

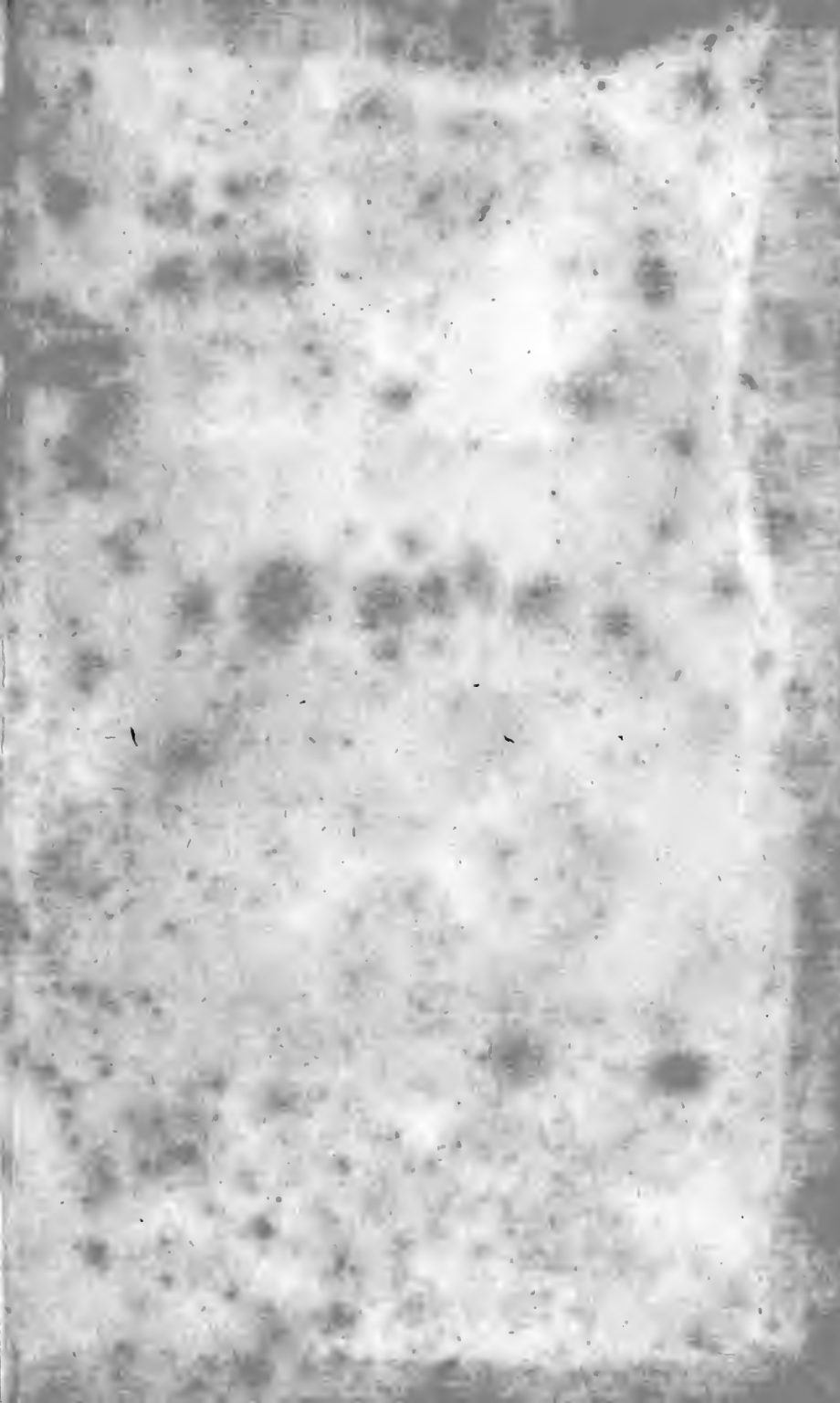


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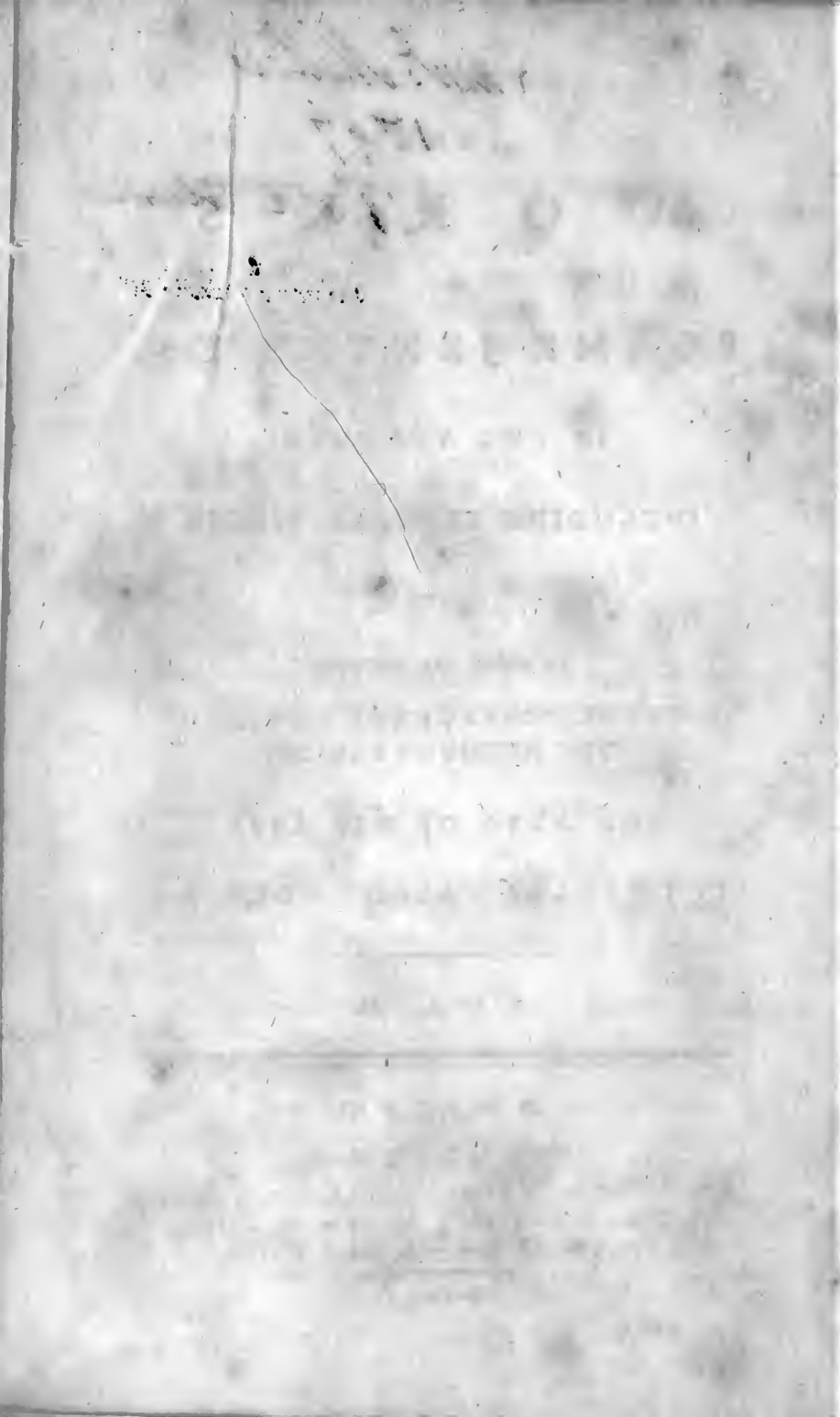




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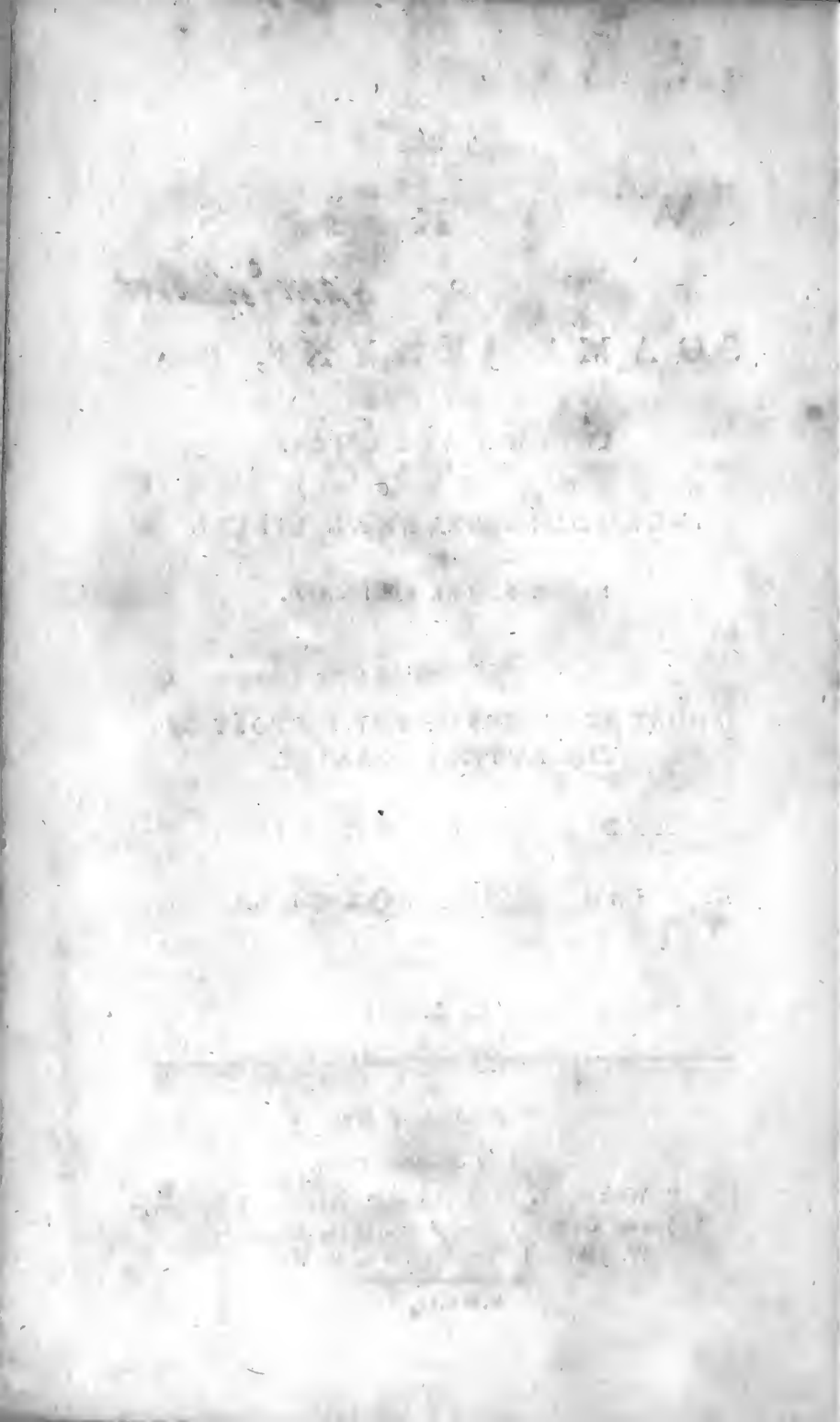
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A  
FREE INQUIRY  
INTO THE  
NATURE AND ORIGIN  
OF  
EVIL.  
IN SIX LETTERS TO—  
WITH  
AN ADDITIONAL PREFACE, AND SOME  
EXPLANATORY NOTES.

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## P R E F A C E.

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**T**HE author of the following letters is too well acquainted with human nature to be in the least surpris'd at the reception they have met with; that is, that they have been much liked, much censured, and little assented to: Truth, he knows, has at all times been so received; for though by her native beauty she is sure to charm, yet from her repugnancy to most men's interests, she is seldom welcome: politicians are afraid of her, parties detest her, and all professions agree that she is mad, and very dangerous if suffered to go about in public: he knows that mankind live all in masquerade, and that whoever presumes to come amongst them barefaced must expect to be abused by the whole assembly: he could therefore have no motive for thus imparting his free sentiments to the public, except the dictates of his own heart, which tell him, that it is every man's duty, who comes into the world, to use his best endeavours, however insignificant, to leave it as  
much

much wiser, and as much better as he can. Induced by this motive alone, he at first undertook this inquiry; and now, actuated by the same principle, and unprovoked by all the senseless misapprehensions, and malicious misconstructions, with which it has been tortured, he will here, with all possible conciseness, endeavour to explain those parts of it, which have been so misunderstood, or misrepresented, and give satisfaction to all, who are either able or willing to understand it.

The first letter treats of evils in general, and endeavours to prove, that they all owe their existence, not to any voluntary admission of a benevolent Creator, but to the necessity of their own natures, that is, to the impossibility of excluding them from any system of created beings whatever; and that in all such systems, however wisely contrived, they must have, and must at all times have had a place. Against this but one material objection has been urged; which is this, that, in order to make room for this necessity of evil, the real existence of a paradisiacal state is represented as at all times impossible; and, consequently, the Mosaic account of that state is utterly exploded, on which the whole fabric of the Christian religion is erected. How far the literal belief of that account is essential to the true faith of a Christian need not be here decided; because not the least mention of it is made in this letter: and therefore this objection is in-  
tirely



tirely founded on a mistake. The argument there made use of is only this, that some have endeavoured to justify the goodness of God from the introduction of evil, by asserting, that at the beginning there was no such thing, but that, at first, all creation came out of his omnipotent hand, endued with absolute perfection, and free from all evil, both natural and moral: to shew that this was an ancient opinion, some lines are quoted from Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, describing the Golden Age, in such a state of perfect happiness and innocence; on which the author, thinking them to be no part of any one's creed, imagined himself at liberty to observe, that from the nature of man, and the nature of this terrestrial globe, which he inhabits, the real existence of such a state seemed impossible; and therefore, that these descriptions of it could be nothing more than amusing dreams and enchanting fables. This bears not the least reference to the Mosaic account of Paradise, in which such a state of absolute perfection, void of all evil, is so far from being described, that the serpent, or the devil, the parent of all evil, is one of the principal characters of that history; which therefore by no means contradicts the proposition here asserted.

The second letter undertakes to shew, that evils of imperfection are in truth no evils at all; but only the absence of comparative good, resulting solely from the necessary inferiority

feriority of some beings with regard to others, which cannot be prevented in a system of creation, whose very essence consists in a chain of subordination, descending from infinite perfection to absolute nothing. To this likewise one objection only has been made; which is, that no such chain of subordinate beings, reaching from infinite perfection to absolute nothing, can, in fact, exist, for this notable reason; because no being can approach next to infinite perfection, nor any be contiguous to nothing. But this argument being no more than a quibble on metaphysical terms, to which no precise ideas are affixed, neither deserves, nor is capable of an answer.

The third letter treats of natural evils; and attempts to shew, that most of these, which we complain of, are derived likewise from the same source; that is, from the imperfection of our natures, and our station in the universal system: to this are added three conjectures; first, that many of our miseries may be owing to some secret, but invincible disposition, in the nature of things, that renders it impracticable to produce pleasure exclusive of pain; a certain degree of which must therefore be endured by individuals, for the happiness and well being of the whole; secondly, that many other of our miseries may be inflicted on us by the agency of superior beings, to whose benefit they may possibly be as conducive as the deaths and sufferings of inferior animals are to ours;  
and

and lastly, that by the ancient doctrine of transmigration, the miseries, which for the sake of general utility we are obliged to suffer in one life, may be recompenced in another, and so the divine goodness be sufficiently justified from the admission of them all. To every one of these some objections have been made: against the first, it has been alledged, that this impracticability to produce pleasure without pain, whence arises this utility of the sufferings of individuals for the good of the whole, is merely a production of the author's own daring imagination, founded on no reason, and supported by no proof. To which he answers, that he proposes it as a conjecture only; but cannot think it ill-founded, since it is confirmed by the appearance of every thing around us, and since it is reasonable to believe, that a benevolent Creator would not have permitted his creatures to have suffered on any other terms. In ridicule of the second conjecture, it has been asked, with an air of humour, whether we can think it credible that superior beings should ride, or hunt, or roast, or eat us, as we make use of inferior animals? Which question is most properly to be answered by another; whether, in the unbounded system of creation, there may not be numberless methods, by which beings of different orders may be subservient to each others uses, totally above the reach of our comprehensions? To doubt of which would  
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be like the incredulity of the ignorant peasant, who can scarce be persuaded to believe that there is any thing in the world, some specimen of which he has not beheld within the narrow limits of his own parish. To the last it is objected, that the doctrine of transmigration being only the fanciful and exploded opinion of some ancient philosophers, in the times of darkness, ought not, by the author, to have been here advanced in direct contradiction to the faith and tenets of the Christian religion: to which he replies, that he neither proposes this doctrine as an article of his own belief, or imposes it on others; but mentions it only as the most rational conjecture of the human mind, uninformed by supernatural assistance, concerning a future state; that it is confirmed by Revelation he does not pretend, but that it directly contradicts it, by no means appears. So silent are the scriptures concerning the state of the soul between death and the resurrection, that the most learned divines still widely differ on that subject; some maintaining that it enters immediately into a state of retribution; others, of sleep; and others, of purgation from past offences: why therefore is it more repugnant to the sense of these writings to suppose, that it may possibly animate other bodies during that period, and, at the last day, receive such punishments or rewards as are due on the whole account of its past behaviour? Thus the probability of every

ry one of these conjectures seems to be sufficiently established, and they appear perfectly consistent with reason, and not at all contradictory to revelation.

The fourth letter endeavours to account for moral evil: the most arduous part of the whole undertaking; to which end it attempts to shew, that the common opinion, which derives it solely from the abuse of free-will in man, is ineffectual for that purpose; and that therefore, though its very essence consists in the production of natural evil, yet it could never have been admitted into the works of a just and beneficent Creator, if it had not some remote and collateral tendency to universal good, by answering some ends beneficial to the immense and incomprehensible whole; one of which may possibly be the conversion of unpreventable miseries into just punishments by the production of guilt, without which they must have been inflicted on perfect innocence. To this account of the origin of moral evil, not only many weighty objections have been made, but on it many imputations have been laid of a most formidable nature, as that it makes God the cause of all wickedness, destroys free-will in man, and consequently roots up the foundation of all virtue and morality whatever; and it is, moreover, charged with inconsistency and self-contradiction through every part. To all this the author replies only, that he is assured,

fured, that, if any intelligent reader will peruse the whole letter together with candor and attention, it will evidently appear that these accusations are entirely groundless. He makes no manner of doubt, but that man is endued with free-will, and is justly punishable for the abuse of it; and hopes he has so expressed himself, through this whole piece, as to leave no uncertainty of his opinion on that question: all he means is, that though the abuse of free-will is undoubtedly the immediate cause of moral evil, yet it cannot from thence derive its original admission into the works of a benevolent Creator; because man, not being a self-existent and independent being, must receive that will itself, together with his nature and formation, from the supreme Author of all things; for which reason he cannot apprehend, that the general wickedness of mankind can be an accident proceeding from their unforeseen wrong elections, by which the whole benevolent system is defeated; but must be a part, and a material part too, of the original plan of creation, wisely calculated by the incomprehensible operations of vice and punishment, to promote the good and happiness of the whole. For to assert, that any thing has happened which God did not intend, or that he intended any thing which did not happen, is a language which may be allowed to the poet or the orator, but never to the philosopher; unless we can suppose, that omniscience

ence can be disappointed, and omnipotence defeated. As to inconsistency, he denies not the charge; but believes he is not more inconsistent than all who have undertaken to write on the same subject: the scriptures themselves are guilty of the same seeming inconsistency on this head; they all present man as a being perfectly free, punishable, and punished for his misbehaviour; yet as constantly speak of him as a creature deriving all his thought, will, and dispositions from his Creator, and under his perpetual influence and direction; the appearance of inconsistency, in which two propositions, both undoubtedly true, proceeds only from our ignorance in the nature and limits of free-will, and divine influence, and our inability to comprehend them. In the latter part of this letter a few hints are flung out, to shew that on the principles of the foregoing theory some of the most abstruse doctrines of the Christian revelation of original sin, grace, predestination, and vicarious punishment, might be rendered reconcileable to the strictest reason; a proposal from whence surely much advantage might accrue to the cause of Christianity in general, and by which possibly some articles of our own church might be proved to be much less incompatible with common sense than they are thought to be by all those who will not subscribe them, and by many who do; with this, two classes of men are particularly offended; the rational

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al dissenters, as they please to call themselves, and the methodists: the former of these having arbitrarily expunged out of their bibles every thing which appears to them contradictory to reason, that is, to their own reason, or, in other words, every thing which they cannot understand, are displeased to see those tenets explained, which they have thought proper to reject: the latter, having embraced these very doctrines only because they appeared unintelligible, are unwilling to see them cleared up, and afraid lest those dark and thorny covers should be laid open, under which they have so long sheltered themselves from the rays of reason: with either of these all debate would be vain and useless; because the first, though for the most part honest, religious, and learned men, are unable to comprehend any reasoning, which soars above the limits of their own confined literature and education; and the others are determined to listen to no reasoning at all, having with all reason and common sense declared eternal warfare.

The design of the fifth letter is to shew, that in the government of such imperfect creatures as men over each other there must be much unavoidable evil; that all human governments, whether of the monarchical, popular, or mixed kinds, were at first founded on force or interest, and must ever be supported by the same means, that is, by compulsion or corruption, both of which must  
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be productive of innumerable evils; that these ought not to be imputed to God, because he could not have prevented them without the total alteration of human nature; much less can they be eradicated by men; but that they may in some measure be lessened by the diminution of moral evil, from which all political evils are derived; and therefore that we ought quickly to submit to these evils, when they do not arise to any intolerable degree, and to apply principally that remedy to the faults of government, which is ever the most effectual, that is, the amendment of our own. It is no wonder, that a lesson so disagreeable to the restless humours of most men, and so repugnant to the arts and ends of faction, should call up against the author many opponents, who have liberally bestowed on him the titles of enemy to liberty, and an advocate for corruption, with the same justice that a physician might be stiled an enemy to health, and an advocate for the gout, who in that distemper prescribes patience and temperance, rather than such inflaming medicines as might convert it into a more dangerous disease. All that he has asserted in this letter amounts to no more than this: that no government can subsist without some principle of governing; that is, that men cannot be governed without some means by which their obedience can be obtained; a proposition, which seems as incontestible, as that every effect must

must have a cause. That all government must be disagreeable to those who are governed, is demonstrable from the nature and essence of government itself, which being nothing more than a compulsion of individuals to act in such a manner in support of society, as they are neither wise nor honest enough to do from the suggestions of their own heads or hearts; this compulsion must be contrary to both their judgments and inclinations, and consequently disagreeable, and for that reason perpetually resisted: some method must therefore be made use of to overcome this resistance, and what that method can be, except force or interest, he cannot find out: he is an advocate for neither, except from their necessity; and if any one will point out another, he will readily declare his disapprobation of them both.

The sixth and last letter proceeds upon the same plan as the rest, and endeavours to shew, that religious evils, that is, the defects so visible in all human religions, and the mischievous consequences resulting from them, are not owing to any want of wisdom or goodness in our Creator, but proceed, like all others, from our nature and situation, and the impracticability of giving a perfect religion to an imperfect creature. In order to explain this, it was necessary to point out the particular imperfections, which in fact do exist in all human religions, whether natural or revealed; not with any design to depreciate

depreciate the one, or to invalidate the authority of the other, but only to account for them consistently with God's wisdom and benevolence: those charged upon natural religion have been readily enough agreed to, but those imputed to revelation have offended many, who have from thence considered the whole of this enquiry as intended secretly to undermine the foundations of Christianity, than which nothing can be more averse from the intentions, as well as from the sentiments of the author; but indeed many late deistical writers have attacked that religion so unfairly, by insinuating many cavils, which they dared not express, that they have made it very difficult for any one to treat freely on that subject, without incurring the suspicion of the same insincerity: of all such dissingenuous artifices the author sincerely declares his utmost detestation, and begs to be understood to mean all that he expresses, and nothing more; he solemnly professes, that by recounting these imperfections, he is so far from entertaining any secret designs destructive to that sacred institution, that by it he intended not only to wrest out of the hand of infidelity those weapons, with which it has ever been most successfully assaulted, but also to obviate all those doubts and difficulties which frequently occur to the minds of thinking men, though no infidels, on viewing the deplorable state in which all human religion has continued throughout all

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ages, and the ineffectual assistance it has received even from this divine interposition itself, by no means exempted from numberless evils and imperfections: to those, who perceive none of these imperfections, and consequential evils, he means not to write, nor desires to let in any new light on their tender organs, which can serve only to disturb their present repose; nor does he aspire to the honour of working for those middle-sized understandings, who can be well fitted with ready-made arguments from every pulpit: to the learned, impartial, sagacious, and inquisitive, he alone applies; the establishing one of whom in a rational and well-grounded belief of the Christian Religion does more real service to that cause, than the enlisting legions under that denomination whose immoveable faith proceeds only from their ignorance; that is, who believing without any reason, can possibly have no reason for doubting. To account for the corruption of religion, it was necessary to specify the particular abuses, and abusers of it; and here the author could scarcely overlook the clergy; but he hopes that nothing has escaped his pen, that can throw the least reflection upon them as clergy, but as men only, subject to the same imperfections, and actuated by the same passions as other men, and pursuing the ends of self-interest and ambition by the same paths, in which all others would have trod, conducted by the same temptations

tions and opportunities; he has treated them with no more freedom than he has done princes and parliaments, ministers and patriots, conquerors and heroes, and his work would admit of no partiality; sure he is, that nothing he has said can bear the most distant relation to the present clergy of this country, whom he sincerely thinks are a body of men as honest, learned, and unprejudiced, as ever existed, and for whose persons and profession he has the highest regard. In another part of this letter there is an assertion, which has given some offence; which is, that every religion must be corrupted as soon as it becomes established; this has been thought a reflection upon all national churches, and a persuasion to schism and dissention; but those who think thus, totally misapprehend the tenor of this whole work, which endeavours to prove that every thing human must be attended with evils, which therefore ought to be submitted to with patience and resignation; that many imperfections will adhere to all governments and religions in the hands of men, but that these, unless they rise to an intolerable degree, will not justify our resistance to the one, or our dissention from the other; the assertion itself, the author cannot retract, but the inference, which he desires may be drawn from it, is by no means favourable to dissentions, because from them he can perceive no remedy, which can accrue to these

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evils;

evils; for if it was every one's duty to desert a national church on account of those corruptions which proceed from its establishment, and this duty was universally complied with, let us see the consequence! one of these things must necessarily follow: either that some dissention of superior purity, which usually arises from its being a dissention, must be established in its room, or no religion must be established at all; if the first of these methods should take place, the end proposed by it would by itself be entirely defeated; because that purer religion which was established, would by that very establishment become equally corrupt with that which was deserted; and so the same reason would eternally remain for a new dissention: if the latter should be taken, that is, to establish no religion at all; this would be so far from producing the intended reformation, that it would let in such an inundation of enthusiasm and contradictory absurdities, as must in a short time destroy not only all religion, but all peace and morality whatever; of which no one can entertain the least doubt, who is not totally unacquainted both with the nature and history of mankind. From whence it is plain, that all dissentions from a national church, not in itself sinful, arise from ignorance; that is, from a kind of short-sightedness, which enables men to pry out every imperfection within their reach, but prevents their discerning the more remote necessity for those imper-

imperfections, and the danger of amending them.

To conclude; the author of this enquiry having heard it so much, and as he thought so unjustly calumniated, has reviewed it with all possible care and impartiality, and though he finds many things in the stile and composition, which have need enough of amendment, he sees nothing in the sentiments which ought to be retracted. His intentions were to reconcile the numerous evils so conspicuous in the creation, with the wisdom, power, and goodness of the Creator; to shew that no more of them are admitted by him, than are necessary towards promoting universal good; and from thence to persuade men to an entire resignation to his all wise, but incomprehensible dispensations. To ascertain the nature of virtue, and to enforce the practice of it; to prove the certainty of a future state, and the justice of the rewards and punishments that will attend it; to recommend submission to national governments, and conformity to national religions, notwithstanding the evils and defects, which must unavoidably adhere to them; and lastly, to shew the excellence and credibility of the Christian revelation, to reconcile some of its most abstruse doctrines with reason, and to answer all those objections to its authority, which have been drawn from its imperfections and abuses; these, and these only, were the intentions of the author; and  
if,

if, after all, a work so designed, however unably executed, should by the united force of ignorance and malevolence, of faction, bigotry, and enthusiasm, be represented as introductive of fatalism, immorality, slavery, corruption, and infidelity, he shall be little concerned, and shall only look upon it as an additional instance of that imperfection of mankind, which he has here treated of; from them he desires only an exemption from calumny; honour and applause he has not the vanity to hope for; these, he knows, they bestow not on their benefactors or instructors, but reserve for those alone who deceive, disturb, and destroy them.



## L E T T E R I.

## ON EVIL IN GENERAL.

SIR,

**H**A V I N G enjoyed the pleasure of many accidental conferences with you on metaphysical, moral, political, and religious subjects; on which you ever seemed to converse with more sagacity, as well as more candor, than is usual on the like occasions; I imagined it might not be unentertaining either to you or myself, to put together my sentiments on these important topics, and communicate them to you from time to time as the absence of business, or of more agreeable amusements, may afford me opportunity. This I propose to do under the general title of an Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil; an inquiry which will comprehend them all, and which, I think, has never been attended to with that diligence it deserves, nor with that success, which might have been hoped for from that little that has been bestowed upon it. The right understanding of this abstruse speculation, I look upon to be the only solid foundation, on which any rational system of ethics can be built; for it seems impossible, that men should ever arrive at any just ideas of their Creator or his attributes, any proper notions  
of

of their relation to him, or their duty to each other, without first settling in their minds some satisfactory solution of this important question, *Whence came Evil?* Whilst we find ourselves liable to innumerable miseries in this life; apprehensive of still greater in another, and can give no probable account of this our wretched situation, what sentiments must we entertain of the justice and benevolence of our Creator, who placed us in it, without our solicitations or consent? The works of the creation sufficiently demonstrate his existence; their beauty, perfection, and magnificence, his infinite power and wisdom; but it is the happiness only which we enjoy or hope for, which can convince us of his goodness.

It is the solution therefore of this important question alone, that can ascertain the moral characteristic of God, and upon that only must all human virtue eternally depend.

If there's a power above us,  
(And that there is all Nature cries aloud  
'Thro' all her works) he must delight in virtue,  
And that which he delights in, must be happy.

But should this divine reasoning of the philosopher be at least inconclusive; could we once entertain such blasphemous notions of the Supreme Being, as that he might not delight in virtue, neither adhere to it himself, nor reward it in others: that he could make any part of his creation miserable, or suffer them to make themselves so without a just cause

cause and a benevolent end, all moral considerations must be vain and useless; we can have no rule by which to direct our actions, nor if we had, any kind of obligation to pursue it; nor in this case can any revelation in the least assist us, the belief of all revelation being in its own nature subsequent, not only to the belief of God's existence, but of his justice and veracity; for if God can injure us, he may also deceive us; and then there is an end of all distinctions between good and evil, truth and falsehood, and of all confidence in God and man.

I mean not by this to insinuate the least possibility of a doubt concerning the justice or goodness of our Creator, but only to shew the importance of this inquiry, and the utility of it towards settling our notions of his attributes, and the regulation of our own behaviour in conformity to them. I intend not by it to prove the benevolence of God, but to reconcile the miseries we see and suffer, with that incontrovertible benevolence; I design not to shew that God approves virtue, but that the admission of moral evil is not inconsistent with that undoubted approbation; nor would I be understood to assert, that our obligation to be virtuous depends on this abstruse speculation, but only that our right understanding it will remove all doubts concerning the nature of virtue, and our obligation to pursue it, and fix them on the most firm and immoveable basis.

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To find out therefore how evil of any kind can be the production of infinite goodness, joined with infinite power, should be the first step in all our religious inquiries ; the examination into which wonderful paradox will lead us into many useful and sublime truths ; and its perfect comprehension, was that possible for our narrow capacities, would, I doubt not, make as surprising discoveries in the moral world, as mathematical and physical knowledge have in the natural.

To clear up this difficulty, some ancient philosophers have had recourse to the supposition of two first causes, one good, and the other evil, perpetually counteracting each other's designs. This system was afterwards adopted by the *Manichæan* heresy, and has since been defended by the ingenious *Monf. Bayle*: but as the supposition of two first causes is even in itself a contradiction, and as the whole scheme has been demonstrated by the best metaphysical writers to be as false as it is impious, all further arguments to disprove it would be needless.

Others have endeavoured to account for this by the introduction of a golden age, or paradisiacal state, in which all was innocence and happiness.

*Pena metusque aberant, nec verba minacia fixo  
Ære legebantur, nec supplex turba timebat  
Judicis ora sui : sed erant sine vindice tuti.*

When man yet new,  
No rule but uncorrupted reason knew,  
And with a native bent did good pursue ;

}  
Unforced

Unforced by punishment, unaw'd by fear,  
 His words were simple and his soul sincere :  
 Needleſs was written law, when none oppreſt,  
 The law of man was written in his breaſt :  
 No ſuppliant crowds before the judge appear'd,  
 No court erected yet, nor cauſe was heard,  
 But all was ſafe, for conſcience was their guard.

*Ver erat æternum, placidique tepentibus auris  
 Mulcebant Zephyri natos ſine ſemine flores ;  
 Mox etiam fruges tellus inarata ferebat,  
 Nec renovatus ager gravidis caneſcit ariflis,  
 Flumina jam lactis, jam flumina nectaris ibant,  
 Flavaque de viridi ſtillabant ilice mella.*

The flow'rs unfown in fields and meadows reign'd,  
 And weſtern winds immortal ſpring maintain'd.  
 In following years the bearded corn enſu'd  
 From each unask'd, nor was that earth renew'd.  
 From veins of valleys milk and nectar broke,  
 And honey ſweated from the pores of oak.

Amuſing dreams ! as abſurd in philoſophy,  
 as in poetry delightful ! For though it is  
 probable, from the moſt ancient hiſtories, as  
 well as from analogy drawn from the reſt of  
 Nature's productions, that the world might  
 be more happy and more innocent in its in-  
 fancy, than in more advanced ages ; yet that  
 it could ever be totally free from vice and  
 miſery, may eaſily, I think, be proved im-  
 poſſible, both from the nature of this ter-  
 reſtrial globe, and the nature of its inhabi-  
 tants. So that theſe enchanting ſcenes can  
 in fact never have exiſted ; but if they had,  
 the ſhort duration of this perfection is equal-  
 ly inconſiſtent with infinite power, joined to  
 infinite wiſdom and goodneſs, as any origi-  
 nal imperfections whatever. Fables then of  
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this kind can never in the least account for the origin of evil; they are all but mean expedients, which will never be able to take away the difficulty, and can at most but obscure it, by shifting it a little backward into a less clear light; like that *Indian* philosophy, accounting for the support of the world, which informs us, that it is sustained by a vast elephant, and that elephant by a tortoise, and then prudently drops any further inquiry.

The divines and moralists of later ages seem perfectly satisfied that they have loosed this Gordian knot, by imputing the source of all evil to the abuse of free-will in created beings. God, they say, never designed any such thing should exist as evil, moral or natural; but that giving to some beings, for good and wise purposes, a power of free-agency, they perverted this power to bad ends, contrary to his intentions and commands; and thus their accidental wickedness produced consequential misery. But to suppose in this manner, that God intended all things to be good and happy, and at the same time gave being to creatures able and willing to obstruct his benevolent designs, is a notion so inconsistent with his wisdom, goodness, omniscience, and omnipotence, that it seems equally unphilosophical, and more evidently absurd than the other. They have been led into this error by ridiculously judging of the dispensations of a Creator to  
his

his creatures, by the same rules which they apply to the dealings of men towards each other ; between which there is not the least proportion or similitude. A man who endeavours, to the utmost of his power, to make others virtuous and happy, however unsuccessful, is sufficiently justified ; but in a Being omnipotent and omniscient, the cause of all causes, the origin of all thought, will and action ; who sees all things past, present and to come, in one instantaneous view, the case is widely different ; his active and permissive will must be exactly the same ; and, in regard to him, all consequential and future evils, through every moment of time, are actually present.

Since therefore none of these pretended solutions can, I am certain, give satisfaction to your comprehensive understanding, let us now try to find out one more rational and more consistent with the analogy of every thing around us.

That there is a supreme Being infinitely powerful, wise, and benevolent, the great Creator and Preserver of all things, is a truth so clearly demonstrated, that it shall here be taken for granted. That there is also in the universal system of things, the works of his almighty hand, much misery and wickedness, that is, much natural and moral evil, is another truth, of which every hour's fatal experience cannot fail to convince us. How these two undoubted, yet  
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seeming contradictory truths can be reconciled, that is, how evils of any sort could have place in the works of an omnipotent and good Being, is very difficult to account for. If we assert that he could not prevent them, we destroy his power; if that he would not, we arraign his goodness; and therefore his power and goodness cannot both be infinite.

But however conclusive this argument may seem, there is somewhere or other an error in it; and this error I take to arise from our wrong notions of omnipotence. Omnipotence cannot work contradictions, it can only effect all possible things. But so little are we acquainted with the whole system of nature, that we know not what are possible, and what are not; but, if we may judge from that constant mixture of pain with pleasure, and of inconvenience with advantage, which we must observe in every thing around us, we have reason to conclude, that to endue created beings with perfection, that is, to produce good exclusive of evil is one of those impossibilities which even infinite power cannot accomplish.

The true solution then of this incomprehensible paradox must be this, that all evils owe their existence solely to the necessity of their own natures; by which I mean, they could not possibly have been prevented, without the loss of some superior good, or the permission of some greater evil than themselves



themselves; or that many evils will unavoidably insinuate themselves by the natural relations and circumstances of things, into the most perfect system of created beings, even in opposition to the will of an Almighty Creator, by reason they cannot be excluded without working contradictions; which not being proper objects of power, it is no diminution of omnipotence to affirm that it cannot effect them.

And here it will be proper to make a previous apology for an expression, which will frequently occur in the following pages, which is, that God cannot do such and such things; by which is always to be understood not any retrenchment of the divine omnipotence, but only that such things are in their own natures impracticable, and impossible to be performed.

That the Almighty should be thus limited, and circumscribed by the nature of things, of which he himself is the author, may to some seem not very intelligible; but surely it is not at all difficult to conceive, that in every possible method of ordering, disposing, and framing the universal system of things, such numberless inconveniences might necessarily arise, that all that infinite power and wisdom could do, was to make choice of that method, which was attended with the least and fewest; and this not proceeding from any defect of power in the Creator, but from that impression which is inherent in the nature of all created things.

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This necessity, I imagine, is what the ancients meant by fate, to which they fancied that *Jupiter* and all the gods were obliged to submit, and which was to be controuled by no power whatever. The *Stoicks* seem to have had some dark and unintelligible notions of this kind, which they neither understood themselves, nor knew how to explain to others; that the untractableness of matter was the cause of evil; that God would have made all things perfect, but that there was in matter an evil bias repugnant to his benevolence, which drew another way, whence arose all manner of evils. Of the like kind is a maxim of the same philosophers, that pain is no evil; which, if asserted with regard to the individuals who suffer it, is downright nonsense; but if considered as it affects the universal system, is an undoubted truth, and means only that there is no more pain in it than what is necessary to the production of happiness. How many sœever of these evils then force themselves into the creation, so long as the good preponderates, it is a work well worthy of infinite wisdom and benevolence; and notwithstanding the imperfections of its parts, the whole is most undoubtedly perfect.

Hence then we may plainly see that much evil may exist, not at all inconsistent with the power and goodness of God; and the further we pursue this clue, the more we shall, at every step, discern new lights break out,

out, which will discover clearly numberless examples, where the infinite power and goodness of God is fairly reconcileable with the misery and wickedness of his creatures, from the impossibility of preventing them; and if, in the very small part of the universal system that lies within the reach of our imperfect capacities, many instances of this kind appear, in which they are visibly consistent, we ought, with the utmost assurance, to conclude what is undoubtedly true, that they are really so in all, though we are not able to comprehend them. This is the kind of faith most worthy of the human understanding, and most meritorious in the sight of God, as it is the offspring of reason, as well as the parent of all virtue and resignation to the just, but unscrutable dispensations of providence.

But in order more clearly to explain this abstruse speculation, it will be necessary to divide evils into their different species, and bestow on each a separate consideration. This I shall do under the following heads: Evils of Imperfection, Natural Evils, Moral Evils, Political Evils, and Religious Evils; which, I think, will comprehend most of those to which human nature is unhappily liable. And now, Sir, lest I should add one more evil to this melancholy catalogue, which is that of a long and tedious epistle, I shall reserve the examination into each of these particulars for the subject of a

future letter; and conclude this, by assuring you that I am,

SIR, &c.

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## L E T T E R II.

### ON EVILS OF IMPERFECTION.

SIR,

**I**N pursuance of the plan proposed in my last, I shall now proceed to examine into the nature of each particular kind of evil, and in the first place of those therein denominated evils of imperfection; which are in truth no evils at all, but rather the absence of some comparative good; and therefore I shall not have occasion to detain you long on this part of my subject.

No system can possibly be formed, even in imagination, without a subordination of parts. Every animal body must have different members subservient to each other; every picture must be composed of various colours, and of light and shade; all harmony must be formed of trebles, tenors, and basses; every beautiful and useful edifice must consist of higher and lower, more and less magnificent apartments. This is in the  
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very essence of all created things, and therefore cannot be prevented by any means whatever, unless by not creating them at all: for which reason, in the formation of the universe, God was obliged, in order to carry on that just subordination so necessary to the very existence of the whole, to create beings of different ranks; and to bestow on various species of animals, and also on the individuals of the same species, various degrees of understanding, strength, beauty and perfection; to the comparative want of which advantages we give the names of folly, weakness, deformity, and imperfection, and very unjustly repute them evils; whereas in truth they are blessings as far as they extend, though of an inferior degree. They are no more actual evils, than a small estate is a real misfortune, because many may be possessed of greater.

Whatever we enjoy, is purely a free gift from our Creator; but that we enjoy no more, can never sure be deemed an injury, or a just reason to question his infinite benevolence. All our happiness is owing to his goodness; but that it is no greater, is owing only to ourselves, that is, to our not having any inherent right to any happiness, or even to any existence at all. This is no more to be imputed to God, than the wants of a beggar to the person who has relieved him: that he had something, was owing to his benefactor; but that he had no more only to his original poverty.

They who look upon the privation of all the good they see others enjoy, or think possible for infinite power to bestow, as positive evil, understand not that the universe is a system whose very essence consists in subordination; a scale of beings descending by insensible degrees from infinite perfection to absolute nothing; in which though we may justly expect to find perfection in the whole, could we possibly comprehend it; yet would it be the highest absurdity to hope for it in all its parts, because the beauty and happiness of the whole depend altogether on the just inferiority of its parts, that is, on the comparative imperfections of the several beings of which it is composed.

It would have been no more an instance of God's wisdom to have created no beings but of the highest and most perfect order, than it would be of a painter's art to cover his whole piece with one single colour the most beautiful he could compose. Had he confined himself to such, nothing could have existed but demi-gods or arch-angels, and then all inferior orders must have been void and uninhabited: but as it is surely more agreeable to infinite benevolence, that all these should be filled up with beings capable of enjoying happiness themselves, and contributing to that of others, they must necessarily be filled with inferior beings, that is, with such as are less perfect, but from whose existence, notwithstanding that less perfection,

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on, more felicity upon the whole accrues to the universe, than if no such had been created. It is moreover highly probable, that there is such a connection between all ranks and orders by subordinate degrees, that they mutually support each other's existence, and every one in its place is absolutely necessary towards sustaining the whole vast and magnificent fabric.

You see, therefore, that it is utterly impracticable, even for infinite power, to exclude from creation this necessary inferiority of some beings in comparison with others. All that it can do is to make each as happy as their respective situations will permit: and this it has done in so extraordinary a manner, as to leave the benevolence of our great Creator not to be doubted of; for though he cannot make all superior, yet in the dispensations of his blessings, his wisdom and goodness both are well worthy the highest admiration; for, amongst all the wide distinctions which he was obliged to make in the dignity and perfections of his creatures, he has made much less in their happiness than is usually imagined, or indeed can be believed from outward appearances. He has given many advantages to brutes, which man cannot attain to with all his superiority, and many probably to man which are denied to angels; amongst which his ignorance is perhaps none of the least. With regard to him, though it was necessary to the

the great purposes of human life to bestow riches, understanding, and health, on individuals in very partial proportions; yet has the Almighty so contrived the nature of things, that happiness is distributed with a more equal hand. His goodness, we may observe, is always striving with these our necessary imperfections, and setting bounds to the inconveniences it cannot totally prevent, by balancing the wants, and repaying the sufferings of all by some kind of equivalent naturally resulting from their particular situations and circumstances. Thus, for example, poverty or the want of riches is generally compensated by having more hopes and fewer fears, by a greater share of health, and a more exquisite relish of the smallest enjoyments than those who possess them are usually blessed with. The want of taste and genius, with all the pleasures that arise from them, are commonly recompenced by a more useful kind of common-sense, together with a wonderful delight, as well as success, in the busy pursuits of a scrambling world. The sufferings of the sick are greatly relieved by many trifling gratifications imperceptible to others, sometimes almost repaid by the inconceivable transports occasioned by the return of health and vigour. Folly cannot be very grievous, because imperceptible; and I doubt not but there is some truth in that rant of a mad poet, that there is a pleasure in being mad, which none but madmen know.



know. Ignorance, or the want of knowledge and literature, the appointed lot of all born to poverty, and the drudgeries of life, is the only opiate capable of infusing that insensibility which can enable them to endure the miseries of the one, and the fatigues of the other. It is a cordial administered by the gracious hand of providence; of which they ought never to be deprived by an ill-judged and improper education. It is the basis of all subordination, the support of society, and the privilege of individuals; and I have ever thought it a most remarkable instance of the divine wisdom, that whereas in all animals, whose individuals rise little above the rest of their species, knowledge is instinctive; in man, whose individuals are so widely different, it is acquired by education; by which means the prince and the labourer, the philosopher and the peasant, are in some measure fitted for their respective situations. The same parental care extends to every part of the animal creation. Brutes are exempted from numberless anxieties, by that happy want of recollection on past, and apprehension of future sufferings, which are annexed to their inferiority. Those amongst them who devour others, are taught by nature to dispatch them as easily as possible; and man, the most merciless devourer of all, is induced, by his own advantage, to feast those designed for his sustenance, the more luxuriously to feast upon them

them himself. Thus misery, by all possible methods, is diminished or repaid; and happiness, like fluids, is ever tending towards an equilibrium.

But was it ever so unequally divided, our pretence for complaint could be of this only, that we are not so high in the scale of existence as our ignorant ambition may desire: a pretence which must eternally subsist; because, were we ever so much higher, there would be still room for infinite power to exalt us; and since no link in the chain can be broke, the same reason for disquiet must remain to those who succeed to that chasm, which must be occasioned by our preferment. A man can have no reason to repine, that he is not an angel; nor a horse, that he is not a man; much less, that in their several stations they possess not the faculties of another; for this would be an insufferable misfortune. And doubtless it would be as inconvenient for a man to be endued with the knowledge of an angel, as for a horse to have the reason of a man; but as they are now formed by the consummate wisdom of their Creator, each enjoys pleasures peculiar to his situation; and though the happiness of one may perhaps consist in divine contemplation, of another in the acquisition of wealth and power, and that of a third in wandering amongst limpid streams, and luxuriant pastures; yet the meanest of these enjoyments give no interruption to the most sublime;

sublime, but altogether undoubtedly increase the aggregate sum of felicity bestowed upon the universe. Greatly indeed must that be lessened, were there no beings but of the highest orders. Did there not, for instance, exist on this terrestrial globe any sensitive creatures inferior to man, how great a quantity of happiness must have been lost, which is now enjoyed by millions, who at present inhabit every part of its surface, in fields and gardens, in extended deserts, impenetrable woods, and immense oceans; by monarchies of bees, republics of ants, and innumerable families of insects dwelling on every leaf and flower, who are all possessed of as great a share of pleasure, and a greater of innocence, than their arrogant sovereign, and at the same time not a little contribute to his convenience and happiness.

Has God, thou fool! work'd solely for thy good!  
 Thy joy, thy pastime, thy attire, thy food!  
 Who for thy table feeds the wanton fawn,  
 For him as kindly spreads the flow'ry lawn.  
 Is it for thee the lark ascends and sings?  
 Joy tunes his voice, joy elevates his wings.  
 Is it for thee the linnet pours his throat?  
 Loves of his own, and raptures, swell the note.  
 The bounding steed you pompously bestride,  
 Shares with his lord the pleasure and the pride.  
 Is thine alone the seed that strews the plain?  
 The birds of heav'n shall vindicate their grain.  
 Thine the full harvest of the golden year?  
 Part pays, and justly, the deserving steer.

POPE.

Thus the universe resembles a large and well-regulated family, in which all the officers

cers and servants, and even the domestic animals, are subservient to each other in a proper subordination: each enjoys the privileges and perquisites peculiar to his place, and at the same time contributes by that just subordination to the magnificence and happiness of the whole.

It is evident, therefore, that these evils of imperfection, proceeding from the necessary inferiority of some beings in comparison of others, can in no sense be called any evils at all; but if they could, it is as evident from thence, that there are many which even infinite power cannot prevent; it being sufficiently demonstrable, that to produce a system of created beings, all supreme in happiness and dignity, a government composed of all kings, an army of all generals, or an universe of all gods, must be impracticable for omnipotence itself.

We have here then made a large stride towards our intended goal, having at once acquitted the divine goodness, and freed mankind from a numerous train of imaginary evils, by most clearly shewing them to be no evils at all; and yet under this head are really comprehended all the evils we perpetually complain of, except actual pain, the nature of which, and how it came to have a place in the works of an omnipotent and good being, shall be considered in the next letter from,

SIR, &c.

L E T.

## L E T T E R III.

## O N N A T U R A L E V I L S.

SIR,

**I** SHALL now lay before you my free sentiments concerning the origin of natural evils, by which I understand the sufferings of sensitive beings only; for tempests, inundations, and earthquakes, with all the disorders of the material world, are no farther evils than as they affect the sensitive; so that under this head can be only comprehended pains of body, and inquietudes of mind. That these are real evils, I readily acknowledge; and if any one is philosopher enough to doubt of it, I shall only beg leave to refer him to a severe fit of sickness or a tedious law-suit, for farther satisfaction.

The production of happiness seems to be the only motive that could induce infinite goodness to exert infinite power to create all things; for, to say truth, happiness is the only thing of real value in existence; neither riches, nor power, nor wisdom, nor learning, nor strength, nor beauty, nor virtue, nor religion, nor even life itself, being of any importance but as they contribute to its production. All these are in themselves neither good nor evil; happiness alone is  
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their great end, and they desirable only as they tend to promote it. Most astonishing therefore it must appear to every one who looks round him, to observe all creatures blessed with life and sensation, that is, all creatures made capable of happiness, at the same time by their own natures condemned to innumerable and unavoidable miseries. Whence can it proceed, that providence should thus seem to counteract his own benevolent intentions? To what strange and invisible cause are all these numerous and invincible evils indebted for their existence? If God is a good and benevolent being, what end could he propose from creation, but the propagation of happiness? and if happiness is the end of all existence, why are not all creatures that do exist happy?

The true solution of this important question, so long and so vainly searched for by the philosophers of all ages and all countries, I take to be at least no more than this, that these real evils proceed from the same source as those imaginary ones of imperfection before treated of, namely, from that subordination, without which no created system can subsist; all subordination implying imperfection, all imperfection evil, and all evil some kind of inconvenience or suffering; so that there must be particular inconveniences and sufferings annexed to every particular rank of created beings by the circumstances of things, and their modes of existence.

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Most of those to which we ourselves are liable may be easily shewn to be of this kind, the effects only of human nature, and the station man occupies in the universe: and therefore their origin is plainly deducible from necessity; that is, they could not have been prevented without the loss of greater good, or the admission of greater evils than themselves; or by not creating any such creatures as men at all. And though this, upon a general view of things, does not so forcibly strike us, yet on a more minute inspection into every grievance attendant on human nature, it will most evidently appear. Most of these, I think, may be comprehended under the following heads; poverty, labour, inquietudes of mind, pains of body, and death; from none of which we may venture to affirm man could ever have been exempted so long as he continued to be man. God indeed might have made us quite other creatures, and placed us in a world quite otherwise constituted; but then we had been no longer men; and whatever beings had occupied our stations in the universal system, they must have been liable to the same inconveniences.

