

SCC 2337 v.1
Abernethy, John, 1680-1740.
Discourses concerning the
being and natural

DISCOURSES

CONCERNING THE

Being and Natural Perfections

OF

G O D,

IN WHICH

That First Principle of Religion,

THE

EXISTENCE of the DEITY,

IS PROV'D,

From the Frame of the MATERIAL WORLD,
from the ANIMAL and RATIONAL LIFE, and
from HUMAN INTELLIGENCE and MORALITY;

AND

The DIVINE ATTRIBUTES of SPIRITUALITY, UNI-
TY, ETERNITY, IMMENSITY, OMNIPOTENCE, OM-
NISCIENCE, and INFINITE WISDOM, are explain'd.

By JOHN ABERNETHY, M. A.

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*Because that which may be known of God is
manifest in them, for God hath showed it
unto*

C O N T E N T S.

unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal Power and Godhead.

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SER-

S E R M O N I.

The Being of GOD prov'd from the
Frame of the Material World.

Rom. i. 19, 20.

Because that which may be known of God, is manifest in them, for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.


THE mind of man, by attending to SERM.
its own constitution, and to the I.
state and appearances of the world, 
is naturally led to an enquiry concerning the
origin and causes of things, the proper mea-
sures of its own conduct, with the conse-
quences of them, and to future events as far as
it can attain the knowledge of them, that is
to an inquiry concerning God and religion.
When a man, endued with all the vital, sen-
sitive and intellectual powers which belong to
A his

SERM. his nature, and arrived at the perfect exercise of them, with a competent knowledge of himself, and the various relations and uses of things about him; when, I say, he deliberately views the obvious face of nature, when he beholds the vast expanse of heaven, the glorious light of the sun, and by it a numberless multitude of other objects, many of which, he knows, by his senses, his appetites, his affections and experience, are in different ways useful to him and to each other; reflecting at the same time on his own being, his various powers and perceptions, one would think he could scarcely avoid such inquiries as these,

I.

“ Whence am I, and by what power produc’d? Whence all these beings with which I see my self surrounded? As I have no other knowledge of my existence, nor any other way to judge of its duration, than by conscious perception, I must conclude, that some time ago I was not, for I had no consciousness nor perception of any thing. How then is this wonderful transition from non-existence into being to be accounted for? Is it to be attributed to a superior designing cause? and has that same mighty intelligent cause form’d all those other beings I perceive,

“ which

“ which by their appearances seem to be re-^{SERM.}
“ lated to each other and to me, so as to ^{I.}
“ make up one intire system ? But now that 
“ I find my self in such a situation, what am
“ I to do ? There are instincts in my na-
“ ture, which prompt me to various actions
“ and enjoyments ; I am furnished with the
“ instruments of sensation and motion, I see,
“ and hear, and taste, and smell, and feel ;
“ I can move the organs of my own body,
“ and by them some other bodies, merely
“ by an act of my own will, or the volunta-
“ ry exertion of an inward self-determining
“ power ; I have hunger and thirst at certain
“ returning seasons, and am readily supplied
“ with meat and drink, whereby this body is
“ nourish’d and sensibly refresh’d. This is
“ common with me to a multitude of living
“ things in different shapes, with which the
“ earth is stor’d : But I find in my self the
“ powers of reason and higher affections,
“ whereof *they* give no discovery, which leads
“ me to conclude there is a nobler end of my
“ being, and I am capable of a greater hap-
“ piness. I can reflect, compare my own
“ perceptions of things, and inquire into
“ their origin and tendencies ; I perceive at
“ first view some truths, and they give me

SERM. “ pleasure ; I investigate others by a delibe-
 I. “ rate attention to my own ideas, and to
 “ their agreement and relations, still with a
 “ growing satisfaction ; I am conscious of li-
 “ berty or a freedom of choice, and the ideas
 “ of right and wrong in action, naturally oc-
 “ cur to me ; I must therefore be directed in
 “ my conduct by a regard to that difference :
 “ I find benevolence to sensitive beings, es-
 “ pecially those of my own kind, naturally
 “ arise in my mind, together with reverence
 “ and gratitude to a superior nature, the sup-
 “ posed author of my existence and of all
 “ my enjoyments ; which affections, as they
 “ are reflected on with delightful self-appro-
 “ bation, a more excellent enjoyment than
 “ any sensible object can yield ; so they are
 “ accompanied with a desire to please that
 “ superior Being, and be approved by him.
 “ But how shall I continue possess'd of exist-
 “ ence, with all the variety of enjoyment
 “ that belongs to it, which is so very desira-
 “ ble ; and since experience convinces me
 “ that the present life is frail, and has in it
 “ a mixture of unhappiness, what prospect
 “ have I of a future state, for the thoughts of
 “ falling again into nothing fill my mind
 “ with horror ; and how shall I attain to the
 “ highest

“ highest perfection I am capable of? For SERM.

“ it plainly appears that, at least, the nobler I.

“ powers of my nature may admit of a more

“ various exercise than the present, and a fur-

“ ther improvement. All that is possible for

“ me to do, as an intelligent agent, where-

“ by I may contribute to my own happiness,

“ and answer the end of my being, is to fol-

“ low the guidance of my own reason and

“ what nature points to, considering the

“ whole of my constitution, and preserving

“ the just subordination of its lower, to its

“ superior parts: And for the continuance of

“ my being, and what additional felicity, I

“ may desire or expect, I must hope in the

“ same supreme power and goodness, to

“ which I owe all that is now in my posses-

“ sion. ”

If these are the inquiries and the sentiments which the mind of man, unbiass'd by any prejudices or prepossessions, would naturally fall into, and whether they are or not, let any one judge who carefully attends even to the most obvious appearances in the human constitution: we may consider whether they are not very becoming us. It is true we grow up to the exercise of our reason gradually; the first part of life is past

SERM. over with very little reflection, the world is
 I. become familiar to us, we have learn'd the
 use of things and opinions concerning them, which engage our assent and our affections, before we come to that maturity of understanding which is necessary to qualify us for a thorough and rational examination. But neither the familiarity contracted with our own existence and the world, (we cannot but be sensible, that our knowledge of both is of no long standing) nor any prejudice we may have received in a childish immature state, should divert us, when we have attained to the full use of our reason, from attending such important enquiries, which the least self-reflection will shew to be every way worthy of men. Whether our inquiries will rationally end in religion, founded on the belief of a Deity is what I am now to consider. This, however, seems to be the plainest and most natural way of attaining satisfaction in that great point; for by the Deity we mean the powerful, wise and good parent of mankind, the maker, preserver and ruler of the world; and how shall we know him but by the characters of his perfections stamp'd upon his works? Thus the apostle argues in my text, That which may be known

*of God is manifest to men, for God hath shew-
ed it unto them (by their own reason). For
the invisible things of him from the creation
of the world, are clearly seen, being understood
by the things that are made, even his eternal
power and godhead.*

SERM.
I.

It is certain, the belief of a Deity has generally obtained among mankind; excepting the objects of the mind's immediate intuition and of sense, concerning which there can be no dispute, excepting these, I say, perhaps there is not any one point to which Men have more universally given an explicit assent, than the Being of God. This is thought, by some, to be a strong presumption in its favour; for they alledge, nothing but the clear irrefragable evidence of truth could have induced all nations of the world to agree in it. As to vulgar opinions, acknowledged to be erroneous in other points, such as the magnitude and distance of the heavenly bodies, the case is very different; for there the error plainly arises from inattention, and forming a judgment too hastily upon the report of sense, concerning appearances which it cannot examine. But in such a point of speculation as the existence of the Deity, to the knowledge of which we are led by our own

SERM. I. most obvious reflections, and which the more it is attended to, the more firmly it is believed; an uniform agreement seems to proceed from the voice of nature, or God himself speaking intelligibly to every nation by his works. There is, undoubtedly, in the human mind a knowledge of things which are not the objects of sense, nay in many instances reason corrects sense, and discovers its mistakes: indeed, the greatest certainty we have is in the clear perception of an agreement between our own abstract ideas; so that a concurring persuasion concerning propositions form'd of such ideas, and concerning rational deductions from them, has the best appearance of being founded on truth, because in them men are least obnoxious to deception.

There have been however some, very few of mankind in comparison, who have professedly denied the being of God, and pretended to account for the formation of the world and all the phænomena of nature without him. These men ridicule the common belief as superstitious, proceeding wholly from ignorance of causes, political fiction, customary tradition, or the passion of fear, which often produces groundless imaginations. I may afterwards have occasion to examine

amine these pretences; in the mean time, SERM.
without resting this first principle of all religion on the presumption in its favour, taken I.
from the general consent of mankind, or any other presumptions, however strong, I shall proceed directly to establish it by clear evidence of reason, in the method which appears to me the most simple and natural: Only let it be observed,

That the notions of men, concerning the Deity and his attributes, have been very confus'd, and their opinions widely different, even *theirs* who agree in the profess'd belief of his Being: some have declared themselves unable to form any idea of substance distinct from body, and therefore concluded, that as the human soul is only a subtile kind of matter, or a particular modification of it, so God himself is corporeal; this way of thinking, tho' very gross, is plainly discovered in the writings of the celebrated stoic philosophers, mixt at the same time with noble sentiments concerning the Divine moral perfections and providence: Some conceiv'd that the creation of material substance was absolutely impossible, tho' it is intirely subject to the disposal of active intelligence, and that therefore it must be coeval with the supreme Being, whom they

SERM. they imagin'd to be the eternal soul of an eternal universe : Others seem to have deny'd the unity of the Godhead, at least, they divided their worship among a plurality of divine beings, so called, tho' 'tis probable, the Polytheism of the Gentiles is to be understood, concerning a multiplicity of inferior agents in the Divine administration, or ministering spirits, all subject to the one Supreme: Others again, have so perplex'd the doctrine of the Divine eternity and immensity, as to render them unintelligible. But above all, the errors concerning the moral perfections, as they are most pernicious, have been the most frequent in the world, the *Christian* world itself not altogether excepted. Not to mention the Gods of *Epicurus*, which he imagined, or pretended to have imagined, to be a kind of indolent happy things, neither the makers nor rulers of any thing, but like other beings, made out of atoms by accident ; I say, pretended to have imagin'd, for it is not unlikely that part of his scheme was a complement to the religion of mankind, or rather a sneer, such as is not unusual with writers of his sort : The heathens had, many of them, very absurd conceptions of the morals of their inferior gods, and *Jupiter* himself was far from

from being perfectly pure and good; there are, even among those who have the best means of instruction, very gross opinions, and of a dangerous tendency, concerning the justice and goodness of God, and the measures of his government over moral agents, which 'tis needless now to insist on more particularly.

SERM.
I.

The use I shall make at present of this observation, is, to avoid at our entrance on this subject, a particular definition of the Deity, by enumerating all the perfections which, I hope we shall in the sequel, see reason to attribute to him, because the present controversy is only with *Atheists*, not with any, even of the most imperfect *Theists*. Besides, I think, in such an inquiry, we ought to begin with the plainest principles, that having once seen them establish'd with clear evidence, we may then proceed to points less obvious. Thus, if it first appears by convincing proof, that there is an intelligent designing cause in the universe, to which the order and appearances of it are to be ascrib'd, we may thence take our rise to the consideration of the characters of that cause, and so by degrees advance to the most compleat notion of God which we can form.

I shall

SERM.

I.

I shall therefore consider the subject before us in the simplest view, and begin with an inquiry into the true cause of the visible frame of nature, stating the question, as it thus plainly stands between us and our adversaries, whether the material world, with its principal and most obvious phænomena, which fall under our observation, is form'd and guided by mere chance or blind necessity, which are the different hypotheses of *Atheism*, and I shall examine them severally; or if, on the contrary, it was produced by, and is under the direction of an active, understanding and intending Cause?

In order to this, let us first consider the ideas of intelligence and activity, of cause and effect, and of necessity and chance, which arise in our minds, by attending to what passes in them, and by observing what our senses inform us of, in the ordinary course of things. Perception is always and necessarily accompanied with consciousness. That a man sees and hears, and remembers and understands, and reasons, and desires and wills, needs no proof to him, nor indeed is capable of any; nothing being so evident to his mind, not the very existence of any thing without him, nor is it possible, with-

out

out consciousness, to convince a man of any operation or perception in his own mind. SERM.

I.

Our agency, from an inward self-determining principle, is as well known to us, as our passive perceptions are: As we cannot help seeing, hearing, perceiving pleasure upon some occasions, and pain upon others, whether external or internal; we are as sensible that we can, without a consciousness of any necessity impelling, turn our attention to one object in preference to another, we can recal the ideas which have been formerly in our minds, we can variously associate them, compare and examine their relations to each other; conscious that these operations do not arise from without, but depend wholly upon our selves, and we are equally sensible, that some corporeal motions proceed from the determination of our own wills. Our bodies begin to move, or particular members of them, some other bodies also are moved by their force, and all such motions are continued or stopt, while we are not conscious of any thing whereby either the continuance or cessation are produc'd, but our own simple volitions.

Hence arise the notions of free or voluntary Agency, and necessity as distinguish'd from

SERM. from it, and of cause and effect. Such powers as we find in our selves, we can easily conceive to belong to other Beings, either in a greater or lesser degree. As we have clear evidence of perception and spontaneous motions in other Animals, tho' different in kind from, and both of them much more confin'd than ours; so there is no difficulty in apprehending that there may be intelligence of a much larger comprehension than the human, and a more extensive activity, producing more numerous, and vastly greater effects.

We have at the same time the idea of what is called passive Power, or a capacity of being moved and changed; for we can move our own Bodies and alter the situation, the external form and the sensible qualities of other bodies, by the use of proper means, which we have learn'd by observation and experience. And these bodies we find to be constantly and uniformly liable to the same or the like alterations by active force. Whatever appearance there is of action in this sort of beings, will be found upon closer attention, to be really no action at all. A man can easily distinguish between walking, and being carried, between the involuntary motion

motion of his hand, and that which depends SERM. solely upon the command of his own will ; I.
in the one, he is an agent, in the other wholly passive. In like manner, a stone falling, which we do not conceive to move from an internal principle, because no power of self-motion ever appears in that kind of being, is no more active than the earth on which it makes an impression, or the human body which it bruises, occasioning a sensation of pain : And for other corporeal action, so called, producing various and considerable effects, such as that of fire and air, it can only be attributed to the intestine motion, not spontaneous, of more subtle material parts, and therefore is no more properly action than the motion of intire solid bodies, whose parts are at rest among themselves, that is, do not at all change their situation with respect to each other.

Thus we are led to distinguish between the positive ideas of blind necessity and intelligent activity, as directly opposite to each other, the one belonging to a cause, the other to an effect. Indeed the negative idea of necessary existence is not self-contradictory, no more than that of infinity ; but to say that unintelligent necessity operates, must, I think

SERM. think, appear to our minds to be a contradiction in terms ; it is to assert operation, and at the same time deny it in a proper sense, and to destroy the very notion of activity, which yet we know as clearly as we do our own existence, being equally conscious of it. There may be, 'tis true, a train of necessary effects, as in the instance of motion communicated to various inanimate bodies, one impelling another successively, and the prior has the appearance of causing the posterior ; but really they are alike passive, and to imagine that they operate, is to confound the most inconsistent notions of acting and being acted upon. And as thus the ideas of cause and effect, of active and passive power, of agency and necessity, take their rise from an attention to our selves, our own minds and our bodies ; so we cannot avoid observing the same difference among all other beings which we know. I have not indeed the same intuitive knowledge of another man's conscious activity, as I have of my own, but yet I have such evidence of it, as excludes all doubt ; nor can I question, but that the earth I walk on, the pen I hold in my hand, and other instruments of action which I use, are passive inanimate things, always

ways yielding to force, and never discovering the least sign of an inward self-determining principle. This distinction runs through the whole universe, as far as we are acquainted with it, and all the knowledge we have of being, our own or any other, leads us to discern the essential irreconcilable contrariety of spontaneous acting, to blind necessity. It follows, that if there be any things or appearances, which we judge to be effects in the world, and who can help observing a multitude of them; to attribute them to unintelligent necessity, is to attribute them to what we can have no notion of as a cause at all; and to say that such necessity is universal, is to say there is not, nor can be any such thing as a cause, or it is to deny the possibility of action.

It is still to be remembered, that the necessity here spoken of, is only such as excludes intelligence and design: The question concerning necessary agency in another sense, that is, whether an intelligent agent acts so necessarily, that it is impossible in the event he should act otherwise than he does, whatever the reason be; this question, I say, is intirely different, and not concern'd in the controversy with *Atheists*; for supposing it to

SERM. be determin'd in the affirmative, still it leaves
 I. us the idea of intelligent active power, as a
 proper cause producing effects ; and with respect to the formation and order of the universe, the idea of an intelligent active power, equal to the production of such an effect, which is what we mean by the Deity : But to attribute operation to undefining necessity, is to attribute it to an abstract notion, and to confound all our ideas of cause and effect ; and how can a man, who is as fully convinc'd of active power in himself, as of his own existence, and in the same manner, that is, by being conscious of it, reason with him who denies the being, and even the possibility of such a power ? And how absurd an assertion must it appear, that nothing at all, not the least being in nature, nor any mode or quality, not so much as the least motion, could possibly (by an antecedent necessity, independant on design) have been otherwise than it is ? Can a man believe this, who sees such marks of indifferency in a multitude of things, so many changes in the face of nature, and knows that so many depend on his own choice.

The notion of chance, so far as it relates to the present subject, arises wholly from men's ignorance of causes. As we see very often
 in

in the world many changeable appearances, which by the novelty, variety, and other circumstances of them, we can't help believing to be effects, but not being particularly determined by any necessity, nor yet by the intention of any agent which we can observe, the word chance is substituted in the place of the unknown cause. And this may be sufficient for some purposes, for which the knowledge of causes is of no importance. But in an inquiry concerning the origin of things, to apply chance as a kind of hypothesis to solve the appearances of nature, and account for the order of the world, is evidently absurd; for the word so apply'd, can have no other signification than ignorance or nothing at all, tho' in some men's minds, at least in their manner of expressing themselves, there seem to be utterly inconsistent ideas, confusedly jumbled together, as the signification of it; for they seem to imagine a kind of efficiency at the same time that there is no certain determinate cause (which it is impossible for them to know) that is, they most absurdly attribute a real uncertain efficiency, to nothing, to an empty sound, or a vague undetermined notion, when, if they would examine their thoughts, they would find that

SERM.
I.


SERM. the true meaning of chance is only, we don't
 I. know what.

Thus we see the *Atheistic* schemes concerning the formation of the world, its order and appearances, instead of giving a rational, intelligible account, are founded only in ignorance, and indeed are everfive of true human knowledge; the one of them (*Necessity*) destroys the very idea of intelligent and designing activity, which is as clear to our minds as any idea can be, being perceiv'd by an inward consciousness; the other (*Chance*) is an utter absurdity, made up of inconsistent notions, and really meaning nothing but ignorance.

But I will not content my self with arguing thus against the hypothesis of the *Atheists* in general. Let us allow more than they have any pretence in reason to demand; let us suppose necessity to stand for something, whose operation is like that of material causes, improperly so called, which effect appearances by an undirected impulse, or without the interposition of any design; a constant uniformity however, must be included in the idea of such operation, for necessity, whether it be applied to existence, power, or whatever else, admits of no change, no
inter-

interruption, no variety either in kind or degree : And let chance, however inconsistently, be suppos'd to be something, we don't know what, which operates, but its operation is not determin'd, either by a natural necessity, or by counsel. Now, if neither of these hypotheses, between which *Atheists* have been divided, some choosing the one, some the other, and a different *Atheistical* hypothesis never has been, nor can be devised ; but if, I say, neither of them can reasonably be admitted in accounting for the being and disposition of things, as in fact they appear, there is then nothing left to rest in but the contrivance and agency of an intelligent cause. But that neither of these hypotheses does answer the profess'd design, *viz.* to explain the formation and order of the world, I shall endeavour to shew clearly, from the common appearances, which cannot possibly have escap'd the most careless observer. Whatever way we turn our eyes, to whatever part of the universe, or the whole of it which is visible to us, the face of nature has these two characters, which no one can help observing ; it is various, and it is uniform ; the former is a convincing argument against necessity, and the latter against chance.

SERM.

I.

SERM.

I.

First, there appears in the visible frame of nature, a great variety. When we look up to the heavens in the day, our sight, piercing through a thin pellucid medium, terminates in a vast azure concave, without any diversity, only that we see in it a great luminous fiery globe, which we conclude to be the fountain of light, and sometimes interposed clouds, which by observation and reason, we know to be only watery exhalations from the earth, gathered together in a region not far distant from us, and when they are condensed, falling down again in rain; but when we turn our eyes the same way at night, the prospect is quite changed, and a new scene presented to us. The great ruling luminary of the day is withdrawn, and in his stead there are seen numberless lesser lights, among them, one larger than the rest, with various appearance, conspicuous, but pale, and shining with a faint and borrowed lustre. This is the constantly changing appearance of the heavens in every diurnal revolution, besides other periodical alterations in the course of the sun and the moon, which every one must observe. In our own globe, which our eyes can more accurately survey, there appears a much greater diversity; a vast collection

lection of waters, supplied by perpetual currents, dispersed in several channels, continually flowing into it: On the solid part where we live, here mountains and rocks, there plains and valleys, in one place stately groves, in another flowry meadows, or fields covered with corn, all stock'd with numerous inhabitants; the sea stor'd with fishes of surprizingly various shapes and sizes, the dry land with as great a diversity of beasts, and the air with fowls. I do not speak now of the mutual relations of these things, the suitableness of one to another, and the convenient regular disposition of all, which must strike an attentive mind with a sense of natural beauty in the whole, and lead it to the acknowledgment of wisdom and goodness in the author; but upon the most indifferent superficial view, which presents to us such an amazing variety, and without looking narrowly into the composition of particular beings, which greatly increases it, let any man think, if he can, that blind, undesigning necessity has produc'd such a multiform appearance. The operation of necessary causes, if they must be call'd causes, is always alike, and admits of no changes. The mechanical powers of springs, weights and wheels,

SERM.

I.

SERM. wheels, and other instruments of motion, are
 I. exerted uniformly : fire is another necessary corporeal agent, which operates always in the same manner, tho' it has different effects, according to the different texture of the bodies into which it penetrates, causing some parts to ascend in smoak and flame, reducing some to ashes, and making some liquid or malleable. To give these and such like instruments, that diversity of operation, which is necessary to answer even the low purposes of human art, and the conveniencies of human life, there must be, we know, a superior intending Cause, to guide the application of them ; but that such necessary causes, as senseless atoms, should, out of themselves, without any skill in the application of their force, or the interposal of any intelligent direction, produce such a wonderful variety as there is in the visible appearance of the world, the liquid waters, and the more fluid air of a different constitution, the strangely subtle and penetrating light, the solid earth, and the firmer rocks, the almost infinite kinds of vegetables, diverse in shape, colour, flower and fruit ; not only the many species of animals and the numberless individuals, each intire, but the yet more various parts of their composition,

position, the solid and the fluid, the organs of motion and sensation ; this is such a paradox, it must be an understanding of a very odd make, that can believe it.

SERM.

I.



The *Atbeist* may next betake himself to chance, which is capricious enough, and variable, to answer the greatest imaginable or possible diversity of productions, if it be admitted to have any share in them. Necessity is limited, and must always produce exactly similar and unvarying effects, but fickle chance is tied down to no rule of operation, if it can operate at all ; supposing it to determine the existence, and the order of things, what should hinder the diversity which there is in the world, nay, an infinitely greater diversity ; why may not water, and air, and light, and rocks, and animals, and vegetables, all kinds of substances, and all possible qualities, be jumbled together ? But as the variety which there is in the appearances of nature, is an invincible argument against their being the production of necessary causes, an equally strong objection lies against the hypothesis of chance, namely, their uniformity. Every one must be sensible, that *this* is as truly the character of the face of nature, as the *other*. Whenever we turn our eyes to the heavens,


SERM. heavens, they have the same uniform aspect
 I. as when we view'd them before, the sun and
 the moon, and the stars, hold their places, and go on constantly in their courses, producing a regular succession of day and night, summer and winter: One wou'd think *they continue after an ordinance*, and are subject to a law, rather than guided by giddy hazard. In our lower world, not only *the hills are everlasting*, and the *rocks not removed out of their place*, but the waters, however easily yielding to force, keep their perpetual channels, and the whole self-balanc'd globe hangs in loose fluid air, which has no strength to support it. The tender herbs which seem to die every winter, revive again in the spring, and cover the earth with a renewed verdure; the living things of so brittle a frame and short-liv'd, yet do not quite disappear and give way to different kinds, which being equally possible, have an equal chance for production, if chance ruled, but the same species are perpetuated in a constant succession. If this argument were pursued more minutely, it would still appear the stronger. If we do not take the works of nature in the gross, and content our selves with a bare view of their outsides, but examine their interior constitution,

stitution, the evidence against hazard in their formation, will still increase, for it must be plain to every one, that the more complicated any pieces of work, machines or systems are, design is still the more apparent in their similarity. But the most obvious view is sufficient to our purpose, for let any man consider whether he would not make a difference between heaps of sand and stones huddled together in confusion, and a regular building, between a fortuitous jumble of pieces of brass iron and lead, and a well going clock, between a mob, or a tumultuous assembly of men without any order, and a well form'd political society, or a well disciplin'd army; let him consider, I say, whether he would not make a difference in these cases, presuming there was counsel and design in some, but not in others. And now, if we apply the same reasoning to the works of nature, whereas, upon the supposition of chance, there is infinite to one against any certain determin'd production, for chance ranges unguided, to the utmost verge of possibility, when in fact, we see amidst an almost infinite variety of things, there is such an obvious constant uniformity in the appearances of the world, is it not surprizing, that it should
ever

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I.


SERM. ever have entered into the mind of any
 I. man, to exclude design, and attribute all to
 chance?

The argument, so far as we have proceeded, seems to be fully conclusive, and we may confidently rest in it as prov'd, that neither the hypothesis of chance, nor of undefining necessity, can account for the appearances of the universe. But we shall be more directly convinced that there is manifested intelligence and design in the frame of the mundane system, if in the next place we consider what the ancients called *πικαι καλας*, the beautiful and harmonious, the regular and convenient, the amiable and good, with which the world every where abounds. This point admits of a large illustration, all the discoveries which have been made in astronomy, natural philosophy, and natural history, tending to shew that there is a fitness in things, a correspondence in the parts of the world, one answering to another so as to demonstrate wise contrivance, and unity of design in the whole. There is not one region of the universe of which we have any knowledge, the heavens, the air, the earth, or the sea, not one intire particular being which we have the means of inquiring narrowly

rowly into, one fish, one fowl, one beast or SERM.
one tree; there is not one of all these that I.
does not appear to be artificially made, and 
does not by the exact proportion and harmo-
ny of its parts, discover design in the whole
of its constitution. And indeed, in these
last ages particularly, men of leisure and
penetration have so happily employed their
time and their understandings in the study of
nature, as to set the argument in a very
clear light, proving beyond all rational con-
tradiction, the wisdom and goodness of God
in his works, to the utter confusion of those
who are either so stupidly blind or obstinate-
ly wicked as not to regard the operation of
his hands.

But I shall only insist on those things
which every understanding must discern, the
appearances which every eye sees, or the ob-
servations of fact which must occur to the
most unattentive of mankind, who has but
common sense; for even *they* will be suffi-
cient to establish this great truth upon. Let
us first consider the visible world at large, as
it appears to a naked eye, and to a plain,
unimproved understanding. No man of the
meanest capacity, and the lowest way of
thinking, can be ignorant that there is a
relation

SERM. relation between the parts of the universe;
 I. that from the sun there is a communication
 of light and heat to the earth, which is the
 apparent cause of the various productions
 upon its surface, and of so manifold use to
 its inhabitants that they could not subsist
 without it. By that genial warmth tender
 plants of different kinds spring up from small
 seeds, and are nourished, some into strong
 stalks, some into low shrubs, and some into
 stately trees, all bearing fruits which are the
 food of animals: And among animals there
 is an order and mutual usefulness, the other
 kinds being in subordination to man, who,
 by the prerogative of his superior nature,
 claims a dominion over their labours and
 their lives. To man particularly, and to
 other living things proportionably to the
 lower purposes of their being; the light of
 the sun is so comfortable and so useful, that
 we cannot conceive how the ends of a life,
 constituted as ours is, could be answered, and
 its conveniencies obtained, without it. But
 that light, and the nourishing heat with
 which it is accompanied, is so conveniently
 distributed, as in the best manner to illumi-
 nate and animate the whole earth, the glo-
 bular figure of which requires a diurnal ro-
 tation,

tation, that all the dwellers on it may be supplied in their turns; nor do any of them,

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1.

especially not the principal, suffer by the darkness they are overspread with, whilst the sun visits others with his benign influences, for night gives man a necessary vacation from the labours of the day. But no one can avoid observing the changes of the seasons, occasion'd by the annual (apparent) course of the sun; if he kept one perpetual track, the greatest part of the earth must be uninhabited, either by reason of excessive heat or cold, the gloomy regions never visited by him, must be shut up in continual darkness and impenetrable frost, while the climates on which his beams should still directly fall, must be quite burnt up, yielding no sustenance for man or beast. But instead of these extremes, how commodiously is this great benefit dispensed, by the fixed periodical revolution of the great orb in a yearly course, so directed, as to prevent, as far as can be, the excesses both of heat and cold, and produce the grateful and useful variety of summer and winter, seed-time and harvest. Again, if we take but even a slight view of this lower world it self, we shall see an admirable correspondence between its parts; however different

SERM. I. ferent they are, yet every one fitted to another, and to all the rest, so as to make the whole a convenient dwelling-place for the several tribes of animals which live upon it, and for mankind especially. The solid earth supports our heavy bodies, the thin air we breathe, is absolutely necessary to our preservation; and no one can be ignorant of how manifold use water is, not only more remotely, by serving the purposes of vegetation, but by the immediate refreshment it gives, and as a means of the decent and comfortable enjoyment of life. Every element has its proper inhabitants, which by the peculiar make and organization of their bodies, are adapted to it; the fishes have fins, the land animals feet and legs, and even the groveling reptile is furnished with the proper instruments of its slow motion: All these so various, that the kinds of them can scarcely be numbered, have food convenient for them, and every thing which is suitable to their several natures.

Now, even upon this general imperfect view, let any man judge whether there be not clear evidence of contrivance and design in the formation of our world, indeed, whether it does not appear such a regular connected



nected system, as considering the infinite variety of its parts, all of them so exquisitely fitted to each other, and dispos'd in such exact order, as to make a perfect harmony in the whole; whether, I say, considering this, any understanding less than infinite, could have form'd the model? This is so plain, I do not think it needful to use many words in illustrating it; the truth is, I cannot help concluding, that without the most unaccountable infatuation or perverseness, every one must acknowledge it. Surely it would be far less absurd to imagine, that the most curious machine ever fram'd by human art, the most beautiful edifice, the finest picture, or the most delightful musical harmony; that these, any, or all of them, made themselves, by a merely casual mixture of their parts, than that this stupendous and most artificial fabric of the universe, arose from nothing, or from rude, utterly indisposed materials, by undirected necessity or hazard.

Before we proceed any further, let us stop here to make one obvious reflection, or rather indulge our selves in those thoughts which will naturally arise. The human mind is so constituted, as to have a pleasing sense of beauty, in order, proportion and harmony,

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particularly, as it is thereby led to apprehend wisdom and good design in the contrivance. It is this which affords so various and delightful entertainment, from the curious productions of the artist's hand, but first of his mind; one admires statuary, another architecture, another gardening, others are delighted with the compositions which are merely the work of genius, without any gross materials, such as poetry and history; but still it is the regularity that pleases, the proportion of the parts, and the harmony of the whole; and the more complicated and various the matter or the subject is, it is the more pleasing, provided the regularity be apparent. Why then should we not admire the beauties of nature, nay, don't we all agree, that those are the most beautiful works of art, which copy the most exactly after nature, and are the truest imitation of her original forms.

Let us therefore fix our thoughts in a steady contemplation of the world about us, view it in this light, as a regular finish'd system, discovering exquisite skill in the exact proportion of all its parts, and a perfect symmetry in the whole. In vain shall we seek for beauty, harmony and order, in the productions of human genius; if we turn our
 eyes

eyes with attention to all things around us, in SERM.

their simple natural appearance, the idea of a nobler regularity, and more grand design, will arise in our minds. Is there any image made by painting or sculpture, equal to the human face and person, any map or landskip to the natural soil it self, diversified with real rocks and hills, tall trees in blossom or laden with fruit, and cattle ranging the wide pasture? How wonderful is the structure of a single animal, inimitable by art, its parts made according to exact measure, and so conveniently situated, that every one performs its proper functions, useful to the whole! this animal has a near relation to the kind, the kind it self to other species; all in such a due disposition, that every individual is provided for, living commodiously on this terrestrial globe, which continually receives its vital warmth whereby they are nourished, from the far distant heavenly bodies, holding on their perpetual course. Here is a noble subject of meditation, to a mind that delights in harmony and order; but whither will it lead us? Directly to the acknowledgment of perfect understanding in the universe, of All-ruling wisdom, in conjunction with the most amiable goodness, the true compleat original

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original beauty, the fountain of all excellence and perfection. Praise the Lord all ye his works, praise him ye angels and all his hosts, praise him sun and moon, praise him ye stars of light, praise him ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that are above the heavens. Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created, he hath also established them for ever, he hath made a decree which shall not pass. Praise the Lord from the earth, ye dragons and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and vapour, stormy wind fulfilling his word, mountains and all hills, fruitful trees and all cedars, beasts and all cattle, creeping things and flying fowl. Kings of the earth and all people, princes and judges. Both young men and maidens, old men and children. Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is excellent, his glory is above the earth and heaven. * O Lord, how manifold are thy works, in wisdom thou hast made them all, the earth is full of thy riches, so is the great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both great and small beasts. These wait all upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due

* Psal. cxlviii.

season. That thou givest them they gather, thou openest thy hand, they are filled with good *. Therefore let every one of us resolve with the devout Psalmist †, *I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live, I will sing praises to my God while I have being.*

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I.

* Pfal. 104. v. 24, 25, 27, 28. † v. 33.

S E R M O N II.

The Being of GOD prov'd from the
Animal and Rational Life.

Rom. i. 19, 20.

Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.

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II.

THE main point in debate between us and *Atheists*, is concerning the intelligence of the supreme Being. They will not deny, that something must have existed from eternity, either the world in its present form, or the materials of it put into form by chance or necessity; they will acknowledge too that the eternal self-existent Being must be call'd, in some sense, the cause of all things; and perhaps they may add, that it has a kind of
passive

passive perception and consciousness : The ancient *Hylozoists*, atcrib'd life and understanding to matter, whereby it form'd it self into regular systems ; and some of the modern *Atheists* pretend to acknowledge a sort of necessary perception in the Deity, meaning by the Deity the universal substance, as they call it, that is, the intire system of things, comprehending all particular beings as its parts : But an active intelligence, as the proper efficient cause of the world, and distinct from the world, designing and directing its formation, all *Atheists* deny and must deny.

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This is what I have propos'd to prove, shewing, according to the Apostle's assertion in the text, from the creation of the world, that the invisible things of God are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made ; and I have in a former discourse, insisted on the general order of the visible world, the relation and mutual dependence of its parts, such as the heavens and the earth, with the vast number and various kinds of beings it contains, clearly demonstrating it to be one beautiful connected system, which necessarily required an active designing intelligence to its formation. But besides this general proof, distinct arguments

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to establish the same principle, may be drawn from particular appearances in nature, which cannot possibly be explained by the fortuitous or necessary concurrence of atoms, or any rude and unprepared materials. And,

The first I shall mention is the animal life, of which we see a numberless variety; bodies growing up from very small beginnings, by imperceptible degrees, to a large bulk, and animated by a principle, which is endued with sense and self-motion. The structure of animal bodies is curious, consisting of parts exquisitely fine, and most artificially disposed for receiving nourishment and a gradual increase; but above all, the faculties of perception and spontaneous motion, are never to be accounted for, without the interposal of an intelligent Cause.

Some mechanic philosophers, even who profess to believe a Deity, have made too near approaches to *Atheism*, at least, too much serv'd its cause, by pretending to explain all the Phænomena of the world, without any divine interposition; but they appear to be very bungling world-makers, and their hypothesis, not only defective, failing in a tolerably fair solution of many very important and very common appearances, but

some

some of their essential principles have been demonstrated to be false : Especially in the point before us, their schemes are most remarkably defeated, for they have never been able to give, I do not say, a certain and satisfying, but even a plausible account of the animal constitution, in any state of its existence, or any step of its progress, from its commencement to its perfection, especially, not of the sentient and self-moving powers. The formation of the fœtus is, as the scripture justly calls it, a work *curious and wonderful*, according to a divine model; *its members were all writ in the volume of God's book*, that is, the composition of all its parts exactly answers to his designing idea. Not to insist on the modern discoveries, whereby it seems probable, that the nutrition of an animal, in the dark recess appointed for its first abode, and where its existence has been generally thought to commence, is no more than extending and enlarging upon the slender pre-existent, vital stamen, which leads us still more clearly to the acknowledgment of a mighty creating hand, the wise Author of nature ; not to insist on this, it is evident to an attentive mind, that no general impulse or motion impress'd upon matter, according
to

SERM. to mechanical laws, can give us the least tolerable pretence for imagining that, in the first stage of its being, an animal cou'd have been produc'd without a special intelligent direction.

II.

The notions of the Epicurean Atheists, concerning the origin of animals, and man in particular, are so ridiculouſly absurd, that it is scarce decent enough to repeat them. They profess to imagine, that as numberless atoms, after moving fortuitously through a successive infinite duration, in an infinite void, at last, by various unguided rencounters, accidentally jumbled themselves into this terraqueous globe, and these beautiful celestial spheres; so the earth having been long barren, yet still retaining the motive quality of its parts, (no body knows from whence derived) and therefore labouring with a strong actual intestine motion, in process of time brought forth monstrous unshap'd births, which had some little likeness to living things of the several kinds, and it may be some low beginnings of life which could not long subsist for want of proper vehicles; at length, after many imperfect essays, growing more skilful in the plastic art, strange! how that should come to pass! she produc'd finish'd

complete animals. If one should ask how it SERM. happens that in all ages of the world, of II. which we have any historical monuments, there are not the least footsteps of such generation. No man ever saw, or pretends to have seen animals of any kind, perfect or imperfect, issue from the teeming womb of mother earth: what can the reason be according to this philosophy? Is it that she became barren by age? This is hard to conceive, considering that she came to her prolific virtue so late as after an eternity was past, and that the constituent atoms had preserved their vigour in an unwearied dance thro' numberless ages; or did she wisely (but who made her wise?) resign her fertility, when the settled law (by what direction?) took place for the more orderly propagation of the species? Again, if it be inquired in what condition these earth-born animals appeared; did they come to the world in a state of maturity, and of different sexes, ready to increase and multiply? This is the account given in the Mosaic history of the creation, but must be resolv'd as it is most reasonably in that history, into the mighty command of the Creator as the sole cause. But if the animals were thrust out in infancy (which the Epicureans choose

SERM. choose to say, that their formation in every
 II. step of its progress may look the more like
 random work) the question then will be, how were they cared for, how defended in that weak and helpless state? Here the most precarious suppositions are heap'd up very unphilosophically, a several hypothesis to solve every particular difficulty, too plainly shewing, that philosophers of this sort will admit of any thing, be it ever so absurd, rather than a Deity, and having resolved in their hearts that they will not see God, they indulge their imaginations in the most unbounded liberty of forming pretences, whereby they may harden themselves in unbelief.

