do all this at home. No: they can privately worship God at home; and so they ought to do. Such are acts which ought to be performed; but the other is not to be left undone. Let those men of speculation, who are used to exercise their minds in abstract reasoning, for a moment consider the universality of custom; that hath in every country, and in every age, erected temples to the Deity. And then let them question themselves, whether such universality of custom must not have as universal a cause; whether God Almighty hath not directed all mankind, as well as Solomon, *to build him a house*, by a secret impulse stamped upon the human mind. For antient history informs us of no nation, that had not their temples and their God. And it is very remarkable, that even among those wretched Barbarians, whom the discoveries of modern

dern travellers have made known to us, those, who were themselves almost without houses, when their respective states have been accurately investigated, and their manners known, have never been found without temples, bowers, or caves, consecrated to the more immediate presence of their God. And one thing I will venture to assert, that the man of pleasure, the man of business, and he of philosophic mind, when the day of sickness overtakes him, and the hour of death approaches, when he sees things as they are, and not as the false medium of worldly prejudice may represent them, will confess those hours to have been the best spent periods of his life, that had been spent in a public attendance on his Creator, and adorative acts of praise.

The instance I have next to produce, of the ill effects of prevailing fashion, is in the general disuse of a long-established and pious custom, a custom on which we may defy the world to fix the stigma of absurdity; the act of thanksgiving formerly observed at a principal meal, termed a Grace. This disuse originated among the
 lower

lower orders of people; but, contrary to the general force of example, has since ascended, and been adopted by the highest; by such as ought to have been better informed. The Puritanism of the last century, by lengthening out this short form beyond all reason, might have rendered it apparently ridiculous, and perhaps in some instances inconvenient: and the libertinism of this age, from the tables of the *truly polite*, hath refined it away. Yet it is a very old custom: thus we find Samuel *blessing the feast or sacrifice*; and *afterwards*, saith that portion of holy writ, *the people eat that were bidden*. That this likewise was our Saviour's custom, appears from various passages. That it was his common practice, we may impliedly gather from the circumstance at Emaus: where we are told, that having *broken bread and blessed it*, probably in some form of words commonly used by him, *his disciples immediately knew him*. But the example neither of the prophet, nor of our Lord himself, I am aware, will have much weight with some: with others, however,

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it may have its influence, and triumph over the incroachments of fashion. I contend not for a long superfluous form of words: we know from the best authority, that *no man is heard for his much speaking*. But surely, when the table is spread before us, loaded with luxurious viands, it cannot argue a littleness of understanding, it does not argue an ill-placed expression of gratitude, to lift up the heart and eye to the Supreme Giver of all those blessings, and thank him for them in a single word of pious praise. And in what view considered, can we descry the unpoliteness of it? Do we affect absolute independence? Do we own no Being above us? On these principles of atheism, such an observance may indeed be held unnecessary, but on no principle of religion, can it be deemed an act of supererogation; on no principle of reason can it be proved ridiculous or unpolite.

I will detain you only with one instance more, in which example *leads a multitude to do evil*; and this, as well as the two former instances I produced, regards our
 duty

duty to God. It is the great violation, which fashion hath introduced among us, of the sabbath-day. Though a pharisaical observance of it, such a rigid observance, as is not only incompatible with indifferent, but even good actions, be foreign to the nature of its institution; though we may not make it a day of idleness, we are certainly not to consecrate it to purposes of pleasure and thoughtless festivity. Though on the sabbath-day we are to listen to the voice of philanthropy, whenever it may call us to active duties; yet, let us not abuse a permission to do good, to an indulgence in doing harm. Let us not make the day of contemplative rest, a day of Bacchanals; let not revelry and dissipation usurp the place of good works, and seduce us from the fair straight line of duty, nor let us suffer fashion to inveigle us so far into her trammels, as by our practice to do away from the day every character of distinction. God hath said, *hallow my sabbaths*. And is it too much to sacrifice one day in the week to the more immediate service of Him, who has

a right

a right to exact it every day; but who graciously gives up to our plenary indulgence in innocent amusements, and honest vocations of business, the other six? If however the busy pleasurable world will not be prevailed on to devote those days wholly to religious meditations and exercises of piety; surely it will not be esteemed too much, to dedicate them to some degree of privacy and retirement, and the tranquil satisfaction of domestic enjoyments. At least, let us not employ it in the ordinary drudgery of our worldly concerns: much less celebrate the sabbath of JEHOVAH in nocturnal orgies at Dissipation's varied shrines: vainly delivered from one place of rendezvous, and one species of amusement to another, forgetting ourselves, our duty, and our God; and inviting by a bad example our inferiors to do the same. Let us not persuade ourselves, that we are worthily engaged, or innocently amused; when, on a day especially devoted to the service of the Almighty, we are prosecuting the common occupation of the week, or flying about to parties

parties in chace of entertainment, crowding the roads with our carriages on pretended calls of business; or, to the obstruction of sober passengers, blocking up the streets at the solicitation of pleasure. Those who are in the constant habit of business, as well as those whose every day is open to amusement, will find the intermission of one day in seven, abstracted from the call of duty, and considered in the view either of business or pleasure, an interesting and advantageous relaxation. Such an intermission gives vigour to the pursuit of business, and a new relish to innocent amusement; so graciously hath our benevolent creator consulted for us, as to make our duty, in this, as in every other instance of life, conducive both to our interest and our pleasure.

Finally, as Christians represent to yourselves, for to such only the nature of this discourse applies, the danger to which those commissions and omissions expose you; they regard God, and if by them you offend Him, you forfeit every future hope. If on the contrary they be indifferent,

ferent, what is your gain? Not benefit; they may operate against interest, but can not possibly promote it: not pleasure; for to those, who six days in the week thread the giddy circle of amusement, an uninterrupted succession of it through the whole seven, tends only to satiety. For what then is all this risk encountered? For the poor satisfaction of an acquiescence in fashionable practices, a tame submission to custom and example. If the case be fairly stated, let reason determine whether it be not, in the instances I have mentioned, more wise, and more adviseable, to be a little singular, than to follow the multitude in practices, which, to speak most softly of them, cannot be safe.

THE FEAR OF GOD.

SERMON IX.

GEN. xxxix. 9.

*How can I do this great wickedness, and sin
against God!*

THE Apostle speaking of several acts of wickedness recorded in the Old Testament, and of punishments consequent of them, observes; *that all these things happened to them [the antient Jews] for ensamples; and were written for our admonition.* In plain and simple enarrations of facts it is accordingly given us to apprehend duties enjoined, precepts enforced, temptations to be shunned, and the malignity of vices that awaken all our caution to guard against them. And if from those examples we with reference to ourselves assimilate cases, form comparisons, and deduce inferences;

inferences; from the various instances so recorded in the lives of those characters, which compose the history of sacred writ, we may derive instruction, that in the regulation of our own conduct will advantageously apply.

Such document of useful admonition doth the reflection of the text afford. The occasion that introduced it is too well known to need in this place a recital of the particulars attending it. I will therefore content myself with a general observation, that in addition to the force of the temptation itself, the excellent character, to whose conduct this little portion of history refers, had in case of non-compliance the resentment of an enraged, powerful, bad woman to dread; a circumstance this, which gives a superiority to the triumph of the Hebrew over every other similar instance of virtue displayed in the like temptations, (for instances of virtuous resistance in similar temptations, the page of prophane history affords us), and characters his triumph as the most compleat one

of the kind, that ever dignified human nature.

In the moment of surprize, reason off her guard, and passion awakened, when no human step was near to interrupt his guilty pleasures, when no human eye was witness to the act of ingratitude to which he was solicited; in that moment, when he had nothing on earth to fear in his compliance with the temptation, and every thing to dread in resisting it, how powerful must have been the principle, that withheld that exemplary man from so foul a commission! The nature of it, and ground of its operation, as the same causes will be ever attended with similar effects, and the motive, which influenced him to resist the lure of temptation, will act in temptations of *every* kind, will constitute a subject of useful investigation. And this principle, we collect from the text, was no other than the dread of offending God; that God, whose pervasive eye is present always every where, and his arm ever stretched out against the perpetrators of sin. Armed with the apprehension

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sion of those terrors, he triumphed over temptation, and fled from the inveiglement of sin; from the violence of disappointed passion he sought refuge in conscious virtue, and trusted for protection in the goodness of God. *How can I, or rather, how SHALL I, do this great wickedness and sin against God!* The change of tense, which is properly future, adds an implied force to the reflection: it argues a degree of conflict in the mind between passion and virtue, between inclination and duty. *How shall I*—that is, “alluring as the temptation is, strongly as passion may plead, however inclination may dispose me to comply, *how shall I* bring myself, *how shall I* dare, to commit so great a wickedness, and offend against the majesty of heaven!”

As this best preservative against sin, THE FEAR OF GOD, like every other virtue, has its counterfeit, I will in the sequel endeavour to distinguish between them: pointing out 1st, what is THE FALSE FEAR OF GOD; and ascertaining 2dly, and in contra-distinction to it, the characters of that

divine principle, that heaven-lent assistance, the proper and TRUE FEAR OF GOD. I will in the 3d place apply this principle to the case before us, and on some particular circumstances attending that kind of temptation address a word in conclusion.

I. First, then, THE FALSE FEAR OF GOD is founded in false notions of the divine nature; and consists rather in a fear of God, than a fear of offending Him. Under this false persuasion, men conceive of the Deity, as a great and powerful Being indeed; but withal arbitrary and capricious: who created mankind for misery and mortification, and delights in the music of their sighs and groans. And from the notion of God, thus falsely conceived, they determine as falsely of the duties of their station. They fly to solitude and scenes of mortification: and wantonly impose tortures on themselves; to please, according to their wild opinions of Him, a vengeful irascible God. Hence the self-imposed tortures of Indian devotees: hence gloomy cells, and monastic whips and scourges. Supposing mankind created
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for sufferings, and destined to torture, that it is the will of God they should be tormented, and that therefore there is merit in torment, they voluntarily seek, and chuse the shape in which to meet it: thereby hoping to avoid the more severe inflictions of God, that might otherwise be exercised on them. A way of thinking and judging how false, on the question addressed to our Saviour by his Disciples, in regard to those whose "blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices, or those who were crushed with the fall of Siloam's Tower," the word of truth declares; who tells his hearers, those events were not directed immediately against the sufferers, who merited them not more than other men; but were events in the great chain of nature, referable not to particular persons, but to secret and general causes. This world is a place of trial and probation, and therefore trouble is unavoidable: but it is not a place of punishment; and therefore pains, and tortures, and mortifications, have, as such, no merit in themselves; nor have we any ground to sup-

pose will find acceptance with God; unless productive of virtue, or accompanied with repentance.

And hence let me take the occasion, which this season * presents, to observe; that whatever practices of mortification and self-denial, on which some lay so undue a stress, either exclude acts of real religion, or profess to compensate for the neglect of them, and are unattended with some apparent and consequent good, do not only incur the charge of supererogation, but, as founded in error, encouraging vice, and seducing conscience, are objects even of reprehension: that whatever restraints are of human device, whether in the matter, or the degree of them, unless they have a direct tendency to subdue a lust, to improve a virtue, or to quicken our relish of intellectual pleasures, are silly and fantastical, I may add, superstitious too. And when the atheistic poet imputed the acknowledgment of God's existence and religious worship to

* Preached in Lent.

a principle of dastardly fear * ; he clearly mistook superstition for religion, this *false* fear of God for the *true* one.

Such is the FALSE FEAR OF GOD, and its operation. Let us now, in contra-distinction to it, endeavour 2dly, to ascertain what is the TRUE FEAR OF GOD, its influence on the human mind, and its consequent effect on human actions.

II. THE TRUE FEAR OF GOD is founded on no single attribute of the Deity, but on a combination of his infinite perfections, his power, justice, wisdom, and goodness, his ubiquity, and omniscience. It is a holy fear, mixt with love, and reverence. We fear to offend a Being, who hath declared his resolution to punish offences, and whose power is equal to the execution of his resolves. But when we add to the infinite power of that Being our idea of his infinite justice too ; our dread of his displeasure becomes blended with a consciousness of our own guilt. And hence we experience a double ground of fear ; a

* Primus in orbe Deos fecit timor. LUCR.

fear of his power, and the heart-wringing sense of having deserved the severe effect of it. To these attributes adding his wisdom, our guilt assumes the aggravation of folly: for it is impossible to offend infinite wisdom, without incurring the charge of extreme folly. If to this combination of perfections we add the consideration of infinite goodness; to the pungency of our other feelings, on the dread of divine displeasure, we have to place to our account the sense of ingratitude. And to give an edge to all these sensations, God's omniscience and ubiquity preclude the very shadow of hope, that our offences may escape his notice; and render our punishment as certain as our guilt. A dread then of offended power, blended with the consciousness of guilt, folly, and ingratitude, the whole heightened by a certainty of detection, and impossibility of escape, constitute that energetic principle, which, if properly encouraged, must, or nothing can, act as a deterrent from vice, **THE TRUE FEAR OF GOD.**

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Such is the principle inculcated in the text ; and so incontrovertible is the verity of it, that it need but be properly considered, to obtain its influence on the human mind, and consequent effect on human actions. *When I consider*, says Job, *I am afraid of Him*. The due consideration of an invisible, presiding, governing Being, possessed of holiness, power, justice, wisdom, goodness infinite, with omnipresence, omniscience, and all those high attributes that constitute perfection, must naturally and necessarily strike the contemplative mind with pious awe ; and have a consequent and correspondent effect on human actions. The further progress of its operation is regular and constant, as cause and necessary effect can render it. His power impresses the mind with reverence : while his justice engages us to guard our conduct with a sacred regard to right, conscious that for all our actions we are accountable to his sovereign power : and his wisdom prevents us from being dastardly and pusillanimous, trembling without cause, and deviating into absurd practices

tices without end or motive. Creative and preserving goodness produces an inflamed affection, that displays itself in an earnest desire to please Him; and his omniscience and ubiquity give a check to every base pursuit, to every mean and dishonest action.

Hence it may be collected, that there is no branch of moral and religious duty, however distinguished or diversified, but is either included in this great rule of life, THE FEAR OF GOD, or deducible from it; whether in regard to God, our neighbour, or ourselves.

As respecting God Himself, it is this holy reverential fear of Him which at once engages the heart and mind in the great business of solemn worship and devotion; that fixes the attention, and raises all the affections of the soul. Is it our duty to regard God as our sovereign and ruler? This fear to offend Him, forms the soul to an entire subjection to his all-wise commands, and disposing will: not from an abject slavish principle; but from a filial and reverential duty to Him, arising from those his attributes of infinite perfection, that
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are amiable, as well as formidable, and all together adorable. And as such, so far is it from being inconsistent even with the entire love of Him; that these two principles fear and love tend mutually to assist and strengthen each other.

And as enforcing obedience, whenever the Almighty calls us to difficulties and trials; this fear engages us to encounter and resist every enticement to offend Him; whether those trials relate immediately to God; or the duties he hath constituted in our relations to one another, as we are united in the nearer bonds of nature, or in social and civil life. The fear of offending our neighbour originates in the religious fear of offending God. He constituted civil society. He ordained the relative and social duties required in it: and to him man is accountable for the breach of them. In regard likewise to ourselves, the same principle directs us in every part of self-government, in reducing the passions to an habitual subjection to God's will, as declared by reason, or made known by revelation: teaching us so to *use the world,*

world, both in its businessses and pleasures, as not abusing it.

III. This principle of action, **THE FEAR OF GOD**, as thus explained, I proceed according to my third proposition, to apply particularly to the conduct of that exemplary character, to which it pertains, in the instance before us.