Poverty, for example, is what all could not possibly have been exempted from, not only by reason of the fluctuating nature of human possessions, but because the world could not subsist without it; for had all been rich, none could have submitted to the commands

mands of another, or the drudgeries of life; thence all governments must have been dissolved, arts neglected, and lands uncultivated, and so an universal penury have overwhelmed all, instead of now and then pinching a few. Hence, by the bye, appears the great excellence of charity, by which men are enabled, by a particular distribution of the blessings and enjoyments of life, on proper occasions, to prevent that poverty, which by a general one omnipotence itself could never have prevented: so that, by enforcing this duty, God as it were demands our assistance to promote universal happiness, and to shut out misery at every door, where it strives to intrude itself.

Labour, indeed, God might easily have excused us from, since at his command the earth would readily have poured forth all her treasures without our inconsiderable assistance; but if the severest labour cannot sufficiently subdue the malignity of human nature, what plots and machinations, what wars, rapine, and devastation, what profligacy and licentiousness must have been the consequences of universal idleness! So that labour ought only to be looked upon as a task kindly imposed upon us by our indulgent Creator, necessary to preserve our health, our safety, and our innocence.

Inquietudes of mind cannot be prevented without first eradicating all our inclinations and passions, the winds and tides that pre-  
serve



serve the great ocean of human life from perpetual stagnation. So long as men have pursuits, they must meet with disappointments; and whilst they have disappointments, they must be disquieted; whilst they are injured, they must be inflamed with anger; and whilst they see cruelties, they must be melted with pity; whilst they perceive danger, they must be sensible of fear; and whilst they behold beauty, they must be inflamed by love: nor can they be exempted from the various anxieties attendant on these various and turbulent passions. Yet without them we should be undoubtedly less happy and less safe; for without anger we should not defend ourselves, and without pity we should not assist others; without fear we should not preserve our lives; and without love they would not be worth preserving.

Pains of body are perhaps but the necessary consequences of the union of material and spiritual essences; for matter being by nature divisible, when endued with sensibility, must probably be affected by pains and pleasures by its different modifications; wherefore, to have been freed from our sufferings, we must have been deprived of all our sensual enjoyments; a composition by which few surely would be gainers. Besides, the pains of our bodies are necessary to make us continually mindful of their preservation; for what numberless lives would be lost in every trifling pursuit, or flung away  
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in ill humour, was the piercing of a sword no more painful than the tickling of a feather.

Death, the last and most dreadful of all evils, is so far from being one, that it is the infallible cure for all others.

To die is landing on some silent shore,  
Where billows never beat, nor tempests roar;  
Ere well we feel the friendly stroke 'tis o'er.

GARTH.

For, abstracted from the sickness and sufferings usually attending it, it is no more than the expiration of that term of life God was pleased to bestow on us, without any claim or merit on our part. But was it an evil ever so great, it could not be remedied but by much greater, which is by living for ever; by which means our wickedness, unrestrained by the prospect of a future state, would grow so insupportable, our sufferings so intolerable by perseverance, and our pleasures so tiresome by repetition, that no being in the universe could be so completely miserable as a species of immortal men. We have no reason therefore to look upon death as an evil, or to fear it as a punishment, even without any supposition of a future life; but if we consider it as a passage to a more perfect state, or a remove only in an eternal succession of still improving states (for which we have the strongest reasons) it will then appear a new favour from the divine munificence; and a man must be as absurd to re-  
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pine at dying, as a traveller would be, who proposed to himself a delightful tour through various unknown countries, to lament that he cannot take up his residence at the first dirty inn which he baits at on the road. The instability of human life, or the hasty changes of its successive periods, of which we so frequently complain, are no more than the necessary progress of it to this necessary conclusion; and are so far from being evils deserving these complaints, that they are the source of our greatest pleasures, as they are the source of all novelty, from which our greatest pleasures are ever derived. The continual succession of seasons in the human life, by daily presenting to us new scenes, render it agreeable, and, like those of the year, afford us delights by their change, which the choicest of them could not give us by their continuance. In the spring of life, the gilding of the sun-shine, the verdure of the fields, and the variegated paintings of the sky, are so exquisite in the eyes of infants at their first looking abroad into a new world, as nothing perhaps afterwards can equal. The heat and vigour of the succeeding summer of youth ripens for us new pleasures, the blooming maid, the nightly revel, and the jovial chace. The serene autumn of compleat manhood feasts us with the golden harvests of our worldly pursuits: nor is the hoary winter of old age destitute of its peculiar comforts and enjoyments, of which

the recollection and relation of those past are perhaps none of the least; and at last death opens to us a new prospect, from whence we shall probably look back upon the diversions and occupations of this world with the same contempt we do now on our tops and hobby-horses, and with the same surprize, that they could ever so much entertain or engage us.

Thus we see all these evils could never have been prevented even by infinite power, without the introduction of greater, or the loss of superior good; they are but the necessary consequences of human nature; from which it can no more be divested than matter from extension, or heat from motion, which proceed from the very modes of their existence.

If it be objected, that after all that has been said, there are innumerable miseries entailed upon all things that have life, and particularly on man; many diseases of the body and afflictions of mind, in which nature seems to play the tyrant, ingenious in contriving torments for her children; that we cannot avoid seeing every moment with horror numbers of our fellow-creatures condemned to tedious and intolerable miseries, some expiring on racks, others roasting in flames, some starving in dungeons, others raving in mad-houses, some broiling in fevers, others groaning whole months under the exquisite tortures of gout and stone: If it be said further, that some men being exempted

empted from many calamities with which others are afflicted, proves plainly that all might have been exempted from all; the charge can by no means be disputed, nor can it be alledged that infinite power could not have prevented most of these dreadful calamities. From hence, therefore, I am persuaded, that there is something in the abstract nature of pain conducive to pleasure; that the sufferings of individuals are absolutely necessary to universal happiness; and that, from connections to us inconceivable, it was impracticable for omnipotence to produce the one, without at the same time permitting the other. Their constant and uniform concomitancy through every part of nature with which we are acquainted, very much corroborates this conjecture, in which scarce one instance, I believe, can be produced of the acquisition of pleasure or convenience by any creatures, which is not purchased by the previous or consequential sufferings of themselves or others; pointing out, as it were, that a certain allay of pain must be cast into the universal mass of created happiness, and inflicted somewhere for the benefit of the whole. Over what mountains of slain is every mighty empire rolled up to the summit of prosperity and luxury, and what new scenes of desolation attend its fall? To what infinite toil of men, and other animals, is every flourishing city indebted for all the conveni-

ences and enjoyments of life, and what vice and misery do those very enjoyments introduce? The pleasures peculiar to the continuing our species are severely paid for by pains and perils in one sex, and by cares and anxieties in both. Those annexed to the preservation of ourselves are both preceded and followed by numberless sufferings; preceded by the massacres and tortures of various animals preparatory to a feast, and followed by as many diseases lying in wait in every dish to pour forth vengeance on their destroyers. Our riches and honours are acquired by laborious or perilous occupations, and our sports are pursued with scarce less fatigue or danger, and usually attended with distresses and destruction of innocent animals. This universal connection of pain with pleasure seems, I think, strongly to intimate, that pain abstractedly considered must have its uses; and since we may be assured, that it is never admitted but with the reluctance of the supreme author, those uses must be of the highest importance, though we have no faculties to conceive them.

The human mind can comprehend but a very small part of the great and astonishing whole; for any thing we know, the sufferings (and perhaps the crimes producing those sufferings) of the inhabitants of this terrestrial globe may some way or other affect those of the most distant planet, and the whole animal world may be connected by  
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some principle as general as that of attraction in the corporeal, and so the miseries of particular beings be some way necessary to the happiness of the whole. How these things operate, is indeed to us quite inconceivable; but that they do operate in some such extensive manner is far, I think, from improbable.

All ages and nations seem to have had confused notions of the merits of sufferings abstracted from their tendency to any visible good, and have paid the highest honours to those who have voluntarily endured them, as to their common benefactors. Many in Christian countries have formerly been faint-ed for long fasting, for whipping or tormenting themselves, for sitting whole years in uneasy postures, or exposing themselves to the inclemency of the weather on the tops of pillars. Many at this day in the East are almost deified for loading themselves with heavy chains, bending under burthens, or confining themselves in chairs stuck round with pointed nails. Now, if these notions are not totally devoid of all reason and common sense, (and few, I believe are so which become universal) they can be founded on no other principle than this, of the necessity of pain to produce happiness, which seems another weighty instance of the probability of this ancient and universal opinion, though the reasons for it are forgot or unknown, and the practices derived from it big with the most absurd and ridiculous superstitions.

One

One cause, I think, from which many of our severest sufferings may be derived, may be discovered by analogical reasoning, that is, by assimilating those things which are not objects of our understandings to others which lie within their reach. Man is one link of that vast chain, descending by insensible degrees, from infinite perfection to absolute nothing. As there are many thousands below him, so must there be many more above him. If we look downwards, we see innumerable species of inferior beings, whose happiness and lives are dependant on his will; we see him cloathed by their spoils, and fed by their miseries and destruction, enslaving some, tormenting others, and murdering millions for his luxury or diversion; is it not therefore analogous and highly probable, that the happiness and life of man should be equally dependant on the wills of his superiors? As we receive great part of our pleasures, and even subsistence, from the sufferings and deaths of lower animals, may not these superior beings do the same from ours, and that by ways as far above the reach of the most exalted human understandings, as the means by which we receive our benefits are above the capacities of the meanest creatures destined for our service? The fundamental error in all our reasonings on this subject, is that of placing ourselves wrong in that presumptuous climax of beast, man, and God; from whence, as we suppose falsely,



falsely, that there is nothing above us except the Supreme Being, we foolishly conclude that all the evils we labour under must be derived immediately from his omnipotent hand : whereas there may be numberless intermediate beings who have power to deceive, torment, or destroy us, for the ends only of their own pleasure or utility, who may be vested with the same privileges over their inferiors, and as much benefited by the use of them, as ourselves. In what manner these benefits accrue to them, it is impossible for us to conceive ; but that impossibility lessens not the probability of this conjecture, which by analogy is so strongly confirmed.

Should you, Sir, have been lately employed in reading some of those sublime authors, who, from pride and ignorance, delight to puff up the dignity of human nature, the notions here advanced may appear to you absurd and incredible, because inconsistent with that imaginary dignity ; and you may object, that it is impossible that God should suffer innocence to be thus afflicted, and reason thus deceived ; that though he may permit animals, made solely for the use of man, to be thus abused for his convenience or recreation, yet that man himself, the sole possessor of reason, the lord of this terrestrial globe, his own ambassador, vicegerent, and similitude, should be thus dependant on the will of others, must be utterly inconsistent with the  
divine

divine wisdom and justice. But pray, Sir, what does all this prove, but the importance of a man to himself? Is not the justice of God as much concerned to preserve the happiness of the meanest insect which he has called into being, as of the greatest man that ever lived? Are not all creatures we see made subservient to each others uses? and what is there in man, that he only should be exempted from this common fate of all created being? The superiority of man to that of other terrestrial animals is as inconsiderable, in proportion to the immense plan of universal existence, as the difference of climate between the north and south end of the paper I now write upon, with regard to the heat and distance of the sun. There is nothing leads us into so many errors concerning the works and designs of providence, as that foolish vanity that can persuade such insignificant creatures that all things were made for their service; from whence they ridiculously set up utility to themselves as the standard of good, and conclude every thing to be evil which appears injurious to them or their purposes. As well might a nest of ants imagine this globe of earth created only for them to cast up into hillocks, and cloathed with grain and herbage for their sustenance; then accuse their Creator for permitting spades to destroy them, and ploughs to lay waste their habitations; the inconveniences of which they feel, but are utterly unable to comprehend.

hend their uses, as well as the relations they themselves bear to superior beings.

It is surprising that none of those philosophers, who were drove to the supposition of two first causes, and many other absurdities, to account for the origin of evil, should not rather have chosen to impute it to the ministration of intermediate beings; and when they saw the happiness of all inferior animals dependent on our wills, should not have concluded, that the good order and well-being of the universe might require that ours should be as dependant on the wills of superior beings, accountable like ourselves to one common lord and father of all things. This is the more wonderful, because the existence and influence of such beings has been an article in the creed of all religions that have ever appeared in the world. In the beautiful system of the Pagan theology, their silvan and household deities, their nymphs, satyrs, and fauns, were of this kind. All the barbarous nations that have ever been discovered, have been found to believe and adore intermediate spiritual beings, both good and evil. The Jewish religion not only confirms the belief of their existence, but of their tempting, deceiving, and tormenting mankind; and the whole system of Christianity is erected entirely on this foundation.

Thus, Sir, you see the good order of the whole, and the happiness it receives from a proper subordination, will sufficiently account for

for the sufferings of individuals; and all such should be considered but as the necessary taxes, which every member of this great republic of the universe is obliged to pay towards the support of the community. It is no derogation from the divine goodness, that these taxes are not always imposed equally in the present stage of things; because as every individual is but a part of the great whole, so is the present state but a part of a long, or perhaps an eternal succession of others; and, like a single day in the natural life, has reference to many more both past and to come. It is but as a page in a voluminous account, from which no judgment can be formed on the state of the whole; but of this we may be assured, that the balance will some time or other be settled with justice and impartiality. The certainty, therefore, of a future state, in which we, and indeed all creatures endued with sensation, shall somehow or other exist, seems (if all our notions of justice are not erroneous) as demonstrable as the justice of their Creator; for if he is just, all such creatures must have their account of happiness and misery somewhere adjusted with equity, and all creatures capable of virtue and vice must, according to their behaviour, receive rewards and punishments; and, to render these punishments consistent with infinite goodness, they must not only be proportioned to their crimes, but also some way necessary to

to universal good; for no creatures can be called out of their primitive nothing by an all-wise and benevolent Creator, to be losers by their existence, or to be made miserable for no beneficial end, even by their own misbehaviour: so that all future misery, as well as present, must be subservient to happiness, or otherwise infinite power, joined with infinite goodness, would have prevented both vice and punishment.

For this reason, amongst all the short-sighted conjectures of man into the dispensations of providence and a future state, the ancient doctrine of transmigration seems the most rational and most consistent with his wisdom and goodness; as by it all the unequal dispensations of things so necessary in one life, may be set right in another, and all creatures serve the highest and lowest, the most eligible and most burthensome offices of life by an equitable kind of rotation; by which means their rewards and punishments may not only be well proportioned to their behaviour, but also subservient towards carrying on the business of the universe, and thus at the same time answer the purposes of both justice and utility. But the pride of man will not suffer us to treat this subject with the seriousness it deserves; but rejects as both impious and ridiculous every supposition of inferior creatures ever arriving at its own imaginary dignity, allowing at the same time the probability of human nature

nature being exalted to the angelic, a much wider and more extraordinary transition, but yet such a one as may probably be the natural consequence, as well as the reward of a virtuous life; nor is it less likely that our vices may debase us to the servile condition of inferior animals, in whose forms we may be severely punished for the injuries we have done to mankind when amongst them, and be obliged in some measure to repair them, by performing the drudgeries tyrannically imposed upon us for their service.

From what has been said, I think, it plainly appears that numberless evils do actually exist, which could not have been excluded from the works of infinite goodness even by infinite power; and from hence it may be concluded, that there are none which could; but that God has exerted all his omnipotence to introduce all possible happiness, and, as far as the imperfection of created things would permit, to exclude all misery, that is, all natural evil, from the universal system; which notwithstanding will introduce itself in many circumstances, even in opposition to infinite power.

The origin of moral evil lies much deeper, and I will venture to assert has never yet been fathomed by the short line of human understanding. That I shall be able to reach it, I have by no means the vanity to imagine; but, laying aside all pre-conceived opinions

opinions and systematical prejudice, I will in my next endeavour to come as near it as lies in the power of,

SIR, &c.

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## L E T T E R IV.

### ON MORAL EVIL.

SIR,

**I** MUST now leave that plain and easy road through which I have hitherto conducted you, and carry you through unfrequented paths, and ways untrodden by philosophic feet. Already, I think, the existence of natural evil has been sufficiently accounted for, without any derogation from the power, wisdom, or goodness of God. What next remains to be cleared up, is the origin of moral evil; which, consistently with the same divine attributes, I have never seen accounted for by any author ancient or modern, in a manner that could give tolerable satisfaction to a rational enquirer. Nor indeed can this be ever effectually performed, without at the same time taking into consideration all those most abstruse speculations concerning the nature of virtue, free-will, fate, grace, and predestination, the debates of  
ages,

ages, and matter of innumerable folio's. To attempt this, therefore, in the compass of a letter, would be the highest presumption, did not I well know the clear and ready comprehension of the person to whom it is addressed; and also that the most difficult of these kinds of disquisitions are usually better explained in a few lines, than by a thousand pages.

In order, therefore, to find out the true origin of moral evil, it will be necessary, in the first place, to enquire into its nature and essence; or what it is that constitutes one action evil, and another good. Various have been the opinions of various authors on this criterion of virtue; and this variety has rendered that doubtful, which must otherwise have been clear and manifest to the meanest capacity. Some indeed have denied that there is any such thing, because different ages and nations have entertained different sentiments concerning it; but this is just as reasonable as to assert, that there are neither sun, moon, nor stars, because astronomers have supported different systems of the motions and magnitudes of these celestial bodies. Some have placed it in conformity to truth, some to the fitness of things, and others to the will of God. But all this is merely superficial: they resolve us not why truth, or the fitness of things, are either eligible or obligatory, or why God should require us to act in one manner rather than another.



another. The true reason of which can possibly be no other than this, because some actions produce happiness, and others misery; so that all moral good and evil are nothing more than the production of the natural. This alone it is that makes truth preferable to falsehood, this that determines the fitness of things, and this that induces God to command some actions and forbid others. They who extol the truth, beauty, and harmony of virtue, exclusive of its consequences, deal but in pompous nonsense; and they who would persuade us, that good and evil are things indifferent, depending wholly on the will of God, do but confound the nature of things, as well as all our notions of God himself, by representing him capable of willing contradictions; that is, that we should be, and be happy, and at the same time that we should torment and destroy each other; for injuries cannot be made benefits, pain cannot be made pleasure, and consequently vice cannot be made virtue by any power whatever. It is the consequences therefore of all human actions that must stamp their value. So far as the general practice of any action tends to produce good, and introduce happiness into the world, so far we may pronounce it virtuous; so much evil as it occasions, such is the degree of vice it contains. I say the general practice, because we must always remember, in judging by this rule, to apply it only to the general species

species of actions; for the infinite wisdom of God, desirous to set bounds to the destructive consequences which must otherwise have followed from the universal depravity of mankind, has so wonderfully contrived the nature of things, that our most vicious actions may sometimes accidentally and collaterally produce good. Thus, for instance, robbery may disperse useless hoards to the benefit of the public; adultery may bring heirs, and good humour too, into many families, where they would otherwise have been wanting; and murder free the world from tyrants and oppressors. Luxury maintains its thousands, and vanity its ten thousands. Superstition and arbitrary power contribute to the grandeur of many nations, and the liberties of others are preserved by the perpetual contentions of avarice, knavery, selfishness, and ambition: and thus the worst of vices, and the worst of men, are often compelled by providence to serve the most beneficial purposes, contrary to their own malevolent tendencies and inclinations; and thus private vices become public benefits by the force only of accidental circumstances. But this impeaches not the truth of the criterion of virtue before mentioned, the only solid foundation on which any true system of ethics can be built, the only plain, simple, and uniform rule by which we can pass any judgment on our actions but by this we may be enabled, not only to determine which are good and which

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are evil, but almost mathematically to demonstrate the proportion of virtue or vice which belongs to each, by comparing them with the degrees of happiness or misery which they occasion. But though the production of happiness is the essence of virtue, it is by no means the end: the great end is the probation of mankind, or the giving them an opportunity of exalting or degrading themselves in another state by their behaviour in the present. And thus indeed it answers two most important purposes; those are, the conservation of our happiness and the test of our obedience: for had not such a test seemed necessary to God's infinite wisdom, and productive of universal good, he would never have permitted the happiness of men, even in this life, to have depended on so precarious a tenure as their mutual good behaviour to each other. For it is observable, that he who best knows our formation, has trusted no one thing of importance to our reason or virtue: he trusts only to our appetites for the support of the individual, and the continuance of our species; to our vanity, or compassion, for our bounty to others; and to our fears for the preservation of ourselves; often to our vices for the support of government, and sometimes to our follies for the preservation of our religion. But since some test of our obedience was necessary, nothing sure could have been commanded for that end so fit and proper, and

at the same time so useful, as the practice of virtue; nothing have been so justly rewarded with happiness, as the production of happiness in conformity to the will of God. It is this conformity alone which adds merit to virtue, and constitutes the essential difference between morality and religion. Morality obliges men to live honestly and soberly, because such behaviour is most conducive to public happiness, and consequently to their own; religion, to pursue the same course, because conformable to the will of their Creator. Morality induces them to embrace virtue from prudential considerations; religion, from those of gratitude and obedience. Morality, therefore, entirely abstracted from religion, can have nothing meritorious in it; it being but wisdom, prudence or good œconomy, which like health, beauty, or riches, are rather obligations conferred upon us by God, than merits in us towards him; for though we may be justly punished for injuring ourselves, we can claim no reward for self-preservation; as suicide deserves punishment and infamy, but a man deserves no reward or honours for not being guilty of it. This I take to be the meaning of all those passages in our scriptures, in which works are represented to have no merit without faith; that is, not without believing in historical facts, in creeds, and articles; but without being done in pursuance of our belief in God, and in obedience to his commands.

mands \*. And now, having mentioned scripture, I cannot omit observing, that the Christian is the only religious or moral institution in the world that ever set in a right light these two material points, the essence and the end of virtue; that ever founded the one in the production of happiness, that is, in universal benevolence, or, in their language, charity to all men; the other, in the probation of man, and his obedience to his Creator. Sublime and magnificent as was the philosophy of the ancients, all their moral systems were deficient in these two important articles. They were all built on the sandy foundations of the innate beauty of virtue, or enthusiastic patriotism; and their great point in view was the contemptible reward of human glory; foundations which were by no means able to support the mag-

\* What was that faith which the author of the Christian religion indispensably required in all his disciples? It could not be a literal and implicit belief of the divine inspiration of all the books of the Old Testament; and consequently of all the history, chronology, geography, and philosophy contained in them; because to these the Jews, who rejected it, adhered with the most superstitious exactness: it could not be the same kind of belief in the writings of the New Testament, because these in his life-time had no existence; much less could it consist in a blind assent to the numberless explanations of these books, and least of all in the belief of creeds, articles, and theological systems founded on such explanations; for all these were the productions of later ages. It must therefore have been this, and this alone; a sincere belief in the divine authority of his mission, and a constant practice of all moral duties from a sense of their being agreeable to his commands.

nificent structures which they erected upon them; for the beauty of virtue, independent of its effects, is unmeaning nonsense; patriotism, which injures mankind in general for the sake of a particular country, is but a more extended selfishness, and really criminal; and all human glory but a mean and ridiculous delusion. The whole affair then of religion and morality, the subject of so many thousand volumes, is in short no more than this: the Supreme Being, infinitely good as well as powerful, desirous to diffuse happiness by all possible means, has created innumerable ranks and orders of beings, all subservient to each other by proper subordination. One of these is occupied by man, a creature endued with a certain degree of knowledge, reason, and free-will, as is suitable to his situation, and placed for a time on this globe as in a school of probation and education. Here he has an opportunity given him of improving or debasing his nature, in such a manner as to render himself fit for a rank of higher perfection and happiness, or to degrade himself to a state of greater imperfection and misery; necessary indeed towards carrying on the business of the universe, but very grievous and burthensome to those individuals, who, by their own misconduct, are obliged to submit to it. The test of this his behaviour, is doing good, that is, co-operating with his Creator, as far as his narrow sphere of action will permit, in the pro-

production of happiness. And thus the happiness and misery of a future state will be the just reward or punishment of promoting or preventing happiness in this. So artificially by this means is the nature of all human virtue and vice contrived, that their rewards and punishments are woven as it were into their very essence; their immediate effects give us a foretaste of their future; and their fruits in the present life are the proper samples of what they must unavoidably produce in another. We have reason given us to distinguish these consequences, and regulate our conduct; and lest that should neglect its post, conscience is also appointed as an instinctive kind of monitor, perpetually to remind us both of our interest and our duty.

When we consider how wonderfully the practice of virtue is thus enforced by our great Creator, and that all which he requires of us under that title is only to be happy, that is, to make each other so; and when at the same time we look round us, and see the whole race of mankind, through every successive generation, tormenting, injuring, and destroying each other, and perpetually counteracting the gracious designs of their maker, it is a most astonishing paradox how all this comes to pass, why God should suffer himself to be thus defeated in his best purposes by creatures of his own making; or why man should be made with dispositions to defeat

feat them at the expence of his own present and future happiness; why infinite goodness should form creatures inclined to oppose its own benevolent designs, or why infinite power should thus suffer itself to be opposed.

There are some, I know, who extricate themselves from this difficulty very concisely by asserting, that there is in fact no such original depravity, no such innate propensity to vice in human nature; but as this assertion is directly contrary to the express declaration of the scriptures, to the opinion of the philosophers and moralists of all ages, and to the most constant and unvariable experience of every hour, I think they no more deserve an answer than they who would affirm, that a stone has no tendency to the center by its natural gravity, or that flame has no inclination to ascend.

But the usual solution applied to this difficulty by the ablest philosophers and divines, with which they themselves, and most of their readers, seem perfectly satisfied, is comprehended in the following reasoning: That man came perfect out of the hands of his Creator, both in virtue and happiness; but it being more eligible that he should be a free agent than a mere machine, God endued him with freedom of will; from the abuse of which freedom, all misery and sin, that is, all natural and moral evils, derive their existence; from all such therefore the divine goodness is sufficiently justified, by reason  
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they could not be prevented without the loss of superior good; for to create men free, and at the same time compel them to be virtuous, is utterly impossible.

But whatever air of demonstration this argument may assume, by whatever famed preachers it may have been used, or by whatever learned audiences it may have been approved, I will venture to affirm, that it is false in all its principles, and in its conclusion also; and I think it may be clearly shewn, that God did not make man absolutely perfect, nor absolutely free: nor, if he had, would this in the least have justified the introduction of wickedness and misery.

That man came perfect, that is, endued with all possible perfections, out of the hands of his Creator, is evidently a false notion derived from the philosophers of the first ages, founded on their ignorance of the origin of evil, and inability to account for it on any other hypothesis: they understood not that the universal system required subordination, and consequently comparative imperfections; nor that in the scale of beings there must be somewhere such a creature as man with all his infirmities about him; that the total removal of these would be altering his very nature; and that as soon as he became perfect he must cease to be man. The truth of this, I think, has been sufficiently proved; and besides, the very supposition of a being originally perfect, and yet capable of rendering

ing itself wicked and miserable, is undoubtedly a contradiction, that very power being the highest imperfection imaginable.

That God made man perfectly free is no less false : men have certainly such a degree of free-will as to make them accountable, and justly punishable for the abuse of it; but absolute and independent free-will is what, I believe, no created being can be possessed of. Our actions proceed from our wills, but our wills must be derived from the natural dispositions implanted in us by the author of our being: wrong elections proceed from wrong apprehensions or unruly passions; and these from our original frame or accidental education; these must determine all our actions, for we have no power to act differently, these previous circumstances continuing exactly the same. Had God thought proper to have made all men with the same heads and the same hearts, which he has given to the most virtuous of the species, they would have all excelled in the same virtues: or had the bias implanted in human nature drawn as strongly towards the good side, as it now apparently does towards the bad, it would have operated as successfully, and with as little infringement on human liberty: men, as well as all other animals, are exactly fitted for the purposes they are designed for; and have inclinations and dispositions given them accordingly; He who implanted patience in the lamb, obedience

dience in the horse, fidelity in the dog, and innocence in the dove, might as easily have inspired the breast of man with these and all other virtues; and then his actions would have certainly corresponded with his formation: therefore, in the strict philosophical sense, we have certainly no free-will; that is, none independent of our frame, our natures, and the author of them.

But were both these propositions true, were man originally created both perfect and free, yet this would by no means justify the introduction of moral evil; because if his perfection was immediately to be destroyed by his free-will, he might as well never have been possessed of the one, and much better have been prevented from making use of the other: let us dispute therefore as long as we please, it must eternally be the same thing, whether a Creator of infinite power and knowledge created beings originally wicked and miserable, or gave them a power to make themselves so, fore-knowing they would employ that power to their own destruction.

If moral evil, therefore, cannot be derived from the abuse of free-will in man, from whence can we trace its origin? Can it proceed from a just, a wise, and benevolent God? Can such a God form creatures with dispositions to do evil, and then punish them for acting in conformity to those evil dispositions? Strange and astonishing indeed must this appear to us, who know so little of the uni-

universal plan! but it is far, I think, from being irreconcilable with the justice of the Supreme disposer of all things: for let us but once acknowledge the truth of our first great proposition, (and most certainly true it is) that natural evils exist from some necessity in the nature of things, which no power can dispense with or prevent, the expediency of moral evil will, perhaps, follow on course: for if misery could not be excluded from the works of a benevolent Creator by infinite power, these miseries must be endured by some creatures or other for the good of the whole: and if there were none capable of wickedness, then they must fall to the share of those who are perfectly innocent. Here again we see our difficulties arise from our wrong notions of omnipotence, and forgetting how many difficulties it has to contend with: in the present instance it is obliged either to afflict innocence, or be the cause of wickedness; it has plainly no other option: what then could infinite wisdom, justice, and goodness do in this situation more consistent with itself, than to call into being creatures formed with such depravity, in their dispositions, as to induce many of them to act in such a manner as to render themselves proper subjects for such necessary sufferings, and yet at the same time endued with such a degree\* of reason and free-will

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\* Some have asserted that there can be no degrees of free-will, but that every being must be absolutely free, or possessed

as to put it in the power of every individual to escape them by their good behaviour: such a creature is man; so corrupt, base, cruel, and wicked, as to convert these unavoidable miseries into just punishments, and at the same time so sensible of his own depravity and the fatal consequences of guilt, as to be well able to correct the one, and to avoid the other. Here we see a substantial reason for the depravity of man, and the admittance of moral evil in these circumstances seems not only compatible with the justice of God, but one of the highest instances of his consummate wisdom in ordering and disposing all things in the best manner their imperfect natures will admit.

possessed of no freedom at all: and this seems to have been the principal error that has led those who have supported both sides of this question into so many absurdities; as it well might, since they were both equally wrong in espousing a proposition, which contradicts both reason and experience. Brutes have a certain degree of free-will; else why do we correct them for their misbehaviour, or why do they amend upon correction? Yet certainly they have not so great a degree as ourselves. A man raving mad is not, nor is considered as a free-agent; a man less mad has a greater portion of freedom; and a man not mad at all has the greatest; but still the degree of his freedom must bear a proportion to the weakness of his understanding, and the strength of his passions and prejudices; all which are a perversion of reason, and madness as far as they extend, and operate on free-will in the very same manner: so that it is so far from being true, that all men are equally free, that probably there are no two men who are possessed of exactly the same degree of freedom.

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I presume not by what has been here said to determine on the counsels of the Almighty, to triumph in the compleat discovery of the origin of moral evil, or to assert that this is the certain or sole cause of its existence; I propose it only as a guess concerning the reason of its admission, more probable, and less derogatory from the divine wisdom and justice, than any that has hitherto been offered for that purpose.

There is undoubtedly something farther in the general depravity of mankind than we are aware of, and probably many great and wise ends are answered by it to us totally incomprehensible. God, as has been shewn, would never have permitted the existence of natural evil, but from the impossibility of preventing it without the loss of superior good; and on the same principle the admission of moral evil is equally consistent with the divine goodness: and who is he so knowing in the whole stupendous system of nature as to assert, that the wickedness of some beings may not, by means unconceivable to us, be beneficial to innumerable unknown orders of others? or that the punishments of some may not contribute to the felicity of numbers infinitely superior?

To this purpose the learned Hugenius says with great sagacity, *Præterea credibile est, ipsa illa animi vitia magnæ hominum parti, non sine summo concilio data esse: Cum enim Dei providentiæ talis sit Tellus, ejusque incolæ, quales cernimus,*

*cernimus, absurdum enim foret existimare omnia hæc alia facta esse, cum ille voluerit, sciveritque futura\*.*

But let us not forget that this necessity of vice and punishment, and its subserviency to public good, makes no alteration in their natures with regard to man; for though the wisdom of God may extract from the wickedness of men some remote benefits to the universe; yet that alters not the case with regard to them, nor in the least extenuates their guilt. He has given them reason sufficient to inform them, that their injuries to each other are displeasing to him, and free-will sufficient to refrain from such actions, and may therefore punish their disobedience without any infringement of justice: he knows indeed, that though none are under any compulsion to do evil, yet that they are all so framed, that many will certainly do it; and he knows also that incomprehensible secret why it is necessary that many should: but his knowledge having no relation to their determination renders not their vices less criminal, nor the punishment of them less equitable; for though with regard to God, vice may be perhaps the consequence of misery, that is, men may be inclined to vice in order to render them proper objects of such a degree of misery as was unavoidably necessary, and previously determined for the

\* Cosmotheoros, Lib. i. p. 34.

fake of public good, yet, in regard to man misery is the consequence of vice; that is, all human vices produce misery, and are justly punished by its infliction.

If it be objected, that this makes God the author of sin, I answer, God is, and must be the author of every thing; and to say that any thing is, or happens, independent of the first cause, is to say that something exists, or happens, without any cause at all. God is the author, if it may be so expressed, of all the natural evils in the universe; that is, of the fewest possible in the nature of things; and why may he not be the author of all moral evil in the same manner, and on the same principle? If natural evil owes its existence to necessity, why may not moral? If misery brings with it its utility, why may not wickedness?

“ If storms and earthquakes break not Heav’n’s design,  
“ Why then a Borgia or a Catiline ?”

Wherefore it ought always to be considered, that, though sin in us, who see no farther than the evils it produces, is evil, and justly punishable; yet in God, who sees the causes and connections of all things, and the necessity of its admission, that admission may be no evil at all, and that necessity a sufficient vindication of his goodness.

But it may be alledged that this principle totally changes the nature of vice, destroys



destroys the criterion before affixed to it, and encourages the universal practice of wickedness: for if moral evil, and the punishment of it, are necessary towards promoting universal good, then the more wicked men are, the more they promote that good; and the more they co-operate with their Creator in completing his great and benevolent plan of universal happiness. But this reasoning is extremely fallacious; because no collateral, remote, unknown, and undesigned good resulting from vice can alter the nature of it, or divest it of criminality; and moreover if that good arises only from its punishment, so far is it from an encouragement to wickedness, that it proves only that the punishment of it is necessary and unpreventable; nay, in its nature incapable of remission, without a penal satisfaction from some being or other; nor does its co-operation with the designs of Providence render it less criminal, or less worthy of his just indignation; all histories are filled with instances of the wickedness of men conspiring to bring about the counsels of the Almighty; such were the ambition and ferocity of the Romans, the obstinacy of the Jews, the cruelty of Herod, and the treachery of Judas; yet were these never esteemed for that reason meritorious or innocent.

From this important proposition, that all natural evil derives its existence from necessity, and all moral from expediency arising  
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from that necessity ; I say, from this important proposition, well considered and pursued, such new lights might be struck out as could not fail, if directed by the hands of learning and impartiality, to lead the human mind through the unknown regions of speculation, and to produce the most surprising and useful discoveries in ethics, metaphysics, and in Christianity too: I add Christianity, because it is a master-key, which will, I am certain, at once unlock all the mysterious and perplexing doctrines of that amazing institution, and explain fairly, without the least assistance from theological artifice, all those abstruse speculations of original sin, grace, and predestination, and vicarious punishments, which the most learned, for want of this clue, have never yet been able to make consistent with reason or common sense.

In the first place, for instance, the doctrine \* of original sin is really nothing more than the very system here laid down, into which we have been led by closely pursuing reason, and without which the origin of moral evil cannot be accounted for on any principle whatever. Indeed, according to the

\* Original sin is a contradiction in terms ; original signifying innate, and sin the act of an accountable being : by this expression, therefore, of original sin cannot be meant original or innate guilt, for that is absolute nonsense, but only an original depravity, or an innate disposition to sin.

common notions of the absolute omnipotence of God, and the absolute free-will in man, it is most absurd and impious, as it represents the Deity voluntarily bringing men into being with depraved dispositions, tending to no good purposes; and then arbitrarily punishing them for the sins which they occasion with torments which answer no ends, either of their reformation or utility to the universe: but when we see, by the foregoing explanation, the difficulties with which Omnipotence was environed, and that it was obliged by the necessity of natural evils to admit moral, all these absurdities at once vanish, and the original depravity of man appears fairly consistent with the justice and even goodness of his Creator.

The doctrines of predestination and grace as set forth in the scriptures, on the most impartial interpretation, I take to be these: that some men come into the world with dispositions so extremely bad, that God foreknows that they will certainly be guilty of many crimes, and in consequence he punished for them; that to others he has given better dispositions, and moreover protects them from vice by a powerful but invisible influence, in the language of those writings called grace: this scheme has appeared to many so partial and unjust, that they have totally rejected it, and endeavoured, by forced interpretations, to explain it quite out of the bible, in contradiction to all the sense of

language, and the whole tenour of those writings: and indeed, on the old plan of God's absolute omnipotence, uncontrouled by any previous necessity, in the nature of things, to admit both natural and moral evil, it is highly derogatory from his wisdom and goodness; but, on the supposition of that previous necessity, there appears nothing incredible in it, nor the least inconsistent with divine justice; because if God was obliged by the nature of things, and for the good of the whole, to suffer some to be wicked, and consequently miserable, he certainly might protect others both from guilt and punishment. He in this light may be compared to the commander of a numerous army, who, though he is obliged to expose many to danger, and some to destruction, yet protects others with ramparts and covert-ways; but so long as he exercises this power for the good of the whole, these distinctions amongst individuals ought never to be imputed to partiality or injustice.

The doctrine\* of sacrifice, or vicarious punishment, is the most universal, and yet, exclusive of this plan, the most absurd of all

\* If the punishments of the wicked serve not some ends with which we are unacquainted, the sufferings of the innocent can possibly bear no manner of relation to them; and consequently the words Sacrifice, Atonement, Propitiation, and Vicarious Punishments, can no more have any ideas affixed to them than the ringing of a bell or the blowing of a trumpet, but are mere sounds, without any meaning at all.

religious tenets that ever entered into the mind of man; so absurd is it, that how it came to be so universal is not easy to be accounted for: Pagans, Jews, and Christians, have all agreed in this one point, though differing in all others; and have all treated it as a self-evident principle, that the sins of one creature might be atoned for by the sufferings of another: but from whence they derived this strange opinion, none of them have pretended to give any account, or to produce in its defence the least shadow of a reason; for that there should be any manner of connection between the miseries of one being and the guilt of another; or that the punishing the innocent, and excusing the guilty, should be a mark of God's detestation of sin; or, that two acts of the highest injustice should make one of justice, is so fundamentally wrong, so diametrically opposite to common sense, and all our ideas of justice, that it is equally astonishing that so many should believe it themselves or impose it upon others. But on the foregoing theory this also may be a little cleared up, and will by no means appear so very inconsistent with reason: for if a certain quantity of misery in some part of the universal system is necessary to the happiness and well-being of the whole; and if this necessity arises from its answering some purposes incomprehensible to the human understanding; I will ask any impartial reasoner, why the sufferings of

one being may not answer the same ends, or be as effectual towards promoting universal good, as the sufferings of another? If the miseries of individuals are to be looked upon as taxes which they are obliged to pay towards the support of the public, why may not the sufferings of one creature serve the same purposes, or absolve as much of that necessary tax, as the sufferings of another, and on that account be accepted as a payment or satisfaction for their sufferings; that is, for the sufferings due to the public utility from the punishment of their crimes, without which the happiness of the whole could not subsist, unless they should be replaced by the sufferings of others? As we are entirely ignorant why misery has any existence at all, or what interest it serves in the general system of things, this may possibly be the case, for any thing we know; and that it is not, I am certain no one can affirm with reason: reason indeed cannot inform us that it is so, but that it may be, is undoubtedly no contradiction to reason.

If I mistake not, it might be shewn, that this principle of the necessity of moral evil, and its punishment, is the foundation on which the whole fabric of the Christian dispensation is erected; the principle itself is avowed by the author of that dispensation in clear and express words: *It must needs be, says he, that offences come; but woe unto that man by whom the offences cometh.* That is, it is necessary

fiary towards complicating the designs of providence, that some men should commit crimes; but as no individual is compelled by necessity to commit them, woe unto all who are thus guilty. He came, by his excellent precepts and example, to diminish the quantity of moral evil in the world, and of misery consequential from its punishment, but found it necessary to replace that misery in some degree by his own voluntary and unmerited sufferings; and perhaps the unparalleled tortures inflicted on his disciples and followers might be also necessary and subservient to the same purposes.

From what has been here said, I think it is evident that the origin of evil is by no means so difficult to account for as at first sight it appears; for it has been plainly shewn that most of those we usually complain of are evils of imperfection, which are rather the absence of comparative advantages than positive evils, and therefore, properly speaking, no evils at all; and as such, ought to be entirely struck out of the catalogue. It has likewise been made appear, that of natural evils, which are the sufferings of sensitive beings, many are but the consequences naturally resulting from the particular circumstances of particular ranks in the scale of existence, which could not have been omitted without the destruction of the whole; and that many more are in all probability necessary, by means to us incomprehensible,  
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to the production of universal good. Lastly, it has been suggested, that from this necessity of natural evils, may arise the expediency of moral, without which those necessary sufferings must have been with less justice inflicted on perfect innocence; and moreover, that it is probable moral evil, as well as natural, may have some ultimate tendency to the good of the whole; and that the crimes and punishments of some beings may, by some means or other, totally beyond the reach of our narrow capacities, contribute to the felicity of much greater numbers.

This plan, Sir, I am persuaded is not far distant from the truth; and on this foundation, if I mistake not, a system of morality and religion, more compleat and solid, more consistent with reason, and with Christianity too, might be erected than any which has yet appeared: I heartily wish that some person of more learning, abilities, and leisure than myself, (and much more, I am sure, of all it would require) encouraged by your favour, and assisted by your sagacity, would undertake it, and condescend to fill up these out-lines so inaccurately sketched out by,

SIR, &c.

LET-



## L E T T E R V.

## ON POLITICAL EVILS.

SIR,

**A**CCORDING to my proposed plan there still remain two sorts of evils to be accounted for, political and religious; under which heads, (if you are not already tired with so abstruse and unentertaining a correspondence) I shall endeavour to shew you, that it is utterly impossible, even for omnipotence itself, to give a perfect government, or a perfect religion to an imperfect creature; and therefore, that the numberless imperfections inherent in all human governments and religions are not imputable to God, nor any defect of power, wisdom, or goodness in him: but only to the inferiority of man's station in the universe, which necessarily exposes him to natural and moral evils, and must, for the same reason, to political and religious; which are indeed but the consequences of the other. Superior beings may probably form to themselves, or receive from their Creator, government without tyranny or corruption, and religions without delusions or absurdities; but man cannot: God indeed may remove him into so exalted a society; but whilst he continues to be man,

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he must be subject to innumerable evils; amongst which those I call political and religious are far from being the least.

But as these two kinds of evils are very different, they will require different considerations; I shall therefore in the present confine myself to the political only; by which I mean all those grievous burthens of tyranny and oppression, of violence and corruption, of war and desolation, under which all ages and nations have ever groaned on account of government: little less destructive perhaps to the happiness of mankind, than even anarchy itself; but which, notwithstanding, are so woven into the very essence of all human governments from the depravity of man, that without them none can be either established, maintained, or administered, nor consequently can they be prevented without changing that depravity into perfection; that is, without a compleat alteration in human nature. How this comes to pass may be easily explained by a short examination, first into the nature and origin of government in general, and afterwards into those of particular forms and policies; than which nothing has been more commonly misunderstood and misrepresented.

As to government in general, it is no wonder that it is so productive of evil, since its very nature consists of power trusted in the hands of such imperfect and vicious creatures as men, and exercised over others as im-

imperfect and vicious as themselves; in which there must be pride, avarice, and cruelty on one side; envy, ignorance, and obstinacy on the other; and injustice and self-interest on both. Its origin also arises from the same impure source of human imperfection; that is, men being neither wise nor honest enough to pursue their common or mutual interests without compulsion, are obliged to submit to some, in order to secure their lives and properties from the depredations of all: but though this necessity drives them into some kind of government, yet it can never decide who shall govern, because all men being by nature equal, every one has an equal right to this superiority: this therefore, can be determined only by more imperfections; that is, by the struggles of ambition, treachery, violence, and corruption; from success in which universal scramble are derived all the mighty empires of the earth: one man at first, by some of these methods, acquiring the command over a few, then by their aid extending his power over great numbers, and at last, by the assistance of those numbers, united by the advantage of plundering others, subduing all opposition: and thus we see all human government is the offspring of violence and corruption, and must inherit the imperfection of both its parents. It is plain also that national governments can never be supported by any other methods than those by which they were at first

first raised; for being all independent of each other, and retaining still their original inclination to devour each other; and having no superior tribunal to refer to for justice, they can have no means to secure their own possessions, or to repel their mutual encroachments, but by force, which is called the right of war; that is, the right of doing all the wrong that lies in their power; for war, however dignified with honours and encomiums by conquerors and their flatterers, is in fact nothing else but robbery and murder. Nations having no more right to plunder each other than parishes, nor men to kill one another in their political than in their private capacities.

If we look into the internal constitutions of all these governments, we shall find likewise, that they must be administered by the same violence and corruption to which they are indebted for their origin; that is, by hiring one part of the society to force the other into subjection; and that none of them ever subsisted any longer than whilst the stronger part, not always the most numerous, found it for their advantage to keep the weaker in obedience; for it should be ever remembered, as the fundamental of all politics, that men will never submit to each other merely for the sake of public utility\*,  
too

\* If any one is so ignorant of human nature, as to fancy that they will, let him make the experiment in a single parish,

too remote a benefit to make any impression on the dull senses of the multitude; but must be always beat or bribed into obedience. Higher orders of beings may submit to each other on nobler motives, from their sense of virtue or of universal benefit; but man can be governed by nothing but the fear of punishment or the hopes of reward; that is, by self-interest, the great principle that operates in the political world in the same manner that attraction does in the natural, preserving order and restraining every thing to its proper course by the continual endeavours of every individual to draw all power and property to himself\*.

If we descend to the examination of particular forms of government, we shall see them all exactly correspond with this general plan; we shall find that none of them owe their origin to patriarchal power, the

parish, and there, if without power or compulsion, interest or gratuity, solely by the strength of reason, and motives of public advantage, he can persuade the inhabitants to submit to equal and necessary taxes, to repair roads, build bridges, inclose commons, drain marshes, employ their poor, or perform any works of general utility; if he can accomplish this, let him retain his opinion; but if he finds it utterly impracticable, let him not expect that it can ever be done in a whole nation, in which there are so many more factions, interests, and absurdities to contend with.

\* There is indeed one other method of government frequently made use of by the most illustrious princes and legislators, that is, fraud; but as this operates only by the appearance of self-interest, it may properly be comprehended under that head.

divine

divine right of princes, or the uninfluenced choice of the people; things which never existed but in the idle dreams of visionary politicians; but all to the struggles of ambition and self-interest, subsiding at last into some kind of policy; either into absolute monarchy, or some species of popular government more or less remote from it, as the different parts of it have had strength or fortune to prevail; all which must be carried on by the same vicious methods of violence or corruption, and consequently be productive of numberless, if not of equal, evils.

In absolute monarchies, for instance, great violence must be exercised to keep men, by nature equal, in so unnatural a subjection; this must produce plots, rebellions, civil wars, and massacres; and these must require more violence to repress them; but this violence cannot be used without much corruption; for it is not the person of the sovereign, his crown and scepter, that can preserve his authority, nor can he destroy thousands with his own hand, like a hero in a romance; a powerful army must be kept in pay to enslave the people, and a numerous clergy to deceive them\*; whose ambition,

\* It has been represented as if the author by this designed to insinuate, that the whole business of the clergy was to deceive the people; than which nothing can be more distant from his intentions: all that he means is, that men will not easily submit to tyranny unless their consciences are first enslaved; or that popery is the most effectual support of  
arbi-

bition, avarice, luxury, and cruelty must be satiated with the blood and treasures of that very people as a reward for their services: hence infinite evils must arise, the lives, liberties, and properties of all must be dependent on the capricious will of one, or what is worse, on the wills of his pimps, flatterers, and favourites: justice must be perverted by favour and that favour, can seldom be obtained but by adulation, servility, and treachery; this produces all kinds of moral evils, and these beget more political.

In democratical governments, if there is less violence there is more corruption; which in these indeed is the basis of all power, and productive of the most mischievous effects; here all things are at the disposal of an ignorant and giddy multitude, always led to their own destruction by the flimsy eloquence and pretended patriotism of knaves, fools, and enthusiastic madmen; or commonly of some extraordinary genius, formed for popularity by a lucky composition of all these excellent ingredients; all subordination is subverted; and the most insolent and vicious of the people must be caressed, bribed, and intoxicated, and by that means rendered still more insolent and vicious; and all who by these methods acquire their favour, must be no less vicious than themselves. If in despo-

bitrary power; a proposition which he supposes no one will presume to contradict.

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tic governments power cannot be attained but by servility and adulation, in democratical it can never be acquired but by the more pernicious vices of turbulence and faction; for which reason these are ever sure to be governed by the most wicked, ambitious, avaricious and mischievous of their members.

Mixed governments, though perhaps productive of fewer evils than either of the former, yet must necessarily partake of those belonging to both, and be supported by more or less violence, as they more or less approach the despotic; or of corruption, as they come nearer to the democratical principles: the further they shrink from the iron scourges of the one, the more will they be entangled in the golden fetters of the other; for corruption must always increase in due proportion to the decrease of arbitrary power; since where there is less power to command obedience, there must be more bribery to purchase it, or there can be no government at all. These have, besides, many evils peculiar to themselves, the very excellence of these sort of constitutions being productive of inconveniencies: for this excellence consisting principally in this, that their different parts are able to counteract each others mischievous intentions, the reins of government are kept tight only by each pulling a different way, and they subsist by a perpetual contention, like a body kept alive  
by



by the opposite effects of contrary poisons: a very precarious and uneasy kind of existence! This exposes them in some measure to all the evils incident to both absolute and popular governments, though in a less degree; to the oppression of the one, and the licentiousness of the other, to factions at home, weakness abroad, and infinite expence in all parts of their administration: yet are these mixed constitutions the very best that human wisdom could ever discover for the regulation of human societies.

All these evils arise from the nature of things and the nature of man, and not from the weakness or wickedness of particular men, or their accidental ascendancy in particular governments: the degrees of them may indeed be owing to these, but their existence is immutable. So long as the imperfection of human nature continues, so long will princes, for the most part, convert that power with which they are trusted for the sake of public utility, to the ignoble ends of their own avarice, luxury, or ambition; so long will the people prefer present self-interest to remote benefits arising from national prosperity; and so long will corrupt ministers employ this popular venality to their own private advantage; and how many forever are lopt off,

*Non deficit aureus aller.*

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It is the misapprehension of this that is the fundamental error of all ignorant but well meaning speculative politicians \*, of all others the most untractable in government, and mischievous in business, the engines with which knaves work, and the ladders on which they mount to preferment ; who endeavour to destroy all governments, because they are not perfect ; and oppose all administrations, because they cannot govern men by such means as they are not designed or formed to be governed by ; who by a Sisyphæan kind of politics, are ever labouring to roll up a stone that must recoil upon them ; and to render that faultless, which infinite power and wisdom cannot exempt from inconveniencies, abuses, and imperfections,

Should one enumerate all of this kind, which cannot be excluded from government without the total alteration of human nature;

\* It is a strange, but a certain truth, that in politics most principles speculatively right are practically wrong : to give a few instances of this kind out of many commonly adopted ; viz. that those who are possessed of most property will fight best in its defence ; that national business is most successfully carried on by assemblies of men uninfluenced and unconnected ; that unbounded liberty, civil and ecclesiastical, is most conducive to public happiness and virtue : all these propositions have reason on their side, but experience against them ; they all captivate vulgar minds, because they look like truth ; and they look like truth, because they would be true if mankind in general acted upon honest or even upon rational principles ; but as in fact they do neither, they are utterly false, and all political structures built on such unstable foundations will inevitably fall to the ground.