Since I have mentioned some of these inferior appearances in the animal kingdom, I shall take notice of one more which strongly evinces intelligent direction, that is the conservation of the distinct species by a regular propagation. Is it not a surprizing thing, and to them who deny a governing wisdom in the universe, utterly inexplicable, that for so many ages wherein we have any knowledge of animals being in the world, unerring nature has followed one invariable rule in their production? The several kinds remain as distinct

distinct as ever they were, they have never run into confusion, nor mix'd with each other: We see no such thing as Syrens and Centaurs, which are only the creatures of human imagination; and yet if we exclude ruling wisdom, they might have a chance for actual existence as well as intire men or intire horses, intire women, or intire fishes. But there has never once such a monster happened as a human face joined to a brutal body, or so much as the head of a bull placed upon the neck of an ass: Nay, so true is nature to her rule, and so nicely accurate in preserving the distinction, that when two kinds so nearly resemble each other, as the horse and the ass, that there is not difference enough in the outward form to direct the instinct of the sexes, and therefore they mingle together; there is no farther propagation of that sort, the anomalous breed terminates in the first production, and no new species arises.

Again, as none of the species have ever run into each other, so it does not appear that any of them have been lost, for want of the necessary means and opportunities of propagation. This evidently depends on the distinction of the sexes, and a proneness in them

SERM.

II.



SERM. to continue their kind. Strange! that in so
 II. many descents there should never have hap-
 pened, if hazard ruled and not wise provi-
 dence, all males of, at least one species, or all
 females, or that the individuals of one sex
 should not so out-number the other, as to
 put an end to, at least very much diminish
 the race; (but we see the contrary in fact;) and that there should have been a never fail-
 ing determination in the individuals to fulfil
 their natural law of propagation. The sum
 is this, these appearances I have mentioned
 in the animal world, amount to the three fol-
 lowing observations of fact, which may be de-
 pended on as certain and constant, and let
 the Atheist, if he can, reconcile them to his
 beloved chance or blind necessity. First,
 that there is belonging to every kind of ani-
 mals, a distinguishing nature, by the direc-
 tion whereof all the matter by which they
 are nourished, or an addition is made to
 their bulk, whether in the womb or out of
 it, is moulded into their particular and pro-
 per form. This *nature* we all acknowledge
 in the forms of living things, for when any
 extraordinary production happens, deficient
 in members, or with supernumerary mem-
 bers, or a situation of them different from
 what


what is usual in the kind, we present-
ly call it monstrous and unnatural. 2dly,

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The species are preserved by the distinction of sexes in the individuals, and there has been of males and females belonging to the several kinds, in all the generations which have hitherto pass'd, such a proportion, as all circumstances considered, is best calculated to answer the purpose of perpetuating the species. 3dly, The propagation thus provided for, depends upon instincts planted in the individuals, and these have always appeared strong enough to answer their end.

If we proceed, in the next place, to consider the principal, but very obvious phenomena of the animal, and especially of the human constitution, *viz.* perception and activity with all their modes, in the same view with the frame of the visible world, and the origin and regular propagation of the sensitive kinds, that is if we consider them only as evidences of intelligence and design in their production; they add a force to the argument which, one would think, should appear to an attentive mind irresistible. For surely it can never be imagined, with any appearance of reason, that sensation and its different modes, seeing, hearing, &c. spontaneous

SERM. **II.**  taneous motion, and the various instincts of animals producing such a regular œconomy in their lives, each individual caring for it self and pursuing its own ends, by the proper use of its powers and organs, and all of the several tribes conspiring together to promote the common good of the whole, so far as their several conditions require; much less that the powers of reason and reflection, the social and moral affections wherewith men are endued, together with the improvements of them in the intire scheme of human life, and human societies, comprehending so much order, contrivance and various enjoyment; it cannot, I say, be imagin'd, that all these are to be attributed to undefigning necessity or chance.

There is a variety with uniformity and beautiful order, in the sensitive and intellectual, as well as in the material world, which must strike every considerate person with a sense of grand design in its formation. As in the corporeal system, vastly numerous parts, all properly situated and commodiously dispos'd, with an apparent mutual relation and usefulness, is a clear demonstration of wise contrivance in the whole; so the no less, perhaps much greater diversity of percipient and ac-
 tive

tive powers, with the different degrees of SERM.
them, which appears under visible forms, at II.
the same time a regular unchanging familiarity
in the several species, which could no more
proceed from chance, than the variety could
from undirected force ; and if we add to all
this the convenient disposal of them, so that
every individual power has a full scope for its
exercise, and instead of interfering with each
other, there is an apparent mutual correspon-
dence throughout the whole of their state,
and a subordination of use, according to the
measures of their perfection, the lower still
serving the higher, as inanimate nature mi-
nisters a constant supply to them all ; this is
at least an equally invincible proof of de-
sign in the author of the system. In short,
the animal and rational inhabitants of this
globe, even upon a superficial view of them se-
parately, of their natures, capacities and condi-
tions, and the œconomy which appears in the
most obvious face of this living world, carry
such irrefragable evidences of design, that refer-
ring to the comparison us'd by some of the an-
cients, it would be an equal, or even a great-
er absurdity to resolve these appearances into
blind necessity or chance, than to account for
the composition of the finest poem, by the


SERM. necessary or merely fortuitous jumble of letters. How strangely is the human understanding capable of being misled by prejudices and prepossessions, so as not to discern the clearest truths?

II.

But if we consider more particularly these principal appearances of the animal life, especially the limited rational faculties of man, the argument will be yet more convincing to prove unoriginated intelligence and activity in the universe. I observ'd before, that by attending to our selves, and to the report of our senses, concerning external objects, we have the essentially different ideas of percipient and unpercipient beings, of cause and effect, of active and passive powers, or of voluntary agency and necessity, as distinguish'd from it : And now I add, that we cannot avoid observing in our selves different kinds of perception, namely, sense and understanding. By the *former* we have only the ideas of what are called primary sensible qualities, as extension, solidity, divisibility and figure, and other ideas, such as heat, coldness, colours, sharpness, sweetness and the like, which our reason tells us, are not in the objects themselves, but perceptions or phantasms rais'd in our minds by the various texture,

texture, figure, motion and situation of parts, which are all we can conceive in such beings, that can produce any effect. Every one of these latter ideas however, takes in the primary sensible qualities; whatever appears to us hot, cold, coloured, &c. appears at the same time extended, divisible and figured. But we find also in our own minds, perceptions of another kind, which take in no ideas of any sensible qualities. By attending to the exercise of our own powers and the various modes of thinking, we have notions, and the knowledge of truths, which have no manner of relation to extension, magnitude, divisibility, figure or motion. But the other and lower, even the sentient principle, opens to us a scene in nature different from the curious and beautiful fabric of the heavens, the earth, and all other inanimate effects; for *they* require nothing besides unactive and unintelligent matter for the subject of them, tho' they lead us to the acknowledgment of wisdom and design in the directing and disposing Cause; but *here* seems to be in the effect it self a superior order of Being, having properties and powers of a kind intirely different, and this seems to be in all the various sorts of animals, in some degree or other, some of

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II.


SERM. II.  them being more, some less perfectly sensitive. It is true, we can't know what passes in brutes, as we do what passes in our own minds; yet when we consider their organs in the exterior form, and in the anatomy of them, very much resembling our own, and when we consider the effects which follow the presenting, and the application of material objects to them, very like those which appear in us on the same occasion, we cannot well avoid concluding, that they have the external senses of hearing, seeing, feeling, tasting and smelling, in common with us, and the like perception of sensible qualities as we have. Some Philosophers have represented them as meer machines, and the whole œconomy of their senses and operations, as if it were no more than a curious piece of clock-work, form'd with exquisite art. But this notion is deservedly exploded, for indeed the obvious appearances can never be accounted for by any mechanical hypothesis.

But let us consider the sensitive powers as we find them in our selves, and though they are the lower part of our nature, far less excellent than some other faculties of the human mind, yet they seem to be of quite another kind and original, and of a higher nature

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ture than the gross corporeal part, or any of SERM.
its organs, indeed higher than any naturally II.
incogitative and unactive being is capable of,
at least, without the interposition of a supe-
rior designing Agent. If now we have found
a being, nay, a multitude of beings in the
world, essentially distinguish'd from others
by the peculiar powers of perception, exer-
cis'd in a variety of modes, this must over-
throw all the *Atheistical* hypotheses; for their
necessary mechanical causes in an infinite se-
ries, and atoms by a fortuitous motion com-
pounding and diversifying themselves into va-
rious forms, are wholly insufficient to pro-
duce such effects. But this particular appear-
ance leads us directly to acknowledge some-
thing resembling it, rather superior to it, that
is understanding in the author. For can any
one imagine, that a blind undesigning cause
could have produc'd perception, distinguish'd
into so many kinds, as of colours, sounds, pain,
pleasure, &c. all united in one undivided prin-
ciple. This perceptive faculty is a low image of
intelligence, which is very reasonably attribu-
ted to a free intending Agent, who may, him-
self possess of perfect power and wisdom, com-
municate various degrees of those perfections
to his works, as he sees fit, but can never

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with any pretence of reason, be accounted for by chance or necessity, or by any unperceiving cause, especially considering it as an abiding principle, uniformly subservient to certain ends, subsisting in a regular diversity of outward forms, and in a great variety of degrees.

This will be still more evident, if we consider in conjunction with sense, that other principal appearance of the animal life, spontaneous motion. We know that inanimate things at rest, necessarily continue so, till they are moved by a force superior to their own power of resistance; but animal bodies, either the whole, or particular members of them, change their posture, begin to move or continue in motion, by an inward activity and voluntary self-determination. This, one would think, should be a very surprizing phenomenon to the *Atheist*, who denies the existence of an original active Cause. But how does he get rid of the difficulty? Why, he roundly denies any such thing as self-motion, and alledges, that all which looks like it in animal action, is the meer effect of the inward agitation of the machine, raised by the impulse of external objects on the organs of sense. But to this account the fact does not at

all

all agree, as every one may be easily satisfied SERM.
by his own observation. Tho' 'tis true that II.
in our sensations we are passive, and they necessarily arise, according to an establish'd law, by the impression which certain objects make upon us ; we cannot avoid the perception of pleasure and pain upon some occasions, nor the hearing of sounds and seeing of colours, when the organs are duly dispos'd, and these sensations are necessarily attended with some motions in the animal system ; yet for the actions which are called voluntary, we know that, as they are never properly caused, they are often not so much as occasioned by the impulse of external objects. Is not every man conscious to himself that he moves his hands, his feet and other parts of his body, by the sole command of his will, frequently when there is no impulse at all from without, exciting him to it, and that the proper agent in such cases is the same conscious self, which is intimately present in all parts of the body, perceiving the impressions which are made upon it by its organs of sense. We cannot indeed explain the nature and manner of this operation, nor would the exactest knowledge we can attain of the animal economy enable us to understand it ; for tho' a

SERM.

II.



learned anatomist may describe the muscles, and show their convenient situation, fitting them by their contractions to move the several members ; yet how the act of the soul contracts those muscles, how it directs the course of the animal spirits, or influences whatever are the nearest and most immediate instruments of the animal motion ; this he is as ignorant of, as the most unskilful rustic, but this they equally know, and all mankind know it by an inward consciousness, which is the surest evidence, that the motion takes its rise from, being constantly and uniformly produc'd by a self-determining power within.

Here then is a plain familiar example, directing us to form an idea of a mind acting upon matter, a percipient, self-determining principle, moving bodies only by a volition. By this the supreme first Mover has left us a witness within our selves, which confounds the cavils of *Atheism*. Shall it be said, that the whole system of the universe, and all it contains, is to be resolv'd into mechanism, without a directing immechanical principle, that the being of such a principle, which is the spring of thought and active operations on unthinking matter, is unintelligible, and that

that no motion can be conceiv'd to be effect-
ed but by a material impulse; all this which
Atheists call absurd, is exemplified in that
little system, a single animal. Shall we not ac-
knowledge, that he who form'd this percipi-
ent self-determining power, the ruler of the
body which it inhabits, yet unknowing how
it exercises its dominion; that he, I say, is
possess'd of superior intelligence and power,
and is it not easily conceivable, that such in-
telligence and power may have a command
over large material systems? This animal
life, tho' far more excellent than inanimate
nature, which yet is none of it without the
characters of the author's perfections stamp'd
upon it, gives us but a faint notion of the
Deity; let us rise to something higher, and
which carries in it a brighter and more illu-
strious image of the divine understanding.


What I mean, are the intellectual powers
of the human nature, far transcending the
sensitive, both in the excellence of their kind,
and the extent of their exercise: When sense
and understanding perceive the same object,
it is after a very different manner. The for-
mer discerns what we call the sensible quali-
ties of material objects, that is, those objects
by effluvia from them, or by the intervention
of

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SERM. of some corporeal medium, make such impressions on our organs, as are the occasion of exciting certain ideas in the mind, and here the capacity of sense terminates, it can go no further. But we are conscious of another power which can review those ideas, examine their nature and relations, and by comparing them together, discover truths concerning them, which the merely animal capacity does not reach to. For example, when a coloured object is presented to us, the idea of red, white, black, or any other colour is rais'd; here the report of sense stops, and many unattentive persons, too hastily forming a judgment upon it, conclude that these are qualities really inherent in the bodies themselves: But upon a more close attention and careful enquiry, others are satisfied that they are really no more than our own sensations, caused by some particular disposition of parts in the surface of the coloured body, giving such a determination to the rays of light, that they form those images in the organs of sight, which are the nearer object of our perception. Our reasoning in this and many other instances upon sense, shows a power superior to *it* in the mind, which apprehends the same objects af-
ter

tera quite different manner; we have thoughts SERM.
concerning them, which sense could never II.
have suggested, we consider their relations, 
their similitude and dissimilitude, we form
general notions, wherein the mind abstracts
from individual existence, which the sensi-
tive faculty is not capable of; we discern the
agreement or disagreement of our own ideas,
their connexion and dependence; we form
propositions upon them, affirming and deny-
ing, distinguishing between truth and fals-
hood, and having clearly perceiv'd some
truths, we proceed in our search after more,
by consideration and arguing. Now, tho'
the occasion of all these and others modes of
thinking, may be introduc'd by the senses,
every one who attends, must be convinced,
that the exercise of the mind in them is very
different from sensation.

But there are other objects of the under-
standing, not deriv'd either immediately or
remotely from the senses. Consciousness is
no image or representation of any thing with-
out, that clear intuitive knowledge we have
of our being and our own powers, with all
their various exercises and acts, such as per-
ceptions of every kind, sensations, reflections,
remembrance, judgment, reasoning, self-de-
terminations,

SERM. terminations, affections, desire, fear, hope,
 II. sorrow, joy ; all these are accompanied with
 a consciousness in the mind, which does not,
 nor possibly can proceed from any external
 object, for an external object can only im-
 print something of it self, nothing at all of
 the inward active discerning self. Besides,
 the sensation we are now considering, as dif-
 ferent from, and inferior to understanding,
 still takes in the qualities of passive matter,
 extension, divisibility, figure, &c. but there
 are other ideas in the mind as real and di-
 stinct, which do not represent extended, fi-
 gured, divisible substance, nor have the least
 relation to any of its properties or modifica-
 tions, such as the ideas of virtue, of honesty,
 benevolence, gratitude, justice, compassion,
 which have no manner of affinity with sen-
 sible qualities, yet are of great importance
 to the purposes of our being, the objects of
 strong affection, and a consciousness of them
 yields the most solid and substantial pleasure
 to the soul ; we reason upon them as clearly,
 perceive truths concerning them, and draw
 consequences, in which the mind rests as
 much satisfied of their evidence, as in its
 knowledge of the figures, gravity and other
 affections of matter. And thus it plainly ap-
 pears,

appears, that there are in the human soul intellectual powers, superior to, and different from the sensitive, both in respect of the objects about which they are conversant, and the nature and manner of their exercise, when the objects are the same.

SERM.
II.

If it be so, we have a more clear discovery than the animal powers can give us, of self-original intelligence in the universe, for, either the understandings we find our selves possess'd of must be eternal and unoriginated, which no mortal ever imagined, or they must be originally derived from an intelligent Author, to whom these characters belong.

The reasoning of *Socrates* on this subject seems to be very strong and convincing, as it is related by *Xenophon* * : After he had endeavoured to prove the wisdom of the Deity by the beautiful order of the material world, and particularly the frame of the human body, he argues to this purpose, that as every man is conscious of a mind, an intelligent principle within him, he is thereby led to acknowledge understanding in the world without him. For, as in the composition of our bodies, there is deriv'd to us a part, and

* Memorab. Socrat. Lib. 1.

SERM. but a very small part of the solid, the liquid
 II. and other ingredients, in the mighty mass of
 surrounding matter, it would be very strange, if reason, which is our highest excellence, should come to us by some lucky chance from nothing, or no intelligent cause; and that there should be no such thing originally in the universe or the whole of being, when yet we see the plain marks of it in the orderly disposition of all things.

The Stoics us'd just the same reasoning, and added, that as in the human constitution, so in the intire system of things, the whole is more excellent than a particular part, that it would be extreme vanity in mankind to fancy themselves the head of the universe, being indeed but a very small part of it, and that which comprehends and presides over all, must have in it self all absolute perfection, from which every real perfection scattered through the world is derived.

It was a received maxim among the ancients, but very differently understood, that Nothing can come from Nothing. Not to enter into the consideration of the use which *Atheists* made of it against the creation of matter, which our present argument does not require, the maxim in this sense is most certainly

tainly true, that nothing can be produc'd, SERM.

II.



without a sufficient cause in order of nature before it, and that no real * perfection can be in the effect, which is not in the cause, either actually or virtually, for if it were, that perfection would be produc'd without a cause, or by nothing, which is a direct contradiction. Now, applying this to the point before us, the question is, how came intelligence into the world, if not from an intelligent cause? The *Atheist* may, if he pleases, ridicule what we call perfection, for indeed his principles tend to level all things, and destroy the beautiful subordination which there is in nature; but it is surprizing, that any one possess'd of rational powers should think so meanly of them. Is there no excellence in conscious thinking with all its various modes, in reasoning, the discernment of truth, and an intel-

* The word Perfection is here used, as it is commonly, without explication. For understanding it the better, and to prevent mistakes, we may observe, that as the human mind cannot avoid discerning a difference in things, it as necessarily, upon comparison, prefers some to others. The measure of this preference in our judgment, is the sense we have of natural and moral Good: By perfection therefore is meant, a capacity of enjoyment, or a capacity of virtue, which we can't help apprehending real, and valuable in the degree wherein it is possess'd, and where it has the plain appearances of an effect, we can't help apprehending, as in all other effects, an equal or superior capacity is the Cause.

lectual

SERM. Intellectual progress in discovering it, in the exercise of liberty by a rational self-determination, and of our best affections, with the various enjoyment they afford; is there, I say, no excellence in all this above the qualities of passive unintelligent beings? But though I think the human mind can scarcely help acknowledging a superior excellence in the intellectual and moral capacity, far surpassing the powers of incogitative and merely passive being, which therefore must owe it self to a superior intelligent cause; yet waving this consideration, 'tis impossible to doubt of the thing it self, that there actually is what we call understanding in man: let us see then, if the rise of it can be accounted for without a prior intelligence as its cause? Supposing, tho' ever so absurdly, all the appearances of corporeal nature not to require, to their being and their order, the direction of any designing Agent, but that their magnitude, figure and all other qualities, proceed from unguided moving force, or the fortuitous jumble of their compounding parts; the question is, if intelligence with all its modes is thus also to be explained, and if it has been struck out in the same necessary or casual manner? And any attentive person will be

convinc'd

convinc'd, that this solution is altogether insufficient, and indeed extremely unreasonable. For all the visible phœnomena of inanimate nature, whatever diversity there may be in their exterior appearance, carry the marks of their internal constitution, having still inseparably belonging to them, the essential properties and primary qualities of that whereof they are compounded, such as solidity, divisibility, figure, its capacity of motion and rest, to which it is in its own nature indifferent, not capable, of it self, to change its state from either to the other, but always yielding to force; intelligence can never be the result of these, any or all of them, or any composition or change of them; for let magnitude, figure and motion be ever so much altered, compounded or divided, they can really produce nothing but magnitude, figure and motion. But perception and consciousness have no relation to these; our ideas of them are as distinct as any can possibly be: What resemblance has consciousness to motion or figure? Or, by an attentive consideration, must not every one perceive, that reasoning and volition have not the least affinity with magnitude or divisibility? And if, by the most apparent distinction of our own ideas,

SERM. we may not conclude a real difference of
 II. things, there is an end of all certainty, and
 our knowledge is reduc'd to utter confusion.

The secondary qualities of passive unintelligent being, such as colours, sounds, tastes, resulting from the various texture, disposition and motion of its parts, and our adversaries may suppose that all perceptions arise in the same manner as they do; these secondary qualities, I say, are really no more than our own sensations, not the modes of external objects but of thought, requiring themselves a peculiar principle for the subject of them, and therefore a superior power to produce them; consequently, instead of being an argument to show that understanding might possibly take its rise from unthinking matter and its modifications, they really serve the quite contrary purpose: If ever there had been nothing in the world but passive matter and motion, however compounded and diversified, not only there never cou'd have been any such thing as consciousness, but indeed there never could have been so much as colour, sound and taste, since these are only modes of perception, and therefore peculiar to beings indued with a perceptive power, which could only be produc'd by an agent himself perceiving,



cient, either in that or a more perfect manner. Wherefore the reasoning related in *Cicero* *, is extremely weak, when in opposition to *Socrates's* argument already mentioned, *viz.* whence did we derive our reason, if there be no such thing in the world, it is alledged one may as well ask, whence had we numbers, musick or speech?—And again, if the argument be good, that because there is understanding in us, therefore it must be originally in the world, by the same argument it may be prov'd, that the superior intelligent in the world, must be an orator, a mathematician and a philosopher; nor is their reasoning any better who pretend, that if life and understanding in the effect require Life and understanding in the cause, whereby we find our selves oblig'd to acknowledge these powers eternal and unmade, by the same argument it may be prov'd, that sensible qualities must be attributed to the original Cause, and there must be, for example, an eternal unmade red and green. The answer to all which is very obvious, that none of these qualities mentioned require to their being, any thing distinct from the animal and

* De natura Deorum, Lib. 3.

SERM.

II.



and therefore it is by no means necessary to suppose, that they belong to the original author of them, whereas life and understanding, indeed the lowest perceptions, imply a perfection which passive unperceptive powers, merely of themselves, can never reach to, and therefore they must be produc'd by another cause, to which either they formally, or a superior excellence must be ascrib'd. Upon the whole then it is apparent, that the secondary qualities of corporeal nature, as they are called, being really and properly no more than modes of perception, nor the particular application of the human faculties, as in singing, speech and philosophy; I say, that none of these have any thing parallel to the case of intelligence, to weaken the force of the argument from its being in the world to prove that it must be eminently in the cause of it. But least of all is there any pretence for alledging, that from our reasoning it may be infer'd, that the cause of passive matter must have its properties, such as figure, divisibility, &c. as well as that the cause of intelligence must be intelligent. For daily experience shews in numberless instances, that intelligence produces effects very unlike it self,

and

and of a quite different nature ; whereas not only no instance can be alledg'd to show that figure, divisibility, &c. ever did produce conscious intelligence, but it is impossible that ever they should, for as has been observ'd, extended divisible matter, with all its changes and modifications, can never produce any thing to which these its essential properties do not inseparably belong ; therefore not intelligence.

In this reasoning I have abstracted from the question concerning the possibility of matter's being endued with thinking and active faculties, which some wise men have thought too difficult for us to determine, alledging, that the human understanding does not so thoroughly comprehend the nature of thought and of corporeal substance, as to be able to judge with certainty, that the latter may not, by the power of God, be made the subject of the other, tho' they agree that matter, with its passive powers and all its known properties, could never possibly of itself have produc'd any degree of intelligence and activity. This is what I have asserted, and therefore that the human, rational and self-determining faculties, whatever the subject of them be, could not possibly proceed from

SERM. unintelligent matter and motion, or the fortuitous concourse of atoms, which is all that *Atheists* mean, or that, I conceive, can be meant by undefining necessity or chance; consequently, that active intelligence must be self-original in nature. Nay, if we should suppose that there is no substance distinct from body, and that the Deity himself is corporeal, if it be allow'd that he is the intelligent Cause of all things; this as truly overthrows the cause of *Atheism*, as the juster principle of his eternal spiritual nature. Some *Atheists* have been so sensible of this insuperable difficulty which presses their scheme, namely, to account for the rise of thought from unthinking matter, without the agency of a designing Cause, that rather than abandon their fundamental principle that there is nothing in the universe but mere matter with its modifications, they have fled to that most absurd hypothesis, that all matter and every single atom of it, is intelligent; which, not to mention any more reasons, other *Atheists* themselves have refuted by this invincible one, that then every living intelligent being, particularly every man would be, not a single person or intelligent agent, but a multitude or a system of them, contrary to what every one is conscious

scious of. But the opinion of the Atomists is, if possible, yet more extravagant, who from the figure, magnitude and motion of parts, confessedly void of sense and understanding, wou'd raise perception and consciousness, essentially different from all modes and compositions of magnitude, figure and motion, which is to suppose a real and distinct perfection to be produc'd out of nothing, or without a cause.

SERM.

II.

It may be objected against all this, that if from the order and harmony of the visible world, and from a multitude of sensitive and rational beings, we justly infer a designing Cause; supposing this to be true, and that order and harmony, intelligence and activity are in the divine mind, what is the reason of this, and may we not prove by the same argument, that *it* must be attributed to a prior cause? I answer, our argument is not, that of every thing which has being, or which is wise and good, there must be a cause; but that, as in all other cases, by various marks of contrivance in any work, the human mind is naturally led to acknowledge an intending author; so in this case, by the clear evidences of design in a numberless variety of instances, even all parts of the known

SERM. universe, the inanimate, the sensitive and the
 II. rational, we find our selves oblig'd to recog-
 nise an understanding and designing Cause. And here we may rest ; if there be an intelligent Author of universal nature and of all the appearances we can discern in the whole world, of their mutual relations, connexions and dependencies, he is the God for whom we enquire. A search after unseen causes of unseen Causes to infinity, can discover nothing but perplexity and confusion of thought; the intelligent Fountain of all the wisdom, all the good and the order which actually is in the universe, will appear to every impartial mind worthy of our highest veneration and esteem, and justly intitled to our love and confidence.

But with respect to a first Cause, it is acknowledg'd by *Atheists*, as well as by us, that something must have been from eternity, self-existent and independent : Accordingly they say, that the material world form'd as it is, or matter and motion, or bare matter, is that necessarily existing thing. I shall not now enter into the consideration of this point, but I hope in its proper place, to shew that designing active mind has of all things the best pretensions, nay, that it alone has any just pre-

pretensions to the characters of necessarily ex-
istent, self-original and independent.

SERM.

II.



Upon a review of this whole reasoning, and indeed of the intire opposite schemes of *Theism* and *Atheism*, with regard to the points which have been consider'd, this remarkable difference appears; that whereas there is a great diversity of beings in the universe, and a great variety of qualities, powers and perfections belonging to the several kinds of them, the *Atheistic* opinion makes the very lowest of all, namely, senseless passive matter, the first principle of all, the eternal self-existent being, from which, as the sole independent origin, all things, even the most regular and beautiful arose, nay, the highest perfection of intelligence, virtue and happiness, without an active designing Cause. For which reason that hypothesis is incumber'd with insuperable difficulties in every step of the scale of being. It cannot account for any thing but by chance or necessity, which in respect of causality are really nothing, and as propos'd to the human understanding for a reason, only signify ignorance; it cannot so much as account for the order of the world, the exact proportion of its parts and the harmony of the whole, the apparent
mutual

SERM. II. mutual relations of the heavens and the earth, as united in one system, the convenient situation of the earth with respect to its distance from the sun, and such a proper direction both of its diurnal and annual motions as in the best manner to provide for the comfortable subsistence of its numerous inhabitants, the formation of the animal life in such a variety of species, all preserv'd distinct and without confusion, and propagated by a settled law, each fitted to its own element, provided with proper food and with suitable instincts and organs, especially sensation and self-motion, the principal appearances of the sensitive life; and least of all can the *Atheistical* hypothesis account for conscious intelligence and the various modes of it, which it diminishes into a vain empty shadow, the the merely accidental result of the figure and motion of matter, tho' it is that which makes every man *Himself*, and therefore nothing can appear to him more real and substantial.

But the doctrine of Deity and Providence is the perfect reverse of all this, and explains the system of the universe in a consistent satisfactory manner. It represents intelligence as the first of things, the origin and cause of all

all derived beings, and by the help of its direction, sets all things in a fair and amiable light. An eternal self-existent mind, immutably possess'd of all absolute perfections, form'd the plan of the world, and wisely finish'd it, according to its own most perfect model. It was to be expected that the work of such an architect should bear the signature of his hand, that is, his counsel and power in its magnificence, variety, proportion and beautiful harmony, and so it does. The low dark outworks of this stately building, that is the whole mass of extended passive bulk, in it self so mean and contemptible, is form'd into various beauty, by the energy of Spirit which inhabits it. From this there is a gradual ascent towards the utmost height of excellence, and every rising step in the scale carries in it a growing display of original perfection: Vegetation it self is a vast improvement upon dead matter, showing the superior plastic virtue of spirit; but animal sensation and spontaneity, however low in comparison, are strong images of understanding and activity. Human intelligence, with its various powers, exercises and enjoyments, is the highest in our world, and leads us directly to the great Original it was form'd by,

the

SERM. the uncreated mind. Between these two
 II. there is a mighty chasm, and we may well
 imagine many intermediate orders of celestial
 spirits, superior to us, tho' the highest of them
 at an immense distance from unoriginated ex-
 cellence.

Let any candid attentive person set these
 schemes against each other in his calm deli-
 berate thoughts, and embrace that which ap-
 pears the most rational. I do not doubt but
 you will be convinc'd the latter is the very
 truth, in which your minds may rest with
 intire satisfaction. Let us therefore joyn in
 adoring the glorious fountain of light and
 life, and with all the wise inhabitants of hea-
 ven and earth, acknowledge him *worthy to*
receive glory and honour and power, who has
created all things, and for his pleasure they
are and were created. Amen.

S E R M O N III.

The Being of God prov'd from Human Intelligence and Morality.

Rom. i. 19, 20.

Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.

I HAVE endeavoured in two preceding ^{SERM.} discourses to prove the Being of God from ^{III.} his works, that is, as the question is properly stated between the *Atheists* and us, to prove an active intelligence in the formation of the universe. Indeed the existence of the very lowest things we see, the most contemptible pebble or clod of earth, cannot be accounted for without the agency of an intelligent and powerful Cause, much less this beautiful system

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tem of the world, dispos'd in such exquisite order, and having its parts so exactly fitted to each other, as to make up one regular whole. But above all, that understanding which we are conscious of in our selves, even constrains us to acknowledge the supreme eternal Mind as its Author; for if inanimate matter form'd into a system, discovers his glorious wisdom and activity, much more his own living image in our perceptive and self-determining powers. This last well deserves a more particular consideration, as containing a peculiarly illustrious manifestation of the divine wisdom, and I hope, by a due attention to what passes in our own minds, we shall find our selves obliged to recognize the All-ruling intelligence of our Maker, and to adore him who *is perfect in knowledge*. At least, supposing the former reasoning to be just, what I shall further offer upon this subject, will give us a more enlarged idea of the divine understanding, which is the principal point in our present inquiry.

Here I shall confine my self to what is called pure intellect, that is those exercises of the mind which abstract wholly from the external senses, and the sole object of them, singular corporeal existence: For tho', as I
 observ'd

observ'd before, the sensitive and intellectual SERM.

powers are employ'd about the same object, III.

apprehending it in a very different manner, yet are there intelligibles, indeed those of the sublimest kind, in which we have the greatest certainty of knowledge, as well as the noblest mental entertainment, which do not at all fall under the perception of the senses, such as the abstract ideas of natures or essences, eternal truths and moral qualities, which have all of them, tho' no sensible existence, yet an important reality, and the ideas of them in the eternal mind are their original archetypes.

First, Abstract Natures or Essences are represented by some as the mere creatures of the human understanding, taking occasion from the apparent similitude and dissimilitude of things to form abstract notions of their several different kinds, which no where subsist but in the understanding it self; at the same time referring to the internal constitutions of things, the true cause of the apparent similitude and dissimilitude of their outward forms. These internal constitutions are the real Essences, for the most part unknown to us, and the essences which are the objects of our apprehension, are therefore called nominal,

SERM.

III.



nal, because the true interior nature of things, whereby they are what they are, complete in themselves and invariably distinct from all others, lie too deep for us to discover. Now tho' this may be a fair representation of the method in which the human understanding proceeds, and the true origin of its ideas of Essences, which being posterior to individual existence, and derived from it, can be no more perfect than our knowledge of individual existing things, yet it leads us by clear reasoning to conclude, that there is a more perfect knowledge of Essences, which abstracting from actual existence, can only subsist as ideas in a mind, but it must be a mind infinitely more perfect than ours.

To shew this, I shall take leave to borrow an observation from a celebrated author, who gives the very account of Essences which I have been mentioning *. He tells us, that we know the Essences, and distinguish the species of artificial things, with far less confusion and uncertainty than natural things, because an artificial thing being a production of man, which the artificer design'd, and well knows the idea of, the name of it is suppos'd

* *Lock's Essay on Human Understanding. Book III. Ch. vi.*

to stand for no other idea, nor to import any other Essence than what is certainly to be known, and easy enough to be apprehended. He might have said, that every sensible Artificer must perfectly know the real essence of his own work, so far as it is his own, however ignorant he may be of the nature of the materials, stones, timber, iron, silver, gold or whatever they are, which another intirely unacquainted with the mechanic art, may understand much better ; yet the proper disposition of the parts, and joining them fitly together, so as to make one compleat fabric or machine, which is his own work, he must know ; and his understanding reaches to a thorough comprehension of the design, which is its true essence, before he begins the manual operation. Now applying this to the great Artificer of nature, *who stretch'd out the heavens by his wisdom, and establish'd the earth by his discretion*, we must conclude, that since he was the intending Cause of the world, and exercis'd active intelligence in the formation of all things, the plan was form'd in his All-comprehending mind ; in other words, the design or the archetypal ideas of the true Essences of things, subsisted in his understanding before the things themselves actually

SERM. III. }
III. }

SERM. had a being ; for who can imagine such an
 III. inconsistency as intelligence in the operation
 and not in the intention ? Can a work be
 made with wisdom, and wisdom not be prior
 to it, or the parts of a structure so put together
 as to show wise contrivance, without the
 Agent's having laid a scheme before-hand,
 and formed a model by which his proceeding
 should be directed.

But further we must conceive in a designing
 cause, freedom and choice, especially in a
 complicated production, which comprehends
 a great variety of parts : One general end is
 to be obtain'd, taking in many which are
 subordinate ; a vast variety of means are pre-
 sented to the mind, the fittest of which are
 to be chosen, and the rest rejected. This to
 imperfect understandings is the cause of long
 deliberation upon their projects, they take
 time to compare the means which offer them-
 selves to their thoughts, and try which, up-
 on the whole, as far as they can judge, are
 the most convenient ; but without a plurali-
 ty of such means or parts, we can have no
 notion of wisdom exercis'd in the work, for
 it consists in a choice or preference of the best
 and fittest. Now when we survey the world,
 so much of it as is known to us, (how ex-
 tensive

tenfive actual existence is beyond our sight or the reach of our understandings we cannot possibly tell,) containing such a multitude of beings as cannot be numbered, all form'd and dispos'd with intelligence and design, shewing that the ideas of them subsisted before in the mind of the author ; what a vast variety of ideas (we lose our selves in imagining it) must we suppose to have been in the same understanding, that there might be room for that preference, which we cannot help thinking, is absolutely necessary to the exercise of wisdom in his works. No one can say the world could not possibly have been otherwise than it is, or any of its parts otherwise than they are, in this sense that it would imply a contradiction in the nature of things, for that is in effect to deny all free agency, and all wisdom in the formation of the world, which is, I think, already prov'd by convincing arguments. But if that the world could not be otherwise than it is, supposes intelligence, and therefore means that of all possible systems appearing to his own mind, the Creator chose that which in the whole, was the fittest and the best ; this necessarily implies what I just now said, namely, that other models or designs were equally in his

SERM.

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power, and all alike actually in the view of his understanding, prior, I do not say in time, but in our order of conceiving, to the determination of producing the system which now actually exists. This seems to be the true meaning of *Plato's* ideas which he represents as the original forms and exemplars of whatever is in being, that is, the conceptions of the divine most perfect intellect, in which the whole scheme of existence was laid; tho' some of the latter *Platonists* turned his doctrine to an absurdity (and perhaps he gave too great occasion to it himself) calling those ideas not only archetypes and patterns, but living substances and physical causes, nay, a sort of deities. Here then we find in the universe, not only intelligence, directing the frame of nature, finishing all the particular forms in it, and appointing them their proper places, disposing the whole circle of being, and guiding the intire series of causes, with their operations; but an understanding not limited by the universe it self, reaching to the utmost bounds of possibility, and comprehending all conceivable essences or intelligible forms, relations, connexions and dependencies of things.