Had honour, that counterfeit of virtue, been the principle, on which he acted; passion would easily have silenced his scruples on that head, by whispering him, that it was a fancied good, a standard of action vague and vain; that it lived, and had its being in public estimation, that Potiphar's good opinion was all he had to regard; for, that secured, from the faucy breath of scandal his honour would not suffer a foil.

Let us next see how far the prudential principle of self-interest would have prevailed in checking his compliance with the alluring temptation. It would have represented to him the resentment of his master, and in consequence of it his own downfall from his present honours and
possessions,

possessions, and his hopes of future aggrandisement. And as self-interest is a powerful motive of action, he might hesitate for a moment, admit its plea in all its force, and wish to fix his resolves in its favour; till the sollicitation of pleasure, supporting the temptation, formed an unequal struggle in his bosom, and found means to do his doubts away. And to this end, in aid of all her blandishments, she would have flattered him with wisdom and prudence, sufficient to guard against discoveries; or, should he through inadvertence be detected, she would have suggested to him, that he had wealth and power to purchase secrecy, and stifle rumour in its birth.

What shall we say of moral rectitude, with fine-spun ideas of the fitness of things? It would have suggested the harmony, that God had established in the moral world, and the depravity of mind, which could induce any one to disturb it. It would have told him, virtue is so beautiful, that could she be seen naked, all the world would be in love with her; and would
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have remonstrated on the turpitude of violating her spotless charms. But would a philosophic rant, a flimsy harangue on the beauty of virtue and the deformity of vice, have baffled the pleadings of such a temptation as this; and stopped the career of passion? It was a far different principle of action, that in the instance under consideration did effect this. It was an inflamed affection, which the virtuous object of this temptation possessed, for that Being, of whose goodness he had largely partaken; who had planted in his mind just notions of right and wrong, and strictly enjoined him to avoid the one, and to pursue the other; whose exact justice necessitates him to punish disobedience, and whose infinite power can do it; who is ever the same unchangeable God, every where present with him, *about his path, and about his bed,* and who *noteth all his ways.* It was the uniform and consistent awe, arising from an assemblage of wise and just considerations, which the allurements of pleasure could not subdue, nor the arts of casuistry do away, that enabled him to
maintain

maintain his virtue with such unshaken resolution; at every risk to resist the temptation, and regard every consideration as secondary to the fear of offending God. *How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God!*

It now only remains on the crime, to which the instance in my text alludes, to say a word in conclusion.

The annals of this age, I am sorry to say, of this country too, character the vice alluded to in my text as deplorably prevalent. But familiar as it may be, it is not therefore the less criminal. However fashion may vary, human laws may relax, and example palliate; the law of God is, like himself, the same to-day, yesterday, and for ever; and custom, and example, will not alter it. The circumstances, that generally attend and heighten the commission of this crime, need no amplification of words, to render it more detestable, than it really is. Nor after urging a dissuasive from it, so solemn and cogent as the fear of offending God, can I suppose any arguments founded on human considerations,

derations, and referable to temporal motives, of any weight : or I would submit to the reflecting mind the outrage committed in it against society, and the irreparable injury to our neighbour : I would point out to you the act of complicated cruelty inflicted on a whole family ; their happiness subverted, and misery through life, perhaps after life, entailed on them. I would represent to you an injured husband, robbed of every thing he held most dear, deprived of every comfort in life, driven it may be to distraction, or lost to the world : a ruined wife, fond perhaps and affectionate, till the fiend-like arts of an insidious seducer had lured her from the path of duty, innocence, and happiness : children, disowned by one parent, deserted by the other, innocent, helpless, and unprotected. And I would then bid the seducer question himself, what degree of punishment such accumulated cruelty deserves.

Before I conclude, I will say one word more ; and suppose, I wish experience would not justify the supposition, that the
seducer

seducer was the injured sufferer's friend ; that he was the companion of his social hours, the witness of his domestic felicity, that he enjoyed his confidence and barbarously converted it against his peace, that he plunged a dagger into the bosom that received him. And then let me ask him, if such a magnitude of complicated guilt, wanting almost a pretence, does not also want a name.

Let fashion laugh, let the complaisance of human laws connive, at the crime ; God's law hath declared the penalty of it death. At his tribunal we are all amenable ; and, as responsible beings, at his tribunal we must all appear. It is impossible to a reflecting mind to address a more persuasive argument, than this awful consideration. But to the temporalist, that can not lift his mind above the limits of this world, the preceding reflections offer another, in the proof they afford, from the plainest deductions of reason, that religious principles are, in regard to this world's good, of incalculable value. Where else shall the parent find a guard against the

seduction of innocence? Where else will the husband find security for the fidelity and affection of a wife? Not in the bubble honour. Not in prudence: for, religion apart, pleasure is prudence, when there is nothing to fear. Were I to exclaim, shew me the family where there is no religion, and I will refer you to a scene of inconsistency, if virtue and innocence reside there: the reflection might appear harsh, but I may defy the acutest reasoner to prove it unjust. When pleasure invites, and passion pleads, while opportunity and importunity conspire in support of the sollicitation; no earthly consideration can counterbalance the force of such a temptation: virtue thus powerfully attacked no principle less powerful, than the fear of God, will secure. The panoply of innocence is of celestial frame: and to the influence of the next world we must look for the security of every thing that is truly valuable in this. For God Almighty hath so closely united virtue and religion, the interests of this world and the next; that all the sophistry and conceits of man
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can not put them afunder. *Seek ye first, faith the word of truth, the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.*

Now to God the Father, &c.

ON CONSCIENCE.

SERMON X.

ROMANS ii. 14, 15.

When the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law; these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.

TO such extravagant height did the more rigid among the Jews carry their contempt of the nations of the world; that they denied the Gentiles, who were without the law, to have either virtue or vice: whatever these did, they supposed was done by them not of choice or election,

tion, but by nature; and that therefore there was no reason why they should be rewarded for the one, or punished for the other. To this overweening notion of the Jews the passage before us seems particularly to allude. Though, says the apostle, they are destitute of the light of revelation, yet are they not without a rule of conduct; though they have no written law, they have a law graven on their hearts; by which in general cases they understand, and are conscious to themselves, what is good and evil, and therefore are just objects of salvation and condemnation; capable of rewards, if they observe this law, and liable to punishment, if they act against it. *When the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law; these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.* Or perhaps rather, their thoughts the mean while respectively to themselves accusing or else

excusing them. Respectively to themselves, or each one's to himself, seems in this place to be the proper import of the words *μετὰ ζῆλον ἀλλήλων*.

From these words I will take occasion to enquire into the nature of the principle, by the apostle here styled conscience; which will lead me to consider, in the second place, how far it is or is not a full and sufficient rule of action.

I. Conscience, according to the common acceptance of the word, is understood to signify the judgment of a man's mind upon the moral rectitude or iniquity of his actions: but the checks or impulse of conscience frequently precede any such operation of reason: some internal monitor frequently stops us short in the career of evil; and it is not till in consequence of such checks, that we begin to look about us, to reason, and deliberate upon the fitness of what we are going to engage in. Conscience therefore should seem to imply something more than the usual explications attribute to it; something, that acts in concert with right reason, but is nevertheless

theless distinct and different from it. For if the case was otherwise, if conscience was nothing else than the determination of reason in judging upon moral obligations; the most acute and subtle reasoner would always be the man of nicest and most feeling conscience. Whereas the fact is frequently found to be the very reverse of this: reason often exerts itself with vigour and acuteness in men of corrupt morals and the most depraved appetites; where the voice of conscience is silenced, or at best but faintly heard. And on the contrary, the conscience of the rude unlettered man will sometimes start at the commission of an evil action, which the man of refined reason will either overlook, or with the subtle device of some nice distinctions gloss over and palliate. Reason is the investigation of truth; conscience, as the word seems etymologically to imply, an innate knowledge of it. Reason acts by making comparisons, forming judgment upon them, and by a long train of thought: conscience operates instantaneously; without any laborious deductions of reason,

directs, approves, or chides. It is as it were a ray of intuitive knowledge, that image* of the Deity, after which man was originally created; a particle of divine light, which by the great and general depravation of human nature has since the first fair original been much obscured, but is not even yet entirely extinguished. Those general conceptions of right and wrong, naturally engendered in the human mind, and implicated with the frame and constitution of it, still influence it, though with various and diminished powers: they form that principle, which still continues to upbraid and rebuke a man with an evil action; and to impart the most sensible satisfaction on the performance of a good one.

This principle then we may suppose at first implanted in human nature, to assist reason in the investigation of moral obli-

* Agreeably to what is here observed, the Apostle files the revival of the old law of nature, in the Revelation of Jesus Christ, the renewal of the Image of God in man: Col. iii. 10. *Ye have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him.*

gations;

gations; to bear witness to, and enforce it. And the united powers of reason and conscience, as they were afforded us, whereby to regulate our conduct, and to direct us in the discharge of our duty, it is natural to suppose were abundantly sufficient to the end, for which our gracious Creator intended them. It is just to presume they were at the creation, and before the fall, a sufficient standard and rule of action, had man duly attended to them. It is reasonable to conceive, without indulging our fancy too far, that could any doubt have arisen in the mind, in regard to moral conduct, reason would have distinguished so readily, clearly, and impartially, and the verdict of conscience have been so pure and untainted, so forceful and express, that a just determination would have been as early as the proposal. If a man turn his eyes inward, and look impartially into his own breast; he will perceive something putting him in mind of what he should, or should not, do, and afterward accusing, or else excusing him, accordingly as he has, or has not done it.

And

And from what he feels passing within himself at this period, and in this corrupted state of our nature, he may in some measure conceive how clearly and forcibly this principle might have acted in its original vigour: before the violent inroads of passion, and the general spread of vice, had reversed our nature; and reduced us from a set of beings, created little inferior to angels, in many instances beneath the level of brutes.

This was that principle, or, as the apostle terms it, law, which was originally afforded Adam, whereby to regulate his conduct; and for transgressing against the dictates of which, he incurred the fatal punishment of his sin. It was to the virtuous heathen * his monitor, his guide, his God. It was to every man, if fairly consulted, and duly attended to, the best of casuists, and the most faithful friend. But in a course of years vice made so large strides in the world, that this law, though in the minds of some few it might shine with distinguished lustre, with the

* Socrates.

generality

generality of men became almost obliterated. In short, it was to be, that offences should come; and at length through the power of temptations, which the growing luxury of the world on every side held out, through the prevalency of passions from within, the force of habit and example from without, and the almost insurmountable ascendancy of inveterate prejudices, the original light of reason was so much obscured; and with it the voice of conscience, that was accustomed to attend its decisions, either lulled asleep, or bribed to plead against it; that it became no easy matter in all cases to discern right from wrong, and good from evil: insomuch that men, even well-designing men, were often betrayed to impose both on themselves and others with false notions, and correspondingly false and evil actions; to substitute bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter. The apostle himself declares, speaking in the character of a Jew, that he *had not known sin, but by the law, for he had not known lust, except the law had said, thou shalt not covet.* That is, we should not have
known

known sin so certainly and precisely, in all its minute branches, and latent principles, but by the law. Scarcely should we have known that lust, or irregular desire, was a sin, except the law had so expressly forbidden it.

Such was the state of mankind, when it pleased the Almighty to redeem them from the great ignorance and error, into which they had fallen, by a revealed manifestation of his will. The original light of nature Moses was sent to revive, explain, and enforce. And a successive train of divine delegates at different periods appeared in the world, gradually opening, and preparing mankind for that revelation, which Christ himself came down from heaven to complete; who therefore expressly affirms, that the end of his mission was to fulfill the law. Thus were the clouds of error dispersed, and reason taught again to shine with more than original lustre: the law written in man's heart attending the result of his will and actions with a voice of accusation or excuse.

Strange

Strange then that this handmaid of religion, this assistant of reason, should be so frequently seduced from the plain dictates both of the one, and the other. The man of the world, as it is emphatically expressed, *fears* his conscience; and then mistakes its want of feeling for approbation. The bigot, on the other hand, maligns and persecutes all who in practice or opinion differ from him; and thinks, or feigns to think, he is therein doing God service. Thus from a misinformed conscience proceeds the vain confidence of the sceptic, and from the same corrupted source the pious rants of enthusiasm.

II. In enquiring farther how this principle, calculated for the best and noblest purposes, becomes so liable to be perverted, and made subservient to the very worst, I shall be led to consider, in the second place, how far it is, or is not, a full and sufficient rule of action.

We supposed this law of the mind, written by God himself on the tablet of every man's heart, to have been originally full and explicit; sufficient to the purpose for
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which it was intended. We have also seen, that after the fall, this internal light became greatly obscured; and in a course of years, human nature verging from bad to worse, was at length only not extinguished. Hence appeared the necessity of some more certain and perfect standard to walk by, and the goodness of our Creator in reviving the faint and glimmering light of nature with an accession of light neither faint nor glimmering, which reforms the manners, while it enlarges the understanding; and, while it opens the noblest prospect of happiness hereafter, conducts us to it through *ways of pleasantness, and paths of peace.*

But if in this corrupt state of our nature, where the passions take the lead, men will argue, that because no revelation was at first made, and mankind were suffered to continue many ages without one, therefore no revelation could ever afterwards be necessary; that because reason and conscience were all the rule of conduct, that was at first given, and must consequently be supposed then to have been a sufficient rule,

rule, therefore it must ever remain to be so; and from such arguments are led to form their conduct on certain vague principles, which each proposes for himself, derived from the bias of natural inclination, or the prevailing force of example; the insufficiency of this rule, and impropriety of a conduct formed on it, will best appear from attending to their natural consequences.

Every man has his darling passion, which usurps a predominancy, and pleads for gratification and indulgence more powerfully than the rest. These are apt to dazzle our reason, and seduce our conscience; we miscall, we palliate, we smooth and soften them. The man of pleasure for instance calls sensuality the dictates of nature, and obeys those dictates as often as inclination prompts, and opportunity offers. And though he would start at avarice or ingratitude; his conscience gives him no uneasiness in that point, to which his natural complexion inclines him. The miser stamps upon avarice the amiable name of frugality: and, while he sees
luxury

luxury and sensuality in their blackest colours, idolizes his Mammon; and, though the enemy both of God and man, perceives nothing criminal in the worst of crimes.

In these therefore and the like cases right and wrong are no longer the same; but what is virtue with one man is with another vice: and the apparent fitness of things, upon which the man of reason is apt to lay so much stress, is continually altering and changing, as vague as men's various humours and caprice. And not only so; but this rule of action shall to the same persons appear different, at different times. The less progress men have made in vice, the more tender and delicate their consciences are: but when they have made a larger advancement in it, their consciences by being frequently wounded become more callous, and the difference between right and wrong less sensibly affects them. It is the same in the moral; as in the natural world: moral honesty, like objects of sight, the farther we remove
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from it, is the more faintly and indistinctly discerned by us.

If therefore by the assistance of our passions and prejudices, and other external helps which the world will afford us, we can so far blind our reason, as firmly to persuade ourselves we may advance such and such lengths in vice without incurring guilt, and innocently indulge ourselves in those peculiar vices to which we are most inclined, provided we keep clear of others to which perhaps we have no inclination; reason thus dazzled, and the passions triumphant, we shall never hear the faintest whispers of conscience. Indeed, the principle we might call conscience, thus biassed, becomes no conscience at all; but rather fancy, humour, or prejudice, taken up from education, interest, or example: all which are apt to be frequently mistaken for conscience; and under that fair and seemly disguise to betray men of weak judgment, strong passions, and heated imaginations, into the greatest extravagancies of absurdity and vice.