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they would be endless; to instance but a few: all political bodies, like the natural, must have the seeds of their own dissolution sown in their very essence, and like them be destroyed by every excess; by excess of poverty or riches, of slavery or liberty, of ignorance or knowledge, of adversity or prosperity; a strong proof of their imperfection, that they cannot bear excess even of the greatest good; and yet they cannot be formed of more durable materials, so long as they are constituted of human creatures. All power trusted in the hands of so imperfect a creature as man must be pernicious and oppressive; and yet somewhere such power must be trusted. All human laws must be liable to misconstruction and uncertainty; yet without laws property cannot be secured. All popular elections must be attended with corruption, licentiousness, and the perversion of justice; yet without them the liberty of no country can be preserved. All national provisions for the poor must not only be encouragements to idleness, but productive of contests, and often times of cruelty; yet without such many honest but unfortunate people must inevitably perish. All religious tests and subscriptions are in their own natures subversive of truth and morals; yet the folly of one part of mankind, and the knavery of the other, will scarcely permit any government to subsist without them. Trade and wealth are the strength and the

pursuit of every wise nation; yet these must certainly produce luxury, which no less certainly must produce their destruction. All war is a complication of all manner of evils natural and moral, that is, of misery and wickedness; yet without it national contentions can never be determined. No government can be carried on, nor subordination preserved, without forms and ceremonials, pomp and parade; yet all such, from the inferiority of human nature giving itself airs of grandeur and magnificence, and the despicable expedients it is obliged to have recourse to, to support it, must always have something mean and ridiculous in them to exalted understandings. All governments are in a great measure upheld by absurd notions infused into the minds of the people, of the divine right of some particular person or family to reign over them; a foolish partiality for some particular spot of ground; an outrageous zeal for some religion which they cannot understand, or a senseless pursuit of glory which they can never attain: these are all false principles; yet without them, or some like them, no nation can long subsist: they can never be defended by reason, yet reason can produce no others that can supply their places. Every flourishing nation endeavours to improve arts, and cultivate reason and good sense; yet if these are extended too far, or too universally diffused, no national government or national religion can

can long stand their ground; for it is with old establishments as with old houses, their deformities are commonly their supports, and these can never be removed without endangering the whole fabric. In short no government can be administered without in some degree deceiving the people, oppressing the mean, indulging the great, corrupting the venal, opposing factions to each other, and temporising with parties.

It is this necessity for evil in all government, which gives that weight and popularity, which usually attends all those who oppose and calumniate any government whatever; appearing always to have reason on their side, because the evils of all power are conspicuous to the meanest capacity; whereas the necessity for those evils are perceivable only to superior understandings. Every one can feel the burden of taxes and see the inconveniences of armies, places and pensions that must encrease them; but very few are able to comprehend, that no government can be supported without them in a certain degree; and that the more liberty any nation enjoys, the greater must be their number and necessity. The most ignorant can perceive the mischiefs that must arise from corrupt ministers and venal parliaments; but it requires some sagacity to discern that assemblies of men unconnected by self-interest, will no more draw together in the business of the public, than horses without harness

ness or bridles; but like them, instead of being quietly guided in the right road of general utility, will immediately run riot, stop the wheels of government, and tear all the political machine to pieces.

From hence it comes to pass that all ignorant wrongheaded people naturally run in opposition and faction, whilst the wise man knows that these evils cannot be eradicated, and that their excess only can be prevented; that thus far every honest man will endeavour to his utmost, but to proceed farther only fools will hope for, or knaves pretend. He knows that numbers of men must always act in the same manner, if in the same circumstances; that politics are a science as reducible to certainty as mathematics, and in them effects as invariably follow their causes; that the operations of will are as uniform as those of matter and motion; and that though the actions of individuals are contingencies, those of numbers are constant and invariable; that, though a single man may possibly prefer public utility to private advantage, it is utterly impossible, that the majority of numerous bodies should be actuated by the same generous and patriotic principles\*; these can spring only from virtue and  
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\* This may be demonstrated by a familiar instance: It is by no means uncommon for a single die to come up a six, although the odds against it are five to one; but that a majority of five hundred dice should at the same time come up  
six's

wisdom, benevolent hearts, and comprehensive understandings; which being the portion but of a few more exalted individuals, can never be found in the multitude to be governed: nor can they be bestowed in any extraordinary degree on those who govern, who would thereby be rendered unfit for their occupations: statesmen and ministers, who must be hackneyed in the ways of men, cannot be made of such pure and refined materials; peculiar must be the composition of that little creature called a *Great Man*. He must be formed of all kinds of contradictions: he must be indefatigable in business, to fit him for the labours of his station, and at the same time fond of pleasures, to enable him to attach many to his interests, by a participation of their vices: he must be master of much artifice and knavery, his situation requiring him to employ, and be employed by, so many knaves; yet he must have some honesty, or those very knaves will be unwilling to trust him: he must be

six's is scarcely within the power of fortune; because the odds against each individual become almost infinite when operating upon the whole five hundred together. For the same reason, supposing every sixth man to be wise, honest, and public-spirited, which surely in any country is a very liberal allowance, there would not be the smallest probability that the majority of any five hundred to be chosen out of the whole, would be of that sort, though elected with the utmost impartiality; but if ambition, self-interest, and corruption interfere in the choice, as they most infallibly will, these will render it totally impossible.

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possessed of great magnanimity perpetually to confront surrounding enemies and impending dangers; yet of great meanness, to flatter those enemies, and suffer tamely continual injuries and abuses; he must be wise enough to conduct the great affairs of mankind with sagacity and success, and to acquire riches and honours for his reward; and at the same time foolish enough to think it worth a wise man's while to meddle with such affairs at all, and to accept of such imaginary rewards for real sufferings. Since then in all human governments such must the governors, and such the governed eternally be, it is certain they must be ever big with numberless imperfections, and productive of abundant evils: and it is no less plain, that if infinite goodness could not exclude natural and moral evils, infinite power can never prevent political.

I hope, Sir, the picture I have here drawn of human nature and human government, will not appear to you too much of the caricature kind: your experience in both must inform you that it is like, though your good nature may incline you to be sorry that it is so. I trust likewise to your good sense to distinguish, that what has here been said of their imperfections and abuses, is by no means intended as a defence of them, but meant only to shew their necessity: to this every wise man ought quietly to submit, endeavouring at the same time to redress them

to



to the utmost of his power; which can be effected by one method only; that is, by a reformation of manners: for as all political evils derive their original from moral, these can never be removed, until those are first amended. He, therefore, who strictly adheres to virtue and sobriety in his conduct, and enforces them by his example, does more real service to a state than he who displaces a bad minister, or dethrones a tyrant; this gives but a temporary relief, but that exterminates the cause of the disease. No immoral man then can possibly be a true patriot; and all those who profess outrageous zeal for the liberty and prosperity of their country, and at the same time infringe her laws, affront her religion, and debauch her people, are but despicable quacks, by fraud or ignorance increasing the disorders they pretend to remedy: as such, I know, they have always appeared to your superior judgment, and such they are ever esteemed by,

SIR, &c.

L E T-

## L E T T E R VI.

## ON RELIGIOUS EVILS.

SIR,

I NOW come to my last head of evils, which I call religious; by which I mean all that madness and folly, into which mankind have perpetually fallen under the name of religion; together with all those persecutions, massacres, and martyrdoms, which some have been induced to inflict, and others to suffer, from an enthusiastic zeal for those errors and absurdities: evils of the most enormous size, and which of all others are the most difficult to be accounted for, as their existence seems most inconsistent with infinite goodness, and most easily preventable by infinite power. For though human nature could not be exempted from natural and moral evil (as has been shewn) even by omnipotence, yet one would think a far less degree of power might have been sufficient to have defended it from religious; by imparting to mankind a true, rational, and explicit system of theology and ethics; by which means all the absurdities of false religions, and all the calamities flowing from those absurdities, would have been effectually prevented. Wonderful, therefore, must  
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it appear, since the happiness of men, through every part of their existence, so much depends on their religion, that it is, on their entertaining right notions of God and his attributes, of their duty to him, and their behaviour to each other; most wonderful, I say, and astonishing it must appear, that a wise and benevolent Creator should so far have deserted his creatures on this important occasion, as to have suffered them, through all generations, to have wandered amidst such perilous precipices in the dark; or if at any time he has vouchsafed them any supernatural light, that it should have been so faint and glimmering that it has rather served to terrify them with the gloomy prospect of their danger, than to enable them to avoid it.

If we look back as far as history will carry us, we shall find all ages and nations practising, under the name of religion, such inhuman, obscene, stupid, and execrable idolatries, that it would disgrace human nature but to enumerate them; we shall see the wisest men of the wisest countries consulting oracles of wood and stone, and confiding in the foolish superstition of the flight of birds, the entrails of beasts, and the pecking of chickens; we shall see them butchering their innocent herds and flocks as an atonement for their vices, and sacrificing their enemies, their slaves, their children, and sometimes themselves, to appease the wrath of their  
imaginary

imaginary deities, of whose worship no cruelty was too horrid to be made a part; and by whose infamous examples no wickedness was too execrable to be patronised. At length Christianity appeared; a sketch of morality the most rational, and of religion the most sublime the world had ever seen; which if ever God condescended to reveal his will to man, undoubtedly makes the fairest pretensions to be that revelation; and indeed, if we seriously consider its internal excellence, the reasonableness of its morality, the sublimity of its theology, that it alone has fixed the right criterion of virtue, alone discovered the magnanimity of forgiveness; that its notions of the deity, his attributes and dispensations, are so unlike all that ever entered into the heads of the wisest philosophers of preceding ages, and yet so well confirmed by the learned discoveries of all succeeding times; so far exalted above all human reason, and yet so consonant with it, and what is most conclusive, so infinitely above the capacities of those who published them to the world; if we add to this its obscure rise and amazing progress, I think, we can scarcely doubt but that there must be something supernatural in it: and yet, with all these marks of divinity stamped upon it, far from answering that idea of perfection which we might expect from the divine interposition, it was but a sketch, whose out-lines indeed  
 appear

appear the work of a consummate master, but filled up from time to time by unequal and injudicious hands. It had many defects in its institution, and was attended with many and great evils in its consequences; in its institution it wanted universality, authenticity \*, perspicuity †, and policy ‡, and  
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\* By want of authenticity, is here meant only the want of that demonstrable and infallible authority, of which all historical facts are in their own nature incapable; and which, had the friends of the Christian revelation never pretended to bestow upon it, the truth of that event had been no more disputed, than the truth of any other well-attested history whatsoever.

† The want of perspicuity in this revelation, needs surely no other testimony than the millions of writers, who, for seventeen centuries, have laboured to demonstrate, harmonise, systemise, illustrate, and explain every one of its doctrines; and the no less numberless and various opinions that remain to this day concerning them all: much indeed of this obscurity has proceeded from men's endeavours to make it what they fancied it should have been, but for which it was never intended; that is, a regular, clear, and explicit body of moral and political institutes.

‡ By policy is here meant all institutions and regulations of human government, both civil and ecclesiastical; concerning which the author of the Christian religion has carefully avoided giving any directions. All these he has left to be ordered by every state in such a manner as shall appear to them most convenient, and has commanded his disciples to be subject, as men, to their ordinances, *not only for wrath, but for conscience sake*; but foreseeing the infinite mischiefs that must arise from trusting human creatures with a divine power, he has forbid them, as Christians, either to exercise, or submit to, any authority over each other, under any pretence of its being derived from himself; *You know*, he says,  
that

in its consequences it was soon corrupted, and from that corruption productive of the most mischievous effects. Its great author designed it not to be exempted from any of these imperfections. He revealed it only to a small and obscure corner of the world in parables and mysteries; he guarded not its original purity, which seems too have died with himself, by committing it to any written records, but left it in the hands of illiterate men, who though they were honest enough to die for it, were never wise enough perfectly to understand it. All policy he disclaims in express words, saying, *My kingdom is not of this world*; that is, I meddle not with the political affairs of mankind; I teach men to despise the world, but not to govern it. Nor did he expect any better consequences from its progress than those which actually followed: he was by no means ignorant of its future corruption, and that, though his primitive institution breathed nothing but peace and forbearance, good-will and benevolence; yet that in mixing with the policies and interests of mankind, it would be

*that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them; but it shall not be so among you, &c.* Matt. xx. 25. And perhaps there is no stronger proof of the divine wisdom of this great instructor of mankind, than the extraordinary caution with which he has passed over a subject, on which no rules could be prescribed not inconsistent either with practice or with virtue: and yet a subject which all other legislators have considered as their most important object.

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productive of tyranny and oppression, of martyrdoms and massacres, of national wars and family dissensions. *Think not, says he, I come to send peace on earth, I come not to send peace but a sword: for I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.* A prophecy too fatally fulfilled!

From what inscrutable source can all these imperfections, and all these consequent evils derive their existence? On what incomprehensible plan must the wise disposer of all things proceed, to suffer men thus to bewilder themselves in the labyrinths of error, and from thence to plunge into the gulphs of wickedness and misery, when the least direction from his omnipotent hand would lead them through the flowery paths of truth to virtue and felicity? Strange! that he has not given them reason sufficient to perform this important office! Stranger! that, if ever he condescended to assist that reason with his infinite wisdom, even the religion that results from that supernatural assistance, should be still deficient in almost every one of the principal requisites necessary towards accomplishing the great and beneficent ends it was designed for! that it should want universality to render it impartial, authenticity to make it demonstrable, perspicuity to make it intelligible, and policy to make it useful to mankind; that it should immediately have been corrupted, and from that  
corruption

corruption been productive of all the misery and wickedness it seemed calculated to prevent. But on examination we shall find, that these evils, like all those of which we have before treated, owe their existence to no defect of goodness or power in God, but to the imperfection of man, and their own necessity; that is, to the impracticability of giving a perfect religion to an imperfect creature: from whence this impracticability arises, I will endeavour to explain.

There are but two methods, that we know of, by which God can communicate a religion to mankind; that is, either by the deductions which he has impowered him to make by the force of that natural reason which he has implanted in him, or by the extraordinary interposition of divine revelation: now from the first of these little need be said to shew that nothing perfect can be expected: our reason is unstable in its foundations, and uncertain in its conclusions; our lives are extremely short, and our progress in science no less tedious, and retarded by numberless obstacles; much of our time is employed in getting ideas, and much in acquiring language to express them; few men have capacities to reason, and fewer leisure; some having sense but no learning, want materials to work with; others having learning and no sense, become more absurd by having amassed much matter to mistake about; so that to raise any tolerable system of religion



gion or morals, from human reason, requires the labours of many generations : from all which have already past how little truth can we collect ? and yet, perhaps, much of that little is owing to revelation, which we are apt to think unnecessary from the very assistance we have received from it ; like the country-man who despised the sun because it shined in the day-time. We see but a very small part of the great whole, and see that small part so superficially, that we comprehend not the essence of any thing ; neither of body\* or spirit, of space† or time, of infinity

\* Metaphysicians divide all beings into spirit and matter : to spirit they attribute motion, activity, sensibility, thought, will, and reason, free from all solidity and extension ; to matter they ascribe solidity and extension only, void of all self-motion, sense, and perception ; but these descriptions are quite arbitrary, founded only upon their own imaginations, and by no means consistent with experience ; for spirit seems to have many properties not so distinct from matter by its intimate union with it in the composition of all animals ; and matter has certainly many qualities contradictory to this distinction, such as cohesion, attraction, elasticity, electricity, fermentation, heat, and vegetation, none of which can be accounted for from the mere passive principles of solidity and extension.

† Many philosophers have considered time and space as real essences ; whereas they have certainly no more than imaginary existence, derived solely from the imperfection of human conceptions, and human language. They are in themselves really nothing, and the attributes we bestow upon them are applicable with equal propriety to nothing ; that is, nothing has neither beginning nor end, nor can be comprehended within any bounds. The intervening period between historical facts we distinguish by the names of days and

infinity\* or eternity; we know scarce any thing of any thing, and least of all of the nature of God or ourselves; and therefore it is by no means surprizing that all religions derived from such a source should be full of errors and absurdities. If it be asserted, that God might have given to man a more comprehensive reason, and a greater insight into nature and futurity; I answer, he certainly might, and he might also have given him the strength of the horse, and the swiftness of the stag, as well as the understanding of an angel; but then he had not continued to be man; or if he had, he would have suffered many superior evils from these unhappy acquisitions.

If we consider the other method, by which God can communicate a religion to mankind,

and years; the distances between places we call yards and miles; and from this manner of expressing ourselves they gain the appearance of being something; whereas, abstracted from those facts and places, they are really nothing: so that if all things were annihilated, space would immediately vanish, and, literally speaking, *Time would be no more.*

\* All the ideas we have of infinity and eternity are acquired by adding, in our imagination, miles to miles, and years to years, by which means we come never the nearer to them; for no addition of parts can ever make any thing infinite or eternal; no two objects can be placed at an infinite distance, because they would then be the two ends of infinity: an infinite number is a contradiction in terms, and therefore every thing that is infinite or eternal must exist in some manner which bears no manner of relation to space or time, and which must therefore be to us totally incomprehensible.

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we shall find it no less incapable of producing a perfect one; because though God is sufficiently able to give a perfect religion, man is utterly unable to receive it. God cannot impart knowledge to creatures, of which he himself has made them incapable by their nature and formation; he cannot instruct a mole in astronomy, or an oyster in music, because he has not given them members, nor faculties necessary for the acquisition of those sciences; neither is this any diminution of his omnipotence, because acting in such a manner would be willing contrarieties at the same time: it would be opposing his own designs, making creatures what they are not, and granting them powers which he thought proper to deny them; a revelation therefore from God can never be such as we might expect from infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, but must condescend to the ignorance and infirmities of man. Was the wisest legislator in the world to compose laws for a nursery, they must be childish laws; so was God to reveal a religion to mankind, though the revealer was divine, the religion must be human, or it could be of no use to those for whose sake it was revealed; and therefore, like them, it must be liable to numberless imperfections, amongst which all those deficiencies before-mentioned are absolutely unavoidable, and impossible to be prevented by any power whatever; these are the want of uni-

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versality, authenticity, perspicuity, and policy; its certain corruption, with all that inundation of wickedness and misery which must flow from that corruption. Great and numerous evils! from which it is not difficult to shew, that no revelation communicated to man can be exempted by an omnipotent revealer.

First, then, it must want universality; that is, however conducive it may be to the virtue and happiness of mankind in general, it cannot be alike communicated to all men in all ages and all nations of the world; because, from the nature of things, it must have a beginning and a progression; it must at first be revealed at some time and in some place; and whenever and wherever that is, there must have been times and places in which it was not revealed; and therefore it is impossible it can be universal: and this not proceeding from any impotence or partiality in the revealer, but from the modes of existence of all human affairs.

It must likewise want authenticity, that is, though its divine authority may be more or less credible according to the circumstances of the evidence, yet it can never be capable of a direct or demonstrative proof; because God must communicate this revelation to mankind either by a general or a particular inspiration; that is, either by inspiring all men, or by inspiring a few to teach it to others: the first of these methods,

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or an universal inspiration, is impossible in nature, and absurd even in imagination, and would be the total alteration of human nature; the other must be ever liable to infinite uncertainty; because, though a man may possibly know when he himself is inspired, (though that, I think, may be very well questioned) yet, that he should ever produce indubitable credentials of divine commission to others, who are uninspired, seems utterly impracticable, there being no marks by which the fact can be ascertained, nor any faculties in the human mind which are able to distinguish it: the excellence of the revelation he teaches, its beneficent ends, and the miracles he may work in its confirmation, may altogether render it more or less probable, but can never amount to a certain proof, because we know so little of the ends and consequences of things, and so much less of the nature of miracles: we understand indeed nothing about them, but that we ourselves are unable to perform them; but what beings of superior orders may be able to do we cannot tell; nor yet what power, inclination, or permission such beings may have to deceive us. If it is impossible, therefore, we can be certain of the divine authority of a revelation even by a personal communication with its first author, much less can we be assured of it through the fallacious mediums of tradition or history; for whoever observes the propensity men have to im-

pose upon themselves and others, how difficult is it to come at a true representation of the commonest fact, even at the distance of a few miles, or a few years, will be easily convinced, that all human tradition can be nothing more than a complication of designed fraud and inevitable error; a glass which misrepresents all objects by magnifying or diminishing them, just as it is placed by the hand of knavery for the inspection of folly and credulity. History, indeed, carries with it a greater authority, but must ever be liable to infinite imperfections: we can never be certain that the writers of it, being men, were not imposed upon themselves, or did not intend to impose on others; and therefore its original evidence cannot be conclusive, and must grow daily weaker in proportion to its antiquity; it must necessarily be subject to all uncertainties proceeding from the variation of languages and customs, ignorant transcribers, false translations, interpolations, and forgeries; and as the histories of religions are more connected with men's interests than those of other occurrences, so they must be ever more subject to these frauds and impositions; for the same reason that a bank-note is more likely to be counterfeited than a newspaper. It is therefore impossible that history can afford us any certain proof of a supernatural and miraculous dispensation, because a fact, unlikely to be true, can never be demonstrated

monstrated by a relation not impossible to be false. If it be said, that God may inspire the writers of such important records with infallibility; I answer, the proof that he has so inspired them will be attended with no less difficulty, than the proof of that divine authority which is to be established by it; and it must ever be absurd to prove the truth of a revelation by the infallibility of its records, and the infallibility of its records from the truth of the revelation. It is plain, therefore, that, though infinite goodness may reveal a religion to so imperfect a creature as man, yet infinite power cannot, by reason of that imperfection, give to that revelation such a degree of authenticity, that is, such a demonstrable proof of its divine authority, as some men unreasonably expect, and others as ridiculously bestow upon it\*.

It must want perspicuity; that is, it must be much more obscure, both in its speculative and practical doctrines, than might be expected from the interposition of infinite wisdom, truth, and benevolence. In its speculative doctrines, obscurity must be unavoid-

\* Nothing here offered is meant by any means to invalidate the authority of revelation: that of the Christian is possessed of as much certainty as the nature of the fact, and the nature of its evidence will admit of. Those who endeavour to bestow more upon it, do in reality but make it less; and, like unskilful architects, weaken a building already sufficiently strong, by overloading it with unnecessary supporters.

able, because they must treat of subjects above the reach of our comprehensions; which neither eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor has entered into the heart of man to conceive; and therefore no power can impart to us clear and explicit ideas of such things, without first bestowing on us new faculties and new senses; that is, without the total alteration of our natures. But what is most of all extraordinary is, that it must be likewise to a certain degree obscure in its practical and moral precepts; and this from a reason not the less valid for having never before been insisted on; which is, from the necessity of moral evil; that is, since God, as has been shewn, was obliged by necessity to admit moral evil into the creation, he must probably be obliged, by the same necessity, to suffer it in some degree to continue; and therefore cannot enforce the universal practice of virtue by laws so explicit, by threats and promises so glaring, and by commands so incontestably of divine authority, as can admit of no doubt; for these would be so absolutely irresistible as at once to eradicate all human vice, which has already been proved to have been admitted only from the impossibility of its exclusion without the introduction of greater evils, or the loss of superior good. If omnipotence could not prevent the existence of moral evil by the original formation of man, totally to extirpate it by revelation, would be to counteract his



his own wife, though incomprehensible designs; and therefore a divine revelation can never be a regular body of practical institutes, clear and perspicuous, free from all doubts and altercations, enforced by perpetual miracles, by visible and immediate rewards and punishments; but a still voice whispering gentle warnings, divine admonitions, and supernatural truths; a light shining in a dark place, illuminating to a certain degree the native obscurity of the human mind, and discovering by faint glimmerings the designs of providence, and a distant prospect of a future life.

It must also want policy; that is, it can never prescribe political rules by which mankind can be conducted in the government of nations, or their pretended rights of war and peace, because all these affairs being incapable (as has been shewn) of being carried on by any other means than those of violence, fraud, and corruption; a divine revelation cannot possibly give any directions about them; because all such must be necessarily inconsistent either with virtue or with practicability; totally to forbid these methods of governing mankind, who can be governed by no other, would be destructive of all government; to allow them, of all morality: and therefore it is necessary that men should be left to act in these matters at their peril, as particular circumstances may require, with only a general system of religion

religion and morality for their guide. If a divine revelation can give no laws for the management of civil government, much less can it institute any new policies peculiar to itself, under the names of spiritual or ecclesiastical; all which, however divine in their original, must necessarily be administered, if administered by man, by the same unjustifiable methods as others; with this additional inconvenience, that they could never be justly resisted. God cannot, therefore, I apprehend, delegate spiritual power to man, without patronising all that violence, corruption, and iniquity, which must result from it, and without which no power in the hands of men can be exercised over men. For the imperfection of man is incompatible with the purity of a divine government. The government of all creatures must correspond with their natures; and it seems to me as impossible that societies of men should submit under a divine government, as that wolves and tygers should live together under the regulations of human policy; but most of all impossible it must be that a divine and human government should subsist together in the same society, for they must immediately clash; and whenever that happens, the least spark of divine authority, if really divine, must infallibly consume all human power, and destroy all civil government whatever.

Lastly,

Lastly, It must very soon be corrupted, and from that corruption be productive of the most mischievous effects; for, as the purest stream poured into an impure vessel, must partake of its impurity; so must the most perfect religion, that can be revealed by God to so imperfect a creature as man, partake of his imperfection, and produce many and great evils both natural and moral; that is, much of that misery and wickedness which it was intended to prevent: this no wisdom can obviate, no power put a stop to, so long as that imperfection remains; but it must constantly come to pass from a train of unavoidable consequences, which must invariably follow their causes, so long as human nature continues what it is.

For instance, when a divine revelation is first communicated to mankind, it must be received (if received at all) because its precepts are approved, and its authority believed; and all those nations who thus approve the one, and believe the other, must esteem it both their interest and their duty to encourage and support it. This they can effect by no other means than by granting peculiar privileges to all who profess it, by forming from it their national religion, and public worship, and by maintaining an order of men to preach that religion, and minister that worship to the people; all which amounts to a national establishment. Now  
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the moment any religion becomes national, or established, its purity must certainly be lost, because it is then impossible to keep it unconnected with men's interests; and if connected, it must inevitably be perverted by them. Whenever temporal advantages are annexed to any religious profession, they will be sure to call in all those who have no religion at all: knaves will embrace it for the sake of interest, fools will follow them for the sake of fashion; and when once it is in such hands, omnipotence itself can never preserve its purity. That very order of men, who are maintained to support its interests, will sacrifice them to their own; and being in the sole possession of all its promises and all its terrors, and having the tenderness of childhood, the weakness of age, and the ignorance of the vulgar to work upon; I say, these men, vested with all these powers, yet being but men, will not fail to convert all the mighty influence they must derive from them to the selfish ends of their own avarice and ambition, and consequently to the total destruction of its original purity; from it they will lay claim to powers which it never designed them, and to possessions to which they have no right; to make good these false pretensions, false histories will be forged, and fabulous traditions invented; groundless terrors will be flung out to operate on superstition and timidity; creeds and articles will be contrived to con-

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found all reason, and tests imposed to sift out all who have honesty or courage enough to resist these unwarrantable encroachments. Devotion will be turned into farce and pageantry, to captivate men's eyes, that their pockets may with more facility be invaded: they will convert piety into superstition, zeal into rancour, and this religion, notwithstanding all its divinity, into diabolical malevolence. By degrees knaves will join them, fools believe them, and cowards be afraid of them; and having gained so considerable a part of the world to their interests, they will erect an independent dominion among themselves dangerous to the liberties of mankind, and representing all those who oppose their tyranny as God's enemies, teach it to be meritorious in his sight to persecute them in this world, and damn them in another. Hence must arise hierarchies, inquisitions, and popery; for popery is but the consummation of that tyranny which every religious system in the hands of men is in perpetual pursuit of, and whose principles they are all ready to adopt whenever they are fortunate enough to meet with its success.

This tyranny cannot subsist without fierce and formidable opposition, from whence innumerable sects, schisms, and dissensions will lift up their contentious heads, each gaping for that very power which they are fighting to destroy, though unable either to acquire

acquire or retain it; and introductive only of their constant concomitants, ignorance, self-conceit, ill-breeding, obstinacy, anarchy, and confusion. From these contests all kinds of evil must derive their existence, bloodshed and desolation, persecutions, massacres and martyrdoms.

All these evils you see are but the necessary consequences of the national establishment of any religion which God can communicate to man, in whose hands its divinity can never long preserve its purity, or keep it unmixed with his imperfections, his folly, and wickedness. Nay, so far is the divinity of a revelation from being able to prevent its corruption, that it will but increase and hasten it; for the greater share of divinity it partakes, the greater excellence, the more universal must be its approbation; the more it is approved, the more it must be encouraged; the more it is encouraged, the sooner it will be established; and the sooner it is established, the sooner it must be corrupted and made subservient to the worst purposes of the worst men; yet it is plain this establishment is no more than the consequence of its excellence, and men's approbation; no more than the alternative of its total extinction, and without which it cannot be preserved at all; and therefore the corruption of every divine revelation communicated to man, is, by the nature of man, clearly unavoidable.

From

From what has been here said it appears plainly that all the numerous evils which adhere to, and all the mischievous effects which follow all human religions, whether natural or revealed, by no means owe their existence to any want of power, wisdom, or goodness in God, but, like all others, to the imperfection of man; that is, to his folly and wickedness, which must inevitably corrupt them. It is also, I think, no less evident that all arguments levelled against the divine original of Christianity, founded on its imperfections and pernicious consequences, (which are all, I think, that have any weight) may be proved to be vain and inconclusive; and this not by concealing or denying those imperfections and pernicious consequences, as many have absurdly attempted, but by fairly shewing, that they all proceed from the imperfections of those creatures to whom it is revealed; and that, so long as those continue, these cannot be prevented by any wisdom, goodness, or power whatever\*.

Thus, Sir, if I mistake not, I have sufficiently, though concisely, answered that most abstruse and important question, *Whence came evil?* and proved, that all the evils we feel,  
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\* If we look into the deistical writings of all times, we shall find, that they have always attacked the Christian religion most successfully from this ground; they have shewed the many imperfections that adhere to it, and then concluded, that nothing imperfect could derive its original  
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and all which we see around us, derogate not in the least from the wisdom, power, or goodness of our Creator; but proceed entirely from that subordination which is so necessary to the happiness, and even to the existence of the great and incomprehensible whole. I have shewn that all subordination must imply imperfection in some beings or other; and that all imperfection must consist in the absence of comparative good, or the admission of positive evil. I have shewn that most of the evils we usually complain of are of the first kind; the want only of those perfections we see others enjoy, or imagine infinite power might have bestowed upon ourselves; which are therefore in fact no evils at all: that those of the latter sort, or positive evils, are such as from the nature of things must intrude themselves into all creation, and therefore that omnipotence can do no more than make choice of that system which admits the fewest; being obliged by the imperfection of all created beings, the untractableness of matter, and some incomprehensible connection between good and evil, happiness and misery, to admit both, or to give existence to neither. I have likewise shewn that moral evil may have its necessity and utility as well as natural; at least,

from God; their adversaries have injudiciously denied those imperfections, which for the most part are true, and agreed to their conclusion, which is indisputably false; for every thing we possess is derived from God, and yet we possess nothing endued with absolute perfection.

that



that if natural evils are necessary, moral ones are expedient, to prevent that necessary misery from falling to the share of perfect innocence, and to convert unavoidable sufferings into just punishments; that though the essence of all moral evil consists in the production of natural, yet it may have some collateral tendency to good; and that the wicked, whilst they are justly punished for the miseries which they occasion, may probably, by that very guilt and punishment, some way remotely contribute to universal happiness. I have shewn that if natural and moral evils could not be prevented, the existence of political and religious evils must of course be unavoidable, they being but the certain consequences of the other: that all human government must be in the highest degree imperfect, and big with all manner of evils, being the dominion of ignorant and wicked creatures over each other; that, as such creatures can be governed only by fear of punishment or hopes of reward, all government amongst them must be founded on violence or corruption, and ever supported and administered by the same vicious and unjustifiable methods: that no power whatever can give a perfect religion to so imperfect a creature as man, either by nature or revelation; not by nature, because, whilst that is human nature, he can never discover by reason the truths on which a perfect system of theology or ethics can be erected; not by revelation, because he wants

faculties

faculties to comprehend such supernatural discoveries, although they should be imparted to him; that, was he capable of once receiving a perfect religion, it is not possible he could retain it; because if it could be kept entirely separate from his worldly interests, it would soon be neglected and perish in oblivion; and, if it was not, such a connection would quickly corrupt its purity, and destroy its essence, so that national establishments would be necessary for its support, and yet infallibly productive of its destruction. That all these evils proceed not from wrong dispositions or accidental causes, but singly and solely from the imperfection of man; and yet that in gradation from infinite perfection to absolute nothing, there must be one rank occupied by such a creature as man with all his imperfections about him; that these imperfections must be annexed to his situation, and adhere to every thing that relates to him, to his happiness, to his morals, to his government, and to his religion: that, in like manner, all other created beings must have evils and imperfections peculiar to their stations, and proportioned to their inferiority; notwithstanding all which, there is as much good and as little evil in the universal system, as the nature of creation will admit of; and that therefore it is a work equal to what we might expect from the operations of infinite benevolence joined with infinite power.

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# DISQUISITIONS

ON

SEVERAL SUBJECTS.

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## DISQUISITION I.

ON THE CHAIN OF UNIVERSAL BEING.

**T**HE farther we inquire into the works of our great Creator, the more evident marks we shall discover of his infinite wisdom and power, and perhaps none more remarkable, than in that wonderful chain of beings, with which this terrestrial globe is furnished; rising above each other, from the senseless clod, to the brightest genius of human kind, in which, though the chain itself is sufficiently visible, the links, which compose it, are so minute, and so finely wrought, that they are quite imperceptible to our eyes. The various qualities, with which these various beings are endued, we perceive without difficulty, but the boundaries of those

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qualities, which form this chain of subordination are so mixed, that where one ends, and the next begins, we are unable to discover. The manner by which this is performed, is a subject well worthy of our consideration, though I do not remember to have seen it much considered; but on an accurate examination appears to be this.

In order to diffuse all possible happiness, God has been pleased to fill this earth with innumerable orders of beings, superior to each other in proportion to the qualities and faculties which he has thought proper to bestow upon them; to mere matter he has given extension, solidity, and gravity; to plants, vegetation; to animals, life and instinct; and to man, reason; each of which superior qualities augments the excellence and dignity of the possessor, and places him higher in the scale of universal existence. In all these, it is remarkable, that he has not formed this necessary and beautiful subordination, by placing beings of quite different natures above each other, but by granting some additional quality to each superior order, in conjunction with all those possessed by their inferiors; so that, though they rise above each other in excellence, by means of these additional qualities, one mode of existence is common to them all, without which they never could have coalesced in one uniform and regular system.

Thus,

Thus, for instance, in plants we find all the qualities of mere matter, the only order below them, solidity, extension, and gravity, with the addition of vegetation; in animals, all the properties of matter, together with the vegetation of plants, to which is added, life and instinct; and in man we find all the properties of matter, the vegetation of plants, the life and instinct of animals, to all which is superadded reason.

That man is endued with these properties of all inferior orders, will plainly appear by a slight examination of his composition; his body is material, and has all the properties of mere matter, solidity, extension, and gravity; it is also vested with the quality of plants, that is, a power of vegetation, which it incessantly exercises without any knowledge or consent of his; it is sown, grows up, expands, comes to maturity, withers, and dies, like all other vegetables: he possesses likewise the qualities of lower animals, and shares their fate; like them, he is called into life without his knowledge or consent; like them, he is compelled by irresistible instincts, to answer the purposes for which he was designed; like them, he performs his destined course, partakes of its blessings, and endures its sufferings for a short time, then dies, and is seen no more: in him instinct is not less powerful than in them, though less visible, by being confounded with reason, which it sometimes

concurs with, and sometimes counteracts; by this, with the concurrence of reason, he is taught the belief of a God, of a future state, and the difference between moral good and evil; to pursue happiness, to avoid danger, and to take care of himself and his offspring; by this too he is frequently impelled, in contradiction to reason, to relinquish ease and safety, to traverse inhospitable deserts and tempestuous seas, to inflict and suffer all the miseries of war, and, like the herring and the mackarel, to hasten to his own destruction, for the public benefit, which he neither understands or cares for. Thus is this wonderful chain extended from the lowest to the highest order of terrestrial beings, by links so nicely fitted, that the beginning and end of each is invisible to the most inquisitive eye, and yet they altogether compose one vast and beautiful system of subordination.

The manner by which the consummate wisdom of the divine artificer has formed this gradation, so extensive in the whole, and so imperceptible in the parts, is this:—He constantly unites the highest degree of the qualities of each inferior order to the lowest degree of the same qualities, belonging to the order next above it; by which means, like the colours of a skilful painter, they are so blended together, and shaded off into each other, that no line of distinction is anywhere to be seen. Thus, for instance, soli-  
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dity, extension, and gravity, the qualities of mere matter, being united with the lowest degree of vegetation, compose a stone; from whence this vegetative power ascending through an infinite variety of herbs, flowers, plants and trees to its greatest perfection in the sensitive plant, joins there the lowest degree of animal life in the shell-fish which adheres to the rock; and it is difficult to distinguish which possesses the greatest share, as the one shews it only by shrinking from the finger, and the other by opening to receive the water which surrounds it. In the same manner this animal life rises from this low beginning in the shell-fish, through innumerable species of insects, fishes, birds, and beasts to the confines of reason, where, in the dog, the monkey, and chimpanzè it unites so closely with the lowest degree of that quality in man, that they cannot easily be distinguished from each other. From this lowest degree in the brutal Hottentot, reason, with the assistance of learning and science, advances, through the various stages of human understanding, which rise above each other, till in a Bacon or a Newton it attains the summit.

Here we must stop, being unable to pursue the progress of this astonishing chain beyond the limits of this terrestrial globe with the naked eye; but through the perspective of analogy and conjecture, we may perceive that it ascends a great deal higher, to the inha-

inhabitants of other planets, to angels, and archangels, the lowest orders of whom may be united by a like easy transition with the highest of our own, in whom to reason may be added intuitive knowledge, insight into futurity, with innumerable other faculties, of which we are unable to form the least idea; through whom it may ascend, by gradations almost infinite, to those most exalted of created beings, who are seated on the footstool of the celestial throne.

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## DISQUISITION II.

### ON CRUELTY TO INFERIOR ANIMALS.

**M**AN is that link of the chain of universal existence, by which spiritual and corporeal beings are united: as the numbers and variety of the latter his inferiors are almost infinite, so probably are those of the former his superiors; and as we see that the lives and happiness of those below us are dependant on our wills, we may reasonably conclude, that our lives and happiness are equally dependant on the wills of those above us; accountable, like ourselves, for the use of this power, to the Supreme Creator and Governor of all things. Should this analogy be well founded, how criminal will  
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our account appear, when laid before that just and impartial judge! How will man, that sanguinary tyrant, be able to excuse himself from the charge of those innumerable cruelties inflicted on his unoffending subjects committed to his care, formed for his benefit, and placed under his authority by their common father? whose mercy is over all his works, and who expects that this authority should be exercised not only with tenderness and mercy, but in conformity to the laws of justice and gratitude.

But to what horrid deviations from these benevolent intentions are we daily witnesses! No small part of mankind derive their chief amusements from the deaths and sufferings of inferior animals; a much greater, consider them only as engines of wood or iron, useful in their several occupations. The carman drives his horse, and the carpenter his nail, by repeated blows; and so long as these produce the desired effect, and they both go, they neither reflect or care whether either of them have any sense of feeling. The butcher knocks down the stately ox with no more compassion than the black-smith hammers a horse-shoe, and plunges his knife into the throat of the innocent lamb, with as little reluctance as the taylor sticks his needle into the collar of a coat.

If there are some few, who, formed in a softer mould, view with pity the sufferings of these defenceless creatures, there is scarce  
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one who entertains the least idea, that justice or gratitude can be due to their merits or their services. The social and friendly dog is hanged without remorse, if, by barking in defence of his master's person and property, he happens unknowingly to disturb his rest; the generous horse, who has carried his ungrateful master for many years with ease and safety, worn out with age and infirmities contracted in his service, is by him condemned to end his miserable days in a dust-cart, where the more he exerts his little remains of spirit, the more he is whipped, to save his stupid driver the trouble of whipping some other, less obedient to the lash. Sometimes, having been taught the practice of many unnatural and useless feats in a riding-house, he is at last turned out and consigned to the dominion of a hackney-coachman, by whom he is every day corrected for performing those tricks, which he has learned under so long and severe a discipline. The sluggish bear, in contradiction to his nature, is taught to dance, for the diversion of a malignant mob, by placing red-hot irons under his feet; and the majestic bull is tortured by every mode which malice can invent, for no offence but that he is gentle, and unwilling to assail his diabolical tormentors. These, with innumerable other acts of cruelty, injustice, and ingratitude, are every day committed, not only with impunity, but without censure, and even without

out observation; but we may be assured, that they cannot finally pass away unnoticed and unretaliated.

The laws of self-defence undoubtedly justify us in destroying those animals who would destroy us, who injure our properties, or annoy our persons; but not even these, whenever their situation incapacitates them from hurting us. I know of no right which we have to shoot a bear on an inaccessible island of ice, or an eagle on the mountain's top, whose lives cannot injure us, nor deaths procure us any benefit. We are unable to give life, and therefore ought not wantonly to take it away from the meanest insect, without sufficient reason; they all receive it from the same benevolent hand as ourselves, and have therefore an equal right to enjoy it.

God has been pleased to create numberless animals intended for our sustenance; and that they are so intended, the agreeable flavour of their flesh to our palates, and the wholesome nutriment which it administers to our stomachs, are sufficient proofs: these, as they are formed for our use, propagated by our culture, and fed by our care, we have certainly a right to deprive of life, because it is given and preserved to them on that condition; but this should always be performed with all the tenderness and compassion which so disagreeable an office will permit; and no circumstances ought to be omitted,

omitted, which can render their executions as quick and easy as possible. For this, providence has wisely and benevolently provided, by forming them in such a manner, that their flesh becomes rancid and unpalatable by a painful and lingering death; and has thus compelled us to be merciful without compassion, and cautious of their suffering for the sake of ourselves; but, if there are any whose tastes are so vitiated, and whose hearts are so hardened, as to delight in such inhuman sacrifices, and to partake of them without remorse, they should be looked upon as dæmons in human shapes, and expect a retaliation of those tortures which they have inflicted on the innocent, for the gratification of their own depraved and unnatural appetites.

So violent are the passions of anger and revenge in the human breast, that it is not wonderful that men should persecute their real or imaginary enemies with cruelty and malevolence; but that there should exist in nature a being who can receive pleasure from giving pain, would be totally incredible, if we were not convinced, by melancholy experience, that there are not only many, but that this unaccountable disposition is in some manner inherent in the nature of man; for as he cannot be taught by example, nor led to it by temptation, or prompted to it by interest, it must be derived from his native constitution; and is a remarkable

remarkable confirmation of what revelation so frequently inculcates—that he brings into the world with him an original depravity, the effects of a fallen and degenerate state; in proof of which we need only observe, that the nearer he approaches to a state of nature, the more predominant this disposition appears, and the more violently it operates. We see children laughing at the miseries which they inflict on every unfortunate animal which comes within their power: all savages are ingenious in contriving, and happy in executing the most exquisite tortures; and the common people of all countries are delighted with nothing so much as bull-baitings, prize-fightings, executions, and all spectacles of cruelty and horror. Though civilization may in some degree abate this native ferocity, it can never quite extirpate it; the most polished are not ashamed to be pleased with scenes of little less barbarity, and, to the disgrace of human nature, to dignify them with the name of sports. They arm cocks with artificial weapons, which nature had kindly denied to their malevolence, and with shouts of applause and triumph see them plunge them into each other's hearts: they view with delight the trembling deer and defenceless hare, flying for hours in the utmost agonies of terror and despair, and at last, sinking under fatigue, devoured by their merciless pursuers; they see with joy the beautiful pheasant and harmless partridge

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drop from their flight, weltering in their blood, or perhaps perishing with wounds and hunger, under the cover of some friendly thicket to which they have in vain retreated for safety; they triumph over the unsuspecting fish, whom they have decoyed by an insidious pretence of feeding, and drag him from his native element by a hook fixed to and tearing out his entrails; and to add to all this, they spare neither labour nor expence to preserve and propagate these innocent animals, for no other end but to multiply the objects of their persecution.

What name should we bestow on a superior being, whose whole endeavours were employed, and whose whole pleasure consisted in terrifying, ensnaring, tormenting, and destroying mankind? whose superior faculties were exerted in fomenting animosities amongst them, in contriving engines of destruction, and inciting them to use them in maiming and murdering each other? whose power over them was employed in assisting the rapacious, deceiving the simple, and oppressing the innocent? who, without provocation or advantage, should continue from day to day, void of all pity and remorse, thus to torment mankind for diversion, and at the same time endeavour with the utmost care to preserve their lives, and to propagate their species, in order to increase the number of victims devoted to his malevolence, and be delighted  
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in proportion to the miseries which he occasioned? I say, what name detestable enough could we find for such a being? Yet, if we impartially consider the case, and our intermediate situation, we must acknowledge that, with regard to inferior animals, just such a being is a sportsman.

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### DISQUISITION III.

#### ON A PRÆ-EXISTENT STATE.

**T**HAT mankind had existed in some state previous to the present, was the opinion of the wisest sages of the most remote antiquity. It was held by the Gymnosophists of Egypt, the Brachmans of India, the Magi of Persia, and the greatest philosophers of Greece and Rome; it was likewise adopted by the fathers of the Christian church, and frequently enforced by her primitive writers; why it has been so little noticed, so much overlooked, rather than rejected, by the divines and metaphysicians of later ages, I am at a loss to account for, as it is undoubtedly confirmed by reason, by all the appearances of nature, and the doctrines of revelation.

In the first place then it is confirmed by reason, which teaches us that it is impossible  
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that the conjunction of a male and female can create, or bring into being an immortal soul; they may prepare a material habitation for it; but there must be an immaterial præ-existent inhabitant ready to take possession. Reason assures us, that an immortal soul, which will exist eternally after the dissolution of the body, must have eternally existed before the formation of it; for whatever has no end, can never have had any beginning, but exist in some manner which bears no relation to time, to us totally incomprehensible; if therefore the soul will continue to exist in a future life, it must have existed in a former. Reason likewise tells us, that an omnipotent and benevolent Creator would never have formed such a world as this, and filled it with such inhabitants, if the present was the only, or even the first state of their existence, a state which, if unconnected with the past and the future, seems calculated for no one purpose intelligible to our understandings; neither of good or evil, of happiness or misery, of virtue or vice, of reward or punishment, but a confused jumble of them altogether, proceeding from no visible cause, and tending to no end. But, as we are certain that infinite power cannot be employed without effect, nor infinite wisdom without design, we may rationally conclude, that this world could be designed for nothing more than a prison, in which we are awhile confined to receive punishment for the

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the offences committed in a former, and an opportunity of preparing ourselves for the enjoyment of happiness in a future life.

Secondly, These conclusions of reason are sufficiently confirmed by the face of nature and the appearances of things; this world is evidently formed for a place of punishment as well as probation; a prison, or house of correction, to which we are committed, some for a longer, and some for a shorter period; some to the severest labour, others to more indulgent tasks; and if we consider it under this character, we shall perceive it admirably fitted for the end for which it was intended. It is a spacious, beautiful, and durable structure; it contains many various apartments, a few very comfortable, many tolerable, and some extremely wretched; it is enclosed with a fence so impassable, that none can surmount it but with the loss of life. Its inhabitants likewise exactly resemble those of other prisons: they come in with malignant dispositions, and unruly passions, from whence, like other confined criminals, they receive great part of their punishment by abusing and injuring each other. As we may suppose, that they have not all been equally guilty, so they are not all equally miserable; the majority are permitted to procure a tolerable subsistence by their labour, and pass through their confinement without any extraordinary penalties, except from paying their fees, at their discharge by death.

death. Others, who perhaps stand in need of more severe chastisement, receive it by a variety of methods; some by the most acute, and some by the most tedious pains and diseases; some by disappointments, and many by success, in their favourite pursuits; some by being condemned to situations peculiarly unfortunate, as to those of extreme poverty, or superabundant riches, of despicable meanness, or painful pre-eminence, of galley-slaves in a despotic, or ministers in a free country. If we survey the various regions of the globe, what dreadful scenes of wretchedness every where present themselves to our eyes! in some, we see thousands chained to the oar, and perpetually suffering from the inclemency of all weathers, and their more inclement masters; in some, not fewer condemned to wear out their miserable lives in dreary mines, deprived of air and daylight; and in others, much greater numbers torn from their native country, their families, and friends, and sold to the most inhuman of all tyrants, under whose lash they are worn out with fatigue, or expire in torments. The history of mankind is indeed little more than a detail of their miseries, some inflicted by the hand of providence, and many more by their own wickedness, and mutual ill-usage. As nations, we see them sometimes chastised by plagues, famines, inundations, and earthquakes; and continually destroying each other with fire and  
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and sword; we see fleets and armies combating with savage fury, and employing against each other every instrument of torture and death, which malevolence can invent, or ferocity make use of; we see the dying and the dead huddled together in heaps, and weltering in each other's blood; and can we be spectators of this horrid tragedy, without considering the performers as condemned criminals, compelled, like the gladiators of the ancients, to receive their punishment from each other's hands? The orator, the poet, and the historian may celebrate them as heroes fighting for the rights and liberties of their respective countries; but the Christian philosopher can look upon them in no other light than as condemned spirits exiled into human flesh, and sent into this world to chastise each other for past offences. As individuals, we see men afflicted with innumerable diseases, which proceed not from accident, but are congenial with their original formations, and evidently the dispositions of providence, designed for the most important ends; the stone grows in the human bladder, under the same direction as in the quarry, and the seeds of scurvy, rheumatism, and gout are sown in the blood by the same omnipotent hand, which has scattered those of vegetables over the face of the earth. From these various instruments of torture, numberless are the miseries which mankind endure; nor are

those perhaps less numerous, though less visible, which they suffer from that treachery, injustice, ingratitude, ill-humour, and perverseness, with which they every hour torment one another, interrupt the peace of society, and imbitter the comforts of domestic life; to all which we may add that wonderful ingenuity which they possess, of creating imaginary, in the absence of real misfortunes, and that corrosive quality in the human mind, which, for want of the proper food of business or contemplation, preys upon itself, and makes solitude intolerable, and thinking a most painful task. Who, that surveys this melancholy picture of the present life, can entertain a doubt, but that it is intended for a state of punishment, and therefore must be subsequent to some former, in which this punishment was deserved.

Lastly, The opinion of præ-existence is no less confirmed by revelation than by reason, and the appearances of things: for, although perhaps it is no where in the New Testament explicitly enforced, yet throughout the whole tenour of those writings it is every where implied: in them mankind are constantly represented as coming into the world under a load of guilt; as condemned criminals, the children of wrath, and objects of divine indignation; placed in it for a time by the mercies of God, to give them an opportunity of expiating this guilt by sufferings, and regaining, by a pious and vir-  
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tuous conduct, their lost state of happiness and innocence: this is styled working out their salvation, not preventing their condemnation, for that is already past, and their only hope now is redemption; that is, being rescued from a state of captivity and sin, in which they are universally involved. This is the very essence of the Christian dispensation, and the grand principle in which it differs from the religion of nature; in every other respect they are nearly similar; they both enjoin the same moral duties, and prohibit the same vices; both inculcate the belief of a future state of rewards and punishments; but here they essentially disagree; natural religion informs us, that a just and benevolent Creator could have no other design in placing us in this world, but to make us happy, and that, if we commit no extraordinary crimes, we may hope to be so in another; but Christianity teaches a severer and more alarming lesson, and acquaints us, that we are admitted into this life oppressed with guilt and depravity, which we must atone for by suffering its usual calamities, and work off by acts of positive virtue, before we can hope for happiness in another. Now, if by all this a *præ-existent* state is not constantly supposed, that is, that mankind have existed in some state previous to the present, in which this guilt was incurred, and this depravity contracted, there can be no meaning at all, or such a meaning as contradicts every principle of common sense

—that guilt can be contracted without acting, or that we can act without existing: so undeniable is this inference, that it renders any positive assertion of a præ-existent state totally useless; as, if a man at the moment of his entrance into a new country was declared a criminal, it would surely be unnecessary to assert, that he had lived in some other before he came there.

In all our researches into abstruse subjects, there is a certain clue, without which, the further we proceed the more we are bewildered, but which being fortunately discovered, leads us at once through the whole labyrinth, puts an end to our difficulties, and opens a system perfectly clear, consistent, and intelligible. The doctrine of præ-existence, or the acknowledgment of some past state of guilt and disobedience, I take to be this very clue; which, if we constantly carry along with us, we shall proceed unembarrassed through all the intricate mysteries both of nature and revelation, and at last arrive at so clear a prospect of the wise and just dispensations of our Creator, as cannot fail to afford compleat satisfaction to the most inquisitive sceptic.