2dly, As these abstract ideas appearing to our minds, are the materials of all our science, which is not conversant about singular existence, and in proportion as they are discerned by every mind, they are the materials of its knowledge; so upon comparing them results truth (for it consists in their agreement) which is another real and important object of the understanding. Our minds are made with a desire to discover truth, and they rest in it when found, with great satisfaction; tho' our knowledge of essences is very imperfect, and what we call the essences of natural things actually existent, that is, our own abstract ideas of them, are for the most part little more than nominal, yet the perception of their agreement is to us certain truth, and we acquiesce in it with pleasure: But that mind which thoroughly comprehends the real natures of things, having form'd them with all their properties and powers, must see an infinity of truths in their various relations, which we cannot discern. Let it be especially observ'd, that our principal and most satisfying knowledge is purely intellectual, the subject of it being our own ideas, which abstract intirely from existence. For example, the points, lines and figures which

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SERM. III. are the subject of mathematical demonstration, are not perceived by our senses, nor supposed to have a sensible existence, but only are our own ideas abstracting from all matter, really form'd, or imagined to be form'd into such figures; those straight lines, curves, triangles, squares and other figures, whose properties, mutual relations, equalities and proportions are demonstrated, perhaps could none of them exactly, certainly some of them could not be exemplified in bulky materials, nor do the demonstrations concerning them depend on that, the subject of them being only our own ideas; yet no man who understands them will say they are chimerical, since he sees real truth in them, to which he cannot refuse his assent; nor can it be reasonably said that they depend wholly on the mind, and are its arbitrary combinations of its own ideas, for it cannot make truth or falsehood, but must consider them as independent on its own pleasure, and equally real whether it discerns them or not. It remains then that geometrical theorems and other propositions, for I mention them only as examples, are eternal verities, the same at all times, and, as some of the ancients speak; ingenerable and incorruptible, alike true
whether

whether any human mind perceives them or SERM.
not, nay, whether any human mind exists III.
or not. But were these eternal necessary truths altogether unknown before any human mind existed? No, they were the proper objects of eternal necessary intelligence, subsisting in the eternal mind. The occasion of our discerning them is taken from the works of God; it is from corporeal beings we get the ideas of figures and numbers (tho' the abstract ideas we form of them, are not sensible but intellectual) and the same may be said concerning the subjects of other self-evident or demonstrated propositions. Now has God scattered over his works such traces of intelligence, that very imperfect observers are led by them to see, and be delighted with truth, and shall himself not discern that same truth, nay, must he not have discern'd it from everlasting, since from everlasting it was equally discernable by a perfect understanding, which comprehended the essences, that is the ideas of things with all their relations, whence that truth necessarily results? Surely we have no mental perfection but what is derived from the eternal Mind, the Father of our spirits: If then we are endued with a power of discovering truth (which we

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cannot reflect upon without having pleasure in it, as an excellence in our nature) he must have possess'd that power in a more eminent and perfect manner before we had a being, and the truths which were eternally knowable, must be to him eternally known. Human science lies within a narrow compass, but certainly it is one of the most delightful entertainments the mind can have. What pleasure does it give, to some at least, to see a proposition demonstrated which comprehends, and to full conviction determines the relation of a great variety of things, for example, the proportion of many different lines or figures ; and can we imagine that our nature, in every part of its constitution carrying the plainest marks of understanding and design, could be made with a sense of beauty in such truths, and yet the designing Author of that nature, be ignorant of them? Thus we behold the divine wisdom manifested in the intelligible as well as the sensible world, and by some sketches of eternal truth which we our selves are enabled to discern with delight, we have not only clear evidence that the first of Beings, the original Cause of all things, is himself intelligent, but are led to a more enlarged view of what is the agreeable,

tho'

tho' to us incomprehensible object of his eternal contemplation.

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3dly, This will still more fully appear, if we consider moral qualities and truths, which evidently appear to our minds, and are of the greatest importance to the ends of our being. Without entering into the detail of these qualities and truths, which may be suppos'd to be so far known as is necessary to our present purpose, I shall only make the following observations concerning them. First, That they are intirely abstracted from the external senses and their objects. Other animals which have those senses in common with us, give no discovery of their having any notions of morality, and are not reckon'd moral agents, which is the highest and peculiar character of rational beings. How could the external senses lead us to any sentiments of virtue, which has not the least relation to any qualities of matter, either primary or secondary? What resemblance have justice and benevolence to the figure and motion of bodies, or what affinity with colours, sounds or tastes? Nor indeed do the ends of sensitive life require so sublime a sense as that of morality; the preservation of individuals and of the kind, and their usefulness to other species


SERM. *cies of beings in their manner, which are its*
 III. *highest apparent purposes; these ends, I say,*
 { *are all answered by lower instincts.*

2dly, Moral qualities, which have no other subject than the affections of the soul, and actions proceeding from them, tho' intirely independent on matter and all its properties, are yet real, and necessarily regarded by our minds as such. A sense of moral beauty and deformity in human characters and actions, is as natural as a sense of another kind of beauty and deformity in corporeal forms; nay, our minds as necessarily perceive a difference between cruelty and mercy, gratitude and ingratitude, temperance and debauchery, as between light and darkness, sweet and bitter, harmony and discord, which we distinguish by our external senses. The idea of virtue, whether in our selves or others, is always accompanied with approbation, and vice with dislike. An excellent moral character constantly attracts our esteem, and a vicious one cannot be consider'd otherwise than with aversion; a beneficent action is applauded and a cruel one condemned, abstracting from any advantage or disadvantage to our selves arising from either. We review virtuous dispositions in our own hearts,

hearts, and virtuous works flowing from them, with the highest satisfaction, and the contrary are unavoidably attended with remorse. It is true, that as there is a great variety in the practice of virtue, which in some instances is attended with embarrassing circumstances, and in our present state there are many things to divert our attention from it; on these accounts, and because of negligence, corrupt customs, the prejudices of education, and particularly false notions of religion, some may have far less knowledge of virtue than others, and the virtuous affections may be weaker in them, but a sense of morality (capable indeed of more or less improvement, according to our opportunities and the degrees of our attention and diligence) seems to be indelibly imprinted on our nature, so that we can no more divest our selves of it altogether, than we can put off humanity itself.

3dly, As moral qualities and truths concerning them, are real, and necessarily regarded by our minds, so they are of the greatest importance to the happiness of mankind. This I have hinted already with respect to particular persons, having observ'd that the peace and satisfaction of their minds depends,

SERM. in a great measure, upon an inward consciouſ-
 III. ness of virtuous dispositions, and the design-
 ed regulation of their conduct by them. I
 believe every man will find by experience,
 that he is not able wholly to extinguish his
 sentiments of morality, nor without the ut-
 most violence to obscure and weaken them
 so, but that his heart will condemn him for
 his crimes, nor can he arrive to an unmanly
 ease in his vices, till after a long course of af-
 fected stupidity and sottish infatuation, which
 is reproachful to the rational nature, and
 takes away the truest self enjoyment. How
 unhappy are wicked men by their wicked-
 ness? What a train of miseries and misfor-
 tunes in the present state, arise from debau-
 chery and sensual excesses, from fraud and
 violence? But if there be intelligence in
 framing the human nature, and appointing
 the condition of men, it must extend to the
 whole kind; and indeed morality may be
 therefore pronounced important to our na-
 tures, because it does not only in a sensible
 manner affect the interest of single persons,
 but the greatest collective bodies of them,
 nay, the intire species. Let any one imagine
 the whole human race to be without the least
 sense of virtue, of the fear of God, of good
 will

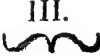
will to mankind, of the excellence of honesty, SERM.
gratitude, fidelity, temperance, and the tur- III.
pitude of the contrary, so that there should be 
nothing left but the fear of personal outward
danger and inconveniences to prevent the
most licentious rage of unruly destructive pas-
sions, and all the mischiefs they could pro-
duce; how miserable, upon such a supposi-
tion, would our state be? It may be reasona-
bly question'd whether the kind could have
subsisted so long, or any remain'd to have in-
habited the earth; but at least it is certain,
life must have been a dull, uncomfortable,
inelegant and insipid thing, in comparison of
what it now actually is, unadorned with
those arts and inventions which are owing to
the secure possession of peace and liberty, un-
improv'd by science, and destitute of the
high pleasures of friendship, and all kinds of
delightful social entertainment; not to speak
of a future state, the happiness of which (if
there really be such a thing) must necessa-
rily depend upon virtue, nor is it possible for
the mind of man, calmly and deliberately to
judge otherwise; and of that future state we
have constant premonitions in our own pre-
saging thoughts (so strong as most sensibly to
affect

SERM. affect the comfort of our present being) without, at least, any possible security against it.

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Now if these observations be true and just, and whether they are or not, let every man upon calm reflexion, judge for himself, let us see what consequences may be fairly drawn from them to our present purpose. In the first place, here is an important part of the human constitution which can never be accounted for upon *Atheistic* grounds, that is chance or mechanism, the fortuitous rencounter of atoms, or the necessary result of matter and motion. Supposing an accidental concourse of atoms moving in an infinite void, or an undirected force impress'd on matter, could possibly produce corporeal systems and their various beautiful forms which we see, tho' even that has been already prov'd to be sufficiently absurd, yet how shall this hypothesis solve the phænomena of moral Entities? What strange collision of atoms, or undirected impulse of matter, could produce beauty and deformity in human characters and actions? Could any combination of figures or disposition and agitation of material parts, strike out the ideas of just and unjust, kind and unkind, sober and vicious? Shall it be said that these are mere fancies, the arbitrary

arbitrary figments of the mind without any SERM.
true and solid foundation in nature? I an- III.
swer, that indeed our ideas of morality are 
not ideas of corporeal existence, but it does
not follow that therefore they are not real.
Let any man try how he can satisfy himself
concerning the reality of any object of his
knowledge; if his organs are duly dispos'd,
if he is conscious to himself that he has the
free and undisturb'd exercise of his rational
powers, if his perceptions be clear and dis-
tinct, and especially if they be constant and
uniform, his ideas always the same, inde-
pendently of his own choice, whenever he
applies his mind to the review of them; when
it is so, there can be no doubt concerning
the reality of such knowledge, unless we in-
troduce an universal scepticism. Can any
man in his senses make it a question whether
his ideas of colours, and tastes and sounds, be
real or phantastical? As little reason has he
to doubt the reality of his ideas of *pure, and
true, and just, and honest, and virtuous.* In
the best state of his mind, when his under-
standing is clearest and freest from disturb-
ance, whenever he thinks of moral differen-
ces, they appear always the same, nay, the
more he considers them, the more plain and
important

SERM. III. important they appear. Can we doubt whether a thing exists which causes in us pleasure or pain, whether we will or not ; for example, whether the fire exists which warms or burns us, whether a sharp iron instrument exists, which piercing our flesh causes the sensation of acute pain. In like manner, has any man reason to doubt whether there be a real difference between virtuous dispositions and works, which diffuse inward serenity and satisfaction through his mind, and vicious ones which necessarily fill him with horror and the most painful self-condemnation ? We must therefore, to account for this appearance, abandon the *Atheistic* scheme and all the forms of it, and have our recourse to an intelligent Cause, which has deeply interwoven into the human constitution, a sense of things intirely independent on matter and all its properties and powers, as real however as any we perceive by our external senses, concerning which we can form propositions as true and certain, and draw consequences from them as clear as any which appear to our minds ; for even the properties of lines and geometrical figures, and the incommensurability of some with others, is not more evident than the moral fitness and unfitness of some actions.

2dly, The

2dly, The importance of morality to the human life, and to its main ends, shews wisdom and design in giving men the sense and knowledge of it. Political constitutions are reasonably judg'd to be form'd with understanding, because of the ends which they answer. When laws are well fram'd for the preservation of public peace and order, the measures of civil authority and subjection wisely settled, provision made for supporting the legal powers of the rulers, and liberties of the people, for securing them against foreign invasions and intestine broils, for deciding their debates about property in an equitable manner, for encouraging industry and other virtues, which tend to the benefit of the society, and restraining those irregularities which threaten its destruction; when all this is apparent in the constitution of any community, no one will attribute it to a casual unconcerted encounter of men, since there are so plain evidences of wisdom and design in the whole scheme. As little reason is there to imagine, that when a species of intelligent beings are sent into the world with sentiments of morality, which are so evidently conducive to their happiness, tending to improve their nature, to ennoble

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the life of every one of them, filling it with a variety of rational pleasure, and to render them eminently useful to one another, so that it is hardly to be conceiv'd to what a height of perfection and felicity they would be rais'd, if these moral sentiments were duly improv'd and had their full effect, and on the other hand how miserable the whole race would be, if intirely destitute of them ; it is unreasonable, I say, to imagine that this should be without a directing Intelligence in the Cause of it.

Nothing can be more groundless and unsupported with any pretence of reason, than to alledge that the notions of morality, so common and prevailing in the world, were originally invented by politicians, and by their artifice impos'd upon credulous mankind, as the dictates of nature. For, besides that strict virtue is often too little agreeable to the maxims and measures of their policy, to give it any appearance of proceeding from such an original ; every man who will look carefully into his own heart, may find there a standard of right and wrong, prior to any instructions, declarations and laws of men, whereby he pronounces judgment upon them: Nor was it ever known that

that any human invention, or any thing which was not the voice of reason and nature it self, appeared so uniform and unvaried, always consistent with it self, and always in the same light to the minds of men, as the principal moral species do. The forms of civil government differ according to the circumstances and inclinations of the people who create them; the external forms of religion too are variable, and so is every thing of positive appointment and institution; but justice and mercy, gratitude and truth never alter, the learned and the unlearned, the most uninstructed and the most polite nations agree in their notions concerning them, and whenever they are intelligibly propos'd, approve them.

It is therefore evident, that morality is a part of the human constitution, and must be attributed to its author. Let this be understood in a sense agreeable to the nature of the thing. I do not mean that we are necessarily virtuous, as we are sensitive and intelligent, or that the practice of virtue is so essential, that no man can possibly be without it, for the very notion of it imports free agency or choice; but I mean, that the mind of man is so fram'd, as when it attains the

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full exercise of its rational powers, to be necessarily sensible of moral obligations, and so far determin'd to satisfy them, that it cannot wilfully and designedly act a contrary part, without doing violence to it self, which is all the necessity that is consistent with the nature of such a being, and the nature of morality. If it be so, we may surely infer, that the cause of this constitution was intelligent: Since all the individuals of mankind are found to have a sense of virtue, and every one of them who reflects upon it must be conscious that it is engraven on his heart, prior to any intention of his own, or any instruction that he knows of, it must either have happened without any design at all, or it must have been design'd by the Author of our being. To say that moral agency, which is so universally the character of men, that without it no one can be reckon'd perfectly of the kind, and which is of so great importance, not only to the ornament and conveniency of life, but to all the highest purposes of our being, so far, that the want of it would make an essential difference in the species; to say that this is merely accidental, in other words, that there is no cause to be assign'd for it at all, is too gross an absurdity

to require any confutation. If our minds can rest fatisfied with that folution, there is an end of all rational enquiry; it may be faid every thing came from nothing, and there is no caufe to be fought of any perfection whatever. But if this be what we cannot poffibly acquiefce in, and indeed I will venture to fay no man can, however he may force himfelf to a ftupid inattention, there is nothing left to conclude, but that we were made moral agents by an intending intelligent Caufe. I do not at prefent carry the argument fo far as to infer from it the moral perfections of the Deity, tho' it will very well bear even *that*, but he that will fhut his eyes againft the evidence of underftanding and defign in the formation of the human nature, as we fee it is form'd univerfally, with a fente of virtue and vice, good and evil, right and wrong in actions, and with a neceffary approbation of the one and difapprobation of the other; I fay, he that can fhut his eyes againft this evidence, is hardened beyond the power of reasonable conviction, and is no more fit to be argued with.

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Thus I have endeavoured, by a diftinct confideration of the various works of God in the inanimate, the animal, the rational

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and moral world, to prove his Being, that is, which was the point to be prov'd, and is directly the point in controversy between us and *Atheists*, that the formation of the universe and all its parts, is to be attributed to an active intelligent and designing Cause. But if this be so clear as we alledge, how comes it to pass that any of mankind should deny it, nay, that men, in whose writings there is a considerable appearance of reasoning and learning, professedly maintain the contrary principle. That men should be ignorant of God may be accounted for from their inattention, nor is it any presumption at all against the truth of his Being and Attributes, since we know in a multitude of instances, that the generality of mankind are ignorant of the most certain truths, tho' *this* is a matter of such common concernment and so universally acknowledged in the world, that scarcely any one is without a loud call to attend to it. But if the evidence be so strong as is pretended, it is surprizing that men otherwise sensible, and whose knowledge qualifies them to write in a tolerably consistent manner, should avow a disbelief of this grand article.

To remove this prejudice which may arise in some minds from the profession of *Atheism* by learned men, let it be observ'd, *First*, That other great absurdities, contrary to the clearest evidence, even that of sense, have in like manner been advanc'd by philosophers themselves, whether from an affectation of superior knowledge, enabling them to puzzle the plainest truths and confound vulgar understandings, or from whatever other cause it proceeded, the fact is certain, that the most extravagant opinions have been vented with a show of strong arguments to support them, and demonstrations have been boasted of to prove what all mankind by their eye-sight knew to be false. It is very well known that *Zeno* and other philosophers have pretended to prove by demonstrative reasons that there is not, nor can be any such thing as motion. *Secondly*, The nature of this subject is such, that our weak minds must necessarily be embarrass'd in their conceptions of it ; the necessary existence and absolute perfections of the supreme Being, which our reason obliges us to ascribe to him, are so far beyond our comprehension, that we cannot possibly form an adequate idea of them. How can we, seeing all things about

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us in the world circumscrib'd within certain bounds, conscious of limited existence, a limited power and understanding, and a short duration, comprehend infinity and eternity, which must belong to the first Cause of all things? This incomprehensibleness and these difficulties in conceiving what is so high above us, have been magnified by men, thro' the pride of their hearts, into strong objections against the truth, otherwise fully evident; and a fond conceit of their own abilities, which made them scorn to acknowledge any thing too hard for them, was the fatal snare which betray'd them into the most horrid impiety. Thus, by what they called *wisdom*, or by a false show of knowledge, *they knew not God*, tho' he manifested himself clearly to them by his works. *Thirdly*, The opinions concerning the Deity, which sometimes prevail'd among those who profess'd to believe it, were so absurd, that some were tempted by them to doubt of, or deny it altogether. When the *glory of God was changed into the image of corruptible men, and of birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things*, and the Godhead was parcell'd out among a multitude of things, or rather inconsistent notions which had no manner of likeness to

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the true God ; when the doctrine of *Theism* was thus misrepresented, it is not very much to be wondered at, that some should be led to reject it in the lump, who had not understanding, candor and patience enough to examine things narrowly, that they might distinguish between truth and falsehood. The transition from *Polytheism* to *Atheism*, and from a foolish, immoral and barbarous religion to none at all, was only a transition from one absurdity to another.

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But in the last place, above all, the viciousness of men's tempers and the wickedness of their lives, which they were unwilling to part with, was the prevailing snare whereby they were led into this greatest of all errors. They must have been very unattentive to what may be commonly observ'd in the world, and indeed to the constitution of the human mind, who do not know that it is often bias'd by its affections, and misled in its judgment of things by interest and passion. Men are difficultly persuaded to embrace disagreeable opinions, and too easily induc'd to believe what they wish to be true ; the slenderest appearances of reason on the side of inclination, pass for strong arguments, and insuperable difficulties against *it* are neglected

SERM. as trifling objections. Now, as the idea of
 III. God always takes in authority over men, his
 inspection into their affairs and their accountableness to him, and is therefore accompanied with a suspicion at least, that the crimes with which their consciences charge them, will meet with his disapprobation, and a punishment from him, of which they know no measure nor end; 'tis this which fills them with a dread of his Being, and because they are obstinately unwilling to reconcile themselves to the thoughts of it, and make it fit easy on their minds by a resolution of forsaking their vicious courses, they are led at last to an utter denial of it, that so they may get rid of those uneasy apprehensions which arise in them from the consideration of his moral character.

But the generality of bad men treat the principles of religion with neglect; they don't carry their opposition to them so far as to form any thing like a consistent scheme of *Atheism*, in which their minds may rest satisfied as truth, but rather endeavour to bury them in forgetfulness, applying their thoughts to other affairs and amusements in which they take greater pleasure; they greedily entertain a bold jest or a fally of wit
 which

which tends to countenance their vices ; but the main support of them is stupid inconsideration, which has all the effects of infidelity, with regard to any influence on their practice, for principles not at all attended to, can no more excite the affections and regulate our conduct, than if they were not believ'd. Nor is inconsideration less criminal ; for the guilt of wrong opinions arising wholly from negligence, prejudices and bad dispositions, wherever these are equally prevalent, they are equally faulty, whether they produce errors in judgment or not.

It may be alledg'd on the other hand, that virtuous minds are prejudic'd in favour of *Theism* : As morality appears to them most amiable, they are apt to imagine, perhaps without sufficient evidence, such a constitution of things in the universe as is favourable to it, to intitle it to a perfect understanding of which they think it is worthy, and put it under the protection of irresistible power. I acknowledge this is so far true, that I believe it is hardly possible for a sincere lover of virtue, not to have his affections engag'd to the Deity, not to wish his Being earnestly, if it should appear at all doubtful, or that any suspicion lies against it, and not to
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rejoyce in it when he is fully persuaded that it is true. Let an *Atheist* call this prejudice if he will, I should never be ashamed of it. A principle which has a necessary connexion with virtue, is its chief support, and without which it cannot prevail in the world; such a principle is not dangerous if it can possibly be a mistake, tho' its excellent tendency, I may say absolute necessity to the happiness of mankind, is a strong presumption of its truth. But if this be the prepossession of virtuous minds, the contrary temper disposes to a contrary opinion: let these two be set against each other, that we may judge which is the most becoming human nature, and has the greatest probability of leading us to a right judgment; I believe at last the cause of religion and virtue must stand or fall together, and the hearty friends of the latter cannot be enemies to the other.

But still it may seem strange that this great fundamental article should be liable to any controversy, that since it is of so great Importance to the duty and happiness of intelligent creatures to acknowledge the supreme Being, the evidence of his existence and his attributes is not so strong as to exclude all possibility of doubt. If this be
meant

meant as an objection against, or ground of SERM. suspicion concerning the truth of that grand III. article, the being of God, it has no colour of argument to that purpose; for the only principle it can rest upon, is this, that Nothing is to be certainly believ'd, which can at all be contradicted, and if that be allow'd, our knowledge will lie within a very narrow compass. Except our own being, and some few axioms of very little use without such applications of them, and consequences from them, as may be involv'd in dispute, almost nothing will pass for certain. The existence of matter, the possibility of motion, and even geometrical truths have been argu'd against and deny'd; nay, perhaps there is scarcely any proposition capable of proof, but what is capable of being contradicted, thro' the weakness, inattention or prejudices of men. If the pretence that the evidence of the divine Being and Attributes is not so satisfying as might be expected, at least not so necessitating as to exclude all possibility of doubt; if, I say, the pretence be carried no farther than as an alledged instance of defectiveness in the human constitution, and therefore difficultly reconcil'd to the wisdom and goodness of it's Author; the consideration
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SERM. of it in that view, does not belong to this
 III. place, where we are only insisting on the
 evidence of the principle it self. And yet, not to pass it by altogether unregarded, I observe that the true meaning of the objection, really amounts to no more than this, that it is hardly consistent with the wisdom and goodness of God to make rational creatures so imperfect as we are, or wanting a certain perfection which we imagine would have been very proper for them, particularly without an intuitive knowledge of his existence, such as they have of their own being. Now how is it possible for any man to prove that such a constitution was wrong, that in a world which contains so great a variety of creatures with so many different kinds and degrees of perfection, wisdom and goodness did not allow that there should be an order of intelligent beings, who should not indeed have the knowledge of their Maker (upon which their duty and their greatest happiness depends) forc'd upon them, so that they could not possibly resist it, yet with sufficient evidence of the truth, and faculties enabling them to discern it; at the same time under obligations, which must appear if they reflect on their own constitution, to use their faculties for that purpose? How

How wisdom and goodness may require SERM.
that Atheists should be dealt with, is quite III.

another question, what unhappiness they may bring upon themselves by their own perverseness, leading them into their fatal error, or what allowances are to be made for particular infelicities in the condition of any, which may give some occasion to it, God knows best, and the Judge of the whole world will surely do right. But for us, our proper business is, without murmuring at any appointed imperfections in our make, to improve all the advantages of it in the best manner we can, that we may attain to the affectionate practical knowledge of our Creator, and thereby to all that perfection and happiness to which it tends to raise our nature. And to conclude with a particular application of the argument I have been insisting on, since we have so full proof of ruling intelligence in the formation and government of the world, since all the works of nature proclaim it, and especially our own constitution, for who but the author of our being *hath put wisdom in the inward parts, and given understanding to the heart*; (a) this is the character of the Deity which claims our highest veneration.

(a) *Job, 38. 36.*

SERM. ration. It is a very elegant description which
 III. *Job* (6) gives us of the excellence of wisdom
 and which every attentive mind must assent
 to, *Man knoweth not the price thereof, it cannot
 be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be
 weighed for it. It cannot be valued with gold
 of Ophir with the precious onix or the Saphir.
 The gold and the chrystal cannot equal it, and
 the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of
 fine gold. No mention shall be made of coral
 or of pearl, for the price of wisdom is above
 rubies. The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal
 it. But where shall wisdom be found, and
 where is the place of understanding? The depth
 and the sea and destruction and death, say it
 is not in them; the effects of it are scatter'd
 over all the works of nature, and the whole
 œconomy of providence in a beautiful variety;
 and the lively image of it is stamp't on
 rational creatures, whom God has taught what
 is their true wisdom, namely to fear him, and
 to depart from evil, and to whom he has com-
 municated such an understanding as we cannot
 but account the high distinguishing privilege
 of their nature: But how much more to be
 admir'd, and worthy of our most peculiar ve-
 neration and esteem, is the eternal fountain of
 intellectual light who is himself only perfect
 in knowledge.*


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S E R M O N I V .

The Spirituality of the Divine Nature
explain'd and asserted.

John iv. 24.

God is a Spirit.

I HAVE endeavour'd in the foregoing dis-^{SERM.}
courses to prove that first fundamental ^{IV.}
principle of religion, the existence of the 
Deity, or of an active intelligent Being, who
is the original Cause of all the great appear-
ances in the corporeal system of the universe,
and of those self-moving, sensitive and in-
tellectual powers with which many particu-
lar beings are endu'd. But intending to e-
stablish this great truth on such a foundation
as should comprehend all believers in God,
however otherwise differing in their opinions,
at the same time the most evident, and the
least liable to difficulties, I abstracted from
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the consideration of those properties, perfections or attributes which belong to the Divine nature, not insisting even on its spirituality. Nevertheless, it will set the whole subject still in a clearer light, and add great force to the arguments which have been already adduc'd, if we can advance one step farther, and prove that the supreme, active and intelligent Cause of all things, is spiritual or immaterial ; and this I shall endeavour to do in the following method, *First*, I will shew, from the frame and appearances of the material world it self, that there is such a thing as spirit, essentially different from matter. *Secondly*, That the beings which are endued with life, sense and understanding, in a limited degree of perfection, are spiritual ; from whence it will evidently follow, that the original Cause is himself a pure Spirit.

First, To show from the frame and appearances of the material world it self, that there is such a thing as spirit, essentially different from matter. This alone is sufficient to overthrow the fundamental grounds of *Atheism*, for however different its forms be, they all agree in excluding spirit from any share in the origin and constitution of things, and in
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the effects we see produc'd, ascribing them all, even sense and self-motion which we perceive in animals, nay, and understanding which we are conscious of in our selves; ascribing all, I say, to senseless matter and its casual or necessary motion. The admission of spirit would ruin the *Atheistic* scheme, for spirit is suppos'd to be essentially distinct from body, being by its nature active and intelligent, and if that be once allow'd to have an existence separate from, and independent on matter, by what pretence of reason shall counsel and design be excluded out of the formation and government of the world, or any part of it, nay, where can a barrier be fixed against infinite perfection, or the Deity? Now that spirit must be admitted, will appear from this consideration, that attending carefully to the obvious common properties of matter, we shall find it impossible, without having recourse to the agency of spirit, to account for the motion, the changes of the situation, and of the magnitude, figure and other qualities of corporeal beings. It is the necessary condition of all bodies, the very law of their nature, to continue in the state wherein they are, and to resist any alteration, until it be effected, and the resistance

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SERM. IV. conquered by an external force. If this necessarily belongs to all matter, its smallest and its greatest quantities, how shall the beginning of motion and the most common appearances in material nature it self, such as the changes of its form which depend upon motion, be explained without an external agent ?

Those who have studied the powers of matter with the greatest exactness, find that there is established among all bodies a law of mutual attraction and gravitation ; and by the help of this one observation, attending to it closely and pursuing it through all its consequences, they have made the greatest improvements in natural philosophy, and given the most satisfying explication which has yet appear'd, of the constant motions and other great phœnomena in the visible heavens and the earth; but they do not pretend to tell us the cause of attraction and gravitation, whereby all bodies tend towards each other, with a force greater or lesser according to their distances; only 'tis certain, this active moving force is not in bodies themselves, for all which can be call'd their action on each other, or their impulse, is by the contact of their surfaces, whereas the force of gravity operates at a distance,

stance, and is always in proportion to the solid content of the gravitating and attracting bodies ; and therefore the immediate Cause must be something which pervades the intire mass of them even to their very centers, and makes an impression upon every particle. In vain should we fly for a satisfying solution of this appearance, to a subtle fluid matter, which penetrating solid bodies and filling their interstices, impels them towards each other ; for besides that this is but an arbitrary supposition, it ought to be considered that subtle matter is matter still, passive and undesigning, not acting but acted upon. The difficulty will remain, and the question, as chang'd by this hypothesis, be as hard to answer as the question concerning the cause of gravitation without it. What is it that determines and gives a force to the (essentially unactive) subtle matter of the sun, and the subtle matter of the earth, whereby they impel those bodies towards each other, with a force proportionable to the quantity of solid extended substance they contain, when other bodies which contain a lesser quantity of the like extended solid substance, but are as open to the impressions of the undistinguishing subtle matter, do not so gravitate. In short, if we

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should heap material causes upon material causes to infinity, we shall never be satisfied in that way; there must be a beginning of operation from an active principle which we call spirit, essentially distinct from matter; the ideas of it and its properties, namely, activity and consciousness, are as different from extension, solidity, divisibility and figure, which belong to all bodies, as any ideas in our minds can possibly be. The more we consider, the more we shall be convinc'd that matter of it self, and without spirit, can produce nothing even in it self, none of its own appearances, neither motion, gravity nor form; it is capable of being variously compounded and divided, it is capable of various figures and situations, but it can neither compound nor divide it self, neither change its figure nor situation.

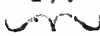
If it be so, we must conclude there is such a thing in the world as spirit, essentially different from, but intimately present with all bodies which we see, and continually operating upon them, for it is the efficient cause of their most common and constant appearances: Mechanism it self cannot be without spirit, for the mechanical powers of matter, commonly so called, depend upon it,

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since gravity is owing to its influence. It is true all this does not directly prove understanding in the cause of motion, gravity and other common appearances in the material world, but it proves activity essentially different from matter, which forms it and produces the most important effects that appear in it; and this is sufficient to overturn the grounds of *Atheism*, showing that matter is not the sole being or substance in the universe, and the sole origin and cause of all things. Besides, as we find by experience in our selves, and other agents as far as we know, activity is still accompanied with thought and perception; there can be no rational pretence for denying understanding to the great active forming principle of the corporeal system, without which matter, if it could possibly have existed, must have remain'd an eternal chaos, devoid of motion, and consequently of various figure, or any kind of regular appearance. What limits can be set to the intellectual perfection of that mighty Agent, who is independent of the material world, on whom it necessarily depends, prior in nature, for he is the author of its form, and has moulded its parts into their different shapes, with all the diversity

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 IV. laws by which it is still govern'd; rather indeed what we call its laws, are his own continued, uniform and regular operations. And tho', as I observ'd before, some who believ'd a Deity, weakly imagin'd him to be corporeal, not conceiving any substance distinct from matter; this was only an inconsistency in their notions, which proceeded from not attending to the irreconcilable difference between the ideas of material qualities and intelligence; if they had fully considered their own acknowledg'd principle of an eternal, all-wise and powerful mind, comparing with it the essential and most obvious properties of all matter, this would have corrected their error; but the case is very different of those who therefore exclude spirit, because they exclude original contrivance and agency, who not only profess, but their scheme necessarily requires them to do so, as the chief security of their grand principle against the existence of God, that there is no being in the universe but matter, from the modifications whereof all appearances arise, even intelligence it self; which scheme is effectually refuted, if it be prov'd that the simplest and most common qualities of matter upon which


its appearances depend, must be attributed SERM.
to the energy of an active immaterial prin- IV.
ciple. 

Secondly, The beings which are indu'd with life, sense and understanding, in a limited degree of perfection, are spiritual, that is the vital, sensitive and intelligent principles in them are spiritual. Indeed it would seem impossible in the nature of things, that matter should by any modification, that is, any motion and change of the figure and order of its parts, be exalted even into animal sensation, much less into pure intellection abstracted from any sensible quality. The reasoning of some ancient writers is very strong to prove that the percipient of material objects and their sensible qualities cannot be it self material ; for if it were, the perceptive faculty must either be lodg'd in one single indivisible point, or in every point of the extended substance, or else every part must receive only a several part of the image or impression, and the perception be the result of the whole compar'd and united together. The first of these suppositions is an evident absurdity, there being no such thing as an indivisible point or particle of matter, and if there were, how can it be conceiv'd
that

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that a single atom in every animal should be only sensitive, the rest wholly incapable of that privilege, that it should alike receive the impression of all magnitudes, and that it should be invariably permanent through the whole life, when the other particles of matter which enter into the constitution are in a perpetual flux. That the whole perceptive power or the entire sensation, is not in every part of the supposed material soul, is as manifest, for upon that supposition, an animal would be, not a single percipient but a collection of them, and the perception itself must be various, compounded of many, contrary to what we know it is by our own consciousness of its perfect simplicity. And *Lastly*, to say that every part of the perceiving extended substance, receives a several part of the image or impression of the external object, will no way account for perception, because perception being single, it must, on that supposition, be the result of the whole united, and in order to that union, the parts must be brought to an indivisible point, properly the percipient, which has been already shewn to be absurd. If this reasoning be thought not obvious enough (I have however, set it in the clearest light I could) yet it will

will naturally appear to any attentive person, SERM.
very unreasonable to think, if not altogether IV.
unconceivable, that a body put into any form, 
being really no more than an aggregate of
parts void of life and sense, should by any possible
disposition of its parts, be rais'd to a capacity
of animal sensation, the idea of which has not the
least affinity with divisibility, magnitude, figure
or any quality of matter. If it be so, we must
conclude that there are beings in the world essentially
different from matter. But the argument for the
immateriality of the human soul will appear still
stronger, if we consider the exercise of its purely
intellectual powers. We have the ideas of matter
by our senses, representing to our minds its sensible
qualities, from which we infer its particular kind
of existence, as the occasion, or somewhat which
has the power of exciting those ideas. But attending
to the exercises of our own minds and reflecting
on them, we have ideas of an intirely different
kind, which do not take in any of the properties
of matter, such as solidity, divisibility and figure,
nor its secondary qualities, as hardness, colour
and the like, nor the idea of motion. Of this sort
are perception, consciousness, the affections of
the mind, its desires and volitions

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tions or self-determinations, and the more complex qualities of gratitude, justice, generosity, mercy and other virtues ; the subject of these we call spirit. Now these two kinds of ideas are as different as any can possibly be, without any mutual relation or agreement at all ; and if we may not from thence infer a real difference between the subjects of the properties which are represented by such essentially distinct ideas, there can be no certainty of human knowledge.

If these two points be settled upon clear evidence, that the active principle which form'd and governs the corporeal world is a spirit, and that the animating principles of the sensitive and rational life are spirits, we must infer that God also is a Spirit, for either he himself is the immediate forming and directing Cause of the corporeal system and its appearances, or the active principle which is the immediate Cause is deriv'd from him ; and all the intelligent agents in the universe, not absolutely perfect nor eternal and unoriginated, of which there is a numberless variety, being spirits, cannot be the accidental or necessary result of certain dispositions in the parts of matter, but must proceed from an original intelligent and powerful Spirit ;

for

for that no perfection can belong to the effect which does not, in the same, or a more eminent degree belong to the Cause. But even upon supposition that the argument were not conclusive with respect to sensitive and inferior rational beings, and that it were not impossible for a particular system of matter to be endu'd with all the faculties of the human soul, yet still it holds concerning the supreme original Cause of all things ; for that supposed possibility (which some learned men allow, at the same time firmly believing that the Deity is, and necessarily must be immaterial) means no more than that we are so ignorant of the essences and properties of things, as not to be sure of an utter inconsistency, in supposing that Omnipotence may endue a part of matter with the capacity of thought ; but that matter meerly of it self, and without the agency of a superior power, has not that capacity, and consequently, that original intelligence cannot be corporeal, is sufficiently evident.

Let us now more particularly consider this perfection of the Deity, which in our Saviour's judgment is a most necessary point of belief, for he taught it to a very ignorant person, and lays it as the foundation of the most perfect

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SERM. perfect and acceptable worship thus describ'd,
 IV. *worship in spirit and truth.* 'Tis principally with this view we should apply our minds to the consideration of the Divine Attributes. All men who believe the Being of God, agree in acknowledging he is to be worshipp'd: Nature teaches us benevolence to an intelligent Being, reverence and submission to a superior, and gratitude to a benefactor; but if there is a God, he is the most perfect Intelligence, the supreme Lord, as being the independent Cause of all things, and to him we owe our existence, all our powers and all our happiness; therefore to him our best affections are unquestionably due, with the most proper and reasonable expressions of them; besides his unlimited dominion over us makes it our highest interest to please him as far as possibly we can, and obtain his approbation. These considerations show that nothing can concern us more than to understand the true character of the Supreme Being. Their ignorance of him involv'd multitudes of mankind in superstition, which was reproachful to their rational nature, and in consequence of that, in most scandalous and destructive vices; *becoming vain in their imaginations* concerning the
 divine

divine perfections, *their foolish hearts were darkened, and they changed the glory of the incorruptible God into images made like corruptible things*, in pursuance of which they were abandon'd to *vile affections, to a reprobate mind* *, and to unnatural wickedness. It is true, that errors concerning the moral attributes of God, have the most immediate influence on the tempers and manners of men, because he being first suppos'd to be an object of the highest esteem and veneration, we will naturally incline to imitate the dispositions and qualities which we ascribe to him, and account it our glory to do so; for which reason, when the heathens imagin'd their gods were corrupt, passionate, revengeful and lascivious, it was to be expected that the worshippers should also, after their example, be corrupt, indulging themselves without restraint, in the same passions and the same sensual gratifications. But the natural perfections of the Deity are of a different consideration, for they are not the patterns which we pretend, or are supposed to imitate; it never enter'd into any man's mind that he must be eternal, immense and unchangeable like God,

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* Rom. i. 21, 23, 24.