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To evince the danger of such mistakes, and the necessity there is of being well informed how far our conscience may be depended upon, or not; it is sufficient to observe, that whatever notions we may entertain of virtue and vice, their nature is nevertheless immutable, and God's judgment of them the same: and therefore we shall be accountable for the practice of them, as they are, and not as a perverted conscience may represent them to us.

What is apt to palm itself upon the mind for conscience, I observed, is oftentimes no more than the prepossession of some passion, or prejudice. And indeed were we nicely to investigate the nature of a false and erroneous conscience, and through all its devious turns and windings trace it up to its proper source; we should ever find it ultimately flowing from some prevailing passion, from interest, or example. Each of these, its charms respectively adapted to the mind it possesses, pleads with eloquence so palatable and prevailing, that conscience is vanquished; and this new minion usurps both its place and office:

office: so that, however we may deceive ourselves, it is not in this case the judgment of conscience, that acquits, or condemns; but some vicious propensity or prejudice, which over-rules that judgment: and conscience, where it is not entirely silenced, thus baffled and superseded in one quarter, changes the attack, and exerts all its power against those other vices: where no passion or prejudice prevails in their favour. Hence it is that we oftentimes observe a man laying great stress upon some peculiar virtues, or rather perhaps some external forms of virtue, exclusive of the rest; and proportionably vehement against particular vices. And hence too we may perhaps in some measure account for that observation, neither uncommon, nor unjust; that those, who make the greatest parade of conscience, are frequently found in reality to have the least of it. A man may *fast twice in the week, and give tithes of all that he hath*; but if he be at the same time proud, censorious, and uncharitable; he may speak peace to his conscience, and thank God that he is

not as other men are : but we may collect from our Saviour's remark, that he speaks peace where there is no peace.

Conscience is always uniform ; it comprehends virtue in all its branches : and though it may not be sufficient at all times to guard and secure us against every attack of vice ; it will never lay out its powers in securing us against particular vices, and leave us exposed to, and even countenance, the rest. It will never cease to disquiet and molest us, till we cease to sin ; nor, in complaisance to passion, ever impose upon us in a fair flattering disguise. Would Herod, for instance, who knew John to be *a just man and holy* ; who heard him gladly in some things, and paid great regard to his advice and direction ; would he have judged himself obliged to sacrifice this good counsellor, this just, this holy man, to a rash unguarded promise, unless conscience had imposed upon him in the harlot dress of honour ? In consequence of his solemn promise, and regard to the respectable company before whom it was made, he felt himself bound in honour
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and conscience to commit murder, with the most aggravating circumstances.

I might, in farther confirmation of what has been in general advanced, descend to other particular instances; in which the secret springs of this false principle would appear as clearly laid open, as *in the* case just mentioned: might I not presume the insufficiency of conscience, as a rule of action, let and hindered as we are by the incumbances of sin, and the temptations that on all sides so powerfully solicit us, fully evinced; as also the necessity of some fixed standard, whereby to regulate a principle otherwise so little to be depended on, so very vague and vain. And after what has been already premised, little more need be added to point out the criterion intended. Revealed religion being now what the law of nature originally was, we may in every case depend upon conscience, regulated by the revelation which God has been pleased to make to us, fairly and rationally interpreted, to be a full and sufficient rule of action. Since so excellent and compleat a system of morality

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rality has Christ left us; that there is no duty which we ought to practise, nothing we ought to refrain from, but what is there clearly and expressly commanded, or forbidden. It is from thence, and thence only, that conscience is to take its measures: so that as every man is bound to walk according to his own conscience, every man's conscience is equally bound to the direction of God's word.

It may be objected, that if divine revelation be the only full and sufficient standard by which conscience is to be regulated; what will become of those, and how are they to act, whom this day-spring from on high hath never visited: to which the words under consideration are a sufficient answer. Though the heathen have not the written law of God, still have they an universal law written in their hearts; which, though less clear and forceful than the other, is still sufficient in general cases to direct them in the discharge of their duty: though less purity and holiness will be required of them, and proportionably less will their merit or demerit be, this
their

their law is both so clear and forceful, as to render them accountable for their actions; justly liable to punishment, and through the applied merits of Christ capable of rewards.

The sum of what may be practically inferred from the above discourse is, that since our Creator hath stamped upon the human mind so faithful a monitor, and so sure a guide, if properly regulated and duly attended to, as conscience; it is both our interest and our duty, carefully to follow its dictates, and submissively attend to its reproofs. A strict regard to it will by little and little wean us from our sins, by the uneasiness and remorse * it will on the commission of vice create to us. For it is difficult to figure to ourselves a more un-

* This uneasiness, and remorse of conscience, as it is termed, which we feel upon the commission of an evil action, affords no bad argument in support of the freedom of will and action. For why should we feel any uneasiness in consequence of an action, to which we were necessarily determined? Remorse is a temporary punishment; and often a very severe one. But the act must be free and voluntary, else it is no crime: and it must be a crime, else it is not in strict justice punishable.

happy man than him, who has a just sense of virtue, yet whose virtue is continually yielding to the blandishment and charms of vice; whose life is a constant succession of sinning and repenting; who hates himself for being the thing he is, yet wants resolution to become otherwise. But when the voice of conscience is silenced; when the passions, originally formed in subservience to reason, have once broke from their allegiance, and usurping dominion annul and abrogate the law written in our hearts; the strongest barrier against the inroads of vice is demolished, and no other defence of sinking virtue will be left, than worldly interest, or the dread of worldly shame.

Seeing then that rebellion against this law is so uneasy to us, and inattention to it so dangerous; will it not abundantly recompence to us all our pains, to labour to preserve this principle pure and undefiled; *to exercise ourselves to have always a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man?* Which is nothing less than what our Saviour in other words calls our duty

duty to God and our neighbour; and which he affirms to comprise the whole law and the prophets. That this be our care, as it will be our comfort here, and our happiness hereafter; may God of his infinite mercy grant, &c.

ON INSPIRATION.

Preached on Whit Sunday.

SERMON XI.

2 TIMOTHY iii. 16.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God.

A Religion, that like the Christian fundamentally opposes every kind of vice, must necessarily draw upon it the ill will of all such as are engaged in vicious pursuits; accordingly the quiver of infidelity has been drained, and no shadow of occasion neglected by the sensualist to cavil at its doctrines, and if possible rid his conscience of so galling a yoke. Divine revelation has been considered as an idle dream of enthusiasm, all notions of inspiration have been controverted, and because there have been many false pretences made to it, the reality of the thing has been called in question:

question: which argues just as good reasoning, as it would be, to dispute the reality of virtue, because there are in the world so many hypocrites.

By inspiration we understand a supernatural conveyance of divine truths to the mind; which, in attestation of the reality of it, hath been ever attended with a display of miraculous powers. The particular inspiration, which we this day commemorate, was evinced in the extraordinary profusion of the Holy Ghost on the apostles assembled at the great feast of Pentecost; and was sufficiently displayed to the wondering assembly by the various gifts of tongues, with which the apostles were instantaneously instructed. The fact is by the sacred historian thus simply related.

At the general feast of Pentecost, when the Jews were assembled from all quarters of the world at Jerusalem; a surprising sound, like that of a mighty rushing wind, filled the house where the apostles were sitting: whilst * *a kind of fiery tongues*, as

* *ὡς ἕως πυρός.*

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proper symbols of those gifts with which they were then inspired from on high, appeared over each of them. And the effects that immediately followed, were fully answerable to those figurative resemblances, for they were instantaneously filled with the Holy Ghost, and expressed themselves as the spirit dictated in such variety of languages, that they could readily converse with the Parthian, the Mede, and Elamite, in short with the natives of every country in Europe, Asia, and Africa; with each in the language of the country in which he was born.

Against the truth of this fact, however extraordinary it may appear, there can be objected no implication of impossibility or contradiction. There are two ways, by which a knowledge of different languages may be acquired; ordinary and extraordinary. The ordinary way of requiring this knowledge of languages, is by conversing frequently with those who understand them; or by long study and application: the other, and extraordinary way, of attaining to it, is by an immediate divine

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vine conveyance. And who can doubt, but that He, who furnished us with faculties capable of learning different languages in length of time and by dint of application, can, whenever he sees fit, convey to us the same degree of knowledge instantaneously? However, there are not wanting those, who suppose all notions of inspiration, of supernatural knowledge and power communicated to man, to be false and vain. Leaving therefore the particular fact above related to stand or fall with inspiration in general, the principal objections that have been lately urged against the truth and reality of the latter, shall in the sequel of this discourse be considered. And in order to remove those objections, I will endeavour, first, to evince that there are certain criteria, by which an inspired person may himself know assuredly when he is inspired; and means, by which this knowledge may be communicated to others who are uninspired: and will, 2dly, examine the inspiration of the apostles of Christ according to the rules laid down.

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I. It cannot be denied, that He, who established the laws of nature, can, whenever He sees fit, supersede those laws: and if we can assign a cause worthy of such extraordinary interposition of the Deity, we must believe He will do it. If then the promulgation of certain divine truths, that concerned not the interests of this or that society of men, but on which depended the good and happiness of the whole race of mankind, could not be rendered effectual, without some supernatural display of divine power; we have a cause or motive demanding and worthy of the effect, the reality of which it is here proposed to establish. And, considered in this view, we may venture to pronounce the possibility of inspiration. True it is, that the vain illusions of distempered zeal may impose upon a weak judgment and heated imagination; and misrepresent the wild flights of enthusiasm for holy raptures of inspiration. But still though one person should fancy himself to be inspired, when he is not; this affects not the possibility of another person's feeling and knowing that
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he is inspired, when he really is so. It has however been asserted by the adversaries of revelation, that no one can know assuredly that he is inspired; or, granting that he was inspired, yet it is utterly impracticable that he should ever produce indubitable credentials of a divine commission to others, who are uninspired. Which leads me to consider, as was proposed in the first place, whether certain criteria might not be discovered, that would infallibly prove the reality of inspiration both to the inspired person himself, and to others.

If we allow that God can in particular cases, and for special reasons, enlarge the powers of human agents, in an extraordinary manner; may we not also believe that he can communicate to the persons thus inspired such incontestible evidence of their inspiration, as shall with regard to themselves place the truth of the fact beyond all doubt? Whoever considers the vast power and influence, which He who formed the soul must have upon it, must believe that He can afford such clear and
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strong conviction of any truths He shall be pleased extraordinarily to communicate, can give such a vigorous perception, can accompany his own revelations with such sufficient proofs of the reality of them; that the persons, charged with them, shall assuredly know whether they are from God.

Let us suppose a man of ordinary understanding; or, to place the matter in a stronger light, an ignorant illiterate person to feel his mind on a sudden opened, his understanding illumined, and his ideas enlarged; must he not conclude such an effect to be some way supernatural? If he perceive within himself a knowledge of certain facts, which perhaps till then he never thought on; or at most never thought on, but with perplexity and obscurity: if without any nice disquisitions, any laborious researches, he sees, by a kind of intuitive knowledge, truths which before he was not able to ascertain by any deductions of reason; if it be further given him, to pierce into the dark womb of time, and there discover productions
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maturing into birth; must he not conclude this sudden acquisition of knowledge to be supernatural: that is, must he not conclude himself to be inspired? To give objections their full claim; let it be granted that on weak and distempered minds fancy may operate thus strongly, that all this may be effected by enthusiasm. Yet when this enlargement of the intellectual powers is likewise attended with the evidence of the senses; when to this fancied knowledge is added a power of working miracles; when the man possessed of wisdom and discernment, which might seem too wonderful and excellent for mere man to attain to, also performs things which are beyond the ordinary operations of nature: when he can converse with people of all nations in languages which before he never heard, and finds himself understood by them; when sickness and disease fly at his touch; when he can say to the lame, walk, and he walketh; and to the blind, receive thy sight, and he receiveth it; the person so inspired may rest assured, that this is no vain illusion, but a real in-

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piration ; God himself as it were by signs and miracles thus setting his seal to the truth and reality of it.

These are the means, and sufficient means they seem to be, whereby a person may judge whether he himself be inspired, or not. And the last argument alledged for this purpose, viz. the power of working miracles, is no weak one towards the conviction of others. But as very uncommon things may have been effected by natural powers, as we cannot exactly determine upon the powers that Beings of a superiour nature, even evil spirits, may be permitted to exercise ; before those miracles can be absolutely pronounced divine, they must have some good design to serve, some end worthy of the great cause to which they are ascribed. And what cause upon earth so worthy of God's interposition, as that of virtue and religion ? If then the miracles be wrought in confirmation of the purest and compleatest system of morality that can be conceived ; we may judge of the divinity of the miracles from the end they are intended to serve :
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the authority of those precepts may be estimated by the powers evinced in the promulgation of them; and as our Lord himself argues, the persons thus charged may be believed for the work's sake. To suppose a person himself inspired, incapable of proving the divinity of his commission to others who are uninspired, is an hypothesis almost too absurd to need confutation.

Can we suppose that God would reveal to any one truths, the knowledge and belief of which are essential to the happiness of mankind; without investing the person so charged with powers sufficient to convince the reasoning and unprejudiced part of the world of the divinity of his commission? To grant the heaven-favoured prophets the gift of inspiration, but at the same time shut up the hearts of the persons most concerned in those prophecies against all confidence and belief in them, may form a pretty fable for Pagan theology, but will never find a place in the creed of a rational Christian. Such a notion degrades the Deity. *The manifesta-*

tion of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. The extraordinary gifts of inspiration are conferred on no man for his own private advantage, honour, or satisfaction; but for the general good and benefit of others. But what general good or benefit could possibly accrue from any one's inspiration; if he could convince nobody of the divinity of his commission, and in consequence of it, of the excellence of those doctrines which he was delegated to promulgate, and of the degree of assent that was therefore due to them? Hence it appears, that the absurdity of such a supposition is itself a sufficient confutation of it.

Another corroborative argument, for I mention it not as singly such, whereby the reality of the inspiration may be made appear to others, is the success this supposed system shall meet with. If it fall to the ground with the first preachers, no farther good being discerned to proceed from it; we may assure ourselves of the falsity of it: for a religion divinely instituted, must necessarily be divinely supported. And if a
religion

religion be attended with a success infinitely above the slender means that human assistance afforded; this is a corroborative argument of the truth of it, though an argument of little force taken singly. For a false religion God may permit to flourish; either to keep alive a zeal in those who are so happy as to be engaged in the profession of the true one; or as a stumbling block for such as stop their ears against the voice which whispers joy and comfort, which charmeth ever so wisely; or for the punishment of those who, if they hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, yet with so cold and languid wishes receive the word, that their thoughts and actions are at perpetual variance; or for some other wise and good purpose, best and perhaps only known to God himself.

In short, as no one can limit the powers of Omnipotence, where no contradiction is implied; no one can with any pretence of reason deny the possibility of inspiration. And by those general rules, above alleged to evince the truth of the inspira-

tion, both to the inspired person himself, and to those who are uninspired, it seems not only possible but easy to distinguish real inspiration from enthusiasm or imposture. According to these established rules then we will, as was in the second place proposed, examine the inspiration of the apostles of Christ.