For instance; Are we unable to answer that important question, Whence came evil? that is, why a Creator of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, should have formed a world replete with so many imperfections, and those so productive of calamities to its inhabitants?

inhabitants? this clue will direct us to this satisfactory reply, as far as the question relates to the evils of the present life—because he designed it for a place of punishment and probation, for which it is perfectly adapted; and we can be no more surprised to see such a world as this make a part of the universal system, than to see a magnificent prison, with all its appendages of punishment, whips, pillories, and gibbets, make a part of a large, populous, and well-governed city. Are we under difficulties to comprehend why the same omnipotent and benevolent Creator should fill this world with inhabitants so wicked, and so miserable? this clue will immediately lead us to a solution of them, and point out the true reason—because they are sent hither to be punished and reformed. Do we reject all those passages in the New Testament as derogatory to the divine wisdom and goodness, which declare, that mankind come into this world under a load of guilt and depravity, and under the displeasure of their Creator?—no sooner are we brought by this clue within sight of a præ-existent state, in which this guilt and depravity may have been contracted, but our incredulity vanishes, and we perceive plainly, that their admission into this world, under those circumstances, is not only consistent with the justice of God, but the strongest instance of his mercy and benevolence; as by it they are enabled to purge off this depravi-

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ty, to expiate their offences, and to reinstate themselves in his favour.

Thus is a præ-existent state, I think, clearly demonstrated, by the principles of reason, the appearances of things, and the sense of revelation ; all which agree, that this world is intended for a place of punishment, as well as probation, and must therefore refer to some former period ; for, as probation implies a future life, for which it is preparatory, so punishment must imply a former state, in which offences were committed, for which it is due ; and indeed there is not a single argument drawn from the justice of God, and the seemingly undeserved sufferings of many in the present state, which can be urged in proof of a future life, which proves not with superior force the existence of another, which is already past.

#### DISQUISITION IV.

##### ON THE NATURE OF TIME.

**W**E are so accustomed to connect our ideas of time with the history of what passes in it, that is, to mistake a succession of thoughts and actions for time, that we find it extremely difficult, perhaps impossible, totally



totally to separate or distinguish them from each other : and indeed, had we power to effect this in our minds, all human language is so formed, that it would fail us in our expression : yet certain it is, that time, abstracted from the thoughts, actions, and motions which pass in it, is actually nothing : it is only the mode in which some created beings are ordained to exist, but in itself has really no existence at all.

Though this opinion may seem chimerical to many, who have not much considered the subject, yet it is by no means new, for it was long since adopted by some of the most celebrated philosophers of antiquity, particularly by the Epicureans ; and is thus well expressed by Lucretius :

*Tempus item per se non est ; sed rebus ab ipsis  
Consequitur sensus, transactum quod sit in ævo,  
Tum quæ res instat, quid porro deinde sequatur ;  
Nec per se, quemquam tempus sentire, fatendum est,  
Semotum ab usu, motu, placidaque quiete.*

Time of itself is nothing ; but from thought  
Receives its rise, by lab'ring fancy wrought,  
From things considered : while we think on some  
As present, some as past, and some to come :  
No thought can think on Time, that's still confess'd,  
But thinks on things in motion, or at rest.

CREECH.

From observing the diurnal revolutions of the sun. and the various transactions which pass during those revolutions, we acquire conceptions of days ; by dividing these days  
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we form hours, minutes, and seconds; and by multiplying them, months, years, and ages; then by measuring these imaginary periods against each other, and bestowing on each distinct denominations, we give them the appearance of something real: yesterday, which is past, and to-morrow, which is not yet come, assume the same reality as the present day; and thus we imagine time to resemble a great book, one of whose pages is every day wrote on, and the rest remain blank, to be filled up in their turns with the events of futurity; whilst in fact this is all but the delusion of our own imaginations, and time is nothing more than the manner in which past, present, and future events succeed each other: yet is this delusion so correspondent with our present state, and so woven up with all human language, that without much reflection it cannot be perceived, nor when perceived can it be remedied; nor can I, while endeavouring to prove time to be nothing, avoid treating it as something in almost every line.

There seems to be in the nature of things two modes of existence; one, in which all events, past, present, and to come, appear in one view; which, if the expression may be allowed, I shall call perpetually instantaneous; and which, as I apprehend, constitutes Eternity: the other, in which all things are presented separately and successively, which produces what we call Time.

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Of the first of these human reason can afford us no manner of conception; yet it assures us, on the strongest evidence, that such must be the existence of the Supreme Creator of all things, that such probably may be the existence of many superior orders of created beings, and that such possibly may be our own in another state: to beings so constituted, all events past, present, and future, are presented in one congregated mass, which to us are spread out in succession to adapt them to our temporary mode of perception: in these ideas have no succession, and therefore to their thoughts, actions, or existence, time, which is succession only, can bear not the least relation whatsoever. To existence of this kind alone can eternity belong; for eternity can never be composed of finite parts, which, however multiplied, can never become infinite; but must be something simple, uniform, invariable, and indivisible; permanent, though instantaneous, and endless without progression. There are some remarkable expressions both in the Old and New Testament, alluding to this mode of existence; in the former, God is denominated *I am*\*; and in the latter, Christ says, *Before Abraham was, I am*†: both evidently implying duration without succession: from whence the schoolmen probably derive their obscure notions of such a kind of dura-

\* Exod. iv. 14.

† John viii. 58.

tion, which they explain by the more obscure term of *punctum stans*.

With the other mode of existence we are sufficiently acquainted, being that in which Providence has placed us, and all things around us, during our residence on this terrestrial globe; in which all ideas follow each other in our minds in a regular and uniform succession, not unlike the tickings of a clock; and by that means all objects are presented to our imaginations in the same progressive manner: and if any vary much from that destined pace, by too rapid or too slow a motion, they immediately become to us totally imperceptible. We now perceive every one, as it passes, through a small aperture separately, as in the camera obscura, and this we call time; but at the conclusion of this state we may probably exist in a manner quite different; the window may be thrown open, the whole prospect appear at one view, and all this apparatus, which we call time, be totally done away: for time is certainly nothing more than the shifting of scenes necessary for the performance of this tragi-comical farce, which we are here exhibiting, and must undoubtedly end with the conclusion of the drama. It has no more a real essence, independent of thought and action, than sight, hearing, and smell have, independent of their proper organs, and the animals to whom they belong; and when they cease to exist, time  
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can be no more. There are also several passages in the scriptures, declaring this annihilation of time, at the consummation of all things: *And the Angel, which I saw stand upon the sea and the earth, lifted up his hand towards heaven, and swore by him that liveth for ever and ever, &c. that there should be time no longer* \*.

To this opinion of the non-entity of time it has by some been objected, that time has many attributes and powers inherent in its nature; and that whatever has attributes and powers, must itself exist: it is infinite, say they, and eternal; it contains all things and forces itself on our imaginations in the absence of all other existence. But to this it may be answered, that the human mind is able in the very same manner to realize nothing; and then all the same attributes and powers are applicable with equal propriety to that nothing, thus supposed to be something:

† Nothing, thou elder brother ev'n to shade!  
Thou had'st a being, ere the world was made,  
And well fix'd are alone of ending not afraid.

Nothing is infinite, and eternal; that is, hath neither beginning nor end: it contains all things; that is, it begins where all existence ends, and therefore surrounds and contains all things: it forces itself on the mind, in the absence of all existence; that is, where

\* Rev. x. 5.

† Lord Rochester.

we suppose there is no existence, we must suppose there is nothing: this exact resemblance of their attributes and powers, more plainly demonstrates, that time is nothing.

From this non-existence of time thus established, many conclusions will arise, both useful and entertaining; from whence perhaps new lights may be thrown on several speculations religious and metaphysical, whose outlines I shall just venture to trace, and leave them to be filled up by abler pens.

1st. If time be no more than the succession of ideas, and actions, however these may be accelerated or retarded, time will be just the same: that is, neither longer or shorter, provided the same ideas and actions succeed one another, as far, I mean, as it relates to beings so thinking and acting. For instance, were the earth and all the celestial bodies to perform the same revolutions in one day, which they now perform in a whole year, and were all the ideas, actions, and lives of mankind hastened on in the same proportion, the period of our lives would not be in the least shortened; but that day would be exactly equal to the present year: if in the space of seventy or eighty of these days a man was born, educated, and grown up, had exercised a profession, had seen his children come to maturity, his grandchildren succeed them, and, during this period, had had all his ideas and actions, all his enjoyments and sufferings, accelerated in  
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the same proportion, he would not only seem to himself, and to all who lived in the same state with him, and measured time by the same standard, to have lived as long, but actually and in fact would have lived as long as one who resides on this globe as great a number of our present years.

2dly. This being the case, it follows, that the life of every man must be longer or shorter, in proportion to the number of his thoughts and actions ; for was it possible for a man to think and act as much in an hour as in a year, that hour, as far as it related to him, would not only seem, but actually become a year. On the other hand, was it possible for a man totally to abstain from thinking and acting for an hour, or a year, time, with regard to him, for that period, would have no existence ; or, could he keep one idea fixed in his mind, and continue one single act during the same space, time, which is a succession only of ideas and actions, must be equally annihilated : whether these ideas and actions are exercised on great or little occasions, whether they are productive of pleasing or painful sensations, with regard to this purpose their effects will be the same ; neither their importance or consequences will add anything to time, but their numbers and celerity most undoubtedly will. Our lives, therefore, when diversified with a variety of objects, and busied in a multiplicity of pursuits, though perhaps less happy, will  
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certainly be longer than when dosed away in sloth, inactivity, and apathy.

3dly. From hence it is evident, that we can form no judgment of the duration of the lives, enjoyments, and sufferings of other animals, with the progression of whose ideas we are totally unacquainted, and who may be framed in that respect, as well as in many others, so widely different from ourselves. The gaudy butterfly, that flutters in the sunshine but for a few months, may live as long as the stupid tortoise that breathes for a century; the insect, that survives not one diurnal revolution of the sun, may, for any thing we know, enjoy an age of happiness; and the miserable horse, that appears to us to suffer the drudgery of ten or twenty years, may finish his laborious task in as many months, days or hours.

4thly. For the like reasons we can judge but very imperfectly of what are real evils in the universal system, whilst we remain in this temporal state of existence, in which all things are exhibited to us by scraps, one after the other; for these detached portions, which viewed separately, seem but misshapen blotches, may to beings, who in an eternal state see past, present, and future, all delineated on one canvass, appear as well-disposed shades necessary to render perfect the whole most beautiful landscape. Nay, even pain, that taken singly is so pungent and disagreeable a potion, when thrown into the cup of universal happiness, may, perhaps,  
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add to it a flavour, which without this infusion it could not have acquired.

5thly. If time has itself no existence, it can never put an end to the existence of any thing else; and this seems no inconclusive argument for the immortality of the soul; for if any thing is, and no cause appears to us why it should cease to be, we can have no good reason to believe that it will not continue. Whatever has no connection with time must be eternal: now the only property of the soul, with which we are acquainted, is thought, which bears no relation to time; whence it is reasonable to suppose, that the soul itself is equally unconnected with it, and consequently eternal. Even in material beings we see continual mutations, but can perceive no symptoms of annihilation; and therefore we have surely less cause to suspect it in immaterial: from whence I am inclined to think, that the essences of all things are eternal, that is, unrelative to time, and that it is only our manner of perceiving them, that causes them to appear temporal to us; past, present, and future being not inherent in their natures, but only in our progressive mode of perception.

6thly. From what has been said, we may perceive into what amazing absurdities many of our ablest divines and metaphysicians have plunged, in their investigations of eternity; for making which their receipt is usually this: they take of time a sufficient quantity, and, chopping it in small pieces, they dispose

dispose them in imaginary lengths, which they distinguish by the names of minutes, hours, days, years, and ages; then feeling in their own minds a power of multiplying these as often as they think fit, they heap millions upon millions; and finding this power to be a machine that may be worked backwards and forwards with equal facility, they extend their line both ways, and so their eternity is compleated, and fit for use: they then divide it in the middle, and out of a single eternity they make two, as they term them, *a parte ante*, and *a parte post*; each of which having one end, may be drawn out, like a juggler's ribband, as long as they please. The contradictions so manifest in this system, sufficiently declare its falshood; for in adopting it we must acknowledge, that each half of this eternity is equal to the whole; that in each the number of days cannot exceed that of the months, nor the month be more numerous than the years, they being all alike infinite; that whether it commenced yesterday, or ten thousand years since, the length of its duration must be the same; for the length depends not on the beginning, but on the end, but that cannot be different where there is no end at all: the absurdity of all these propositions is too glaring to stand in need of any refutation; for it is evident, that whatever contains parts, length, or numbers, can never be infinite; whatever had a beginning must have an end, because beginning and ending are the modes of temporary existence:

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what has no end could have no beginning, because both are equally inconsistent with eternity. In truth, all these absurdities arise from applying to eternity our ideas of time, which, being two modes of existence intirely different, bear not the least relation to each other: time is in its nature finite and successive; eternity infinite and instantaneous; and therefore their properties are no more applicable to each other, than those of sounds to colours, or of colours to sounds; and we can no more form eternity out of time, than, by mixing red, blue, and green, we can compose an anthem or an opera.

7thly. From hence appears the necessity, in our considerations on these subjects, of keeping our ideas of those two modes of existence intirely and constantly distinct, as they themselves are in nature; by which means we shall presently sweep away many of those theological and metaphysical cobwebs, which now encumber and disgrace our most learned libraries; and cut short many impertinent enquiries concerning the creation of the universe, God's foreknowledge and predestination, the præ-existent and future state of souls, the injustice of eternal punishments, and the sleep of the soul, with numberless others of the same kind, all derived from injudiciously blending and confounding these two kinds of existence together, and applying notions and expressions to one, which can only with propriety belong to the other.

To enter largely into these abstruse and intricate subjects, would require a folio; I shall therefore only say one word or two to each.

It has been frequently asked, why God created the universe at the time in which he did create it, and why he suffered millions of ages to pass away before the commencement of so glorious a work? To this it may be replied with equal conciseness and truth, that in fact no such ages ever did or could pass before it was created; nor was it created in any time at all; for neither the essence or actions of God have the most distant relation to time; he has been pleased in his infinite wisdom to bestow on some parts of his creation a temporal mode of existence, and from this alone time derives its origin: to suppose time antecedent to temporal existence, is to suppose effects to precede their causes; and not less absurd than to imagine, that there could be perception before sensitive beings, or thought before intelligent beings existed. This very question proves the absurdity of connecting time and eternity together; for if God's power of creating is coæval with his existence, that existence eternal, and that eternity only time extended; this evident contradiction follows, that God, though always equally able, yet in fact never could create any thing so soon, but that he might have created it sooner: that is in other words, that he never could create any thing as soon  
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as he could. All this puzzle arises from our foolishly supposing, that eternal and temporal beings must act in a manner similar to each other : if we do any thing, it must be done at some time or other ; but God acts in ways as different from ours, as inconceivable to us ; his ways are not like our ways, nor his thoughts like our thoughts : one day is to him as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day ; that is, neither of them, with his manner of existing, thinking, or acting, have any connection whatever.

All disputes about God's foreknowledge and predestination, are of the same species, and derive their birth entirely from the same absurd supposition. Foreknowledge and predestination imply succession, and are relative to time, which has no relation to the essence or perception of the Creator of all things ; and therefore, in the sense usually applied to them, cannot with any propriety be attributed to him. He knows all things, and ordains all things ; but as all things are equally present to the divine intuition, it is impossible that he can foreknow or predestinate any thing.

Of the same kind are all questions concerning the præ-existent and future state of the soul, arising likewise from confounding our ideas of these two modes of existence, temporal and eternal : whenever the soul is united with the body, perceiving all things by succession through material organs, it ac-

quires ideas of time, and can form none of existence unconnected with it ; but whenever this union is dissolved, it probably returns again to its native mode of eternal existence, in which the whole circle of its perception being at once visible, it has nothing further to do with time ; it is neither old nor young, it lives no more in the seventeenth than in the seventh century, no nearer to the end than the beginning of the world : all ideas of years and ages, of præ-existence and futurity, of beginning and ending, will be totally obliterated ; and possibly it will be as incapable of forming any conceptions of time, as it is now of eternity. The soul, therefore, being quite unconnected with time, whenever it is unconnected with a body, cannot properly be said to exist in another time, either prior or posterior, but only in another manner.

Every argument also endeavouring to prove the injustice and disproportion of eternal punishments for temporal offences, is founded on the same erroneous principles, and admits of the same answer ; that all computations of the magnitude of such punishments from their duration, by heaping years and ages upon each other, are absurd, and inconsistent with that state in which they are to be inflicted : crimes will there be punished according to the degrees of their malignity, but neither for a long, or a short, nor for any time at all : for all punishments must be correspondent to the state in which they are suffered : in an eternal state, they must  
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be eternal, in a temporal they must be temporal; for it is equally impossible, that a being can be punished for a time, where no time is, as that it should be punished everlastingly in a state which itself cannot last. As therefore, from the nature of things, this dispensation is necessary, it cannot be unjust, and from the infinite wisdom and goodness of the Author of nature, we may reasonably presume that it cannot be disproportioned to its several objects.

The non-entity of time will serve likewise to settle a late ingenious controversy, and shew, that, like most others of the kind, it is a dispute only upon words; this controversy is concerning the sleep of the soul; that is, whether it enters into a state of happiness or misery immediately on its dissolution from the body, or remains in a state of profound insensibility till the general judgment, and then receives its final sentence, and suffers its execution: for if time is nothing but the thoughts and actions which pass in it, the condition of the soul, whether it sleeps or not, will be exactly the same; nor will the final sentence be one moment deferred by such a state of insensibility, how long soever it may continue; for though, during that period, many revolutions of the sun, and of empires, may take place, many millions of thoughts and actions may pass, which not only measure time, but create it; yet with regard to the soul so sleeping, none of these, that is, no time will pass at all; and  
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if no time intervenes, judgment, however remote with regard to others, will as instantly follow its dissolution, as if that had happened the precedent moment. But if, according to the foregoing principles, the soul in a separate state bears no relation to time, then no event in which it is there concerned can be before or after another, either nearer or farther from any period, from death or judgment, from the creation or dissolution of this planetary system : this we see must at once put an end to all disputes on this subject, and render the use of soporifics entirely needless.

After all that has been here advanced, I am not insensible, that we are here so constantly conversant with temporal objects, and so totally unacquainted with eternal, that few, very few, will ever be able to abstract existence from time, or comprehend that any thing can exist out of, and unconnected with it: in vain should I suggest, that the various planets are peopled by the divine wisdom with a variety of beings, and even this terrestrial globe with innumerable creatures, whose situations are so different, that their manner of existence is quite unknown and incomprehensible to each other; that millions inhabit the impenetrable recesses of the unfathomable ocean, who can no more form conceptions of any existence beyond the limits of that their native element, than we ourselves can beyond the boundaries of time; and



and that therefore in reality, time may be no more necessary to existence than water, though the mode of that existence we are unable to comprehend. But, I well know, these analogous arguments have little weight; the prejudice of education, the strength of habit, and the force of language, all formed on the supposed union of existence with time, will persuade men to reject this hypothesis as vain and chimerical. To all busy men, and men of business, to all jogging on in the beaten roads of professions or scrambling up the precipices of ambition, these considerations must appear unprofitable illusions, if not incomprehensible nonsense; for to endeavour to convince a merchant subsisting on long credit, a lawyer enriched by delay, a divine who has purchased a next presentation, a general who is in no hurry to fight, or a minister whose object is the continuance of his power, that time is nothing, is an arduous task, and very unlikely to be attended with success. Whoever desires to taste or understand such abstracted speculations, must leave for a while the noisy bustle of worldly occupations, and retire into the sequestered shades of solitude and contemplation: from whence he will return certainly not richer, possibly not wiser, but probably more susceptible of amusement from his own company for want of better, and more able to draw entertainment from his own imaginations;

nations ; which in his journey through life he will often find an acquisition not altogether inconsiderable.

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## DISQUISITION V.

### ON THE ANALOGY BETWEEN THINGS MATERIAL AND INTELLECTUAL.

**A**S all things, both material and intellectual, are derived from the same omnipotent author, we shall find, on an accurate examination, that there is a certain analogy, which runs through them all, well worthy of our attention and admiration ; that is, that there are in the elements of the material world, and in the passions and actions of mankind, powers and propensities of a similar nature, which operate in a similar manner, throughout every part of the material, moral, and political system. But this theory, rather abstruse, is difficult to be explained, and will be best elucidated by examples, which every day fall within our observation.

In the material world, for instance, we see all disorders cured by their own excesses : a sultry calm fails not to produce a storm, which dissipates the noxious vapours, and restores a purer air ; the fiercest tempest, exhausted by its own violence, at length subsides

sides; and an intense sun-shine, whilst it parches up the thirsty earth, exhales clouds, which quickly water it with refreshing showers. Just so in the moral world, all our passions and vices, by their excesses, defeat themselves; excessive rage renders men impotent to execute the mischiefs which they threaten; repeated treacheries make them unable to deceive, because none will trust them; and extreme profligacy, by the diseases which it occasions, destroys their appetites, and works an unwilling reformation.

As in the natural world, the elements are restrained in their most destructive effects, by their mutual opposition; so in the moral, are the vices of mankind prevented from being totally subversive of society, by their continually counteracting each other: profusion restores to the public the wealth which avarice has detained from it for a time; envy clips the towering wings of ambition; and even revenge, by its terrors, prevents many injuries and oppressions: the treachery of the thief discovers his accomplices; the perfidy of the prostitute brings the highwayman to justice; and the villainy of the assassin puts an end to the cruelty of a tyrant.

In the material world, the middle climates, farthest removed from the extremes of heat and cold, are the most salubrious and most pleasant: so in life, the middle ranks are ever most favourable to virtue, and to happiness; which dwell not in the extremes of poverty or riches.

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As throughout the various regions of the earth, advantages and inconveniences are distributed with a more impartial hand than we on a transitory view are apt to imagine; so are they to the various conditions of human life: if the more southern climates are gilded with a brighter sun-shine, perfumed with more fragrant gales, and decorated with a greater profusion of plants and flowers, they are at the same time perpetually exposed to pestilential heats, infested with noxious animals, torn by hurricanes, and rocked by earthquakes, unknown to the rougher regions of the north. In like manner, if the rich enjoy luxuries, from which the poor are debarred, they suffer many diseases and disquietudes, from which those are fortunately exempted.

We behold with admiration the vivid azure of the vaulted sky, and variegated colours of the distant clouds; but, if we approach them on the summit of some lofty mountain, we discover that the beautiful scene is all illusion, and find ourselves involved only in a dreary fog or a tempestuous whirlwind: just so, in youth, we look up with pleasing expectation to the pleasures and honours, which we fondly imagine will attend maturer age; at which, if we arrive, the brilliant prospect vanishes in disappointment, and we meet with nothing more than a dull inactivity or turbulent contentions.

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The properties of the various seasons of the year, the gaiety of spring, the vigour of summer, the serenity of autumn, and the gloom of winter, have been so often assimilated to the corresponding periods of human life; the dangers and disquietudes of grandeur so often compared to the tempestuous situation of lofty mountains; and the quiet safety of inferior stations, to the calm security of the humbler vale, that a repetition of them here would be impertinent, and useless; yet they all contribute to point out that analogy which uniformly pervades every part of the creation with which we are acquainted.

Between the material and political world, this analogy is still more conspicuous: in the former, every particle of matter, of which the vast machine is composed, is actuated by that wonderful principle of attraction, which restrains, impels, and directs its progress to the destined end; in the latter, every individual of which the great political body is formed, is actuated by self-interest, a principle exactly similar, which, by a constant endeavour to draw all things to itself, restrains, impels, and directs his passions, designs, and actions to the important ends of government and society. As the first operates with force in proportion to the contents of the body in which it resides, so does the latter; in individuals it is small, in societies greater, and in populous and extensive

five empires most powerful. As the one acts with power in proportion to its distance, so does the other; for we constantly find, that a small benefit bestowed on men as individuals, will influence them much more than a larger, which they may receive from national prosperity; and a trifling loss, which immediately affects themselves, is more regretted, than one more considerable, which they feel only through the medium of public calamities. In another respect, also, they greatly resemble each other; they are both productive of many mischiefs, yet both necessary to the well-being and preservation of the whole. It is attraction that plunges us in the ocean; dashes us against the rocks; tumbles us from the precipice; and pulls down the tottering fabric on our heads: but it is this, also, that constitutes all body, that binds together the terrestrial globe, guides the revolving planets in their courses, and without it not only the whole material system would be dissolved, but I am inclined to think, that matter itself must be annihilated; for, matter being infinitely divisible, without this property it must be infinitely divided; and infinite division seems to be nothing less than annihilation; for without attraction there could be no cohesion, without cohesion no solidity, and without solidity no matter. In like manner, self-interest, or what we mistake for it, is the source of all our crimes, and most of our sufferings. It  
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is this that seduces the profligate, by the prospect of pleasure; tempts the villain by the hopes of gain; and bribes the hero with the voice of fame: but it is this also that is the source of all our connections, civil, religious, political, and commercial; that binds us together in families, in cities, and in nations, and directs our united labours to the public benefit: and without its influence, arts and learning, trade and manufactures, would be at an end, and all government, like matter by infinite division, would be annihilated.

The natural world subsists by a perpetual contention of the elements of which it is composed, the political by as constant a contest of its internal parties, struggling for superiority. In the former, the great system is carried on by a continual rotation of good and evil, alternately producing, and succeeding each other: continued sunshine produces tempests; these discharge themselves in refreshing rains; rains cause inundations, which, after some ravages, subsiding, assist commerce and agriculture, by scouring out the beds of rivers, and fertilizing lands; and sunshine returns again: so in the latter, long peace, the political sunshine, generates corruption, luxury, and faction, the parents of destructive wars; war for a time awakens national vigour, and pours down wealth and plunder, then causes inundations of poverty and distress; distress calls forth industry,

try, agriculture, and commerce, and peace returns once more.

As night and day, winter and summer, are alternately circulated over the various regions of the globe; so are poverty and wealth, idleness and industry, ignorance and science, despotism and liberty, by an uniform process arising from their own natural constitutions, and their invariable effects upon each other. In poor countries, necessity incites industry, and cheapness of provisions invites traders and manufacturers to reside; this soon introduces wealth, learning, and liberty; and these are as soon followed by profusion, faction and licentiousness; commerce will keep no such company, but, like a bird of passage, migrates to climes by poverty and cheapness better adapted to her constitution: these, in their turns, grow rich, civilized, free, dissolute, and licentious in the same manner, and are successively deserted for the same reason, and the same circle is again renewed.

In the material world, the constant circulation of the air, and flux and reflux of the tides, preserve those elements from a putrid stagnation; so in the political, controversies, civil and religious, keep up the spirits of national communities, and prevent them from sinking into a state of indolence and ignorance: but if either exceed the bounds of moderation, their consequences are extremely fatal; the former producing storms and inundations, and the latter anarchy and confusion.



sion. Lord Bacon observes, that war is to states, what exercise is to individuals; and in this they are extremely similar; a proper proportion may contribute to health and vigour, but too much emaciates and wears out a constitution.

Thus by a wise and wonderful disposition of things material and intellectual, God has infused into them all powers and propensities greatly analogous, by which they are enabled and compelled, in a similar manner, to perform their respective parts in the general system, to restrain their own excesses, and to call back each other, whenever they too far deviate from their destined ends; and has said unto every thing, as well as to the ocean, to night and day, to winter and summer, to heat and cold, to rain and sunshine, to happiness and misery, to science and ignorance, to war and peace, to liberty and despotism, "Hitherto shalt thou go, and no farther." These amazing instances of infinite wisdom in the œconomy of things, presenting every where an analogy so remarkable, are well worthy of our highest admiration; yet have been but little observed, because these divine dispositions appear to us to be no more than the necessary consequences of previous causes, and the invariable operations of nature, and we forget that nature is nothing more than the art of her omnipotent author.

## DISQUISITION VI.

## ON RATIONAL CHRISTIANITY.

**T**O several learned and ingenious writers, some doctrines of the Christian religion have appeared so contradictory to all the principles of reason and equity, that they cannot assent to them, nor believe, that they can be derived from the fountain of all truth, and justice. In order, therefore, to satisfy themselves and others, who may labour under the same difficulties, they have undertaken the arduous task of reconciling revelation and reason; and great would have been their merits, had they begun at the right end, that is, had they endeavoured to exalt the human understanding to the comprehension of the sublime doctrines of the gospel, rather than to reduce those doctrines to the low standard of human reason; but, unfortunately for themselves and many others, they have made choice of the latter method, and, as the shortest way to effect it, have with inconsiderate rashness expunged from the New Testament every divine declaration, which agrees not exactly with their own notions of truth and rectitude; and this they have attempted by no other means, than by absurd explanations, or by bold assertions that they are not there, in direct contradiction

dition to the sense of language, and the whole tenour of those writings; as some philosophers have ventured, in opposition to all men's senses, and even their own, to deny the existence of matter, for no other reason, but because they find in it properties which they are unable to account for. Thus they have reduced Christianity to a mere system of ethics, and retain no part of it but the moral, which in fact is no characteristic part of it at all, as this, though in a manner less perfect, makes a part of every religion which ever appeared in the world. This ingenious method of converting Christianity into Deism, cannot fail of acquiring many respectable proselytes; for every virtuous and pious man, who would be a Christian if he could, that is, who reverences the name of Christianity, but cannot assent to its tenets, is glad to list under the standard of any leader, who can teach him to be a Christian, without believing any one principle of that institution.

Whoever will look back into the theological annals of this country, will find, that during the last century, the fashionable philosophers were for the most part Atheists, who ascribed every thing to chance, fate, or necessity; exclusive of all intelligence or design: these mighty giants, who fought against Heaven, being, at length overthrown by the absurdity of their own principles, and the superior abilities of their adversaries, retreated

about the beginning of the present, to the more tenable fort of Deism; but here again, being frequently worsted, they at last took shelter under the covert-way of rational Christianity, where they now make their stand, and attack revelation with less odium, and more success, than from the open plains of professed Deism, because many are ready to reject the whole substance of the Christian institution, who would be shocked at the thought of relinquishing the name.

If Christianity is to be learned out of the New Testament, and words have any meaning affixed to them, the fundamental principles of it are these—That mankind come into this world in a depraved and fallen condition;—that they are placed here for a while, to give them an opportunity to work out their salvation, that is, by a virtuous and pious life to purge off this guilt and depravity, and recover their lost state of happiness and innocence, in a future life;—that this they are unable to perform, without the grace and assistance of God;—and that after their best endeavours, they cannot hope for pardon from their own merits, but only from the merits of Christ, and the atonement made for their transgressions by his sufferings and death. This is clearly the sum and substance of the Christian dispensation; and so adverse is it to all the principles of human reason, that, if brought before her tribunal, it must inevitably be condemned.

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If we give no credit to its divine authority, any attempt to reconcile them is useless; and, if we believe it, presumptuous in the highest degree. To prove the reasonableness of a revelation, is in fact to destroy it; because a revelation implies information of something which reason cannot discover, and therefore must be different from its deductions, or it would be no revelation. If God had told us, that we come into this world in a state of perfect innocence, void of all propensities to evil; that our depravity proceeds entirely from the abuse of that free-will, with which he has been pleased to endue us; that, if in this life we pursue a virtuous conduct, we have a right to be rewarded, and if a vicious, we may expect to be punished in another, except we prevent it by repentance and reformation, and that these are always in our own power—if God had informed us of nothing more, this would have been no revelation, because it is just what our reason, properly employed, might have taught us; but if he has thought proper, by supernatural means, to assure us, that our situation, our relations, our depravity, our merits, and our powers, are all of a kind extremely different from what we imagine; and that his dispensations towards us are founded on principles which cannot be explained to us, because, in our present state, we are unable to comprehend them; this is a revelation, which we may believe, or not,

according to our opinion of its authority ; but let us not reason it into no revelation at all.

The writers of the New Testament frequently declare, that the religion which they teach, is a mystery, that is, a revelation of the dispensations of God to mankind, which without supernatural information we never could have discovered ; thus St. Paul says, “ Having made known to us the mystery of his will.” What then is the mystery ? not the moral precepts of the gospel ; for they are no more a mystery than the Ethics of Aristotle, or the Offices of Cicero : the mystery consists alone in these very doctrines, which the Rationalist explodes, because they disagree with the conclusions of his reason ; that is, because they are mysteries, as they are avowed to be by those who taught them.

But these bold advocates for reason, understand not its extent, its powers, or the proper application of them. The utmost perfection of human reason, is the knowledge of its own defects, and the limits of its own confined powers, which are extremely narrow. It is a lamp which serves us very well for the common occupations of life, which are near at hand, but can shew us no prospect at a distance : on all speculative subjects, it is exceedingly fallacious, but in none so frequently misleads us, as in our religious and political inquiries ;

inquiries ; because, in the former, we draw conclusions without premises ; and in the latter, upon false ones. Thus, for instance, reason tells us, that a Creator, infinitely powerful and good, could never permit any evil, natural or moral, to have a place in his works ; because his goodness must induce him, and his power enable him, to exclude them : this argument is unanswerable by any thing but experience, which every hour confutes it. Thus again, reason assures us, that sufferings, though they may be just punishments for past crimes, and a means to prevent them for the future, can never be compensations for them ; much less can the sufferings of one being atone for their guilt of another ; against this no objection can be urged, except the belief of mankind, in all ages and nations, and the express declarations of revelation ; which unanimously contradict it, and afford sufficient grounds for our concurrence. In these two instances we are deceived by misapplying our reason to subjects in which we have no premises to reason upon ; for, being totally ignorant on what plan the universal system is formed and supported, we can be no judges of what is good or evil with regard to the whole ; and, as we know not for what ends either guilt or sufferings were ever admitted, we must be unable to comprehend what connections between them may possibly be derived from those ends. In our political discussions, reason equally misleads

misleads us ; in these, she presents us with schemes of government, in which, by the most admirable contrivances, justice is so impartially administered, property so well guarded, and liberty so effectually secured, that in theory it seems impossible, that any people under such wise regulations can possibly fail of being happy, virtuous, and free ; but experiment soon convinces us, that they are inadequate to these salutary purposes ; and that, in practice, they are productive only of anarchy and confusion. Here our errors arise from reasoning on false premises, that is, from supposing that mankind will act on principles incompatible with the vices, the follies, and the passions of human nature. If reason, therefore, is so fallible a judge in the little and low concerns of human policy, with which she is daily conversant, how absurd is the Rationalist, who constitutes her sole arbiter in the discussions of the most sublime subjects, of which she has not the least comprehension, the attributes and dispensations of the Almighty, our relations to him, and our connections with past and future states of existence !

Of all men, who are called Christians, the Rationalist seems to have the least pretence to that denomination : the Church of England acknowledges the belief of all the doctrines of this institution in her articles, though in them they are ill explained, and worse expressed ; the Church of Rome as-  
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ients to them all, but adds many without sufficient authority; the Calvinist denies them not, but disgraces them by harsh, obscure, and absurd comments; the Quaker admits them, but is bewildered by enthusiastic notions of partial inspirations; and the Methodist subscribes to them all with the utmost veneration, but (inconsistently) depreciates the merit of moral duties, at the same time that he insists on the practice of the most rigid; but the Rationalist reprobates the whole, as impious, ridiculous, and contradictory to the justice of God, and the reason of man. Nor is he less adverse to the spirit, than to the letter of this religion: the true Christian is humble, teachable, and diffident; the Rationalist is assuming, obstinate, and self-sufficient: the Christian hopeth all things; feareth all things, and believeth all things, the Rationalist hopeth for nothing, but from his own merits, feareth nothing from his own depravity, and believeth nothing, the grounds of which he cannot perfectly understand. Why then must he be a Christian? no man is now compelled to come in, nor more obliged to be a Christian, than a Free-mason; the belief of it is not necessary to his advancement in life, nor his progress in any profession; we know that he may be a lawyer, a physician, or even a divine, without it. If, on an impartial enquiry, he is a religious and moral Deist, why not own it? Such were Socrates, Plato, and Cicero;

Cicero ; and it is still a character by no means disgraceful to a virtuous man. I blame no one for want of faith, but for want of sincerity ; not for being no Christian, but for pretending to be one, without believing. The professed Deist gives Christianity fair play ; if she cannot defend herself, let her fall ; but the rational Christian assassinate her in the dark : the first attacks Christ, as did the multitude, with swords and staves ; the latter, like Judas, betrays him with a kiss.

## DISQUISITION VII.

### ON GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL LIBERTY.

**I**F any one casts his eye on the title of this essay, short as it is, he will scarcely be persuaded to read any farther ; as he will rationally conclude, that, on a subject so hackneyed by the best and worst writers of all ages, from Aristotle to the newspaper politicians of the present times, nothing can be added, which can afford either instruction or entertainment : but so many absurd principles, concerning government and liberty, have of late been disseminated with unusual industry ; principles as false as mischievous, as inconsistent

consistent with common sense as with all human society ; that it seems necessary that they should not pass quite unnoticed, especially as they require nothing more, than to be fairly stated, to be refuted. The most considerable of them are the following ; to each of which I shall say a few words.

1st. That all men are born equal.

2dly. That all men are born free.

3dly. That all government is derived from the people.

4thly. That all government is a compact between the governors and the governed.

5thly. That no government ought to last any longer than it continues to be of equal advantage to the two contracting parties; that is, to the governed, as to the governors.

First then ; that all men are born equal ; by which proposition, if it is only meant, that all men are equally born, that is, that one man is as much born as another, I shall not dispute its truth : but in every other sense it is entirely false ; for we daily see, that some are born with beautiful and healthy bodies, and some with frames distorted, and filled with the most deplorable diseases ; some with minds fraught with the seeds of wisdom and genius, others with those of idiotism and madness ; some, by the laws and constitution of their countries, are born to the inheritance of affluent fortunes and

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distinguished honours, others to a life of poverty, labour, and obscurity. How these can be said to be born equal, I cannot comprehend. If by this proposition is to be understood, that, at the time of their birth, all men are possessed of an equal share of power, wealth, wisdom, learning, and virtue; when they are equally incapable of possessing any; this would be no less ridiculous, than to assert, that all men are born with teeth of the same length, when none of them are born with any teeth at all. But supposing they were all born equal; would this prove, what is always intended to be proved by it, that they ought always to continue so? or can any argument be drawn from thence, against their future inequality and subordination? must no man presume to be six feet high, because, perhaps, he was born of the same size as another, who is now but four? must no man assume power over another, because they were born equal, that is, because at their birth they were both incapable of exercising any power whatever? Thus, we see, this mighty argument, drawn from the supposed natural equality of mankind, by which all powers and principalities are threatened to be overthrown, is entirely false, and if true, is nothing to the purpose for which it has been so often and so pompously introduced.

Secondly; That all men are born free. This is so far from being true, that the first  
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infringement of this liberty is being born at all; which is imposed upon them, without their consent, given either by themselves or their representatives; and it may easily be shewn, that man, by the constitution of his nature, never subsists a free and independent being, from the first to the last moment of his residence on this terrestrial globe: where, during the first nine months of his existence, he is confined in a dark and sultry prison, debarred from light and air; till at length, by an Habeas Corpus brought by the hand of some kind deliverer, he is set at liberty: but what kind of liberty does he then enjoy? he is bound hand and foot, and fed upon bread and water, for as long a period; no sooner is he unbound, than he makes so bad a use of his liberty, that it becomes necessary that he should be placed in a state of the severest discipline, first under a nurse, and then a schoolmaster, both equal tyrants in their several departments; by whom he is again confined without law, condemned without a jury, and whipped without mercy. In this state of slavery he continues many years, and at the expiration of it, he is obliged to commence an involuntary subject of some civil government; to whose authority he must submit, however ingeniously he may dispute her right, or be justly hanged for disobedience to her laws. And this is the sum total of human liberty. Perhaps it may be said, that all this may be ingenious ridicule, but  
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cannot be intended for serious argument; to which I reply, that it is the most serious argument that can be offered, because it is derived from the works, and the will of our Creator; and evidently shews, that man was never designed by him to be an independent and self-governed being, but to be trained up in a state of subordination and government in the present life, to fit him for one more perfect in another: and, if it was not a reflection too serious, I should add, that, in the numerous catalogue of human vices, there is not one which so compleatly disqualifies him from being a member of that celestial community, as a factious and turbulent disposition, and an impatience of controul; which frequently assumes the honourable title of the love of liberty.

Thirdly; That all government is derived from the people. This is another fallacious proposition; which in one sense is true, but, with regard to the principles so often established upon it, entirely false. It is true, indeed, that all government is so far derived from the people, that there could be no government if there were no people to be governed: if there were no subjects there could be no kings, nor parliaments if there were no constituents, nor shepherds if there were no sheep; but the inference usually drawn from this proposition is utterly false, which is, that, because all government is derived from the people, the people have a right

right to resume it, and administer it themselves, whenever they please. But whatever claim they may have to this right, the exercise of it is impracticable, from the very nature of government; for all government must consist of the governors, and the governed; if the people at large are the governors, where shall we be able to find the governed? All government is power, with which some are intrusted, to controul the actions of others; but how is it possible that every man should have a power to controul the actions of every man? this would be a form of government which we have heard sometimes recommended as the most perfect, in which all are governed by all; that is, in other words, where there is no government at all. I agree with these pretended patriots, that the people in every country have a right to resist manifest grievances and oppressions, to change their governors, and even their constitutions, on great and extraordinary occasions; whenever they groan under the rod of tyranny, they have a right to shake it off, and form a constitution more productive of liberty; and, in like manner, if they find themselves torn by irreconcilable factions, and debilitated by internal contentions, they have an equal right to change it for a government more arbitrary and decisive. But we shall not agree so well in our definition of that important and misapplied term ‘the people;’ by which I would be understood to mean

mean the whole body of a nation, advised and directed by the most respectable members of it; who are possessed of rank, property, wisdom, and experience: But who are those in this country, whom our modern demagogues distinguish by this name, and vest with this supreme dominion? Not the hereditary peers of the realm; not the representatives of this very people in parliament assembled; not the pastors of the church, the sages of the law, or the magistrates who are guardians of the public safety; not the possessors of landed property, the opulent stockholder, or the wealthy merchant. These are all represented as tools of ministers, lovers of slavery, united in a conspiracy to destroy their country and ruin themselves: they point out to us no defenders of our liberties or properties, but those who have themselves neither; no public-spirit, but in the garrets of Grub-street; no reformation, but from the purlieu of St. Giles's; nor one Solon, or Lycurgus, but who is to emerge from the tin-mines of Cornwall, or the coal-pits of Newcastle. These are not the people whom I should chuse to trust with unlimited power, because I know they are totally incapable of employing it to any salutary purpose, even for themselves; and, whatever might be our grievances, redress from such hands would be much more intolerable.

Fourthly;



Fourthly; That all government is a compact between the governors and the governed. This imaginary compact is represented by some, as a formal agreement entered into by the two contracting parties, by which the latter gives up part of their natural independence, in exchange for protection granted by the former; without which voluntary surrender, no one man, or body of men, could have a right to controul the actions of another; and some have gone so far as to assert, that this surrender cannot be made binding by representation, that parents cannot consent to it for their children, or nations for individuals, but that every one must give his personal concurrence, and that on this alone the constitution of every government is or ought to be founded: but all this is a ridiculous fiction, intended only to subvert all government, and let mankind loose to prey upon each other; for, in fact, no such compact ever was proposed or agreed to, no such natural independence ever possessed, and consequently can never have been given up. We hear a great deal about the constitutions of different states, by which are understood some particular modes of government, settled at some particular times, which ought to be supported with religious veneration through all succeeding ages: in some of these, the people are supposed to have a right to greater degrees of liberty than in others, having made better bargains for themselves,

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and given up less of their natural independence: but this, and all conclusions drawn from these premises, must be false, because the facts on which they are founded are not true; for no such constitutions, established on general consent, are any where to be found; all which, we see, are the offsprings of force or fraud, of accident, and the circumstances of the times, and must perpetually change with those circumstances: in all of them, the people have an equal right to preserve or regain their liberty, whenever they are able. But the question is not, what right they have to liberty, but, what degree of it they are capable of enjoying, without accomplishing their own destruction. In some countries this is very small, and in none can it be very great, because the depravity of human nature will not permit it. Compact is repugnant to the very nature of government; whose essence is compulsion, and which originates always from necessity, and never from choice or compact; and it is the most egregious absurdity, to reason from the supposed rights of mankind in an imaginary state of nature, a state the most unnatural, because in such a state they never did or can subsist, or were ever designed for. The natural state of man is by no means a state of solitude and independence, but of society and subordination; all the effects of human art are parts of his nature, because the power of producing them is bestowed upon him by the

the author of it. It is as natural for men to build cities, as for birds to build nests; and to live under some kind of government, as for bees and ants; without which he can no more subsist than those social and industrious insects; nor has he either more right, or power, than they, to refuse his submission. But if every man was possessed of this natural independence, and had a right to surrender it on a bargain, he must have an equal right to retain it; then he has a right to chuse, whether he will purchase protection at the price of freedom, or whether he prefers liberty and plunder to safety and constraint: a large majority of mankind, who have neither property nor principles, would undoubtedly make choice of the latter, and all these might rob, and murder, and commit all manner of crimes with impunity; for, if this their claim to natural independence is well founded, they could not be justly amenable to any tribunal upon earth, and thus the world would soon become a scene of universal rapine and bloodshed. This shews into what absurdities we run, whenever we reason from speculative principles, without attending to practicability and experience: for the real truth is no more than this, every man, by the constitution of human nature, comes into the world under such a degree of authority and restraint as is necessary for the preservation and happiness of his species and himself; this is no more left

to his choice, than whether he will come into the world, or not; and this obligation he carries about with him, so long as he continues in it. Hence he is bound to submit to the laws and constitution of every country in which he resides, and is justly punishable for disobedience to them. To ask a man whether he chuses to be subject to any law or government, is to ask him, whether he chuses to be a man, or a wild beast, and wishes to be treated accordingly. So far are men from being possessed of this natural independence, on which so many systems of anarchy have been erected, that submission to authority is essential to humanity, and a principal condition on which it is bestowed: man is evidently made for society, and society cannot subsist without government, and therefore government is as much a part of human nature, as a hand, a heart, or a head; all these are frequently applied to the worst of purposes, and so is government; but it would be ridiculous from thence to argue, that we should live longer and happier without them. The Supreme Governor of the world has not determined who shall be his vicegerents, nor what forms of government shall be adopted; but he has unalterably decreed that there shall be some; and therefore, though no particular governors can lay claim to a divine right of ruling, yet government itself is of divine institution, as much  
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as eating, and for the same reason, because we cannot subsist without it.

Fifthly; That no government ought to subsist any longer than it continues to be of equal advantage to the governed as to the governors. If this proposition is adopted, and by advantage wealth and power are to be understood, there is an end of all government at once; for the greatest share of these must be possessed by the governors; because without it they could not govern: power and property always accompany each other, and power is government; these, therefore, must reside with those who govern; and, how often soever these may change hands, and the condition of individuals be altered, with regard to the community the case must eternally be the same: on this principle, therefore, the governed would have a perpetual right to resist, and every government ought to be dissolved at the moment of its commencement: on this principle, the lowest of the people, in every country, may at any time be incited to rebel, and their rebellion be justified; for, while they feel themselves oppressed with poverty, and condemned to labour, and behold their superiors enjoying all the pomps and luxuries of life, it will be easy to persuade them, that they receive greater benefits from government than themselves, and that, for that reason, they have a right to subvert it: this right they are always ready to assert, and will not

so easily be dissuaded from the attempt, by being told, what is certainly true, that they really receive as much benefit from government as those who govern; because, by that alone, they are every day prevented from tearing one another to pieces: but this argument will have but little weight, because they will never be convinced, that this is any benefit, and not rather an infringement of their natural rights.

In short, all these wild and extravagant principles are the production of ignorance, or ambition, invented and propagated either by those who are unacquainted with human nature, and human government, or those who endeavour to render it impracticable in the hands of others, that it may fall into their own; and all terminate in one absurd conclusion, which is, That government is an unjustifiable imposition, and violation of the rights of nature, and ought to be eradicated from the face of the earth. But, happily for the world, whenever men presume to reason against the course of nature, and the decrees of Providence, their arguments, however ingenious, have but little effect; for government there must be, so long as there are men, and the dispute will still continue to be, that only of who shall govern.

It is an old and a just observation, that the loudest advocates for liberty have always been the greatest tyrants whenever they have  
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got power into their hands; and this must necessarily be, because a love of liberty is an impatience of controul, and, when this impatience of controul is united with power, resistance is an infringement of their liberty who possess it, and is treated by them with severity, in proportion to their impatience of controul; and thus the same disposition, which in a subject constitutes a patriot, in a prince creates a tyrant. This shews, that an extraordinary zeal for liberty is nothing more than an extraordinary fondness for power, that is, a power to controul the actions of others, uncontrouled ourselves; and this love of liberty does not arise so much from our fears of being ill-governed as from our dislike of being governed at all. So true is this, that I am fully persuaded, that if an angel was sent from heaven, vested with irresistible power, to govern any country upon earth, and was to execute his commission with the utmost degree of wisdom, justice, and benevolence, his dominions would very soon be deserted by most of the inhabitants; who would rather chuse to suffer mutual injuries and oppressions, however grievous, under any government in which they themselves had a share, than to be compelled to be virtuous and happy by any superior authority whatever.

The usual fallacy of which democratic writers avail themselves, is this—they constantly charge all the numerous evils inherent in all human governments to the account

count of the governors ; which for the most part are imputable with more propriety to the governed : it is owing to their vices that there is any such thing as government, or any occasion for it ; and consequently all its attendant evils must be derived from the same source. It is their crimes, which require punishment, and their venality which makes corruption necessary ; war, with all its horrors, springs from their depravity, the violence of faction, the avarice of commerce, the ambition of the rich, and the profligacy and idleness of the poor : princes are made tyrants by the perverseness and disobedience of their subjects, and subjects become slaves from their incapacity to enjoy liberty. Every governor is in the situation of a gaoler, whose very office arises from the criminality of those over whom he presides ; these sometimes suffer much from the abuse of his power ; but they would suffer more from their mutual ill-usage, if unrestrained by his superintendant authority. A vicious and corrupt people can never be free, because they are obliged to take shelter under despotism, which alone can defend them from the oppressions and injuries which they would every hour inflict upon each other ; and a virtuous people will never be slaves, because they stand in need of no such defence.

We cannot fall into a more common, or more pernicious error, than to imagine, that, because liberty is our supreme blessing, we, for



for that reason, can never have too much: if this was true, government would indeed be a grievance, and ought every where to be abolished; but the blessings of liberty, like all others bestowed upon mankind, are circumscribed within certain bounds, and become misfortunes by excess: dominion is not allotted to the few, for their own, but for the benefit of the many over whom they rule, and no greater degree of power should ever be trusted in the hands of man, than is requisite for that end; but to so much every community must submit for its own preservation; and this is the only standard by which a just proportion of liberty can be ascertained. Every nation is by no means happy in proportion to the degree of freedom which it enjoys, but, as that degree is adapted to the circumstances and the dispositions of the people; and with them must frequently change. The same degree of power, which happily governs a small, industrious, virtuous, and frugal state, is totally unable to restrain the avarice, ambition, and faction of an extensive, rich, and luxurious empire; as the still and crystal lake is quietly bounded by the flowery banks which surround it; whilst the turbulent and tempestuous ocean can be confined only by tremendous rocks and aspiring mountains. The greatest degree of liberty, which any people can enjoy, is, to be governed by equitable and impartial laws; but these cannot

not be administered, but either by their voluntary submission, or by superior force; if the first is refused, the latter must be exerted, and then liberty subsists no more: and hence it is evident, that those who will not be contented with the greatest degree of this invaluable blessing, must quickly find themselves deprived of the least; and that every people, who, from false and impracticable notions of liberty, refuse to submit to any government of their own, must very soon, from the constitution of human nature, be obliged to receive it under the yoke of some foreign power, which is wiser, and therefore stronger than themselves.

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## DISQUISITION VIII.

### ON RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENTS.

**T**HE zealous advocates for religious liberty, frequently attack us with this triumphant question, What has government to do with men's religion? To which I answer, Nothing; provided men's religion had nothing to do with government: but our religious and political opinions and interests are so intimately connected, and so blended together, that it is impossible to divide them. Were religious

gious controversies relative to speculative doctrines only, government would have neither right or inclination to interfere in them; but such are by no means the objects of contention: these doctrines, believed by few, and understood by fewer, are nothing more than the signals of parties struggling for superiority, not for truth; for, as in civil contests men persecute each other for wearing ribands of different colours, so do they in religions, for professing different opinions; not that they have any objections to the ribands, or the opinions, but because both are the marks by which those are distinguished who are adverse to their pursuits. Protestants never institute severe penal laws against Papists because they believe transubstantiation, (for why should they not believe it, if they can?) but, because the profession of that doctrine is the test, by which those are known to be members of a church which would infringe their liberties, and devour a great part of their property; on the other hand, the Church of Rome does not prosecute Protestants because they cannot assent to this doctrine, but, because the disavowal of it is the signal that they are desirous to pull down that fabric of wealth and power, which they have erected for themselves, and are unwilling to part with: opinions are held forth as marks of distinction, but ambition and interest are the real causes of the dispute.