SERM. or such a spirit as he is. Yet the natural per-
 IV. fections tend to raise in our minds a high ad-
 miration of God, and besides, are consider'd
 as the foundation of the moral attributes, in
 the eminent degree wherein he is possess'd of
 them ; so that erroneous opinions concerning
 the *one*, lead to pernicious mistakes about the
other, and therefore it is necessary for us to
 inquire, as far as our faculties will enable us;
 into those divine perfections which are com-
 monly called natural by way of distinction
 from the moral, and to settle our notions
 concerning them. We cannot indeed by
 searching find out God, nor understand the
 Almighty to perfection: His essence is not
 to be comprehended by the human under-
 standing, nor any of his attributes ; when
 we call him a Spirit, 'tis but a very obscure
 and inadequate idea we express by that
 word. The truth is, tho' we know there is
 a real difference between body and spirit,
 and this distinction is generally thought (I
 will not affirm it to be exactly true) to com-
 prehend all kinds of beings in the universe,
 the subjects of the properties, qualities and
 modes of which we have any notion, or as
 they are commonly called, substances, yet,
 we do not understand the intimate essence of
 either.

either. But the denomination of spirit is justly attributed to God, and gives us a true, tho' imperfect idea of his nature, as comprehending consciousness, intelligence, liberty and affections, the foundation and capacity of moral perfection and happiness, which are the chief excellencies of inferior spirits above all material beings, and must eminently belong to the Father of Spirits.

That we may proceed further, and avoid mistakes in forming our notions of this subject, let it be observ'd, that as in the corporeal system we see a vast variety of forms, and in respect of various and important use, regularity, magnificence and other qualities which strike the imagination, there are some bodies which appear much more excellent than others ; so we cannot doubt but there may be, indeed that there are, many different kinds of beings comprehended under the general denomination of spirit. One low kind which we know best, are our own souls, which in the exercise of their faculties, have at present, a great dependence on our bodies and their organs. But there is no reason at all to imagine, that the same is the condition of all spirits, and in every state ; for as we perceive an essential difference between

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tween body and spirit, between the ideas of which and their properties there is no connexion, the mutual dependence of them which we find in our selves, cannot be reasonably thought to arise from the nature of spirit ; but the union of soul and body so as to make one man (the nature of which union we do not understand, only discern that the compounding parts have a mutual dependence and influence on each other) this, I say, is rather to be attributed to the free constitution and appointment of our Creator. There is no reason then why we should not conclude that our souls may, and that they shall subsist in a separate state, and exert their powers more perfectly than they do now, and there is no reason why we should not believe that there may be, and that there are other kinds of spirits, which have not, nor ever had a dependence, in their being, perfections and operations, on matter or any bodily organs. These appear to be the most excellent kind of spirits, which are the most independent on bodies, as being more unconfined in their manner of perceiving external objects, and their activity not limited to a narrow sphere ; besides being free from many other inconveniencies, which our own experience

experience

rience teaches us that such a condition as ours SERM.
 is liable to. But the supreme Spirit is alone IV.
 absolutely perfect and independent, having
 the intire system of matter under his direc-
 tion, to form and dispose of it at his pleasure,
 not subject to such impressions from it, nor
 tied down to such a manner of acting upon it
 as inferior spirits are, by the limited condi-
 tion of their nature, and by the constitution
 which he has appointed for them.

The notion of some ancient philosophers,
 particularly the stoics, that God is the soul of
 the world, was mean and unworthy of his
 high perfections. Tho' it imply'd an acknow-
 ledgment of the Divine Presence in all parts
 of the universe, every where intelligent and
 governing the whole, and represented all,
 even the most different and the most distant
 parts of the world, as united together in one
 system, under the care and direction of one
 sympathizing intelligent nature, which con-
 tinually promotes the greatest absolute good
 of the whole, which was a noble sentiment
 much insisted on by some of those learned
 men, and improv'd by them to excellent
 practical purposes; yet that the Deity ani-
 mates the *Mundane* system in the same man-
 ner that the human soul animates the human
 I 2 body,

SERM. IV. body, is too low a way of thinking concerning the supreme Being. For besides that it naturally leads one to imagine an independence of the world in its being, on the eternal Spirit (as the human mind does not make its own body, nor has a power over its existence) which probably was the erroneous opinion of some of the ancients, and tends to limit the Divine absolute Perfections and Presence to created nature; it carries in it such an idea of his subjection to impressions, and even uneasinesses arising from the disorders of the world, as is inconsistent with the infinite immutable excellence and happiness of his independent Being. The notion of an eminent modern philosopher is much more just and reasonable, who, as the result of his most curious and excellent observations on the Divine counsel and power manifested in the system of the universe, says that the Deity imports the dominion of a spiritual being over the world, not as his own body but as his servants, intirely subject to his government *.

This leads us to consider the peculiar and transcendent excellence of God as a Spirit. Tho' some inferior beings have the same de-

* Sir Isaac Newton, *Schol. Gener.*

nomination, and are truly of a spiritual nature, yet he is of an intirely different, and infinitely more perfect kind. There may be, for ought we know, as great a diversity in the spiritual, as in the material world, as many different species of spirits, that is, of beings which have no bodily substance, as there are of visible forms, and some of them as much inferior to, as well as distinct from others, as the lower kinds of life, perception and activity are from dead and senseless matter it self. We must not therefore imagine, that we have form'd an adequate idea of God's nature, when we have prov'd him to be a spirit and conceive of him as such, meaning by that name a living, intellectual and active being, essentially distinguish'd from corporeal substance ; for tho' that is truly affirm'd of him in common with other spirits, yet he excels all other, even intellectual natures, more than our souls do the lowest inanimate beings.

There are two principal properties of spirit, intelligence and activity, which as I have shewn, must be attributed to the Deity, but they belong to him in an infinitely higher degree, and are exercis'd by him in a more perfect manner than by any dependent being. Tho' the common use of all languages a-

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scribes to God the perceptions we are conscious of in our selves, as seeing and hearing and remembrance, nay, and the organs of sensation, such as eyes and ears, yet scarcely are there any so ignorant as to understand these forms of speaking in a literal sense, but every one means by them the Divine most exact knowledge and discernment of things, to which our low and imperfect manner of perceiving by corporeal organs, bears some analogy. He that *made the eye* of man, to convey to him such a representation and knowledge of external objects as is not complete and thoroughly comprehensive of their nature, but accommodated to the purposes of our present state, and proportionate to the other imperfect faculties of the human mind; *he*, the Maker, *sees*, not in a strict and proper sense as we do, but understands all things in a more eminent and perfect manner; he that *made the ear*, the instrument by which are convey'd to us, the sentiments and desires of our fellow creatures moving our affections; *he*, in a superior and more perfect way, knows and understands the sentiments and desires of all intelligent beings, whether conceiv'd only in the mind or express'd by the mouth. In like manner as the human strength and power

er of operation are exerted by the means of SERM. arms and hands, these bodily organs are figuratively attributed to God, to denote his Almighty power, tho' it is exercised by him in a quite different manner, which we cannot comprehend, but we are sure it is not like tedious and laborious human operation. IV.

In a special manner it is to be observ'd, that many of the springs of action in embodied spirits, setting their powers a work, and which we are conscious of in our selves, tho' they are analogically attributed to the infinite eternal Mind, yet do not properly belong to him. The wise Author of our constitution has seen fit to mix in it, with superior faculties, some lower appetites and passions, which powerfully excite us to pursue the ends of our nature in the present imperfect state: Our minds are furnish'd with determinations which tend to the preservation of the body, and to the comfort and happiness of the animal life; we have desires and affections which rise no higher in their design; and we have passions which are excited by, and accompanied with certain motions in the body. But the divine purely spiritual nature is infinitely above these infirmities. Some of the heathens were so gross as to think the gods

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capable of sensual desires, and pleasure in the gratification of them, and perhaps there are others who imagine something like human passions in the Deity, particularly the passions of pity, hatred, anger and grief. Indeed the Scripture it self speaks of God's hating the wicked, of his bowels of compassion mov'd for distressed creatures, and of his anger and grief; but these expressions are only us'd in the same figurative manner of speaking as when the bodily organs of sense and motion are ascrib'd to him, and we should be far from thinking there are any such emotions in his most blessed and perfect mind, as we feel in our selves arising from things surprising or disagreeable to us. A little reflection would convince us that such passions show the imperfection of our state, and a mixture of unhappiness in it; and therefore they cannot possibly affect the infinite self-sufficiency, the undisturb'd rest and the perfect felicity of the supreme independent Being. When therefore he is spoken of as having indignation, compassion, anger or grief, it is only to be understood as an analogical representation of his conduct as governor of the world towards his creatures; what men would do when they are compassionate, an-
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gry or grieved, that God does, or produces a similar effect, with unerring wisdom, perfect tranquility and goodness, without the weakness of pity, the sensation of sorrow, or perturbation of wrath.

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Again, an unchangeable life or absolute immortality, is a property belonging to the Divine nature as it is spiritual. Our spirits are subject to pains and changes in their condition, from the body and otherwise; other spirits of a higher order may be so too in various degrees; but the most perfect Spirit is infinitely above the reach of sufferings, and infinitely remote from all possibility of change: Such is the absolute simplicity of his Being, free from any mixture or composition, there are no seeds or principles of decay *within* him, nor can he suffer from any thing *without*. We find by experience, that our compounded natures, made up of different parts, are liable to dissolution; it is the more simple spiritual part of our constitution that shall outlive the present state, and being dislodg'd of the earthly tabernacle, shall subsist separately: But there is a great difference between our immortality and God's; ours, as we were *created for his good pleasure*, continually depends upon it, and may cease if he pleases,

SERM. ses, but it is impossible he should not be the
 IV. *living God, the same immutable Spirit, yesterday and to day and for ever.*

I shall only add, as the foundation of the improvement I propose to make of this subject, and which the text leads us to, namely, the regulating of our worship, that the Deity is not resembled by any sensible forms, His nature and attributes are alike essentially different from all the properties and qualities of matter, and no one part of it makes any nearer approaches to him than another. He is not be touched or handled, and *no man hath seen him at any time, nor can see him*: The most subtle æther or the purest light is no image of his spiritual substance, and the human shape is no more a true representation of God than the shape of any other animal, nay, than a clod of earth or any other inanimate thing. It was therefore wisely provided by the Lawgiver of the *Jews*, whose principal care seems to have been the preserving of their worship from idolatry, that no image should be made of the Godhead, and he gives the reason for it, that in all the miraculous appearances and extraordinary manifestations God had ever vouchsafed to them, and they were very many, they had never seen any

any *similitude*; there was never any handle given them for so absurd and gross a conceit, as that the Deity is like any visible being in the whole world. We read often of God's discovering his glory to them, as at the giving of the law, by a prodigious tempest, thunder and fire, and in their march thro' the wilderness, by a cloud in the day, and a pillar of fire in the night, which were called the tokens of his *presence*, tho' really he is alike present in all places; such astonishing things were apt to strike the minds even of very stupid people with a sense of his interposition in their behalf, and that his care and power were employ'd for them; but still there was no determinate shape, no figure of any abiding sensible object, imitable by human art, whereby they should have the least countenance or occasion given them, to make an image of their God, or *change his glory into the likeness of any creature*. It is true, we read sometimes in the Old Testament of divine appearances in a human form: Thus God is said to have *spoken to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend*, and of the three angels which appeared to *Abraham* in the likeness of men, before the destruction of *Sodom*, one was distinguish'd by the peculiar veneration of that eminent

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minent faint, as of a superior character. But this seems to be rightly understood by interpreters concerning the *Messias*, that divine Person who was in *the form of God*, before his incarnation : Several passages of the Old Testament and the New compar'd together, plainly intimate that he was with the *Israelites* conducting them as the divine *Presence*, and the *Angel of the covenant*, in whom *the name of God* was. St. *Stephen*, in the 7th of the *Acts*, speaking of God's appearing to *Moses* in the burning bush, and saying with an audible voice, *I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob* ; St. *Stephen*, I say, expressly attributes this to the person whom he calls the *Angel of the Lord*, and who *was with Moses in the church in the wilderness* ; and the Apostle *Paul* * mentioning the sins and punishments of the *Israelites* in the wilderness, for an *admonition to us on whom the ends of the world are come*, clearly insinuates that *Christ* was present with them directing their affairs, for he says * *neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents*. Thus as our Lord *Jesus Christ*, *the image of the in-*

* 1 Cor. x. † v. 9.

visible God, in the fulness of time, assum'd the human nature, the word was made flesh and dwelt with us as in a tabernacle, manifesting the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth; before his incarnation he acted with full power, representing his Father in his transactions with men, by him God made the worlds, and by him govern'd the church: But the Divine nature it self, the essence of the supreme Being is invisible; to whom is God like, or whereunto can he be resembled?

I shall in the next place, consider the practical purpose to which our Saviour has gone before us, in applying this important doctrine of natural religion asserted in the text, namely, the regulating our worship. First of all, we may see the absurdity of that practice which great multitudes of mankind have run into, the forming corporeal images of the Deity as mediums of worship. The worshipping of false gods, that is beings, whether real or imaginary, to which Divinity is falsely attributed, is an error against other religious principles, either against the existence of the true God, or his unity: But this species of idolatry so early introduc'd into the world, and which so generally prevail'd in it

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SERM. for many ages, is a most direct and heinous
 IV. indignity to the spiritual Divine nature. The
 unreasonableness of it, one would think, might easily appear to men, if they did but seriously reflect on themselves; for how just and evidently conclusive is St. *Paul's* argument to the *Athenians*, Acts xvii. 29. *Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God; (we intelligent creatures, conscious of intellectual and self-determining powers, and of noble affections which do not terminate on sensible objects, but on spiritual and moral excellence); we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold or silver or stone, graven by art or man's device.* What man is so far lost to a just sense of the dignity of his nature, as not to know that the vital principle within him of thought, of choice, of sublime desire, of rational and moral pleasure, is far more noble than a whole world of corporeal inanimate beings, and should we then so affront the Father of our spirits, from whom all their excellence is deriv'd, himself the original and purest Spirit, as to imagine he is like any material and corruptible thing.


Superstition grew by degrees in the world, to such a height of stupidity and barbarity, as was reproachful to the intelligent human nature;

nature ; but the beginnings of it were more refin'd and plausible. The first idols probably were the sun, moon and stars, not as the ultimate objects of worship, but as the suppos'd habitations of the Deity, the visible instruments and magnificent representations of his power and goodness ; but afterwards those creatures themselves were *honour'd besides the Creator*, and were admitted to a participation of the respect due to him. For such is the weakness of men's minds, and if they do not carefully watch against it, their attention is so easily ingross'd by the objects of sense continually before them, and which they find useful, that they forget things of vastly greater excellence and moment, which require careful reflexion to preserve a lively sense of them. They proceeded next to the deifying of departed Heroes, imagining that their virtues were rewarded with an exaltation to a high dignity in the other world, and that they were even taken into a share of the divine administration, still having an affectionate remembrance of their friends and their country, to which they had been useful upon earth. As these men, suppos'd to be advanc'd to Godhead, were of mixt characters, the idea of the Divine moral purity and perfection

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SERM. IV.  fection began to be alter'd, and vices had their patrons among the gods, till at length ignorance and corruption still increasing, some of them were worshipped with the most obscene and inhuman rites. Even brute animals of several kinds, and vegetables too became idols, and in fine, whatever recommended it self to the affections of men by its usefulness, and whatever was dreaded by them because it might be hurtful, was worshipped. Thus we see that the tendency of departing from the simplicity of a reasonable service, is to the most absurd opinions and practices, as opposite to real religion as *Atheism* it self is; in this respect worse, because they destroy humanity, and under the pretence of devotion, give a sanction to those crimes which nature it self, abstracting from any consideration of God, would abhor. Every kind of idolatry, even the most refin'd, and for which the best excuses are made, such as that worship is not intended to terminate on the inferior beings, sensible objects or others before which it is offered, but that they are only us'd as helps to devotion, preserving still a higher regard for God, who is the ultimate object of adoration; every kind of idolatry, I say, is founded in falshood, as the natural

progress

progress of it is to the utter subversion of all true piety and virtue ; it proceeds from, or imports such notions as these, which are contrary to the absolute perfection of the divine, immense and spiritual Being, That the presence of God is confin'd to some particular parts of the universe, to the sun, the stars or some eminently sacred place upon earth, and that he can possibly be represented by some visible similitude, or that there are some material objects which give us a truer and juster idea of his nature than others. It is therefore necessary above all things, in order to the practice of true religion, and persevering in it, that we endeavour by a constant and diligent attention, to fix in our minds becoming sentiments concerning the Deity, as a most pure and perfect Spirit.

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I have said that idolatry (which in all its forms, even the most innocent of them, is an error against the doctrine of the text) tends to corrupt the tempers and the manners of men ; but the observation deserves to be farther considered, and we may see it justified by the constant experience of the world. *St. Paul*, in the first chapter of his epistle to the *Romans*, teaches us concerning the *Gentiles*, and their own histories confirm it, that

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SERM. tho' they knew God, for his works proclaim
 IV. his being and perfections intelligibly to all
 mankind, and their first and most natural
 sentiments concerning him were the best; yet not liking to *retain him in their knowledge, they chang'd his truth into a lie*, that is, into idolatry, built upon a false foundation, and repugnant to the real nature of the Deity; in consequence of which, they were abandon'd to such monstrous and unnatural wickedness, as nothing could have drawn them into but their idolatrous superstition; and we find that the declensions of the *Jews* to impiety and wickedness, began with inventing means and instruments of service to the true God, but from thence proceeded to grosser kinds of superstition, which at last extinguished all sense of virtue and humanity, carrying them to the unnatural cruelty of sacrificing their own children to *Moloch*. Even among Christians themselves, superstition has had very lamentable effects, some of them not only substituting their false worship in the place of virtue, and making atonement by it for their sins, but being led by a blind zeal for their own inventions, to such barbarity, as men, without a pre-
 tence

tence of religion, would never have been guilty of.

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2dly, Since God is a Spirit, we can never reasonably hope to please him by merely corporeal things or bodily exercises. There are, 'tis true, external acts of homage and adoration necessary to be perform'd to God : In our present state the affections of the mind are naturally express'd by outward actions ; benevolence, esteem, gratitude and other dispositions towards our fellow-creatures, are not silent and unactive in the heart ; nature and custom have taught us the proper expressions whereby they shew themselves, and if *these* be altogether omitted, we shall scarcely believe the inward principles have a being. By parity of reason, if we have internal good affections towards the Deity, the sincerity and the force of them appear by proper outward acts : But the sincerity of intention, and truly pious affections can only be acceptable to God ; without these no forms of devotion or seemingly religious works, however pompous, expensive and magnificent, are of any value at all ; such formal service not proceeding from just sentiments, nor animated by inward good affections, is unworthy of our rational spirits to perform, and

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unworthy of the divine Spirit to accept. What notion can any man have of the Deity, who imagines that sacrifices and other ceremonious performances will please him, when separated from virtuous dispositions and a good life? The question which the *Psalmist* puts in the name of God to the formal worshipper, is a very proper one, *Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?* * For, however absurd that be, no better account can be given of the hypocrite's spiritless devotion, who is laborious in the forms and ceremonies of worship, but utterly negligent of moral duties, which alone he has any reason to think, can recommend him to the approbation of a pure spirit. *God does not see as man sees*, he has not those views of sensible things, nor those affections and desires to them which we have. Will he be delighted with a fine picture or an expensive statue? are gold and silver more precious to him than common earth? Has he ears like ours, to be delighted with the melody of sounds? These are gross imaginations, unworthy of reasonable beings: Strange! that ever it should enter into the heart of a man, that he

* *Psal.* l. 12.

could reconcile himself to God by *thousands of rams, and ten thousand rivers of oil*, or that *offering the fruit of his body* could expiate his crimes; and yet it is certain, there is such a proneness in mankind to this sort of superstition, that not only they have been guilty of it who had no other guide than the light of nature, trespassing thereby against the plain dictates of reason, and particularly this important principle that God is a Spirit, but even they who enjoy'd the benefit of a divine revelation, have, many of them fallen into the same error, contrary to the most express warnings and reproofs given them by God's extraordinary messengers. Many of the ancient *Jews* plac'd their religion in sacrifices and other ceremonial observances, in which they trusted as sufficient to recommend them to the divine acceptance, and to make amends for the want of true repentance and reformation, notwithstanding the most express declarations of the prophets, that no external service, tho' of divine institution, would be acceptable to God, without purity of heart and the practice of righteousness. The prophet *Jeremy* tells them * that to trust in the *temple of the Lord* for their se-

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* Chap. vii. v. 4.

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curity, whilst they did not amend their lives, was to trust in *lying* words; he puts them in mind of the desolation that was brought upon *Shiloh* for the wickedness of their fathers, tho' it was a place once as sacred, and the presence of God was there, as conspicuously as afterwards in the house which was built for him in *Jerusalem*; and by that remarkable example in their own history, he warns them that the temple would be no protection to them, if they continued in their crimes; nay, while they were guilty of murder, adultery, oppression, fraud, perjury and idolatry, their entrance into the temple as worshippers was a profanation of it, and turning the *house of God into a den of thieves and robbers*; but if they would please God and be intitled to the accomplishment of the promises made to their fathers, they must thoroughly *amend their ways and their doings, they must execute judgment between a man and his neighbour, they must not oppress the stranger, the fatherless and the widow, nor shed innocent blood, neither walk after other gods* *. The declarations of the prophet *Isai-ah*, are as clear and strong against their vain confidence in their sacrifices and religious as-

* v. 5, 6.

semblies, at their new moons, sabbaths and other festivals, Chap. i. 11. *To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me saith the Lord.—I delight not in the blood of bullocks or of lambs, or of he-goats. When you come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hands? Bring no more vain oblations, incense is an abomination to me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of the assemblies I cannot away with, it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting: But wash ye, make you clean put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, plead for the widow.*

I wish *Christians* were not chargeable with the same fault; but it is certain many of them are. Tho' our Saviour has taken great care to give his followers just notions of the divine nature, and on that foundation to raise a reasonable service; and tho' the *Christian* worship has the characters of plainness and simplicity in a more eminent degree than any other form ever had, yet has it been greatly corrupted by some *Christians*: Especially the church of *Rome* has multiplied her rites and ceremonies to a greater number, and thereby made her service more burdensome than the

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Jewish institution it self was. If it was absurd in the worshippers of *Baal* to think that they could prevail with their God by cutting themselves with lances, is it not equally absurd in *Christians*, and much more inexcusable, to imagine that their God, whom they acknowledge to be a pure Spirit, will hear them for their speaking much, will be pleased with their vain repetition of formal insipid devotion, which is the exercise of the body and not of the mind, with postures and vestments which carnal worshippers have devised, as fondly fancying a kind of humility and decency in them, or with fastings, pilgrimages and such like severities, which God has not commanded, and which instead of promoting repentance and true holiness, are relied upon in place of them ; thus *making void the precepts of the moral law*, which are of eternal and immutable obligation.

Other *Christians* make too near approaches to the same kind of superstition, who place their religion in points of mere speculation, in a zeal for matters of small importance, or in positive duties, a diligent attendance on assemblies for worship, receiving the sacrament and such like outward performances. *These things ought not to be left undone*, because

cause God has prescrib'd them, but they are enjoin'd to intelligent creatures, and the uses and designs of them are fully explain'd : in general they are all intended for the promoting of good dispositions in men, and the practice of virtue, and we may be assured our observance of them is no farther pleasing to God, than as they are, this way, useful to our selves. Therefore to lay any stress on positive institutions, as if by any merit or efficacy in them, they could procure our acceptance with God, or in some other unintelligible manner, do us good, without contributing to our instruction, the exciting good affections in our minds and our progress in piety, righteousness and charity ; this is to alter the very nature of them, to separate the means from the end to which God appointed them to be subservient, and to abuse his ordinances to superstition, which cannot be pleasing to him who is himself perfectly intelligent, and delights in the reasonable service of his creatures. And to conclude,

Lastly, If God is a Spirit, our duty in consequence of this principle, and in opposition to the errors already mention'd, is to worship him in spirit and truth, that is, with sincerity,



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sincerity, with our best affections, and the most vigorous exercise of our inward powers. We cannot but have an abhorrence and contempt in our minds of hypocrisy; any professions of respect to our selves which we know to be insincere, and not to proceed from the heart, we would certainly reject with detestation as real affronts, and shall we then offer such an indignity to the omniscient Spirit? But if we consider what the service is which our own minds, upon calm and deliberate reflexion approve, we shall thereby understand what is acceptable to God; it is the homage of the heart, the inward devotion of the soul and affections, with serious attention, proceeding from clear apprehensions and a firm persuasion of his adorable perfections, and evidencing its sincerity in our whole conversation by the fruits of holiness; it is an humble reverence for, and high esteem of his glorious excellencies, gratitude for his benefits, confidence in his mercy, submission to his will and an imitation of his purity and goodness. Wherefore, *let sinners cleanse their hands, and the double-minded purify their hearts, and thus, if they draw nigh to God, he will draw nigh to them.*

S E R M O N V.

The Unity of God prov'd from the
apparent Unity of Design in his
Works.

Deuteronomy vi. 4.

Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.

SINCE we are convinc'd by the most full SERM.
and satisfying evidence, that the system V.
of the universe is intellectual, or that the for-
mation of the world and all its parts is to be
attributed to a designing Cause; our next in-
quiry is, where shall that wisdom be found,
and where is the place of understanding?
Whether in a plurality of beings, co-ordi-
nate and independent, or in one original per-
fect mind? That intelligence and activity are
seated in a mind as their proper subject we
know; for the knowledge we have of what
passes in our selves, teaches us to distinguish
between perception and a percipient, between
operation

SERM. operation and power, as the principle from
 V. which it proceeds ; and that mind is a being
 or substance different from matter, especially that spirituality must necessarily be implied in original intelligence, has been prov'd. The present question is not whether there are other orders of understanding agents, superior to men, which may be easily allow'd upon all suppositions ; for tho' our own reason does not furnish us with demonstrative proof of it, yet who can find any difficulty in supposing, even if the world were made by chance, and there were no intending Cause in the origin of things, that there are many minds, and many different species of them, whose capacities are much larger than ours, who have a much more comprehensive knowledge, and a far less limited sphere of action, whose manner and extent of perception transcends ours, as much as we in understanding surpass the brutal kinds ; and their activity may reach to vast quantities of matter, whereas we are confin'd to a small part of it, and very unfit for great operations. And as there are many different kinds of spirits with very different degrees of perfection ; those who maintain the unity of God, the first independent Cause and supreme Ruler of
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the universe, do not at all doubt of his employing such inferior spiritual agents, as the ministers of his providence. But the question properly is concerning the original Cause of things, and the monarchy of the world, whether there be one supreme intelligent Being, to whom all other Beings owe their existence and all their powers, and who has an absolute dominion over all, the fountain of being, of understanding and power; or whether there be a variety of partial, independent, unmade causes of the universe, and all its appearances?

This last is most properly call'd *Polytheism*, but it has been exploded by the generality of men who have thought on this subject with any tolerable degree of attention. And indeed, the idea of a Deity, as it is explain'd both by those who assert and oppose his existence, naturally leads us to attribute singularity to him, to appropriate that character to *one*, and exclude all others from a partnership in his perfections and prerogatives. For the notion of God is of an absolutely perfect, uncaus'd, and therefore necessarily existent Being on whom all things depend, by his intelligence directing, and by his powerful will producing whatever actually

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SERM. tually is; the whole frame of nature with all
 V. the kinds and degrees of order and perfection
 which it contains. Now the true subject of controversy between us and *Atheists*, is concerning the existence of such a Being; we believe that the phœnomena of the world cannot otherwise be accounted for, they maintain the contrary. But there is no appearance of reason for a plurality; the doctrine of *Theism* does not require it, for the Being of one God absolutely perfect, is fully sufficient to all its purposes. The *Atheistical* scheme opposes the unity of God; in fact the arguments of the *Atheists* are levell'd against it; and in reason, a multitude of independent agents ununited in design and operation, so diminishes the idea of absolute perfection, and so dissipates and enervates the ruling counsel of the universe, as to sap the foundations of religion, and leave *Atheism* little to quarrel with. *Epicurus* himself, a violent adversary to the Being of the true God, the Maker of all things, yet imagin'd a multitude of independent Deities, consistently enough with his principles, excepting in one circumstance, that he said they were incorruptible, which can never be reconcil'd to his hypothesis, that all things, and even
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the gods were generated by the casual encounter of atoms. But of what sort were these Deities? Only idle unactive beings, who liv'd in pleasure, without any share in the formation of the world, or in presiding over it; and the truth is, to suppose a plurality of partial independent causes, under no common direction, almost leaves the origin of things in the same confusion, and signifies as little to the purposes of religion as the fiction of *Epicurus* *.

* If it should be suppos'd, that there may possibly be a plurality of eternal independent beings, the makers of the world to whom the characters of necessary existence and absolute perfection belong, and consequently, who must be united in all their counsels and operations, for that infinitely perfect intellectual powers should differ, is a manifest absurdity: This hypothesis is imagin'd without any necessity (all appearances being at least, as well accounted for on the contrary supposition of unity) and supported by no argument. Besides, as multiplicity, at least possible, naturally accompanies the idea of effects, whose contingent existence and limited perfections are determined by the power and will of the designing Cause: so the idea of necessary existence and unlimited perfection seems to exclude all diversity of being, and how can it be thought that a plurality of independent, infinitely perfect beings, essentially immense, all-powerful and all-knowing, should divest themselves of these perfections, or the exercise of them, by dividing among them the formation and government of the world, for which every one singly is allowed to be sufficient. But as no such opinion is maintain'd, so far as I know, by any adversaries of religion, nor would at all serve their purposes; I shall not insist any farther upon it, but endeavour to prove unity of design in the frame and government of the world, which is the just foundation of our pious affectionate regards to the Deity.

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The *Polytheism* of the *Gentiles* seems to be a strong argument against what I have said. It is notoriously known, that before the times of *Christianity*, mankind universally, all but the *Jews*, worshipp'd *many Gods and many Lords*, and not only the ignorant vulgar, but even the most eminent philosophers: How then can it be alledged that there has been any thing like an agreement, among the wise themselves, in believing the unity of God? I answer, that upon a careful inquiry into the history of ancient times, it appears indeed that learned men complied with the superstition of their several countries; but at the same time strenuously argued for, and profess'd to believe one supreme Being, the absolute Lord of all; insomuch, that if we except the *Epicureans*, there is not one philosopher of note, who asserted a multitude of independent gods. There are clear authentic testimonies, still remaining, which fully prove that the most celebrated authors among the *Persians*, the *Greeks* and even the *Egyptians*, the most idolatrous of all nations, asserted that there is one unoriginated, self-existent Cause, to whom they gave the characters of the **GREATEST** and the **BEST**, the Maker
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of all things, the Father of gods and men. SERM.
The poets themselves, the great depravers of V.
the *Pagan* theology, filling it with fables, }
yet plainly and frequently declar'd this truth.

There are various accounts given of the *Heathen Polytheism*, or worshipping a plurality of gods, whereby it appears to be consistent with the acknowledgment of one supreme, undivided Monarchy of the universe; as *First*, That the one eternal and self-existent Deity was the ultimate Object of their adoration, under different names. Thus *Pan*, and *Janus*, and *Jupiter*, and *Cælus*, and *Saturn*, and *Pluto*, and *Apollo*, and *Minerva*, these and other Deities, so called, however the true notion of them may be disguised by the fabulous inventions of the poets, and even pretended histories given of their originals and acts, which represent them as so many derived and temporary beings, yet the testimonies collected by *Christian* writers, who have search'd accurately into this matter, from the most sensible *Pagans*, plainly shew that these several names did not signify different gods, for that they had each the characters of the universal *Numen* ascrib'd to them, tho' the superstitious and credulous vulgar imagin'd a diversity, which

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false imagination was industriously cherish'd among them for political reasons. Nor is it an argument of any weight to the contrary, that some of the names were also used to denote particular parts of the visible world, as the heavens, the sun, the earth and the sea, for this only shews that their theology was obscur'd, as it certainly was by a multitude of ambiguous words used in it, not that the wisest among them did not intend by these very words, that their devotion should terminate on the great God, the Creator of heaven and earth, which themselves expressly say they did.

It is further alledged, and very probably true, that many of the *Heathens* designed by their different denominations to signify, not distinct beings, but partial considerations of the supreme Deity, as manifesting himself by his various works. The vast multitude of creatures which are produc'd, and the numberless variety of appearances in the world, tho' all proceeding from the same original Cause, might give weak minds occasion to imagine a diversity of operating and governing principles; yet others really meant, and explain'd themselves as meaning, no more than a diversity of effects. Thus, tho' the *Pa-*
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gan worship might seem at first sight to be divided between the Divinity presiding in the heavens, in the sun, the moon, the air, the earth, the sea, and the invisible state of separate spirits; yet the wiser sort intended it to the one supreme God, to whose dominion the whole world is subject, whom they believed to be every where present, pervading all things, as they express'd themselves, and diffusing the fruits of his power, wisdom and liberality thro' all parts of the universe. And therefore when the inanimate parts of the creation were personated, and deified, such as the sun and the earth, we cannot reasonably think that, at least the men of sense and learning among the *Heathens*, were so stupid as to imagine that the material systems themselves were proper objects of religious invocation; but the true meaning was, either that they were animated by subordinate intelligences, whom they honoured with an inferior worship, as I shall afterwards observe, or rather that the sovereign virtues of this Deity, tho' one in the principle, yet multiform in their apparent exertions, were to be reverently acknowledged wherever they are manifested. From the deifying of the works of nature, as containing so many dif-

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ferent manifestations of the Divine power and providence, they proceeded farther to make gods of unsubstantial things, mere accidents, such as the qualities, the affections and passions of the human mind; virtue, justice, clemency, hope, had temples consecrated to them and altars erected; not surely that these were thought to be personal deities, subsisting by themselves, but it was designed to be acknowledged, that in them the Author of nature has display'd his virtues, giving a moving force to created beings, whereby important effects are produc'd in the world.

If this was the true sense of the more intelligent *Pagans*, and by the many quotations which learned men have taken the pains to collect from their writings, it seems to be so, we must conclude, that under an appearance of *Polytheism*, they conceal'd a real persuasion concerning the real unity of God. And this will be still more evident, if we consider what I observ'd on another occasion, that some of them worshipp'd the Deity as the Soul of the world, than which, however wrong in it self, nothing can give us a clearer idea of unity, or a stronger intimation that they believed it; for as we know

know by our own consciousness, that the human soul is one percipient active being, so a common soul, animating the whole system of the universe, must be apprehended to be one. I have already shewn, that this notion was gross and unworthy of the supreme Being. It is probable, that many of the philosophers who thus express'd their sentiments, intended no more than that the Divine reason, as they spoke, or understanding, is intimately present with all things, wisely governing them ; some of them certainly had more sublime conceptions of the Deity, as an infinitely superior nature, the Author of the world, inhabiting it not as a Soul, but as a sovereign Ruler, who continually superintends all its affairs, and exercises a just and gracious care over them ; and some of them imagin'd a plastic and intelligent universal nature, deriv'd from him, which was properly the Soul of the world, and they called it a secondary God. But however divided their opinions might be as to that point, they agreed in this, that the supreme Deity, the ultimate Object of worship, is One only, manifested in the several parts of the universe, either as his animated members, or his works, in which he is intimately

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present, continually displaying his wisdom, power and goodness ; so that he *containeth all things in himself*, and *all things are full of him*, which they carried so far, that this was not an uncommon saying with them, *Deus unus et omnia*.

Lastly, It is certain that the *Pagans*, the wisest and most learned of them, designedly and avowedly worshipped inferior gods, substantial invisible powers, whom they supposed to be created or generated by the one supreme Being, either in time or from eternity, and employ'd by him as the ministers of his providence. These Deities were of several sorts, as separate spirits of various orders and degrees of perfection, who never inhabited terrestrial bodies, but were either altogether incorporeal or possess'd only aerial or ætherial vehicles, each presiding over a particular part of the universe, as the station and province appointed to him by the universal King ; and the departed souls of heroes, whom they supposed to be advanc'd to a high degree of power, dignity and happiness, as a reward of their virtues, and the eminent services they had done to mankind, while they were upon earth.

The pretences by which the *Heathens* justified this part of their devotion were such as these, that since there are so many excellent beings, subordinate indeed to the great God, and his servants, but superior to men, and by whose ministry many and great benefits are convey'd to them ; it seems reasonable that their favours should be acknowledg'd with gratitude, and that they should be honoured by men, in proportion to their dignity and beneficence. Besides, that as there is an infinite distance between the supreme Majesty, and mortals dwelling upon earth, it seems fit that they should not presume to approach his presence immediately with their adorations, but by the mediation and intercession of his favourite ministers, who continually stand before him and surround his throne. In both these sorts of worship, I mean the supreme and inferior, they used ceremonies and external symbols, especially sacrifices and images ; sacrifices in testimonies of gratitude and acknowledgments of dependence, likewise bloody victims, as rites of deprecation, and for expiating their sins ; and they used images, not as at all participating in their worship, at least the more intelligent pretended so, but only to

SERM. V. make a more sensible impression on their minds, and thereby help their devotion. Besides, some of the *Pagans* did, and some do at this day, pay a kind of religious respect to evil dæmons, from no principle but that of servile fear, intending to appease, at least mitigate their malice, and escape the harm which otherwise they might and are inclined to do; or else, men, having themselves mischievous designs, implore the assistance of wicked spirits in accomplishing them: But many others utterly disclaim this, as impious and altogether unworthy of men, who acknowledge the supreme dominion of a good God over the world, whose providence directs the whole series of events, and tho' it may permit malevolent creatures to exert their power and execute malicious designs in some instances, yet always permits them only for wise reasons, and over-rules the issue for good.

What I have said concerning the *Pagan* theology and worship, is not at all intended to excuse their errors and corruption of it. It is impossible to vindicate idolatry, or giving divine honour to others besides the Almighty Maker of heaven and earth, as the scripture speaks, *worshipping the creature besides*

sides the Creator who is blessed for evermore ; for

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that is certainly to rebel against the clear light of reason, whereby he discovers himself to us, requiring that we should glorify him as God, that is, that we should dutifully recognise his peerless Majesty, and pay him an homage which cannot possibly be due to other beings in any degree, on account of his not only unequal'd but incommunicable excellency, as the sole self-originated fountain of all being, power, wisdom and goodness. To adore the Deity as the Soul of the universe, is to confound him with his creatures, and to disparage his absolute perfection by jumbling it into one composition with the most imperfect of all things ; to worship him under the partial consideration of particular benefits communicated to us, as by the sun, the earth, corn and wine, is to lead unthoughtful men, as in fact it probably did lead many of the vulgar *Heathen*, into that most stupid notion that these creatures themselves are original Deities, which is rather *Atheism* than any kind of religion : And to serve angels or the departed spirits of good men religiously, as it is liable to the same inconvenience with the particular last mentioned, namely, ensnaring weak minds into that

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SERM. V. most pernicious error of attributing independent Divinity to them ; it has no foundation in reason, since we know not what communication those separate spirits have with us, or what knowledge of our affairs, nor have we any ground to believe it is acceptable to them ; rather on the contrary, that they are displeas'd with it, as an affront to the God whose servants they are, and before whom they prostrate themselves with the humblest reverence. Besides, the *Gentile* worship, wrong in its foundation, as contrary to plain reason, was still more deprav'd by the craft of priests and politicians, who fram'd it to their own selfish purposes, not without the secret concurrence of evil spirits, intending mischief to mankind, by ensnaring them into vice and unhappiness under the specious pretence of religion. By these means the devotion of the greatest part of mankind grew to a monstrous absurdity, some of it at least so irrational, so foul, barbarous and obscene, as to be a disgrace to the human nature ; and in consequence of it, as *St. Paul* very well observes in the first Chapter of his Epistle to the *Romans*, they were wretchedly debas'd in their morals, running into the most enormous and unnatural crimes. But however

inex-

inexcusable the *Heathen* idolatry was, from the observations which have been made, I think it evidently appears, that amidst all the corruptions which prevail'd, and notwithstanding the strong appearances of *Polytheism*, still that grand principle of natural religion was maintain'd by the most understanding and thoughtful men, that there is one only living and eternal God, and they endeavour'd to explain their worship in a consistency with it.