II. And first here are a set of ignorant illiterate men, taken from their manual occupations; who voluntarily renounce all worldly comforts, all ease, and satisfaction, and take upon them to reform the world: and to the confusion of the wise men of the world publish doctrines of such height and importance, as the greatest extent of human philosophy was never able to reach; the resurrection of the dead, the doctrines of a future state, and the final retribution of rewards and punishments. Nor were these high important truths ushered into the world with the weakness and insufficiency, the madness and enthusiasm of field preachers; they were supported and enforced by miracles, by extraordinary signs, and many wonderful works.

works. These men, like their great master, gave sight to the blind, strength to the lame, and healed all manner of disease among the people. The consciousness of having their minds illumined with such knowledge as this, attended with the incontestible evidence of the senses, must to the persons themselves be a full and sufficient assurance of the real divinity of their commission : and by these marks the apostles of Christ were so thoroughly convinced of their own inspiration, that they laid down their lives in confirmation of it. Which circumstance affords another, and that no inconsiderable, argument for the conviction of others.

To this end however, agreeably to the rules before laid down, besides the power of working miracles, it is necessary that the drift and design of those miracles be good ; that is, that the doctrines, in support and confirmation of which they are wrought, be of so pure a nature, as may challenge the divine interposition, and not be imputable to the agency of dæmons or evil spirits. Accordingly the utmost efforts of

human reason, assisted with all the advantages of learning and experience, were never able to frame a system of morality, so aptly calculated for universal practice, so well adapted to every capacity, so pure, so perfect, as the religion of Jesus Christ. Indeed the perfect purity that Christianity requires of its professors has been the greatest, if not only source of those cavils which men of libertine principles have laboured to raise against it.

The last concurrent circumstance mentioned as necessary to evince the divinity of any religion, is the success of it. And truly the apostles wrought no greater miracle, than the amazing progress of Christianity affords us. It was promulgated by a set of indigent, destitute, ignorant, illiterate men. It comprized a system of morality, utterly destructive of vice and vanity, directly opposite to men's lusts and passions, to the folly and pleasurable pursuits of this world: and consequently most obnoxious to those who most enjoyed such gratifications; which were in general those who had it most in their power
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to enjoy them. It was therefore not only unsupported by the countenance of power and authority, but most violently opposed by those, whose exalted stations gave them opportunity of doing the greatest harm to it. No sword was drawn in its support, nor had it the rudeness of Arabs to practice upon. No darling pleasure, no choice sensuality was reserved to comfort its professors for the loss of all the rest. The strenuous assertors of Christianity had no temporal rewards to look for; no recompence to spirit them up under all the various difficulties they had to encounter, but what was from above: they were not made captains of hundreds, and captains of thousands. The more bold, the more indefatigable they were in propagating the doctrines with which they were charged; the more cruelly they were persecuted. They were spoken against every where, they met with nothing but contempt, calumny, imprisonment, and death in all its most formidable shapes. Yet in spite of all these difficulties, in spite of all opposition, so amazingly did this religion flourish and prevail;

prevail ; that in a short time princes became its patrons and protectors, and “ queens its nursing mothers.” And at this day the most polished parts of the globe, however loose particulars may be in practice, profess Christianity.

From this representation nude and impartial, I think it evidently appears, that there are certain criteria by which a real inspiration may be distinguished from all false pretensions to it ; and that the inspiration of the apostles of Christ doth in every circumstance exactly coincide with the rules for this purpose established. If from hence we turn our eyes to the impostures of an eminent pretender to divine inspiration ; we shall find that a general defectiveness in every rule above laid down abundantly proclaims the falsity of such his pretensions. Consider the cunning, insinuating Mahomet, making his religion subserve the most ambitious views ; engaging in his projects men of equal art and subtlety with himself, and rewarding their faithful services with wealth and temporal honours : consider his ridiculous pretensions

pretensions to miracles unattested, and his final appeal to the sword for conviction; and lastly consider the nature of his doctrines, which not only permitted, but even enjoined the most inordinate sensualities: and from hence may be collected the very great distinction that lies between real inspiration and false pretensions to it.

Represent to yourselves, on the other hand, the religion of nature, the darling idol of the Deist; see him prostrating himself to the stump of a tree, and saying to a carved stone, Thou art my God: attend her votaries to their religious ceremonies, and you will find acted there the grossest obscenities; approach their altars, and you will see them stained with human sacrifices; you will find throughout the veriest works of hell done under a blind pretence of pleasing heaven: and from hence may be learned the very great necessity there was for a revelation. Let the man of reason think of this sublime faculty as highly as he will; yet these were the wretched effects of unassisted reason. . And if modern freethinkers have
appeared .

appeared to enter more deeply into religious subjects, and to argue upon them more consistently, than the antient heathens have done; they can justly ascribe such their superiority to nothing but the strong lights which Christianity hath reflected on them.

To conclude therefore with a practical reflection: since God hath graciously condescended to afford us such a light; how can we pay too great attention to it! with what profound reverence ought we to regard the precepts and doctrines, the apostles of Christ have transmitted to us, the lively oracles of God! Blinded by ignorance, or prejudiced by our lusts, we may cavil at the doctrines, and refuse to obey those precepts; but it is impossible we should either amend the one, or better ourselves by refusing obedience to the other. We may torture and wrest them; but we are forewarned, it will be to our own destruction. Let us rather with open hearts receive the religion of Christ; not barely as it is a national religion, though even in that light, considered by men who
pretend

pretend to think all religions alike, it might merit some respect, but as a religion most unembarrassed with difficulties, most pure, most perfect; a revelation most strongly confirmed by unbiassed reason, most pregnant of blessings here, and exhibiting to us the noblest prospect of eternal happiness hereafter.

Now to God the Father, &c.

ON A PARADISIACAL STATE.

SERMON XII.

ECCLES. vii. 30.

This only have I found, that God created man perfect; but he hath found out many devices.

WHEN I throw my eyes around me, or contemplate in my mind the beautiful fabric of this visible world, and of every object it contains; so much is there to engage my attention, so much to admire and to praise, that I know not how sufficiently to adore the Almighty Creator: such proofs of infinite power, such traits of unerring wisdom, such marks of condescending goodness do his works display! Whether I regard the virtues of the herb, the tints of the flower, the carols of the bird, or the gambols of the light-hearted quadruped; every think speaks the plastic
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author's exhaustless praise. Who can forbear, on such contemplation, to exclaim, happy, thrice happy race of man, placed at the head of this fair creation; where use and beauty, all that can individually contribute to his happiness, in the aggregate unite! Or who would think the case far otherwise? Who would conceive that evil in a vast variety of shapes had so polluted and corrupted this chief work of the creation, man, a long train of diseases had so unharmonised the body, the unbridled fury of passion had so degraded and depraved the mind; that, instead of the exclamation, happy, thrice happy man! cool reflection will suggest the more humiliating acknowledgment, that on the most favourable representation of his felicity, all that could be pronounced of him was, that he is the most happy, who is the least miserable.

From what bitter and deadly fountain have been derived the evils, that with cares and sorrows, with sickness and disease, have so debased and polluted man in his moral, as well as natural capacity, is a
subject

subject that hath employed the abilities of antient, as well as more modern philosophers, to investigate: a knot, which the Deity himself could only untie. Hence with the short scanty line of human reason affecting to fathom the designs of God, and the secrets of nature, some, as the Manichees, denying His omnipotence, have supposed another God, or Dæmon, whose purposes were always opposite to His, whose business and delight were to frustrate the designs, and marr the works of the good God of nature with the infusion of evil; and, with a kind of chymic art, ill exercised, to extract that poisonous quality from the purest good. Others again have acknowledged God's omnipotence, at the expence of his providence: figuring to themselves a God, wrapt up in his own happiness, and far removed from the concerns of mankind;

“ Whose eye of favour merit never wins,

“ Whose justice visits not the blackest sins *.”

Others

* Est natura Deum _____

Semota a nostris rebus, sejunctaque longe;

Nec bene promeritis capitur, nec tangitur ira. LUCR.

Others again, by a denial of God's existence, rashly endeavour to cut the knot they can not loose. If God, as they argue, could not exclude evil from the creation, He was not omnipotent: if he would not do it, He was defective in benevolence: but a limited or defective Being is not absolute and perfect God. And thus proceeding on a false assumption to deny the existence of a God, they substitute in his place an abstract power, Fatality; who governs all things by an ideal law of irresistible necessity. But necessity implies a cause, some actual power that imposed it: therefore another description of Atheists, as widely erring in an opposite extreme, attribute the creation of the world to a fortuitous movement of atoms, and its government to the blind hand of Chance.

To these hypotheses I will add one more, which is the untractableness of matter; so untractable in its nature, as neither by art, or power, to be separated and disjoined from evil. From whence it is inferred, that evil is of the essence of man; and

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that consequently for his crimes he is rather an object of pity, than a subject of punishment. And hence they flatter themselves with more reason to lament the frailty of human nature, than the wickedness of mankind.

Passing by the former of those opinions noticed above, I will in the sequel of this discourse confine my reflections to the last: as it produces a false plea for every crime, by transferring the blame from man to human nature; that is, ultimately from the worm that is made, to the omnipotent hand that formed it. The advocates for this opinion suppose man to have come from the hand of his Creator so prone to evil, so averse to good, so incompetent to act right, and to live happy; that he never did, nor ever could have enjoyed a state of perfect innocence and happiness. But this is an assumption, which I will endeavour to confront with a proof of contrary purport.

There may be those who term the notion of a paradisiacal state, or golden age, an
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an amusing dream, and poetic fiction: but before such traditional account, deducible from the earliest writers, and recorded by philosophers, historians, and poets of all ages, can be suffered to pass as a mere unfounded fiction; it is not unreasonable to require some counterbalance of proof against the verity of it. And if, on the other hand, there be any truth in the doctrine of a paradisiacal state as delivered by Moses, if there be any vestige of truth in the accounts of antient heathen authors of the first credit and authority concerning the happy state of man, and golden age; the hypothesis of man's natural imperfection, so palatable to the passions and appetites of human nature, must fall to the ground, and the dangerous inferences that flow from it are removed. The object therefore of this discourse is to establish the doctrine of a primæval state of innocence and happiness. In proof of which I will, 1st, produce the authority of the sacred scriptures: 2dly, the suffrage of prophane authors, philosophers, historians,

torians, and poets: and I will endeavour 3dly, to establish the truth of the fact on the concurrent testimony and voice of reason.

I. And first, admitting the account of the paradisiacal state, which the scriptures afford us, whether we understand the Mo-
saic history of the creation as a simple positive fact, or as an eastern allegory, the doctrine inculcated in it is the same: viz. that *God created man perfect, but that he had found out many devices*; that God gave him a law written on his heart, which he should apprehend by the exercise of reason, and feel by the applause or reproach of conscience: that while he observed that law, he was happy; and that he ceased to be so, when he ceased to obey his Almighty Creator's commands. *And God beheld all things that he had made, and behold they were all good.* That is, they were formed with powers adequate to the state and condition, for which they were severally created. The very short sketch, Moses hath given of the primæval state of innocence

cence and happiness, evinces that it was no amusing tale framed to entertain, but the inculcation of a sober and serious truth related to instruct. Nor does that antient record stand nude and unsupported by any other text of scripture: frequent allusions to it occur in other parts of Holy Writ, inculcating the primæval innocence and happiness of man, till by the disobedience of Adam *all died*. And in another passage to the same effect the apostle observes, *as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, &c.* And again, *as by the disobedience of one man many were made sinners, &c.* The truth of the relation was never doubted by the antient Jews, nor the doctrine of the original perfection of human nature, which resulted from it. Neither hath it been rejected by Christians, or modern Jews, since the Christian dispensation took place. Nor on any principle of Christianity can it be controverted: for the whole economy of the Christian dispensation grounds on it. And as that dispensation more and more

opened itself; the doctrines of the fall of man, and of his redemption, concurred in mutually confirming, supporting, and illustrating each other.

The passages already recited, and others to the same purport which we meet with in the sacred writings, thrown together, do not obscurely, and by doubtful implications, intimate the doctrine, but plainly and expressly declare it. In the beginning of the world, it is asserted, our first parents, as all other works of the infinitely wise and good God, were created perfect; formed with appetites conducive to happiness, and furnished with reason and conscience to guide and rule them: and while these maintained their government, man was innocent and happy; but losing his innocence, his happiness fled with it. The sketch of history is short. How long he persevered in his state of innocence, we know not: but sin and misery, we know, had their origin together. And from the time that evil was first introduced into the world, like a river swelling as it flowed, wide and more wide it spread its pestiferous

ous stream, poisoning human life, and with its deadly taint infecting, and even changing, human nature.

II. The sense of scriptures, thus explained, I proceed, as was proposed in the second place, to examine the opinions of heathen authors on the subject: from whose writings if I make larger quotations, than discourses of this kind usually admit; the nature of the subject, which requires, will I trust excuse, it. And to philosophers, and historians, to whom greater credit is generally ascribed, than to poets, I will make my first appeal. And in that number Plutarch, eminent both as a philosopher and historian, offers himself to our attention in the following extraordinary passage. Describing a country in what he calls the fortunate islands, "Here," says he, "the rains fall rarely, and in gentle and refreshing showers; while soft and cooling gales breathe through the island, winged as it were with dew; which delightful temperature of the climate produces all kinds of herbage, and fruits of the most delicious flavour, without cultivation

vation or labour." And to this description he subjoins the following reflection: "so that the Barbarians firmly believe the Elysian Fields to be seated there; and in that delightful climate place the habitation of the happy, celebrated by Homer." But the pristine happy state, to which Plutarch's Barbarians referred, was much more likely to have been the paradisiacal state, of which some traces might have been traditionally handed down by the dispersed family of Noah; than it is credible, they should have gone for poetical figments to Greece.

And what Plutarch records of the Fortunate Islands, Diodorus Siculus relates of the island Toprobane; with this addition, that the inhabitants of this country lead a life free from sickness and disease. And his further observation on the death of the Toprobanites I can not pass by unnoticed; as resembling the opinion which some Christian writers have expressed, concerning the death, or rather departure from life, which was the destination of mankind if they had continued in the
paradisiacal

paradisiacal state. "There grows," says the historian, "a double* plant; on which whoever lies down to sleep falls into a sweet and pleasant slumber: and in the arms of sleep thus passes through the gate of death without inquietude or pain." Whether this relation of Diodorus may not have an allusion to the Mosaic TREE OF LIFE, I would not in a point of conjecture presume to determine for others. I must confess it so strikes me; and the DOUBLE plant of the historian seems to be a corrupted trace of the tradition, that might have reached them, of the two trees, that of sin, and of life. Death, that is, eternal death, strongly expressed by the sacred historian in the denunciation, *dying thou shalt die*, was not the condition of mortality, but the punishment of sin. Why might not therefore the tree of life possess that property, which was ascribed to the Toprobanitan plant, of procuring an easy and pleasant passage through the gate of death to immortality.

* Δεξυη Βοτρυη:

Procopius mentions a paradisiacal country, situated in Africa; watered with pleasant fountains, and adorned with beautiful woods, ever green and always breathing aromatic odours; while cooling and refreshing winds corrected the warmth, and produced a most delightful temperature of the air.

That a belief of such primæval state, as is contended for in this discourse, prevailed not only among the Hebrews and Egyptians, and was received from them by the Greeks, but even among the Indians, there is a very remarkable passage of Strabo in proof: who introduces Callanus, as thus addressing Alexander the Great. “The earth was formerly as replete with wheat and barley, as it is now with dust: and fountains flowed through it, some of water, some of milk, and others of honey, wine, and oil; ’till corrupted as the inhabitants became by luxury and indulgence, Jupiter was offended at their conduct, changed the state of the world, and made the productions of the earth, and the necessaries of life, the acquirement
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of toil and labour." No one, I conceive, who reads this account, can hesitate a moment about the fountain from whence it was derived.