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It will perhaps be said, that, notwithstanding this may be true, there are many, very many pious and honest persons, who, on the strictest examination, and clearest conviction, have adopted opinions on religious subjects, of which they are laudably tenacious, and cannot relinquish without violating both their reason and their conscience; and that of these, for which they are accountable to God alone, no government can have a right to take cognizance, much less to controul. To all this I readily agree, so long as they continue to be opinions only: but whenever they shoot up into actions, which is their natural process, they then come within the line of human jurisdiction, and government is obliged to take notice of them, not from choice, but from necessity and self-preservation: for every religious sect holds principles more or less productive of arbitrary power, liberty, or anarchy, which must necessarily affect the civil constitutions under which they are professed; as they are the most dangerous, as well as the most common combustibles, which knavery employs to set folly and ignorance in a flame, whenever it may be subservient to her interest. All religious sects, however they may differ in other points, agree in one, which is the pursuit of power, and this by the same progressive steps—by first imploring toleration, next claiming equality, and then struggling for superiority over all the rest. Govern-  
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ment cannot remain an unconcerned spectator of these contentions, in which her own existence is at stake, but must stretch out a pacific hand to compose them: this she can effect by no other method, than by taking one, which she most approves, under her protection, maintaining its ministers, and forming her public worship agreeably to its doctrines; that is, in other words, by an establishment: and thus we see, that some religious establishment must necessarily make a part of every national constitution; which necessity proceeds not from any natural connection between religion and government, but, because the artifice, ignorance, and superstition of mankind never fails to unite them: and hence, I apprehend, arises that alliance between church and state, which has been so much discussed, and so little understood.

The establishment of one religion ought always to be accompanied by an unlimited toleration of all others, on the principles of both justice and policy; of justice, because, although every government has a right to bestow her protection and emoluments on any mode of religion which she most approves, she can have no right to enforce the belief or exercise of that, or to prohibit the profession of any other, by compulsive penalties; of policy, because such a toleration is the most effectual means of putting an end to all religious dissensions, which springing,  
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for the most part, from a love of singularity and contradiction, thrive under persecution, and, when they cease to be opposed, they cease to exist.

If some establishment is thus necessary, so must be some tests, or subscriptions, by which the friends of this establishment may be distinguished, and the principles of those who are admitted into it ascertained ; without which it would be no establishment at all : but every wise government will take care to make these as comprehensive as the nature of their institutions will admit, in order to lessen the number of her enemies ; for most assuredly such will all be who are excluded. Whoever are enemies to the religious constitution of any country, whatever they may pretend, can never be friends to its civil ; for it is impossible that an honest man, who believes his own religious profession to be true, and most acceptable to his Creator, should ever be cordially attached to a constitution which discourages the exercise of it, and patronizes another, which appears to him to be false and impious. Extend this comprehension as widely as possible, it will exclude many pious and worthy persons, who are tenacious of different principles ; and narrow it to any degree, it will still admit all those who have none : nor is it inexpedient that they should be admitted ; for every state has a right to avail itself of their assistance, who, though they are not so good  
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men, may be better subjects ; as these may be induced by interest to support the constitution of their country, while those are compelled by principle to subvert it.

Those who will not conform to any Christian establishment, give these reasons for their dissent;—that the religion so established is imperfect, corrupted, and dissimilar to the genuine purity of that holy institution; and that they are in duty bound to reject such a religion, and to search for another, which appears to them to be more perfect and pure. The first of these reasons is unhappily true, but no apology for their conduct; the latter, entirely a mistake, and therefore ought not to be regarded.

First then, the charge of imperfection and corruption may be made good against any established religion that ever existed. It must be liable to many imperfections from its own nature, and the nature of man; in its original institution, it must lean to the errors and prejudices of the times; and, how much soever it is then approved, it cannot long preserve that approbation, because, human science being continually fluctuating, mankind grow more or less knowing in every generation, and consequently must change their opinions on religious, as well as on all other subjects; so that, however wisely any established system may be formed at first, it must, from the natural increase or decrease of human knowledge, be found or thought

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to be erroneous in the course of a few years : and yet the change of national religions cannot keep pace with the alterations of national opinions, because such frequent reviews and reformati<sup>o</sup>ns would totally unhinge men's principles, and subvert the foundations of all religion and morality whatever. It must likewise be corrupted by the very establishment which protects it, because by that it will be mixed with the worldly pursuits of its degenerate votaries ; and it must be extremely dissimilar to its original purity, or it would be incapable of being established ; for pure and genuine Christianity never was, nor ever can be the national religion of any country upon earth. It is a gold too refined to be worked up with any human institution, without a large portion of alloy ; for, no sooner is this small grain of mustard-seed watered with the fertile flowers of civil emoluments, than it grows up into a large and spreading tree, under the shelter of whose branches the birds of prey and plunder will not fail to make for themselves comfortable habitations, and thence deface its beauty, and destroy its fruits.

These imputations on religious establishments are certainly just, but no reasons for dissensions, because the inference which makes the latter proposition is entirely a mistake ; for no man can be bound in duty to desert a national religion, on account of defects congenial to its nature, nor to search  
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for perfection, which is no where to be found. Some religious establishment is absolutely necessary to the existence of every state; but it is not necessary that this should be perfect, and free from all errors and corruption, nor even that it should be so esteemed by those who conform to it: it is sufficiently perfect for this purpose, if it contains nothing repugnant to the principles of sound morality, and the doctrines of Christ. The mass of the people in every country, being incapable of making any accurate enquiry into religious subjects, must have a religion ready made, or none at all; and in this, those of superior abilities may conscientiously join, without impeding their further researches into the dispensations of Providence, and the duties of man. Great and numerous must be the inconveniencies of any religious establishment in the hands of men; but what would be the condition of any nation in which there was none? No uniform mode of public worship could there be adopted; no edifices built or repaired for the celebration of it, nor ministers maintained to perform it, except at the will of an ignorant and discordant multitude, the majority of whom would chuse rather to have neither worship, churches, or ministers, than to incur the expences which must attend them. Every man, who had any sense of religion, would make one for himself; from whence innumerable sects would spring up, each of  
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which would chuse a minister for themselves; who, being dependent for subsistence on the voluntary and precarious liberality of his congregation, must indulge their humours, submit to their passions, participate of their vices, and learn of them what doctrines they would chuse to be taught; and consequently none but the most ignorant and illiterate would undertake so mean and beggarly an employment. A people thus left to the dominion of their own imaginations and passions, and the instructions of such teachers, would split into as many sects and parties, divisions and subdivisions, as knavery and folly, artifice, absurdity, and enthusiasm, can produce; each of which would be attacked with violence, and supported with obstinacy by all the rest. This evidently demonstrates, that some religious establishment must be annexed to every civil government; the members of which are so far from being bound in duty to desert it, because it falls short of their ideas of purity and perfection, that they are obliged by all the ties of benevolence and society to conform to and support it, unless it requires any concessions positively criminal.

Should it still be insisted on, that every man is obliged to profess and exercise that religion which appears to him most consonant to reason, and most acceptable to God, with which no government can have a right to meddle, or power to controul; in answer

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I shall only say, that all this is undoubtedly a mistake, which arises from applying propositions to men, as members of national communities, which are applicable to them only as individuals. Mankind, so long as they reside on this terrestrial globe, ought always to be considered in a two-fold capacity; as individuals, and as members of society; that is, as men, and as citizens: in which different situations, so different are their relations and duties, that there is scarce a proposition which we can affirm of them with truth in one, which is not false if applied to them in the other. It is by this misapplication that the zealous advocates for unbounded liberty, civil and religious, deceive their followers, and sometimes themselves, and draw conclusions equally destructive of all government and religion. Thus, for instance, they assert that all men are by nature free, equal, and independent: this, when applied to men as a general species, is true; they then apply this assertion to men who are members of civil communities, to whom subordination is necessary, and obedience to their superiors an indispensable duty, and therefore in regard to whom it is absolutely false; and yet from hence they endeavour to prove, that government is an infringement of the natural rights of mankind. In like manner they affirm, that every man is obliged to make choice of that religion, and to adhere to that mode of worship, which appear to

his judgment to be the purest, and most acceptable to his Creator: this proposition, likewise, with regard to men considered as individuals, is true; but this again they apply to members of national communities, and established churches: with regard to whom it is not true; for, as such, they are bound in duty to profess that religion, and practise that mode of worship, which the laws of that community enjoin, provided they find nothing in them positively evil: yet from hence they would persuade us, that every individual has a right to desert, or even to oppose, the established religion of his country, whenever he finds, or fancies he can find, a better. Thus are their unwary admirers deceived: the truth of these propositions they cannot deny, and have not perhaps sagacity sufficient to discover their misapplication.

It is remarkable, that Christianity constantly addresses us as men, never as citizens; the only duty it requires of us under that character, is submission to power in general, but prescribes no rules for our political conduct: all those divine precepts of patience, meekness, long-suffering, non-resistance of evil, contempt of the world, and indifference to the things of it, are given us as individuals, but not as members of national communities: because in that character they would have been impracticable: for no state can administer her internal policy, and much less

less regulate her conduct with regard to foreign powers, in conformity to these commands; because the imperfections, the passions, and the vices of mankind will not permit it. Any one as an individual may pay obedience to them; to those who have little to do with the busy occupations of the world, it is an easy and a pleasing task; for those who are deeply and earnestly engaged in the most innocent of them, it is extremely difficult, but for those who are employed in the great concerns of political communities, in carrying on war, negotiating peace, and managing the intrigues of contending factions, it is absolutely impracticable. This I take to be the cause of those frequent declarations from the Author of this religion, that neither himself nor his doctrines are of this world; but adverse to all its pursuits: and this perhaps may be the reason of that assertion, that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God; because, rich men being usually most engaged in these pursuits, most attached to the world, and most involved in the business of it, the extreme difficulty of their admission is thus forcibly expressed: or, if by a rich man, is here meant a great man, that is, a conqueror, a hero, or a statesman, this declaration may perhaps be literally true; and that it should in this place be so understood, seems no improbable conjecture, as a rich man, and a great

man, in most languages are synonymous terms. The first Christians saw their religion in this light, and refused to have any concern with government, unless to obey it; they inquired not into the rights of those who ruled, nor their own to liberty, and wished for nothing, but to pass through this life unincumbered with its business, and well prepared for a better: so long as they were a small sect, dissenting from the religions of the countries in which they lived, this inoffensive conduct was easily preserved; but, when princes and nobles adopted their religion, and by such illustrious examples it became almost universal, these principles of inactivity were no longer tenable, without the total dissolution of all government; for, if no man would govern, there could be none: necessity therefore obliged them to take a part; a part soon awakened ambition, and love of power, those passions so natural to the human heart, and induced them to seize the whole; Christianity was established, in consequence corrupted, and little more of it remained, except the name.

To this opinion of the incompatibility of Christianity with the occupations and customs of the world, were all those numerous monastic institutions, which every where accompanied its progress, indebted for their origin; institutions certainly favourable to the genuine spirit of that religion, but, like the religion itself, so adverse to the nature of man,

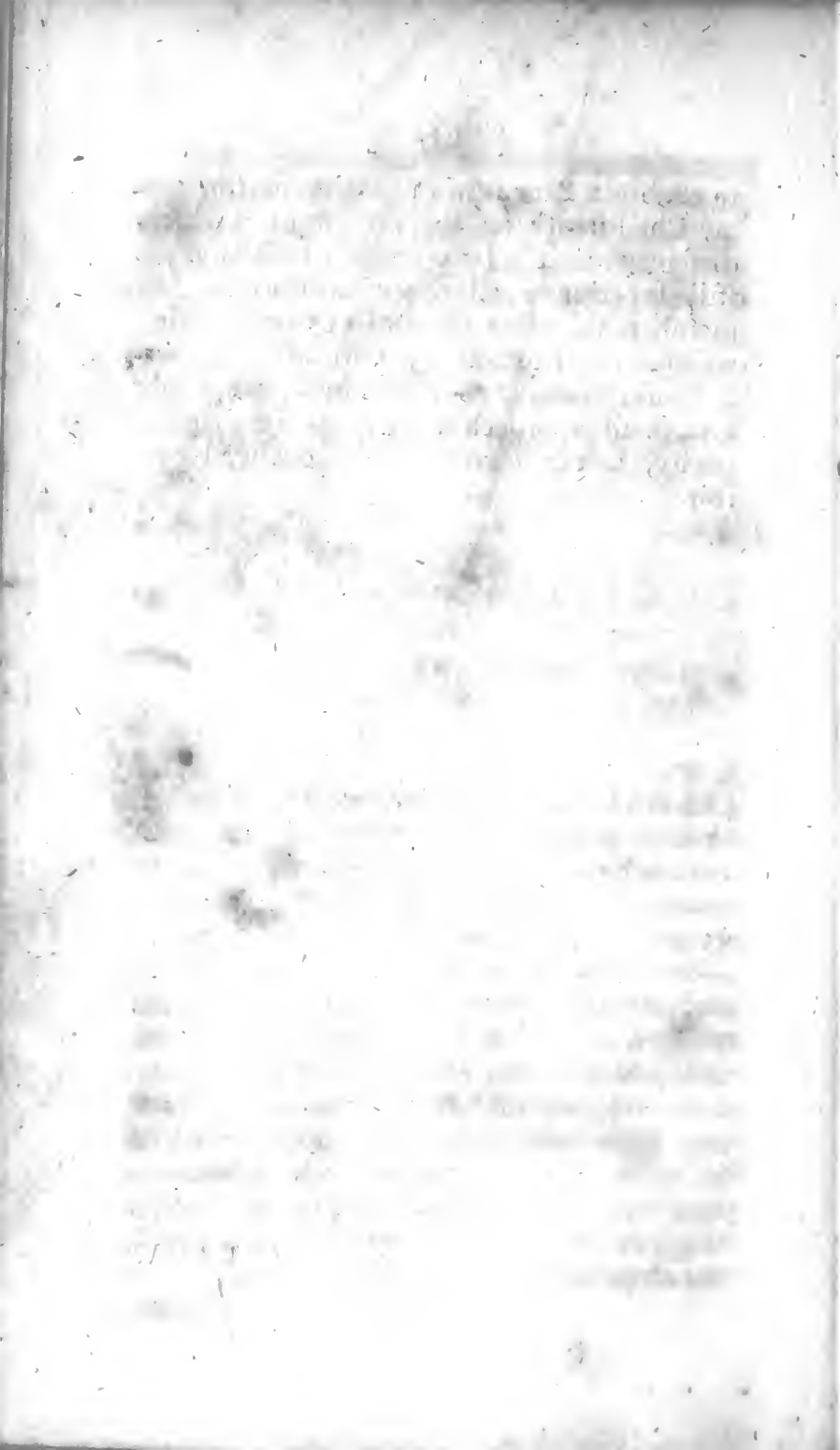
man, that they can never be made fit for general use: could they have been confined to those few, who are capable of employing solitude in devotion and religious contemplation, they would undoubtedly have been conducive to the practice of every Christian virtue; but, as all were indiscriminately admitted, who pretended to sanctity, or who mistook enthusiasm for piety, and a quarrel with the world for the love of God, they could not fail very soon to become nothing better than retreats for laziness, and seminaries of superstition and vice: yet, notwithstanding all their abuses, I am inclined to think there are still within their walls some few instances of patience and resignation, devotion and charity, carried to a higher degree of perfection than they are or can be in any other situation, in which the fashions, the pleasures, and business of life, and the corruptions of national establishments, must more or less obstruct their progress; where our virtue must be endangered by continual temptations, our meditations diverted from celestial objects by wordly pursuits; our devotions interrupted by amusements and impertinence; and that serene cheerfulness and happy complacency, so essential to the Christian profession, must frequently be disturbed by injuries and disappointments. The voluntary hardships which many of these recluses imposed upon themselves, were probably derived from a mistaken notion, that  
suffering

suffering was an essential part of their religion; a notion which they had perhaps contracted from that constant connection between them, which they had so long observed and felt during their persecutions, and were not able suddenly to abandon, in happier and more indulgent times.

But why then establish a religion, which is so improper for the purpose? Because it is less improper than any other. The establishment of some religion is necessary to the existence of every state, and it is as necessary that this should be, or be thought, a revelation from God. Mere Deism never was, or can be, the established religion of any country; for, as all its principles must be derived from the reason of some, they will be always controverted by the reason of others, and can therefore never obtain a general acquiescence. The philosopher, by learned investigations, and the force of his own understanding, may be convinced of the great truths of natural religion; but, without the sanction of supernatural authority, he will never be able to convince others, who will neither believe his doctrines, or obey his precepts. If Christianity, therefore, is not adopted, some fabulous system must supply its place; and, if some established religion there must be, it is surely more eligible to make a true than a fictitious revelation the basis of it. Nor will any one, I suppose, assert, that it would be preferable  
to



to establish Paganism or Mahometism, and lay Christianity by for private use; which, disfigured as it is by worldly connections, is still superior to all other institutions. As members therefore of political communities, we are bound to accept it with all its imperfections; though, as individuals, we ought always to approach as near to its original purity, as our own imperfections will permit.



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A  
V I E W  
OF THE  
INTERNAL EVIDENCE  
OF THE  
CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

*Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.*

Acts xxvi. 28.

**M**OST of the writers, who have undertaken to prove the divine origin of the Christian Religion, have had recourse to arguments drawn from these three heads: the prophecies still extant in the Old Testament—the miracles recorded in the New—or, the internal evidence arising from that excellence, and those clear marks of supernatural interposition, which are so conspicuous in the religion itself. The two former have been sufficiently explained and enforced by the ablest pens; but the last, which seems to carry with it the greatest degree of conviction, has never, I think, been considered with that attention, which it deserves.

I mean

I mean not here to depreciate the proofs arising from either prophecies, or miracles: they both have, or ought to have, their proper weight; prophecies are permanent miracles, whose authority is sufficiently confirmed by their completion, and are therefore solid proofs of the supernatural origin of a religion, whose truth they were intended to testify; such are those to be found in various parts of the scriptures relative to the coming of the Messiah, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the unexampled state in which the Jews have ever since continued, all so circumstantially descriptive of the events, that they seem rather histories of past, than predictions of future transactions; and whoever will seriously consider the immense distance of time between some of them and the events which they foretell, the uninterrupted chain by which they are connected for many thousand years, how exactly they correspond with those events, and how totally unapplicable they are to all others in the history of mankind; I say, whoever considers these circumstances, he will scarcely be persuaded to believe that they can be the productions of preceding artifice, or posterior application, or can entertain the least doubt of their being derived from supernatural inspiration.

The miracles recorded in the New Testament to have been performed by Christ and his Apostles, were certainly convincing proofs

proofs of their divine commission to those who saw them; and as they were seen by such numbers, and are as well attested, as other historical facts, and above all, as they were wrought on so great and so wonderful an occasion, they must still be admitted as evidence of no inconsiderable force; but, I think, they must now depend for much of their credibility on the truth of that religion, whose credibility they were at first intended to support. To prove therefore the truth of the Christian Religion, we should begin by shewing the internal marks of divinity, which are stamped upon it; because on this the credibility of the prophecies and miracles in a great measure depends; for if we have once reason to be convinced, that this religion is derived from a supernatural origin, prophecies and miracles will become so far from being incredible, that it will be highly probable, that a supernatural revelation should be foretold, and enforced by supernatural means.

What pure Christianity is, divested of all its ornaments, appendages, and corruption, I pretend not to say; but what it is not, I will venture to affirm, which is, that it is not the offspring of fraud or fiction: such, on a superficial view, I know it must appear to every man of good sense, whose sense has been altogether employed on other subjects; but if any one will give himself the trouble to examine it with accuracy and candor, he  
will

will plainly see, that however fraud and fiction may have grown up with it, yet it never could have been grafted on the same stock, nor planted by the same hand.

To ascertain the true system, and genuine doctrines of this religion, after the undecided controversies of above seventeen centuries, and to remove all the rubbish, which artifice and ignorance have been heaping upon it during all that time, would indeed be an arduous task, which I shall by no means undertake; but to shew, that it cannot possibly be derived from human wisdom, or human imposture, is a work, I think, attended with no great difficulty, and requiring no extraordinary abilities, and therefore I shall attempt that, and that alone, by stating, and then explaining the following plain and undeniable propositions.

First, That there is now extant a book intitled the New Testament.

Secondly, That from this book may be extracted a system of religion intirely new, both with regard to the object and the doctrines, not only infinitely superior to, but unlike every thing, which had ever before entered into the mind of man.

Thirdly, That from this book may likewise be collected a system of ethics, in which every moral precept founded on reason is carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection, than in any other of the wisest philosophers of preceding ages; every moral precept founded on false principles is totally omitted,

omitted, and many new precepts added peculiarly corresponding with the new object of this religion.

Lastly, That such a system of religion and morality could not possibly have been the work of any man, or set of men ; much less of those obscure, ignorant, and illiterate persons, who actually did discover, and publish it to the world : and that therefore it must undoubtedly have been effected by the interposition of divine power, that is, that it must derive its origin from God.

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### PROPOSITION I.

**V**ERY little need be said to establish my first proposition, which is singly this : That there is now extant a book intitled the New Testament ; that is, there is a collection of writings distinguished by that denomination, containing four historical accounts of the birth, life, actions, discourses, and death of an extraordinary person named Jesus Christ, who was born in the reign of Augustus Cæsar, preached a new religion throughout the country of Judea, and was put to a cruel and ignominious death in the reign of Tiberius. Also one other historical account of the travels, transactions, and orations of some mean and illiterate men, known by the title of his Apostles, whom he commissioned to propagate

gate his religion after his death; which he foretold them he must suffer in confirmation of its truth. To these are added several epistolary writings, addressed by these persons to their fellow-labourers in this work, or to the several churches or societies of Christians, which they had established in the several cities through which they had passed.

It would not be difficult to prove, that these books were written soon after those extraordinary events, which are the subjects of them; as we find them quoted, and referred to by an uninterrupted succession of writers from those to the present times: nor would it be less easy to shew, that the truth of all those events, miracles only excepted, can no more be reasonably questioned, than the truth of any other facts recorded in any history whatever: as there can be no more reason to doubt, that there existed such a person as Jesus Christ, speaking, acting, and suffering in such a manner as is there described, than that there were such men as Tiberius, Herod, or Pontius Pilate, his contemporaries; or to suspect, that Peter, Paul, and James were not the authors of those epistles, to which their names are affixed, than that Cicero and Pliny did not write those which are ascribed to them. It might also be made appear, that these books having been wrote by various persons, at different times, and in distant places, could not possibly have been the work of a single impostor, nor of a fraudulent combination, being



ing all stamped with the same marks of an uniform originality in their very frame and composition.

But all these circumstances I shall pass over unobserved, as they do not fall in with the course of my argument, nor are necessary for the support of it. Whether these books were wrote by the authors whose names are prefixed to them, whether they have been enlarged, diminished, or any way corrupted by the artifice or ignorance of translators or transcribers; whether in the historical parts the writers were instructed by a perpetual, a partial, or by any inspiration at all; whether in the religious and moral parts, they received their doctrines from a divine influence, or from the instructions and conversation of their master; whether in their facts or sentiments there is always the most exact agreement, or whether in both they sometimes differ from each other; whether they are in any case mistaken, or always infallible; or even pretended to be so, I shall not here dispute: let the Deist avail himself of all these doubts and difficulties, and decide them in conformity to his own opinions, I shall not contend, because they affect not my argument: all that I assert is a plain fact, which cannot be denied, that such writings do now exist.

## P R O P O S I T I O N II.

**M**Y second proposition is not quite so simple, but, I think, not less undeniable than the former, and is this: That from this book may be extracted a system of religion entirely new, both with regard to the object, and the doctrines, not only infinitely superior to, but totally unlike every thing, which had ever before entered into the mind of man: I say extracted, because all the doctrines of this religion having been delivered at various times, and on various occasions, and here only historically recorded, no uniform or regular system of theology is here to be found; and better perhaps it had been, if less labour had been employed by the learned, to bend and twist these divine materials into the polished forms of human systems, to which they never will submit, and for which they were never intended by their great author. Why he chose not to leave any such behind him we know not, but it might possibly be, because he knew, that the imperfection of man was incapable of receiving such a system, and that we are more properly and more safely conducted by the distant and scattered rays, than by the too powerful sunshine of divine illumination: “If I have told you earthly things,” says he, “and ye believe not, how shall ye believe  
“ if

“ if I tell you of heavenly things \*?” that is, If my instructions concerning your behaviour in the present, as relative to a future life, are so difficult to be understood, that you can scarcely believe me, how shall you believe, if I endeavour to explain to you the nature of celestial beings, the designs of Providence, and the mysteries of his dispensations; subjects which you have neither ideas to comprehend, nor language to express?

First then, the object of this religion is entirely new, and is this; to prepare us by a state of probation for the kingdom of heaven. This is every where professed by Christ and his apostles to be the chief end of the Christian's life; the crown for which he is to contend, the goal to which he is to run, the harvest which is to pay him for all his labours: Yet previous to their preaching no such prize was ever hung out to mankind, nor any means prescribed for the attainment of it.

It is indeed true, that some of the philosophers of antiquity entertained notions of a future state, but mixed with much doubt and uncertainty: their legislators also endeavoured to infuse into the minds of the people a belief of rewards and punishments after death; but by this they only intended to give a sanction to their laws, and to enforce the practice of virtue for the benefit of man-

\* John iii. 12.

kind in the present life : this alone seems to have been their end, and a meritorious end it was : but Christianity not only operates more effectually to this end, but has a nobler design in view, which is, by a proper education here to render us fit members of a celestial society hereafter. In all former religions the good of the present life was the first object ; in the Christian it is but the second ; in those, men were incited to promote that good by the hopes of a future reward ; in this, the practice of virtue is enjoined in order to qualify them for that reward. There is great difference, I apprehend, in these two plans, that is, in adhering to virtue from its present utility in expectation of future happiness, and living in such a manner as to qualify us for the acceptance and enjoyment of that happiness ; and the conduct and dispositions of those, who act on these different principles, must be no less different : on the first, the constant practice of justice, temperance, and sobriety, will be sufficient ; but on the latter, we must add to these an habitual piety, faith, resignation, and contempt of the world : the first may make us very good citizens, but will never produce a tolerable Christian. Hence it is that Christianity insists more strongly, than any preceding institution religious or moral, on purity of heart and a benevolent disposition ; because these are absolutely necessary to its great end ; but in those whose recommenda-

tions

tions of virtue regard the present life only, and whose promised rewards in another were low and sensual, no preparatory qualifications were requisite to enable men to practise the one, or to enjoy the other : and therefore we see this object is peculiar to this religion ; and with it was entirely new.

But although this object, and the principle on which it is founded were new, and perhaps undiscoverable by reason, yet when discovered they are so consonant to it, that we cannot but readily assent to them. For the truth of this principle, that the present life is a state of probation, and education to prepare us for another, is confirmed by every thing which we see around us : it is the only key which can open to us the designs of Providence in the œconomy of human affairs, the only clue which can guide us through that pathless wilderness, and the only plan on which this world could possibly have been formed, or on which the history of it can be comprehended or explained. It could never have been formed on a plan of happiness : because it is every where overspread with innumerable miseries ; nor of misery, because it is interspersed with many enjoyments : it could not have been constituted for a scene of wisdom and virtue, because the history of mankind is little more than a detail of their follies and wickedness : nor of vice, because that is no plan at all, being destructive of all existence, and con-

frequently of its own. But on this system all that we here meet with may be easily accounted for; for this mixture of happiness and misery, of virtue and vice, necessarily results from a state of probation and education; as probation implies trials, sufferings, and a capacity of offending, and education a propriety of chastisement for those offences.

In the next place, the doctrines of this religion are equally new with the object; and contain ideas of God and of man, of the present and of a future life; and of the relations which all these bear to each other, totally unheard of, and quite dissimilar from any which had ever been thought on, previous to its publication. No other ever drew so just a portrait of the worthlessness of this world, and all its pursuits, nor exhibited such distinct, lively, and exquisite pictures of the joys of another; of the resurrection of the dead, the last judgment, and the triumphs of the righteous in that tremendous day, “when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality\*.” No other has ever represented the Supreme Being in the character of three persons united in one God†.

\* 1 Cor. xv. 53.

† That there subsists some such union in the divine nature, the whole tenour of the New Testament seems to express, and it was so understood in the earliest ages: but whether this union does, or does not imply equality, or whether it subsists in general, or only in particular circumstances, we are not informed; and therefore on these questions it is not only unnecessary, but improper for us to decide.

No other has attempted to reconcile those seeming contradictory but both true propositions, the contingency of future events, and the foreknowledge of God, or the free will of the creature with the over-ruling grace of the Creator : no other has so fully declared the necessity of wickedness and punishment, yet so effectually instructed individuals, to resist the one, and to escape the other : no other has ever pretended to give any account of the depravity of man, or to point out any remedy for it : no other has ventured to declare the unpardonable nature of sin without the influence of a mediatorial interposition, and a vicarious atonement from the sufferings of a superior being\*. Whether these wonderful doctrines are worthy of our belief must depend on the opinion, which we entertain of the authority of those, who published them to the world ; but certain it is, that they are all so far removed from every tract of the human imagination, that it seems equally impossible, that they should ever have been derived from the knowledge or the artifice of man.

\* That Christ suffered and died as an atonement for the sins of mankind, is a doctrine so constantly and so strongly enforced through every part of the New Testament, that whoever will seriously peruse those writings, and deny that it is there, may, with as much reason and truth, after reading the works of Thucydides and Livy, assert, that in them no mention is made of any facts relative to the histories of Greece and Rome.

Some indeed there are, who, by perverting the established signification of words, (which they call explaining) have ventured to expunge all these doctrines out of the scriptures, for no other reason than that they are not able to comprehend them; and argue thus:—The scriptures are the word of God; in his word no propositions contradictory to reason can have a place; these propositions are contradictory to reason, and therefore they are not there. But if these bold assertors would claim any regard, they should revise their argument, and say—These doctrines make a part, and a material part of the scriptures, they are contradictory to reason; no propositions contradictory to reason can be a part of the word of God, and therefore neither the scriptures, nor the pretended revelation contained in them, can be derived from him: This would be an argument worthy of rational and candid Deists, and demand a respectful attention; but when men pretend to disprove facts by reasoning, they have no right to expect an answer.

And here I cannot omit observing, that the personal character of the author of this religion is no less new, and extraordinary, than the religion itself, who “spake as never man spake\*,” and lived as never man lived: in proof of this, I do not mean to al-

\* John vii. 46.



ledge, that he was born of a virgin, that he fasted forty days, that he performed a variety of miracles, and after being buried three days, that he arose from the dead; because these accounts will have but little effect on the minds of unbelievers, who, if they believe not the religion, will give no credit to the relation of these facts; but I will prove it from facts which cannot be disputed; for instance, he is the only founder of a religion in the history of mankind, which is totally unconnected with all human policy and government, and therefore totally uncondusive to any worldly purpose whatever: all others, Mahomet, Numa, and even Moses himself, blended their religious institutions with their civil, and by them obtained dominion over their respective people; but Christ neither aimed at, nor would accept of, any such power; he rejected every object, which all other men pursue, and made choice of all those which others fly from, and are afraid of: he refused power, riches, honours, and pleasure, and courted poverty, ignominy, tortures, and death. Many have been the enthusiasts and impostors, who have endeavoured to impose on the world pretended revelations, and some of them from pride, obstinacy, or principle, have gone so far, as to lay down their lives, rather than retract; but I defy history to shew one, who ever made his own sufferings and death a necessary part of his original plan, and essential to  
his

his mission; this Christ actually did, he foresaw, foretold, declared, their necessity, and voluntarily endured them. If we seriously contemplate the divine lessons, the perfect precepts, the beautiful discourses, and the consistent conduct of this wonderful person, we cannot possibly imagine, that he could have been either an idiot or a madman; and yet, if he was not what he pretended to be, he can be considered in no other light; and even under this character he would deserve some attention, because of so sublime and rational an insanity there is no other instance in the history of mankind.

If any one can doubt of the superior excellence of this religion above all which preceded it, let him but peruse with attention those unparalleled writings in which it is transmitted to the present times, and compare them with the most celebrated productions of the Pagan world; and if he is not sensible of their superior beauty, simplicity, and originality, I will venture to pronounce, that he is as deficient in taste as in faith, and that he is as bad a critic as a Christian: for in what school of ancient philosophy can he find a lesson of morality so perfect as Christ's sermon on the mount? From which of them can he collect an address to the Deity so concise, and yet so comprehensive, so expressive of all that we want, and all that we could deprecate, as that short prayer, which he formed for, and recommended to, his disciples?

ples? From the works of what sage of antiquity can he produce so pathetic a recommendation of benevolence to the distressed, and enforced by such assurances of a reward, as in those words of Christ? “Come, ye  
 “blessed of my Father! inherit the kingdom  
 “prepared for you from the foundation of  
 “the world: for I was an hungred, and ye  
 “gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave  
 “me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took  
 “me in; I was naked, and ye clothed me;  
 “I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in  
 “prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall  
 “the righteous answer him, saying—Lord,  
 “when saw we thee an hungred, and fed  
 “thee, or thirsty, and gave thee drink? when  
 “saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in,  
 “or naked, and clothed thee? or when saw  
 “we thee sick and in prison, and came unto  
 “thee? Then shall I answer and say unto  
 “them,—Verily, I say unto you, inasmuch  
 “as you have done it to the least of these  
 “my brethren, ye have done it unto me\*.”  
 Where is there so just, and so elegant a reproof of eagerness and anxiety in worldly pursuits, closed with so forcible an exhortation to confidence in the goodness of our Creator, as in these words?—“Behold the fowls  
 “of the air; for they sow not, neither do  
 “they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your  
 “heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not

\* Matt. xxv. 34.

“ much better than they? Consider the lilies  
 “ of the field, how they grow; they toil not,  
 “ neither do they spin; and yet I say unto  
 “ you, that even Solomon in all his glory  
 “ was not arrayed like one of these: where-  
 “ fore, if God so clothe the grass of the field,  
 “ which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into  
 “ the oven, shall he not much more clothe  
 “ you? O ye of little faith \*!” By which of  
 their most celebrated poets are the joys re-  
 served for the righteous in a future state, so  
 sublimely described, as by this short decla-  
 ration, that they are superior to all descrip-  
 tion? “ Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard,  
 “ neither have entered into the heart of man,  
 “ the things, which God hath prepared for  
 “ them that love him †.” Where amidst the  
 dark clouds of Pagan philosophy can he shew  
 us such a clear prospect of a future state, the  
 immortality of the soul, the resurrection of  
 the dead, and the general judgment, as in  
 St. Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians?  
 Or from whence can he produce such cogent  
 exhortations to the practice of every virtue,  
 such ardent incitements to piety and devo-  
 tion, and such assistances to attain them, as  
 those which are to be met with throughout  
 every page of these inimitable writings? To  
 quote all the passages in them relative to  
 these subjects, would be almost to transcribe  
 the whole; it is sufficient to observe, that

\* Matt. vi. 26, 28.

† 1 Cor. ii. 9.

they are every where stamped with such apparent marks of supernatural assistance, as render them indisputably superior to, and totally unlike, all human compositions whatever; and this superiority and dissimilarity is still more strongly marked by one remarkable circumstance peculiar to themselves, which is, that whilst the moral parts, being of the most general use, are intelligible to the meanest capacities, the learned and inquisitive throughout all ages, perpetually find in them inexhaustible discoveries, concerning the nature, attributes, and dispensations of Providence.

To say the truth, before the appearance of Christianity there existed nothing like religion on the face of the earth; the Jewish only excepted: all other nations were immersed in the grossest idolatry, which had little or no connection with morality, except to corrupt it by the infamous examples of their imaginary deities: they all worshipped a multiplicity of gods and dæmons, whose favour they courted by impious, obscene, and ridiculous ceremonies, and whose anger they endeavoured to appease by the most abominable cruelties. In the politest ages of the politest nations in the world, at a time when Greece and Rome had carried the arts of oratory, poetry, history, architecture, and sculpture to the highest perfection, and made no inconsiderable advances in those of mathematics, natural, and even moral philosophy, in  
religious

religious knowledge they had made none at all; a strong presumption, that the noblest efforts of the mind of man, unassisted by revelation, were unequal to the task. Some few indeed of their philosophers were wise enough to reject these general absurdities, and dared to attempt a loftier flight: Plato introduced many sublime ideas of nature, and its first cause, and of the immortality of the soul, which being above his own and all human discovery, he probably acquired from the books of Moses or the conversation of some Jewish rabbies, which he might have met with in Egypt, where he resided, and studied for several years: from him Aristotle, and from both Cicero and some few others drew most amazing stores of philosophical science, and carried their researches into divine truths as far as human genius alone could penetrate. But these were bright constellations, which appeared singly in several centuries, and even these with all this knowledge were very deficient in true theology. From the visible works of the creation they traced the being and principal attributes of the Creator; but the relation which his being and attributes bear to man they little understood; of piety and devotion they had scarce any sense, nor could they form any mode of worship worthy of the purity and perfection of the divine nature: they occasionally flung out many elegant encomiums on the native beauty, and excellence of virtue:

tue: but they founded it not on the commands of God, nor connected it with a holy life, nor hung out the happiness of heaven as its reward, or its object. They sometimes talked of virtue carrying men to heaven, and placing them amongst the gods; but by this virtue they meant only the invention of arts, or feats of arms: for with them heaven was open only to legislators, and conquerors, the civilizers, or destroyers of mankind. This was then the summit of religion in the most polished nations in the world, and even this was confined to a few philosophers, prodigies of genius and literature, who were little attended to, and less understood by the generality of mankind in their own countries; whilst all the rest were involved in one common cloud of ignorance and superstition.

At this time Christianity broke forth from the east like a rising sun, and dispelled this universal darkness, which obscured every part of the globe, and even at this day prevails in all those remoter regions, to which its salutary influence has not as yet extended. From all those which it has reached, it has, notwithstanding its corruptions, banished all those enormities, and introduced a more rational devotion, and purer morals: it has taught men the unity, and attributes of the Supreme Being, the remission of sins, the resurrection of the dead, life everlasting, and the kingdom of heaven; doctrines as inconceivable to the wisest of mankind, antecedent

to

to its appearance, as the Newtonian system is at this day to the most ignorant tribes of savages in the wilds of America; doctrines, which human reason never could have discovered, but which, when discovered, coincide with, and are confirmed by it; and which, though beyond the reach of all the learning and penetration of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, are now clearly laid open to the eye of every peasant and mechanic with the bible in his hand. These are all plain facts too glaring to be contradicted, and therefore, whatever we may think of the authority of these books, the relations which they contain, or the inspiration of their authors, of these facts no man, who has eyes to read, or ears to hear, can entertain a doubt; because there are the books, and in them is this religion.

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### PROPOSITION III.

**M**Y third proposition is this, That from this book, called the New Testament, may be collected a system of ethics, in which every moral precept founded on reason is carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection, than in any other of the antient philosophers of preceding ages; every moral precept



precept founded on false principles is entirely omitted, and many new precepts added, peculiarly corresponding with the new object of this religion.

By moral precepts founded on reason, I mean all those which enforce the practice of such duties as reason informs us must improve our natures, and conduce to the happiness of mankind: such are piety to God, benevolence to men, justice, charity, temperance, and sobriety, with all those which prohibit the commission of the contrary vices, all which debase our natures, and, by mutual injuries, introduce universal disorder, and consequently universal misery. By precepts founded on false principles, I mean those which recommend fictitious virtues productive of none of these salutary effects, and therefore, however celebrated and admired, are in fact no virtues at all; such are valour, patriotism, and friendship.

That virtues of the first kind are carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection by the Christian religion than by any other, it is here unnecessary to prove, because this is a truth which has been frequently demonstrated by her friends, and never once denied by the most determined of her adversaries; but it will be proper to shew, that those of the latter sort are most judiciously omitted; because they have really no intrinsic merit in them, and are totally incompatible with the genius and spirit of this institution.

Valour,

Valour, for instance, or active courage, is for the most part constitutional, and therefore can have no more claim to moral merit, than wit, beauty, health, strength, or any other endowment of the mind or body; and so far is it from producing any salutary effects by introducing peace, order, or happiness into society, that it is the usual perpetrator of all the violences, which from retaliated injuries distract the world with bloodshed and devastation. It is the engine by which the strong are enabled to plunder the weak, the proud to trample upon the humble, and the guilty to oppress the innocent; it is the chief instrument which Ambition employs in her unjust pursuits of wealth and power, and is therefore so much extolled by her votaries: it was indeed congenial with the religion of Pagans, whose gods were for the most part made out of deceased heroes, exalted to heaven as a reward for the mischiefs which they had perpetrated upon earth, and therefore with them this was the first of virtues, and had even engrossed that denomination to itself; but whatever merit it may have assumed among Pagans, with Christians it can pretend to none, and few or none are the occasions in which they are permitted to exert it: they are so far from being allowed to inflict evil, that they are forbid even to resist it: they are so far from being encouraged to revenge injuries, that one of their first duties is to forgive them;

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so far from being incited to destroy their enemies, that they are commanded to love them, and to serve them to the utmost of their power. If Christian nations therefore were nations of Christians, all war would be impossible and unknown amongst them, and valour could be neither of use nor estimation, and therefore could never have a place in the catalogue of Christian virtues, being irreconcilable with all its precepts. I object not to the praise and honours bestowed on the valiant, they are the least tribute which can be paid them by those who enjoy safety and affluence by the intervention of their dangers and sufferings: I assert only that active courage can never be a Christian virtue, because a Christian can have nothing to do with it. Passive courage is indeed frequently, and properly inculcated by this meek and suffering religion, under the titles of patience and resignation: a real and substantial virtue this, and a direct contrast to the former; for passive courage arises from the noblest dispositions of the human mind, from a contempt of misfortunes, pain, and death, and a confidence in the protection of the Almighty; active, from the meanest; from passion, vanity, and self-dependence: passive courage is derived from a zeal for truth, and a perseverance in duty; active, is the offspring of pride and revenge, and the parent of cruelty and injustice: in short, passive courage is the resolution of a philosopher;

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sopher; active, the ferocity of a savage. Nor is this more incompatible with the precepts, than with the object of this religion, which is the attainment of the kingdom of heaven; for valour is not that sort of violence, by which that kingdom is to be taken; nor are the turbulent spirits of heroes and conquerors admissible into those regions of peace, subordination, and tranquillity.

Patriotism also, that celebrated virtue so much practised in antient, and so much professed in modern times, that virtue, which so long preserved the liberties of Greece, and exalted Rome to the empire of the world: this celebrated virtue, I say, must also be excluded; because it not only falls short of, but directly counteracts, the extensive benevolence of this religion. A Christian is of no country, he is a citizen of the world; and his neighbours and countrymen are the inhabitants of the remotest regions, whenever their distresses demand his friendly assistance: Christianity commands us to love all mankind, patriotism to oppress all other countries to advance the imaginary prosperity of our own: Christianity enjoins us to imitate the universal benevolence of our Creator, who pours forth his blessings on every nation upon earth; patriotism, to copy the mean partiality of an English parish officer, who thinks injustice and cruelty meritorious, whenever they promote the interests of his own inconsiderable village. This has  
ever

ever been a favourite virtue with mankind, because it conceals self-interest under the mask of public spirit, not only from others, but even from themselves, and gives a licence to inflict wrongs and injuries not only with impunity, but with applause; but it is so diametrically opposite to the great characteristic of this institution, that it never could have been admitted into the list of Christian virtues.

Friendship likewise, although more congenial to the principles of Christianity, arising from more tender and amiable dispositions, could never gain admittance amongst her benevolent precepts, for the same reason; because it is too narrow and confined, and appropriates that benevolence to a single object, which is here commanded to be extended over all. Where friendships arise from similarity of sentiments, and disinterested affections, they are advantageous, agreeable, and innocent, but have little pretensions to merit; for it is justly observed, "If ye love them, which love you, what thanks have ye? for sinners also love those that love them\*." But if they are formed from alliances in parties, factions, and interests, or from a participation of vices, the usual parents of what are called friendships among mankind, they are then both mischievous and criminal, and consequently for-

\* Luke vi. 32.

bidden; but in their utmost purity deserve no recommendation from this religion.

To the judicious omission of these false virtues we may add that remarkable silence, which the Christian legislator every where preserves on subjects esteemed by all others of the highest importance, civil government, national policy, and the rights of war and peace; of these he has not taken the least notice, probably for this plain reason, because it would have been impossible to have formed any explicit regulations concerning them, which must not have been inconsistent with the purity of his religion, or with the practical observance of such imperfect creatures as men ruling over, and contending with each other: for instance, had he absolutely forbid all resistance to the reigning powers, he had constituted a plan of despotism, and made men slaves; had he allowed it, he must have authorised disobedience, and made them rebels; had he in direct terms prohibited all war, he must have left his followers for ever an easy prey to every infidel invader; had he permitted it, he must have licensed all that rapine and murder, with which it is unavoidably attended.

Let us now examine what are those new precepts in this religion peculiarly corresponding with the new object of it, that is, preparing us for the kingdom of heaven: of these the chief are poorness of spirit, forgiveness of injuries, and charity to all men;

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to these we may add repentance, faith, self-abasement, and a detachment from the world, all moral duties peculiar to this religion, and absolutely necessary to the attainment of its end.

“ Blessed are the poor in spirit ; for theirs “ is the kingdom of heaven\* : by which poorness of spirit is to be understood a disposition of mind, meek, humble, submissive to power, void of ambition, patient of injuries, and free from all resentment. This was so new, and so opposite to the ideas of all Pagan moralists, that they thought this temper of mind a criminal and contemptible meanness, which must induce men to sacrifice the glory of their country, and their own honour, to a shameful pusillanimity ; and such it appears to almost all who are called Christians even at this day, who not only reject it in practice, but disavow it in principle, notwithstanding this explicit declaration of their master. We see them revenging the smallest affronts by premeditated murder, as individuals, on principles of honour ; and, in their national capacities, destroying each other with fire and sword, for the low considerations of commercial interests, the balance of rival powers, or the ambition of princes : we see them with their last breath animating each other to a savage revenge, and, in the agonies of death, plunging with

\* Matt. v. 3.

feeble arms their daggers into the hearts of their opponents: and, what is still worse, we hear all these barbarisms celebrated by historians, flattered by poets, applauded in theatres, approved in senates, and even sanctified in pulpits. But universal practice cannot alter the nature of truth: pride was not made for man; but humility, meekness, and resignation, that is, poorness of spirit, was made for man; and properly belongs to his dependent and precarious situation; and is the only disposition of mind which can enable him to enjoy ease and quiet here, and happiness hereafter: yet was this important precept entirely unknown until it was promulgated by him, who said, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of heaven: Verily I say unto you, whoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein \*."

Another precept, equally new and no less excellent, is forgiveness of injuries: "Ye have heard," says Christ to his disciples, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy; but I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you †." This was a lesson so new, and so utterly unknown, till taught by his

\* Matt. x. 14.

† Matt. v. 43.



doctrines, and enforced by his example, that the wisest moralists of the wisest nations and ages represented the desire of revenge as a mark of a noble mind, and the accomplishment of it as one of the chief felicities attendant on a fortunate man. But how much more magnanimous, how much more beneficial to mankind, is forgiveness ! it is more magnanimous, because every generous and exalted disposition of the human mind is requisite to the practice of it : for these alone can enable us to bear the wrongs and insults of wickedness and folly with patience, and to look down on the perpetrators of them with pity, rather than indignation ; these alone can teach us, that such are but a part of those sufferings allotted to us in that state of probation, and to know, that to overcome evil with good, is the most glorious of all victories : it is the most beneficial, because this amiable conduct alone can put an end to an eternal succession of injuries and retaliations ; for every retaliation becomes a new injury, and requires another act of revenge for satisfaction. But would we observe this salutary precept, to love our enemies, and to do good to those who despitefully use us, this obstinate benevolence would at last conquer the most inveterate hearts, and we should have no enemies to forgive. How much more exalted a character therefore is a Christian martyr, suffering with resignation, and praying for the guilty, than that of a Pagan hero,

hero, breathing revenge, and destroying the innocent ! Yet, noble and useful as this virtue is, before the appearance of this religion it was not only unpractised, but decried in principle as mean and ignominious, though so obvious a remedy for most of the miseries of this life, and so necessary a qualification for the happiness of another.

A third precept, first noticed and first enjoined by this institution, is charity to all men. What this is, we may best learn from this admirable description, painted in the following words : “ Charity suffereth long,  
 “ and is kind ; charity envieth not ; charity  
 “ vaunteth not itself ; is not puffed up ; doth  
 “ not behave itself unseemly ; seeketh not  
 “ her own ; is not easily provoked ; think-  
 “ eth no evil ; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but  
 “ rejoiceth in truth ; feareth all things ; be-  
 “ lieveth all things ; hopeth all things ; en-  
 “ dureth all things\*.” Here we have an accurate delineation of this bright constellation of all virtues ; which consists not, as many imagine, in the building of monasteries, endowment of hospitals, or the distribution of alms ; but in such an amiable disposition of mind, as exercises itself every hour in acts of kindness, patience, complacency, and benevolence to all around us, and which alone is able to promote happiness in the present life, or render us capable

\* 1 Cor. xiii. 4.

of receiving it in another: and yet this is totally new, and so it is declared to be by the author of it: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye love one another; by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another\*." This benevolent disposition is made the great characteristic of a Christian, the test of his obedience, and the mark by which he is to be distinguished. This love for each other is that charity just now described, and contains all those qualities, which are there attributed to it; humility, patience, meekness, and beneficence: without which we must live in perpetual discord, and consequently cannot pay obedience to this commandment by loving one another; a commandment so sublime, so rational, and so beneficial, so wisely calculated to correct the depravity, diminish the wickedness, and abate the miseries of human nature, that did we universally comply with it, we should soon be relieved from all the inquietudes arising from our own unruly passions, anger, envy, revenge, malice, and ambition, as well as from all those injuries to which we are perpetually exposed from the indulgence of the same passions in others. It would also preserve our minds in such a state of tranquillity, and so prepare them for the kingdom of heaven, that we should slide out of

\* John xiii. 34.

a life of peace, love, and benevolence, into that celestial society, by an almost imperceptible transition. Yet was this commandment entirely new, when given by him, who so intitles it, and has made it the capital duty of his religion, because the most indispensably necessary to the attainment of its great object, the kingdom of heaven ; into which if proud, turbulent, and vindictive spirits were permitted to enter, they must unavoidably destroy the happiness of that state by the operations of the same passions and vices by which they disturb the present ; and therefore all such must be eternally excluded, not only as a punishment, but also from incapacity.

Repentance, by this we plainly see, is another new moral duty strenuously insisted on by this religion, and by no other, because absolutely necessary to the accomplishment of its end ; for this alone can purge us from those transgressions from which we cannot be totally exempted in this state of trial and temptation, and purify us from that depravity in our nature, which renders us incapable of attaining this end. Hence also we may learn, that no repentance can remove this incapacity, but such as entirely changes the nature and disposition of the offender ; which, in the language of scripture, is called “ being born again.” Mere contrition for his past crimes, nor even the pardon of them, cannot effect this, unless it operates to this  
entire

entire conversion or new birth, as it is properly and emphatically named: for sorrow can no more purify a mind corrupted by a long continuance in vicious habits, than it can restore health to a body distempered by a long course of vice and intemperance. Hence also every one, who is in the least acquainted with himself, may judge of the reasonableness of the hope that is in him, and of his situation in a future state by that of his present. If he feels in himself a temper proud, turbulent, vindictive, and malevolent, and a violent attachment to the pleasures or business of the world, he may be assured, that he must be excluded from the kingdom of heaven; not only because his conduct can merit no such reward, but because, if admitted, he would find there no objects satisfactory to his passions, inclinations, and pursuits, and therefore could only disturb the happiness of others without enjoying any share of it himself.

Faith is another moral duty enjoined by this institution, of a species so new, that the philosophers of antiquity had no word expressive of this idea, nor any such idea to be expressed; for the word *πίστις*, or *fides*, which we translate faith, was never used by any Pagan writer in a sense the least similar to that, to which it is applied in the New Testament: where in general it signifies an humble, teachable, and candid disposition, a trust in God, and confidence in his promise; when

when applied particularly to Christianity, it means no more than a belief of this single proposition, 'That Christ was the son of God; that is, in the language of those writings, the Messiah, who was foretold by the prophets, and expected by the Jews; who was sent by God into the world to preach righteousness, judgment, and everlasting life, and to die as an atonement for the sins of mankind. This was all that Christ required to be believed by those who were willing to become his disciples: he who does not believe this, is not a Christian, and he who does, believes the whole that is essential to his profession, and all that is properly comprehended under the name of faith. This unfortunate word has indeed been so tortured and so misapplied to mean every absurdity, which artifice could impose upon ignorance, that it has lost all pretensions to the title of virtue; but if brought back to the simplicity of its original signification, it will deserve that name, because it usually arises from the most amiable dispositions, and is always a direct contrast to pride, obstinacy, and self-conceit. If taken in the extensive sense of an assent to the evidence of things not seen, it comprehends the existence of a God, and a future state, and is therefore not only itself a moral virtue, but the source from whence all others must proceed; for on the belief of these all religion and morality must entirely depend. It cannot be altogether void of  
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moral merit, (as some would represent it) because it is in a degree voluntary; for daily experience shews us, that men not only pretend to, but actually do believe, and disbelieve, almost any propositions, which best suit their interests, or inclinations, and unfeignedly change their sincere opinions with their situations and circumstances. For we have power over the mind's eye, as well as over the body's, to shut it against the strongest rays of truth and religion, whenever they become painful to us, and to open it again to the faint glimmerings of scepticism and infidelity when we "love darkness rather than light, because our deeds are evil\*." And this, I think, sufficiently refutes all objections to the moral nature of faith, drawn from the supposition of its being quite involuntary, and necessarily dependent on the degree of evidence, which is offered to our understandings.