It is not to be dissembled however, that there has been a real difference upon this head among professed *Theists*, nay, among professed *Christians*; some have asserted that there are two eternal, unmade, independent Principles, one good and the other evil; which opinion others have rejected as a very great error. The philosopher of greatest note who maintained the being of an eternal evil dæmon, the author of all the mischief and disorder that is in the world, was *Plutarch* the celebrated moralist. He pretends indeed that he was not singular in this notion, but that some of the most learned among the *Persians* and *Egyptians*, as well as *Greeks*, especially *Plato*, went before him in it; which in all probability is a mistake, at least

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SERM. V. least with respect to *Plato*, and the other eminent *Greeks*: For the sentiments of the *Persian Magi*, it is more doubtful, whether *Arimanius*, whom their theology represented as the head of the opposition to goodness, were understood by them to be a substantial, unmade, independent principle or not. Among the sects of profess'd *Christians*, almost every one knows that *Manes* and his followers were charg'd with this error, (and from him it bears the name of *Manicheism* to this day) how justly, it is hard to determine, for it is certain that the history of ancient heresies is involv'd in great darkness. However that be, the grounds of the opinion are of much greater importance, and more necessary to be considered than the history of its rise and progress. Now what gave, the principal, I may say, the only occasion to it, was the difficulty, and as the abettors of it alledge, the impossibility of accounting otherwise for the origin of evil. Shall we, say they, attribute all the good that is in the world to a good author, and from his works infer his being and his moral character, which is allow'd to be a just way of reasoning; and shall we not, in like manner, impute the evil that is in the world, to an evil cause?

Or

Or is it to be imagined, that a Being essen-^{SERM.}

tially good, would have produc'd or even permitted, when it was in his power to have prevented, so much wickedness and so much unhappiness as we see among mankind? It is plain, that the point thus stated, is not proper for our present consideration, because it is apparently an objection against the goodness of God, and we have not yet proceeded so far in our inquiry as to any of his moral perfections. I shall therefore wave it at this time, and only argue against the *Ditheistic* scheme, as well as *Polytheism*, from the foundations already laid, that is, I will, in the remaining part of this discourse, consider whether the proofs which have been adduc'd for the Being of God, or an universal, designing and active intelligence in the world, will lead us this one step farther, to conclude the unity of that intelligence or not?

The only argument which has been insisted on for the existence of a Deity, or an intelligent Cause of all things, is taken from the evidence of design in the formation of the universe, and its several parts; in the obvious and most common appearances of the material system, such as the variety and uniformity, which, upon the slightest view,

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we cannot but observe in the works of nature, the apparent harmony and order of our world, and the mutual relation of its parts, as the heavens, the air and the terraqueous globe, divided into collections of waters and dry land, in each of which are numerous living inhabitants, suited by the frame and texture of their bodies to their proper elements; in the production of animals and their various kinds, preserv'd unmix'd, and propagated by a settled never-failing law; in the principal phœnomena of the animal life, sensation and self-motion; and especially in the human understanding, its abstract notions, its knowledge of eternal truths, and above all its knowledge of morality, of so great and important use to the perfection of the intelligent Nature, and the common advantage of the whole species. Now if we review all these particulars and compare them together, we shall see that they discover not only design in the origin and contrivance of them, but unity of design, and therefore that all things are derived from one eternal source of intelligence and activity, or one God: But I shall content my self with making a few remarks on some of them, especially on their mutual dependence and connexion, directing

us to consider them as parts of one system, and consequently as proceeding from one intelligent Cause.

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First, As gravity is the common quality of all bodies, arising not from the nature and properties of matter, nor to be explain'd without the agency of a foreign Cause, yet producing numberless uniform effects in the corporeal system ; it is in all reason to be attributed to one contrivance, rather than the different designs of two or more partial independent causes. What a vast variety of appearances in nature depend on this one, the self-balanc'd earth hangs upon its centre, the mountains are set fast, there is a perpetual flux and reflux of the sea, vapours continually arise, the clouds are balanced till by their own weight they descend in rain, animals breathe and move, the heavenly bodies hold their stations and go on in their constant course, by the force of gravity, after the *ordinance* of that wisdom which appointed them this law. Now when we see a multitude of effects proceeding from one Cause, effects so various in their kind and so important, a Cause simple and unvaried in all the diversity produc'd by it, can we avoid ascribing this to an unity of intelligence, if there be intelligence

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ligence in it all? For could we suppose different independent beings, acting with different designs, and by distinct operations to have form'd the several parts of the world, and the several species of creatures which are in it, what reason can be imagin'd why they should all be govern'd by, and all necessarily depend upon one law? The Maker of the sun, or if a partial cause of nature could be suppos'd to have an understanding large enough for it, the Contriver of the whole visible heavens, must, one would think, have finish'd his scheme independently on any other, without borrowing aid from the work of another God; in like manner the Gods of the seas and of the dry land, and the creator of animals would have compleated their several systems, each by it self, not depending on any other for its order and preservation: Whereas, on the contrary, we see in fact they are none of them independent, but all held together by the common bond of gravity; the heavens and the earth continue in their situations at a proper distance from each other by the force of this law, the sea keeps within its channels, and animals live and move by it. All which leads us to acknowledge one directing Counsel in the whole

whole

whole frame, for what but an understanding SERM.
which comprehends the whole extent of nature, V.
reaching from the utmost circuit of heaven to the center of the earth, could have fix'd such a common law, so necessary to all its parts, that without it not one of them could subsist, nor the harmony of the whole be preserved. The strict cohesion of the parts which constitute particular bodies, requires a peculiar cement, different from that of the gravitating force, and as it can never be explain'd by the nature and properties of matter itself, and is absolutely necessary to the forms and the uses of bodies in the several far distant regions of the world, it must in like manner be attributed to the contrivance of an understanding, and the agency of a power which takes in the whole corporeal system, not to a partial Cause limited in its intelligence and operation.

2dly, The beautiful order and harmony of the universe, since it must be acknowledg'd to be the work of understanding, has all the appearance which is necessary to satisfy any fair inquirer, of its being form'd under the direction of one governing wisdom. Disconcerted counsels can never produce harmony ; if a plurality of intelligent causes pursue each

SERM. his separate design, difunion will continually
 V. cleave to their works, but when we see an
 intire piece made up of many parts, all cor-
 responding to each other, and conspiring to-
 gether so as to answer one common end,
 we naturally conclude unity of design. As a
 work of art is formed according to the pre-
 conceived idea of a designing artificer, with-
 out which it has not its necessary intireness
 and uniformity, the same may be observ'd
 in the works of nature. A tree is as much
 one as a house, an animal as compleat a sys-
 tem in it self (only much more curiously
 fram'd) as a clock. If we carry our views
 farther into nature, and take in whole regions
 of the universe, with all their contents, the
 same characters of unity are still visible. The
 earth it self is not a confus'd mass, or a med-
 ley of incoherent and unrelated parts, but a
 well contrived fabric, fitted and plainly de-
 sign'd for use ; If we consider what a mul-
 titude of living creatures are in it of different
 kinds and degrees of perfection, each sort ha-
 ving proper apartments assign'd them, where
 they dwell conveniently together, with suitable
 provision made for them, and instincts direct-
 ing them to the use of it ; if we consider the
 interests of the several kinds, not interfering in
 the

the main, but rather serviceable to each other, furnished with necessary defences against the inconveniencies to which they are liable, either by the preventing care of nature, which without any thought of their own has provided for their safety, by the appointed advantages of their situation, or by an implanted wisdom directing them to find out the means of it; and if we consider the constant interposition of the same liberal intelligent nature, appearing by the daily new productions from the same fertile womb of the earth, whereby the returning wants of animals are reliev'd with fresh supplies; all the species of living things having the common benefit of the air, without which they could not subsist, and the light of the sun, which cannot at once illuminate the whole globe, being dispensed among them with so good œconomy, that they have every one what is sufficient to guide them in the exercise of their proper functions, that they may fulfil the purposes of their being. When we consider all this, can we doubt but the earth is dispos'd and govern'd by one intending Cause? If in a large house, wherein are many mansions, and a vast variety of inhabitants, there appears exact order, all from the highest to the lowest continually attend-

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SERM. ing their proper business, and all lodg'd and
 V. constantly provided for suitably to their se-
 veral conditions ; we find our selves oblig'd
 to acknowledge one wise œconomy ; and if
 in a great city or commonwealth there be a
 perfectly regular administration, so that not
 only the whole society enjoys an undisturb'd
 peace, but every member has the station as-
 sign'd him which he is best qualified to fill ;
 the unenvied chiefs constantly attend their
 more important cares, serv'd by the busy in-
 ferior, who have all a suitable accommoda-
 tion, and food convenient for them, the very
 meanest ministering to the public utility and
 protected by the public care ; if, I say, in
 such a community we must conclude there
 is a ruling Counsel, which if not naturally,
 yet is politically one, and unless united, could
 not produce such harmony and order ; much
 more have we reason to recognise one go-
 verning Intelligence in the earth, in which
 there are so many ranks of beings dispos'd of
 in the most convenient manner, having all
 their several provinces appointed to them,
 and their several kinds and degrees of enjoy-
 ment liberally provided for, without en-
 croaching upon, but rather being mutually
 useful to each other, according to a settled
 and

and obvious subordination. What else can account for this but a fovereign Wisdom, a common provident nature prefiding over, and caring for the whole.

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But the earth, as great as it appears to us, complicated in its frame, and having such a variety in its constitution, sustaining and nourishing so many tribes of animals, yet is not an intire system by it self, but has a relation to, and dependance on other parts of the universe, as the beings it contains have upon it. It owes its stability to the common law of gravitation, it derives its light and its heat from the sun, by which it is render'd fruitful and commodious to its inhabitants. In short, a bond of union runs through the whole circle of being, as far as human knowledge reaches, and we have reason to make the same judgment concerning the parts of the world which we do not know, and to conclude that they all together compose one great whole, which naturally leads us to acknowledge one supreme uniting Intelligence. To object against this, the possibility of wild confusion reigning in worlds unknown, is to feign and not to argue, and to suppose disorder prevalent in an infinity of being which we are unacquainted with, which is the *Atheistic* hy-

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pothesis, isto take away all rational foundation for regularity any where, tho' we see it actually obtains every where, as far as our observation can reach. But confining our speculations on this subject within the compass of known existence, as we ought to do in a fair inquiry, the apparent order of the effects is a strong evidence of unity in the Cause. For if different independent causes produced, each a part, why are there no footsteps of this in the whole extent of nature, why does not so much as one piece appear, as the separate monument of its author's power and wisdom? From divided counsels one would naturally expect interfering schemes; but on the contrary, we see an universal harmony. Men indeed from a sense of their indigence, and by the direction of instincts, which must be attributed to the designing author of their constitution, joyn in societies, which, tho' compos'd of many, are govern'd by one counsel: But that is only an artificial union, a submission to the majority, or to those who have the supreme power delegated to them, rather than an agreement in design. But this cannot be the case of independent beings, self-existent, and each compleat in it self, without relation to any other: And yet we see in nature

ture

ture a perfect harmony, from whence it is plain there must be an agreement at least in counsel and design, if we could suppose a plurality of independent causes. But whence comes this agreement? To say by chance, is *atheistically*, and very unreasonably to attribute the most perfect of all effects, universal order, to no cause at all; if we say by design, it must be one comprehensive design, forming the whole scheme of nature and providence, which directly brings us to what we are looking for, one sovereign commanding Intelligence in the universe, or one God. This was the argument by which some of the ancient philosophers prov'd that there is one only eternal and independent Principle, the Fountain of being and the Author of all things. *Pythagoras* called it a *Monad*, and *Aristotle* argu'd from the phænomena that all things are plainly co ordered, to one, the whole world conspiring into agreeing harmony, whereas if there were many independent principles, the system of the world must needs have been incoherent and inconspiring, like an ill agreeing *drama*, botch'd up of many impertinent *interfertions*. And he concludes that things are well administred, which they could not be under the govern-

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SERM. V. ment of many, alluding to the verse in *Ho-*
mer, Ουκ αγαθον Πολυκοιρανιη, εις Κοιρανος εσω.

3dly, The condition and order of inferior, derived, and evidently dependent intelligent agents, shew not only intelligence, but unity of intelligence in the Cause of them. Every man, a single active conscious self, is the image of his Maker ; there is in him one undivided animating principle, which in its perceptions and operations runs through the whole system of matter that it inhabits, it perceives for all the most distant parts of the body, it cares for all, and governs all, leading us, as a resemblance, to form an idea of the one great quickening Spirit which presides over the whole frame of nature, the spring of motion and all operation in it, understanding and active in all the parts of the universe, not as its soul indeed, but as its Lord, by whose vital directing influence it is, tho' so vast a bulk, and consisting of so many parts, united into one regular fabric. Again, the general apparent likeness which there is among all the individuals of the human kind, is a strong evidence of their being the children of one Father. I do not mean principally the similitude of the exterior form, tho' even that, in reason, should be attributed to the direction

tion of one intelligent Cause, but that where-
by we are especially God's offspring, our in-
tellectual capacities, which as far as we can
judge, are very nearly alike; a great differ-
ence there may be, no doubt there is, in the
improvement of them, but the powers them-
selves, and all the original modes of percep-
tion, in the different individuals of mankind,
seem to resemble each other, as much as any
really distinct things in nature. Now from
a multitude, or a constant series of similar ef-
fects, which do not arise from necessity; we
infer unity of design in the Cause: So great a
number of rational beings as the whole hu-
man race, dispos'd of in the same manner,
endued with like faculties and affections, ha-
ving many, and those principal things in their
condition common, provided for out of the
same fund and made for the same purposes;
may reasonably be supposed to belong to one
family, to be deriv'd from the same origin,
and still under the same paternal care.

Above all, the moral capacity of mankind,
which is a most important part of their con-
stitution, tending to the highest perfection of
their nature, and the principal bond of regu-
lar society among them, as it proceeds from
a wise intending Cause, shews unity of wis-
dom

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dom in the Cause; and the government over the moral, as well as the natural world, evidently appears to be a monarchy. Since, as I observ'd before, a sense of good and evil in characters and actions is indelibly imprinted on every human heart, and there are affections of very great force, planted in our minds, whereby we are determined to act according to that sense, and since this is the effect of an original constitution, interwoven with the very frame of our nature, and no otherwise to be accounted for than by the design of its Author; let us see how this is to be explained upon the contrary suppositions of one Supreme, or a plurality of independent governing minds? The evident tendency of virtue is not only to the private happiness of single persons, but the good of the whole kind, an universal benevolence links us together and interests every one of us in the affairs of another, so far as to desire and endeavour their safety and happiness, not inconsistently with our own. There are other particular determinations of the virtuous kind, such as compassion, natural affection, gratitude and the love of our country, so confessedly natural to men, as by common consent to obtain the name of humanity, but so prevalent in some as to put them

them


them upon the most self-denying and hazar-

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V.

dous enterprizes, nay, to sacrifice their private interests, even to their very lives, for the good of others; and these determinations of the human mind every one must see, do not center in it self, but that the ultimate intention and effect of them is to promote the good of the whole species. Now if we are thus form'd with design, and if this constitution be the result of intelligence, is it reasonable to attribute it to different intelligences, having different views, each framing and pursuing a several scheme, when the principal effect, which in a work of wisdom must be the principal intention, is not the separate good of one or a few, as it must have been upon the hypothesis of various independent causes, each caring for his own workmanship, but the common good of all; or rather does not this view of the constitution, which is a very plain and natural one, pointing out its main end, evidently shew that the whole collective body of mankind, comprehending *all the nations of men, which are made of one blood to dwell upon the face of the whole earth,* is the family of *one God, the father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all?* It is true, there are found in men dispositions

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SERM. V.  contrary to virtue, which produce effects hurtful to society, and destructive of the common peace and happiness, yet this does not prove a contrariety in the constitution, which must be attributed to the influence of opposite causes in the frame and contrivance of it: Whether these bad dispositions are an argument against the goodness of the Author, shall be consider'd in its proper place; in the mean time we may observe, that not only we have powerful instincts, whereby we are prompted to pursue the greatest universal happiness of mankind, but we are under the greatest necessity that voluntary agents can be under, of acting according to those instincts, because of the connexion our doing so has with our own happiness, for we cannot otherwise be approved to our own minds, nor consequently have any true self-enjoyment; which plainly shews that the governing design of the human frame was one, namely the good of the whole, and therefore that the one Father of all men is the Author of it, tho' he has made us in an imperfect state, and not without the possibility of rebelling against the law of our nature.

From this may be infer'd the whole duty of man, summ'd up by our Saviour in these

two branches, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self.* The obligation of the latter, the love of our neighbour, or every one of mankind, arises from the law of our creation. Since we are children of the same family, the offspring of one father, and plac'd under a constitution which is wisely and graciously intended for the greatest and most extensive good of the whole kind, what can be more natural and reasonable, than that we should do all the good offices in our power to each other? This is to answer the end of our being, and to work together with God. The inanimate creatures serve the purposes for which they were made, without any thought, and the brutal species act according to their instincts, without discerning the design of them; but since God has indued us with a capacity of understanding the end of his own works, and of our own powers and affections, is it not evident that we ought to fulfil that end, in a nobler manner, not by an unintelligent necessity, but voluntarily? It is true, we have a principle of self-love planted in us, which far from thwarting the design of the social affections,

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V.



fections, is perfectly consistent with it, and ministers to it, for the care of every individual, is for the good of the whole species. But to confine our affections and our cares to our selves, neglecting the offices which arise from the relation we have to men, as our brethren, is to trespass against the establish'd order of the world, and to violate the respect which we owe to the one God and Father of all, who is the Author of it.

2dly, The principal duty of mankind is to love the Lord their God and to serve him. This follows directly from the acknowledgment of his unity ; and accordingly *Moses* having in the text, called upon *Israel* to hearken to this important truth that the Lord our God is one Lord, immediately adds in the following verse, *and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.* The same duty is otherwise express'd at the 13th verse, refer'd to and thus quoted by our Savior, * *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and him only shalt thou serve.* The constitution of our minds leads us directly to that honour and service God requires, so that we

* Matt. iv. 10.

need not say *who shall ascend to heaven for us, or descend to the deep*, to bring us instruction concerning our duty to him, the knowledge of it is *near us, even in our hearts*. If we look attentively into our selves, we shall find that intelligence necessarily attracts our esteem, and that gratitude to a benefactor is the natural growth of our minds; an inward veneration arises for wisdom display'd in a variety of works wherein one noble end is regularly pursued; and good communicated with design, produces warm affections in every heart which deliberately attends to it, and is not under a strong unnatural prepossession. Now since our reason convinces us that all the wisdom of the universe centers in one mind, that all the effects of intelligence which we behold in the universal system of nature, are to be attributed to one Cause, that all the scattered rays of intellectual light which we discern in limited, dependent understandings, are but emanations from one eternal fountain of wisdom, and all the good we possess, or see, flows from one never-failing, bountiful Spring; then in all reason, according to the direction of our intelligent nature, our highest esteem and most intense affection should be plac'd on that eternal
Mind,

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SERM. V. Mind, that glorious, perfectly wise and benevolent Cause of all things; he is intitled to a peculiar honour from us, such as no other being can claim, we ought to have the greatest respect for him in our hearts, and carry it always with the humblest reverence towards him in our whole behaviour; so reasonable is that rule of revealed religion, and which is one principal design of it, that men laying aside all superstition and idolatry, should worship and serve the true God, the supreme Being alone, *and have no other gods before him*, still remembering that *he is a Spirit, and they that worship him acceptably, must worship him in spirit and truth*, not with outward forms of devotion, which when separated from good dispositions of mind and the obedience of our lives, cannot please him, but with the imitation of his holiness and goodness, and obeying his precepts of eternal and immutable righteousness, according to that excellent declaration of the Apostle St. John, * *This is the love of God that we keep his commandments.*

* 1 John v. 3.

S E R M O N VI.

Absolute Eternity explain'd and
shewn to be a peculiar Attribute
of God.

Pfal. xc. 2.

From everlasting to everlasting thou art God.

ALL men who believed the being of ^{SERM.}
God, have ever agreed in ascribing e- ^{VI.}
ternity to him as an absolute perfection of
his nature, tho' tis impossible for our minds
to comprehend it. We have very clear no-
tions of intelligence and activity, which, be-
ing conscious of them in our selves, we can
easily ascribe to other beings in a greater or
lesser degree ; but a present existence which
was from everlasting or without beginning,
that is an infinite duration now actually past ;
this at the first proposal overwhelms our feeble
understandings, and our ideas of it must be
inadequate. It becomes us therefore to enter

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on the consideration of this subject with a sense of our own weakness, and with a resolution to rest satisfied, if we have convincing proof that God is, in the highest sense eternal, tho' there may be puzzling objections rais'd against it, which really amount to no more than this, that the object is too big for our faculties, and that we cannot by searching find it out, nor understand it to perfection.

The words eternal, everlasting, for ever, and others of the like import, have different significations in common speech and in scripture ; sometimes they mean no more than a very long duration, sometimes a continuance so long as the subject to which they are applied shall exist ; the highest sense in which they are used concerning created beings, is that of an endless future subsistence ; thus they denote the immortality of the human spirit and of angels, and the never-ending felicity of good men after this life : But the eternity of God is the unchangeable permanency of his being, as compleat in himself and independent, not only without end, but without beginning, which is the most perfect manner of existence. Whatever is deriv'd from another voluntary and intelligent cause, receives

receives its limited condition of being from, is always subject to, and may cease to be, by the power and will of that Cause; but he who is unoriginated, and therefore absolutely unlimited and totally self-sufficient, remains in the strictest sense, eternally the same, liable to no alteration by any power, and, as it is express'd in the text, *from everlasting to everlasting God*: I shall in this discourse, *First*, endeavour to prove the doctrine of God's eternity: *Secondly*, to shew what are the most proper, tho' they are imperfect conceptions, we can form of it; and then I will make some practical reflexions.

First, To prove the doctrine of God's eternity; and the most intelligible method of proceeding in it, is, I think, by the following steps; *First*, the idea of eternal duration naturally forces it self upon the human mind; we may indeed, abstract from the consideration of any particular being, or of all beings as existent in it, or we may imagine an eternal nothing; but still the idea of eternity will remain. Now the difficulties which attend our notion of the Divine eternity, seem equally to attend the notion of eternity, unapplied to the existence of any being; for shall it be said that the duration of the Dei-

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ty without succession, is what we can have no idea of, and on the other hand, his eternal successive duration is alike inconceivable, as supposing infinity unequal, and capable of addition and diminution; and may not the same be said concerning duration considered abstractly? These difficulties therefore ought not to be made objections against God's being from everlasting to everlasting, since they equally lie against an abstract duration without beginning and without end, which yet is inseparable from our thoughts. The truth is, such reasonings only shew us the imperfection of our own understandings, that have real ideas familiar and unavoidable, of things which they cannot comprehend, namely, ideas of duration and space, necessarily growing up to infinity, too large therefore for the human mind to grasp, being it self finite; we know they are, but do not know what they are, we know they are both divisible into so small parts that we cannot discern the least of them, and both of so great an extent that we cannot attain to the knowledge of their utmost bounds. Shall we then object against the eternity of God as incomprehensible? And yet we cannot avoid thinking on, and being persuaded of eternity, which,

which, without him, is equally incompre-
henfible.

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Secondly, It has been universally acknowledged, even by *Atheists* who pretended to reason for their opinions, that something must have existed from eternity, and that if there ever had been nothing, there never could have been any thing ; indeed 'tis difficult to imagine how this could be denied by any man, for we cannot conceive of a commencement of being otherwise than as an effect, and an effect without a cause is too palpable an absurdity for any one to maintain ; it is really an effect which at the same time is not an effect : Vain therefore are the cavils of unbelievers against the eternity of God, which must equally affect all their own hypothesis, an eternal chaos, an infinite succession of worlds, or an infinite series of dependent causes. Again, our minds attribute, and cannot avoid attributing duration to all beings of which they have any knowledge : We are conscious of it in our selves, by attending to the succession of our own thoughts, and we cannot help conceiving it to be inseparable from all existence. But what kind of duration shall we attribute to an uncaused being ? It must be without a

SERM. beginning as the existence is without a cause ;
 VI. the supposition of a beginning necessarily im-
 porting the possibility of a cause : So that if
 the mind finds it self constrained to assent to
 this proposition, that there is an uncaused
 being, it seems to be under the same necessity
 of acknowledging that being to be with-
 out beginning, or absolutely eternal. And
 tho' our ideas of uncaused and eternal are ne-
 gative, the meaning of that expression is
 not, that nothing positive is intended by
 these words, for then they could not signify
 the attributes of any being, and uncaused eter-
 nal existence, would be a contradiction in
 terms ; but the negation only is of our fully
 understanding the subject, and the mind
 apprehends as implied, real attributes of the
 Deity which transcend its own capacity to
 conceive, a positive manner and duration of
 existence above its comprehension.

Thirdly, It appears also certain that intelli-
 gence is eternal. It has been already prov'd,
 that intelligence is discover'd in the forma-
 tion and constitution of things ; therefore it
 must have been in the origin of the world,
 and before it ; for the Cause, I mean the vo-
 luntary directing and contriving Cause, must
 be before the effect. If it be alledged that
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the argument amounts to no more than that intelligence was before the present system which we see, or whatever we have any knowledge of, not that it is absolutely without beginning; I answer, if it appears with sufficient evidence, that wisdom is the first thing and the first principle of all things, of which we have any knowledge, whether animate or inanimate, sensitive or rational; this is sufficient to our purpose, and to flee to the arbitrary supposition of bare possibility beyond the compass of known existence, is a poor refuge, unworthy of a fair reasoner, when the inquiry is concerning what has actually existed. If it be certain beyond all rational contradiction, that something has existed from everlasting, and there is no difficulty or pretence of argument against the eternity of intelligence, but what is equally against the eternity of any existence whatever; and if it be also certain, that there is nothing we can discern or fix our thoughts upon in the whole circle of being, but what, in the production and the frame of it, must be attributed to intelligence in the Cause, so that it must be acknowledg'd prior to the whole known universe; the conclusion seems


SERM. to be very evident that intelligence is abso-
 VI. lutely eternal.

Besides, the very same reasoning which demonstrates that something must have existed from eternity, proves also that understanding is eternal, or without beginning. For as Non-entity could never have produc'd being, so unintelligent Being could never have produc'd understanding; to imagine it, is the same absurdity, as in the other case, to imagine an effect without a cause. And not to insist on this, which yet is very plain to any attentive mind, that to deny intelligence to a Cause, is really to deny causality or efficiency altogether, there being properly no cause but a voluntary and designing, that is, an intelligent one, the transition is as great (and requires no less power to effect it) from meer senseless inanimate being to intellectual capacities, as from nothing to existence. And *Lastly*, to deny intelligence to the first Cause, or which amounts to the same, to say that something unintelligent existed before it, and produc'd it, is to attribute the order and all the appearances of the world to chance, or necessity, or to nothing, if not immediately, yet remotely; that is, to run directly into *Atheism*, which
 has

has been already refuted, or at least into as great an absurdity as any *Atheist* has ever yet advanced, namely, that indeed intelligence produc'd the regular system of the universe, but mere hazard or undefining necessity, as a præ-existent Cause, produc'd intelligence.

Lastly, The active intelligence which form'd the world, and still governs it, is seated in one eternal Mind; the effects of it are diffus'd through the whole extent of being, and there is no one appearance in the universal system of nature in which it is not manifested, and which is not under its direction; but the source is one everlasting spring of thought, one conscious understanding principle. This I shall take for granted as already prov'd, for if there be one Cause of all things, *in whom they consist*, form'd by his sovereign power and wisdom, into a regular whole under his supreme absolute dominion, it must be acknowledg'd that he is before all things. The *Atheistic* scheme agrees with ours in acknowledging eternity, nay, the human understanding must necessarily acknowledge it, it being impossible for it, as was before observ'd, to remove from it self the idea of eternal duration; it is agreed farther, that something has existed from eternity,

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SERM. VI.  ternity, but that scheme fixes on no individual permanent being to which the character of eternal belongs, unless it be chance or necessity, which are only confus'd general notions, rather empty insignificant names, and with respect to individual beings, eternity is the attribute of none, but belongs to a series of separate existences, which is at least as difficult to conceive, as the everlasting duration of a single absolutely perfect being. But if it be true, and it has been prov'd, that the character eternal must be ascrib'd to the one intelligent Cause of all things, this leads us to the idea of a peculiar condition or manner of existence: While it is undetermined to a certain object in our thoughts, and unappropriated to a singular existence, it seems to be apprehended no otherwise than as a long continuance, or as duration in general, which is common to all beings, not distinguish'd by any differences in their nature; it belongs just the same way to the most excellent and the most contemptible of all things. But the idea of eternity, as solely the attribute of one intelligent Being, carries in it what must appear to our minds grand, and attractive of a special veneration, as shall be afterwards observ'd. In the mean time
this

this leads me to what I propos'd in the next SERM. place. VI.

Secondly, To shew what seem to be the most proper, tho' they are imperfect conceptions, we can form of the Divine eternity. And *First,* it includes self-existence, necessary existence, and independence. These are characters of the supreme Being, of which we have very imperfect and inadequate ideas, because there is nothing that we are conscious of in our selves, nor does any thing appear in the objects we perceive by our senses, and from these sources are deriv'd all the first materials of our knowledge; there is nothing, I say, that we know, which bears the least resemblance to the self-existence, necessary existence and independence of the Deity, or can give us any notion of them. The self-existence of God is not to be understood in this positive sense, that he produc'd himself, or was the cause of his own being, for that is evidently an absurdity, supposing him to be both prior and posterior in nature, both cause and effect; but it signifies, that as he did not arise from nothing, which is true concerning all beings, so he was not produc'd by any other, which must be true concerning a being absolutely and in the highest

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highest sense eternal. I doubt our understandings do not proceed much farther in distinct and positive knowledge, by adding the character of necessarily existent, which seems to mean little more than that, since the Deity was not caused by an external agent, his existence and perfections could not be hinder'd by any; for as to an antecedent necessity in the nature of the thing, consider'd as a foundation for us to reason upon, interfering from it an apparent impossibility of not being, or that the supposition of non-existence implies an express contradiction; this I'm afraid is, at least not obvious enough to every capacity. Indeed if the impossibility of the Deity's not being, or that the supposition of his non-existence implies an express contradiction, can be clearly conceiv'd, it puts a speedy end to all controversy with *Atheists*; but it does not with full and satisfying evidence strike every, even attentive mind; for which reason it is necessary to use other arguments. The independence of the Divine Being carries in it the same idea I have been mentioning, only with this addition, that in all the periods of duration, his eternal existence and self-sufficient, because underiv'd perfections, cannot be affected by

any

any external cause ; for it is not to be apprehended, that what receives its being, and whatever belongs to the perfection of its state from no cause, can, for its continuance depend upon, or be subject to any external power.

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It may not be amiss however, tho' these characters self-existent, necessarily existent, and independent be very obscure, and our ideas of them very inadequate, to consider them a little further, with a view to the pretensions which other beings besides the Deity may have to them ; and if it appears that there is no ground for such pretensions, we shall be the more convinc'd that we rightly appropriate them to him, as the peculiar attributes of his eternal existence. Since all men are agreed that something must have been from eternity, they must all consequently say, that that thing whatever it were, existed of it self necessarily and independently. Accordingly, the *Atheists* acknowledge necessary existence to be the attribute of the material world, whether of bare matter, or matter and motion, or of the form also in which it appears ; and the most strenuous modern asserters of *Atheism* have declar'd for the last of these opinions, agreeably to another principle

SERM. ciple of theirs, that there is no such thing as
 VI. free agency, but that God himself (meaning
 by that word universal substance) operates
 only by necessity ; so that things could not
 possibly be otherwise than they are, even as
 to the manner and order of their subsistence.
 I have on another occasion, shewn that the
 multiform appearances, which we see in the
 face of nature, cannot reasonably be attri-
 buted to necessary causes ; and indeed, con-
 sidering what we are conscious of, namely,
 that some alterations in the form and order
 of material objects, depend on our own pow-
 er and will ; considering this, I say, it is
 surprizing any man should think that none
 of them could possibly be otherwise than as
 they now actually are, much more is it sur-
 prizing, when we consider the variety of ob-
 jects and events which daily occur to us, that
 it should be imagin'd none of them could
 have happen'd in any other manner than they
 do, not because they are directed by unerring
 Wisdom, but from an impossibility in the
 nature of things, or want of power to have
 determin'd otherwise, for that is the real
 meaning of their being produc'd by a necessi-
 ty of nature. If we know any thing at all,
 we know there is a great diversity of beings
 in

in the universe, each having a singular and separate existence, independent on the rest.

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What connexion is there between the being of a horse and a fish, of a tree upon this earth and a fixed star in the far distant heavens. Can all these things, the whole system and every one of its parts exist necessarily, so that not one individual of any kind, nor even the most minute particle in their composition, could possibly be wanting. One would think such a world has the least appearance of being underived and self-existent, which seems rather to be a manner of being perfectly uniform and uncompounded, as absolutely necessary and proceeding from no cause. At the same time there is an apparent relation of particular things, and the parts of the universe to each other, which has been prov'd, and every one may see it, as between animals and the earth, fishes and the sea, the whole terraqueous globe and the heavens; this plainly discovers wisdom in their Cause, not their necessary existence, which is absolute in it self, and unrelated to any thing. *2dly*, Motion, upon which the appearances of the material world depend, is not necessary, for whereas that which is self-existent is uniform, and without variation, nothing appears to be farther

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further from that character than motion : It is by our senses only we have any idea of it, and they represent it as the most precarious of all things, in its being, forms and degrees, as begun, increas'd, diminish'd and chang'd arbitrarily, insomuch that the first self-evident axiom concerning it is this, that all bodies continue in their state of motion or rest, till it be alter'd by a force impress'd upon them. And *lastly*, bare matter, the most passive and variable of all things, the most evidently dependent in its state, infinitely divisible, compounded and circumscrib'd in its being, having no power but that of inactivity, has of all others the least claim to necessary or self-existence. Since therefore it is agreed on all hands, that these attributes, self-existence, necessary existence and independence must belong to some being, as having an inseparable connexion with absolute eternity, and since none of those things which have been set up in opposition, have any title to them ; it remains that they are the sole unalterable characters of that supreme intelligent being, who is absolutely, in the highest sense eternal, and the first Cause of all things.

2dly, Another perfection necessarily con-
nected with absolute eternity, is unchange-
ableness, and it seems to be designedly ex-
press'd in the text, *from everlasting to ever-*
lasting thou art God, possessing the same uni-
form and unvaried being, in all the periods
of duration. God is the same that he was
before the world began ; indeed without be-
ginning, and shall continue without any
change for ever. The scripture often delivers
this doctrine in very strong and emphatical
terms, as in *Rev. i. 4. From him which is,*
and which was, and which is to come ; not
barely meaning that the Divine Nature sub-
sists in different successive periods, which in
some sense may be said concerning other be-
ings, but that the one God and Father of
all is rightly described by this peculiar cha-
racter, the Being which is, and which was,
and which is to come, who in himself im-
mutably excellent, possesses all his perfecti-
ons, glory and happiness, *without variable-*
ness or shadow of turning, in past, present,
and future duration. In this respect other be-
ings are compared with God, and he is pre-
fer'd to those of them which seem to be the
most firm and stable. The frame of the
heavens above, which has continued so long,

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and the foundations of the earth laid so strong and deep, yet may be changed, the scripture tells us *they shall perish, yea all of them shall wax old like a garment, and as a vesture be changed*; but God who effects all changes in nature, is himself *the same, and his years shall have no end*. The first of Beings uncaused by any other, exists in a way superior to, and more excellent than all others; all the periods of beginningless and endless eternity are connected in him; there never was any time when he was not, and he shall endure for ever.

As imperfect as our knowledge is of the essence and perfections of the Deity, we cannot but be convinc'd by our own reason, that immutability is imported in, or is a consequence from his eternity, as it has been explain'd, that is, from an eternal, uncaused, necessary existence. That which had neither beginning nor cause, which is the true meaning of absolute eternity, cannot be depriv'd of its being by any power, nor be liable to any change. Other things may continue to eternity, always depending on the pleasure of their Maker, for the power which created can annihilate their substance, as well as alter their forms; that only which has no precarious


precarious existence, and does not owe its being, nor any of its perfections to an external cause, has a fixed immutable permanence of being, in it self absolutely incapable of any alteration; and this being peculiar to the Divine nature, that it is self-original, and depends upon nothing, it can be subject to no power, nor ever be affected by any thing.

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The natural perfections of the Deity, his power, and knowledge, and wisdom, not depending even upon his own will, as they are derived from no other cause, but included in his Essence it self, must be like it, invariable; 'tis impossible they should ever cease to be, or suffer any diminution, being the essential characters whereby he is what he is, so that they must be, as his existence, necessary, to everlasting, as well as from everlasting, liable to no influence from without, incapable of any change within himself, impaired by no time, nor limited by any periods of eternal duration. The moral attributes indeed, such as Holiness, Goodness, Justice and Veracity, are of somewhat a different consideration, and our way of thinking concerning them does not lead us to the same notion of their immutability. We have a very clear and determinate idea of moral

SERM. VI.  rectitude ; but it carries in it free agency, and is in our selves and other inferior moral agents, accompanied with a possibility of doing wrong. How then moral perfections should be essential to any being, always free in their exercise, depending on the will, and yet so necessary as to be absolutely immutable ; this is hard for us to conceive. At the same time, as moral goodness is necessarily high in the esteem of the human mind, so that we cannot account any being absolutely perfect without it, and every property of the Divine nature, proceeding from no external cause, must belong to it in a manner which we cannot comprehend, different from the limited and derived qualities of all inferior beings, we must conclude that the moral perfections of the Supreme Being are, like his other attributes, essential, necessary and eternal, tho' the manner of their being so, is to us incomprehensible. And since this does not arise from any defect of power, knowledge or wisdom, but on the contrary, from the infinite fulness of all real perfection, the unchangeableness of the Divine moral attributes does not lessen, but heighten their glory ; which is plain from this consideration, that every one will acknowledge, that the
more

more mutable any good moral character or dis-
positions are, the less valuable, and the more
steadily any person is in goodness, the more
excellent. It is therefore a very amiable repre-
sentation which the scripture gives us of the
justice of God, that it is like *the great moun-
tains*^a steadfast and unmoveable, of his truth,
that it endureth for ever^b; and of his good-
ness, that it *endureth continually*^c; and with
the *Father of lights from whom every good and
perfect gift cometh down, there is no variable-
ness nor shadow of turning*^d.