To those writers, who however different in their representations of the situation of the country they respectively describe, there is little doubt, allude all to the same original tradition, and to a representation of the same place, I will add a philosopher of learning, dignity, and weight; the first of writers, and the first of philosophers, that adorned the heathen world. In the dialogue, entitled the STATESMAN *, which is prefixed as a kind of introduction to the books that follow on POLITY, and the LAWS, the philosopher treats at large of the origin of polity, which he traces back to the earliest times: when he considers man, as placed by his Creator in a state of happiness, and in an age truly golden. His description of that happy and golden age he calls a tradition; in that term intimating an account of things derived from antient times, and not a dream of

* Πολιτικός.

philosophy,

philosophy, or a poetic fiction. The stress he lays on that tradition, and the credit he would conciliate to it, the strong terms in which he mentions it evince. "Those traditions," says he, "were handed down to us from our most antient ancestors; those who lived nearest the earliest revolution in the state of the world. They were the persons, from whom those accounts were originally received." Plato's description of primæval happiness, painted as it is in such lively colours, my subject will not suffer me immediately to dismiss: in which if we do not find accurate and exact truth, the vestige and traces of it there are few I think who will not acknowledge. "In that age," says our philosopher, "there existed nothing ferocious and savage, no carnivorous animals devoured each other, nor were war and faction known. God supplied the means of subsistence to mankind. He was their guardian and their shepherd. And while under his government, civil politics in states and cities there were none.—Fruits in abundance the trees and fertile soil spontaneously produced,
without

without the labour or the art of husbandry." In his allusions to Saturn's reign, the same author has many relations, plainly characteristic of the paradisiacal state. And from the same fountain, from whence he obtained his information, he observes, were derived many other instructive anecdotes, more extraordinary than those he has recorded; which from the great distance of time are partly very obscure, and partly so scattered and confused as not to admit of an easy explanation. If any thing more was wanting, after the ample and particular description Plato has given of the happy age, to evince the store-house from whence he drew his materials; that part of his *Timæus*, or Dialogue on Nature, in which he treats of the creation of mankind, will to this purpose be found very satisfactory; particularly where he discusses the subject relating to the origin of evil. On the whole, stripping off the shade in which truth is involved, the traditions he records are in sum and substance to this amount; that while mankind preserved the image of the Deity

Deity impressed on them uncontaminated, they lived happily and well; and otherwise, when they lost their purity, and became the slaves of passion.

From the historians and philosophers to descend to the poets, whose descriptions though embellished with fiction were often founded upon truth, let us hear Homer's description of the Elysian Fields.

Joys ever young, unmix'd with pain or fear,
 Fill the wide circle of th' eternal year:
 Stern winter smiles on that auspicious clime;
 The fields are florid with unfading prime:
 From the bleak poles no winds inclement blow,
 Mould the round hail, or flake the fleecy snow:
 But from the breezy deep the blest inhale
 The fragrant murmurs of the western gale. POPE.

What shall I say of the gardens of Alcinoüs? Are not these too derived from the same source? Does not this description character a garden situate in some much happier, than Phæacian, clime? Some critics have supposed the poet drew his copy from the Atlantic islands. But those pleasant gardens, or rather gardens of pleasure, let fancy exercise her powers

as she will, reason evinces, with all other various descriptions to be met with in prophane authors to the same tenour, have a reference to one and the same original, the paradisiacal state: a representation received by tradition from the first ages, and handed down by the earliest writers.

The place next to Homer Hesiod claims, a poet of the same, as some critics have supposed, or of an earlier, age, as is contended by others. More full and particular, and more clearly allusive to the same original, is his description:

In happy ease, like gods, then lived mankind;
 No toils the body rack'd, no cares the mind.
 They knew not then disease's ruthless rage,
 Nor felt the blighting hand of weak old age.
 But in full vigour, while they life enjoy'd,
 They tasted all its blessings unalloy'd.
 Death was like sleep: and the prolific earth
 With power spontaneous waken'd into birth
 Its fruits and flowers; while envy was unknown,
 And all, in common, was of each his own.

I know not how a Christian writer could have painted the paradisiacal state in more lively colours or more accurately, than in the above description Hesiod hath done.

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The golden age described at large by Ovid, as universally known, I omit. Indeed I entertain no doubt from various passages, and various subjects introduced in his *Metamorphoses*, that he had either himself had a sight of the Bible, or been furnished with corrupted anecdotes, allusive to facts contained in it, by Greek philosophers who had travelled into Egypt. What shall we say of Virgil's Saturnian Kingdom? Where is it to be referred, but to the same record of antiquity?

No sturdy hind, before Jove's iron reign,
 With toilsome labour cleav'd the stubborn plain.
 But all, by bounds unmark'd, were left to share
 The common earth, as common as the air.
 And without leave her sons, as without toil,
 Enjoy'd the blessings of the happy soil.

And in the next, the second, book of the *Georgics* is introduced a reference to the same tradition.

Before Dictæan Jove's ferocious reign
 No heifer bled, no bleating sheep was slain;
 Faction unknown, unfelt tyrannic rage,
 While Saturn's sceptre sway'd a golden age:

Permit

Permit me here to observe a special mark of the paradisiacal state, when man eat no animal food, but lived on the fruits of the earth alone. The above extracts from the poets I will close with these beautiful lines from Lucretius.

And now, so dwindled down, the starvling yeat
 Its puny animals can scarcely rear;
 Of which in antient days the teeming earth
 Vigorous and young produc'd a lussy birth.
 The earth spontaneous cloath'd her laughing fields
 With the rich treasures golden Ceres yields,
 And taught around its husband elm to twine
 The fond embraces of the amorous vine;
 Such fruits and herbs could then uncultur'd raise,
 As mock the labour of our modern days.

Here we have a disciple of Epicurus acknowledging, that man in his primæval state was more perfect, than he now appears; and the earth more fertile, more luxuriant, and delightful, than in its present appearance. And as this observation militates against the principles of Epicurus, the poet would certainly not have introduced it, had it not been supported by general assent as a tradition sanctioned

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by the voice of antiquity, and established by the authority of the most eminent and respectable writers. Nothing, I conceive, less than an opinion almost universal, could have induced the atheistic bard, the object of whose work, he declares, was to liberate the mind from the idle tales and narrow trammels of religion, to admit a traditional story that implicates in its inference the novelty of the world, and the existence of a Divine Framer of it.

To the authorities already cited various other writers of antiquity might be added, if the subject required it, and the time would permit, expressing themselves to the same purport and effect. Are all these numerous descriptions then of Saturn's reign, and of a golden age, the mere sports of imagination, or shall we assume them to have a foundation in fact? Relations so general we must refer to some general cause and common foundation in truth. And whither shall we resort for such foundation in fact? Certainly not to a fictitious character's ideal reign. But having as good ground to believe the existence of
such

such a character as Noah, as we have of that of Julius Cæsar; thither it is reasonable to refer it. The tradition Noah was very competent to have received from his primæval ancestors: and from the sons of Noah their posterity might have received it; delivered down, as Plato observes, in a scattered, dispersed, and imperfect state.

III. That the traditional account of a paradisiacal state, received from those “who lived nearest the times*,” and confirmed by prophane authors, was a fact agreeable to reason, and consistent with the divine agency as displayed in all other parts of the creation, was in the third and last place to be ascertained.

That every work of God is perfect, is an aphorism which will admit neither controversy, nor doubt, as understood respectively to relative, not absolute, perfection. Framed by an all-wise and Almighty Creator, it can not be otherwise. Every being, to which God hath given life, is

* See reference to Plato above.

possessed of faculties and powers sufficient to its own enjoyments, fitted to provide for and supply its own wants, and to guard against and avoid whatever will disadvantage or hurt it. In this common observation all who have studied nature unanimously concur: this, wherever we turn our eyes, is so manifest; that if the royal Psalmist had reason to exclaim, *O Lord in wisdom hast thou made all things;* he had equal reason to subjoin, *The earth, O Lord, is full of thy goodness.*

Under this impression, who would not exclaim, O miserable state of human nature, O wretched man! who, the constituted Lord of this world, is the only unhappy being that inhabits it; who at the head of the creation, in which happiness and perfection reign, is the only imperfect and unhappy being that pertains to it. For, what good purpose doth reason serve; reason, that infallible guide of human actions; and, according to the flourish of philosophy, that most delightful companion of human life? To what end was that divine particle of celestial air confer-

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red on him? Was it to point out to him the height of that perfection, and of that virtue, to which it is not in the power of human nature to attain? Was it to torment him for faults and errors, which he could not avoid? Was it to render him miserable by exposing to him his own imperfections and wants? *That be far from thee, O Lord.* Or, was not that governess and guide of human life rather given, to control the passions, to direct moral actions, to preserve men virtuous, and to make them happy? To that purpose then reason either was competent, or it was not. If not; it was inadequate to the end for which it was assigned. And man, to whom it was for that purpose given, is thereby imperfect and unhappy. But every being, as was assumed, came out of the hands of the Creator perfect and happy: and therefore reason must have been adequate to the end for which it was given. So reason plainly dictates it should be: while experience teaches a different lesson. How then shall we reconcile theory and fact?

By one plain and necessary conclusion : that if it be otherwise now, if reason appear not now adequate to the purpose for which it was originally given ; there must have been a time when it was so : that the admission of a primæval happy state solves the difficulty, and is the only thing that will solve it.

To what complicated evils human life is exposed, the best and wisest men both know and feel. And the apprehension of those evils, which neither wisdom can elude, nor virtue itself repel, adds to the weight, and increases the burthen of them. The life of the brute is subject to evils : yet neither the remembrance of those that are past, nor the fear of those that may happen, disturb or torment it : from nature's stores it drinks the sweet oblivion of life. But diseases, pains, and death, with the pallid legion of cares, not only attend man's steps, but haunt his mind, and are continually in prospect before him. And if you turn your eyes to the bright side of human life ; light are the
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the pleasures that sweeten it, few, and never unalloyed. But can we suppose an infinitely great and good God created beings necessarily pressed with many and great evils, and with the enjoyments of pleasures very small, and very few, to counterbalance them? If the picture be a true representation of facts; it must be man's fault, that it is so, and not the act of his Creator.

Take human life in all its various scenes of opulence and penury; and tell me, if it be not a perpetual civil war between reason and the passions. What is best, to approve and commend, and to practise what is worst, is human. The instinctive principle, that directs the brute, operates more consistently. Hope, fear, anger, and the whole train of inordinate passions, govern and rule in turns the man: while reason, like a weak and pusillanimous governor, to those rebellious subjects surrenders the administration of his internal polity. Hence her small still voice, advising what is right and true, is faintly heard,

and little attended to: while to the requisitions of those impetuous and unruly rioters a facile ear and ready compliance is given. Till the edge of passion blunted, and appetite satiated by gratification, reason returns, expostulates, and reproves: when shame, remorse, and repentance follow. In short, to offend, and repent, and again offend, is the miserable vicissitude, that distinguishes the moral conduct of man. But with this picture of man let us compare another, and different one: the image of man in un sullied innocence, and happiness without alloy. Suppose the powers of mind and body in harmonised union conspiring to constitute the happiness of the man; the mind possessed of knowledge, and by the continual influx of new ideas improving; the judgment acting in accordance to the law written originally by his Creator on the heart, the affections regulated by its decisions, and the passions in due subservience to reason's wise control: the human powers in proper order thus composed, and acting, and
 why

why should not such a constituted order have existed, hence follows the Platonic harmony, hence the paradise of Moses, and of prophane history the golden age.

That primæval state of perfection, in which reason concludes man to have been originally formed, and the imperfect state in which experience deplorably convinces us he is at present sunk, involve in the extraordinary metamorphosis such difficulties, as did not escape the researches of heathen philosophy; but has been ever above the reach of its solution. The change is too obvious to have been denied; the cause remained unknown. God himself hath in his sacred word been pleased to reveal it; and to solve a knot worthy of divine interference. The fountain He and source of truth, hath demonstrated, that *amidst the clouds and darkness which are round about Him, righteousness and justice are the habitation of his seat.*

There may, I am aware, be those who consider the subject of our present investigation as a matter rather of curiosity, than
 use :

use: and there are those, who consider every article of religion in the same light. But is it a trivial and light concern, to possess proper notions of God, and of ourselves? Is it a matter of small concern, to know why we were sent into this world, as into a place of punishment *; exposed to innumerable evils, with the counter-balance scarcely of a shadow of real happiness? Ignorant of the cause of our present evils, what ground have we on which to rest a hope of future felicity? But attending to the light that God has graciously reached out to mankind, a ray of brightness breaks in upon us, that dissipates our doubts, gives us every thing to hope, and leaves us nothing to fear. To that light it is our duty, as it will conduce to our happiness, to attend. It is no meteor blaze, that for a moment warms the heart of the enthusiast, and then droops and dies. It is a luminous ray, perma-

* The advocates for the doctrine of the pre-existence of human souls suppose men sent into this world, as into a house of correction, for sins committed in a prior state.

nent and steady : at which reason lights her torch, and derives new vigour and confidence from it. May we set the value on it, which it deserves ! It illumines this world ; and shews the way to a better : to which that we may finally attend, may God, &c.

SERMON XIII.

Preached at Oxford on the 30th of January.

ROM. xiii. 5.

*Ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath,
but also for conscience sake.*

A VERY unjustifiable opinion prevailed in the age of the Apostles among some recently converted Jews, probably of the pharisaical sect, that they were exempted from the ties of civil government. Under the impression of their peculiar relation to Jehovah, enforced by a concluding distinction of eminence in their admission into the kingdom of Christ, they indulged an enthusiastic pretension to a discharge from obedience to any external ordinances of temporal polity; or to any magistrates not immediately set over them by particular designation from heaven. As the subjects

jects of God, and the redeemed of the Lord, they disclaimed all authority of men, pronounced it usurpation, disparaged its dignity, disputed its imposts.

Against this extravagant delusion, so derogatory to their religion, as if favouring a rebellious, or inspiring a turbulent spirit, and so dangerous to their safety by provoking the vengeance of jealous power, St. Paul bears his testimony in the injunction before us. He tells his Roman converts, that government is the ordinance of God, the first means established by his providence, and resulting from the nature and frame of social beings, for the preservation of public peace and order; that submission is due to every form of it, as respectively settled with suitable relation to the manners, temper, and interests of different countries: and this obedience to the civil power he enjoins, not only on account of the benefits which it procures, not only through fear of that punishment which might be incurred by disobedience; but as a duty arising from the reason of the thing itself, and confirmed in the
Christian

Christian revelation by the express authority of God.

And so far government may be justly stiled a divine appointment; as being the great instrument employed in the course of God's providence to conduct the affairs of the world, and the best provision for the general good and security of the rational creation. This notion of it is agreeable to the maxims of antient wisdom, and the sense of all civilised countries. It appears from the experience of all ages and nations, to be so useful in maintaining the tranquillity, and advancing the common interests of society; and strict obedience to it is so necessary for the regular execution of laws, and the due enjoyment of all those various blessings which flow from them; that there is all possible reason to conclude from the present constitution of things, that He, who created man for society, ordained the state of civil subordination, without which society cannot subsist. But it would be an unwarrantable conclusion from this presumption of the divine will, and the sacred character

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ter with which the magistrate is hereby invested, to infer that he is not to be opposed on pain of damnation, even though he should act contrary to the good end for which he was appointed; though he should presume to oppress those liberties, which he was ordained to support; and venture to trample on those laws, which he was commissioned to protect. It cannot be justly supposed, that the word of God has restrained men from free agency in any case that threatens real danger to their civil rights and liberties, in the protection of which by the voice of reason He has left them free; or that the Christian law has put them into a defenceless state, where the essential law of self-preservation has given them the necessary means of defence.