Self-abasement is another moral duty inculcated by this religion only; which requires us to impute even our own virtues to the grace and favour of our Creator, and to acknowledge, that we can do nothing good by our own powers, unless assisted by his over-ruling influence. This doctrine seems at first sight to infringe on our free-will, and to deprive us of all merit; but, on a closer examination, the truth of it may be demon-

\* John iii. 19.

strated both by reason and experience, and that in fact it does not impair the one, or depreciate the other : and that it is productive of so much humility, resignation, and dependance on God, that it justly claims a place amongst the most illustrious moral virtues. Yet was this duty utterly repugnant to the proud and self-sufficient principles of the ancient philosophers as well as modern Deists, and therefore before the publication of the gospel totally unknown and uncomprehended.

Detachment from the world is another moral virtue constituted by this religion alone : so new, that even at this day few of its professors can be persuaded, that it is required, or that it is any virtue at all. By this detachment from the world is not to be understood a seclusion from society, abstraction from all business, or retirement to a gloomy cloyster. Industry and labour, cheerfulness and hospitality are frequently recommended : nor is the acquisition of wealth and honours prohibited, if they can be obtained by honest means, and a moderate degree of attention and care : but such an unremitted anxiety, and perpetual application as engrosses our whole time and thoughts, are forbid, because they are incompatible with the spirit of this religion, and must utterly disqualify us for the attainment of its great end. We toil on in the vain pursuits and frivolous occupations of the world, die in  
our



our harness, and then expect, if no gigantic crime stands in the way, to step immediately into the kingdom of heaven: but this is impossible; for without a previous detachment from the business of this world, we cannot be prepared for the happiness of another. Yet this could make no part of the morality of Pagans, because their virtues were altogether connected with this business, and consisted chiefly in conducting it with honour to themselves, and benefit to the public: but Christianity has a nobler object in view, which, if not attended to, must be lost for ever. This object is that celestial mansion of which we should never lose sight, and to which we should ever be advancing during our journey through life: but this by no means precludes us from performing the business, or enjoying the amusements of travellers, provided they detain us not too long, or lead us too far out of our way.

It cannot be denied, that the great author of the Christian institution, first and singly ventured to oppose all the chief principles of Pagan virtue, and to introduce a religion directly opposite to those erroneous though long-established opinions, both in its duties and in its object. The most celebrated virtues of the ancients were high spirit, intrepid courage, and implacable resentment.

*Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer,*

was the portrait of the most illustrious hero,  
drawn

drawn by one of the first poets of antiquity: To all these admired qualities, those of a true Christian are an exact contrast; for this religion constantly enjoins poorness of spirit, meekness, patience, and forgiveness of injuries. “But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil; but whoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also\*.” The favourite characters among the Pagans were the turbulent, ambitious, and intrepid, who through toils and dangers acquired wealth, and spent it in luxury, magnificence, and corruption; but both these are equally adverse to the Christian system, which forbids all extraordinary efforts to obtain wealth, care to secure, or thought concerning the enjoyment of it. “Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth, &c. Take no thought, saying what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed? for after all these things, do the Gentiles seek†.” The chief object of the Pagans was immortal fame: for this their poets sang, their heroes fought, and their patriots died; and this was hung out by their philosophers and legislators, as the great incitement to all noble and virtuous deeds. But what says the Christian legislator to his disciples on this subject? “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and shall say all manner of evil against you,

\* Matt. v. 39.

† Matt. vi. 31.

“ for my sake; rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven\*.” So widely different is the genius of the Pagan and Christian morality, that I will venture to affirm, that the most celebrated virtues of the former are most opposite to the spirit, and more inconsistent with the end of the latter, than even their most infamous vices; and that a Brutus wrenching vengeance out of his hands to whom alone it belongs, by murdering the oppressor of his country, or a Cato murdering himself from an impatience of controul, leaves the world more unqualified for, and more inadmissible into, the kingdom of heaven, than even a Messalina, or an Heliogabalus, with all their profligacy about them.

Nothing, I believe, has so much contributed to corrupt the true spirit of the Christian institution, as that partiality, which we contract from our earliest education for the manners of Pagan antiquity: from whence we learn to adopt every moral idea, which is repugnant to it; to applaud false virtues, which that disavows; to be guided by laws of honour, which that abhors; to imitate characters, which that detests; and to behold heroes, patriots, conquerors, and suicides with admiration, whose conduct that utterly condemns. From a coalition of these opposite principles was generated that monstrous

\* Matt. v. 11.

system of cruelty and benevolence, of barbarism and civility, of rapine and justice, of fighting and devotion, of revenge and generosity, which harraſſed the world for ſeveral centuries with cruſades, holy wars, knight-errantry, and ſingle combats, and even ſtill retains influence enough, under the name of honour, to defeat the moſt beneficent ends of this holy inſtitution. I mean not by this to paſs any censure on the principles of valour, patriotiſm, or honour: they may be uſeful, and perhaps neceſſary, in the commerce and buſineſs of the preſent turbulent and imperfect ſtate; and thoſe who are actuated by them, may be virtuous, honeſt, and even religious men: all that I aſſert is, that they cannot be Chriſtians. A profligate may be a Chriſtian, though a bad one, becauſe he may be overpowered by paſſions and temptations, and his actions may contradict his principles; but a man, whoſe ruling principle is honour, however virtuous he may be, cannot be a Chriſtian, becauſe he erects a ſtandard of duty, and deliberately adheres to it, diametrically oppoſite to the whole tenour of that religion.

The contrast between the Chriſtian, and all other inſtitutions religious or moral, previous to its appearance, is ſufficiently evident, and ſurely the ſuperiority of the former is as little to be diſputed; unleſs any one ſhall undertake to prove, that humility, patience, forgivenefs, and benevolence are leſs amiable,

amiable, and less beneficial qualities, than pride, turbulence, revenge, and malignity: that the contempt of riches is less noble, than the acquisition by fraud and villainy, or the distribution of them to the poor, less commendable than avarice or profusion; or that a real immortality in the kingdom of heaven is an object less exalted, less rational, and less worthy of pursuit, than an imaginary immortality in the applause of men: that worthless tribute, which the folly of one part of mankind pays to the wickedness of the other; a tribute, which a wise man ought always to despise, because a good man can scarce ever obtain.

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## CONCLUSION.

**I**F I mistake not, I have now fully established the truth of my three propositions.

First, That there is now extant a book intitled the New Testament.

Secondly, That from this book may be extracted a system of religion entirely new; both in its object, and its doctrines, not only superior to, but totally unlike, every thing, which had ever before entered into the mind of man.

Thirdly, That from this book may likewise be collected a system of ethics, in which  
 every

every moral precept founded on reason is carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection, than in any other of the wisest philosophers of preceding ages; every moral precept founded on false principles totally omitted, and many new precepts added, peculiarly corresponding with the new object of this religion.

Every one of these propositions, I am persuaded, is incontrovertibly true; and if true, this short but certain conclusion must inevitably follow; that such a system of religion and morality could not possibly have been the work of any man, or set of men, much less of those obscure, ignorant, and illiterate persons who actually did discover, and publish it to the world; and that therefore it must have been effected by the supernatural interposition of divine power and wisdom; that is, that it must derive its origin from God.

This argument seems to me little short of demonstration, and is indeed founded on the very same reasoning, by which the material world is proved to be the work of his invisible hand. We view with admiration the heavens and the earth, and all therein contained; we contemplate with amazement the minute bodies of animals too small for perception, and the immense planetary orbs too vast for imagination: We are certain that these cannot be the works of man; and therefore we conclude with reason, that they  
must

must be the productions of an omnipotent Creator. In the same manner we see here a scheme of religion and morality unlike and superior to all ideas of the human mind, equally impossible to have been discovered by the knowledge, as invented by the artifice of man; and therefore by the very same mode of reasoning, and with the same justice, we conclude, that it must derive its origin from the same omnipotent and omniscient Being.

Nor was the propagation of this religion less extraordinary than the religion itself, or less above the reach of all human power, than the discovery of it was above that of all human understanding. It is well known, that in the course of a very few years it was spread over all the principal parts of Asia and of Europe, and this by the ministry only of an inconsiderable number of the most inconsiderable persons; that at this time Paganism was in the highest repute, believed universally by the vulgar, and patronised by the great; that the wisest men of the wisest nations assisted at its sacrifices, and consulted its oracles on the most important occasions: Whether these were the tricks of the priests or of the devil, is of no consequence, as they were both equally unlikely to be converted, or overcome; the fact is certain, that on the preaching of a few fishermen, their altars were deserted, and their deities were dumb. This miracle they undoubtedly performed, whatever

whatever we may think of the rest : and this is surely sufficient to prove the authority of their commission ; and to convince us, that neither their undertaking nor the execution of it could possibly be their own.

How much this divine institution has been corrupted, or how soon these corruptions began, how far it has been discoloured by the false notions of illiterate ages, or blended with fictions by pious frauds, or how early these notions and fictions were introduced, no learning or sagacity is now able precisely to ascertain ; but surely no man, who seriously considers the excellence and novelty of its doctrines, the manner in which it was at first propagated through the world, the persons who achieved that wonderful work, and the originality of those writings in which it is still recorded, can possibly believe that it could ever have been the production of imposture, or chance ; or that from an imposture the most wicked and blasphemous (for if an imposture, such it is) all the religion and virtue now existing on earth can derive their source.

But notwithstanding what has been here urged, if any man can believe, that at a time when the literature of Greece and Rome, then in their meridian lustre, were insufficient for the task, the son of a carpenter, together with twelve of the meanest and most illiterate mechanics, his associates, unassisted by any supernatural power, should be able  
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to discover or invent a system of theology the most sublime, and of ethics the most perfect, which had escaped the penetration and learning of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero; and that from this system, by their own sagacity, they had excluded every false virtue, though universally admired, and admitted every true virtue, though despised and ridiculed by all the rest of the world: If any one can believe that these men could become impostors, for no other purpose than the propagation of truth, villains for no end but to teach honesty, and martyrs without the least prospect of honour or advantage; or that, if all this should have been possible, these few inconsiderable persons should have been able, in the course of a few years, to have spread this their religion over most parts of the then known world, in opposition to the interests, pleasures, ambition, prejudices, and even reason of mankind; to have triumphed over the power of princes, the intrigues of states, the force of custom, the blindness of zeal, the influence of priests, the arguments of orators, and the philosophy of the world, without any supernatural assistance; if any one can believe all these miraculous events, contradictory to the constant experience of the powers and dispositions of human nature, he must be possessed of much more faith than is necessary to make him a Christian, and remain an unbeliever from mere credulity.

But

But should these credulous infidels after all be in the right, and this pretended revelation be all a fable; from believing it what harm could ensue? Would it render princes more tyrannical, or subjects more ungovernable? the rich more insolent, or the poor more disorderly? Would it make worse parents or children, husbands or wives, masters or servants, friends or neighbours? Or would it not make men more virtuous, and consequently more happy in every situation? It could not be criminal; it could not be detrimental. It could not be criminal, because it cannot be a crime to assent to such evidence, as has been able to convince the best and wisest of mankind; by which, if false, Providence must have permitted men to deceive each other, for the most beneficial ends, and which therefore it would be surely more meritorious to believe, from a disposition of faith and charity, which believeth all things, than to reject with scorn from obstinacy and self-conceit: It cannot be detrimental, because if Christianity is a fable, it is a fable, the belief of which is the only principle which can retain men in a steady and uniform course of virtue, piety, and devotion, or can support them in the hour of distress, of sickness, and of death. Whatever might be the operations of true deism on the minds of Pagan philosophers, that can now avail us nothing: for that light which once lightened the Gentiles, is now absorbed in the  
brighter

brighter illumination of the gospel; we can now form no rational system of deism, but what must be borrowed from that source, and, as far as it reaches towards perfection, must be exactly the same; and therefore if we will not accept of Christianity, we can have no religion at all. Accordingly we see, that those who fly from this, scarce ever stop at deism; but hasten on with great alacrity to a total rejection of all religious and moral principles whatever.

If I have here demonstrated the divine origin of the Christian religion by an argument which cannot be confuted; no others, however plausible or numerous, founded on probabilities, doubts, and conjectures, can ever disprove it, because if it is once shewn to be true, it cannot be false. But as many arguments of this kind have bewildered some candid and ingenuous minds, I shall here bestow a few lines on those which have the most weight, in order to wipe out, or at least to diminish, their perplexing influence.

But here I must previously observe, that the most unfurmountable, as well as the most usual obstacle to our belief, arises from our passions, appetites, and interests; for faith being an act of the will as much as of the understanding, we oftener disbelieve for want of inclination, than want of evidence. The first step towards thinking this revelation true, is our hopes that it is so; for whenever we much wish any proposition to be true,

true, we are not far from believing it. It is certainly for the interest of all good men, that its authority should be well founded; and still more beneficial to the bad, if ever they intend to be better; because it is the only system either of reason or religion which can give them any assurance of pardon. The punishment of vice is a debt due to justice, which cannot be remitted without compensation: repentance can be no compensation; it may change a wicked man's dispositions, and prevent his offending for the future, but can lay no claim to pardon for what is past. If any one by profligacy and extravagance contracts a debt, repentance may make him wiser, and hinder him from running into further distresses, but can never pay off his old bonds; for which he must be ever accountable, unless they are discharged by himself, or some other in his stead: this very discharge Christianity alone holds forth on our repentance, and, if true, will certainly perform; the truth of it therefore must ardently be wished for by all, except the wicked, who are determined neither to repent or reform. It is well worth every man's while, who either is, or intends to be virtuous, to believe Christianity, if he can; because he will find it the surest preservative against all vicious habits and their attendant evils, the best resource under distresses and disappointments, ill health, and ill fortune, and the firmest basis on which contemplation can rest; and  
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without some, the human mind is never perfectly at ease. But if any one is attached to a favourite pleasure, or eagerly engaged in worldly pursuits incompatible with the precepts of this religion, and he believes it, he must either relinquish those pursuits with uneasiness, or persist in them with remorse and dissatisfaction, and therefore must commence unbeliever in his own defence. With such I shall not dispute, nor pretend to persuade men by arguments to make themselves miserable: but to those, who, not afraid that this religion may be true, are really affected by such objections, I will offer the following answers, which, though short, will, I doubt not, be sufficient to shew them their weakness and futility.

In the first place, then, some have been so bold as to strike at the root of all revelation from God, by asserting, that it is incredible, because unnecessary, and unnecessary, because the reason which he has bestowed on mankind is sufficiently able to discover all the religious and moral duties which he requires of them, if they would but attend to her precepts, and be guided by her friendly admonitions. Mankind have undoubtedly at various times from the remotest ages received so much knowledge by divine communications, and have ever been so much inclined to impute it all to their own sufficiency, that it is now difficult to determine what human reason unassisted can effect: But to form a true judgment on this subject, let

let us turn our eyes to those remote regions of the globe, to which this supernatural assistance has never yet extended, and we shall there see men endued with sense and reason not inferior to our own, so far from being capable of forming systems of religion and morality, that they are at this day totally unable to make a nail or a hatchet: from whence we may surely be convinced, that reason alone is so far from being sufficient to offer to mankind a perfect religion, that it has never yet been able to lead them to any degree of culture or civilization whatever. These have uniformly flowed from that great fountain of divine communication opened in the east, in the earliest ages, and thence been gradually diffused in salubrious streams, throughout the various regions of the earth. Their rise and progress, by surveying the history of the world, may easily be traced backwards to their source; and wherever these have not as yet been able to penetrate, we there find the human species not only void of all true religious and moral sentiments, but not the least emerged from their original ignorance and barbarity; which seems a demonstration, that although human reason is capable of progression in science, yet the first foundations must be laid by supernatural instructions: for surely no other probable cause can be assigned, why one part of mankind should have made such an amazing progress in religious, moral, metaphysical, and philosophical

phical enquiries; such wonderful improvements in policy, legislation, commerce, and manufactures, while the other part, formed with the same natural capacities, and divided only by seas and mountains, should remain, during the same number of ages, in a state little superior to brutes, without government, without laws or letters, and even without clothes and habitations; murdering each other to satiate their revenge, and devouring each other to appease their hunger: I say, no cause can be assigned for this amazing difference, except that the first have received information from those divine communications recorded in the scriptures, and the latter have never yet been favoured with such assistance. This remarkable contrast seems an unanswerable, though perhaps a new proof of the necessity of revelation, and a solid refutation of all arguments against it, drawn from the sufficiency of human reason. And as reason in her natural state is thus incapable of making any progress in knowledge; so when furnished with materials by supernatural aid, if left to the guidance of her own wild imaginations, she falls into more numerous and more gross errors than her own native ignorance could ever have suggested. There is then no absurdity so extravagant, which she is not ready to adopt: she has persuaded some, that there is no God; others, that there can be no future state: she has taught some, that there

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is no difference between vice and virtue, and that to cut a man's throat and to relieve his necessities are actions equally meritorious: she has convinced many, that they have no free-will, in opposition to their own experience; some, that there can be no such thing as soul, or spirit, contrary to their own perceptions; and others, no such thing as matter or body, in contradiction to their senses. By analysing all things she can shew, that there is nothing in any thing; by perpetual sifting she can reduce all existence to the invisible dust of scepticism; and by recurring to first principles, prove to the satisfaction of her followers, that there are no principles at all. How far such a guide is to be depended on in the important concerns of religion, and morals, I leave to the judgment of every considerate man to determine. This is certain, that human reason in its highest state of cultivation amongst the philosophers of Greece and Rome, was never able to form a religion comparable to Christianity; nor have all those sources of moral virtue, such as truth, beauty, and the fitness of things, which modern philosophers have endeavoured to substitute in its stead, ever been effectual to produce good men, and have themselves often been the productions of some of the worst.

Others there are, who allow, that a revelation from God may be both necessary and credible; but alledge, that the scriptures,  
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that is, the books of the Old and New Testament, cannot be that revelation ; because in them are to be found errors and inconsistencies, fabulous stories, false facts, and false philosophy ; which can never be derived from the fountain of all wisdom and truth. To this I reply, that I readily acknowledge, that the scriptures are not revelations from God, but the history of them : This revelation itself is derived from God ; but the history of it is the production of men, and therefore the truth of it is not in the least affected by their fallibility, but depends on the internal evidence of its own supernatural excellence. If in these books such a religion, as has been here described, actually exists, no seeming, or even real defects to be found in them can disprove the divine origin of this religion, or invalidate my argument. Let us, for instance, grant that the Mosaic history of the creation was founded on the erroneous but popular principles of those early ages, who imagined the earth to be a vast plain, and the celestial bodies no more than luminaries hung up in the concave firmament to enlighten it ; will it from thence follow, that Moses could not be a proper instrument in the hands of Providence, to impart to the Jews a divine law, because he was not inspired with a foreknowledge of the Copernican and Newtonian systems ? or that Christ must be an impostor, because Moses was not an astronomer ?

nomer? Let us also suppose, that the accounts of Christ's temptation in the wilderness, the devil's taking refuge in the herd of swine, with several other narrations in the New Testament, frequently ridiculed by unbelievers, were all but stories accommodated to the ignorance and superstitions of the times and countries in which they were written, or pious frauds intended to impress on vulgar minds a higher reverence of the power and sanctity of Christ; will this in the least impeach the excellence of his religion, or the authority of its founder? or is Christianity answerable for all the fables of which it may have been the innocent occasion? The want of this obvious distinction has much injured the Christian cause; because on this ground it has ever been most successfully attacked, and on this ground it is not easily to be defended: for if the records of this revelation are supposed to be the revelation itself, the least defect discovered in them must be fatal to the whole. What has led many to overlook this distinction, is that common phrase, that the scriptures are the word of God; and in one sense they certainly are; that is, they are the sacred repository of all the revelations, dispensations, promises, and precepts, which God has vouchsafed to communicate to mankind; but by this expression we are not to understand, that every part of this voluminous collection of historical, poetical, prophetical, theological,

logical, and moral writings, which we call the Bible, was dictated by the immediate influence of Divine inspiration: the authors of these books pretend to no such infallibility, and if they claim it not for themselves, who has the authority to claim it for them? Christ required no such belief from those who were willing to be his disciples. He says, "He that believeth on me, hath everlasting life\*;" but where does he say, He that believeth not every word contained in the Old Testament, which was then extant, or every word in the New Testament, which was to be wrote for the instruction of future generations, hath not everlasting life? There are innumerable occurrences related in the scriptures, some of greater, some of less, and some of no importance at all; the truth of which we can have no reason to question, but the belief of them is surely not essential to the faith of a Christian: I have no doubt but that St. Paul was shipwrecked, and that he left his cloak and his parchments at Troas; but the belief of these facts makes no part of Christianity, nor is the truth of them any proof of its authority. It proves only that this Apostle could not in common life be under the perpetual influence of infallible inspiration; for, had he been so, he would not have put to sea before a storm, nor have forgot his cloak. These writers were undoubt-

\* John vi. 47.

edly directed by supernatural influence in all things necessary to the great work, which they were appointed to perform: At particular times, and on particular occasions, they were enabled to utter prophecies, to speak languages, and to work miracles; but in all other circumstances, they seem to have been left to the direction of their own understandings, like other men. In the sciences of history, geography, astronomy, and philosophy, they appear to have been no better instructed than others, and therefore were not less liable to be misled by the errors and prejudices of the times and countries in which they lived. They related facts like honest men, to the best of their knowledge or information, and they recorded the divine lessons of their master with the utmost fidelity; but they pretended to no infallibility, for they sometimes differed in their relations, and they sometimes disagreed in their sentiments. All which proves only, that they did not act, or write, in a combination to deceive, but not in the least impeaches the truth of the revelation which they published; which depends not on any external evidence whatever: for I will venture to affirm, that if any one could prove, what is impossible to be proved, because it is not true, that there are errors in geography, chronology, and philosophy, in every page of the Bible; that the prophecies therein delivered are all but fortunate guesses, or artful applications, and the miracles there  
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recorded no better than legendary tales: if any one could shew, that these books were never written by their pretended authors, but were posterior impositions on illiterate and credulous ages: all these wonderful discoveries would prove no more than this, that God, for reasons to us unknown, had thought proper to permit a revelation by him communicated to mankind, to be mixed with their ignorance, and corrupted by their frauds from its earliest infancy, in the same manner in which he has visibly permitted it to be mixed, and corrupted from that period to the present hour. If in these books a religion superior to all human imagination actually exists, it is of no consequence to the proof of its divine origin, by what means it was there introduced, or with what human errors and imperfections it is blended. A diamond, though found in a bed of mud, is still a diamond, nor can the dirt, which surrounds it, depreciate its value or destroy its lustre.

To some speculative and refined observers, it has appeared incredible, that a wise and benevolent Creator should have constituted a world upon one plan, and a religion for it on another; that is, that he should have revealed a religion to mankind, which not only contradicts the principal passions and inclinations which he has implanted in their natures, but is incompatible with the whole œconomy of that world which he has cre-

ated, and in which he has thought proper to place them. This, say they, with regard to the Christian is apparently the case: the love of power, riches, honour, and fame, are the great incitements to generous and magnanimous actions; yet by this institution are all these depreciated and discouraged. Government is essential to the nature of man, and cannot be managed without certain degrees of violence, corruption, and imposition; yet are all these strictly forbid. Nations cannot subsist without wars, nor war be carried on without rapine, desolation, and murder; yet are these prohibited under the severest threats. The non-resistance of evil must subject individuals to continual oppressions, and leave nations a defenceless prey to their enemies; yet is this recommended. Perpetual patience under insults and injuries must every day provoke new insults and new injuries; yet is this enjoined. A neglect of all we eat and drink and wear, must put an end to all commerce, manufactures, and industry; yet is this required. In short, were these precepts universally obeyed, the disposition of all human affairs must be entirely changed, and the business of the world, constituted as it now is, could not go on. To all this I answer, that such indeed is the Christian revelation, though some of its advocates may perhaps be unwilling to own it, and such it is constantly declared to be by him who gave it, as well as by those who published

published it under his immediate direction : To these he says, “ If ye were of the world, “ the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have “ chosen you out of the world, therefore the “ world hateth you \*.” To the Jews he declares, “ Ye are of this world : I am not of “ this world †.” St. Paul writes to the Romans, “ Be not conformed to this world ‡;” and to the Corinthians, “ We speak not the “ wisdom of this world §.” St. James says, “ Know ye not, that the friendship of the “ world is enmity with God? whosoever “ therefore will be a friend of the world is “ the enemy of God ||.” This irreconcilable disagreement between Christianity and the world is announced in numberless other places in the New Testament, and indeed by the whole tenour of those writings. These are plain declarations, which, in spite of all the evasions of those good managers, who choose to take a little of this world in their way to heaven, stand fixed and immoveable against all their arguments drawn from public benefit and pretended necessity, and must ever forbid any reconciliation between the pursuits of this world and the Christian institution : but they who reject it on this account, enter not into the sublime spirit of this reli-

\* John xv. 19.

† Rom. xii. 2.

|| Jam. iv. 4.

† John viii. 23.

§ 1 Cor. ii. 6.

gion, which is not a code of precise laws designed for the well-ordering society, adapted to the ends of worldly convenience, and amenable to the tribunal of human prudence; but a divine lesson of purity and perfection, so far superior to the low considerations of conquest, government, and commerce, that it takes no more notice of them, than of the battles of game-cocks, the policy of bees, or the industry of ants: they recollect not what is the first and principal object of this institution; that this is not, as has been often repeated, to make us happy, or even virtuous in the present life, for the sake of augmenting our happiness here; but to conduct us through a state of dangers and sufferings, of sin and temptation, in such a manner as to qualify us for the enjoyment of happiness hereafter. All other institutions of religion and morals were made for the world, but the characteristic of this is to be against it; and therefore the merits of Christian doctrines are not to be weighed in the scales of public utility, like those of moral precepts, because worldly utility is not their end. If Christ and his Apostles had pretended, that the religion which they preached would advance the power, wealth, and prosperity of nations, or of men, they would have deserved but little credit; but they constantly profess the contrary, and every where declare, that their religion is adverse to the world, and all its pursuits. Christ says,  
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speaking of his disciples, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world \*." It can therefore be no imputation on this religion, or on any of its precepts, that they tend not to an end which their author professedly disclaims: nor can it surely be deemed a defect, that it is adverse to the vain pursuits of this world; for so are reason, wisdom, and experience; they all teach us the same lesson, they all demonstrate to us every day, that these are begun on false hopes, carried on with disquietude, and end in disappointment. This professed incompatibility with the little, wretched, and iniquitous business of the world, is therefore so far from being a defect in this religion, that, was there no other proof of its divine origin, this alone, I think, would be abundantly sufficient. The great plan and benevolent design of this dispensation is plainly this; to enlighten the minds, purify the religion, and amend the morals of mankind in general, and to select the most meritorious of them to be successively transplanted into the kingdom of heaven: which gracious offer is impartially tendered to all, who by perseverance in meekness, patience, piety, charity, and a detachment from the world, are willing to qualify themselves for this holy and happy society. Was this universally accepted, and did every man observe strictly

\* John xvii. 16.

every precept of the gospel, the face of human affairs and the œconomy of the world would indeed be greatly changed; but surely they would be changed for the better; and we should enjoy much more happiness, even here, than at present: for we must not forget, that evils are by it forbid as well as resistance; injuries, as well as revenge; all unwillingness to diffuse the enjoyments of life, as well as solicitude to acquire them; all obstacles to ambition, as well as ambition itself; and therefore all contentions for power and interest would be at an end; and the world would go on much more happily than it now does. But this universal acceptance of such an offer was never expected from so depraved and imperfect a creature as man, and therefore could never have been any part of the design: for it was foreknown and foretold by him who made it, that few, very few would accept it on these terms. He says, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth into life, and few there be that find it\*." Accordingly we see, that very few are prevailed on, by the hopes of future happiness, to relinquish the pursuits of present pleasures or interests, and therefore these pursuits are little interrupted by the secession of so inconsiderable a number. As the natural world subsists by the struggles of the same elements, so does the

\* Matt. vii. 4.

moral by the contentions of the same passions, as from the beginning: the generality of mankind are actuated by the same motives, fight, scuffle, and scramble for power, riches, and pleasures with the same eagerness: all occupations and professions are exercised with the same alacrity, and there are soldiers, lawyers, statesmen, patriots, and politicians, just as if Christianity had never existed. Thus we see this wonderful dispensation has answered all the purposes for which it was intended: it has enlightened the minds, purified the religion, and amended the morals of mankind; and, without subverting the constitution, policy, or business of the world, opened a gate, though a strait one, through which all, who are wise enough to choose it, and good enough to be fit for it, may find an entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

Others have said, that if this revelation had really been from God, his infinite power and goodness could never have suffered it to have been so soon perverted from its original purity, to have continued in a state of corruption through the course of so many ages, and at last to have proved so ineffectual to the reformation of mankind. To these I answer, that all this, on examination, will be found inevitable, from the nature of all revelations communicated to so imperfect a creature as man, and from circumstances peculiar to the rise and progress of the

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the Christian in particular : for when this was first preached to the Gentile nations, though they were not able to withstand the force of its evidence, and therefore received it; yet they could not be prevailed on to relinquish their old superstitions, and former opinions, but chose rather to incorporate them with it : by which means it was necessarily mixed with their ignorance, and their learning; by both which it was equally injured. The people defaced its worship by blending it with their idolatrous ceremonies, and the philosophers corrupted its doctrines by weaving them up with the notions of the Gnostics, Mystics, and Manichæans, the prevailing systems of those times. By degrees its irresistible excellence gained over princes, potentates, and conquerors to its interests, and it was supported by their patronage: but that patronage soon engaged it in their policies and contests, and destroyed that excellence by which it had been acquired. At length the meek and humble professors of the gospel enslaved these princes, and conquered these conquerors their patrons, and erected for themselves such a stupendous fabric of wealth and power, as the world had never seen: they then propagated their religion by the same methods, by which it had been persecuted; nations were converted by fire and sword, and the vanquished were baptized with daggers at their throats. All these events we see proceed from a chain of causes  
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and consequences, which could not have been broken without changing the established course of things by a constant series of miracles, or a total alteration of human nature: whilst that continues as it is, the purest religion must be corrupted by a conjunction with power and riches, and it will also then appear to be much more corrupted than it really is; because many are inclined to think, that every deviation from its primitive state is a corruption. Christianity was at first preached by the poor and mean, in holes and caverns, under the iron rod of persecution, and therefore many absurdly conclude, that any degree of wealth or power in its ministers, or of magnificence in its worship, are corruptions inconsistent with the genuine simplicity of its original state: they are offended, that modern bishops should possess titles, palaces, revenues, and coaches, when it is notorious, that their predecessors the Apostles were despicable wanderers, without houses or money, and walked on foot. The Apostles indeed lived in a state of poverty and persecution attendant on their particular situation, and the work which they had undertaken; this was their misfortune, but no part of their religion, and therefore it can be no more incumbent on their successors to imitate their poverty and meanness, than to be whipped, imprisoned, and put to death, in compliance with their example. These are all but the suggestions of envy and malevolence,

violence, but no objections to these fortunate alterations in Christianity and its professors; which, if not abused to the purposes of tyranny, and superstition, are in fact no more than the necessary and proper effects of its more prosperous situation. When a poor man grows rich, or a servant becomes a master, they should take care that their exaltation prompts them not to be unjust or insolent; but surely it is not requisite or right, that their behaviour and mode of living should be exactly the same, when their situation is altered. How far this institution has been effectual to the reformation of mankind, it is not easy now to ascertain, because the enormities which prevailed before the appearance of it are by time so far removed from our sight, that they are scarcely visible; but those of the most gigantic size still remain in the records of history, as monuments of the rest: Wars in those ages were carried on with a ferocity and cruelty unknown to the present: whole cities and nations were extirpated by fire and sword; and thousands of the vanquished were crucified and impaled for having endeavoured only to defend themselves and their country. The lives of new-born infants were then intirely at the disposal of their parents, who were at liberty to bring them up, or to expose them to perish by cold and hunger, or to be devoured by birds and beasts; and this was frequently practised without punishment, and  
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even without censure. Gladiators were employed by hundreds to cut one another to pieces in public theatres for the diversion of the most polite assemblies; and though these combatants at first consisted of criminals only, by degrees men of the highest rank, and even ladies of the most illustrious families, enrolled themselves in this honourable list. On many occasions human sacrifices were ordained; and at the funerals of rich and eminent persons, great numbers of their slaves were murdered as victims pleasing to their departed spirits. The most infamous obscenities were made part of their religious worship, and the most unnatural lusts publicly avowed, and celebrated by their most admired poets. At the approach of Christianity all these horrid abominations vanished; and amongst those who first embraced it, scarce a single vice was to be found: to such an amazing degree of piety, charity, temperance, patience, and resignation were the primitive converts exalted, that they seem literally to have been regenerated, and purified from all the imperfections of human nature; and to have pursued such a constant and uniform course of devotion, innocence, and virtue, as, in the present times, it is almost as difficult for us to conceive as to imitate. If it is asked, why should not the belief of the same religion now produce the same effects? the answer is short, because it is not believed: The most sovereign medicine

cine can perform no cure, if the patient will not be persuaded to take it. Yet notwithstanding all impediments, it has certainly done a great deal towards diminishing the vices and correcting the dispositions of mankind ; and was it universally adopted in belief and practice, would totally eradicate both sin and punishment. But this was never expected, or designed, or possible, because, if their existence did not arise from some necessity to us unknown, they never would have been permitted to exist at all ; and therefore they can no more be extirpated, than they could have been prevented : for this would certainly be incompatible with the frame and constitution of this world, and in all probability with that of another. And this, I think, well accounts for that reserve and obscurity with which this religion was at first promulgated, and that want of irresistible evidence of its truth, by which it might possibly have been enforced. Christ says to his disciples, “ To you it is given to “ know the mystery of the kingdom of God ; “ but unto them that are without, all these “ things are done in parables ; that seeing “ they may see, and not perceive, and hearing “ they may hear, and not understand ; “ lest at any time they should be converted, “ and their sins should be forgiven them \*.” That is, to you by peculiar favour it is given

\* Mark iv. 11, 12.



to know and understand the doctrines of my religion, and by that means to qualify yourselves for the kingdom of heaven; but to the multitude without, that is to all mankind in general, this indulgence cannot be extended; because that all men should be exempted from sin and punishment is utterly repugnant to the universal system, and that constitution of things, which infinite wisdom has thought proper to adopt.

Objections have likewise been raised to the divine authority of this religion from the incredibility of some of its doctrines, particularly of those concerning the Trinity, and atonement for sin by the sufferings and death of Christ; the one contradicting all the principles of human reason, and the other all our ideas of divine justice. To these objections, I shall only say, that no arguments founded on principles, which we cannot comprehend, can possibly disprove a proposition already proved on principles which we do understand; and therefore that on this subject they ought not to be attended to: That three Beings should be one Being, is a proposition which certainly contradicts reason, that is, *our* reason; but it does not from thence follow, that it cannot be true; for there are many propositions which contradict our reason, and yet are demonstrably true: one is the very first principle of all religion, the being of a God; for that any thing should exist without a cause of its own existence,

ence, are propositions equally contradictory to our reason; yet one of them must be true, or nothing could ever have existed : in like manner, the over-ruling grace of the Creator, and the free-will of his creatures, his certain fore-knowledge of future events, and the uncertain contingency of those events, are to our apprehensions absolute contradictions to each other ; and yet the truth of every one of these is demonstrable from Scripture, reason, and experience. All these difficulties arise from our imagining, that the mode of existence of all Beings must be similar to our own ; that is, that they must all exist in time, and space ; and hence proceeds our embarrassment on this subject. We know, that no two Beings, with whose mode of existence we are acquainted, can exist in the same point of time, in the same point of space, and that therefore they cannot be one : but how far Beings, whose mode of existence bears no relation to time or space, may be united, we cannot comprehend : and therefore the possibility of such an union we cannot positively deny. In like manner our reason informs us, that the punishment of the innocent, instead of the guilty, is diametrically opposite to justice, rectitude, and all pretensions to utility ; but we should also remember, that the short line of our reason cannot reach to the bottom of this question : it cannot inform us, by what means either guilt or punishment ever gained a place in  
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the works of a Creator infinitely good and powerful, whose goodness must have induced him, and whose power must have enabled him, to exclude them: It cannot assure us, that some sufferings of individuals are not necessary to the happiness and well-being of the whole: It cannot convince us, that they do not actually arise from this necessity, or that, for this cause, they may not be required of us, and levied like a tax for the public benefit; or that this tax may not be paid by one Being, as well as another; and therefore, if voluntarily offered, be justly accepted from the innocent instead of the guilty. Of all these circumstances we are totally ignorant; nor can our reason afford us any information, and therefore we are not able to assert, that this measure is contrary to justice, or void of utility: for unless we could first resolve that great question, Whence came evil? we can decide nothing on the dispensations of Providence; because they must necessarily be connected with that undiscoverable principle; and, as we know not the root of the disease, we cannot judge of what is, or is not, a proper and effectual remedy. It is remarkable, that, notwithstanding all the seeming absurdities of this doctrine, there is one circumstance much in its favour; which is, that it has been universally adopted in all ages, as far as history can carry us back in our inquiries to the earliest times; in which we find all nations, civilized and barbarous, however differing in all other religi-

ous opinions, agreeing alone in the expediency of appealing their offended Deities by sacrifices, that is, by the vicarious sufferings of men or other animals. This notion could never have been derived from reason, because it directly contradicts it ; nor from ignorance, because ignorance could never have contrived so unaccountable an expedient, nor have been uniform in all ages and countries in any opinion whatsoever ; nor from the artifice of kings or priests, in order to acquire dominion over the people, because it seems not adapted to this end ; and we find it implanted in the minds of the most remote savages at this day discovered, who have neither kings or priests, artifice or dominion, amongst them. It must therefore be derived from natural instinct or supernatural revelation, both which are equally the operations of divine power. If it is further urged, that however true these doctrines may be, yet it must be inconsistent with the justice and goodness of the Creator, to require from his creatures the belief of propositions which contradict, or are above the reach of that reason, which he has thought proper to bestow upon them. To this I answer, that genuine Christianity requires no such belief: It has discovered to us many important truths, with which we were before intirely unacquainted ; and amongst them are these : that three Beings are some way united in the divine essence ; and that God will accept of the sufferings of Christ as an atonement

atonement for the sins of mankind. These, considered as declarations of facts only, neither contradict, or are above the reach of human reason : The first is a proposition as plain, as that three equilateral lines compose one triangle ; the other is as intelligible, as that one man should discharge the debts of another. In what manner this union is formed, or why God accepts these vicarious punishments, or to what purposes they may be subservient, it informs us not, because no information could enable us to comprehend these mysteries ; and therefore it does not require that we should know or believe any thing about them. The truth of these doctrines must rest intirely on the authority of those who taught them ; but then we should reflect that those were the same persons who taught us a system of religion more sublime, and of ethics more perfect, than any which our faculties were ever able to discover, but which when discovered are exactly consonant to our reason ; and that therefore we should not hastily reject those informations which they have vouchsafed to give us, of which our reason is not a competent judge. If an able mathematician proves to us the truth of several propositions by demonstrations which we understand, we hesitate not on his authority to assent to others, the process of whose proofs we are not able to follow : why therefore should we refuse that credit to Christ

and his Apostles, which we think reasonable to give to one another ?

Many have objected to the whole scheme of this revelation, as partial, fluctuating, indeterminate, unjust, and unworthy of an omniscient and omnipotent author, who cannot be supposed to have favoured particular persons, countries, and times, with this divine communication, while others no less meritorious have been altogether excluded from its benefits; nor to have changed and counteracted his own designs; that is, to have formed mankind able and disposed to render themselves miserable by their own wickedness, and then to have contrived so strange an expedient to restore them to that happiness which they need never have been permitted to forfeit; and this to be brought about by the unnecessary interposition of a mediator. To all this I shall only say, that however unaccountable this may appear to us, who see but as small a part of the Christian, as of the universal plan of creation, they are both in regard to all these circumstances exactly analogous to each other. In all the dispensations of Providence, with which we are acquainted, benefits are distributed in a similar manner; health and strength, sense and science, wealth and power, are all bestowed on individuals and communities in different degrees, and at different times. The whole œconomy of this world consists of evils and remedies; and these for the most part administered

administered by the instrumentality of intermediate agents. God has permitted us to plunge ourselves into poverty, distress, and misery, by our own vices, and has afforded us the advice, instructions, and examples of others, to deter or extricate us from these calamities. He has formed us subject to innumerable diseases, and he has bestowed on us a variety of remedies. He has made us liable to hunger, thirst, and nakedness, and he supplies us with food, drink, and clothing, usually by the administration of others. He has created poisons, and he has provided antidotes. He has ordained the winter's cold to cure the pestilential heat of the summer, and the summer's sunshine to dry up the inundations of the winter. Why the constitution of nature is so formed, why all the visible dispensations of Providence are such, and why such is the Christian dispensation also, we know not, nor have faculties to comprehend. God might certainly have made the material world a system of perfect beauty and regularity, without evils, and without remedies; and the Christian dispensation a scheme only of moral virtue, productive of happiness, without the intervention of any atonement or mediation. He might have exempted our bodies from all diseases, and our minds from all depravity, and we should then have stood in no need of medicines to restore us to health, or expedients to reconcile us to his favour. It seems indeed to  
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our ignorance, that this would have been more consistent with justice and reason; but his infinite wisdom has decided in another manner, and formed the systems both of Nature and Christianity on other principles; and these so exactly similar, that we have cause to conclude that they both must proceed from the same source of divine power and wisdom, however inconsistent with our reason they may appear. Reason is undoubtedly our surest guide in all matters, which lie within the narrow circle of her intelligence: On the subject of revelation her province is only to examine into its authority; and when that is once proved, she has no more to do, but to acquiesce in its doctrines; and therefore is never so ill employed, as when she pretends to accommodate them to her own ideas of rectitude and truth. God, says this self-sufficient teacher, is perfectly wise, just, and good; and what is the inference? That all his dispensations must be conformable to our notions of perfect wisdom, justice, and goodness: but it should first be proved, that man is as perfect, and as wise as his Creator, or this consequence will by no means follow; but rather the reverse, that is, that the dispensations of a perfect, and all-wise Being must probably appear unreasonable, and perhaps unjust, to a Being imperfect and ignorant; and therefore their seeming impossibility may be a mark of their truth, and in some measure justify that pious  
rant



rant of a mad enthusiast, "Credo, quia impossibile." Nor is it the least surprising, that we are not able to understand the spiritual dispensations of the Almighty, when his material works are to us no less incomprehensible; our reason can afford us no insight into these great properties of matter, gravitation, attraction, elasticity, and electricity, nor even into the essence of matter itself: Can reason teach us how the sun's luminous orb can fill a circle, whose diameter contains many millions of miles, with a constant inundation of successive rays, during thousands of years, without any perceivable diminution of that body, from whence they are continually poured, or any augmentation of those bodies on which they fall, and by which they are constantly absorbed? Can reason tell us how those rays, darted with a velocity greater than that of a cannon-ball, can strike the tenderest organs of the human frame without inflicting any degree of pain, or by what means this percussion only can convey the forms of distant objects to an immaterial mind? or how any union can be formed between material and immaterial essences; or how the wounds of the body can give pain to the soul, or the anxiety of the soul can emaciate and destroy the body? That all these things are so, we have visible and indisputable demonstration; but how they can be so, is to us as incomprehensible, as the most abstruse mysteries of revelation can

can possibly be. In short, we see so small a part of the great whole; we know so little of the relation, which the present life bears to pre-existent and future states; we can conceive so little of the nature of God, and his attributes, or mode of existence; we can comprehend so little of the material, and so much less of the moral plan on which the universe is constituted, or on what principle it proceeds, that, if a revelation from such a being, on such subjects, was in every part familiar to our understandings, and consonant to our reason, we should have great cause to suspect its divine authority; and therefore, had this revelation been less incomprehensible, it would certainly have been more incredible.

But I shall not enter further into the consideration of these abstruse and difficult speculations, because the discussion of them would render this short essay too tedious and laborious a task for the perusal of them, for whom it was principally intended; which are all those busy or idle persons, whose time and thoughts are wholly engrossed by the pursuits of business or pleasure, ambition or luxury, who know nothing of this religion, except what they have accidentally picked up by desultory conversation or superficial reading, and have thence determined with themselves, that a pretended revelation, founded on so strange and improbable a story, so contradictory to reason, so adverse to  
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the world and all its occupations, so incredible in its doctrines, and in its precepts so impracticable, can be nothing more than the imposition of priestcraft upon ignorant and illiterate ages, and artfully continued as an engine well adapted to awe and govern the superstitious vulgar. To talk to such about the Christian religion, is to converse with the deaf concerning music, or with the blind on the beauties of painting: they want all ideas relative to the subject, and therefore can never be made to comprehend it: to enable them to do this, their minds must be formed for these conceptions by contemplation, retirement, and abstraction from business and dissipation; by ill-health, disappointments, and distresses; and possibly by divine interposition, or by enthusiasm, which is usually mistaken for it. Without some of these preparatory aids, together with a competent degree of learning and application, it is impossible that they can think or know, understand or believe, any thing about it. If they profess to believe, they deceive others; if they fancy that they believe, they deceive themselves. I am ready to acknowledge, that these gentlemen, as far as their information reaches, are perfectly in the right; and if they are endued with good understandings, which have been intirely devoted to the business or amusements of the world, they can pass no other judgment, and must revolt from the history and doctrines of this religion.

religion. " The preaching Christ crucified " was to the Jews a stumbling block, and " to the Greeks foolishness \*;" and so it must appear to all, who, like them, judge from established prejudices, false learning, and superficial knowledge; for those who are quite unable to follow the chain of its prophecy, to see the beauty and justness of its moral precepts, and to enter into the wonders of its dispensations, can form no other idea of this revelation, but that of a confused rhapsody of fictions and absurdities.

If it is asked, Was Christianity then intended only for learned divines and profound philosophers? I answer, No: it was at first preached by the illiterate, and received by the ignorant; and to such are the practical, which are the most necessary parts of it, sufficiently intelligible: but the proofs of its authority undoubtedly are not, because these must be chiefly drawn from other parts, of a speculative nature, opening to our inquiries inexhaustible discoveries concerning the nature, attributes, and dispensations of God, which cannot be understood without some learning and much attention. From these the generality of mankind must necessarily be excluded, and must therefore trust to others for the grounds of their belief, if they believe at all. And hence perhaps it is, that faith, or easiness of belief, is so frequently

\* 1 Cor. i. 26.

and so strongly recommended in the gospel; because if men require proofs, of which they themselves are incapable, and those who have no knowledge on this important subject will not place some confidence in those who have; the illiterate and unattentive must ever continue in a state of unbelief: but then all such should remember, that in all sciences, even in mathematics themselves, there are many propositions, which on a cursory view appear to the most acute understandings, uninstructed in that science, to be impossible to be true, which yet on a closer examination are found to be truths capable of the strictest demonstration; and that therefore, in disquisitions on which we cannot determine without much learned investigation, reason uninformed is by no means to be depended on; and from hence they ought surely to conclude, that it may be at least as possible for them to be mistaken in disbelieving this revelation, who know nothing of the matter, as for those great masters of reason and erudition, Grotius, Bacon, Newton, Boyle, Locke, Addison, and Lyttelton, to be deceived in their belief: a belief, to which they firmly adhered after the most diligent and learned researches into the authenticity of its records, the completion of the prophecies, the sublimity of its doctrines, the purity of its precepts, and the arguments of its adversaries; a belief, which they have testified to the world by their writings, without any  
other

other motive, than their regard for truth and the benefit of mankind. Should the few foregoing pages add but one mite to the treasures with which these learned writers have enriched the world; if they should be so fortunate as to persuade any of these minute philosophers to place some confidence in these great opinions, and to distrust their own; if they should be able to convince them, that notwithstanding all unfavourable appearances, Christianity may not be altogether artifice and error; if they should prevail on them to examine it with some attention, or, if that is too much trouble, not to reject it without any examination at all; the purpose of this little work will be sufficiently answered. Had the arguments herein used, and the new hints here flung out, been more largely discussed, it might easily have been extended to a more considerable bulk; but then the busy would not have had leisure, nor the idle inclination to have read it. Should it ever have the honour to be admitted into such good company, they will immediately, I know, determine, that it must be the work of some enthusiast or methodist, some beggar, or some madman. I shall therefore beg leave to assure them, that the author is very far removed from all these characters: that he once perhaps believed as little as themselves; but having some leisure and more curiosity, he employed them both in resolving a question which

which seemed to him of some importance —Whether Christianity was really an imposture founded on an absurd, incredible, and obsolete fable, as many suppose it? Or whether it is, what it pretends to be, a revelation communicated to mankind by the interposition of supernatural power? On a candid enquiry, he soon found, that the first was an absolute impossibility, and that its pretensions to the latter were founded on the most solid grounds; in the further pursuit of his examination, he perceived, at every step, new lights arising, and some of the brightest from parts of it the most obscure, but productive of the clearest proofs, because equally beyond the power of human artifice to invent, and human reason to discover. These arguments, which have convinced him of the divine origin of this religion, he has here put together in as clear and concise a manner as he was able, thinking they might have the same effect upon others, and being of opinion, that if there were a few more true Christians in the world, it would be beneficial to themselves, and by no means detrimental to the public.





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SHORT AND CURSORY  
OBSERVATIONS  
ON  
SEVERAL PASSAGES  
IN THE  
NEW TESTAMENT.

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MATT. v. 3.

Μακαριοι οἱ πτωχοι τῷ πνευματι, ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεια τῶν  
οὐρανῶν.

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of  
heaven.*

**I**N this declaration of Christ, two questions offer themselves to our consideration: 1st, Who are the poor in spirit?—And 2d, What is the kingdom of heaven?

By the poor in spirit are here meant, those who, by their natural dispositions, are meek, quiet, teachable, and submissive; or those who, by reflection and cultivation, have rendered their dispositions such, and have eradicated from their hearts pride, envy, and ambition, those high-spirited passions, so destructive

destructive of the happiness of society, as well as of their own. What portion of mankind comes under this description is known only to the searcher of all hearts; but we may reasonably conclude, that neither heroes, conquerors, or any of those whom the world dignifies with the titles of great men, can be of the number.

By the kingdom of heaven is here to be understood, that celestial community of the spirits\* of just men made perfect, over which God more immediately presides, and which is therefore sometimes called the kingdom of God; in which there are no wars, factions, struggles, or contentions, but all is benevolence, peace, concord, or subordination: a kingdom frequently hung out to our view in the New Testament, of which we are promised to be made subjects in a future life, provided we shall be properly qualified for it by our behaviour in the present.

To select the most excellent of mankind, and to qualify them for admission into this holy and happy society, seems to be the chief object of the Christian dispensation. What that qualification must be, we are sufficiently informed by the author of it—Calling to him little children, he says, “Of such is the kingdom of God;” and again, “Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child,

\* Heb. xii. 23.

“ he shall not enter therein \*.” It is also evident from the nature of this community, that none but the poor in spirit can be admitted ; because, were the proud, factious, turbulent, and ambitious to find entrance, they would immediately destroy that tranquillity and happiness with which it is blessed ; and this kingdom, though not of this world, would soon become exactly similar to those which are.

It is said, “ Many are called, but few are chosen ;” but we are not therefore to conclude, that all who are not chosen are to be consigned to a state of misery ; many who are deficient in this necessary qualification, and therefore inadmissible into this state of purity and perfection, may deserve no greater punishment than the loss of so inestimable an acquisition ; and some perhaps may have virtues which may entitle them to rewards of an inferior kind. Mankind are by no means divisible into two classes only—the righteous and the wicked. We find them indeed so divided in many passages of the New Testament, all which must be understood but as general declarations, that the righteous shall be rewarded, and the wicked punished, in a future life ; but cannot be applied to individuals, because in fact no such line of distinction can be drawn between them. The generality of mankind are compleatly nei-

\* Mark x. 14, 15.

ther the one or the other : none are so good as to be guilty of no crimes, and few so bad as to be possessed of no virtues ; and in most men they are intermixed, though in very different proportions. The justice of Providence must have prepared many intermediate states of happiness and misery, in which every individual will receive reward or punishment in exact proportion to his merits. Astronomy has opened to our view innumerable worlds, some of which are probably happier, and some more miserable than this which we at present inhabit ; in them there is ample room for the display of the divine justice and benevolence, as in some of them such a situation may be allotted to every one as his conduct has deserved.