But let us consider a little farther, how
our minds may be assisted in forming con-
ceptions (which tho' weak and inadequate,
yet may be useful) of the immutable Divine
eternity, or of duration always passing, as it
is applied to the Supreme Being, with whom
there is no change. It has been already ob-
serv'd, and ought to be always remember'd,
that the subject is above our comprehension;
how is it to be imagin'd, that a finite under-
standing can form an adequate idea of that
which is actually and positively infinite?
That eternity is beyond the reach of our un-
derstandings, will still appear more plainly,

^a Psal. xxxvi. 6. ^b Psal. cxvii. 2. ^c Psal. lii. 1. ^d Jam. i. 17.

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when we consider how they come by the idea of duration it self, and proceed upon it. It takes its rise from the succession which we observe in our own thoughts, it is enlarg'd, and time is measured, that is distinguish'd into longer and shorter periods, by the regular successive motion of certain bodies, such as the sun and the moon; but imagination draws it out beyond all we know to have actually pass'd, or beyond all the measures convey'd to our knowledge by means of the senses or reflexion, still with a conceived possibility of addition; so that by this method, we can only attain to a negative idea of eternity, as a duration which is indeterminable, or to which no limits can be set; just as from circumscrib'd corporeal magnitude, we take our rise to the idea of infinite extension, which is negative, like the other, but our reason convinces us of something positive in both, which we call infinity.

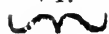
Now the Divine eternity being thus incomprehensible, we must rest satisfied with a very imperfect knowledge of it. Some have represented it as excluding all manner of succession, which they apprehend to be inconsistent with the absolute perfection of the Supreme Being, to whom there can be no past
and

and future, but all things must be ever present to him with whom there is no variableness. Besides, they imagine there cannot be an eternal successive duration, for the reasons mentioned before, such as that an infinite succession past seems to be inconceivable, and that this would be to suppose greater and lesser in infinity: Therefore they call eternity as attributed to God, a *standing point*, which comprehends all possible duration, and co-exists with time and all its changes, but does not pass, like it. But this seems to be utterly unintelligible. How can any man conceive a permanent instant, or which co-exists with a perpetually flowing duration; one might as well apprehend a mathematical point, co-extended with a line, a surface and all dimensions. And for the reasoning used to support this notion, it really proves no more than the weakness of our understandings, which cannot form a positive adequate idea of duration without real or imagin'd limits, tho' we are sure there is an unchangeable existence, to which unlimited duration belongs.


It is certainly reasonable however, as the Deity's manner and condition of Being is infinitely more perfect than ours, to understand

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his duration with as little variety in it as possible, and as free from all the infirmities which cleave to our mutable nature. All things about us are in a perpetual flux; matter continually changing its form, and passing into different states and constitutions, by generation and corruption; our own bodies so continually alter their composition, that in a few years very little remains of the same matter: As to our souls, we know very little of their essence; it is consciousness only which gives us an idea of personal identity, but in the exercise of our rational powers we find a very great variation. Our thoughts change, so do our desires and hopes, and all our other affections; with great difficulty and uncertainty, and often not without mistakes, we endeavour to recollect what is past, and we look forward with anxiety, to unknown hereafter. All these are marks of imperfection, and it does not appear that any finite being can be altogether free from them. But it is not so with the first Cause, the original, self-sufficient and underived Fountain of Being, whose Essence cannot be capable of any alteration, nor do his powers and perfections vary with the changes of time. His omnipotence suffers no diminution by any opposite force, no
more

more than by a natural decay; the heavens SERM.
were stretch'd out and the earth establish'd VI.
by the irresistable determination of his will, 
which the scripture elegantly calls his com-
mand, intimating that the greatest works,
even creation it self, are easy to him; and
this mighty strength remains in its full unim-
pair'd vigour, and whatever pleaseth him
that he doth. His knowledge comprehends
all things, past, present and future, not as if
all existed at once, tho' they are at once in
his view; there is a succession in the objects,
but not in his understanding, which suffers
no change; things past and to come are as
clear to his All-comprehending mind as the
present. There can be no such thing in his
perfect understanding as what we call re-
membrance, that is, reviving former images
or impressions, which are obscur'd or forgot-
ten by new ones succeeding in their place,
for he sees through the whole compass of du-
ration backwards, as well as to the utmost
bounds of present being, and he perceives the
most distant futurity with the same clearness;
known to him are all his works, and all the
works of his creatures, which shall be, as
well as those which are, and *he sees the end
from the beginning*. There can therefore be

SERM. no possible alteration of his purposes and
 VI. measures, but his *counsels shall stand for ever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations.* Whatever changes there may be in the state of things without, according to the limited and imperfect condition of their nature, there is no change in his knowledge and counsels. *One day is with him as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day**; not as if he did not see the real difference between these unequal durations, but they do not affect him, either in his designs or his felicity, as they do finite beings, for no unforeseen event can arrive, in the least to alter his condition or his designs. The intire scheme of his administration was form'd from everlasting, and the whole extent of futurity was at once in his view, so that nothing can possibly happen unexpected, nothing new which may surprize him; no sudden emotion can arise in his mind, no passion, no painful desire, no uneasy hope, no anger, fear or sorrow, but he possesses an eternally uniform and undisturb'd tranquillity. The creation of worlds, and disposing them in beautiful order and harmony, the forming innumerable

* 2 Pet. iii. 8.

living intelligent beings, and communicating various pleasure to them, according to the several capacities he has given them; again, the convulsions of nature, wholly altering the form of some parts of the creation, together with the great revolutions which fall out in the state of some rational creatures, whereby they, originally made for good and for happiness, become evil and miserable; all these things, and whatever other important changes arrive, which are amazing to limited minds, and must produce admiration with divers kinds of affections and feelings, yet pass under his eye, and under his direction, without producing any alteration in his counsels or his happiness. They were all perfectly foreseen, just as they come to pass, without the least variation in any one circumstance, and all wisely adjusted in his eternal decrees. All this is easily intelligible, and necessarily follows from the absolute perfection of the Divine nature, and it may be a consistent explication of that so much celebrated description of the Divine eternity, that it is *interminabilis vitæ, tota simul et perfecta possessio*; but to make it literally a standing perpetual NOW, comprehending all periods of duration, is what we can have no notion of.

I come

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SERM. VI. I come now *Lastly*, to draw some practical inferences. The whole controversy concerning the Being and Perfections of God, is of the greatest importance, to the purposes of forming men's tempers and directing their practice, and it is so regarded by all parties. The *Atbeists* are warm in their opposition, because they cannot help seeing what reverence and dutiful dispositions (which they are averse to, imagining or pretending that it is a servile state of mind) the Divine perfections demand, if once they are acknowledg'd; and the believers in God find themselves oblig'd to contend with a hearty zeal for the respect due to his character. But there is no one attribute which appears more venerable than that of absolute independent Eternity; tho' it is but little we know of it, yet that little fills the mind with the greatest awe, and raises an idea of magnificence, unparallel'd in the whole circle of being. We find our selves possess'd of an existence which is confin'd within very narrow limits, our remembrance is but of yesterday, our consciousness reaches only to a very short period: We see all things about us continually passing, beings like our selves disappear after acting their part but a few years on this stage,

and

and their places know them no more ; we

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cannot avoid apprehending the same fate to our selves, that we shall soon withdraw into darkness and make room for others, rather indeed, upon this superficial view of things, we are perfectly ignorant of what shall come after. What then, has existence it self no stable foundation? Is there nothing in nature but a perpetual round of transitory being, nothing we can fix our thoughts upon that is permanent and undecaying, which holds together the whole series of successive existence, and establishes a connexion of past, present and future? This way of thinking spreads horror and confusion over the whole face of nature, disorder on the origin of all things, and darkness on their last result. Nothing looks great, nor so much as real ; existence it self vanishes into a shadow, and consciousness into a dream, with an universal blank before and behind it. But when we see an eternal intelligence, self-existent and immutable, the same yesterday and to day and for ever, how is the prospect changed? Every thing appears in a fair and amiable light ; however variable the exterior face of nature may be, there is a permanent wisdom in the Cause which directed the beginning
of

SERM. of things, and establishes their continuance,
 VI. which holds fast the foundations of existence
 and unites it to a central point ; that gloomy
 spectre of eternal nothing flies away, or
 which is no better, rather the same under
 empty insignificant names, eternal chance or
 blind undefining necessity. This state of
 order, and intelligence at the head of it, is
 what a wise attentive mind could not but
 wish for, and rejoyce in finding it true, as
 giving it a comfortable enjoyment of its own
 existence, and a delightful idea of regularity
 and beauty in the appearance of the universe.
 But when considering the constitution of
 things, our remotest view either backward
 or forward terminates in non-entity, or in
 ignorance and confusion, the present state it
 self loses all its solidity and all its excellence,
 the highest perfection of being sinks into
 emptiness and vanity. Such is the dismal
 condition of the *Atheist's* mind ; his exist-
 ence is his all, and a poor insipid thing it
 is, scarce having any enjoyments above the
 brutal kinds, and its low enjoyments allay'd
 with suspicions and fears which the brutal
 kinds are not capable of : It knows of no
 being without it to whom it owes it self and
 all the good which it possesses, and there-
 fore

fore nothing to warm it with gratitude, (that noble felicitating affection) nor to be the support of its confidence ; nothing in the world appears worth the caring for, the world it self is stript of all its glory and beauty. The *Atheist* finds no wisdom to entertain his understanding with ; that order, proportion and harmony, which are so entertaining to other minds, are lost to him, regarded no otherwise than as chimeras ; he sees nothing without him that is excellent, feels nothing within his heart that is generous and manly. Benevolence it self decays, unsupported by any just sentiments ; tho' its root is too deep fix'd by the wise unknown Author of his being, to be altogether extirpated, yet the more he views human nature in the false light of his mean principles, the less amiable it appears. How is humanity sunk in these unhappy creatures, and the dignity of our being, indeed of all being lost to them, through their affected ignorance and perverseness ? Their state surely is not to be envied, but extremely to be pitied ; their boasted freedom, what is it but a freedom from the knowledge and the mental enjoyment of all that is wise, and good and great, which is the principal happiness of the human nature.

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2dly, In a special manner that one unchangeable, intelligent, eternal fountain of existence and all perfection, must be transcendently glorious in our eyes. A mind that reflects on its commencement, conscious of present being, and comparing it with former nothing, rejoices in its own existence, the foundation of all its acts and enjoyments; the same is the necessary foundation of all excellence without us. It appears therefore a perfection to be, and yet a greater perfection to continue in being, but an uniform immutable conscious existence, is the utmost conceivable perfection; it is impossible to imagine any thing beyond it, nay, the imagination cannot comprehend it. This is the character of the Deity, which raises him high in our esteem, and intitles him to that name, which *Moses* says, he gave himself, and claims as peculiarly belonging to him, I AM THAT I AM, importing that he exists in a peculiar manner unchangeably, not like other beings which might not have been at all, or might have been otherwise than they are, depending wholly on the will of their Maker, and may be hereafter quite different from what they are at present.

Again,

Again, God is to be ador'd by us, as being immutable, not only in his Essence, but in his purposes. Changes of thought and design are among the most important which befall us, and they are attended with a consciousness of our own infirmity. How little do we look in our own eyes, when we reflect on that imperfection of understanding, and other frailties, which make it necessary for us often to alter our resolutions and our conduct ; and what a diminutive idea have we of other intelligent beings, whose fickle tempers vary as outward accidents do ? Tho' at the same time it must be acknowledg'd the glory of imperfect creatures, when thro' weakness they have erred from the truth, and by temptations been led astray from the paths of righteousness, not to persist obstinately in their mistakes and evil courses, but to forsake them, and to change their sentiments and their conduct ; for truth and right are immutable as God himself, and as he inviolably cleaves to them through the absolute perfection of *his nature*, so ought we to return to them, renouncing the errors and faults into which we have fallen, through the imperfection of *ours*. But how glorious is it and excellent to be of one mind, and to preserve

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the same unvaried temper and tenor of conduct, from an absolute perfection of knowledge, and an unalterable rectitude of will. From hence arises an indispensable and perpetual obligation on us, and all intelligent creatures, of worship and homage to the Deity. If the glory and perfection of his nature can suffer no diminution, and in consequence of that, the measures of his government are through all ages the same, the foundations of our duty to him are unmoveable. Here is an essential difference between the true God of the universe, and idols, fictitious Deities which either have no real being, but are only the creatures of deluded human imagination, or at least have no divinity, no dominion over the world, or authority over men, upstart gods, whose honour raised on no just foundation, shall quickly perish; but the God of the universe thus describes himself; *Isai. xliiii. 10. I am he, before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be any after me.*

3dly, The eternity of God ought to be considered in conjunction with all his other attributes, it is the character of every one of them; his power and wisdom, his righteousness, goodness and truth are eternal and unchangeable

changeable as his being; and by this consideration all our religious duties are greatly enforced. He is the proper object of our fear, because his dominion reaches to the utmost limits of our existence. A temporary power can only claim a temporary obedience, and indeed not an absolute obedience, even while it subsists, for as the relation between human governors and subjects may be dissolv'd, and the servant become free from his master, which will soon be the case in fact of all superiors and inferiors among men, whom death will put upon a level, tho' it does not extinguish their being; so the expectation of that change diminishes the present respect which a short-liv'd authority claims. But the Ruler, whose power extends to all futurity, and who, as he lives and reigns for ever, has the disposal of our condition in ages at the remotest distance, as well as the present, is intitled to our unlimited subjection and perpetual fear. Our Saviour's direction is therefore very just, * *Be not afraid of them which kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do, but I will forewarn*

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* Luke xii. 4, 5.

SEEM. you whom you shall fear, him who after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell.

Again, the grounds of our hope and confidence in God are firm and stable. As the Goodness to which we owe our being, and all the happiness we enjoy, is eternal, God loves his creatures *with an everlasting love*, so, *because he is the Lord and changes not, they are not consumed*; he can provide against all future dangers as well as the present, and however the appearances of things may vary, they are none of them without his foresight, and the direction of his wise and powerful providence. Therefore the objections of men against the Divine administration, when things fall out otherwise than they expected, are vain and groundless, and their conclusion extremely rash, that his promises are not to be trusted. If scoffing infidels say, * *Where is the promise of his coming to judge the world*, and render recompences to men, for *since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were*, the answer in which his servants rest contented,

* Pet. iii.

still humbly confident in his mercy and SER. M.
faithfulness, is *a thousand years are with the* VC.
Lord as one day, all times are equally in his 
power, and sooner or later he will fulfil all
the reasonable and just *desires of them that*
fear him.

S E R M O N VII.

The Doctrine of GOD's Omnipresence explain'd and vindicated.

Pfal. cxxxix. 7, 8, 9, 10.

Whither shall I go from thy spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there, if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there, if I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the utmost parts of the sea, even there shalt thou be present, and thy hand lead me and thy right hand shall hold me.

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IT is evident to any one who attentively considers the constitution of the human mind, that it was not made for a full comprehension of things and a thorough understanding of their natures, but that all the intellectual capacities and modes of perception with which it is indued, were intended by the wise contrivance of its Maker, to answer

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swer other particular purposes. Our sensa-
tions do not at all let us into the knowledge
of the essence of those material objects which
produce them in us, indeed not directly and
immediately into the knowledge of their ex-
istence it self; and tho' we have an inward
consciousness of our own perceptions and vo-
litions, our perceiving and self-determining
powers, and of our own existence, yet what
the intimate nature is of that conscious self,
we do not understand. The Father of our
spirits and of lights *from whom every good
gift cometh down*, has given us such know-
ledge as is sufficient, and was design'd for di-
recting our practice, and for communicating
such enjoyment as he intended for us, not
for our comprehending fully the nature of a-
ny thing, which does not seem requisite to
the ends of our being.

But least of all can we form any adequate
notion of the supreme Being himself; not on-
ly the absolute perfections of his nature can-
not be thoroughly understood by us, but we
have no immediate perception of them, as
we have of other objects. We have distinct
ideas of sensible qualities, such as the figure
and magnitude of bodies, and a direct intui-
tive knowledge of our own rational facul-

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ties and operations ; we have also very clear apprehensions of moral qualities, as of goodness, justice and gratitude ; but of the divine, peculiar and incommunicable attributes, necessary existence, eternity and immensity, we have not, nor are capable of forming any positive idea. It seems reasonable enough to believe that the human mind might have been form'd otherwise than it is, and not improbable that it may have capacities and ways of perceiving in another state of existence, different from those it now has, even such as shall have God and his perfections for their immediate object. I do not say, that it is possible for a finite understanding to comprehend infinity, but as we have now an intuitive knowledge of the qualities and existence of some objects, the essences of which are hid from us, it is not at all inconceivable, that we might have had, and may hereafter have a direct intuition of the Divine glorious Being and Attributes, tho' *his* Essence and *their* utmost extent will still be past finding out. Let it be observ'd, that many of our original ideas, the materials of our knowledge, are not to be accounted for, and the reasons of them explained from the nature of things, but we must resolve them into an arbitrary
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constitution of the Author of our being. No man can tell (I mean give a reason from a prior knowledge of their nature and ours) why material objects raise the sensations in us which we find in fact they do raise, and which it is not in our power to hinder, or in the least to alter. Who then can take upon him to say we could not possibly have had, or that we may not in another state actually have, very different perceptions from the present, and particularly, that the absolutely perfect Being and his Attributes, may not be the immediate object of our perceptions. This is what *St. Paul* means by the figurative expression of seeing God and Divine things *face to face, not darkly and through a glass* * as we do now, which he represents as the high attainment of perfected spirits; that is, their knowledge shall be as much superior to the present in clearness, and in its power of exciting good affections, and giving pleasure to the mind, as an intimate acquaintance with, and immediate vision of the persons and other objects we now know, is to faint images and obscure distant representations.

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* 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

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At present, our knowledge of the Deity is very dark and imperfect, collected from his works and the manifestations he has made of himself, by reasoning, a more difficult and unaffecting way than that of direct intuition: By reflecting on our selves, on the constitution of our own nature with its various powers, tendencies, affections and operations, and by considering external objects, which we perceive by our senses, with their relations and dependencies, we are led to a persuasion of his being, power, wisdom and goodness. 'Tis true, by this method of inquiry, and exercise of our understandings, we are convinc'd, not only of the Divine existence and perfections, but that God is intimately present with us and all beings in the universe, continually *working on every side*, yet it is only by the means of sensible effects which are the direct objects of our perceiving powers we attain to this conviction, the Divine nature and Attributes themselves, the inward principle of his various operations, *no man hath seen at any time nor can see*; not only he does not discern by his external senses, but he has not such a clear, immediate perception of them, as of other things which are neither seen, nor heard, nor felt, have no relation to body nor
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any of its properties, such as our own rational SERM.
faculties and affections, and moral qualities. VII.

The obscurity and imperfection of this kind of knowledge which we have of God is elegantly describ'd in the book of *Job*, * *Behold, I go forward but he is not there, (visible) and backward but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand that I cannot see him.* Hence it follows, and we find it so in experience, that the perfections of God which are the most clearly manifested, and immediately exercis'd in his works, are the best understood by us. We have much more distinct apprehensions of power, and wisdom, and goodness, than of those characters of the Divine nature which are, in no degree, communicable to any dependent being, its self-existence and infinity; the *latter* are not nor can possibly be represented by any image, nor is the notion of them convey'd by any discernible effect, the *other* have produc'd a resemblance of themselves in inferior agents, and the marks of them are engraven on all the Divine operations. It is impossible that the

* Chap. xxiii. ver. 8, 9.

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condition of a creature should lead us into the notion, as containing in it self any image of uncaused existence, that a temporary being should give us an idea of duration without beginning, or that a body circumscrib'd within certain limits, tho' by the position of its parts and its situation with respect to other bodies, we get our first notion of distance and place ; that, I say, it should give us a clear perception of immensity. As these are the attributes which it is hardest for us to conceive, we shall still think and speak of them the most clearly and usefully when, as far as that can be done, we consider them with relation to the works of God, which are the means whereby we attain to any knowledge of him. Thus, I think, particularly, we have a much better notion of the Divine omnipresence, and more applicable to practical purposes, by considering it as filling the whole universe, or the whole of created actual existence, not confin'd to any part of it ; we have a better notion of his universal presence in this view, because we consider him as continually working in all places, continually exerting his active perfections, his power, wisdom and goodness, than by applying our thoughts to the abstract speculation

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tion of absolute immensity, or existing in the whole of extramundane boundless space.

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But tho' the manner of God's existence before the world was made, and of his being in infinite space beyond its limits, now that it does subsist, surpasses our understanding, we cannot help being convinc'd that he does so exist. We have a clear enough idea of space not fill'd with matter, indeed demonstrative evidence, that not only there must be an absolute vacuity within the bounds of the corporeal system, but without it, for the greatest corporeal magnitude must be terminated; nay, we cannot remove out of our minds the idea of immensity, that is of infinite extension or space, no more than of eternal duration, tho' we are far from being able to comprehend it. Our senses convey to us the notion of distance, we easily imagine a greater distance than can be perceiv'd by them, but the imagination endeavouring to grasp its utmost extent, presently loses it self in an object too large for its capacity, and all the length it can proceed is only to this negative conclusion, that no limits can be set to space. Some have apprehended the space which is beyond the world, to be nothing real, they call it imaginary, that it is no more than

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than a meer capacity of being, and if infinity is to be attributed to it, 'tis but a potential infinity. But others think, that since there are certain limits to the material world, there must be measurable distance on its utmost surface, and its parts distinguish'd in their situation, as well as within the system, and those distances on the outside; having like others, equality and different proportions, which cannot be said of absolute nothing, that therefore space is something real, consisting of truly different, tho' inseparable parts, and that immense space is more than a bare possibility, tho' we cannot form a positive idea of it. But whatever it is, and the manner of God's existence in it, we cannot avoid attributing immensity to him. The ideas of uncaused and unlimited existence seem to be connected together, and he who comprehends all things, must be without, as well as within them, his essence circumscrib'd by no bounds. Still however, as was observ'd before, what we are sure of, and more clearly understand, is that the power and wisdom which stretch'd out the heavens and established the earth, are intimately near to them, and all their parts; which notion of the omnipresence of God, that he fills the whole

whole universe, continually preserving and governing it, as it is the most intelligible, so it is the most useful, tending to excite in our minds the most becoming affections towards the Supreme Being. This therefore I shall principally insist on in the following discourse, that as the scripture speaks, *God fills heaven and earth*, not limited in his being and operations to one region of the universe, he possesseth the whole as the sovereign disposing Cause, and supreme Ruler ; inthron'd in heaven where the highest orders of created beings dwell, and pay him their homage, he exercises his dominion in all places at once, not mediately by the delegated power of others, who in his absence rule under him, but by his own immediate presence, powerfully preserving and wisely superintending all things. This I will endeavour to prove and to explain, and then make some practical reflexions upon it.

Since we have sufficient evidence of wisdom and design in the formation and government of the world, and since this appears in every work of nature which we have any knowledge of, we have reason also to conclude the same concerning those which are least known to us. If the motions of the
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sun and moon, and all the phœnomena of the earth, not only the animal life, but even plants and inanimate things ; if they all manifest the counsel and power of the one universal Cause, who can doubt but the same active intelligence rules in distant worlds, and systems beyond ours, if there are any such, even to the utmost bounds of existence. Hence we infer the omnipresence of God in the sense we are now considering it, from the very arguments by which we prove his being. For since that active intelligence to which all things are to be attributed as their Cause, is seated in a Mind, that Mind must necessarily be every where, in heaven and earth, because it must be wherever it perceives and operates.

Again, it is to be observ'd, that the world is not a work, which the Author having put the last hand to it, and settled it in its finish'd form, can subsist by it self without any care or interposition of his, like the productions of human art, which receive no more from the artist than the mere outward form, and the mutual relation of their gross parts, which could as well have stood by themselves in another form, if his hand had never touch'd them ; the Divine operations enter deeper
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into the constitution of things, which must be upheld and directed to their various uses, by the continued influence of the same power which first gave them being. The gravitation of bodies is an example of this kind which I mention'd before, not to be accounted for by any powers originally given to matter, whereby it can, if left to it self, produce such an appearance, but it requires the constant impulse of an external agent to effect it ; and being so necessary as it is to the corporeal system, to its form and continued order, and to its answering the purposes it was made for, shews plainly the presence of an intelligent activity in all parts of it, powerfully preserving and governing them. What therefore we commonly call the laws of nature, whereby the inanimate system is ruled, is really no more than a constant series of uniform Divine operations upon matter, whereby its parts cohere in their regular forms, and answer their ends.

But the other, particular and very various productions of nature, which cannot be explain'd by any general mechanical laws, still more clearly shew the presence of God with all his works. The formation of plants and of animals, the curious texture of their parts,

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the disposing of them in the several places, which are the most convenient for their nourishment and their special uses, the preservation of their several kinds unmix'd, the propagation of them in an establish'd regular method ; these things constantly falling out, not according to any general laws impress'd on matter and motion, but by the particular direction of a plastic power, evidently prove continued design in every one of them, descending to the most minute. For it is not merely the first model of a vegetable, as a pattern for all the rest of the kind, and the formation of the first individual sensitive life of every species, that shews the skill and power of the maker ; they could never have been propagated of themselves, and every new production requires the exertion of the same power, and the direction of the same wisdom.

The human life in the whole of its constitution, and especially its nobler powers, have a constant necessary dependence on the intelligence from whence they are deriv'd. It has been already observ'd, that the ideas of sensation, which we find in our minds necessarily and independently of our own choice, on the occasion of certain objects, do not arise from

from the nature of things, nor can we account for them from any knowledge we have, either of the objects, or the powers of our own minds; they must therefore be resolv'd into the free constitution of our intelligent Maker; which seems not merely to signify his general will, establishing a connexion between objects and our sensations; but rather is to be understood as his continued operation, since the exertion of some power is necessary to produce new perceptions, and there appears no other agent; for we are conscious that our minds, in receiving these ideas, are as passive as the objects which are the occasion of them. The same judgment, I think, is to be made concerning our natural instincts, the meer being, and the first motions of which are, properly speaking, neither virtuous nor morally evil, since they are not our own works, for experience teaches us that they prevent any thought, deliberation or design of ours, and do not depend on our will: But as they are of great use to the purposes of our nature, tending, all of them, either to public or private good, I see no reason why they may not be attributed to the operation of that great intelligent Cause, in whom *we live and move*

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and have our being. And for those powers of human nature which are the most strictly and properly active, tho' we are inwardly conscious of freedom in the exercise of them, and of merit and demerit in the actions proceeding from them, yet that freedom must be infinitely different from self-original and uncaused liberty ; for our self-determining activity, being derived and dependent, known by experience to be capable of increase and diminution, and very much directed and influenc'd by things without us, not in our own power, nor within the reach of our understandings, needs the continual supporting influence of the first Cause, *who worketh in men both to will and to do.* In short, if we judge by what we see in things about us, and find in our selves, we cannot conceive that any creature is, or can be plac'd in a state of independence on its author, for its preservation, and for its exerting powers of any kind, but that he is, and must be intimately near to all his works, upholding them by his power, and conducting them by his wisdom ; thus manifesting his eternal Godhead. Having thus endeavour'd to prove the omnipresence of God, in that sense which is to us the most important and the most useful, that

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is, not the absolute immensity of his nature, of SERM.
which our notions must be very obscure and VII.
inadequate, but his being at once in all parts
of the universe, and intimately near to all his
creatures, let us in the next place

2dly, Endeavour to form the most clear and distinct conceptions of it, we can. Since we have the ideas of extension and of place, by the means of sensible objects, the primary notion of presence is that which belongs to them, and it is such as excludes all others of the same kind, I mean all solid substance, for it is the property of every particle of matter to fill a certain part of space, so as no other can possibly be in it, at the same time. But there are other beings of which we have different conceptions, namely, of their activity and intelligence, not at all including extension and solidity; yet these beings we conceive to be present, or in place, not indeed after the manner of bodies, as impenetrably filling certain parts of space, but by the exertion of their powers. We know by consciousness, the existence of our own spirits, and we know by their operations, that they are in our own bodies, so as they are not in others. The same individual percipient and active principle within us, extends the exer-

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cise of its perceptive and active faculties, to all the parts of the system which it animates, and to that it is confin'd. Our manner of perceiving objects *without* and *within* that which we call our selves, is exceedingly different; upon its own body the mind acts immediately, and only by the intervention of its members, can act upon other bodies. In our bodies therefore, our souls are peculiarly present. But it is easy to apprehend that other spirits may have a larger sphere of perception, and a wider command of matter; at the same time a higher perfection in both, that is, they may have a more compleat knowledge of the systems they inhabit, and a more absolute dominion over them: For as to us, it is certain that we do not thoroughly understand even our own constitution, and its œconomy is not put intirely in our own power (which may not be the case of other intelligent beings,) our perceptions in it, and government of it, being both of a limited nature, and given to us only for particular ends.

From this we may take our rise to a notion of the Divine omnipresence, in the sense in which I am now considering it; I mean, we may conceive of it in this manner, that
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the Deity has a comprehensive knowledge of SERM.
the whole universe and every part of it, and VII.
that he exercises an absolute uncontrouled
power over all. If any one will say this is
hard to be understood ; how can one mind
comprehend so vast a variety, or be capable
of so extensive a government? I own that
*such knowledge is too high for us, we cannot
attain to it,* but there is no inconsistency in
supposing it. Let us first try to explain, if
we can, how our minds perceive at once,
the different impressions made on distant
parts of our bodies, and move their mem-
bers by a meer determination of the will ; and
if this be too difficult for our understandings,
tho' there is no fact we know more certainly,
what pretence is there for alledging, because
the manner is incomprehensible, that the Dei-
ty, supposed and proved to be an infinitely
more perfect spirit, cannot see through, and
govern the whole world, his own workman-
ship. Perhaps to an intelligent being, con-
fin'd to a very small portion of matter, with
senses scarcely capacious enough to take
in the dimensions of a body so large as one
of ours (which is no impossible supposition,)
it might appear wonderful, almost incredi-
ble, that a mind should be able to govern so
vast

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vast and ponderous a machine, and perceive in all its parts; nor would it, on the other hand, be extravagant for us to imagine that a mind vastly more capacious than any of ours, tho' far from absolute perfection, might animate, and in a more perfect manner, a corporeal system to which this little human tabernacle is but a point in comparison; and will any one then venture to say 'tis impossible that the most perfect mind should perceive and operate through the whole solar system, nay, and whatever systems there are beyond it? when we have so clear evidences of his wisdom and power in all parts of the universe, which we have any knowledge of, the most minute, as well as the greatest. He must have very little consider'd the nature of spirits, so much as may be known of it, and the very different degrees of their perfection, which even fall under our own observation, who will call it an absurdity to suppose that the spirit, which is the fountain of being and understanding, comprehends all his own works and rules over them, tho' it is ridiculous to imagine we should know the manner of it, for that were to suppose our capacity equal to his.

I do not intend by this to represent God SERM.
as the Soul of the world, which is a very low VII.
and unworthy notion of the Deity. He had
the same immutable Being, Power and Wis-
dom before it was made, and is not now
confin'd to it, tho' the manner of his exist-
ence in immense space, is what we have no
idea of; and to suppose that his intelligence
and operations have such a dependence on ex-
ternal created objects, as ours have upon bo-
dily organs, and that he is so affected with
the motions in the universe and its changes,
as we are by the impressions made on our
bodies by external objects, and the motions
thereby caused within them; to suppose this,
I say, were an evident absurdity. I only
propose by this low and imperfect image, to
assist our weak understandings in forming an
idea of his intimate presence with, and uni-
versal care over all things in the world, pre-
serving it and wisely superintending its af-
fairs; that as in us, there is one individual
conscious self, that sees, and hears, and feels,
and determines for the whole body, so in
the universe there is one conscious intelligent
Nature, which pervades the entire system, at
once perceiving in every place, and presiding
over all, yet in an infinitely more perfect
manner,

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manner, and free from those infirmities which attend our constitution. But it is especially to be observed (and indeed the example I have made use of for illustrating this subject, helps to guard us against so gross an error) that we must not conceive of the Divine presence, after the manner of corporeal magnitude, which being essentially divisible, cannot be all in one place, but its different parts take up different spaces, and its operation, if it can be said to operate at all, can only be by the successive presence of its parts in motion; whereas the Omnipresence of the Divine Spirit, is only apprehended by the exercise of his power and understanding (which does not include the ideas of extension or successive motion) in all parts of the world; his intelligence and activity are confin'd to no place, and no where excluded. To speak of the Immensity of God as if it were a single point co-extended with infinite space, is the same absurdity as describing his eternity by an instant which co-exists with all duration. Such unintelligible subtleties, whereby the doctrines of religion are pretend'd to be explain'd, tend to confound men's understandings, and bring religion it self into contempt. What appears easily conceiv-

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ble on this subject, because our own consciousness furnishes us with some resemblance of it in our selves, is that the same simple being may exert its perceptive and active faculties, at the same time, in different parts of space ; and if this can admit of no difficulty, because we have an example of it in our own minds, which perceive and operate in all parts of the body, then to compleat the idea of Omnipresence, we need only enlarge our notion of that space which is the sphere of active intelligence, to the whole extent of the universe ; and I think we cannot avoid apprehending that God is, wherever he exercises his power and understanding, tho' the manner of his presence is to us, incomprehensible.

One false imagination ought carefully to be avoided, which may be apt to arise in our minds, from our method of forming the notion of the Divine Omnipresence, namely, that the multiplicity of objects which engage the attention of the Supreme Understanding, may embarrass it. Supposing God to be every where, intimately near to all beings in the universe, as our souls are to our bodies ; and since all things in the world are not equally considerable and worthy of care, it may seem

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more respectful to the greatest of beings, and a conception more suitable to his dignity, to imagine that his immediate inspection is employ'd about matters of the highest importance, leaving easier affairs to inferior agents; as the most eminent persons on earth who fill exalted stations, do not descend to minute things which would be thought beneath them, attending only business of greater moment. This mistake is occasion'd by our being accusom'd so much to think of the narrow human capacity, which not being able to take in a great variety of objects at once, finds it self oblig'd to make a choice of the more important and necessary for its attention, and it is certainly wisdom to do so: But it is a wisdom which at the same time implies weakness. No one can doubt of its being a higher perfection to comprehend a great multitude of things, so as to bestow the necessary care upon them, without neglecting any, and it is the highest perfection of all, appropriated to the self-existent unlimited Being, the first Cause, to comprehend the whole universe at once, disposing wisely of every, even the least thing in it, which being sufficiently evinc'd by strong arguments, it would be very unreasonable in us to doubt

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of it, merely because it so vastly transcends SERM. our capacity. The several kinds of finite intelligent beings in the world have their limited spheres of perception and activity ; there is a determin'd extent to which they can reach and no farther, a certain number of objects fall under their observation, and their perceptions of those objects and their operations upon them, are of very different kinds. The lower sort of understandings can have no notion of the manner of perception, and the powers which belong to superior intelligent beings, no more than an animal wanting any of the external senses, can have of the ideas which are convey'd by that sense. Surely then it should not seem strange to us that these various degrees of limited intelligent perfection, deriv'd from the All-perfect Mind, fall infinitely short of its own capacity, which at once comprehends all its own works, and governs them without perplexity or confusion.

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It would be extremely weak to imagine that the difference we make by our senses, either external or internal, between places as pure and impure, should at all affect the Supreme Being. For what we call uncleanness, not moral but natural, is only relative,
depending

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depending wholly on the frame of our bodily organs; which determine sensible qualities, that is, the images or representations made on our minds from the exterior surface of corporeal objects. An intelligent being therefore, with organs otherwise made, or without any material organs at all, would not receive the same impressions from the bodies called impure, which we do, nor be affected with their nearness as we are. Especially that pure Spirit, who perceives not as man does, the external appearances of things only, but their inmost essences, cannot receive offence or suffer uneasiness, like what we feel, from that which is called defilement, which is a merely sensible idea. And as to *moral turpitude*, tho' we are made with an abhorrence of it, producing strong emotions and painful sensations in our minds, shame, sorrow and resentment, which is a wise part of the human constitution, being a design'd preservative against the greatest evil and unhappiness; yet we ought not to imagine that the Deity is affected with it in the same manner as we are. He sees moral evil, and is present where it is committed, without any participation in it, and disapproves without being made uneasy by it; he preserves his
creatures;

creatures, moral agents as well as others, and exercifes that care over them which their dependent natures feverally require, fupporting their active powers, which is neceffary to their exertion, even when they are acting irregularly, yet without any concurrence in the irregularity, or any perturbation arifing from it, which tho' it be a manner of prefence and of acting, that we are not capable of, by the limited condition of our nature, and the fpecial laws of our conftitution, yet is it not difficult to conceive concerning the Supreme Being, if we confider his abfolute perfection and bleffednefs, far above the poffibility of being mifled into any error, or touch'd with any painful paffion. Having thus endeavour'd to prove and to explain the doctrine of God's Omniprefence, I come now in the

3^d place, to draw fome ufeful inferences from it. It is not to be confider'd as a point of mere fpeculation, but may be applied to very important practical purpofes, and ought to have a great influence on the temper of our minds, and our whole behaviour. The *Pfalmift* defcribes it very affectionately in the text, and purfues his devout meditation on the fame fubject, through the whole *Pfalm*, confidering

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ing it especially as a motive to sincerity, and a strict attention to every part of his conduct, not merely that which is open to the view of the world, but chiefly his most secret actions, and the dispositions and purposes of his heart. How strongly must this consideration affect an attentive mind; “ Had I the
“ command of universal nature, so that I
“ could transport my self whither I pleas’d
“ for a safe retreat, there is no possibility of
“ avoiding the presence of God. If I mount
“ up to the utmost extremities of this mate-
“ rial world, even to the surface that parts
“ it from the immense void, I should find
“ my self there within the verge of his sove-
“ reign dominion. If I descend to the dark-
“ nefs which is hid from all living, there I
“ should be naked before him, there is no
“ obscurity impenetrable to his All-searching
“ eye, the wings of the morning are not
“ swift enough to carry me from his pur-
“ suing hand, and the shadows of night are
“ as open to his view as the brightest sun-
“ shine. But where the Deity is, there is the
“ Power and the Understanding which made
“ the heavens and the earth, and form’d the
“ spirit of man within him”. This cer-
tainly ought, and when it is seriously believ-

ed and deliberately attended to, it will strike SERM.
 our minds with the most profound reverence, VII.
 which is not a weak and foolish dread of we
 don't know what, but a dutiful affection, ve-
 ry natural to the human mind, arising from
 a full and rational persuasion of a real awful
 presence.