The text therefore, whatever it imports, cannot mean to furnish power with a licence to oppress without responsibility, and subject to no control; or to establish abject slavery under the sacred guard of conscience. The example of St. Paul is the fairest and safest comment on his precept

cept and injunction. No one could better practise, or was more exercised in practising, those passive virtues of Christian patience and fortitude under sufferings, than himself: yet we learn from the authentic monuments, which contain a relation of his acts, that he could also shew a just concern for the preservation and support of his civil privileges; could vigorously assert his right of judging, when those privileges were invaded; and express a becoming zeal against any illegal or arbitrary violations of them. While he observed on all occasions the severest precepts of our religion, yet we read he was also ready to vindicate with due warmth the liberties and immunities of his birth-right. And though he perfectly knew how to bear private injuries as a Christian, yet he disdained quietly to submit to public indignities as a Roman *.

Interpreted accordingly by the general maxims of reason, illustrated by the conduct of the Apostle himself, the text in connexion with that section of the epistle

* Acts xvi. and xxii.

which

which it concludes, may be understood to deliver the following doctrine: *Let every soul be subject to the higher powers: i. e.* let every person, without exception, without reserve on pretext of any fancied gift or immunity, submit with due subordination to the presiding, governing, and commanding powers of his civil community. *For there is no power, but from God:* for the governing powers, under which you live, have their establishment, their arrangement, in the plan of nature, for the general purpose of order, or for some particular purpose of wisdom; and are so far the institution of God. *Wherefore, he, who resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God:* wherefore, the subject, who declares hostility, and enters into a disorderly opposition against the presiding power, on pretence of some exclusive privileges vested in themselves, hath resisted, and endeavoured to disturb the adjusted disposition of the Almighty. *And they, that resist, shall receive to themselves damnation:* and they, who have thus stood up to disturb this adjudged scheme of providence,

shall bring upon themselves judgment or condemnation; must answer for their offence at their peril to the ruling powers, who are the guardians of the institution, and to God himself, who framed it. *For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil: they are no objects of terror, where behaviour is innocent; but in case of misdemeanors only. What then is the plain inference? To remove your fears, correct and guard your conduct. Wilt thou not be afraid of the power; do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: for he is the minister of God to thee for good. Wouldst thou be freed from danger, and secure from apprehension; act with observant probity, and a peaceable spirit: so shall commendation attend thee from that very power, which is a designed minister, a commissioned instrument in the counsels of providence, for the general security and promotion of virtue; and therein eventually for the security and promotion of happiness. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the*
minister

minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil: if on the contrary thou actest ill, with reason dread the magistrate, and the sword he carries not uselessly, and in vain; dread him, as a dispenser of justice, in the ministry of God, for the execution of penal displeasure on the malefactor. Wherefore, ye must needs be subject; not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. Regarding him therefore, not only as armed with human powers, but as employed in the œconomy of God's providential dispensations, for a beneficial purpose, think not yourselves at liberty to counteract those powers; but observant of due subordination, be submissive to legal authority, not only from prudential motives to escape temporal punishment, but from a conscientious principle of avoiding to offend against the ordinance of God.

The result of the whole is apparent: viz. that our religion, neither releases subjects from submission to their governors, as Christians; nor yet ties them up from the claims of their natural and constitutional rights; as men. It enforces, what

reason enjoins as a social duty, with the sanction of a Divine command: and thereby extends the breach of that duty to a moral responsibility at the tribunal of God.

After so copious an explanation of the text, let us turn to the melancholy solemnity which has at present assembled us, and with which, as a general rule of conduct, it is obviously connected. Let us turn to it, not in political disquisition, rather calculated for the amusement of the inquisitive, than framed with regard to public utility; in which decisions will clash, and misrepresentations warp the judgment, as long as party or interest can influence opinion. Nor let us advert to this solemn occasion with minds possessed by prejudice, and inflamed with passion; which least of all befits this place. I will rather endeavour to suggest such reflections, deducible from the various circumstances in that eventful period of English history; as may tend to our interest, and supply us with practical instruction.

And

And first, the personal character of the Monarch, whose fate consecrates this day to devotion, was marked with many amiable characters of true worth. His manners were accomplished, his natural disposition gentle, his knowledge diffusive, his generosity beneficent: yet he was dreaded. Art found him a judge, merit a patron, honest services and attached affection a friend: yet he was persecuted. He possessed a magnanimity superior to misfortunes, a probity rooted in its genuine principle, religion: yet he was sacrificed without pity. What ends may be answered by occasional examples of illustrious sufferers, why in a civilised nation so much virtue should ever meet with so fatal a catastrophe, we may conjecture; but God only knows. It was perhaps requisite, that so great a sacrifice should be made to the settlement of the best constitution in the world, upon its true basis; and the reduction of its parts within their proper boundaries. It was perhaps requisite, that so great a monument should be set up to the eyes of Kings; to shew with

moral instruction, that they, in common with the meanest mortals, are subject to the Almighty Governor of the world, and equally exposed to the most disastrous reverses of fortune; and to imprint in them a humble dependence on their Creator, who is the Ruler and Arbiter of their destiny. It was perhaps requisite, that a monument of terror should be set up to the Sovereigns of a free people, to guard them against approaches or attempts towards tyranny; to teach them that no personal merit, no excellence of nature, no acquired accomplishments, no combination of virtues, can communicate quiet to their reign, or stability to their throne, independent of the affection of their subjects.

The unhappy object of this anniversary stands an exemplar yet farther instructive. With his amiable qualities, some blemishes and defects (and what human character is unmixed) were blended. An historian not adverse to him intimates, that his beneficent disposition was clouded by a manner not very gracious, his virtue tinged with

with a degree of superstition, his good sense disfigured by a deference to counsellors of a capacity much inferior to his own; and that his moderate temper exempted him not from hasty and precipitant resolutions. Nor is it to be dissembled, that there were in his measures, however extenuated by early prejudices of education, and later necessity, some stretches of prerogative, menacing to freedom. And at the same time, uncondescending and uncomplying with the spirit that had gone abroad, he was both in granting and in denying to his determined and wily adversaries alike unfortunate. Without art to soften, or firmness to subdue, unreasonable pretensions; without the vigour of an absolute Sovereign, or the managing address of a limited one; at first too tenacious, afterwards too flexible, the unsystematic Monarch gave a plea to his adversaries to charge him in the first instance with the minings of despotism, or the thwartings of perverseness; and in the latter, to regard his concessions as forced and resistless, the reluctant surrenders of

conscious weakness. Practised upon by the loose casuistry of his courtiers, or deceived by his own prejudices about the dispensing nature of the regal authority, he seems to have receded too far from some of his declarations. By this ill-advised conduct, which impressed such unfavourable suspicions of his good faith, and gave so much ground for his enemies to darken his character with the imputation of insincerity, every overture of agreement was suspended: till numbers were at length worked up to so hostile a temper, as opposed and frustrated every prudent method of accommodation, and terminated the breach by the unhappy catastrophe of this day.

II. Contemplating further the situation and conduct of other empowered members of the state, when we observe some few ecclesiastics, actuated perhaps with too warm a zeal for their Sovereign's honour, which they saw trampled on by the influence of faction, and for the interests of religion, which they saw frittered away under specious pretences of reform, some-
times

times thrown off their guard by the insidious cant of Hypocrites; their sufferings will instruct the governors of the National Church to be temperate in their conduct, cool in their designs, resolute in the pursuance of well advised measures; to add *the Serpent's wisdom to the innocence of Doves*. Firm in the preservation of essentials, they will yield in matters of form and ceremony to the persuasions of undisguised, fair-pleading conscience; as far as may be consistent with the safety of a religious establishment, with the urgency of that lawful authority, those honest rights, those competent privileges, which the constitution hath conferred, and the defence and protection of them requires at their hands.

III. From the vicissitudes and reprisals that fluctuated in that reign of triumphant injustice, the two branches of Parliament may learn an inviolable respect to the stations and claims of their fellow subjects. Let the Temporal Lords remember, that when their ancestors had consented to deprive their Spiritual Compeers of Parliamentary

mentary dignity, they were themselves soon after set aside as useless pageants of state: so hazardous, so ruinous is it, to attempt to separate, divide, and tear in pieces a constitution, in its original principles so blended, so compact, so closely knit together, as our own. Let the Commons recollect, that, after lending encouragement to the popular tumults, they had robbed the Lords of their sanctioned rights, they were themselves in turn soon stripped of all their own; and made, with an equitable retaliation, as contemptible vassals, as they had before made their superiors in rank and station: so sacred a thing is property; in the breach of it so apt is the evil to fall on the head of the guilty! In the beginning of their unnatural contests, I think it clear, that neither the King meant tyranny, nor his opponents democracy. But when once the contention was begun, when a rupture was made in that union which should bind the sinews of the state; we see all the malignant passions burst out with an impetuosity unconceived, “*Viresque acquirunt*

runt eundo :” with additional impulse acquired in their course they rushed on ; till they bore down all before them, and in the end laid desolate the whole fair system of religion, law, liberty, and order ; leaving us the salutary reflection, that “ *principiis obstare,*” is a maxim equally valid in politics, as in medicine, or morals.

IV. To the governed, to the people at large, the painful remembrance of what their ancestors did, and their country suffered, in the anarchy of the last century, comes fraught with various instruction ; on the insidiousness of party, the measures of resistance, the temperament of liberty, and the regulation of religion.

1. In that melancholy picture we view the insidious arts of faction. The first opponents of regal oppression ; some of them at least, were men who merited the title of patriots. We revere their memories ; but we regret their association with knaves and hypocrites : and we lament their deception. Warmed with a sense of real evils in the beginning of the war, they became infatuated with the clamour of imaginary
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ones in the progress of it. The desire of redress was transformed into the spirit of revenge; and rendered them insensible of the evils, they were preparing for their suffering country. Even in the terminating step, that destroyed our constitution, the deluded people scarcely saw, that, under the notion of restraining a supposed stretch of power usurped by the crown, they were made the tools of private ambition; and that the seditious and turbulent agents, who had in the progress of things put themselves at the head of those unhappy quarrels, while they professed to fight the battles of the Lord, were prostituting his Holy Name to iniquitous and traitorous purposes.

2. The just measures of resistance, the transactions we are now discussing instruct us, how difficult it is to define. Resistance is a delicate concern: ever mischievous in its progress; in its origin hardly ever perfectly innocent. However warranted in its object, when conducted as the passions of men in those times did, and at all times usually do, conduct it, in the phrenzy of contention,

contention, it quickly loses sight of its lawful ends, and never fails to run wide of its proper means. And accordingly we observe all the exertions of government became clogged by those unremitting and undistinguishing attacks on the executive branch of it, and its power at length disabled for active or effective protection. And from hence we are taught, while we hold in view the merits of contention, at the same instant to weigh soberly the just measures of opposition: measures, which, though at variance with slavery, are often no less at variance with the fierce feuds and contentions that have rent in sunder the best-compacted systems of human polity; and in accordance with the violent passions of men, under the colour of making them free, have run whole societies headlong into servitude.

3. The evils of the times that produced this annual humiliation awaken our attention thirdly to the temperament of liberty. The natural temper of power, unchecked by principle, is the natural temper of the passions: violent, restless, and prompt to extend

extend its dominion. The natural spirit of liberty, for the same reasons, is in the same manner apt to exceed, and to grow exorbitant. Accordingly just as often as either the one, or the other, has found itself in circumstances to take advantage of its respective forms of governments, and to push its claim for dominion; so often has either the unbridled encroachments of power usurped upon all the natural and constitutional rights of mankind, introduced confusion, and destroyed every honest purpose of government; or the extravagant enlargements of liberty, overbearing and overturning the sacred fences of lawful and rational control, have had the same fatal influence on the community and itself, by introducing the same fatal confusions. These instances in the distractions, which solemnise the observance of this day, were deplorably notorious: where the jealous defenders of prerogative, and the warm advocates for liberty (let honest undesigning advocates for liberty remember the warning) stood as far wide of the common cause, which both by
contending

contending efforts respectively engaged to support, viz. the peace and well-being of society, as they were separate and distant from a good understanding between themselves.

4. The last article of instruction I will mention, as exhibited in the series of incidents we are now discussing, regards religion; the spirit of religion: which demands a guard on its conduct, no less than that we have just been considering, the spirit of liberty. This hallowed fire, or a delusive imitation of it, in enkindling and inflaming those divisions which *put down all rule and authority*, shook the realm to its centre, and laid government waste; while the Holy Scriptures were ransacked from beginning to end, for pervertible passages, to countenance the wild schemes of brainsick visionaries, and furious partizans. It is beside my present scope, to enquire of what religious description were the first aggressors. Thus much is certain; that, if some divines of the Royal Class alleged texts to countenance the views of arbitrary prerogative; their antagonists

tagonists were more than even with them, in so torturing and wresting the Jewish History, prophecies, circumstances, and events peculiarly relative to that state, to the language and measures of their own party; as if they had solely respected the affairs of Britain. And what was the consequence? In the first place, that which was the object of these unaccountable perversions, the overthrow of that pride and boast of the Reformation, the Established Church *: in the next place, general disorder; an overweening affectation of fanatic novelty, extended to as eager and absurd an excess, as the most punctilious impositions of the most rigid Hierarchy could be carried. Hence a large spawn of subdividing and contending sects, who gave a loose to all the fallies and impulses

* For this object that restless and treacherous faction have for near two hundred years been openly, and secretly, labouring. In some periods of the last century, when on several trying occasions the Bishops and Episcopal Clergy made their noble stand against Popery; it is well known, and ought never to be forgotten, that the Dissenters held back, or were privately bargaining with that party for indulgence.

of a heated fancy; who turned whatever was found in doctrine, and decent in worship, into the phrenzy of enthusiasm, or the dotage of superstition: whose chief display of zeal for religion lay in professions, quarrels, and animosities about it; and who, by a kind of reaction, not rare in the History of Persecution, inflicted in turn the rigours which themselves had endured. While they expressed the utmost detestation of Popery, they practised in the discipline of their own church some of the most terrible of papal maxims: complained loudly of suffering on account of conscience; yet, as soon as they became possessed of power, allowed liberty of conscience to no communion but their own*: contended earnestly for the right of worshipping God in such manner as they deemed most acceptable to Him; yet forbade all others on pain of fines and imprisonment to worship God even in private assemblies in any manner, but that prescribed by their directory †. Having claimed for themselves the free exercise of

* Ordinance, 1648.

† Neal, v. 3.

private judgment in religious matters, they adjudged the defence of certain opinions, which they called Heresies, to be felony; to be punished with imprisonment on conviction, and, if not abjured, with death*. Such is religion seduced by the pretext of liberty, and corrupted by the violence of passion.