# MATT. v. 5.

Μακάριοι οἱ πραεῖς, ὅτι αὐτοὶ κληρονομήσουσιν τὴν γῆν.

*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*

**I**T appears by no means easy to reconcile the promise with facts and experience ; for earthly prosperity, wealth, power, and pre-eminence, are so far from being the inheritance of the meek, that they seem to be entirely monopolized by the bold, turbulent, and ambitious ; and we may say with Cato, This world was made for Cæsar.

To

To extricate themselves from this difficulty, some commentators have been induced to look out for another earth, which they at last fortunately found in the words of St. Peter ; who says, “ Nevertheless we, according to promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness \*.” To this new earth, they would persuade us, this promise may with propriety be applied, and that therein it will certainly be fulfilled.

But in explaining this passage, there is no occasion to have recourse to so far-fetched and fanciful an interpretation, nor to call in the assistance of a new world. By the meek inheriting the earth, nothing more is meant, than that persons of meek, quiet, and peaceable dispositions, enjoy more happiness on earth, and suffer less disquietude in the present life, than those of opposite characters ; and this is verified by the experience of every day ; they acquire more friends, and fewer enemies, they meet with fewer injuries and disappointments, and bear those which they cannot avoid with less uneasiness, and pass through the world as they do through a crowd, less obstructed, less bruised and jostled, than those who force their way by violence and impetuosity. To which we may add, that a meek and quiet temper is the most efficacious preservative of health, the first of all

\* 2 Pet. iii. 13.

earthly blessings, and without which we are incapable of enjoying any other. Wealth, power, and grandeur, are by no means essential to earthly happiness; but should we admit that they are, and are included in this promise, we should not find it altogether unfulfilled; for, though the turbulent and overbearing may sometimes seize on them by violence, they much oftener fail in their attempts, and sink by their own insolence into ruin and contempt; whilst those of easy and conciliating manners, silently climb above them, less envied, and less opposed, because less noticed and less offending.

It is universally allowed, that nothing so much advances our worldly interests, and so much assists us in our pursuits of wealth and honours, as good-breeding; and what is good-breeding, but an affectation of meekness, humility, and complacency? if, therefore, the pretence to these amiable qualities can do so much, surely the possession of them will do a great deal more. In fact it does, and seldom fails to gain us favour, increase our friends, and advance our interests.—Thus we see this promise is generally accomplished; the meek do inherit the earth, that is, have the best chance of acquiring and enjoying the blessings of this life, as well as the happiness of another.

## MATT. v. 7.

Μακαριοι οι ελεημονες, οτι αυτοι ελεηθησονται.

*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*

**C**RUELTY is the most unpardonable of all crimes, because it is without temptation, and therefore without excuse. Mercy is the most amiable attribute of God ; and a virtue most becoming the situation of man, because the sins which he perpetually commits, and the dangers with which he is constantly surrounded, oblige him to stand in need of it every hour : it is peculiarly congenial to the benevolent spirit of the Christian religion, and as such is here enforced by the Author of it, in this short but emphatical declaration ; in which it is remarkable, that we find nothing which limits our exercise of this amiable virtue within any bounds, or confines it to any description ; not to our relations, our friends, neighbours our countrymen, nor even to mankind : from whence we may reasonably conclude, that he requires us to extend it to every thing that has life and sensibility. The words seem to regard more the disposition of the actor than the object on which it is exerted : “ Blessed are the merciful,” that is, those who are of a tender and compassionate temper, who feel for the miseries of every thing that has life, and endeavour all in their power to relieve them. Whoever, therefore,

therefore, can wantonly inflict pain on the meanest animal, or receive a diabolical pleasure from its sufferings, can have no claim to this blessing, nor to obtain that mercy to which he is a stranger.

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MATT. vi. 16.

Ὅταν δε νηστευητε, μη γινεσθε ὡς περ οἱ ὑποκριται.

*Moreover, when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites.*

**J**ESUS Christ having been born and educated under the Jewish institution, complied with all the ceremonies and customs of that law, and required none of his disciples to relinquish them, in order to receive the religion which he came to teach. Among these, fasting at particular seasons was one, which was commanded by their law, observed by all, and particularly by the Pharisees, with superstitious rigour and hypocritical ostentation; which he here with some asperity reprehends. He reproves them, not for fasting, the use of which, as well as that of all the rest of their religious rites, he approved and encouraged; but it is observable, that in these words there is nothing which requires it; taking it for granted, that they would fast in obedience to their law, he only says, "When ye fast, be not as the hypocrites;" and then proceeds  
to



to instruct them how to perform this duty in a proper manner : but does not command them to perform it at all.

This silence of their master, on a subject which they thought so important, induced many of the Jews, who had become his disciples, to excuse themselves from complying with this unpleasant ceremony ; as is evident from the question put to him by the disciples of John the Baptist, who said, “ Why do we “ and the Pharisees fast often \*, but thy disciples fast not ? ” From hence it appears plainly, that though Christ observed this, as well as all the ceremonies of the Mosaic law, it was no part of his institution, nor was enjoined by him as a Christian, or a moral duty. This indeed, and every other mode of self-punishment, are so opposite to the benevolent spirit of the religion which he taught that, it is impossible they can make a part of it. Christianity requires us to make every one as happy as we are able, to relieve the poor, visit the sick, and comfort the distressed ; but if every man was obliged to inflict sufferings upon himself, instead of excluding misery at every avenue, as we are benevolently commanded, we should introduce as much as if every man was permitted to injure and torment his neighbour. There are many precepts in the New Testament, which require us to suffer with fortitude and

\* Matt. ix. 14.

resignation,

resignation, for righteousness sake, for truth, for our religion, or the benefit of mankind; but we find none which enjoin sufferings for their own sake, or represent them as meritorious in themselves. St. Peter exhorts his disciples to suffer patiently for these great ends, "because Christ also suffered for them, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps \*;" but he does not advise us to suffer for no end at all.

Fasting, with all the rest of their religious rites, are continued to the Jews after their conversion to Christianity, but were never imposed on the proselytes of any other nation; from whence it is evident, that Christ never intended by the gospel to abolish the Mosaic law, with regard to the Jews, nor to extend it to any other people. Hence arises that remarkable difference, which cannot escape our notice, between the religion of Christ and that of his Apostles, and particularly of St. Paul; a difference so great, that, if we attend not to the cause of it, we must consider them as two religious institutions contradictory to each other. Christ commands his disciples to perform the most minute ceremonies of the Jewish law, to pay tithes even of mint, anniseed, and cummin †; St. Paul represents the most important, as useless and insignificant, and says, "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is no-

\* 1 Pet. ii. 21.

† Matt. xxiii. 23.

" thing,

“ thing, but the keeping the commandments  
 “ of God †.” The cause is sufficiently evident: Christ preached to the Jews, and therefore his religion is founded on and incorporated with theirs, which he did not require them to relinquish, in order to accept it, and assures them, that he did not come “ to destroy their law, but to fulfil it.” St. Paul preached chiefly to the Gentiles, but was not commissioned to convert them to Judaism, in order to their becoming Christians; and therefore we do not find that he, or any of the Apostles, imposed the observance of fasts, or any other ceremonies of the Mosaic law, on their Gentile profelytes.

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MATT. x. 29.

Ὁυχι δύο σπερμαὶ ἀσσαρία πωλεῖται. καὶ ἐν ἑξ αὐτῶν ὃ πεσεῖται  
 ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν, ἀνευ τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν.

*Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of these shall not fall to the ground without your heavenly Father.*

**M**ANY have been the controversies amongst philosophers, in all times, concerning a general and a particular Providence. Some have been of opinion, that the great Creator of all things so framed the universal system, that every part of it is carried on by

† 1 Cor. vii. 19.

a regular

a regular process of causes and consequences, without his farther interpolation; and that he cannot interpose, without changing the course of nature by a miraculous act of divine power, which he rarely, if ever, thinks proper to exert: that both the material and moral world are governed by general laws, which cannot be suspended for the sake of individuals, who must therefore submit to this necessity, though rewards and punishments are not always distributed in the present life in proportion to their merits; and that a machine so constituted is a more conspicuous instance of infinite wisdom and power, than the one which stands in need of the continual interference of its author, for regulation and support.—Others have thought, that God not only created the world, but perpetually sustains, invigorates, and directs every part of it; and that, if this energy of divine power was withdrawn but for a moment, the whole would instantly be annihilated.—The latter is undoubtedly the truth, and is confirmed by reason, scripture, and experience. Reason teaches us that the revolutions of the vast and innumerable celestial orbs, through immense spaces, or the delicate movements in animal and vegetable bodies, can never possibly be performed by any principles originally impressed on matter by attraction, cohesion, elasticity, or electricity; because they act in contradiction to them all: and therefore they must be effected

ed by the continual direction of some omnipotent hand: it assures us, that the moral, as well as the material world, must be under the continual influence of the same power; because, without it, the great designs of Providence could never be accomplished. The most important events in life are derived from the operations of matter and will, peace and war, plenty and famine, our health and diseases, our happiness and misery, our safety and destruction. No plan, therefore, could be pursued, if these were all left to the blind movement of the one, or the capricious elections of the other; but happily for us, they are both under the controul of an omniscient and omnipotent governor, who dispenses them as seems best to his infinite wisdom; and this he can do by a perpetual though invisible influence, without the expence of any miracle; for, if his interference in any event constitutes a miracle, every event is a miracle in nature, because there can be no event without it.

The whole tenour of the scriptures implies the constant superintendency of the Creator over all his works, his continual attention to the most inconsiderable, as well as to the most important events, to the fall of a sparrow and to the fall of an empire, to ourselves, our behaviour, our happiness and sufferings, our enjoyments, and our wants; these are all represented as the effects of his will, and therefore the objects of his knowledge and  
his

his care; and on this principle we are every where enjoined to love him, to fear him, to praise him, to adore him, to obey his commands, to implore his forgiveness, to thank him for his mercy, and to deprecate his wrath.

Experience teaches us the same lesson; and a man must be possessed of very little observation, and less faith, who does not recollect daily instances of the apparent interposition of Providence in the detection of crimes, the punishment of guilt, and the protection of innocence, which fall within the circle of his own knowledge, and are recorded in the most authentic histories of all ages.

### MATT. x. 34, 35.

Μη νομισητε ὅτι ἦλθον βαλεῖν εἰρήνην ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν· ἔκ ἦλθον βαλεῖν εἰρήνην, ἀλλὰ μαχαίραν.

Ἦλθον γὰρ διχάσαι ἄνθρωπον κατὰ τὸ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ, καὶ θυγατέρα κατὰ τοῦ μητρὸς αὐτοῦ, καὶ νυμφὴν κατὰ τοῦ πενθερᾶς αὐτοῦ.

*Think not that I am to come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword.*

*For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.*

**T**HIS prophecy of Christ was soon completed and dreadfully fulfilled, particularly in that city, and amongst that people to whom it was spoken; for the Jews were so far

far from accepting that pacific and benevolent religion which he taught, that they perverted it into a new cause of increasing those national contentions and private animosities in which they were then universally involved, and were justly punished for their enormous wickedness, obstinacy, and incredulity, by the swords of their enemies and their own, with such calamities as are unexampled in the history of mankind. This is an undisputed fact; but how is it reconcileable with his frequent declarations on other occasions, and the whole tenour of the New Testament, in which Christ every where is styled the Prince of Peace, and his Gospel represented as introductive of peace and good-will towards men?

The usual solution of this difficulty is this; that such it was intended to be by its benevolent author, but that it was so far perverted by the wickedness of man, that the effects of it proved to be the very reverse of its original design, and it became productive of all the evils which it was intended to prevent.—But this, I think, is by no means satisfactory; because I cannot be persuaded that the wise and beneficent intentions of Providence can ever be defeated by the folly and wickedness of man; their effects, indeed, may sometimes be delayed by events, which to us may seem adverse, but which, in fact, are necessary to their final completion; and this, in the present instance, I take to be the case.

case. The great end of Christ's coming was to send peace and good-will amongst men; and this it has undoubtedly effected to a certain degree: his mild and pacific religion has much abated their native ferocity, cruelty, and depravity, and is making a daily progress in this salutary work; but he found it necessary to send with it a sword, to lop off some part of that enormous wickedness, which, at its first appearance, had overspread the world, and to make men by their sufferings capable of its reception; as some inveterate diseases will admit of no remedy without a severe and painful amputation.

This prophecy of Christ, therefore, is not in the least contradictory to his own declarations, or the sense of the scriptures, because they relate to different objects; the first foretells the many miseries which he foresaw men would bring upon themselves, by the abuse and perversion of the religion which he taught them; the latter informs us of the pacific spirit and benevolent design of that religion, and the salutary effects which it must ultimately produce on the morals and happiness of mankind.



## MATT. X. 41.

Ὁ δεχόμενος προφήτην εἰς ὄνομα προφήτου μισθὸν προφήτου λαΐσει.

*He that receiveth a prophet, in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet's reward.*

**B**Y “a prophet” is here to be understood, a holy, religious, and good man; and the meaning of the whole sentence is this:—“He “that receiveth a prophet,” that is, he that entertains, assists, and patronises a religious and good man; “in the name of a prophet,” that is, because he is, and has the name and character of a religious and good man; “shall receive a prophet's reward;” that is, is entitled to, and shall receive as great a reward as the religious and good man himself. That he should receive an equal reward is perfectly agreeable to divine justice, because, entertaining and patronising a pious and virtuous man, from the sole consideration of his merit, demonstrates a heart as much devoted to piety and virtue as any action which the worthy object of his favour can possibly perform.

If this is true, the converse must be true likewise; that is, that he that entertains, protects, and patronises an impious, a profligate man, for the sake of his vices, is as criminal, and shall receive as severe a punishment, as the most abandoned of his favourites: and this with equal justice, because

cause the approbation of wickedness in others, having no temptation for an excuse, is more atrocious, and demonstrates a more depraved disposition, than even the practice of it. The seduction of pleasure, the lure of interest, or the violence of our passions, may be some, though a poor apology, for the commission of crimes; but to sit coolly by and view with pleasure the iniquities and profligacy of others, and to encourage them by our favour, approbation, and rewards, indicates a disposition more completely depraved than the commission of them, but depraved as it is, we see instances of it every day; we see the most impious and profane, the most corrupt and dissolute, sometimes the idols of the vulgar, and more frequently the idols of the great; we see them, without any introduction or recommendation, except their vices, entertained, careased, and patronised by the rich and powerful, who look with envy and admiration on a degree of profligacy in them, which they themselves are unable to arrive at.

MATT.

## MATT. xi. 25.

Ἐν ἰκύνῳ τῷ καιρῷ ἀποκριθεὶς ὁ Ἰησοῦς, εἶπεν· Ἐξομολογῶμαι σοὶ πατὴρ, κυριε τῆ ἡράνῃ καὶ τῆς γῆς, ὅτι ἀπέκρυψας ταῦτα ἀπὸ σοφῶν καὶ συνετῶν, καὶ ἀπέκαλυψας αὐτὰ νηπιείοις.

*Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.*

**I**T seems not a little extraordinary, that Jesus should, in this solemn manner, return thanks to his heavenly Father, for having hid from the wise and prudent the mysteries of that gospel, which he himself came into the world to promulgate, on the knowledge of which the salvation of mankind depended; but this may be very well accounted for by a proper explanation of these words.

By the “wise,” I apprehend, are to be here understood, those self-sufficient reasoners who will believe no divine revelation which does not exactly tally with their own imperfect ideas of truth, nor obey any precepts which are not conformable to their notions of justice and the fitness of things. By the “prudent,” are meant those, who pay little attention to any religion, but are perpetually employed in worldly occupations, and the pursuits of interest and ambition. Jesus, having experienced the obstinacy and perverseness, with which persons under both these descriptions rejected the revelation

which he offered them, and at the same time the readiness with which it was thankfully received by the meek, the humble, the teachable, and the innocent, returns thanks to his heavenly Father, (that is, in the form of an address, adores and admires the wisdom and justice of God), for having so contrived the nature of the Gospel, that it was less acceptable, and less intelligible to those who, from their evil dispositions, deserved not to partake of the benefits which it confers, than to those who are more worthy to receive them : and this seems to be nothing more than what, we all do, or ought to do, which is, to thank, admire, and adore our gracious Creator, for having so constituted the essence of all human vices and virtues, that each are naturally productive of their own punishments and rewards.

MATT. xvi. 18.

Καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πετρᾷ οἰκοδομήσω μὲ τὴν ἐκκλησίαν.

*Upon this rock will I build my church.*

**F**ROM this declaration of Christ it plainly appears, that he intended to be the founder of a church, that is, a society of persons believing his divine mission, and openly professing the religion which he came to publish to mankind ; which society should be vested with the powers and privileges of a corporate

rate body, and exercise them under his protection to the end of the world; but we do not find that, by any precepts delivered during his life, or any instructions left behind him at his death, he ever communicated to his disciples any plan of the formation of this church, or any rules for the government of it when formed. The reason of which I take to be this:—He knew the administration of this government must fall into the hands of men, be blended with their worldly interests, and in consequence be soon corrupted and abused, and therefore unworthy of divine authority; and that, if he appointed any particular form, or specific regulations for the management of it, he must have given some degree of sanction to those future corruptions and abuses. He knew, likewise, that it was unnecessary; because a community, once established, must naturally produce rule and subordination, that is, a government, because it cannot subsist without one. He instituted a church, because, without some institution of that kind, his religion must quickly have been banished from the world, and known nowhere but in the closets of a few speculative philosophers, and therefore had little influence on the general conduct of mankind; but he chose rather to trust the form and regulations of it to the nature of man, and the nature of government, than to any positive command. He did not ordain that when his religion should have spread over every quarter of the globe, this church

should become equally extensive, and be governed by one supreme head his successor and representative. He did not command, that in every respective country this church should be placed under the dominion of bishops or presbyters, of councils, convocations, or synods. He has prescribed no forms of worship, except one short prayer; no particular habits for the ministers who officiate; no places set apart for the performance of religious duties, or decorations for those places to excite reverence and devotion in the performers. All these he has left to the decision of future ages, to be ordered by different communities, in different countries, in a manner that shall best suit the tempers of the people, the genius of their government, and the opinions of the times; provided nothing is introduced inconsistent with the purity of his original institution. From hence evidently appears the ignorance and absurdity of those who reject all ecclesiastical authority as human impositions, and deny the very existence of any Christian church, in contradiction to the express declarations of its founder; and not less of those who refuse compliance with any national religious establishment, because they cannot find the form and ceremonies of it exactly delineated and prescribed in any part of the New Testament.

Christ has instituted ecclesiastical, in the same manner that God has civil, govern-  
ment,

ment, that is, by making it necessary, without directing the mode of its administration; because, though the thing itself is necessary, the mode is not so.

MATT. xix. 4, 5.

Ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς, εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· Ὁκ ἀνεγνώλει, ὅτι ὁ ποιήσας ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ ἐποίησεν αὐτὰς;

Καὶ εἶπεν· Ἐνεκεν τούτου καὶ ἀλειψέτω ἄνθρωπος τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὴν μητέρα, καὶ προσκολληθῆναι τῇ γυναίκι αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἑσονται οἱ δύο εἰς σὰρκα μιαν.

*And he answered and said, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning, made them male and female;*

*And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?*

**S**HOULD there be any controversy concerning the lawfulness of polygamy under the Christian dispensation, this declaration of its author is surely sufficiently decisive in the negative, because, if a man and a woman, by marriage, become one flesh, it seems impossible that a greater number than two should be incorporated by that union; and, if a man is commanded to leave his father and mother, and cleave to one wife, he is surely not at liberty to cleave to another.

The question here put to Jesus was not, indeed, concerning polygamy, but divorce; but his answer comprehended them both, and declares, by the clearest implication, that

that the first ought not to be permitted, and, in express words, that the last is absolutely unlawful in all cases, except in that of adultery.

The advocates for polygamy alledge, That the practice of it is recorded as far back as history carries us, to the earliest ages of the world; that it was allowed during the whole period of the Jewish theocracy, and continued by that people till the coming of Christ, and then not prohibited by any positive command: and that, therefore, though from a change of circumstances in the present times it may not be expedient, it cannot certainly be unlawful.—This argument has surely much weight; but in answer it may be said, That, although we do not find it any where in the New Testament absolutely forbid, it is, in this and several other places, highly disapproved of by the clearest implications; and indeed it is by no means credible, that a custom so licentious, so injurious to one, and so destructive to the domestic happiness of both sexes; a custom, even at that time, rejected by almost all the Gentile nations; should be adopted or permitted under the purity of the Christian institution.

The true state of the case I take to be this:—Multitudes of the Jews, unable to resist the preaching of Christ, and the evidence of his divine mission enforced by so many miracles, every day became converts to his religion; but, being extremely fond of the ceremonies



remonies and customs of their own, could not suddenly be prevailed on to relinquish them. Of none were they more tenacious than of this of polygamy, in which they and their forefathers had been indulged for so many centuries, and which had been authorised by the example of characters, to whom they looked up with the most profound veneration; and therefore many of them, after their conversion, continued in the practice of it.

That they did so, seems to be confirmed by what St. Paul writes to Titus, that “ a bishop must be blameless, the husband of one wife;” that is, that although polygamy might be overlooked in some of the Jewish converts, who could not be prevailed on to accept Christianity on any other terms, it could not be suffered in any one who undertook so important and so sacred an office as that of a bishop; whose life ought to be exemplary, and his conduct free even from the imputation of all blame.—From hence it appears evident, that polygamy was always considered, by Christ and his Apostles, as incompatible with the religion which they taught; and that, although it might be tolerated in some of the Jewish profelytes, who had immemorial custom to plead in its behalf, yet, even in them, it was looked upon as extremely blameable, and was never claimed by or permitted to any of the Gentiles who were converted.

MATT.

## MATT. XX. 15, 16.

Ἡ ἔκ ἐξέσι μοι ποιησαι ὁ θελω ἐν τοις ἑμοις ; ἡ ὁ ὀφθαλμος σε ποιητος  
 ἔστιν, ὅτι ἐγὼ ἀγαθος εἰμι ;

Οὕτως εἶσθαι οἱ ἰσχατοι, πρῶτοι, καὶ οἱ πρῶτοι, ἰσχατοί.

*Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own ?  
 Is thine eye evil, because I am good ?*

*So the last shall be first, and the first last.*

**I**N order to understand this parable of the householder, who paid his labourers not in proportion to the time in which they worked, or the work which they had performed, but according to his own pleasure; it is necessary to remember to whom, and on what occasion it was spoken. Jesus had just before declared, that when he should sit on his throne of glory, his twelve Apostles should sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Many of his auditors, who had but lately seen these men employed in the lowest occupations, and by no means eminent for their virtues or abilities, thought this a very partial declaration, and this promised exaltation far superior to their merits. To these this parable was particularly addressed; intended to teach them, that all power, glory, and happiness, are the sole property of God, and that he alone has a right to dispose of them according to his pleasure; that all which we enjoy is a free gift from his benevolence, and not a compensation for our merits; that our me-  
 rits,

rits, if we have any, are derived from him; that even these merits proceed from his grace, and the rewards of them from his bounty; that we ought to be thankful for the benefits we receive from his favour, and have no pretence to complain of his partiality, if we see greater conferred on those who may appear to us to deserve them less; that we are bad judges of the merits of others, and worse of our own, and that therefore, in a future life, many who are now last in our estimation, will be first in happiness and glory; and many whom we now admire for their virtues, and imagine will be first in that state, will be the last, that is, least meritorious in the sight of their just and all-discerning judge. From whence we may learn, that it is the highest presumption in us to circumscribe the right of our Creator, in the distribution of his favours, by our imperfect notion of fitness and equity, to set bounds to the operations of any one of his attributes by confronting it with another, to limit his power by the effects of his mercy, or the effects of his mercy by those of his justice. His attributes are all above our comprehension, and therefore we ought only to adore them in silence, and submit to his decision with gratitude and resignation.

## MATT. xxii. 21.

Τότε λέγει αὐτοῖς· Ἀποδοτε ἐν τα Καίσαρι, Καίσαρι· καὶ ἐν τῷ Θεῷ, τῷ Θεῷ.

*Then said he unto them, Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God, the things which are God's.*

**I**N order to ensnare Jesus into offending either their own nation, or the Roman government, under which they were then subjected, the Jews said unto him, "Tell us, therefore, what thinkest thou, Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar, or not?" A question the most insidious, and most dangerous to decide on, that art or malice could have contrived; because, in the decision of it, the most important political rights were to be determined: Whether they, being a people chosen by God, could lawfully submit to the government of any but God; or some one of their own nation, deputed by his immediate direction?—Whether conquest, which is but unjust, though successful violence, can give a just right to govern?—Whether one nation can have a right to rule over, and consequently to impose tribute on another?—And, Whether any sovereign can lawfully compel subjects to pay taxes, without their own consent? If Christ had thought it ever proper for him to give directions on political topics, he certainly would not have neglected this opportunity; but he now, and  
at

at all times, industriously avoided it, and said, "Shew me the tribute money:" then replies to their question, by asking them another, "Whose is this image and superscription?" They answered, "Cæsar's." Then said he unto them, "Render, therefore, unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God, the things which are God's."

Many opinions, by the ingenuity of commentators, have been extracted from these few words of Christ. Some have thought, that, by them, he intended to explode that favourite notion, that they could not be lawfully governed by any except God. Some have asserted, that, by here acknowledging the title of Cæsar, he had established the right of all conquerors to rule over the people whom they had subdued. Others would persuade us, that, by the things which are Cæsar's, are to be understood, taxes imposed by the state; and, by the things which are God's, the revenues of the church: and it is surprising, that no courtly divine has undertaken to prove, from this short decision, that every sovereign has a right to seize on all the money which bears his image and superscription. But certainly none of these fanciful conjectures have any foundation in these words of Christ; which are no more than an evasive answer to an insidious question, and a declaration of what he takes every opportunity of declaring, That he did not come to decide political controversies, to settle

settle the rights of conquerors and the conquered, or of sovereigns and subjects; and that the only instructions which he could give on that head were, to pay quietly tribute and submission to whatever government they lived under, without unnecessary inquiries into the lawfulness of their claims; but to inquire diligently after the will of God, and pay the strictest obedience to it on every occasion.

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### MATT. xxvi. 39.

Και προελθὼν μικρὸν, ἔπεσεν ἐπὶ προσῶπον αὐτοῦ, προσευχόμενος, καὶ λέγων, Πάτερ μου, εἰ δυνατόν ἐστίν, παρελθέτω ἀπ' ἐμοῦ τὸ ποτήριον τούτο.

*And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and praying, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.*

THE hypothetical words, inserted in this fervent address of Christ to his heavenly Father, seem to establish the truth of two important propositions: First, That there may be, and actually are, evils inherent in the nature of things, which even Omnipotence cannot prevent; and, that we have reason to conclude, that all which we suffer in this life, except such as we bring upon ourselves by our misconduct or mutual injuries, are of this kind; that is, such as cannot be prevented without the admission of greater evils, or the

the loss of good more than equivalent; because we cannot suppose that a Creator of infinite power and goodness, would admit any others into any part of his works.

The second proposition is, That the sufferings and death of Christ are likewise of this kind, absolutely necessary as an atonement for the sins of mankind, and therefore unpreventable by any power, without defeating the great design of the benevolent but dreadful task which he had undertaken. As such they are represented, by himself and his Apostles, through every part of the New Testament; not as contingencies, like those of other martyrs in the cause of religion, but as an essential part of the original plan of his mission. From whence this necessity arises, we have not faculties to conceive: but it must be certainly from some connections between suffering and sin, that is, between natural and moral evil, totally beyond the reach of our comprehensions.

Christ, under the most terrible apprehensions of his approaching execution, fell on his face, and prayed, saying, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me;" that is, if it be possible to procure the redemption of mankind without this sacrifice: but it was not possible, and therefore he voluntarily submitted to drink it, as the only means to accomplish that benevolent end; and, in proof of it, says, "No man taketh  
" my

“ my life from me, but I lay it down of myself\*.” No doubt of its possibility could arise from any other cause, for surely it was not only possible, but very easy, for the power of God to have delivered him out of the hands of man. He might have changed the hearts of his enemies: he might have defeated their malice, by placing him in a situation beyond their reach, or by sending twelve legions of angels to his assistance: “ But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be †?” that is, How then shall the prophecies and promises be fulfilled, which assure us, that this important purpose can be effected by no other means, nor satisfaction made for the sins of the world on any other terms?

## MARK ii. 27.

Και ελεσεν αυτοις· Το σαββατον δια τον ανθρωπον εγενετο, οχι ο ανθρωπος δια το σαββατον.

*And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath.*

**T**HIS was the reply which Christ made to the Pharisees, who had frequently reproofed him for healing the sick on the sabbath-day; and, in the present instance, for suffering his disciples to pluck a few ears of corn as they walked through the fields on that day; by which we are to understand, that his opinion on this subject was, that the keeping

\* John x. 18.

† Matt. xxvi. 53.



holy the sabbath-day was a wise and excellent institution, admirably contrived for the benefit of mankind, but not of such indispensable importance, that we should think it is the chief duty of our lives, or that we were placed in this world on purpose to perform it.

The Pharisees were a sect of the Jews, noted for their spiritual pride and hypocrisy, who pretended to extraordinary sanctity, by a strict and superstitious observance of every ceremony appointed by the Mosaic law, particularly that of keeping holy the sabbath, with a rigour beyond what the good of society would admit, or the institution itself required; and it is not a little remarkable, that the sectaries of all times have followed their example in this instance; they have all thought, or pretended to think, that a rigorous observance of this day is the first of all Christian duties, and the neglect of it the most enormous of all crimes; whereas, properly speaking, it is no Christian duty at all, in any other sense, than that it is the duty of every Christian to comply with every institution, from whatsoever source it may be derived, which tends to promote religion and virtue amongst mankind.

The keeping holy the sabbath-day was originally enjoined, by a positive commandment, to the Jews in the Mosaic law; and, as such, was observed by Christ and his Apostles, as was every other part of that law, and was afterwards retained by the  
Christians

Christians of all succeeding ages, for its peculiar excellence and utility, when all the rest were laid aside. But I do not recollect that it is any where enjoined by Christ or his Apostles, or even mentioned in the New Testament, except in this and some other places in which he reproves the Pharisees for their hypocritical and superstitious observance of it, by converting a day that was intended to be set apart for rest, joy, and thanksgiving, into a season of mortification and self-denial of all comforts and conveniences of life.

But this lessens not the force of our obligation to keep this day in a proper manner; that is, to abstain from labour and all worldly cares and occupations, and to employ it in acts of devotion, charity, and hospitality; for which we have the example of Christ and his Apostles, and of every Christian church from their times to the present day. The excellence, likewise, of the institution itself cannot fail to recommend it; for certainly, there never was any other so well calculated to promote the interests of piety and virtue, to call off the worldly-minded from the perpetual toils of ambition and avarice, and to give leisure to those who are better disposed, to improve and cultivate those better dispositions; to afford relief to the poor from incessant labour, and to the rich from continual dissipation, and to produce some sense of religion in the vulgar, and some appearance of it in the great.

MARK

## MARK viii. 38.

Ὅς γὰρ ἂν ἐπαισχυθῇ με καὶ τοὺς ἑμὲς λόγους ἐν τῇ γενεᾷ ταύτῃ τῇ μοιχαλίδι καὶ ἀμαρτωλῇ, καὶ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐπαισχυθήσεται αὐτόν· ὅταν ἔλθῃ ἐν τῇ δόξῃ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ, μὲτα τῶν ἀγγέλων τῶν ἁγίων.

*Whosoever, therefore, shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father.*

**M**ANY and severe are the threats which we find denounced by Christ against hypocrites; that is, against those who pretended an extraordinary sanctity in their manners and conversation, without having any true sense of religion or morality in their hearts. The words before us are a threat, likewise, against hypocrites, but hypocrites of a very different sort; those who pretend to be more profligate than they really are, and therefore may properly be called hypocrites in wickedness. These are much more numerous in the present times, and perhaps more mischievous than the former; as those do honour to religion and virtue by their pretences to them, these affront them by an open disavowal. Those make others better than themselves, and these worse, by their example. We meet with this ridiculous and criminal kind of hypocrisy every day; we see men affecting to be guilty of vices for which they have no relish, of profligacy for which they have no constitutions, and of crimes

which they have not courage to perform. They lay claim to the honour of cheating, at the time they are cheated, and endeavour to pass for knaves, when, in fact, they are but fools. These are the offenders of whom Christ will be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father; which will be a dreadful but just punishment, and a proper retaliation of that foolish and impious modesty, which induced them to be ashamed of him and his word, in complaisance to a sinful and adulterous generation; and to be less afraid of incurring the displeasure of the best of all Beings, than the profane ridicule of the worst of men.

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### MARK xvi. 15, 16.

Και εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· Πορευθεντες εἰς τον κοσμον ἅπαντα, κηρυξατε το εὐαγγελιον παντη τῇ κτίσει.

Ὁ πιστευσας καὶ βαπτισθεις σωθησεται· ὁ δὲ ἀπισήσας, κατακριθησεται.

*And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.*

*He that believeth, and is baptised, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned.*

**T**HIS is the commission, together with the promises and threats annexed to it, which Christ gave to his Apostles when he sent them forth to preach the gospel to every part of the world: in which these three im-  
portant

portant questions offer themselves to our serious consideration; What is meant by believing? What is meant by being saved? and, What by being damned?—Believing cannot here be understood to signify the giving assent to the tradition of one church, or to the creeds and articles of another, or even to the historical facts recorded in the New Testament; because, at the time when this commission was delivered, no church existed, no creeds or articles were formed, nor was the New Testament written. Believing, in the language of that book, is for the most part used as a term synonymous to that of becoming a Christian. Thus it is related of the nobleman, whose son Jesus had cured, “Himself believed, and his whole house\*,” and thus it is said, that “many of the Jews, “which had seen the things which Jesus did, “believed on him†;” that is, were converted to the religion which he taught, and became Christians; for which purpose nothing more was then required, than to acknowledge that Jesus was the Son of God (that is, the Messiah expected by the Jews and foretold by the Prophets), and to receive baptism as an external and visible sign of their initiation into his holy fraternity, which was immediately administered to them on their assenting to this single proposition, as we find it

\* John iv. 53.

† John xi. 45.

was by Philip to the eunuch, without asking any further questions.

In the next place, What is meant by being saved? In order to understand this expression, it is necessary to recollect that, throughout the New Testament, we are everywhere informed, that mankind, in the present life, are in a state of guilt and depravity, under sentence of condemnation, and incapable of admission into the kingdom of Heaven that, in order to redeem them from this unhappy situation, Christ came into the world, and offered them a religion which was effectual for that purpose; and that, whoever shall believe on him (that is, acknowledge his divine authority, accept the religion which he taught, and testify this acceptance by baptism) shall by this, and the atonement made for sin by his sufferings and death, be saved (that is, absolved from their guilt, excused from that sentence, freed from that incapacity, and placed in a state, which, although it may be forfeited by their future misbehaviour, is, in the language of scripture, called salvation). This I take to be the true meaning of being saved; which, without some retrospect, can have no meaning at all.

By being damned, is not here to be understood, being consigned to a state of everlasting punishment, according to the vulgar acceptance of that phrase in our translation, in which sense, I believe, it is no where used  
by

by the writers of the New Testament—the original word is κατακριθῆσεται, *condemnabitur*, which signifies simply, *will be condemned or found guilty*, without referring to any punishment whatever. In the present instance, it means nothing more than the reverse of being saved. “He that believeth will be saved, but he that believeth not cannot be saved;” that is, Whoever refuses this gracious offer can receive no benefit from it, but must remain in the same state of guilt, condemnation, and exclusion from the kingdom of Heaven, as if no such offer had been made; not as a punishment, but as a necessary consequence of his unbelief. This is not a threat, but a declaration; in which there is no more injustice or severity, than in that of a physician, who, having prescribed a specific medicine to a patient labouring under an inveterate disease, assures him, that if he takes it, he will certainly recover; but if he will not, he will as certainly die.—This fair interpretation of this passage I think a full vindication of the justice and goodness of God, from the blasphemous imputations sometimes thrown on the divine conduct, in condemning his creatures to eternal misery, merely for not assenting to propositions which many cannot believe, and more cannot understand; for which there is not the least foundation in the words before us.

## LUKE xi. 8.

Λεγω ὑμῖν, εἰ καὶ ὁ δώσει αὐτῷ ἀνασας, διὰ το εἶναι αὐτὸ φίλος, διὰ γε τὴν ἀναιδείαν αὐτὸ ἐγερθεὶς δώσει αὐτῷ ὅσων χρήζει.

*If say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend; yet, because of his importunity, he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.*

**T**HIS parable, and also another of the importunate widow, in the second chapter, seems to represent the Deity as teased into compliance, and granting requests not from the reasonableness of the petition, or the merits of the petitioners, but merely to put an end to their troublesome importunities. This in man would certainly be a weakness, but in the Supreme Judge and disposer of all things is an absolute impossibility; and therefore cannot be the intention of this parable. But, in order to understand the sense of this, and many other passages in both the Old and New Testament, we should remember, that although these, as well as other writings of remoter ages, abound in more sublime ideas, and more beautiful figures, than the compositions of later ages; yet we must not expect to find in them the same correctness and precision. In their similes, provided there were some resemblance in their principal features, little regard was paid to their disagreement in all the rest. Thus the Psalmist compares the unity of brethren to the  
precious



precious ointment on the head of Aaron, which ran down to his beard, and even to the skirts of his cloathing; between which there is not the least similitude, except that they were both precious and pleasant things. In their parables and fables, provided the great outlines corresponded with the moral which they designed to inculcate, they attended not to the collateral circumstances which were introduced into the story; and therefore we ought never to draw any conclusions from them. Thus, in the parable of the marriage of the king's son, the king, observing that one of the guests had not a wedding-garment, commanded him to be bound hand and foot, and cast into outer darkness; by which we are taught, that whosoever comes to Christ, that is, pretends to be a Christian, without the proper cloathing of righteousness and faith, will incur his displeasure, and be severely punished.—But we must not compare the just dispensations of Providence, with the unjust sentence of the king, who punished a man for not having on a wedding-garment, who had been but just before picked up in the highway, and could not have been expected to have been properly dressed for such an entertainment.

In like manner, in this parable, the sole intention is to inculcate the duty of fervent and importunate prayer, together with the deserved success which attends it. This is very well illustrated by the persevering im-  
portunity

portunity of the petitioner, and the compliance, though late, compliance of his friend. The motive which at last induced him to comply, after so long and obstinate a refusal, is a collateral circumstance, which makes no part of the parable. The parable applies only to the fact, not to the motive, which produced it; and therefore that is not to be attended to.

LUKE xi. 24, 25, 26.

Όταν το ἀκαθαρτον πνευμα ἐξέλθῃ ἀπο τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, διερχόμενος διὰ ἀνυδρῶν τοπων ζητεῖ ἀναπαυσιν· καὶ μὴ εὑρίσκον, λέγει. Ὑποστρέψω εἰς τὸν οἶκόν μου, ὅθεν ἐξῆλθον.

Καὶ ἔλθον εὑρίσκει σεσάρωμενον καὶ κεκοσμημένον.

Τότε πορεύεται καὶ παραλαμβάνει ἑπτὰ ἑτέρα πνευμαῖα πονηρότερα ἑαυτοῦ, καὶ εἰσελθόντα κατοικεῖ ἐκεῖ· καὶ γίνονται τὰ ἰσχυρά τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκείνη χειρὸν τῶν πρώτων.

*When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest : and finding none, he saith, I will return to my house whence I came out.*

*And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished.*

*Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there : and the last state of that man is worse than the first.*

**I** KNOW of no passage throughout the New Testament so obscure as this, nor onewhich the commentators have been so little able to explain:—for which end, it is in the first place necessary to observe, that, in the times in which the gospels were written, an opi-  
nion

nion was univerſally adopted, both by Jews and Gentiles, that madneſs, idiotiſm, many of the diſeaſes and much of the wickedneſs of mankind, were occaſioned by evil ſpirits, who got poſſeſſion of their minds and bodies; and that theſe ſpirits, when caſt out by ſome ſuperior power, wandered about in ſolitary and uninhabited deſerts, reſtleſs and miſerable, until they were able to return to their old, or to occupy ſome new habitation.

This paſſage is plainly founded on this idea, and on this ſuppoſition will be found not altogether unintelligible; but may be fairly explained in the following manner:—

“ When the unclean ſpirit goeth out of a man, he, the ſpirit, walketh in dry places, (that is, wandereth about in dry and ſandy deſerts) ſeeking reſt; and finding none, he ſaith to himſelf, I will return to my houſe whence I came out (that is, to the poſſeſſion of the ſame perſon from whom I have been expelled); and when he cometh there, if he findeth it ſwept and garniſhed, (that is, prepared and made ready for his reception by the perſon’s relapſe into his former ſtate of depravity) then taketh he to him ſeven ſpirits more wicked than himſelf, and they enter and dwell there (that is, they enter and fix their habitation there, and cannot again be caſt out); ſo the laſt ſtate of that man is worſe than the firſt.”—The meaning of all which, diveſted of metaphor and reduced to common language, I take to be this:—When

any

any one, who has by the power of reason and religion, expelled from his heart impious and malevolent dispositions, infused into it by the operations of evil spirits, shall suffer himself again to fall under their dominion, they will return with sevenfold strength, and the man will be many degrees more wicked than he was before.

That evil spirits did, in those ages, take possession of the minds and bodies of human beings, we cannot doubt, if we give any credit to history, sacred or profane; and, although the sagacity of the present more enlightened times hath exploded this opinion with contempt and ridicule, yet we see daily instances, which must induce us to believe, that their power is not even now totally at an end. We see some labouring under diseases which the most skilful physicians are unable to account for or to cure; others perpetrating the most horrid crimes without provocation, temptation, or advantage: we see the hand of the suicide plunging the dagger into his own breast, in contradiction to his reason, his principles, and his corporal feelings: And must we not conclude, that all these unaccountable actions proceed from the directions of some external powers, which the actors are unable to resist? In madness we plainly perceive two distinct wills operating at the same time, one of which compels a man to commit the most outrageous acts, which the other disapproves,

proves, but cannot controul; nay, sometimes foresees, for a considerable time, that he shall be so compelled, but is unable to prevent it.

I cannot conclude this observation, without adding another, on the next succeeding verse, in which we are informed, that, “as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lift up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked.” She had listened to his excellent and intelligible discourse for some time, which she perfectly understood; but when he spake these things, which were above her comprehension, she could no longer forbear lifting up her voice and uttering this pathetic exclamation, to express her applause and admiration. This is a picture so exactly copied from nature and experience, that we can have no doubt of its truth; and is here only mentioned as a mark of the fidelity with which the most minute incidents are recorded by the Evangelical historians.

## LUKE xiv. 10.

‘Αλλ’ ὅταν κληθῇς, πορευθεὶς ἀναπεσον εἰς τὸν ἑσχατὸν τοπὸν.

*But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room.*

**C**HRISTIANITY is the best-bred religion in the world, although the manners of some of its most rigid professors seem to contradict this assertion. There is not a single quality required in the composition of a true Christian, which is not equally requisite in the character of a well bred man; nor a single deviation from politeness, which does not, under the Christian law, become a crime, because it tends to defeat the two great objects of that holy institution, which are to promote peace and good-will on earth, and to qualify us for the kingdom of heaven.

Many were the lessons by which Christ endeavoured to infuse this amiable virtue into the minds of his disciples; in the command before us he forbids every insolent attempt to precedence, as equally adverse to Christianity as to good manners, as it denotes a proud heart and high spirit, inconsistent with the humble precepts of that religion. He says, “Whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain,” that is, In the intercourses of social life, be ready to comply with every innocent proposal, and in every office of civility perform  
twice

twice as much, as is either required or expected. This, therefore, is Christianity, as well as politeness.—Again, he says, “Whosoever shall be angry with his brother, without a cause,” (that is, shall enter into violent, angry, and peevish disputes about nothing) “shall be in danger of the judgment [or displeasure of God]; but whosoever shall say to his brother, Thou fool! shall be in danger of hell-fire;” that is, Who shall make use of such opprobrious and affronting expressions as may provoke retaliation and resentment, which may end in violence and bloodshed, is answerable for the consequences, and therefore shall be in danger of the severest punishment.—Thus we see, that every virtue enjoined by Christianity as a duty, is recommended by politeness as an accomplishment. Gentleness, humility, deference, affability, and a readiness to assist and serve on all occasions, are as necessary in the composition of a true Christian as in that of a well-bred man; passion, moroseness, peevishness, and supercilious self-sufficiency, are equally repugnant to the characters of both:—who differ in this only, that the true Christian really is what the well-bred man but pretends to be, and would be still better bred if he was.

## LUKE xv. 7.

Λεγω ὑμῖν, ὅτι ἔτω χαρὰ ἔσται ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ἐπὶ ἑνὶ ἁμαρτωλῷ μετανοῶντι, ἢ ἐπὶ ἐννενηκονοβίωντα δικαίοις, οἵτινες ὁ χρεῖαν ἔχουσι μετάνοιας.

*I say unto you, That joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance.*

**SOME** modern enthusiasts entertain such favourable ideas of repentance, as to place it higher, in the catalogue of Christian virtues, than even perfect innocence itself. They seem to think, that a man must be a sinner before he can be a saint; and that, if his repentance be sincere, his merits will rise in proportion to his past offences. Nay, some have gone so far as to recommend wickedness as preparatory to repentance, and therefore necessary to insure our salvation. False and impious as these principles are, they may, perhaps, like most errors, have some foundation in truth misunderstood; for we certainly see in this, and many other parts of the New Testament, an extraordinary degree of merit imputed, and an extraordinary degree of favour shewn, to earnest and sincere repentance; although repentance, however sincere and successful, can do no more than place the sinner in the same state as if he had never offended. How then comes it to pass, that we find here a more joyful reception into heaven bestowed



flowed upon the sinner who hath repented, than upon ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance? This seems to be a dispensation not easily reconcileable with the wisdom and justice of God; and therefore I do not apprehend that, by these words, any preference is given to sinners who repent, above the righteous who need no repentance, because, in such a state of perfection no human being ever existed; and therefore the competition can only lie between those who have committed great crimes, of which they are truly sensible, and have sincerely repented, and those who have been daily guilty of many smaller offences, of which they are so little conscious as to think they need no repentance. This is clearly exemplified by the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, who went up to the temple to pray\*. The Pharisee, unconscious of his unworthiness, thought he needed no repentance, and therefore only thanked God that he was not as other men; extortioners, unjust, adulterous, or even as this Publican: the Publican, sensible of the many crimes which he had committed, and sincerely sorry for them, stood afar off, and would not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner." "I tell you," says Christ, "this

\* Luke xviii. 10.

“ man went down to his house justified rather than the other.”

Perhaps, also, there may be something in a sincere repentance for past offences, more acceptable to God, and more congenial to the true spirit of Christianity, and therefore more productive of joy in heaven, than in any degree of original righteousness of which human nature is capable. The painter and the sculptor shew, that beauty cannot be formed by compasses and a rule; a face in which every feature was faultless would be stiff, formal, and unpleasing; there must be some small deviations from exact symmetry to enable it to strike the eye and captivate the heart of every beholder. Just so in our morals, was it possible for any one to act at all times, and on all occasions, as he ought, his conduct would form a character rather admirable than amiable, unnatural to man, and unlike that of a Christian, because it would certainly be accompanied with some kind of arrogance, self-sufficiency, and independence, inconsistent with the lowliness, humility, and diffidence, essential to that religion. Christianity does not expect that we should be guilty of no offences, but that we be sorry for them. It does not require perfection, of which we are incapable; but a broken and contrite heart, repentance for sins past, and perpetual endeavours after future amendment, which is in every man's power. This is the sole principle on which  
this

this holy institution is founded, and therefore it is not surprising that there should be extraordinary joy in heaven on every instance of the salutary effects of it, in the conversion and salvation of a sinner.

Experience teaches us, that we receive more joy from the unexpected return of any good, than from the uninterrupted possession of it; from regaining a lost treasure, than from its undisturbed enjoyment; or the recovery of a beloved friend from a dangerous disease, than from the knowledge of his continual health. This is both natural and rational. Why then should not the angels in heaven be affected with the same sensations from the same cause?

LUKE xvi. 9.

Καὶ γὰρ ὑμῖν λέγω· Ποιήσατε ἑαυτοῖς φίλους ἐκ τοῦ μαμωνᾶ τῆς ἀδικίας, ἵνα ὅταν ἐκλιπῇτε, δεξιῶνται ὑμᾶς εἰς τὰς αἰώνους σκηνάς.

*And I say unto you, make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.*

**N**O commentator, ancient or modern, has yet been able to give us a satisfactory explanation of this exhortation, delivered by Christ to a very numerous audience: the most plausible is this—That by the mammon of unrighteousness, we are to understand ill-gotten wealth; and the advice

which Christ here gives to those who have so acquired it, is to employ it in acts of charity and beneficence, by which means, though they fail in other parts of their duty, they may obtain admission into everlasting life.—This interpretation might do very well, if the words would bear it; but it is certainly impossible, by any torture, to extract out of them such a meaning; and if such a meaning could be allowed, it would not in the least correspond with the preceding parable: in order to understand which, as well as the words before us, it is necessary to recollect, both on what occasion they were spoken, and to whom they were addressed.

We find, in the foregoing chapter, that whilst Jesus was delivering these several parables to a very great multitude, he observed amongst them some Pharisees attending in the crowd; a set of men who were perpetually employed in external acts of piety and devotion, and as constantly busied in every species of extortion and fraud. To these Pharisees, equally remarkable for their religion and their roguery, this exhortation was with peculiar propriety addressed; in which, I apprehend, we are to understand, by the mammon of unrighteousness, the kingdom of Satan; the existence of which was universally believed in those times, and is frequently mentioned or alluded to in the scriptures, and placed in opposition to the kingdom of God. The advice here given  
to

to these men is this—not to attempt, at the same time, to serve God and Mammon; but, when they, by their iniquities, have lost all hopes of admission into the kingdom of light, to secure a reception in the kingdom of darkness, and to imitate the example of the unjust steward, in the parable which he had just before delivered to them, who, having abandoned all expectations of future support from his lord, on account of his misbehaviour, had endeavoured to conciliate to himself the goodness of his tenants; that when he was put out of the stewardship, they might receive him into their houses; for which artful precaution his lord commended him, because he had done wisely; but totally rejected him because he had not done honestly.—This, I think, is a just and fair explanation of this abstruse passage; which seems to be rather an ironical reproof of the Pharisees for their hypocrisy and avarice; than a serious direction for their conduct, and bears some resemblance to what Joshua said to the Israelites; “If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom you will serve\*.” so Christ says, If you will not be subjects of the kingdom of God, make yourselves friends in the kingdom of Satan.

\* Joshua xxiv. 15.

## LUKE xvi. 25.

Εἶπε δὲ Ἀβρααμ· Τέκνον, μνησθήτι ὅτι ἀπέλαβες οὐ τα ἀγαθὰ σε ἐν τῇ ζωῇ σου, καὶ Λαζαρος ὁμοίως τα κακὰ· νυν δὲ ὁδε παρακαλεῖται, σὺ δὲ ὀδυνασται.

*But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things : but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.*

**A**LL the commentators on this parable seem to have mistaken the intention and moral of it ; they have all understood it, as designed only to inform us, that no judgment can be formed of men's condition in a future life, by the appearances in the present, of either their prosperity or distress : that the rich and great will, if criminal, certainly meet with the punishment due to their offences, in another state, which, by the influence of their power, they may have evaded in this ; and the poor and diseased, if virtuous, will there receive retribution for all the miseries and ill-treatment which they have undeservedly suffered. In order to accommodate the parable to this interpretation, they have constantly painted the character of Dives in the blackest, and that of Lazarus in the brightest colours ; for which there is not the least foundation in the parable itself, as there is not one word said of the criminality of the one, or the merits of the other ; Abraham, in his answer to the rich man,

man, does not bid him to remember, that he acquired his wealth by fraud or rapine, or that he had expended it in profligacy or oppression ; and that, therefore, he ought not to complain of punishment which he had so justly deserved. He says nothing of the virtues of Lazarus, that he had been pious, sober, honest, and patient ; he only answers the complainant in a friendly manner, “ Son, “ remember that thou in thy life-time receivedst good things, and likewise Lazarus “ evil things ; but now he is comforted, and “ thou art tormented :” by which I apprehend, he means to address him :—“ Son, although thy present situation is very wretched, and that of Lazarus no less happy, thou hast no reason to arraign the partiality of God ; but oughtest to remember, that thou, in a former state, enjoyedst all the pleasures of wealth and prosperity, and that then Lazarus suffered all the miseries of poverty, and disease, but that now he is comforted, and thou art tormented, in conformity to that impartial and eternal law of Providence, which instituted the perpetual rotation of good and evil.”