Before men of superior power, and repu-
 tation for wisdom; we are struck with awe,
 and solicitous to behave in such a manner as
 to obtain their approbation; but these are
 only faint images of greatness, that glorious
 Being who is the original Fountain of all
 power and wisdom, is infinitely more to be
 feared, and it must be of infinitely greater
 importance to approve our selves to him, re-
 quiring at the same time much greater vigi-
 lance and application of mind, because his
 presence reaches to our inmost essence, and
 he knows our secret thoughts. The Scrip-
 ture therefore very instructively describes the
 whole of religion by that comprehensive ex-
 pression, *walking before God*, which signifies
 a constant serious sense of the Divine Pre-
 sence upon our minds, producing a circum-
 spect care to please him in all things. It is
 not merely an outward decorum in our con-

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duct; that the presence of the invisible God teaches us, nor only a watchful care of our behaviour in the solemnities of devotion, the influence of this great article of religion extends to our most hidden retirements, and it requires very strict attention to the springs and motions of deliberate action in all the affairs of human life, as being all equally *naked and opened unto the eyes of him, with whom we have to do*, as our Ruler and our Judge.

And if there is no darkness or shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves, if their *secret sins are set in the light of God's countenance*, how confounding must this consideration be to the sinners, whose consciences witness against them that they have wilfully and habitually indulg'd themselves in wickedness; and if they are thoroughly convinc'd that their transgressions have been committed in the sight of that God, *who is of purer eyes than that he can behold iniquity* with approbation, what stronger motive can there be to their betaking themselves to his mercy by a speedy repentance? On the other hand, it yields mighty consolation to sincerely good men, that a desire of approving themselves to God rules in their hearts,

hearts, and by it they have form'd their conduct; the rash censures and erroneous judgments of fallible men concerning their actions, do not greatly disturb their minds, since they are conscious to themselves, of having endeavour'd by an uniform integrity of heart and life, to obtain the approbation of an unerring Judge.

2dly, This is a sure foundation of hope and confidence to good men in all the vicissitudes of time, and in all the dangers and distresses which befall them, for the presence of God is a presence of Power, against which no force can prevail, and of Wisdom which no device can over-reach. The most formidable appearances are frequently controul'd, and the most threatening tendencies over-rul'd by Divine Providence to happy issues, for the defenceless who trust in God, and *cast their burdens on him.* * *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.* It is

* Psal. xli. 1, 2, 3.

SERM. true, the care of Providence is to us invisible;
 VII. and we cannot possibly penetrate into the
 methods of its interposition, nor into its designs; yet it must be a perpetual source of comfort to good minds, that *the eyes of God run to and fro throughout the earth, to shew himself strong in behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him* *. He does not indeed give them a perfect security against troubles, to which the condition of man is always liable in this life, and we have none of us reason to expect an exemption from them; but it ought to give us perfect contentment, and we should acquiesce in it with pleasure, that God is ever near to us, that his wisdom governs the world, and directs the whole series of events in it.

3dly, If God is every where present, he is every where to be worshipped, his Perfections not confin'd to any place, are to be acknowledg'd and ador'd by his reasonable creatures in all places. To imagine that the Deity dwells in *Temples made with hands*, as if his presence were appropriated to them, is a very unworthy notion. Indeed as public

* 2 Chron. xvi. 9.

worship is reasonable, that is, that men professing to believe in God should joyn together in calling upon his name ; it follows, that proper places should be provided for it ; but that is only for the conveniency of the worshippers, not as if God were more accessible, or better dispos'd to hear prayers and accept services, in one place than another. There may be, 'tis true, peculiar manifestations of the Divine power and glory in some parts of the creation and not in others ; the heavens are therefore called the throne of God, and his habitation, because there the splendor of his Majesty and his high Perfections shine most illustriously, in the view of those creatures which are the best qualified to discern it ; but his Essence, infinitely perfect in wisdom and power, is equally present in all places. In like manner, during the *Jewish* policy, some places were held more sacred than others, as the tabernacle which *Moses* made in the wilderness, and *Solomon's* temple, because God was pleas'd, for special reasons, to appropriate to them the external service, he then appointed to the *Israelites*, and to distinguish them by visible extraordinary tokens, called his *Presence* ; but these special reasons

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have long ago ceased, and now, according to the more pure and spiritual form of religion which our Saviour has instituted, wherever men *worship in spirit and truth*, wherever they call on God out of a pure heart, *fearing him and working righteousness*, they are accepted. Nay, excepting the reason already mention'd, the conveniency of numerous assemblies, which only relates to *public* worship ; excepting this, I say, to make a choice of places for devotion, as imagining greater sanctity in some than others, is at best but silly superstition, if it is not rather to be imputed, as in some cases certainly it is, to a vain hypocritical pretence of zeal, which the God of truth never approves. Our Saviour therefore enjoyns his disciples, that they may have the clearer and more satisfying evidences of sincerity in their own minds, to choose the greatest secrecy for their private worship, to *retire into their closets, and pray to their heavenly Father, who sees in secret*, and is pleas'd with that undissembled piety which honours him as an Omnipresent God.

Lastly, This doctrine shews the absurdity of worshipping idols. Gods that are acknowledged

knowledged not to be *every* where, are not SERM. worthy of religious respect *any* where. In reality, and *by nature they are no gods* * as *St. Paul* VII. says very justly concerning them, they are *lying vanities*, so the Scripture often calls them, their divinity, the mere fiction of the human imagination; but by the confession of their worshippers, they have only a limited presence, power and understanding, gods only of particular countries, or perhaps only of particular places in them, *gods of the hills and not of the vallies*; and how they came by their several situations, and had their distinct provinces assign'd them, their votaries cannot pretend to tell, which one would think, should be an insuperable difficulty attending the very foundations of their superstition. Who can give a reason for *Chemesh* his being the god of the *Moabites*, and why *Milcom* should exercise his godship over the children of *Ammon*; and if the titles of the topical Deities cannot be made out, the honours paid to them may be misplac'd, and men be serving the wrong god. But it is needless to insist on particular arguments, against a de-

* Gal. iv. 8.

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votion which, in the whole of it, is so apparently irrational. That supreme eternal Being who has manifested, and does still manifest his power and intelligence, and thereby his essential presence every where, is alone worthy to receive the praises, the religious homage and adoration, of all intelligent creatures in heaven and earth, and is *ever nigh to all that call upon him in truth.*

S E R M O N VIII.

God's Almighty Power, by what Acts manifested, and in what Sense to be understood.

Gen. xvii. 11.

The Lord appeared unto Abraham and said unto him, I am God Almighty.

AS the idea of power is one of the most SERM. VIII. familiar to our minds, it arises from a multitude of occasions, from an attention to our own activity, and the many changes we see in material objects, which lead us to the consideration of a cause or causes, that is, power producing them; so Omnipotence is one of the first perfections which reason has taught men to ascribe to the Supreme Being. We cannot avoid observing a great diversity of operations and effects, and consequently

quently a great difference in the degrees of power; but the highest measure of this perfection must belong to the first universal Cause, whose characters have in the preceding discourses, been prov'd, and indeed by all who believe his existence, are acknowledg'd to be intelligence and activity. If there is one immense, necessarily existing and eternal Spirit, the designing original Author of all appearances and of all powers, distinct from his own, in the universe, his power must be the greatest of all, nay, the greatest and most absolute that can be, for it must be sufficient for its own productions, superior to all which are derived from it, and to suppose the possibility of a greater, is to suppose that a superior power may proceed from an inferior and insufficient cause, or from nothing. Accordingly, all of mankind who acknowledg'd the one supreme eternal Deity, have constantly agreed in attributing to him the character which the *God of Abraham* claims for himself, that he is *Almighty*; however they might differ in their notions concerning his other perfections, here they are unanimous. The idea of power always accompanies that of Divinity; the prophet *Isaiab* therefore, having asserted the suprema-

cy of the God of *Israel*, which is prov'd by SERM. VIII.
 his wonderful works, reproaches the heathen
 idols with weakness, he calls upon them to
 shew their Godhead by the operations of their
 power, either *in doing good or evil* *, for an
 impotent God is an absurdity, in the opinion
 of every man; but if there be one independ-
 ent God from everlasting, on whom all
 things depend, there appears no colorable pre-
 tence for denying that he is All-powerful.
 And as this is among the first principles u-
 niversally receiv'd in speculation; so it has a
 most direct and immediate influence to the
 purposes of religion; for tho' all the Divine
 perfections concur in exciting religious dispo-
 sitions, and taken together, they form that
 amiable character, which is the object of
 our devout affections; yet the consideration
 of Almighty power, in a particular manner
 strikes the mind with awe, and produces
 that fear which is a great security of our o-
 bedience. I shall therefore in this discourse
 endeavour to explain the attribute of Omni-
 potence, which by the clearest evidence of
 reason, we are convinc'd, belongs to God.
 And I will, *First*, shew wherein it consists,

* *Isaiah xli. 23.*

and by what works it is manifested. *Secondly*, In what sense and with what limitations it is to be understood.

First, Let us consider *wherein the Omnipotence of God consists, and by what works it is manifested.* The Principle it self, the Almighty Power of the Deity, by which can be meant nothing else but his infinitely active Nature, is too high for us to understand; all the idea we can have of it is by its operations, which is inadequate, but it represents the object to our minds as being very great, since the effects by which we form it, even those of them which fall within our own particular knowledge, are so many and so wonderful. All things that are in the universe, the first Cause himself only excepted, are his works, and all power is derived from him. Now, if the effects vastly transcend the capacity of the human mind, how can it by searching find out the Cause; if we cannot reach to the utmost limits of created nature, nor comprehend the productions of Divine Power, how shall we comprehend the Power it self, which must be suppos'd to be far superior to them? What pretence can there be for denying or doubting that he can do whatever pleaseth him,

him, who made the heavens and all the hosts of them, the earth and all things that are therein, the sea and all that therein is, and who preserveth them all? * But we need not puzzle our thoughts by endeavouring to imagine the utmost extent of possibility, when we begin to form an idea of Divine Power, let us consider it as manifested in actual existence, for that will furnish us with instances to which we shall find our understandings unequal.

The giving being to things that were not, is an exercise of Power which surpasses our comprehension, because it is unparallel'd in other causes, and far beyond any activity that we are conscious of in our selves, or can by means of our senses discern in others, which requires pre-existent materials to work upon. A power to change the exterior and visible forms of matter is what we can easily comprehend, for *that* we find our selves able to do in many instances; and the more difficult operations of nature in changing the inward frame of things, whereby the same substance passes into a variety of very different appearances; for example, that which

* Nehemiah ix. 6.

is now earth and water, having undergone several preparatory alterations, becomes corn and other vegetables, afterwards it is converted into animal juices, from whence some of it perspires in small particles and mixes with the air, the rest adheres to the solid parts of the animal body or is discharged in various forms: These, I say, and such like operations, however it may exceed our skill to imitate, or even to comprehend them fully; yet are familiar to us, being daily exemplified before our eyes in natural generation and corruption. But to bring something out of nothing, or cause that to exist which had no existence before in any form, requires a Power so much superior to ours, and is so unlike any agency which falls within our observation and experience, that no materials of our knowledge can furnish us with any notion of it; and this is an operation which we ascribe to Almighty God.

Some indeed have presum'd to assert, that creation in this sense, is in it self absolutely impossible; so that it pass'd into an axiom with the ancient *Atheists*, which they relied on as the chief support of their cause, that nothing can come from nothing; nay, some *Theists* themselves are said to have acknowledged

ledg'd it, so far as to assert the eternity of SERM.
matter, which however they believ'd, was VIII.
still subject to the Power of the co-eternal
Deity, to modify and dispose of it at his
pleasure. But tho' I grant that this philoso-
phic opinion does not utterly destroy the first
and main principle of religion, and a man,
not altogether inconsistently with his believ-
ing the being of God, may entertain the no-
tion last mentioned, that is, concerning the
eternity of matter; yet I must observe, that
these philosophers seem not to have duely
considered the true notion of absolute eterni-
ty, which includes self-existence, necessary
existence and independence; characters which
can never reasonably be attributed to merely
passive unintelligent things, and therefore, as
has been already shewn, they cannot be abso-
lutely eternal, but their very being as well
as their forms and appearances, must be pro-
duc'd by the Divine Power: But indeed if
we attend to the proposition it self abstract-
ly, *that Nothing can come from Nothing*, we
shall see no rational foundation, upon which
it could be received as a certain truth in this
sense, that nothing can possibly be created, or
no real entity begin to be. What appear-
ance is there of a contradiction in supposing
that

that matter, a kind of being so imperfectly intirely passive and liable to so many mutations, should begin to exist, or that it should cease to be, by the efficiency of a powerful agent? Is there any absurdity in conceiving that there might have been more or less of it than there actually is; nay, is not that a supposition which our minds come easily into? And if so, there can appear no absurdity in placing it within the compass of creating power; one can scarcely imagine what should have led men into such a way of thinking, as that creation, in the strictest sense, is impossible, unless it be that they are sensible it is above their own power, and above the ordinary operations of nature which we discern: But shall we measure all power by our own scantling, and conclude there is none greater than what we possess, at least, than we can comprehend, when there are numberless appearances daily in the world, the productions of an invisible Power, which we neither have ability to effect, nor can understand the reasons of them.

Yet methinks, if we attend to the operations of our own minds, the formation of new being, needs not appear so strange to us, as to give any occasion for imagining it to
be

be impossible ; for tho' our minds are unequal to the production of new substances, yet their works are so far above the operations of matter, which are the objects of our senses, that creation is not more unlike the highest efforts of the human capacity. The rising up of new ideas and sentiments in the mind, and new dispositions, its giving by its own activity a new determination to the exercise of its own faculties, and raising an entirely new motion in some bodies ; I say, creation is not more unlike these, than they are to mechanism, which shews us that operations of one sort can give us no idea of another ; but we have no reason on that account, to deny the possibility of them. Supposing an intelligent being to have no idea of self-determining power (which is no impossible supposition, for there does not appear to us any such connexion between the ideas of perception and self-determining action, but that they may be separated ;) supposing this, I say, spontaneous action would seem as strange to such a being, as making something out of nothing does to us, and there would in that case, be the same reason for denying the possibility of the *former*, that any man has for denying the *other* ; indeed

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there is no more reason in either case, than a blind man has to deny that there is, or can be, any such thing as light or colours.

But why should any man imagine that the power of bringing things into being from pure non-existence, is absurd, who reflecting on himself, is naturally led to conclude, that he began to be, and therefore is an instance of a new substantial production, by creating Power. Every man knows that his own personality, that is, his consciousness had a commencement, and is of no very long duration (for the arbitrary supposition of the pre-existence of souls even from eternity, we may pass by, as a conceit not worthy of our notice, being supported by no kind of evidence; nor is the creature here spoken of a new spiritual substance abstractly, but a new person;) and since this thinking conscious Self, a substantial Being, of whose existence we have the greatest certainty, began to be, not of it self, but produc'd by a Cause, it may be to us a satisfying proof of creating Power; for what greater difficulty can there be in conceiving that *God made heaven and earth*, than in conceiving that *he formed the self-conscious spirit of man within him*. Is matter any
more

more real than the principle of thought and volition, and could not the Power which gave existence to the *one*, also produce the *other*. To say that the spirit is no more than a certain modification or quality of matter, arising from the figure, composition and motion of its more subtle parts, is a pretence which I have elsewhere disprov'd, and shall not now consider it. But without entering into any inquiry concerning the nature of substances, material or immaterial, and the power they may possibly be endued with; of which we have very little knowledge; any man who calmly attends to the beginning of his own personal existence, that is, of his conscious thinking, must see in it an exertion of power of which he can form no distinct idea, and which he cannot but be convinc'd is to him as inexplicable as the creation of the material world.

But tho' creation in the strictest sense, or making things out of pure nothing, is far from being absurd, indeed there lies no just objection against it, for its being incomprehensible to us is no argument at all, since it does not appear to our minds impossible, or to imply a contradiction; on the contrary, we have great reason to believe that both our



own spirits, and the matter of the universe, were originally the productions of infinite Power, out of absolute non-existence: Yet creation, in this strictest sense, is not the principal and most obvious manifestation, whereby we understand the invisible things of God, his eternal Power and Godhead; but that which may be also, and usually is styl-
 cd creation, and which by the clearest evidence of reason we know to be the work of the Deity, namely, the disposing all things in the world into the regular forms which we see, and framing them into vast and beautiful systems, which comprehending an infinite variety of parts, all plac'd in the most exact order, and all conspiring to make one harmonious whole, shew not only the perfect intelligence, but the activity of the great Author, and that he has an unlimited command over universal nature. When we consider that he *telleth the number of the stars and calleth them all by their names, he covereth the heaven with clouds, and prepareth rain for the earth, he giveth snow like wool, and scattereth the hoar-frost like ashes^a: He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hang-*

^a Psal. cxlvii.

eth the earth upon nothing ; he bindeth up the waters in his thick cloud, and the cloud is not rent under them^a. He hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out the heaven with a span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance^b ; when, I say, we consider all this, we must conclude that great is our Lord and of great power, these are only a part of his ways, how little a portion is heard of him, but the thunder of his power who can understand^c ?

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For it is to be observ'd, that the power of a voluntary agent must still be supposed superior to all its effects, all his strength is not exhausted in his works, but the virtue which produc'd them is sufficient to produce more : So that tho' we knew all the works of God, which we do not, we should not thereby be able to make a judgment concerning the utmost extent of his power, which remains one undecaying principle of operation, sufficient for new productions beyond what we can imagine. But the effects of Divine Omnipotence which actually exist, far surpass

^a Job xxvi.

^b Isaiah xl.

^c Job xxvi. 14.



our comprehension. It is one advantage not unworthy of our notice here, which we have by the modern improvements of natural philosophy, that thereby our idea of the works of God is greatly enlarged. Formerly men were used to think that this earth is the only habitation of living creatures, except that the angels, pure spirits, who require no such place of abode, stand in the immediate presence of God, and surround his throne in the heavens. But later and more accurate observation has given men reason to believe that other bodies of a vast magnitude, within the solar system, and of a constitution not unlike that of our globe, are also inhabited. Why should it enter into our minds to imagine that such stupendous orbs are made for nothing, but to be very imperfectly discern'd by mankind? Is it not much more rational to think, that since they are fitted for beings of a constitution like ours, they are possess'd by such, and that by their constant rotations round their own axis, and by their periodical revolutions about the sun as their center, they are illuminated and warm'd by it in the same manner as the earth is? Nor is it unlikely that the fixed stars, shining by their own unborrowed light, at so prodigious a distance

a distance from us that no judgment can be made of it, are the centers of other systems, each of them perhaps as large as this, and how many there may be of them, and how remote from each other as well as from us, no one of mankind can pretend, with the least degree of probability to conjecture. These speculations, which in the main seem to be just, being founded on observation of the magnitude and distance of the heavenly bodies, and their visible variations, tend to give us a very magnificent idea of the works and the power of God. How wonderful are they? How great is *He, worthy to receive glory and honour, who has created all these things for his good pleasure, who has rais'd worlds above worlds, far beyond the reach of human knowledge, all of them stock'd with proper inhabitants, qualified to understand and admire his perfections display'd in them, and to shew forth his praise.*

But the *everlasting God*, the creator of the heavens and the earth, *fainteth not nor is weary, his hand is not shortned, nor has his strength suffer'd any abatement by all he has done.* It is impossible for us to imagine what works of the same, or of different kinds, he is able to produce. One thing we are sure

of, and it gives us a very awful idea of his Omnipotence, that he can destroy his own works; for the power which has made, is sufficient to unmake, and the beings which owe their existence originally to him, and continually depend upon him, must cease to be at his pleasure. He can unhinge the whole frame of nature, and dissolve the great systems which his Power has rais'd. It is not so easy for human force to demolish the fabric, which with great labour it has erected, as for Omnipotence to reduce the heavens and the earth to their original chaos; for they can none of them make the least resistance to his will. Thus the Scripture elegantly describes the sovereign dominion of Almighty God over the world, and his power to remove those parts of it which seem to be built on the most stable foundation; *he removeth the mountains and they know it not, he overturneth them in his anger, he shaketh the earth out of her place and the pillars thereof tremble; he commandeth the sun and it riseth not, and sealeth up the stars^a. The pillars of heaven tremble and are astonished at his reproof, he divideth the sea with his power, and by his*

^a Job ix.

understanding he smiteth through the proud ^a. SERM.

He rebuketh the sea and maketh it dry, and VIII.

drieth up the rivers. The mountains quake

at him and the hills melt, and the earth is

burnt at his presence ^b. So that if the whole

world is not involv'd in confusion, and the

frame of nature does not suffer an universal

dissolution, it does not proceed from any

defect of power in God, but from the per-

fection of his wisdom and goodness, which

leads me to observe,

2dly, The manifestation of the power of

God in preserving his creatures, as he origi-

ginally gave them being, and in governing

them. The whole universe subsists by the

word of his power, and all the parts of it,

with their various motions and changes, are

so directed by his mighty providence, as to

answer the ends for which they were made.

I observed before ^c, that some of the greatest

and most common appearances of nature are

not to be accounted for otherwise than by the

interposition of the Divine power. And tho'

this is often the less attended to because of the

apparent uniformity in the course of things,

which perhaps unthoughtful men consider as

^a Job xxvi. ^b Nahum i. 4, 5. ^c Discourse 7th.

if they follow'd by a kind of natural necessity, rather than intelligent direction; yet a serious reflexion would satisfy us that the *hand of the Lord does all these things*, that it is Divine Providence which upholds the order of the world, and rules the course of nature, *which makes the day spring know its place, and stretches out the shadows of the evening, that commands the sun to shine by day and the moon by night, that prepares a place for the rain, and a way for the lightning of thunder, that maketh the herbs to grow upon the earth,* and brings the fruits to perfection, that fixes the limits of the sea and the dry land; I say, the Providence of God does all this as truly; and by as real an efficiency, as if there were no order and dependence of things, no general laws by which they are govern'd, but the appearances of every moment were so many separate, independent effects, requiring, each a several cause, or at least, a several unconnected exertion of power to produce them. The wisdom of God is conspicuous in the simplicity of his providential administration; at least, our finite understandings are enabled to discern and to admire his counsel in the regularity of his works, by what we call simplicity, as being more easy to our understandings,

ings, tho' no more easy to his infinite power and wisdom. When we see a train of events following each other in orderly succession, and a multitude of effects depend on one cause, it gives us a delightful idea of wise and steady counsel in the government of the world, and we are thereby directed to form our schemes and take the measures of our conduct in life: But it would be extremely stupid so to engage our attention to the settled course of events, as to overlook the invisible power which governs them, not to *behold the majesty of the Lord, nor regard the operations of his hands.*

Yet God does not confine himself to what are commonly called the laws of nature, really no more than the ordinary series of his own operations, for inanimate things, which we are here considering, do not properly obey laws, they are ruled only by an immediate influence of power, which they cannot resist; but, I say, God is not confin'd to these laws, sometimes he acts against the common course of nature, whereby he manifests his power, not as if it were really greater in these instances, or the operation more difficult to him; but to awaken the attention of men by an extraordinary interposition, and excite them to their duty. Of this sort
of

of works were the great flood, whereby *the old world of the ungodly was overthrow'n*, the consuming of *Sodom and Gomorrah* by fire from heaven, the dividing of the red sea, so that the *Israelites* were preserv'd and the *Egyptians* drown'd, the terrible convulsions of nature at the giving of the law in the wilderness, the preternatural events which accompanied the death and resurrection of our Saviour, and many miraculous works done by him and his apostles, of which we have clear historical evidence. 'Tis true, we cannot be absolutely certain from the nature of the things themselves, that all these, and such like events, are the peculiar works of Omnipotence; how far the capacity of inferior unseen agents may reach, and what power they may have, by Divine Permission, over what is commonly called the course of nature, we know not; but this we are sure of, that there is one eternal King whose *throne is prepared in heaven and his kingdom is over all*, the Fountain of all power and authority; and if his ministring spirits are able to effect such prodigies as are astonishing to us, this heightens, instead of lessening our idea of his Majesty, since the highest of *them* are under his command, and absolutely sub-

ject

ject to his disposal, holding their powers, and SERM.
the very foundation of them, their being, by VIII.
no other tenure than his free gift.

3dly, The Perfection of God's supreme power is display'd in the manner of his operation, which is, not like that of finite active beings, gradual and successive, painful and laborious, but his work is as easy to him, as it is irresistible by any opposite strength; and if there be a repetition of Divine acts, or a continuance in working, that does not arise from any difficulty he finds in the execution of his purposes, which is the case with inferior agents, and the cause of their leisurely proceeding. But the greatest of all the works of God, I mean the most incomprehensible to us, perhaps to any finite mind, is, and must be perform'd in an instant, that is creating things out of nothing, or giving them the beginning of their existence; for the transition from nothing to being admits of no succession. We have however, some faint imperfect image of the Divine operations in the activity of our minds; for tho' we are slow and weak in understanding, and the defect of our knowledge must be supplied, so far as we are able to supply it, by consideration, that we may form our purposes as wisely

as we can, yet when they are form'd, the execution is neither tedious nor difficult, within the narrow sphere to which we are confin'd. We are not conscious of any thing but the mere determination of the will, than which nothing can be conceiv'd quicker in producing its immediate effect, that moves the organs of the body, which alone are properly, tho' not absolutely subject to the mind; more distant works necessarily require longer time, from the nature of material instruments, and the imperfect power we have over them. But if we suppose a spirit intimately present in all parts of the universe, having a more perfect knowledge of, and absolute dominion over every thing in nature, than we have over the nearest and most immediate organs of sensation and motion; this gives us a faint notion of the Divine power, and the manner of its exercise; it operates with the most perfect ease and without any resistance, the counsels of God are fulfilled only by his determining them to be done; *by the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the hosts of them by the breath of his mouth* *, and when he sendeth forth his

* Psa. xxxiii. 6.

commandment upon earth, his word runneth SERM.
very swiftly, giving snow, hoar-frost and ice : VIII.
Again, he senas his powerful word and melteth
them, and causeth the waters to flow *. From
this imperfect account it appears, that we can-
not think too highly of the power of God,
which is absolute, and properly called *Almigh-*
ty, since to it the whole world and all things
therein owe their being and perfection ; for
no reason can be assign'd why any thing
within the bounds of possibility, should not be
if God pleases, seeing it requires no more
power to produce it, than has been actually
manifested in the production of that which
does exist. I come in the

2d place, to consider in what sense, and
with what limitations, the doctrine of Divine
Omnipotence is to be understood. And the
first and most obvious limitation has been just
now insinuated, namely, that when it is said
the power of God is infinite, the meaning is
not that it reaches beyond possibility, or ex-
tends to the doing of what is in it self im-
possible, that is, implies a contradiction. The
measure of possibility to us is inconceiva-
bleness ; that of which we can have no idea,

* Psal. cxlvii.

but that reflecting on it, appears to be nothing, we pronounce impossible, and not to be effected by any power. I do not intend by this that we should call things impossible, or pretend to judge that the Power of God cannot produce them, merely because we cannot comprehend, or have any idea at all of the manner of operation, but where there is an apparent inconsistency in the idea of the effect, so that one part of it necessarily destroys another, for that is really the idea of nothing, which is not the object of power. To say that by the Power of God, a thing may be and not be at the same time, that a whole may be no greater than one of its parts, that number or magnitude may be at once equal and unequal, that bodies, contrary to their nature, may be without solidity, and be in different places at the same time; to say that these and such like absurdities may be effected by the Power of God, is only to set his power in a ridiculous light, and to destroy all the foundations of our knowledge. And it is absurd to imagine, that the Being of God himself, and his attributes, essentially unchangeable, are subject to any power whatsoever. And therefore,

2dly, We ought not to ascribe to the Power of God any thing which is unworthy of his other perfections, any thing which is inconsistent with the wisdom, or the moral rectitude and goodness of his nature ; for that is absurdly to set the attributes of the Deity at variance with each other, and to dishonour his true character, under the pretence of magnifying his power. Men may foolishly imagine, that what they call arbitrary power, is a most exalted and glorious condition ; judging not by any real perfection in the thing it self, but only by the distinction and superiority which it gives them above others. If by arbitrary power be meant that which is independent and liable to no controul from without, in that sense it does belong to Almighty God ; but if it signifies a power of acting according to mere will and pleasure, without any regard to right and reason ; this is so far from being in it self an excellency, however it may be desir'd by weak ambitious mortals, that nothing can appear more deform'd, and odious to the unbiass'd human mind. Can any man calmly considering, and not under the influence of passion, think brutal force amiable, that is, force separated from reason, equity and goodness ; rather does it not fill

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the mind with horror? If we compare human governments, of these directly opposite characters, the one limited by law and justice, where the rights of subjects are secured on the same equitable foundation with the prerogative of the prince, and equally safe from violent invasion; the other wholly despotic, where the lives, liberties and estates of men, are absolutely subject to the caprice of a passionate mortal, accustomed to tyrannical cruelty, and flatter'd into an opinion that it is the highest glory, which the human nature is capable of being rais'd to; upon such a comparison, it will be easy to determine whether arbitrary power, in the sense already explain'd, be a real perfection in the esteem of intelligent beings. Far be it from us to entertain any such notions of the Divine dominion, which, tho' it be absolutely uncontrollable, that is, it cannot be resisted by any opposite strength, for *who can stay God's hand, or say unto him, what dost thou?* Yet is always exercis'd with perfect wisdom and moral rectitude. It is therefore alike impossible to alter the nature of things which he has made, that is, make them to be what at the same time he has made them not to be, (that were to destroy the power by which they

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and in what Sense to be understood.

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they are produc'd and do subsist) and for him to act against that invariable reason which must always appear to his perfect understanding, and against his moral perfections which are, equally with power, inseparable from his essence. And for this reason the Scripture justly asserts moral evil to be impossible for God, or any thing which supposes him to have done amiss; as when it says that it is impossible for him to lie, and to repent; which impossibility, tho' in some respects different from what is meant by a contradiction in the nature of things, yet stands upon as sure a foundation; for the attributes of God which are called moral, do as really and immutably belong to his nature, as his natural perfections, and are as necessary a part of his character. Thus *Elibu* excellently speaks concerning the government of Providence*, *Far be it from God that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity. For the work of a man shall he render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways. Yea, surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment.* And this, instead of

* Job xxxiv. 10, 11, 12.

shewing any defect of power, arises from the plenitude of it, for, as *Elibu* adds in the 13th verse, *Who hath given him a charge over the earth? or who hath disposed the whole world?* Men are therefore tyrannical, because they are impotent; a secret consciousness of dependent, precarious power, and a misgiving fear of harm from others, whom their passions represent as formidable enemies, put them upon exerting their utmost ability, in executing their wrath without delay; but he who is secure in his unchangeable All-sufficiency, absolutely independent, and therefore incapable of fear from any adverse power, or of any other passion which terminates in self-defence, can never be tempted to act otherwise than according to the most perfect wisdom, rectitude and goodness.

To form in us a right temper towards God, and that affectionate practical regard to him, which is our principal duty, we should carefully endeavour to have just notions concerning his government (I mean that which is most strictly and properly so called) over rational and moral agents: The sole foundation of it cannot be the natural attribute of Power, for that alone can never produce such obedience, as the voice of our own reason will
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pronounce truly good, and acceptable to the Deity. So the human mind is constituted, as necessarily to discern the difference between moral good and evil, and be directed to form its conduct by a regard to that difference, otherwise it cannot enjoy inward tranquillity with self-approbation. If this be the invariable law of our nature, the declared will of any being, how powerful soever, cannot be the rule of our actions, inconsistently with our original moral sentiments, nor indeed any farther than as it appears agreeable to them. The true foundation therefore of God's moral government is, not his absolute power to dispose of the creatures as he pleases, but the unchangeable rectitude and goodness of his nature, manifested in that moral human constitution, of which he is the Author; tho' the consideration of his natural dominion powerfully enforces our obedience, as containing motives that rationally work upon our hopes and fears, which are not indeed the original springs of morality, but of great use, especially in this imperfect state of trial, to support the mind against temptations, and answer objections taken from the seeming opposition of virtue to our interest.

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Again, we naturally consider all just government over intelligent agents as intended for their good; so that 'tis scarcely possible, any power or authority over men, should appear to the human mind amiable, which does not pursue this end: The same is the great ruling principle of action in every good member of society as such, and he studies according to his station and capacity, to promote the public benefit in the best manner he can, If the true interest of a community were universally known, and all the members sincerely dispos'd to pursue it uniformly, there would be no occasion for laws; but therefore they are necessary, because many of the subjects are ignorant of their duty to the public, or may be diverted from attending to it, by their private irregular affections and passions. Human civil constitutions provide against these inconveniencies as well as they can, tho' still but imperfectly; those forms of government are the best, which most effectually preserve the power of legislation from the influence of human passion, caprice and corruption, and secure its continuance in persons of the greatest reputation for wisdom and integrity; for these are the characters of highest authority among rational beings, and
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which only are regarded by ingenuous minds: SERM.
Penalties added to Laws, which derive all VIII.
their force from meer power, cannot produce
a willing and reasonable obedience; and, as
St. Paul justly says, * such laws with sancti-
ons, were made, not for the righteous, but for
the disobedient and the lawless.

But the Divine moral government, as the obligation it lays upon us, cannot be satisfied otherwise than by an intelligent and affectionate obedience, so every part of its exercise, carries the clearest evidence of wisdom, equity and goodness, the stable foundations of authority which reason cannot resist. Whatever *God requires* of us, he at the same time *shews to be good*, perfectly agreeable to the cool dictates of our own understandings; either what appears intrinsically good at first view, such as the love of himself and our fellow creatures, or what, upon calm reflection, we must discern to have a necessary connexion with those principal duties, as plain consequences from them, or as proper means in order to our performing them. 'Tis true, that for the purposes of morality, as well as of civil government, every subject has not suf-

* 1 Tim. i. 9.

ficient knowledge to discover the best means; and therefore God may condescend to interpose (as he actually has interposed where he has granted a revelation to men) for promoting true moral piety and virtue, to establish certain positive institutions, which are only to be considered as means of religion; but even those positive institutions, at least in *Christianity*, may be discern'd, by attentive minds, to be eminently useful to the moral ends for which they are appointed, and so far they stand upon a moral foundation: And where the usefulness of such positive appointments cannot be clearly discern'd, our obligation to the observance of them does not arise from God's absolute supremacy and natural dominion over us, which cannot produce a reasonable and liberal service, but from a firm persuasion of his immutable rectitude and goodness, and of his unerring wisdom: Tho' we do not at first view, see the propriety and expediency of every such institution in particular, yet deference to the perfect wisdom and goodness of our Ruler, who appointed it for our advantage, does rationally determine us to use it, with diligence and the best application of our thinking powers, that we may obtain

obtain the benefit by it which he graciously intended.

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These, I think, are the best and most becoming sentiments we can have of God's moral government; it is founded, not on his sovereign irresistible power and natural dominion, but on his absolutely perfect purity, wisdom and goodness; the end of it is the most absolute universal good and happiness of the rational creation; its laws are perfect *truth and righteousness*, which every proper subject, that is, every intelligent creature may see, and thereby be induc'd to yield a reasonable and willing obedience, which alone is real religion, and only pleasing to him; his power in the administration of this government is exercis'd, not arbitrarily, but according to the most perfect equity, and rewards and punishments are distributed in exact proportion to the measure of moral good or evil, in the dispositions and actions of every particular moral agent.

There is however some part of the Divine administration, which in another sense, with respect to us, may be called arbitrary; that is, we cannot pretend to find out the reasons of it, but ought to rest satisfied in the sovereign freedom of his will. What I mean is, that tho'



tho' God always preserves inviolable the rights which he has given to his creatures, and acts towards all of them according to the exactest measures of wisdom, equity and goodness, not one of them ever has reason to complain of being treated with an undue severity; yet, as it pleases him to manifest his power, his manifold wisdom and goodness, in the variety of his works, it is not to be expected that we should comprehend the particular grounds of this variety, or understand the reasons why he makes a distinction among his creatures: This only we are sure of, that he never injures any of them, nay, that he deals bountifully with all, which are the proper objects of goodness. The Potter's power over the clay, is a similitude which the prophet *Jeremy* uses, and after him the apostle *Paul*, to represent the dominion of God over the creatures, and particularly men. As the Potter intending vessels for various uses, out of the same mass, arbitrarily chooses materials for the coarser, and the finer sort, distinguishing them by his workmanship, according to the different purposes they are designed for; so the forming hand of God has made a difference among his creatures, as it pleased him; out of the same matter, originally

nally alike capable of all forms, he has made bodies terrestrial and celestial, with all their different glories, the shining constellations in the heavens, beautiful flowers, and clods of earth. In like manner there is an apparent diversity in the condition of intelligent beings, towards whom the Divine moral perfections are exercis'd: They are of superior and inferior orders, some indued with higher, some with lower powers; for which distinction, so far as it relates to individuals, and that they are appointed each to their particular rank, no reason is to be given, but that it so pleased the sovereign Lord of all: But he is just and good to every species, and every individual of them, none has cause of complaint, but ought to acknowledge the bounty of the Creator, whose condition of being is better than Non-existence. Particularly among mankind, the wisdom of Providence has seen fit to appoint a great difference in many respects. Their outward estates, the constitution of their bodies, the natural endowments of their minds, the opportunities for improving them, and their advantages for attaining to the knowledge of religion; all these are very unequal; some are rich some poor, some weak others strong, some

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are favour'd with excellent means of education and instruction, while others are bred up in ignorance. And especially the privileges of God's peculiar people, first appropriated to the *Jews*, and afterwards enlarg'd to the *Christian* nations, which the Scripture highly celebrates, as they are indeed very great, for God has favour'd his people with an exprefs revelation, *he hath shewed them his word, his statutes and his judgments, while he has not dealt so with other nations* *; these privileges, I say, are only to be attributed to the distinguishing favour of God. It was not for any merit in the *Jews* above all others, that God chose them to be a peculiar people unto himself, and the nations in which the light of *Christianity* has shin'd, were perhaps sunk as deep in ignorance, superstition and vice, as any other in the world.

But tho' in this branch of his administration God may be said to act arbitrarily, *giving no account of his matters*, and it is necessary that it should be so, for the order of the world and the great ends of his providence; yet he never acts against the rules of equity and goodness towards any of his creatures.

* Psal. cxlvii. 19, 20.