And now, to bring home to our own times, and our use and advantage, the transactions we have just been reviewing; if between the three estates of the realm the most perfect harmony prevail at home, and secure respectability abroad, the retrospect we have taken, will enhance the happiness we at present experience; and instruct us to set a just value on a well-regulated government, supporting the best constitution in the world. And this harmony, so conspiring to produce the blessings we enjoy, if any member of the community, or any class of men, envious of our fame and welfare, attempt to interrupt; if there be those who plead the feelings of conscience, to gratify the reach-

* Ordin. January, 1652.

ings of ambition; who, wrapt up in the holy mantle of religion, pretend its interest, but mean their own; and arraign the power reposed in the hands of others, only to grasp it themselves: if there be those, who with the dark spirit that conducted the operations of the infamous Vaux openly exult in a texture of well conceived, and resolutely pursued machinations, which will blow up our boasted constitution*; who prostitute the sacred temples of the Deity to the secret purposes of faction; and from the pulpit hurl the firebrands of sedition against our ecclesiastical, intended with further aim to reach our civil, establishment†: if there be those, who, at the

* Dr. Priestley seems to have had Vaux's plot in his eye, when, to excite the spirited efforts of his coadjutors in the work of anarchy and confusion, he assures them, "They were wisely placing as it were, grain by grain, a train of gunpowder, to which the match would one day be laid, to blow up the fabrick of error, which would never again be raised on the same foundation."

† See Dr. Price's Sermon on the Revolution, from beginning to end: in which we might have expected to find religious instruction, and not political declamation. For a greater prophanation of what is sacred cannot exist, than civil commotions excited by the cant of religious hypocrisy.

bidding of their spiritual guides, in the senate open in trite declamations against the bulwark * of an establishment, whose tolerance and moderation their own unrepented invectives abundantly evince; who, some with a religion merely negative, and others without even the bare profession of it, affect to dictate religion to this whole realm: if in this our day there be characters of such description, we hope and trust our provident rulers will treat their desperate exertions with that caution example inculcates, with that firmness the preservation of government, and the protection of the constitution demand.

Cautioned and guarded by the preceding reflections, let us turn the solemnity of this anniversary to its proper use. Let it awaken adoration of God, an awe of his providence, due subjection to his civil mi-

* The Dissenters complain of hardships in being excluded from places of trust and profit, for following what they suppose to be the dictates of conscience: while they insist on the representatives in parliament, for whom they give their voices, voting for a repeal of the corporation and test acts; thereby imposing a restraint on them, of which themselves are complaining.

nisters,

nisters, *not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake*; let it conciliate honour to a sovereign, who, religious without bigotry, by excellence of disposition secures and augments the experienced blessings of an improved constitution; let it inspire a love of liberty, regulated by law, and animated by a love of our country; let it warm our hearts with a zeal for religion principled by reason, tempered by charity, and exemplified in virtue: that so we may not commemorate the sufferings of our progenitors, without remarking their faults, without remembering our own; nor add to the latter too numerous list the mockery of a formal act of humiliation without contrition, of prayer without piety, and profession without obedience. Let us imitate the virtues of the last age, in whatever class of men they may be found; let us shun vice, however dignified by rank, and recommended by abilities: assured that virtue only can make and preserve a people free, and great, and happy.

A C H A R G E

TO THE

REVEREND THE CLERGY

OF THE

ARCHDEACONRY OF BEDFORD,

DELIVERED AT THE EASTER VISITATION, 1801.

C H A R G E, &c.

REVEREND BRETHREN,

WHEN last I had the satisfaction of meeting you, some extraordinary occurrences had taken place, which attracted the attention of the most supine, and filled the contemplative mind with alarm. We beheld a storm then gathering, that hath since scattered devastation through a great part of Christendom, and menaced the rest. We have lived to see in a neighbouring kingdom the sceptre shivered, and the altar destroyed: while the insolence of success encouraged the sacrilegious bands to carry their arms into foreign countries, their object there the same, with similar hostility to triumph over both.

But

But the success of a people, destitute of principle, and profligate in practice, is no impeachment of the justice of Providence in permitting it; no evidence does it afford of the rectitude of their cause. On the contrary, if we consult the Scripture of the Old Testament, we shall there find many instances of God's purposes fulfilled in the punishment of wicked and irreligious states, by the success of people more flagitious than themselves. Nothing is more observable in the economy of the divine dispensations, than the use that God makes of profligate and presumptuous nations in the chastisement of others; who, after combining to do *what the hand and counsel of the Almighty had determined before to be done* for wise and good and general purposes relative and in subservience to the great Whole, have become in their turn miserable proofs, that *it was not for their own righteousness that they experienced success, but for the correction of those against whom they were sent.*

And in contemplating the uncommon
events

events that have marked the present æra; while we lament the subversion of a religious establishment, raised to an uncommon degree of splendour by the piety of former ages, while we deplore the reign of anarchy, it will conduce much to reconcile our feeble judgment to the general means Providence has, in regard to religion, seen fit to pursue; if we only reflect that God Almighty can produce good out of evil, and order out of confusion: and it will animate our hopes, that in the instance before us He will do it; if we reflect that second causes are in the hand of God, and that the effects produced by them are under his direction. In investigating the motives of Divine Agency, in the several particulars of God's moral government of the world, our best conceptions are but ingenious conjectures. The elevated subject only bears the sure stamp of truth, when the deductions of reason are, as in some instances we can discover them to be, supported by Revelation.

In application of this reasoning, in the present case, let us consider, whether
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ther the events which we have lately witnessed, however the causes that immediately produced them might have been intended by those who applied them, were directed by unerring wisdom against Christianity; or against a mass of errors grafted on Christianity, which sadly deformed and disgraced it. Admitting the latter to have been the case, if we turn to the sacred predictions of inspired writers, and consult the illustrations of prophecy, the guiding light which Christian philosophers and learned divines have thrown on them; we shall discover that a subversion of Anti-Christian religion confirms the credibility of prophecy, and so far contributes to establish the truth of the Gospel. Even the very instruments, that we have seen employed in the destruction of Papistical errors, were those which the observations of learned men in the last age noticed, as the means which would be employed*.

* The prevalence of Deistical principles, it was the opinion of Sir Isaac Newton, Dr. Clarke, and others, would lead to the subversion of papacy, and be the means of introducing a general reformation.

Some,

Some, however, from the extraordinary events that have lately taken place, that have convulsed the greatest part of Europe, and in the overthrow of the religious establishment in one country, through Christendom spread a general alarm, have been induced to form very different conclusions; have been led to doubt whether a religion, the perpetual continuance of which was promised by its Divine Founder, and its subversion in a country where it had been long established was apparently effected, possessed every mark of authenticity that truth required. And one writer * in particular, with the best intentions, leading, however, as I conceive, to no good effect, hath very satisfactorily proved the existence of a conspiracy regularly conducted by profligacy and power for the subversion of the religion of the country: but not adverting to the will and designs of God, in permitting so far as He hath done the success of it, and without looking farther than second causes, he stops his enquiry there; resting in the ex-

* The Abbé Barruel.

posure of a plan for that purpose long laid, deeply concerted, and regularly pursued, by men of profligate principles, aided by the influence of station, and the exertion of great abilities.

And so it might be: but contemplative men will be induced to take a larger view of the subject; and looking farther, they are necessarily led to investigate the purpose and design, which in so extraordinary an effect of second causes may have been conducted by Him, *without whose knowledge and permission not even a sparrow falls to the ground.* An effect of so great magnitude as the writer supposes in the subversion of Christianity, though partial and at present confined to one country, if we advance no further in our enquiries, but take up with bare matters of fact without enquiring into the reasons of them, would apparently operate against his own principles; which assume the religion of Christ Divine, revealed by the lip of truth, supported by a series of miracles, and ordained to be perpetual. With such characters of a Divine

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Original, it is inconsistent, and contradictory, to suppose it temporary and subvertible; subvertible by a cabal of vain and profligate men. Such subversion of it by the conspirators themselves might possibly have been intended; though that is a matter of doubt with me: but I have no doubt, that very different was the issue which God Almighty had to those second causes assigned. Looking to them and their effects, and from thence extending our views to that Providence from whom they take their direction, shall we not naturally question ourselves in some such train of arguing as this? "Against such a religion could human efforts have so availed? Or, far as they have availed, must they not be intended mediately to produce some further end? Or, may not the causes themselves be supposed as immediately and directly contributing to some other effect? Against such a religion what could be the avail of the pride of philosophy, and the influence of human power; the pigmy efforts of man's vanity against the fort of Heaven? Against such a fortress

tricks all the wit and irony that ingenious profligacy can sharpen; all the argument too, that sophistry can employ, will fall useless and unimpressive: “*Telum inibelle sine Ictu.*”

The Divine author of that religion declared, that “the gates of hell should not prevail against it;” that all the powers of infidelity, exerted in favour and support of immorality and dissipation, should not be able to eradicate the grain expanded to the full-grown tree which he had planted, nor blast the precious fruit it bore, so long as time endured. Indeed the words of our Saviour just cited go farther; they declare that the religion he revealed should not only not be extirpated, but that no attack which infidelity might make upon it *κατιςχυσσειν* should be of force against it. But against the established religion of the country to which I advert, Atheism and Infidelity, the gates of hell have not only been of force, but have really prevailed. To efface, if possible, every vestige of it, the Seventh, or Sabbath Day, has even been obliterated from their calendar; and
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instead of being set apart for the worship of the Almighty, a Tenth Day has been substituted in its room, is celebrated with songs and dances to the ideal Deities of Liberty, Victory, &c. is ushered in with Pagan games and shews, and concludes with Pagan orgies.

Hence, then, I infer from our Lord's assurance, that Paganism would not have been permitted so effectually to prevail against pure Christianity; and that the religion, against which it has appeared *to have been of force*, and to have prevailed, was not the pure religion of Jesus Christ. I can easily conceive, that God Almighty might make use of the philosophers of the last age, as second causes, in effecting the subversion of Popish errors: but I think it demonstrable, that those means could not have been employed in subverting a religion, which He had himself instituted, in which He had revealed his will, and by which He willed himself to be worshipped. And accordingly admitting that He had disposed second causes to such particular purpose as He had by the spirit of prophecy

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phesy declared He would effect, and employed in them the very instruments which the best interpreters of prophecy had from thence inferred He would make use of; the conclusion follows, that the great events we have lately witnessed demonstrate the truth of prophecy; and this completion of prophecy contributes, as far as the argument from prophecy goes in support of Christianity, to prove the verity of the Christian faith.

That the ingenious writer above alluded to hath with much accuracy traced the plan, and proved an actual conspiracy against the religion of the country, which in the revolutionised state of the government was completely carried into execution, is a truth which must be readily admitted. But influenced by unfortunate prejudices in his representation of facts, he is too apt to confound that religion with pure Christianity; which being the case, such substitution of an erroneous mode of religion for a pure and perfect system of faith, will give a very different turn to the argument that may be drawn from it;

it; which, instead of creating doubts in the breast of the sincere Christian, will strengthen and confirm his hopes. And this I trust will, from the following statement, further appear.

God Almighty, in the mission of Jesus Christ, revealed to mankind the knowledge of Himself so far, as to instruct them in the manner in which He willed them to worship Him. And the worship of Him so revealed in a short time became established through the greater part of the known world. But in great part of the world which had received the will of God so revealed, and is supposed to have consistently observed it in the purity of spirit and truth, in which it was originally propagated and received, the people have lately rejected it; and that not gradually, or partially, but by a total subversion of it: by every means abolishing every trace of it. And this abolition of the worship of God, formerly willed by Him, revealed, and ordained, being from the original institution of the revolutionised government of that country an avowed principle, in-

deed a ruling object of it, and having been by a public reversal of every thing that was formerly held sacred effected, it will follow, either

First, that God no longer willeth that worship of Himself, which he once ordained :

Or, secondly, that the worship, which he hath permitted to be abolished, is not the worship which He originally willed, and by Revelation ordained.

First, then, to suppose that God no longer willeth that worship of Himself, which on the surest ground of reason it is capable of proof he once willed, is attended with difficulties that, consistent with the acknowledged attributes of the Deity, are incapable of solution. If God ever gave a perfect system of religion to mankind, so long as their state and condition required that system, the same goodness that gave it would continue it to them : else He would have become less merciful, and less good, than He had been ; and this it would be blasphemy to suppose. Say, it was withdrawn for the immoralities of
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the people. Yet this is but supposition : and why should we be so inconsistent in our ideas of God, and of his dealings with mankind, as to suppose that He would punish the immoralities of the people, by withdrawing from them the only vestige of righteousness by which He willed Himself to be honoured by them : that rule of righteousness too, best calculated to open their minds, and divert them from the error of their ways? Such a supposition would impute to God mutability, and inconstancy, which imply imperfection. Man changes his purpose, because he experiences that he purposed wrong : he alters his course of acting, because he thinks he can pursue a wiser and better course. But God can change on neither of those accounts ; nor on any account whatever. It is as contrary to the nature of God to change, as of perfection to become imperfection. What He once willed, consistent with his own infinite perfections, He cannot reverse.

If we examine the purity and perfection of the religion itself, of its doctrines and

its precepts; can we in either discover any reason, why God should recall his promise? Its doctrinal part represents the Deity, agreeably to the most perfect ideas of Him that cultivated reason can form, a self-existent spirit, infinite in all perfections. And such is the purity of its moral precepts, as in itself forms a powerful internal evidence of the truth and certainty of its divinity. It forms also the strongest barrier against the influx of moral evil, that divine wisdom could propose to mankind: and if human imbecillity should, notwithstanding such check, sink under the blandishments of vice; if immorality and dissipation should so enervate and soften the mind, as to render it callous to the finer feelings which the innate principles of natural rectitude create, can we with any ground of reason suppose God would therefore withdraw from them the most powerful principle that can operate in checking such great and growing depravity of manners; that He would withhold from them the aid, which in his wisdom and abundant goodness He gave us as
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a guard against infirmities to which human nature was most prone to yield; and at a moment too, when that aid was most wanted? He hath expressly declared he would not. But if the increasing power of darkness had been of force, and even of so great force as to have extinguished the light, which the world had once admitted; the gates of hell would have prevailed against the verity of Christ's prediction, and the truth of his religion have become thereby impugned. This supposition therefore cannot be admitted, on the assumption that Christianity hath internal marks of truth in the perfection of its moral precepts, as well as of divinity in the sublimity of its doctrines.

II. Let us therefore, secondly, consider the alternative, in solution of the difficulty that the present state of things presents: which is, that the worship, which God hath permitted to be so far subverted as in a neighbouring country we have seen, was not the worship of Him, pure and perfect as He once willed, and by Revelation ordained it.