From this parable we may learn, that the Supreme disposer of all things distributes good and evil amongst his creatures, not only with justice, but with a greater degree of equality than we imagine ; and that this he is enabled to perform by having so wonderfully contrived the disposition of things, and the constitution of man, that riches,  
power,

power, wealth, and prosperity, in this life, actually lead him into many vices, which will incur punishment in another; and sickness, poverty, and distress, are as naturally productive of many virtues, which will there merit a reward; by which means happiness and misery are more equally distributed, at the same time that strict justice is done to every individual according to his deserts, and no one can have any cause to complain.

This idea of the rotation of good and evil, of enjoyments and sufferings, is confirmed by the clearest allusions in several parts of the New Testament; for instance, we there read, that, "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God \*;" not because, it is criminal to be rich, but because, whilst riches bestow on their possessors many present gratifications, they usually make them proud, insolent and profligate, which incapacitates them from becoming members of that holy and happy community. Again, it is said, "Blessed are those that mourn, for they shall be comforted †;" not because there is any merit in mourning, but because afflictions naturally tend to make men humble, sober, patient, and virtuous in this life, for which they will deserve and receive a recompence of comfort in another. This wise

\* Matt. xix. 24.

† Matt. v. 4.



disposition of Providence, in the general course of things, although it marks his impartiality, is no impediment to his justice, because it lays no one under compulsion, and may be interrupted by the conduct of every individual. The rich are not obliged to be wicked, nor the poor to be virtuous; a rich man may employ his wealth in such a manner in this life, as to acquire happiness by it in another; and a poor man may be so incorrigible as to make himself very miserable in both. All that we are to learn from it is, to take extraordinary care to avoid those crimes to which our situation renders us peculiarly liable.

### JOHN iii. 3.

Ἀπεκρίθη ὁ Ἰησοῦς, καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ· Ἀμὲν ἀμὲν· λέγω σοι, ἐὰν μὴ τις γεννηθῇ ἄνωθεν, ἔσθ' δυνατὸν ἰδεῖν τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ Θεοῦ.

*Jesus answered, and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

**T**HE meaning of which is this:—That mankind are born or come into the world with dispositions so depraved, so prone to anger, malice, revenge, avarice, and ambition, that it is impossible for them ever to enter into the kingdom of Heaven, except they are so totally changed as to become new creatures. No partial alteration will do; it must be an entire change of temper, sentiments,

sentiments, habits, manners, inclinations, and pursuits. All these turbulent and high-spirited passions must be eradicated, and meekness, gentleness, and poorness of spirit, introduced in their room; anger must give place to patience, malice to benevolence, revenge to forgiveness, and all worldly pursuits to a constant habit of piety and devotion. This, in the language of scripture, is properly and emphatically styled being born again; because it is a kind of entrance upon a new life, and a commencement of a state entirely different from the former. The necessity for this change is sufficiently evident, because, if men could be permitted to carry these evil dispositions with them into the kingdom of God, they would not be happy themselves, nor suffer others to be so.

We see that even upon earth, if a wicked, malignant, and turbulent man was confined for life, in a virtuous, peaceable, and pious society, it would be no inconsiderable punishment; and much more severe would it be in heaven, where the contrast is greater and the duration longer. Wickedness and misery are by nature so closely united, that they cannot be separated, and therefore neither of them can have a place in the kingdom of God. If any one's dispositions are cruel, malignant, envious, turbulent, factious, and ambitious, though, in contradiction to their impulse, he should perform all the duties of piety, benevolence, humility, and

and submission, he could not become a member of this holy and happy society, because his admission would be rather a punishment than a reward: before he could attain this state of felicity, he must be qualified to enjoy it, and this can only be effected by being born again. How a man is to be born again, Jesus further informs us in the succeeding verse; he there says, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God;" that is, except a man be born again, by embracing the doctrines and obeying the precepts of his religion, for which purpose the external sign of baptism, and the internal assistance of the Holy Spirit, are absolutely necessary. By these, together with sincere repentance and reformation, he may become a new person, and perfectly qualified to be, and to make others happy in that blessed community; and when qualified, however great may have been his former offences, he will be readily admitted, and there will be joy in heaven at his reception.

## JOHN vi. 44.

Οὐδεὶς δύναται ἔλθειν πρὸς με, ἰὰν μὴ ὁ πατὴρ ὁ πέμψας με, ἔλυσσιν αὐτόν.

*No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him.*

**M**OST of our commentators, apprehensive lest the obvious sense of these words would lead them into difficulties concerning the grace of God, and the free-will of man, which they were unable to solve, have endeavoured to explain them away, and substitute other significations, for which there is no authority. The true meaning I take to be this:—"No man," says Christ, "can believe the doctrines, or obey the precepts, which I teach, except he is enabled by the assistance and the grace of God:" by which we are not to understand any sudden irresistible impulse, as some enthusiasts would persuade us; but, except God shall be pleased to dispose his heart, and also the circumstances of his situation, in such a manner as to draw him into the right road of faith and obedience. This is the declaration of Christ, and the doctrine universally enforced by all the writers of the New Testament. St. Paul says, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God \*." He says also to the Phi-

\* Cor. iii. 5.

lipians, " For it is God which worketh in you  
 " both to will and to do, of his good plea-  
 " sure \*". This is the constant language of  
 the scriptures; in which we are every where  
 exhorted to seek, to depend on, to hope for,  
 and to pray for this divine influence on our  
 thoughts and actions, as necessary to our  
 thinking any thing right, or performing any  
 thing good: and yet we are constantly  
 considered, by the whole tenour of those  
 writings, as free agents, possessed of perfect  
 liberty to do good or evil, and as such  
 we are instructed, admonished, tempted by  
 rewards, and threatened with punishments.  
 How contradictory soever these two propo-  
 sitions may seem, they are both undoubtedly  
 true. Of the first we cannot fail of being  
 convinced by reason, nor of the latter by ex-  
 perience. Reason assures us, that no crea-  
 ture can think or act independant of his  
 Creator, in whom he lives, and moves, and  
 has his being, and from whom he receives  
 power to think or act at all; and it seems in-  
 deed impossible that a Creator, however om-  
 nipotent, should bestow on his creatures  
 such a degree of freedom as to make them in-  
 dependent of himself: for he must infuse into  
 their original frames some dispositions, good  
 or bad; he must give them reason superior  
 to their passions, or passions uncontrouled by  
 their reason; he must endue them with a

\* Phil. ii. 13.

greater or less degree of wisdom or folly; he must place them within or beyond the reach of temptations, and within the view of virtuous or vicious examples. All these circumstances must proceed from his dispensations, and from these their elections and consequent conduct must be derived. Of the latter, which is, that we are possessed of full liberty to choose good or evil, to do, or forbear doing, any action; every moment's experience assures us with equal certainty. This is not a matter of argument, but of feeling; and we can no more doubt of our being possessed of this power, than of our sight, hearing, or any of our corporeal senses.

How these two contradictory propositions can be reconciled, is above the reach of our comprehensions, and is but another mark, added to many, of their weakness and imperfection. We have no faculties which are able to solve this difficulty, and therefore ought to leave it to that omniscient Being who framed, and is alone acquainted with the composition of the human mind. Each of these opinions has been supported by different sects of philosophers, with equal warmth; but it is remarkable, that the Christian is the only religious or moral institution which ventured to assert the truth of them both; which, as they are both undoubtedly true, seems no inconsiderable proof of the supernatural information and authority of that dispensation.

JOHN

## JOHN vi. 53.

Εἰπὺν ἐν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς· Ἀμὲν ἀμὲν λέγω ὑμῖν, ἐὰν μὴ φάγητε  
τὴν σὰρκα τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, καὶ πινῆτε αὐτοῦ τὸ αἷμα, οὐκ ἔχετε  
ζωὴν ἐν αἰῶνι.

*Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you,  
Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood,  
ye have no life in you.*

**T**HESSE remarkable words of Christ, being the very same which he afterwards used in the institution of the sacrament of his last supper, we cannot but conclude that they must have the same meaning. Modern expositors have, indeed, in both places, explained them in such a manner, as to leave them no meaning at all; they would persuade us, that they are merely figurative and metaphorical, and think, by eating the body, and drinking the blood of Christ, nothing more is to be understood, than being intimately united to him, by believing his doctrines and obeying his precepts; and that, when applied to the bread and wine received in the sacrament, they mean only that these are symbols of his sufferings and death. But they are surely too expressive, too much insisted on, and too often repeated, to admit of so cold an interpretation; nor is it credible that Christ would have made use of an expression for the sake of metaphor, which shocked his hearers, offended his disciples, and

and has produced the most violent contentions amongst them from that time to the present hour.

The Evangelists who heard them, and have so emphatically recorded them, had very different ideas of the importance of these words, and so had St. Paul, who reprobated the Corinthians who received unworthily, by not discerning the Lord's body; that is, by not perceiving that they were then not eating and drinking bread and wine as their daily food, but something which, by powers supernaturally annexed to it, would produce the most important effects on their present dispositions and future happiness. Our first reformers, though they rejected transubstantiation, yet retained the highest veneration for this sacrament, the sanctity of the elements, and the importance of their effects on the communicants; and I am inclined to think, that they understood the sense of the scriptures better, and the true spirit of Christianity more correctly, than our present reformers of reformation. These set up reason as the measure of truth, and then pare away the scriptures to make them fit it: those searched them with diligence and candour, to find out their true and genuine significations, without any regard to the decisions of human reason; from hence they formed their opinions and doctrines, and from them their creeds and articles; and on this principle we ought to subscribe them

—by



—by which we do not assert their truth, but their conformity to the sense of the scriptures, which they were intended to explain: the truth and authority of those writings is another question.

Several of our modern divines represent the sacrament of the Lord's Supper as a mere commemoration of his sufferings and death; by which they entirely destroy the end and intent of it: for, although this is a positive institution, it is of a moral nature, because it is designed to drive the wicked into repentance and amendment; and for this purpose it is most admirably contrived, because, if they have not totally rejected the Christian scheme, it lays them under insuperable difficulties, as it obliges them either to augment their guilt, by the neglect of a positive command, or, by obeying it without repentance and reformation, to ratify their own condemnation. But if these very extraordinary words of Christ have no meaning, or mean nothing more than a bare commemoration—if consecration confers no sanctity on the bread and wine—if those who receive them worthily receive no benefit, nor those who receive them unworthily incur no danger—the institution is vain and useless, and has no more concern with our religion or morals than the commemoration of gunpowder treason, or of any other event recorded in the history of former times.—Although, therefore, we cannot believe, in contradiction

contradiction to our senses, that by these emphatical words of Christ the material substance of the elements is changed; yet, surely, we may believe, without the imputation of credulity, that they have some meaning; and that, by them, powers, property, and effects may be annexed to the proper use of the sacrament, which may greatly contribute to our obtaining pardon for our past offences, prevent us from falling into future transgressions, and essentially assist us in our progress to everlasting life.

### JOHN vii. 46.

Οὐδε ποτε εἶπας ἐλαλήσεν ἄνθρωπος, ὡς οὗτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος.

*Never man spake like this man.*

**I** HAVE always been of opinion, that the most convincing proof of the divine authority of the Christian revelation may be drawn from the originality of its doctrines, precepts, and the character of its author. This religion teaches us, that mankind come into the world in a state of depravity, guilt, and condemnation, from which they cannot be redeemed, but by the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, together with their own sincere repentance, reformation, and faith in him; and that, on these terms, God will accept his sufferings and death, as an atone-  
ment

ment for their fins; but that these terms they are unable to comply with, without the superintendency of his grace and assistance, although they are endued with perfect free-will, and are accountable for the use of it.—All these doctrines are so entirely new, that they had never entered into the head of any one before, and never any man, but this man, had thought or spake any thing like them. Imposture always puts on the garb of truth, and resembles her as near as she can; but in all these propositions there appears not even a pretence to probability, and therefore, as they cannot be invention, we may reasonably conclude that they must be true.

The moral precepts of this institution are, indeed, similar to those of all others; but in this respect they also are entirely new, that they are carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection, than was ever thought of by the legislators and philosophers of preceding ages. They had some distant prospect of a future state of rewards and punishments, but they saw it through a glass darkly, obscured by clouds of doubt and uncertainty; but this man spake of it with certainty and authority, removed all the intervening clouds, and shewed it in the clearest day-light.

The character of the great author of this dispensation, is not less new than the religion itself; there is no instance, in the history of mankind, of the founder of a religion, who proposed by it no benefit to himself, as

well as to the world, who intended not to acquire wealth, power, and dominion over his followers; nor an institution in the construction of which this intention is not evidently visible. But Christ disavows all pretences to such acquisitions, chose nothing for himself, and promised nothing to his disciples but poverty, disgrace, sufferings, and death.

The progress of this religion was equally new and unprecedented with all the rest; for in the course of a few years it triumphed over all opposition, from reason and philosophy, from principalities and powers, and spread itself over all the most civilized and learned countries then in the world. This verified the wise prediction of Gamaliel; who said to the High-priest, desirous of persecuting the Apostles, "Let them alone; for  
 " if this counsel or work be of men, it will  
 " come to nought; but if it be of God, ye  
 " cannot overthrow it \*."

\* Acts v. 38, 39.

## JOHN viii. 57, 58.

Εἶπον ἐν οἷς Ἰουδαῖοι πρὸς αὐτόν· Πεντηκοντα ἔτη ἔγω ἔχεις, καὶ  
 Ἀβραὰμ ἰωρακας;  
 Εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς· Ἀμην ἀμην λεγὼ ὑμῖν, πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι  
 ἔγω εἰμι.

*Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old,  
 and hast thou seen Abraham?*

*Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before  
 Abraham was, I am.*

**I**N this short reply of Jesus to the Jews, there is something exceedingly remarkable; of which the commentators have taken no notice, though it is surprising that so uncommon an expression should have escaped their observation.

Had he said, "Before Abraham was, I was," the obvious meaning would have been no more than this, that he had existed from all eternity, and consequently before the time of Abraham, though he had not made his appearance in this world before that age which was then present; but the extraordinary phrase here used, by applying the present tense to a past event, must imply a great deal more, and refer to the mode of that eternal existence. It seems, indeed, to amount to a plain declaration, that eternal existence is permanent and unsuccessive; not composed of days, and months, and years, like ours in

the present life, but one fixed unchangeable point bearing no relation to time at all; which we have no faculty to comprehend, no language to express.

If this is the true nature of eternity, of which I have no doubt, this extraordinary declaration is no inconsiderable proof of the supernatural information of this extraordinary teacher; because, in the ages and situation in which he lived, he never could have acquired such an idea by any human means.

### JOHN xvii. 40.

Ἐκραυγασαν ἐν παλιν πάντες, λεγοντες· Μη τῆτον, ἀλλὰ τον Βαραββαν· ἦν δὲ ὁ Βαραββας ληστής.

*Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber.*

**I**T has frequently been well observed, that the Supreme disposer of all things never interposes a supernatural power, whenever his designs can be accomplished by ordinary means; that is, by the passions and actions of free beings; the effects of which are as certain and uniform, as those of matter and motion; and which, though to us not so visible, are as accurately known by him who is perfectly acquainted with their frames and dispositions, from whence their actions must inevitably be derived.

This is remarkably exemplified in the Evangelical history of the life and death of  
Jesus

Jefus Chrift ; in which we fee that, in order to afcertain his divine miffion, and give a fanctity to the religion which he taught, miraculous works were every day performed, becaufe this could not have been effected without them ; but the whole progrefs of his perfecutions, fufferings, and death, were left to the ordinary operations of the malice, wickednefs, and ignorance of mankind, the ufual inftruments which Providence employed to bring about the moft important events : and by thefe we find that *this*, the moft important of all others, was effected, without the affiftance of a fupernatural power ; for no fooner did Jefus enter upon his benevolent office of inftructing and reforming mankind, than he was mifunderftood by fome, and misrepresented by others ; he was reviled, infulted, and persecuted, his doctrines were called blaſphemy, and his miracles imputed to the devil. In a little time the Jewiſh prieſthood (apprehenſive from his preaching of danger to their church) and the civil magiſtrates (fearful of infurrection in the ſtate) united to deſtroy him. False witneſſes were ſuborned to accuſe him, and one of his own diſciples was corrupted to betray him. He was then brought before the judgment-ſeat of a Roman governor, who though he declared that he found no fault in him, yet (fearing to offend the moſt powerful part of the nation over which he preſided, and ſtill more overawed

by

by the name of Cæsar) preferred his own interest to the protection of friendless innocence, and condemned him to a cruel and ignominious death. But it being customary, at this time of the passover, to release one malefactor at the requisition of the people, and there being now one under sentence of condemnation, called Barabbas, this timid judge proposed an option to the populace, which of them he should release, hoping that they would do that justice which he himself had not courage to perform. But here a meek and virtuous character had no chance, in a competition for popularity with one who, though a robber, had been the ringleader of an insurrection; and therefore they all cried out, again and again, "Not this man, but Barabbas." All this was but the ordinary process of human wickedness, ignorance, and malevolence; and no miraculous interference appears in any part of this transaction, because none was wanted. For, certainly, no miracle is requisite to produce opposers of truth, enemies to reformation, persecutors of innocence, and magistracy tenacious of their authority; a priesthood jealous of their power, a servant bribed to betray his master, false witnesses, a self-interested judge, and a profligate and misled populace. These are the growth of every age and country in the world, and were fully sufficient to accomplish this important and astonishing event; and will ever remain a remarkable instance, that



that the worst actions of the worst of men are sometimes made use of, by the power and wisdom of God, to carry into execution his most beneficent and salutary designs.

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## JOHN XX. 29.

Λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· Ὅτι ἑώρακας με, Θωμά, πιστεύεις· μακάριοι οἱ μὴ ἰδόντες, καὶ πιστεύσαντες.

*Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.*

**W**HAT! says the self-sufficient reasoner, are those the most blessed who believe without proof? And is the merit of faith greater, in proportion as the evidence for it is less?—To such querists I only answer, That they understand not the nature of faith, nor in what the merit of it consists. In the mere assent to a proposition, there is no merit; because, if the proof is obscure, it is weakness; if clear, it is compulsion. It is not the *act*, but the *disposition*, which places faith so high in the catalogue of Christian virtues, and renders infidelity so criminal. One of the chief characteristics of Christian charity is, that it believeth all things; because this readiness to believe must proceed from an humble, submissive, and teachable temper. Whereas incredulity, when the evidence

dence is sufficient, generally arises from men's vices, and at best, from a self-conceited, suspicious, and untractable disposition, which is utterly incompatible with the whole tenour of that religion. This seems to have been the case of St. Thomas; who is here reproved for not believing the resurrection of Christ, on the positive and unanimous testimony of all the Apostles (with whose honesty and veracity he was perfectly acquainted, and had no reason to question) because he had not seen him with his own eyes, and felt him with his own hands: and, perhaps, he was not indulged with so incontestible proof as the rest had been, in order to try and correct this incredulous and suspicious disposition. If this was really the fact, we may from thence reasonably conclude, that many things are communicated to us, in the scriptures, in a manner not so perfectly clear and demonstrative as they might have been, for the same cause, that is, to try and cultivate in us a disposition so necessary in the composition of a Christian.

## ROMANS viii. 29.

Ὅτι ὃς προέγνω, καὶ προώρισε συμμορφῆς τῆς εἰκόνος τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ.

*For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate.*

**M**UCH unnecessary labour has been employed, by many learned divines and metaphysicians, to reconcile the foreknowledge of God and the free-will of man ; which never can be at variance, because they have nothing to do with each other. The Apostle here says, “ Whom he did foreknow, he also “ did predestinate ;” that is, Those whom he foreknew would be wicked, he foreknows will be punished ; and those whom he foresees will be righteous, he foresees also will be rewarded : but they are not wicked and punished, or righteous and rewarded, because he foreknows it ; but he foreknows because they are so. It is impossible but that an omniscient Being, “ in whom we live, and move, and have “ our being,” must foresee all our thoughts and actions, and the consequences which attend them, and therefore must foreknow our destination in the present, and in a future life : but his foreknowledge is not the cause of our elections, in which we enjoy as perfect liberty as if they were totally unknown ; for the mere knowledge of one being, cannot possibly have any influence on the actions

ons of another. If any man is well acquainted with the dispositions of another, he may nearly guess how he will conduct himself on any occasion; if he knows they are profligate and prodigal, he may reasonably conclude that he will destroy his health, waste his fortune, and die in an hospital or a gaol; this accordingly happens, but not because he had foreseen it; that could not be the cause of this man's misbehaviour or misfortune; which could be derived only from his own folly and extravagance. What is but conjecture in man, in God is certain prescience; but the elections of free agents are no more controuled by the one than the other.—In this, I perceive nothing abstruse, difficult, or in the least inconsistent with the justice of God, or the free-will of man. The cause of all our embarrassments on this subject I take to be this:—From the nature of human conceptions and human language, we are under the necessity of applying ideas and expressions, relative to time, to the existence, the attributes, and actions of the Supreme Being; with which they have no kind of relation; which leads us into innumerable absurdities in our speculations on this subject. With God there is no past, present, and to come: he knows all things equally at all times, and therefore cannot properly be said to foreknow or predestinate any thing. This foreknowledge may be to him predestination;

nation ; but with regard to us, as it affects not our conduct, it is in a moral sense absolutely nothing.

ROMANS xiii. 1, 2.

Πασα ψυχῇ ἰξουσiais ὑπερχουσiais ὑποτασσισθω. Οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν ἰξουσια εἰ μὴ ἀπο Θεοῦ· αἱ δὲ ὑσαι ἰξουσiais, ὑπο τῷ Θεῷ τεταγμεναι εἰσιν.  
 Ὡς ὁ ἀντιτασσομεν τῇ ἰξουσίᾳ, τῇ τῷ Θεῷ διαταγῇ ἀνδρσηκεν· οἱ δὲ ἀνδρσηκοτες, ἑαυτοῖς κριμα ληφονται.

*Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers : for there is no power but of God ; the powers that be are ordained of God.*

*Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God : and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.*

**T**HROUGHOUT the whole New Testament we find, that both Christ and his Apostles were particularly careful to avoid giving any instructions concerning government, and on all subjects of a political nature ; an example which the preachers of his gospel would do well to imitate in all times. The passage here before us is almost the only deviation from this general rule, and is a strong instance of the wisdom and necessity of this extraordinary caution ; for although it is nothing more than a general exhortation to obedience, it has at all times been perverted to speak the language, and serve the iniquitous purposes, of contending parties. The advocates for arbitrary power, and flatterers of princes, have endeavoured to prove from it, that

that all sovereigns are vested, by divine appointment, with uncontrollable authority, accountable for the use of it to God alone, from whom they receive it ; which no subject, however oppressed, can resist, without resisting the ordinance of God, and incurring a punishment due to so presumptuous a crime.—On the other side, the friends of liberty, who are enemies to all power in any hands but their own, connect these words with those in the succeeding verse, which declare, that “ rulers are not a terror to good works, but “ to the evil ;” and from thence would persuade us, that whenever a government is so much perverted from its original design, as to become a terror to good works, and not to evil (that is, whenever it is unjustly and tyrannically administered) it becomes then not only our right, but our duty, to resist it. But in this, as in most controversies, both sides are in the wrong ; for, if the arguments of the former were universally to prevail, there could be no liberty, if of the latter, no government, upon earth ; but certainly Christianity never intended to make men either slaves or rebels. We have here a wise and salutary injunction from St. Paul, to his disciples then at Rome, to submit quietly to any government under which they lived, without making any nice inquiry into the rights of those who govern, or factious objections to their administration ; which is not in the least dispensed with by the following

following words ; that “ rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil ;” which are added as a farther argument to induce all good men to submit to and support government, because it is instituted for their protection ; and we cannot suppose that the Apostle could mean by them to furnish the Christians with an excuse for disobedience, as his whole intention is clearly to enjoin them to submit peaceably to the Roman government, which was then, in the truest sense, a terror to good works, and not to evil ; and particularly to their good works, for which they were daily oppressed and persecuted. The doctrine of St. Paul, is plainly this, That every man ought to be subject to the powers that be (that is, to the established government of the country in which he lives) for this wise and pious reason, because all power must be derived from the appointment, or at least from the permission, of God ; and this not only for wrath, but for conscience sake, (that is, not only for fear of incurring the displeasure of that government, but as a duty required by him). This also is the doctrine of Christ himself, which he enforced, both by his precepts and example, on all occasions. When Pilate said unto him, “ Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee ?” he answered, “ Thou couldst have no power against me, except it was given  
“ thee

“ thee from above;” and therefore he submitted.

There may be cases in which resistance of the Supreme power may be justified by necessity, but such ought never to be defined or pointed out before their arrival; when they come, they will speak for themselves, and men will be ready enough to hear them. Resistance may sometimes be practised, but ought never to be preached, for we stand in need of no lessons to teach us disobedience; and therefore we do not find, throughout the whole New Testament, one definition or commendation of civil liberty, nor one command to fight or die in its defence. These may be the glorious achievements of heroes and patriots; but these are not listed under the banners of Christ; the glory, as well as the duty, of his disciples are, to suffer and submit.—We should remember also, that by resistance, not only force and open rebellion is here to be understood, but all secret machinations, and all turbulent and factious endeavours to distress and impede government, arising from motives of self-interest, ambition, or disappointment. These are, in fact, rebellion, with this only difference, that they are more treacherous and cowardly, more likely to succeed, and less to be punished, and are therefore equally forbid under the denunciation of the same tremendous penalty.



## I CORINTHIANS i. 10.

Παρακαλῶ δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, διὰ τῆς ὀνομαζομένης Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ  
Χριστοῦ, ἵνα το αὐτο λέγητε πάντες, καὶ μὴ ᾖ ἐν ὑμῖν σχισμᾶτα.

*Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you.*

**F**ROM these words of St. Paul, it is evident, that many different opinions, and many controversies concerning them, had found their way into the Christian churches, at so early a period as his life-time. These he endeavoured to suppress, by thus enjoining them to speak the same things; that is, to settle some uniform rule of faith and mode of worship, ascertained by something like creeds or articles, to which they could all assent; without which, no rule of faith, or form of worship, could be established, nor divisions amongst them be prevented, destructive to every community civil or religious. It is true, indeed, that at the first promulgation of the gospel, Christ himself imposed no such on his disciples, who chiefly consisted of the most ignorant and illiterate vulgar, from whom nothing more was required than the bare acknowledgment that he was the Son of God, or the Messiah, who had been long expected. As this is but a single proposition, no difference of opinion concerning it could arise amongst those who  
believed,

believed, and therefore there could be no occasion for any tests to reconcile them. In a little time the great, the wise, and the learned sages and philosophers became profelytes, and brought with them a variety of opinions from their respective schools in which they had been educated; which were blended with the doctrines of Christ, and very soon corrupted the purity of his religion. It then became necessary to fix some standard of truth, to which every Christian might resort; and when these doctrines were committed to writing, in the books of the New Testament, from the uncertainty of all human language, and the various interpretations which they will admit of, this necessity was greatly increased, and is daily increasing by time, which every day introduces new errors, and new disputes about them; so that it seems impossible, that without some test, any religion can be established in any country; and without some establishment no national religion can subsist at all.

Hence appears the absurdity of those who would reject all religious tests, because Christ imposed none on his disciples when there were no errors to encounter nor controversies to decide, and therefore none were wanted: to reject them now, because they were then unnecessary, is as ridiculous as to explode the use of all medicines, because none were administered before any diseases had made their appearance. But, say some,  
If

If tests are necessary, let them be as comprehensive as possible; a declaration that we believe the scriptures, would be fully sufficient. They ought, undoubtedly, to be as comprehensive as the end of their institution will admit; which is, to exclude all those from a community, whose principles must induce them to betray and subvert it: but such a declaration would, by no means, answer this purpose, because our disputes are not about the truth, but the meaning, of those writings; and we see many who believe, or pretend to believe, them, and yet deny their assent to every material doctrine which they contain, and justify their dissent by their own interpretations: a test, therefore, must specify and decide upon the particular doctrines which are disputed, or it is entirely useless and ineffectual. Such are the articles of our church, interpretations of the sense of the scriptures, and explanations of the doctrines therein contained; as such only we subscribe them, not as objects of our reason or belief, any farther than we believe them to be so. This, surely, is very different from asserting their truth in the first instance; this depends on the veracity of the books which they profess to explain; and this on many other different considerations, as the authenticity of those writings, the inspiration, and degrees of inspiration, of their authors, and the purity of their preservation; with all which, in subscribing to those

articles, we have nothing to do. All that is incumbent on us is, to compare them with the books themselves, which, if we fairly and candidly perform, I am persuaded, we shall find them more consonant with their real and genuine sense, and more expressive of their true meaning, than modern theological language and ideas will admit of. The compilers never considered whether they are conformable to reason ; if they expressed the true sense of the scriptures, this was all they intended

# I CORINTHIANS i. 25.

Ὅτι το μωρον τῆ Θεᾶ, σοφωτερον των ἀνθρωπων ἐστι.

*The foolishness of God is wiser than men.*

**T**HERE is something, at first sight, in this expression, indecent, if not impious ; but it means no more than this ; that the doctrines of Christianity, revealed by God, though they were “to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness,” are wiser (that is, better fitted to instruct mankind in the principles of true religion and sound morality) than all the theological lessons of the Rabbis of the one, or the Philosophers of the other. St. Paul, who says this, was,

was, perhaps, as great a master of reason as any man of his own or of all succeeding ages; but he never employed it on subjects to which it cannot properly be applied. he never endeavours by it to explain the mysteries of the Christian religion, or to reject them because he is not able; he believed them himself, and taught them to others, just as they had been delivered by his Lord and Master, without attempting to reconcile them to his own reason, or that of his disciples.

Christ frequently declared, that all mankind come into this world in a state of depravity, guilt, and condemnation; that he was the Messiah, or the Son of God, who came to instruct and reform them, and to lay down his life as a propitiation for their transgressions; and that his heavenly Father, on their sincere repentance, would accept his sufferings and death as an atonement for their sins: that they were free agents, and as such accountable for their conduct; and yet constantly asserts, that they can do nothing of themselves, but that all their thoughts and actions must proceed from the influence of God, "in whom they live, and move, and have their being." These doctrines appeared to the learned philosophers of Rome and Athens to be foolishness (that is, absurdities, contradictory to every principle of human reason) and so they must have done to St. Paul,

had he brought them before the same tribunal; but he never presumed to set up human reason as a judge of divine dispensations. He pretended not to controvert the truth of these doctrines, by arguing, that it was never possible that a wise, benevolent, and just Creator should call into being creatures in a state of depravity, guilt, and condemnation, and punish them for what they could not prevent; nor that, if they could be criminal, he should accept the sufferings of the innocent as a satisfaction for the crimes of the guilty: nor did he alledge, that Omnipotence itself could not create beings at the same time free agents, yet under perpetual influence and direction: all these doubts and difficulties he left to the discussion of the reasoning divines and philosophers of later ages; for himself, he was satisfied of the truth of these doctrines, by the authority from whence they were derived; and as such, has transmitted them to us, in words as clear and explicit as the power of language can furnish. He does not attempt to explain these mysteries, nor enters into any metaphysical speculations on the abstract nature of guilt and punishment, of sufferings or atonement, of free will, predestination, and divine influence. He asserts the facts only as he received them; which is all of which, in our present state, we can be informed.

## I CORINTHIANS vii. 27.

Λιλυσαι ἀπο γυναικος; μη ζῇς γυναικα.

*Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife.*

**S**T. Paul, throughout this whole chapter, recommends celibacy to Christians of both sexes, as most acceptable to God, and most consistent with the purity of their religion. Commentators, I know, in order to extricate themselves from some difficulties, have represented this advice but as local and temporal, occasioned only by the distresses and persecutions under which the Christian churches at that time laboured: but, if we believe his own words, we must see that this was not his only, nor yet his principal reason for giving it; but that he meant it generally, because he was of opinion that marriage, in Christians of both sexes, multiplied their attachments, and increased their cares concerning worldly affairs, and consequently diverted their attention from the sole object of their profession, which is the attainment of everlasting life. He says, “I would have  
 “ you without carefulness. He that is un-  
 “ married careth for the things which be-  
 “ long to the Lord; but he that is married  
 “ careth for the things of the world, how  
 “ he may please his wife.—The unmarried  
 “ woman careth for the things of the Lord,  
 “ that

“ that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband.” For this reason, St. Paul here ventures to avow a doctrine contradictory to the moral and political sentiments of the wisest philosophers and legislators of all times, destructive of domestic happiness and national prosperity, and which, if universally adopted, would eradicate the human species from the face of the earth.

From hence, if we believe that this great Apostle understood the spirit of the religion which he taught, we cannot avoid drawing this conclusion—That there may be actions, the performance of which may essentially contribute to raise individuals nearer to Christian perfection, and to qualify them for happiness in a future life, which may yet widely differ, both in their principles and their end, from moral virtues, and which, if universally practised, would be exceedingly detrimental to mankind in their present state.

Of these celibacy is one; which, though destructive of the happiness, and even of the existence of mankind, may yet give leisure to some few individuals to carry their piety, devotion, virtue, and resignation, to a more exalted height than can be arrived at, under the many cares, connections, and embarrassments incident to the married state. In like manner, to sell all that a man hath,  
and



and give it to the poor, is an act which, if generally practised, must put an end to all trade, manufactures, and industry, and introduce universal idleness and want; yet, the performance of it must proceed from so extraordinary a degree of faith, obedience, and self-denial, that it may deserve, and receive, an extraordinary reward. Precepts of this sort, I apprehend, are not enjoined, but only occasionally flung out, to teach us the nature of Christian perfection; which is so adverse to the world, and all its œconomy, pursuits, and occupations, that we are neither required or expected to attain it in our present state, but ought to make as near approaches to it as our natural depravity and imperfection will permit.

From hence I am inclined to think, that, if monastic institutions were really what they pretend to be, voluntary retreats from all worldly cares, occupations, and connections, wholly appropriated to religious contemplation, piety, and devotion, they might confer very essential benefits on the very few individuals who are capable of receiving them, without any detriment to the business or population of the world. But the great objection to them is this—that they are not made for man, nor man for them. The generality of mankind are formed for action, and not for contemplation, and come into the world to do its business, without perceiving the folly and insignificance of  
what

what they are employed in. If multitudes—therefore, are confined in these gloomy mansions, in contradiction to their inclination, and dispositions, they must soon become, like other prisons, seminaries of ignorance, laziness, profligacy, and vice.

# I CORINTHIANS xiii. 4, 5, 6, 7.

Ἡ ἀγάπη μακροθυμεῖ, χρηστεύεται· ἡ ἀγάπη ἐζηλοῖ· ἡ ἀγάπη ἐπεριεργεύεται, ἐφυσίηται,  
ἐκ ἀσχημονεῖ, ἐζητεῖ τὰ ἑαυτῆς, ἐπαροξυνεῖται, ἐλογίζεται το κακόν,  
ἐχαιρεῖ ἐπὶ τῇ ἀδικίᾳ, συγχαίρει δὲ τῇ ἀληθείᾳ.  
πάντα σέβει, πάντα πιστεύει, πάντα ἐλπίζει, πάντα ὑπομένει.

*Charity suffereth long, and is kind ; charity envieth not ; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,*

*Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil ;*

*Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth ;*

*Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*

**I**N this inimitable portrait of Charity, drawn by the masterly hand of St. Paul, we find every virtue which constitutes the character of a Christian, who is a candidate for the kingdom of heaven; in which it is remarkable, that there is not one, which is not peculiarly calculated to qualify men to become members, and to enjoy and contribute to the felicity of that holy and happy society.

“ Charity suffereth long, and is kind ;” that is, is patient, meek, and benevolent, qualities

ties the most essential to social happiness. "Charity envieth not;" for, as the envious are miserable, in proportion to the happiness they see others enjoy, they would be more miserable in heaven than they are upon earth. "Charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up;" because nothing so much disturbs the peace of society, as pride, insolence, and ambition. "Doth not behave itself unseemly;" that is, is not in conversation ill-bred, self-sufficient, disputatious, and overbearing; offences, perhaps, more adverse to social happiness, than many crimes of a more enormous kind. "Seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked;" that is, rather chuses to give up some part of her property, to which she has an undoubted right, than be the cause of contests, animosities, and litigations, and is not easily provoked to enter into them, either by interests or resentment. "Thinketh no evil;" that is, suspects no evil intentions in the hearts of others, as she feels none in her own. "Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;" that is, takes no pleasure in any kind of wickedness, nor sees it with approbation in others; but is happy in the practice of every virtue which is prescribed by reason and truth, and rejoiceth to see others follow her example. "Beareth all things," all injuries and insults, without anger, or a wish for revenge or retaliation. "Believeth all things," because meek, docile, diffident  
of

of her own judgment, and unsuspicious of fraud and imposition. "Hopeth all things," however unfavourable are their present appearances, will turn out for the best; and therefore "endureth all things," pain, sickness, poverty, and misfortunes, with patience, and perfect resignation to the will of God.

We have here a compleat catalogue of all those virtues and dispositions which are necessary to qualify a Christian for the kingdom of heaven; in any one of which, if he is deficient, he must infallibly be excluded, however eminent his merits may be of another kind; of this the same Apostle assures us, who says, "Though I speak with the  
 " tongues of men and angels, and have not  
 " charity, I am become as sounding brass,  
 " or a tinkling cymbal; and though I have  
 " the gift of prophecy, and understand all  
 " mysteries, and all knowledge, and though  
 " I have all faith, so that I could remove  
 " mountains, and have not charity, I am  
 " nothing. And though I bestow all my  
 " goods to feed the poor, and though I  
 " give my body to be burned, and have not  
 " charity, it profiteth me nothing;" that is, in regard to my attainment of the kingdom of heaven; because there neither eloquence, nor prophecy, nor theological knowledge, nor faith, nor martyrdom, nor bounty to the poor, are wanted; but only such a meek, humble, patient, peaceable, forgiving,  
 and

and benevolent temper and behaviour, as is here specified under the denomination of Charity, which alone can enable us to communicate and participate happiness, either in the present or a future state.

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# I CORINTHIANS xiii. II.

Ὅτε ἦμην νηπιῶν, ὡς νηπιῶν ἐλάλην, ὡς νηπιῶν ἐφρονέην, ὡς νηπιῶν ἐλεηζόμεν· ὅτε δὲ γέγονα ἄνθρωπος, κατήργηκα τὰ τὰ νηπιῶν.

*When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.*

**I**F we trace a man through the different periods of his life, from the cradle to the grave, he appears in such a variety of shapes, that we can scarcely believe him to be the same creature. At first he is an helpless infant in his nurse's arms, without speech, understanding, or thought; then he is a child, speaking as a child, understanding as a child, thinking as a child. He is next a rude, unformed, impetuous school-boy; and then transformed into a youth, graceful, amiable, and amorous. At length, arrived at compleat manhood, he puts away childish things, and becomes a philosopher, a warrior, or a statesman. We then find him measuring out the heavens, investigating other worlds, or busied in the occupations of this. We see him commanding fleets or  
armies,

armies, or haranguing at the bar, in the pulpit, or the senate ; and at last returning back to his primitive state of childhood and imbecillity. Yet, under all these characters, he is but the same single individual.

In what this identity consists, or where it resides, it is by no means easy to ascertain. It cannot be in the body, because every naturalist knows that the component parts of the body are in perpetual motion, are continually discharged by various evacuations, and replaced by the particles of our daily food ; so that, in the course of a few years, not a single atom of our original frame can possibly remain. If a man loses a leg or an arm, or even both legs and arms, he is not less the same person ; and therefore we have reason to conclude, that his identity would not be affected by the loss of his whole body ; and therefore in that it cannot reside.

It cannot be in the mind, because the changes of the mind are as great and as frequent as those of the body, throughout the different stages of human life ; the ideas of a man and those of a child are as unlike as his features and his stature ; at different ages we put away all our former modes of thinking and acting, and adopt new opinions, pursuits, inclinations, and attachments. Many diseases destroy all our mental faculties, derange our reason, extinguish our consciousness, and obliterate our memories ; and yet our  
identity

identity remains unimpaired. If, therefore, it is not to be found either in the body or the mind, there must be some permanent principle in the human composition, in which it does reside, totally unaffected by the continual alterations of them both;—and this, I think, is a new and unanswerable proof of the existence and duration of the soul.

I CORINTHIANS xiii. 12.

Βλεπομεν γαρ ἄρτι δι' ἑσποῖρα ἐν αἰνιγματι.

*For now we see through a glass, darkly.*

SO darkly, indeed, do we see the things of a future life, and so erroneously those of the present, that we form very false estimates of them both; and act still more absurdly than we judge. There are few who are not convinced that there will be a future state of retribution after death, and none who know not that the death of every man may be instantaneous, and cannot be far off; and yet they take no care to prepare themselves for the former, and think so little of the latter, that, on any unexpected event, it is become proverbial to say, I thought of it no more than of my dying day. We fear nothing so much as death; and yet there is nothing which we think of so little. We are more tenacious of riches the less we want them, and toil away the best part of our days to enable us to pass a few in a quiet leisure, which no man could ever  
 enjoy

enjoy who had ever been busy. We infuse into our children the same false ideas, and thus transmit absurdities from generation to generation. We educate them all for this life; there is not one school for the next. "What man is there of you," says Christ, "who, if his son ask for a fish, will give him a serpent †?" Few, indeed, with regard to this world are so foolish or so cruel, but, with regard to another, it is universally practised. Every prudent parent endeavours to infuse into his son the wisdom of the serpent, rather than the innocence of the fish. He spares no pains to qualify them for the highest posts in the kingdom of the earth, but his ambition extends not, like that of the mother of Zebedee, to gain them rank in the kingdom of heaven. Do we hear any father, however worthy and respectable, thus address his son, in the language of a philosopher and a Christian? I shall leave you, my son, an estate, small indeed in the estimation of the world, but sufficient to afford you, not only the necessaries but the comforts of life, and even to administer them to the wants of others: waste it not in vice and extravagance, nor yet labour to increase it by frauds and rapine, nor even by honest industry in professions which will not allow you leisure, either to enjoy this life or prepare for another; but, above all other me-

† Matt. vii. 10.



thods, seek not to augment it by a mercenary marriage, which cannot fail to lead you into an inextricable labyrinth of wickedness and misery; and remember, that mutual fidelity and affection will give you more happiness than wealth is able to bestow.

The very reverse of this is the lesson inculcated by every prudent parent, and ratified by universal approbation.—My son, he says, you will inherit an ample fortune; but let not this tempt you to sit down quietly in an indolent insignificance: there are a variety of methods by which you may improve it, and advance yourself in the world; by a discreet marriage, you, may double it, if you do not foolishly sacrifice your interests; the law, the church, and the army are all open to your endeavours, and may reward them with the highest posts of honour and profit: the East and West are still unexhausted, and ready to pour their treasures into the laps of the brave and enterprising. By such instructions are the seeds of avarice and ambition sown in the minds of youth, which afterwards infallibly produce the bitter fruits of iniquity and disappointment.

That mankind should thus continue, through all ages and generations, to think, speak, and act in contradiction to their reason, their principles, and their interest, is a wonderful phænomenon; which can be occasioned solely by this single circumstance,  
that

that they “see through a glass, darkly:” whenever they see clearly, they seldom judge wrong; the defect is not in their reason, but in their knowledge; every one would pursue his own interest, if he knew what it was, and, in fact, every one does pursue it, but the generality totally mistake it. No man would choose riches before happiness, power before quiet, or fame before safety, if he knew the true value of each: no man would prefer the transitory and worthless enjoyment of this world to the permanent and sublime felicity of a better, if he had a clear prospect of them both; but we see the former through a mist, which always magnifies, and the latter appears to be at so great a distance, that we scarce see it at all; and therefore it makes little impression on our senses, and has as little influence on our conduct.

Why our all-wise and benevolent Creator should have thought proper thus to present all objects to our view, “through a glass, darkly,” is one of the many divine dispensations for which we are unable to account; but this we may know, that if we saw the things of the world clearly, and in a true light, the business and œconomy of it, constituted as it is, could not go on; our pursuits would all be at an end, when we saw there was nothing worth pursuing, our hopes would vanish, our expectations be extinguished, and an universal stagnation would ensue:  
and

and from hence we have reason to conclude, that a distinct prospect of the things of another world, while we reside in this, would be equally detrimental to the well-being of both.

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PHILIPPIANS iv. 8.

Τὸ λοιπὸν, ἀδελφοί, ὅσα ἐσὶν ἀληθῆ, ὅσα σεμνὰ, ὅσα δίκαια, ὅσα ἁγνά, ὅσα προσφιλέα, ὅσα εὐφρημα, εἴ τις ἀρετὴ καὶ εἴ τις ἰπαινεῖ, ταῦτα λογίζεσθε.

*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*

**I**T is not, I think, a little surprizing to see many Christian divines, of the first learning and abilities, employing that learning and those abilities, and much of their time, in framing laborious systems of ethics from the law of nature, whilst they have the books of the New Testament continually lying open before their eyes. In Plato and Aristotle, in Cicero and Seneca, this was a laudable and useful undertaking; but, in a Christian, it is neither useful or meritorious, nor wiser than if any one should chuse to shut his eyes in the brightest day-light, only to try if he was able to grope out his way in the dark. It is now as impossible for any man to form a religious and moral institution by the mere efforts of human reason, as to see by a

farthing candle in the midst of a meridian sunshine. He must unavoidably adopt the doctrines and precepts of the Gospel, and then mistake them for his own. If his own are true and just, they must be exactly the same; and if they differ, they are unworthy of notice. If we believe the doctrine and precepts transmitted to us in the New Testament to be a revelation from God, we cannot, without presumption, search out for any other, nor even accept the same on an inferior authority. Whatever may be their authority, their unrivalled excellence is indisputable. The moral lessons of Christ are all so concise, so clear, so unencumbered with definitions and inquiries, and enforced by parables so apposite and instructive, as brings them nearer to our hearts, and renders them not only superior to, but unlike all which had ever before been published to the world. In omitting all unnecessary disquisitions on moral and religious subjects, the Apostles imitated the example of their master. In the passage now before us, St. Paul, writing to the brethren at Philippi, enjoins them to think on, that is, not to forget to practise, "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure." He takes it for granted, that those to whom he wrote, as well as all mankind, knew what things are true, honest, just, and pure; and therefore he enters not into any metaphysical inquiries into the abstract nature of truth, honesty, justice, and purity, which

which are always useleſs, and ſometimes detrimental, as they never induce men to be virtuous, and ſometimes ſerve to furniſh them with excuſes for vices. Men want not knowledge of their duty, but inclination to perform it. A definition of virtue will never make any one leſs profligate, nor an enquiry concerning the origin of property make any one more honeſt; no more than a diſſertation on optics will make a man ſee, or a receipt for diſtilling brandy or brewing ſtrong beer will make him ſober.

## 2 THESSALONIANS ii. II.

Και δια τὸτο πεμφει αὐτοῖς ὁ Θεὸς ἐνεργείαν πλάνης, εἰς τὸ πῖστευσαι αὐτὸς τῷ ψευδεῖ.

*And for this cauſe God ſhall ſend them ſtrong deluſion, that they ſhould believe a lie.*

**I**N this, and ſeveral other places in both the Old and New Teſtament, God is repreſented as leading men into errors deſtructive to their innocence and happineſs, ſometimes by his own, and ſometimes by the influence of intermediate ſpirits. How is this reconcileable with his juſtice and goodneſs? How can any evil proceed from infinite goodneſs, or any deluſion from the fountain of all truth? No commentator or preacher on theſe texts, that I know of, has yet been able to answer theſe queſtions in a manner ſatisfactory to reaſon or common ſenſe.

But this difficulty, like most others in our interpretations of scripture, arises from our own ignorance and our insensibility of it. We boldly and presumptuously assert, that God cannot do one thing, and that he will not do another, because such things seem to us to be inconsistent with those attributes which we have thought proper to bestow upon him; but we know so little of the nature of good and evil, of truth or falsehood, of God or man, or of the relations between a Creator and his creatures, that we are utterly incapable to prescribe limits to his power, or rules to his will; as well might a worm pretend to decide on the councils of princes, and the policies of empires, as man to pass judgment on the dispensations of the Almighty. We say, God cannot be the cause of any evil; but we know not what is evil; he may be, and is, the cause of many things which appear, and really are, evils to us, however they may be necessary to the production of universal good. We say, he cannot be the cause of any delusion; but why not? truth is by no means the criterion of virtue, as some philosophers would persuade us; delusion, in itself, is neither good or evil; its merit or criminality depends on the end for which it is intended: it is no crime to deceive men for their entertainment, much less for their benefit; there is no immorality in writing a play, a poem, or romance, because it is fiction, but great merit,  
if

if it is calculated to promote virtue, or to discourage vice. The whole of this life is a succession of delusions, kindly imposed upon us by our Creator, to enable us to support the sufferings, and carry on the business of it. The fallacy of each we discover in its turn, but never till it has attained its end. It is all mere scenery, beautiful illusion, in which every object, being placed at a proper distance, and seen through a false medium, appears as it ought, but never as it is. Wealth, honours, and pleasures, are exhibited in the clearest light, to incite our industry; but the vanity of their possessions is hid for a time under a cloud, that we may not sink into sloth and inactivity. Thus we may be said to believe a lie, that is, what is not true; unexperienced, we believe that the prosperity of this world will make us completely happy, that the period of life is of long duration, and that the hour of death is ever at a great distance; in every one of which we find ourselves constantly deceived; on which beneficent deception all our enjoyments, hopes, expectations, and pursuits entirely depend. If God, therefore, by means of these kind delusions, dispenses undeserved blessings on mankind, why may he not sometimes inflict such punishments upon them as their offences may have deserved, by the same means, either by his own power, or the operations of intermediate spirits? We know that he has given us power to deceive  
and

and ensnare, as well as to destroy, inferior animals; a power which we daily exercise without scruple, without arraigning his justice or our own. Why then may he not, with equal justice, grant the same power over us, to beings of superior orders?

We may further add, that there are many passages, in both the Old and New Testament, similar to this before us, which are, in fact, nothing more than modes of expression usually made use of by the writers of those books, who generally impute every event and action, whether good or evil, just or unjust, to God himself, without any reference to second causes. Every disposition of men's hearts, and every act proceeding from them, are ascribed immediately to God; by which nothing more is to be understood, than that such were mens hearts, and such things were done. This, in a large and extensive view, is certainly right, because the great Creator and disposer of all things must primarily be the cause of all dispositions, actions, and events; because the First Cause must be the cause of every cause from whence they can proceed: but how this is consistent with that freewill, of which we know and feel ourselves are possessed, is far above the reach of our imperfect comprehensions; reason assures us that both are true, and scripture every where confirms this conclusion.



## JAMES iv. I.

Ποθεν πολέμοι καὶ μάχαι ἐν ὑμῖν ; ἔκ ἐνθεν, ἐκ τῶν ἡδονῶν ἱμῶν  
τῶν στρατευομένων ἐν τοῖς μέλεσιν ὑμῶν ;

*From whence come wars and fighting among you ? come they  
not hence, even of your lusts ?*

**A**S war and peace so essentially affect the morals, as well as the happiness of mankind, it seems extraordinary that the great Author of the Christian religion should have given no directions on so important a subject. The Apostle here decides nothing concerning the lawfulness of wars amongst Christians, but only informs us from whence they proceed, which is from their ungoverned passions, anger and revenge, avarice and ambition ; nor do we find, in any part of the New Testament, that they are either absolutely allowed or positively forbid. This remarkable silence, I think, is not difficult to be accounted for ; because, if Christ had encouraged, or even expressly permitted, his disciples to carry on wars and fightings, he would have given the sanction of divine authority to all the wickedness and misery which inevitably attend them ; and if he had absolutely forbid them to fight on any occasion, he must have left every country, in which his religion should prevail, a defenceless prey to every infidel invader ; he prudently, therefore, rather chose to leave their defence to the operations of their own passions and vices,  
which

which he knew, notwithstanding all his pacific precepts, would always be sufficient for that purpose.—But although in this, as well as in many other instances, Providence employs the iniquities of men to bring about beneficial ends, this lessens not their criminality, or justifies those who commit them. All the precepts of Christ, and every principle of the religion which he taught, are diametrically opposite to those of war: these require a poor, meek, and humble spirit; which those represent as infamous and contemptible: these exhort us to live peaceably with all men; which is certainly incompatible with a state of war: these recommend patience and forbearance under the greatest insults; those the quickest and most violent resentment: these enjoin us to love and serve our enemies; those to destroy them with fire and sword. How at the same time we can serve two masters, or how their commands can be made consistent with each other, I must leave to some pious and valiant Christian hero to explain.

F I N I S.