On matters of form, or disputable points, when Christians from Christians differ; harsh would be the censure of either persuasion, that the faith of the other was not Christian faith, nor the religion of those who professed it that which Christ revealed. But in essentials, in fundamentals if they differ, it is not the sound of a name that will constitute sameness, and unite them. Before this alternative then be assumed, let the religion that has been subverted be fairly examined: try it by the unerring rule which our Saviour himself directed, and I may venture to affirm it will be found to possess few features of genuine Christianity, very little of it besides the name. Do the Scriptures of the New Testament, for instance, bid us, as Divine Truths, receive *the Commandments of Men*? Do they enjoin the belief of doctrines not only contrary to reason, but against the plain conviction of the senses, because a council, or the assumed infallibility of a church, have stamped the seal of their authority on them? Or do they say, “Search the Scriptures.”—“Try the spirits, by the
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the doctrines they profess, whether they are of God." But how are we, agreeably to our blessed Saviour's commands, and the instruction of his Apostle, *to search*, and *to try*? By reason, by every mean that acquired knowledge and abilities will supply. Doth Christianity command image worship in the invocation of a hundred intercessors and advocates? Or, does it teach that there is one, and only one intercessor and mediator between God and man, even Jesus Christ our Lord? Do the sacred Scriptures tell us, that money will procure us exemption from the obligation to the practice of Christianity, and purchase to the rich a free indulgence in sensuality and vice? I will rake no farther into the gross errors, that have darkened the original lustre, and the corruptions that have stained the purity of the religion of Christ, in a part of Europe, in which that system of nominal Christianity has been so miserably overturned *. Let
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* I am well aware that these reflections may appear too harsh, as they implicate some who are attached to order and government,

the hints I have offered be pursued; and on the free unfettered mind, I am persuaded, they cannot fail to operate conviction, that the religion, too implicitly received from the dictates of the chair at Rome, and now alarmingly menaced with general subversion, was not the religion which the Divine Author of Christianity revealed. And from the declarations of prophecy, and the signs and colour of the times, if there be truth in prophecy, and language in the times, some credit is due to the opinions of learned men who have studied the subject, and of that religion have not hesitated to read the approaching destiny. Of those sacred predictions the greatest philosopher, this or any other

government, and interested and zealous in the sacred cause of religion: but my argument called on me for such illustration of it; and if many, who may have too implicitly adopted on trust such tenets as those to which I have adverted, would freely compare them with the spirit of truth that breathes through the Scriptures, I am persuaded that they, and we of the Established Church, should soon be, as on our Lord's assurance I have no doubt that sooner or later we shall be, *one fold under one shepherd*, and become, in the true sense of the word, a **CATHOLIC** Church.

country

country ever produced, himself too in theological studies ranking among the ablest divines, in less eventful times than these observed, that they “ appeared to be opening more and more on us, and to be fulfilling every day *.” They call upon us with an audible voice to compare events that have lately passed with those which it was long ago declared should pass. And after such comparison, if respecting those events we further weigh the proportion of effects and causes, a reflecting man cannot but acknowledge the finger of God more than commonly visible in them.

It is not the pretended cause of liberty, nor the ideal notion of equality, nor the affected claim of fraternity, that solves the difficulty of accounting for the latent principle, that by successive triumphs over every opposition, hath edged the arms of a profligate people with a continued course of conquest. Even from the first overthrow of their civil government, liberty was stifled in its birth; equality existed

* Sir Isaac Newton on the Prophecies.

with

with them only in name; and as to fraternity, so loosely were they bound by relative duties, that the tendereſt of all ties which can unite individuals, were in effect annihilated among them. They are formed one day, to be diſſolved the next. If then this triple union did not conſtitute the principle of their ſucceſs, to what ſuperiority in execution and action ſhall we attribute it? Not to military ſkill, for they were confronted by the beſt ſoldiers in the world. Not to the prevalence of numbers, for almoſt all Europe was united againſt them. Add to theſe diſadvantages on their part, that they were in political opinions divided among themſelves, their diverſity of opinions creating animoſities, and terminating in civil broils: yet in whatever they engaged, they triumphed; and in the courſe of a few years have ſeen the greateſt part of Europe at their feet.

Under thoſe circumſtances, the effect apparently exceeding the powers that produced it, we muſt go to the firſt great cauſe of all things, to whom all ſecond cauſes
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are subservient, and take their direction from Him; and try if we can discover a probable motive in the Divine Will to impart to second causes the extraordinary energy, which in the present instance excites our admiration. And the plan of divine economy in this instance, I conceive, He hath been pleased not to cloud in obscurity, and totally conceal from us; but by the spirit of prophecy hath in some degree unveiled, both as to the effect and motive of it. I enter into no general investigation on the subject of prophecy, nor into any minute detail of those particular parts that more immediately relate to the points I have now suggested. The copious subject would carry me much beyond the bounds of this address. To illustrate one probable and chief design of the judgments with which God hath at this day visited a guilty world, according to those lights which the best comments on prophecy have thrown on the subject, may be comprised in a shorter compass, and in a few words. And a subject, in which you
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are all conversant, if at your future leisure you should be induced more at large to pursue; far as the prophecies to which I now allude regard the present state of things, you will find the world in general in these awful times, and our sacred profession in particular, very nearly interested in them.

It is remarkable that the great man, to whom I have already alluded, as well as some other eminent philosophers and divines, long ago declared their opinion, that events similar to those which have lately passed would take place; stated the object and intent of them to be, not to subvert governments, destroy order, and level all rank and subordination among mankind; but to restore the religion of Christ to its primitive lustre, reformed from the errors in which power, interest and ambition, by the assumed influence of infallibility, have too long held, corrupted and oppressed the greater part of the Christian world; and have pointed to the very means that would be employed for the
purpose,

purpose, the weapons of infidelity *. The purposes of man, and the designs of God, are frequently at variance. He uses second causes as instruments of his will; which man applies, and with wonder sees events produced so often exceeding physical causes, and so contrary to his expectation; not considering that the instrument in his hand is always under the direction of an Almighty Agent. To overturn empires, and obtain dominion might, in the instance before us, have been the object of man; while to purify religion, and restore.

* The King of Prussia, Lord Chesterfield, and others, from a general acquaintance with the world, and a particular knowledge of the principles and practice that in their time prevailed in France, anticipated a speedy subversion of the Ecclesiastical Constitution of that country. And his Majesty of Prussia, as appears by the Letters of himself and the deified Voltaire, was no inactive spectator of the causes that produced it. Sir Isaac Newton and Dr. Clarke, from the Prophetic Writings, the State of Religion in France, and the Manners of the Age combining with the Divine Oracles to announce the approaching reign of THE BEAST †, that is, the open avowal of Infidelity, drew the same conclusion.

See Notes on Dr. Hartley's Conclusion of Observations on the Nature, Powers, and Expectation of Man.

—Published for W. Mawman, Poultry.

† Revelation, c. 11. v. 7.

mankind

mankind to happiness, was the purpose of the Almighty.

If then such be the Divine determination, and such his will if in the spirit of prophecy God hath been pleased to reveal to us; the Revelation so given calls loudly on us to profit by it. To guard the sacred deposit committed to our trust in all the purity in which it was first propagated, with all the heart, and with all the mind, with all the interestedness of attention which on so high and momentous a subject we can possibly employ, as it is our duty, must be our study, and our care. It bears the same genuine stamp of divinity it ever did; it exhibits the same credentials of divine authenticity, as when martyrs in support of it crowded to the stake. We can appeal to the same arguments reason ever suggested, in demonstration of its credibility and truth. Length of time hath not weakened the evidence, we can to that purpose adduce. On the contrary, the marked accomplishment of prophecy, evolving as years roll on, adds accessional strength to those arguments of conviction, which

which prophecy supplies; and on the ground of prophecy reason maintains and supports them. And to that great and illustrative argument founded on the fall of Popery, which learned and able divines have anticipated, these eventful times give us no common cause to look *. Such event

* “The power of Rome (says Mr. King), is fallen, Babylon is fallen, and become indeed an habitation of devils, and an hold of every evil spirit; and if so, since the fall of the prophetic Babylon was expressly connected with the seventh vial, unless Babylon be restored, unless Rome be restored, and Roman and Pontifical Greatness be effectually revived, the pouring out of all the other vials must be past, and of course the pouring out of the fourth vial must have been long since past, however some of its effects may still continue. Another Pope has indeed been elected at Venice in this year (1800), but without any possession of Rome, or of its territories, without the ecclesiastical revenue, without dominion, without power; a shadow, and not a substance; and, with regard to any continuance of Papal Dominion at Rome, a slighter and more feeble continuation of the appearance of Roman Papal Power than even Augustulus was of the continuance of the power of the Western Roman Emperors. Unless therefore the Pope be restored to his territorial possessions and dominions, and residence in Rome, there is an end of Roman Pontifical Greatness, and the 1260 years are ended, which were named in holy prophecy for the continuance of the usurped Ecclesiastical Empire of the City on seven Hills, and of the little Heir of the furious emblematical Monster.”
—Second Part of the Morfels of Criticism.

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explains

explains the train of wonders that astonish us in second causes ; and those causes conversely illustrate the event.

A religion, such as Christ hath revealed, though supported with every evidence of truth, as it lays a restraint on the appetites and passions of men, must have its adversaries in those, whose turbulence of passion no persuasives can resist, nor hope nor fear allay ; till that happy period shall arrive in God's appointed time, " when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ." And what may we expect amidst a number of adversaries, but plots and combinations against it ? They are natural effects ; and, if they exercise our faith, properly considered they cannot shake it. The conspiracy in particular, which in this Address has engaged our attention, though swollen with malignity, conduces only to evince the impotence of human rage ; and forms a new monument in the annals of mankind of the wickedness, and folly, and vanity of man. However great the expectations of those concerned in it, however
pointed

pointed their designs, they were but labouring in second causes; the issue of which, as the causes were under God's direction, was at his supreme disposal. Whether against the religion itself, as the writer to whom I have alluded supposes, or against the mode of it which in the country where he wrote obtained, as he hath satisfactorily proved, the difference in either case affects not the argument I have drawn from it, or the reasoning I have used. If the former were the case, those great men of the earth, who joined in the conspiracy, were the more eminently wicked and impolitic. Their influence and power ought to have protected that vital principle of order, which God had established in this world, and made the observance of it to individuals preparatory to a happy station in the next. Some of them have already severely experienced the effects of their temerity; others have abundant reason to apprehend them; and all, who may find it not too late to measure back their steps, and withdraw themselves from so desperate a confederacy,

have a lesson before them that alarmingly sounds a retreat.

*Haec Lex est justior ulla,
Quam necis artifices arte perire sua.*

The honours and emoluments attached to that establishment, which hath been by the un pitying hand of savage hordes subverted, were indeed large and splendid, and too captivating to escape the eye of envy, and the grasp of avarice. But the great and powerful, who unjustly and unjustifiably exercised their greatness and their power in the depredation and destruction of them, were actuated by a crooked policy. God Almighty, to bring about *his* wise designs, seems to have darkened the understandings, and hardened the hearts of those, who vainly hoped they were accomplishing *their own*. Or could they with any degree of consistency have supposed, that they might in any instance authorise and abet the ravage of property from its lawful possessors; with a line of demarkation draw the limits of the wild impetuous torrent, themselves had opened;

opened; and vainly hope their mounds and banks would secure their own domains?

Our August Monarch had never joined in the confederacy; and the moderate appointments of our own establishment one might have supposed incapable of provoking either the secret workings of envy, or the shafts that malignity might more publicly employ. But even this little pittance is grudgingly allowed us. One of the most determined adversaries*, our establishment hath ever known, long ago menaced it with *a train of gunpowder so surely laid, that it would burst in an explosion, which would be fatal to it.* Of what combustibles that train, in so bold imagery described, may consist; whether of conventicles and meeting-houses, that have gradually shot up in almost every town and village in the kingdom, under the various pretexes of dissenting from the established church, or hearing more illuminating prayers and preachings than that church affords; or whether of low-priced pamphlets industri-

* Dr. Priestley.

ously circulated through every corner of it, I will not presume to say. Nor in this observation do I include (very far am I from an indiscriminate comprehension of) all religious assemblies that are not held in a church, or of every publication professing a religious purpose that is not the production of a churchman. Many religious meetings so held I am persuaded are calculated solely to do good, and do effect it: of many religious tracts so circulated I may assert the same. But insinuations against the established form of religion, and invectives against the ministers of it, do I also know so frequently disgrace others, meetings as well as publications; that both, I speak with confidence, demand the watchful eye of the legislature.

Against the machinations complained of, if it be asked, what arms we can use, what means we can employ; it must be candidly answered, I know no mean but one; a strenuous perseverance in our duty, particularly in the duty of strict residence: and, in that residence, if from experience I may presume to recommend, I would advise

advise a free and familiar intercourse with our respective parishioners of every denomination, from the highest to the lowest. We must, according to the Apostle's injunction, be *instant in season, and out of season*; not only in the church, but in their houses, in their families; seeking every occasion always, and every where, of administering to them our advice, as well as our exhortations, in temporals too, when required, as well as spirituals. This will go far in gaining their affections; and in gaining their regard and esteem, we secure a well-placed confidence in us, which will be of much avail in our greater and more important work of securing their salvation.

It is scarcely necessary to explain myself to you on a hint which I have thrown out, and of the truth of which you are I know too feelingly convinced. But as a matter of prejudice inconsiderately taken up by some, and for bad purposes encouraged by others, you will indulge me in a word more on the subject of our religious establishment. I have asserted our ecclesiastical allocations to be moderate: and however

ever high rated they may be in the partial estimation of the many, whatever objects they may appear of that ill-humour, which those, whom inferior situations induce to covet them, are sometimes known to express; I will venture to repeat, that they are so moderate, as to induce few, the things of this world alone considered, consistently with their temporal interest, to embrace the profession. The general provision of the parochial clergy, considered respectively to individuals, after a long course of expensive education, affords not the prospect of emoluments, to which an industrious tradesman or mechanic may reasonably extend his views. This is not without good proof, and inconsiderately spoken*: too frequent proof in many a helpless family, after all the care the father of that family consistent with his station could employ, left when bereft of him to the cold charity of a fastidious world.

And if there be some high posts of dignity and emolument, to incite men of su-

* See the Bishop of Llandaff's Letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury.

perior abilities to devote their time to literary pursuits; I may venture to pronounce that there exists not a character in the church, eminent as may be the station in it to which his merit and abilities may have raised him, who might not, by an exertion of the same abilities with equal assiduity and perseverance, in other learned professions have acquired emoluments as great, probably much greater than the envied station he may possess, with all the necessary counter-charges attached to it, will produce. And I may further add, that without such lure held out in remuneration of learning and abilities, religion would be found, without a standing and continued miracle, hardly able to maintain the ground it still holds, against the attacks of subtle and learned infidels, who, if not imprudently encouraged and protected by influence and power, are certainly not sufficiently discountenanced and reprobated by them.

Finally, my Brethren, to whatever crisis we may be hastening, if events so extraordinary as those we have been considering,
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if examples such as the present day affords, if causes and effects so alarming as a neighbouring country holds out, be not sufficient to influence princes, chiefs, and rulers, the great men of the earth, to imitate those sovereigns of better times, who of our holy religion became “the nursing fathers and nursing mothers;” with eye ever fixed on future prospects, let us at least pay every due attention to our duty; at no time an unimportant one, in times like these a very important one indeed. We have it in our power to do much good: in neglecting that, we do much harm: there is no medium. A late sceptic of great and cultivated abilities, used to say, “if he could believe the truth of Christianity, he would set the clergy an example that should shame them*.” If there

* Mr. Gibbon quitted the plain straight road of Gospel Faith, without giving himself time to examine the truth of it †. With undistinguishing zeal he then threw himself into the arms of superstition. To gain a name in fashionable circles, gluttony of fame next made him a sceptic: and in that
character

† He became a proselyte to Romanism at the age of sixteen.

there be characters among us, to whom the reflection may apply; to those it appeals in the strong language of "*Fas est & ab hoste doceri.*"—Be that as it may, I hesitate not to assert, that there are many characters amongst us, whose lives would form a counterpart of the purest example Christian zeal might propose. And, truly, so it ought to be. We, who have devoted our studies to religious pursuits, whose researches have assured us of the truth of Christianity, and who know how to estimate its worth, ought perseveringly to maintain the cause in which we hold so prominent a station. The present times also in a more particular manner demand our best exertions to shew forth our profession in our lives; they call on us, as set apart for God's service, by every means in our power to promote it, to live for it; and, should it please Him to call us to the trial, to die for it, as many predecessors in our posts of duty have formerly done. And

character he exerted the whole acumen of his wit and irony against Christianity, without advancing a single argument of force against the truth of it.

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in such our perseverance to encourage us,
we have the strongest, the clearest, and
the most animating assurance of remuneration
the lip of truth could pronounce:
BE THOU FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH, AND I
WILL GIVE THEE A CROWN OF LIFE.

F I N I S.