There's none of mankind left without manifestations of his mercy, and the distinction he makes by dispensing his superadded gifts *severally as he will*, is not the measure of his final distribution as judge of the world. If he bestows his favours freely on some, he does not thereby injure others, as our Saviour teaches us in his parable *, applying this most reasonable defence of the Divine government to the case of the *Jews*, who are represented as murmuring, because the *Gentiles*, called late to the service of God, were advanced to the same privileges with them. The answer is, to which there can be no colourable pretence of an exception, *Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?* And in the parable, *Mat. xxv.* God is represented as acting with sovereign freedom, in committing his goods to the care of his servants, *to one he delivers five talents, to another two, and to another one*, according to his own will, or according to the judgment which his perfect wisdom makes of *their several abilities*. This unequal distribution makes indeed a difference in their capacity of service, and lays a foundation for different

* *Matt. xx.*

degrees of happiness, which may be suppos'd in every state and every period of our existence, consistently with the righteousness and the goodness of God's moral government; but it is not the measure by which recompences are awarded, for in the sequel of the parable, we find *they* are given according to the improvements severally made by the servants. God will render to every man impartially according to his own works, and the degrees of his diligence and fidelity in using the talents he was entrusted with, not according to the talents given him, or the abilities and opportunities he enjoy'd, for these were properly the *goods of another*.

I shall conclude with this one reflexion on what has been last insisted on, that it gives us a just idea of the Divine government over the moral world, shewing in what sense it is arbitrary, and in what sense it is not; from both which useful instruction arises; and indeed there is nothing comprehended in the supreme power and dominion of Almighty God, of greater importance, and more directly applicable to our selves. On the one hand, since it has pleas'd the great Ruler of the world, to manifest his power, wisdom and goodness, in the variety of his works, and

of his dispensations towards his creatures, we ought in this to recognise his absolute supremacy, and with all humility to acquiesce in his sovereign and uncontrollable disposition of things. In this great fabric of the universe, wherein God has display'd the glory of his Majesty and of all his perfections, it was necessary there should be a diversity; for in the different conditions appointed to the creatures, and the different degrees of perfection and happiness communicated to them, his glory shines more conspicuously than it would have done in an uniform production, and in their various ways, his works harmoniously join in praising him. Since then it was necessary that the world should be diversified in the manner it is, who but the Creator himself could distinguish the ranks of beings, and appoint to every one its proper station. *As for his good pleasure all things were created,* there can be no pretence of injustice done to any of them, for they could have no rights capable of being violated, prior to their being, nor indeed any pretence of unkindness, if their state is more eligible than not to be, which must be acknowledg'd concerning the state wherein all the creatures were made. *Shall the thing formed*

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God's Almighty Power, by what acts manifested, formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus? Shall a brute complain that it was not made a man, or a man that he is inferior to an angel? Every kind of beings, and every individual have reason to be satisfied with the condition appointed to them, and no ground of discontent (always supposing it to be better than non-existence;) for if there were any ground of complaint, any one must have it to whom that lot should fall; and then the objection must lie against the wisdom of God, and the exercise of his power, in making any such order of creatures at all; which objection an attentive mind must condemn, for who can take upon him to say that any thing in the works of God is superfluous, that any particular species of beings was not necessary, and a proper part of the universe. The same reasoning will hold in proportion, for men's submitting to the order of Providence, in the worldly condition which is appointed them; for the place of our nativity and education, our state of sickness or health, riches or poverty, with a multitude of other such like circumstances, are as much subject to the Divine disposal and direction, as to what species of beings we belong, and no more strictly

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within the sphere of distributive justice, the final and compleat exercise whereof is reserved to a future state. God does not leave the government of human affairs to inferior causes, he interposes himself by a sovereign irresistible efficiency. Vain mortals are apt to imagine that the differences of their condition are principally owing to themselves, and they ascribe the success of their endeavours to their own skill and industry; but it is much rather to be attributed to the sovereign agency of Divine Providence, as the *Psalmist* justly observes, *ⁱ Promotion cometh not from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south; but God is judge, he pulleth down one and setteth up another.* It becomes us therefore in all the changes of our state, humbly to acknowledge the supreme dominion of Almighty God in the government of the world, who has divided the earth and the enjoyments of it among the children of men, in what proportions he sees fit: And as they who are in lower situations, ought not to envy their superiors; so neither have the great any reason to glory in their acquisitions, and treat their inferiors with contempt,

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ⁱ Psal. lxxv. 6.

Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches. But let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving kindness, righteousness and judgment in the earth; let him rejoyce, and be humbly confident in the supreme and absolute dominion of that God who wisely governs the world, distinguishing some by his special favour, without doing wrong to any. To which purpose also may be applied (the case refer'd to, being of a parallel nature, and the reasoning founded on the same principle) what St. Paul says concerning the extraordinary gifts of ministration, wherewith some were endow'd for the service of the Christian Church, ^b Who maketh thee to differ from another, and what hast thou that thou didst not receive; why then dost thou glory?

But the Divine government is not arbitrary in another sense, it is not administr'd by lawless force, like that of the tyrants in this world, but with the most impartial equity, tempered with goodness, and directed in its

^a Jer. ix. 23, 24.^b 1 Cor. iv. 7.

and in what Sense to be understood.

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exercise by the most perfect wisdom. * *God* SERM.
hath spoken once, twice have I heard this, that VIII.
power belongeth unto God. Also unto thee, O


Lord, belongeth mercy, for thou renderest to every man according to his work. Tho' he bestows his gifts freely as a sovereign, and makes what distinctions he pleases among his creatures, in the capacities of their nature, and in respect of outward advantages confer'd on some, which are deny'd to others; yet in the exercise of his moral government, especially in the distribution of final recompences, he will strictly observe the exactest measures of equity. He will not contend with his creatures by his great power, nor shew his absolute dominion by crushing under his feet the prisoners of the earth, who have no defence against his might; but will, without respect of persons, render to all men according to their works. Which consideration, as it is terrible to the impenitent workers of iniquity, whom no power can screen from his just displeasure, so it is a never-failing encouragement to good men, who rejoicing in the testimony of their consciences,

* Pfal. lxii. 11, 12.

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 *that in simplicity and godly sincerity they have had their conversation in the world, assure their hearts before him, confident that his power will not be employ'd against them, but for their salvation, and therefore, because he is God Almighty, they walk before him and are perfect.*

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The true Notion of Divine Omniscience, of its Nature, Manner and Extent.

Pfal. cxlvii. 5.


His understanding is infinite.

I Have observ'd on another occasion, that the main controversy between *Atheists* and believers in God, is concerning his intelligence; none of the infidels, whether ancient or modern, have in express terms denied the being of God, but by that word they mean, not a particular designing and perfect Agent, the Maker of all things, which is the true notion of the Deity, but either blind unintelligent necessity, to which they attribute the existence of the world and every thing it contains, as the cause of all, or

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universal substance, comprehending the whole universe and all beings in it. As therefore in opposition to these absurd notions, we have full convincing proof of the existence of one Supreme Being absolutely perfect, the Maker and governor of the world ; by the same clear evidence we know, that intelligence is a primary and essential attribute of his nature : And as this is what all his works teach us, the inanimate, the sensitive and the rational parts of the creation, joyn in proclaiming the understanding of their Maker ; so without acknowledging it, we can have no right conceptions of him at all. The idea of a being without knowledge, even supposed eternal, immense and all-powerful, as *that* signifies not a voluntary activity, but a necessary cause, is really an idea of nothing at all to the purposes of religion, of nothing which can raise any admiration, honour and esteem, and is indeed of no importance to us. The worship of an ignorant Deity is the reproach of human nature ; as no tolerable apology could be made for the *Heathens*, who serv'd idols *that had eyes and saw not, and ears but heard not* ; so none can be made for us if we pay our religious homage to a being supposed void of understanding, whatever other perfections

fections we ascribe to him, which are really SERM.
no perfections at all in the deliberate esteem IX.
of the human mind. 

I shall not now attempt to prove the intelligence of the Deity in general, for that has been already done by the arguments which prove his being ; nor do I pretend to give a compleat idea of the Divine knowledge, which it is not to be imagin'd we can comprehend, for that were to suppose that our understandings are like his, infinite : But my intention in this discourse is, to make such observations concerning the nature, the manner and extent of it, as may give us a just and magnificent, tho' imperfect idea of that adorable perfection, and tend to produce those pious dispositions, and that dutiful respect which it claims from us.

First, It is certain that the knowledge of God extends to the whole compass of existence ; since all things that have being are either God himself or his works, it is impossible that any thing should be unknown to him. He is the most excellent of all objects, and the most incomprehensible by us, but yet a reflection on what passes in our own minds will lead us to this conclusion,

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that his perfections which infinitely transcend our capacity, are in the nearest and most immediate view of his own understanding: For all the conceptions, and all the actions of intelligent beings, with the principles from which they proceed, are accompanied with consciousness. Of all the subjects to which we apply our thoughts, our own faculties and the exercise of them are the most clearly discern'd, and the best understood by us: We know every idea that is presented to our minds, every imagination, every desire and volition, every enjoyment; the self-conscious spirit of a man knows every thing in him; and so we must judge concerning all intelligent beings, even to the highest and most comprehensive understanding. Now if God thoroughly knows his own perfections, if he knows his eternity better than we do our temporary duration, and his immensity more perfectly than we do our limited condition of being; if he knows his own perfect comprehension of things, but as clearly as we do our sensations, and his Almighty power, as clearly as we discern the limited activity of our minds; this is an extent of knowledge which seems to follow necessarily from the supposition of his intelligence, as

evident

evident as his being, but must appear to us SERM.
very great, the object being of all others the IX.
most above our understanding, and past our
finding out. Indeed God's knowledge of
himself, of the proper exercise and unlimit-
ed perfection of his own powers, may be
said in some sense to be the knowledge of all
things; for the utmost bounds of possibility
do not exceed Omnipotence, and the whole
compass of truth is within the reach of infi-
nite understanding. I have observ'd else-
where, * that the Essences of all things must,
before the formation of the universe, have
been known to the eternal Mind, as every
wise agent forms a design in his thoughts be-
fore he executes it. Can any thing be diffi-
cult to him who sees all things in the first
Cause, the whole frame of nature and all
its parts, with the intire series of events from
the foundation of the world, in his own coun-
sels; who sees them, I say, with as great
clearness, and with as great certainty, as we do
the perceptions and determinations of our
own minds?

* SERM. IIIId.

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But it is directly and immediately evident that the whole of created existence is perfectly known to God, because it is all the work of his hands, and upheld by the word of his power. Every voluntary agent must be supposed to understand his own productions; the skill of the meanest artificer reaches to the limits of his own art, tho' he may be unacquainted with the nature of the materials he works upon, he knows the labour he bestows on them, and the compositions, figures and other sensible effects which depend upon his own operation. Since therefore God is the voluntary Maker of all things, disposing the whole frame of nature as it pleas'd him, and continually governing it by his own immediate agency, nothing can be hid from him. If in all that variety of being, and all the appearances which are in the universe, from the greatest to the least, from the utmost circuit of heaven to the center of the earth, there is nothing which his hand has not form'd, and his providence does not direct, every thing must be thoroughly known, for wherever his power works, there his understanding discerns.

This consideration leads us to form an idea of the Divine knowledge as different from,
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and infinitely more perfect than ours, even SERM.
with respect to those objects which are, in IX.
some measure, known to us. It is from a
reflection on our own understandings we
take our rise to the apprehending of that per-
fection in the Deity ; but we ought not to
imagine that things appear to him in the
same manner they do to us. Nothing is
more evident than that different perceptive
powers have different views of the same ob-
ject. Our reason in many cases corrects the
report of our senses, and sees things in quite
another light ; much more is it to be thought
that an infinitely perfect mind *sees not as man*
sees, that things are known to him, not in a
remote and distant way, by their external
appearances and effects, as they are to us, but
that his understanding penetrates into their
inmost natures, and discerns clearly all their
properties and powers. The little knowledge
we have, was given us for particular purpo-
ses, not for a thorough comprehension of
things ; nor are they, any of them, put ab-
solutely into our power, to govern and to use
them every way, and for all the ends they
are capable of serving, which would require
a thorough understanding of their nature,
attributes, and powers of every kind. We
discern

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discern by our senses some qualities of material objects, rather they are the occasion of exciting certain ideas in us, whereby the bountiful author of nature has made them useful to the preservation, the conveniency, and enjoyment of life; our reason goes a little farther, discovering by observation, and by attending to the connexions and dependencies of things, other properties and relations, which may be applied to useful purposes in life, and afford various entertainment to the mind; still however there remains a great deal unknown to us, indeed the human understanding seems to be unequal to the comprehension of any thing. But the Maker and absolute Governor of all things, knows them perfectly, not by external appearances and effects ascending to the discovery of causes, as we do; but as he form'd the plan of the whole universe and the intire extent of being, in his own counsels, he sees effects in their causes, having by the free determination of his own will, given them whatever measure of power and perfection they possess; none of those essences can be hid from him, of which he had the perfect idea in his own mind before the being actually existed; he can be ignorant of no property,

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ty, virtue, or efficiency (nor any thing that can be effected by it) which is derived wholly from himself; all the powers of nature, with the remotest consequences which depend upon them, must be at once in his view, and seeing he has all the creatures absolutely under his dominion, disposing of them at his pleasure, and actually does govern them by the immediate exercise of his power, he must have, not a partial knowledge like ours, of some particular uses they serve, but a thorough understanding of their utmost capacity.

Besides the wide difference which there is between the knowledge of God and that of finite beings, particularly mankind, in the extent of them, both with respect to the number of objects, and the discernment of their nature, properties, relations and uses; the one is narrow and confined to a few things, the other reaches to the whole circle of being, the one is superficial and inadequate, the other sees its object on all sides, discerns not some only, but all its relations, and not the exterior appearances and effects only, but its very essence and the secret springs of all its operations: Besides this, I say, there are other important differences, relating to the manner

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of knowledge ; and to the apprehending of those differences we are also led, by observing the exercise and progress of our own understandings in various instances. There are some of our perceptions perfect in their kind from the very beginning ; our original simple ideas are subject to no alterations, capable of no improvement, the ideas of colours and other sensible qualities remain invariably the same ; the consciousness we have of our own existence, our powers, perceptions and operations, is always clear and determinate ; not only so, our knowledge of some truths is distinct and compleat, from the first moment of their being intelligibly propos'd, without any difficulty or labour in reasoning, and this knowledge is call'd intuitive. But there are other things in the knowledge of which we make proficiency, and proceed to the discernment of them by degrees. We can variously compound and associate our ideas, we observe their connexions and differences, their agreement and disagreement ; and from one truth clearly perceiv'd, we go on to the discovery of another, which, according to the measure of evidence that appears in the connexion, is judg'd certain or probable. Such is the narrowness of the human mind as not

to be able to perceive actually at once, all things which it has known, and this defect is in some measure supplied by memory, or the revival of ideas which were in it before.

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This progress of our understandings arising from their limited capacity, evidently shews their imperfection, and must be attended with difficulty, confusion, and uncertainty in some part of our knowledge, which probably in some degree, all finite beings are subject to. But the supreme Mind is *perfect in knowledge*; all things are clearly perceiv'd by it, and all their connexions, differences and relations, without any confusion, obscurity or uncertainty; the variety and multiplicity of the objects cause no perplexity in his understanding, which is large enough to contain them all, without being embarrass'd or forgetting any thing; *there is no creature that is not manifest in the sight of God, but all things are naked unto his eyes and opened, even to their inmost essences, and without the labour of investigating truth by reasoning, he discerns, by a simple and direct intuition, the whole series of causes and effects.* Thus we ought to conceive of the Divine knowledge, as altogether free from the imperfections and infirmities which cleave to ours;
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and tho' the intellectual powers which God has given to some creatures, as they are a convincing proof of his own intelligence, and may be justly call'd the most excellent of his works, making honorable distinctions among the creatures, in the degree wherein they are possess'd, for knowledge is necessarily esteem'd by every rational being ; yet are they all, even the highest of them, but faint images of that original perfect understanding, from whence they are derived, which therefore justly challenges our highest admiration and esteem. Human acquirements in knowledge, short and defective as they are, procure respect ; the men, who by diligent study, have improv'd their minds in useful learning, are on that account in reputation ; we think of the angels with greater veneration, as a far higher order of beings, and their superior excellence consists in, at least one principal branch of it is, a more extensive knowledge. But even this is only a faint ray deriv'd from the *Father of lights*, the pure eternal Fountain, who communicates light in various measures to the intellectual world, whereby it is animated, directed and fitted to proclaim his praise, yet suffers no diminution of his infinite understanding,

as the sun illuminates, beautifies and refreshes all things within its system, without any abatement of its splendor. To that purest Intelligence, that most perfect Wisdom, which has *taught us more than the beasts of the field*, and to whose *inspiration* we owe our *understanding*, which is the very capacity of all our enjoyments, to that blessed, underived Spring of knowledge, let our minds always give the highest honour and pay the most dutiful respect, adore him who *commanded the light to shine out of darkness, and hath put wisdom into the heart*, the image of his own perfection.

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The 2d observation concerning the Divine knowledge is, that it reaches to all the actions of free moral agents. This is a point of the greatest importance to us, and should affect our minds in the most sensible manner, because we *have to do with God*, as our Lawgiver and our Judge. He has, by various methods, made their duty known to mankind; some notices of his will are given to all men, *the work of his law is written in their hearts*, and he has *shewed them that which is good*, by the light of nature; some of them he has favour'd with a clear and express revelation, and will call them all to account for their obedience to the law they were under. Now

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for this important part of his administration, as the supreme Ruler of the world, he is perfectly qualified by his exact knowledge of men, of all their ways and all their works, even to the most secret of them. His knowledge of other things may excite our admiration, but this more immediately concerns us, and calls for our attention, because the greatest consequences depend upon it, our happiness in the enjoyment of his favour, if he sees that *our works are perfect*, and that we have *walked before him in integrity and with upright hearts*, or the lasting miserable effects of his disapprobation, if he knows that we have been workers of iniquity.

As no consideration can be more awful than that of the Omniscience of God, extending to all our works, and every circumstance which may heighten their moral goodness or malignity ; so it is particularly to be remember'd, that his eye penetrates into the secret springs of action, *he searches the hearts and tries the reins of the children of men*. And this is absolutely necessary in order to a perfect judgment of our moral behaviour ; for virtue and vice, religion and irreligion do not consist merely, or principally, in outward acts, but in the intentions and dispositions of
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the mind, of which every man's conscience SERM.
is a witness, for it approves or reproaches IX.
him, not according to the external appearance of his works, but according to the inward affections and purposes of his heart. Human judicature cannot proceed so far; works, as they appear in the view of men, and the sensible effects of them, come only under its cognifance. Indeed intention is suppos'd, without which an action cannot be said to be rational, or properly human, but it is not known with certainty, and if it were, it is but a very imperfect judgment which could be made by it, concerning the morality of works; for all that civil judicature supposes, is, that a man is the voluntary cause of his own actions, or that he designs to do what he does, it does not pretend to judge of his remoter views, of the prevalent affections of the heart, and the motives which influenc'd it, and of the regard had to the approbation of God and of conscience; all which are points of the greatest moment, in order to a precise determination of right and wrong in the moral sense. But God sees, not as man sees, he looks not to the outward appearance, but the heart, discerning all its most secret imaginations and contrivances. And indeed

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without this, he could not be the righteous Judge of the world, rendering to all men finally according to their works.

The direct proof of this point, is the same that has been already insisted on, for the perfection and universal extent of God's knowledge in general, namely, his being the intelligent Cause and Disposer of all things, which shews that the active powers of the rational creatures are as well known to him, with their utmost exertions, as the passive powers of matter and all its modifications. These kinds of beings are essentially different, and so are their powers, but they are equally the work of God's hands, and therefore must be equally known to him; the free agency of some, wholly derived from, and depending on himself, does not place them out of his view, and since he is the designing Author of that faculty, and form'd it for certain ends, he must understand all its exercises, whereby it is fitted to answer those ends. And as the natural government of the Deity, from which the freest created agents are not exempted, proves his perfect knowledge of all his creatures, and all their works, so of his moral government over mankind, which requires a perfect knowledge of their moral actions,

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tions, we have a natural intimation in our own presaging thoughts. Those to whom God has not given any positive revealed law, yet have a rule of life written in their hearts, to which *their consciences bear witness*; and their own *accusing and excusing thoughts*, as they are attended with the greatest pleasure and pain which the mind is capable of, and which are the present sanction of the law of nature; so they are premonitions of farther rewards and punishments, to be distributed by the supreme Judge. But to this purpose they derive all their force from a secret impression, which seems to be indelibly engraven on every human heart, that God is the inspector of all our actions, and all our thoughts. With a view to a trial by men, we should have no farther solicitude than about the evidence of overt acts, because that is the rule according to which they must proceed; but since the testimony of conscience is the measure of our expectations from God, this necessarily supposes a persuasion that he is *greater than our hearts, and knows all things*. The argument will be greatly strengthened by the consideration of God's moral perfections, his rectitude, his goodness and justice, which cannot be fully exercised towards rational beings, with-

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out an infallible and compleat knowledge of their works; at present I only suppose his moral government, which cannot reasonably be doubted, since it is evident he has given us a moral nature, and a clear intimation that not only it is fit he should, but that he actually will call us to an account: Accordingly, it has been still the common belief of all men, who had any just sentiments concerning the Deity, that he is perfectly acquainted with the conduct of all moral agents, and will at some time or other, render them recompenses according to their works.

If the foundation upon which we believe this particular branch of the Divine Omniscience, be just, namely the evidences of a moral constitution and government of reasonable creatures, and the natural undeceiving impressions on the minds of men, of their being accountable for all their actions to God as their Judge, the consequence must be allow'd, that his knowledge of our hearts, and of all that enters into the morality of our works, is very perfect: For the character of a moral governor requires, not only that the condition of men should be determin'd according to the moral quality of their tempers and actions in general, *that it should be*
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well with the righteous and ill with the wicked, but also that the sentences pass'd upon them should bear a proportion to the measure of their goodness and sinfulness in a state of trial, which shews how exact the knowledge of their Judge must be.

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Altho' all men come under the denomination of good and bad, and accordingly the state to which they shall be adjudged, is called a state of happiness or misery in general; yet both these admit of a great variety. As good men are not all alike good, and vicious men are not all alike vicious, so neither will their enjoyments and sufferings by the judgment of God be equal. * *They who have sown bountifully shall reap bountifully, and they who have sown sparingly, shall reap also sparingly*, that is, men shall enjoy felicity in exact proportion to the degree of their virtuous affections and virtuous labour; on the other hand, *some evil servants shall be beaten with few, and some with many stripes*, their punishment shall be inflicted in proportion to the obligations they have violated, which depend on their various circumstances, capacities, and opportunities of doing good. Now

* 2 Cor. ix. 6.

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to adjust all this exactly, and appoint to every man such a degree of happiness or of punishment, as is strictly proportionable to the measure of good or evil in his dispositions and his works, which a perfect moral government requires; to do this, I say, none but an infinite understanding is sufficient, a clear and certain knowledge of the hearts of men, of the affections which are prevalent in them, of their motives of action, and of all the circumstances which concur to the perfection of their good works, or which either aggravate or extenuate their evil ones.

This extent of the Divine knowledge must appear to us wonderful. We find our selves secure within the inclosure of our own breasts, from the inspection of every human eye, and we are sensible that none of us can discern the thoughts and designs of other men, farther than as they discover themselves by outward signs. But how shall we form an idea of an understanding which reaches to the most hidden recesses of all mens minds, and infallibly discerns the secret thoughts and intents of their hearts? Yet this evidently appears to be the prerogative of the supreme Being, who without it could not be the proper Judge of moral actions, as we are convinc'd

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he is, and cannot remove the impressi^on of SERM.
it out of our minds. And indeed the confi- IX.

deration of his Omnipresence, naturally leads us to acknowledge it : For as our own minds perceive and operate in all parts of the little systems which they animate, so the most perfect Mind being every where, not in a partial derived manner, but in the fulness of its active intelligence, must discern every thing. Thus the *Psalmist* celebrates the glory of the Divine Omniscience in this amazing instance of it, * *O Lord thou hast searched me and known me. Thou knowest my down-sitting, and mine up-rising, thou understandest my thoughts afar off. Whither shall I go from thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence ?*

“ No change of place can hide me from thy
“ All-seeing eye, for in all parts of the uni-
“ verse, I should be alike under thy inspec-
“ tion, and surrounded with thy powerful
“ presence ”. *Thou hast possessed my reins, thou hast covered me in my mother’s womb.*
“ As all the powers of my nature were de-
“ rived from thee, as to thy forming hand,
“ they owe the beginning of their existence,
“ and the various steps of their progress to

* *Psal*, cxxxix.



“ perfection, and are still upheld by thy
 “ mighty providence; so they are continual-
 “ ly in thy view, and every exertion of them
 “ is perfectly known to thee”. Since in
 God we live and move and have our being,
 since all our animal and rational powers ne-
 cessarily depend upon him, and by his con-
 tinued influence the frame of nature is pre-
 served, no vital act, not even the least or
 most secret movement in our minds, or our
 bodies, can be hid from his eye.

Before we proceed any further in our in-
 quiry concerning the Omniscience of God, it
 may not be amiss to make some practical re-
 flexions on what has been already observ'd.
 There is no consideration more affecting to
 serious attentive minds, or which more di-
 rectly tends to produce sincerity in our whole
 behaviour, than this of God's knowing our
 hearts. There is naturally a disposition in
 the minds of men to approve themselves to
 those intelligent beings who are witnesses of
 their Conduct. Thus a desire of pleasing one
 another has a great share in forming our out-
 ward deportment, so far as it is open to hu-
 man observation. But as the Divine appro-
 bation is infinitely more important, so the
 desire of obtaining it has a vastly more exten-
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five influence, reaching not only to the external behaviour, but to the inward dispositions and the intents of the heart. How ridiculous does hypocrify appear to a man who

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considers that all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do, that no outward solemnities, no forms of devotion, or appearances of zeal, can impose on his perfect understanding, that he sees through the most subtle disguises and plausible pretences which an insincere heart can put on, and that they are as odious to him as open bare-fac'd wickedness.

Let us therefore always remember the excellent instructions of our Saviour * concerning acts of devotion and charity, which may also be applied to other duties, namely, that if we would hope for acceptance with God in our prayers and our alms, it is absolutely necessary to avoid outward pomp and ostentation. A prevailing desire of human applause, or as he expresses it, making it our chief end *to be seen of men*, will undoubtedly destroy the sincerity of religious works, so called, and cut off our claim to the Divine approbation ; but if we perform our obedience

* Matt. vi.

SERM. IX. only as unto our heavenly Father, with an affectionate sense upon our minds, of his All-seeing eye, observing us in secret, and with an upright intention to please him, he will accept of our service and *reward us openly*. Thus religion seated in the mind, and expressing it self by an uniform course of good actions, appears to be most reasonable and worthy of men, for it pursues the important design of obtaining God's favour, by the properest means. But on the other hand, if it be certain that God knows the secrets of all hearts, and will judge them, hypocrisy is extreme folly, as well as wickedness, for what good purpose can an insincere profession of piety serve, since we cannot hope to deceive him ; or what rational account will a man be able to give of it to his own mind ? Unless we will suppose the hypocrite persuaded that *God does not know*, and that *there is in the most high no knowledge* of man's actions, which probably is the case of very few : The worship which he performs with the greatest solemnity, and appearance of devotion, must appear to his reflecting thoughts, the most trifling and insignificant part of his conduct ; it seems yet more absurd than the loud cries and extravagant rites of the priests of *Baal*, in that

that ridiculous light wherein the prophet *Elijab* elegantly sets them, * for it is not less unreasonable to awake a sleeping God by clamour, or call him off from other business, which he is supposed to be attending, than to address services to one whom we believe to be awake and attentive, yet without any design to obtain his approbation ?

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And not only should this consideration of the Divine Omniscience engage men to sincerity in their worship, but to universal purity of heart, and integrity in their whole conversation. For as all the parts of our moral conduct are equally under the direction of his law, which requires us to do justly and to love mercy, as well as to walk humbly with God, and every work shall be brought into judgment before him, with every secret thing, whether it be good or evil ; so his eye is continually upon us in all the affairs of life, and in every other deliberation and design, as well as our immediate addresses to himself. In vain *the † eye of the adulterer waiteth for the twilight, saying, no eye shall see me, and disguiseth his face ; and the murderer riseth with the light to kill the poor and*

* 1 Kings xix. 27. † Job xxiv. 15.

needy, lurking as a thief in the night, till he find an opportunity to execute his villanous purposes ; for tho' such wicked men may be able to hide their designs from the view of the world, and thereby escape with impunity in it, yet God is witness to their most secret devices, even to the mischief which they have meditated in their hearts, altho' their hands have never executed it, and he will discover it hereafter to their utter confusion.

*2dly, Since it is God's prerogative to know the hearts of men and judge them, we should not presume to invade it by rash censures. Some works of men both good and bad are manifest, so that we cannot avoid passing a judgment upon them, tho' still it is an imperfect one, for we cannot enter into the secret springs and motives of action ; but other works are altogether hid from our knowledge, and concerning them we ought not to * *judge before the time, until the Lord come, who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart, and then shall every man have praise of God,* the praise which is justly due to his works. It is therefore with great reason that*

* 1 Cor. iv. 5.

the apostles insist so much on this necessary caution to *Christians*, that they do not judge one another ; which is not only becoming the deference they owe to the superior knowledge of their common master, and their professed expectation of appearing before his tribunal, but is the only foundation upon which charity and peace can subsist among them. It is the violation of this rule, and *Christians* adventuring to pronounce judgment upon their brethren, even upon the secrets of their hearts, censuring and casting them out of their fellowship, as insincere in their religious profession, because of different sentiments and practices in matters confessedly not essential ; 'tis this, I say, which has brought so great reproach on *Christianity*, and occasion'd such fierce and scandalous contentions among the followers of *Jesus Christ*. On the other hand, we ought not to be immoderately affected with the unjust censures which frail mortals may ignorantly pass upon us. Every man, 'tis true, desires to stand fair in the esteem of the world, and good men value reputation, even with the weak, as that whereby they are render'd the more capable of being useful to them ; but still there is a sufficient consolation to the sincere
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against unjust reproaches, in the testimony of their own consciences, and the impartial unerring judgment of him who searches the heart. If the praise of wise and virtuous men be a support against the undeserved calumnies of the ignorant and the wicked, much more may he enjoy an undisturb'd tranquillity in his own breast, who having the approbation of his own mind, can securely appeal to an infallible witness, and leave his actions to be tried by the righteous Judge of the world, for to him *it is a very small thing to be judged of men's judgment, seeing he that judgeth justly is the Lord* *. The last branch of the Divine perfect knowledge, to us incomprehensible, which shall be the subject of the

3d, Observation, is prescience or foreknowledge of future events. That things to come as well as the past and present, are known to the first intelligent Cause, is evident; for their being depends on his will, and all their powers are derived from him, he must therefore foresee the utmost which those powers can produce, and cannot be ignorant of what he intends himself to do. E-

* 1 Cor. iv. 3.

very free agent is conscious of his own intentions, which, if there be not a defect of power, may infallibly ascertain the event ; but the *everlasting God fainteth not nor is weary*, he is as able to accomplish his designs at the remotest distance of time, as when they were first form'd, and therefore *known to the Lord are all his works from the beginning*. As to the effects of necessary causes, we can easily conceive that he foresees them, for they are, properly speaking, his own works ; as he is the first mover in the material world, who by his wisdom originally dispos'd its various parts, and by his active power gave them all their force, he foreknows all the revolutions which can ever happen in it, and all the productions which can arise from it, for he is really the cause of them, and they are to be attributed to his continued operation. But that the free moral actions of intelligent beings, of which themselves are the sole compleat causes, depending wholly on the determination of their wills, and intirely imputed to them as their own ; that these should be foreseen by any understanding, must appear to us very wonderful, because it is so far above the reach of human knowledge, and because there appears in it to us, no particular ground

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of certainty, or manner of attaining it, consistent with the freedom of the agents, whose future actions are suppos'd to be known. But yet that it really is so, that not only God knows the present thoughts and intents of all men's hearts, but what they will do and incline to do, in all circumstances wherein they ever shall be, has been believed by the generality of mankind, who have thought seriously on this subject, to be included in the Divine Omniscience. It seems to be unworthy of his infinite perfection to place such a multitude of things, some of them very important, and on which great consequences depend, out of the reach of his foresight : And as from the Omnipresence of God, and the absolute dependence of all rational creatures upon him, so that their powers of liberty and choice, as well as others are derived from him, and supported wholly by his providence, we justly infer that those powers cannot exert themselves in any manner without his present knowledge, which is as incomprehensible to us as Prescience it self ; it seems reasonable to conclude, that since these foundations of his knowledge are immutable, and alike clearly understood by him from eternity, being really nothing else but his

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own perfections and operations, the object SERM.
must be equally in his view at all times, and IX.
and that he must discern at once all the crea-
tures, and the intire series of their actions,
during the whole of their existence : Nay,
the argument taken from God's being the in-
telligent Cause and supreme Ruler of all things,
to prove that he knows the whole of actual
existence, and whatever is done within its
compass, in which all the operations of ra-
tional beings are included ; this argument
concludes as strongly for the same extent of
his absolute eternal Prescience : For if the
intire frame of nature now actually in being,
and the intire scheme of providence, which
he is now carrying on, comprehending the
whole series of events ; if these be the works
of design, they must have been known be-
fore they began to be, and it is absurd, that
powers wholly derived from, and absolutely
depending on a wise Author, for ends which
he intended, should not be foreseen by him,
with all their exercises and all their possible
productions. I shall not insist on it as a proof
of this doctrine, that there have been pro-
phecies fulfill'd, of future events, which de-
pended on the choice of free agents ; not on-
ly believed by the weak and superstitious vul-

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gar, but by men of the best understanding, upon clear historical evidence ; such as the famous prediction of *Isaiab* concerning the great revolution in the *Eastern* monarchy, which was translated from *Babylon* to *Persia*, and particularly concerning *Cyrus*, whom the prophet expressly names long before he was born, describing his memorable acts, and the favour granted by him to the *Jews* ; nor the yet more illustrious example of our Saviour's death, foretold as fix'd in the *determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*, tho' by wicked hands he was crucified and slain : Altho' no reason can be assign'd why, if the Divine Prescience extends to these cases, wherein men have acted their part as freely as in any other, the same Prescience may not be supposed, equally to extend to all parallel cases, that is, to all the voluntary actions of men, and all the events which are accomplish'd by them. But, not to insist at present on arguments taken from revelation, however convincing they may appear to be, it would seem that if we only acknowledge the universal dominion of the supreme Being over the world, and his moral government over his rational creatures, the freest actions of men, and all other moral

agents,

agents, are foreseen by him, otherwise there SERM.
must be an uncertainty in the measures of IX.
his own administration. As the distribution

of rewards and punishments is a very eminent part of his government, in which the honour of his Majesty, and his moral perfections, is nearly concern'd, and which is attended with the most remarkable changes in the state of the world, it must be unforeknown to himself in particular, with all the consequences of it, if the behaviour of rational creatures, to which it bears an exact proportion, is unforeknown; but this is a supposition which we can hardly think consistent with the glory of his absolute supremacy, the perfection of his wisdom, and the immutability of his counsels.

But the great difficulty, which I hinted before, is concerning the consistency of this infallible Divine Prescience, with the liberty of human actions. If God knows all future events certainly, and it is impossible any thing, particularly any action, should not come to pass which he foresees, and in the manner in which he foresees it, how then are these actions free? The answer is, that foreknowledge has no influence at all upon the nature of things, to make the least alte-

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ration in them: The events which are necessary are foreknown as necessary, and those which are contingent and voluntary, are foreknown no otherwise than as contingent and voluntary. As our knowledge of things present, be it ever so certain, does not affect their condition or manner of being; the mechanical motions of bodies are alike necessary, and the moral actions of men are alike free, whether we know them or not; and our foreknowledge of these different sorts of events, supposing we had it, could affect them no more than our knowledge of them when present; so neither has the simple Divine Prescience any kind of causality in the production, or does at all affect the nature and kind of events which are the objects of it. The foresight men have of their future actions in certain circumstances, does not in the least degree lessen their liberty, nor does God's foreknowledge of his own actions make him the less free; no more is there any reason to imagine that his Prescience of what other agents will do, impairs their freedom. We are conscious to our selves of all the liberty in action, which we can think essentially requisite to the purposes of morality; we know that we are under no constraint

strait in doing good or evil, but that our choice and refusal of the one or the other, proceeds from our own affections and the inward determination of our own minds, and this is the foundation of the inward self-condemnings and self-approbations which we feel ; and as the knowledge which God has of our actions, whether present or future, is what we are not conscious of, nor find any influence of it upon our self-determining and active powers ; so it does not really change their nature or quality, making them more or less free.

As to the manner of God's foreknowing certainly contingent future events, that is, which have no necessary cause, nor are to be accomplish'd by his own power, and the determination of his will, but produc'd by other free agents ; this seems to be incomprehensible by the human understanding : That any mind should foresee with certainty, a distant event, which does not necessarily proceed from the nature of things, nor is fix'd by the purpose of a voluntary agent, is wonderful to us and far surpasses our conception ; for as our knowledge of futurity can only rest on one or other of these foundations, we can form no distinct notion of any fore-

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knowledge without them. It is probably their apprehending the Divine Prescience after the same manner, and limiting it to the same grounds, which has occasion'd so much perplexity in the minds of men, and involv'd their speculations upon this subject in so much confusion. Some imagining that contingent events could not otherwise be so ascertain'd, as to be infallibly known, have suppos'd peremptory eternal decrees concerning all of them, even the freest actions of men; and not only so, but a previous Divine influence on the active powers of rational creatures, exciting them to action: But others judging this to be utterly inconsistent with human liberty, and with respect to evil actions, inconsistent with the purity and goodness of the Divine nature, yet still adhering to the same limited foundation of foreknowledge, have denied the doctrine of Prescience altogether, or doubted concerning it. I believe the best way for us to get rid of these difficulties, is wholly to neglect the hypotheses, which have been invented to account for the manner of the Divine Prescience, acknowledging that it is to us inexplicable, and yet concluding that this is no sufficient objection against a doctrine, otherwise well

well confirmed. The futurity of contingent events is real, tho' we cannot tell the cause of it, or upon what grounds it is to be known: A free action now done, was yesterday, or in any preceding point of duration, as truly future, as it has to day actually come to pass; therefore it is not impossible, (for our minds can discern no contradiction in it) that an infinite understanding should foreknow such events, tho' that knowledge is *too high for us*, or perhaps any finite mind, *we cannot attain to it*. And here we may safely rest, as we find our selves oblig'd to do in our inquiries concerning the other perfections of God, which are evidently prov'd to belong to his nature, and therefore believ'd, tho' to us incomprehensible. We acknowledge his Omnipresence, Eternity, Self-existence and Omnipotence; yet the nature of these attributes, and the manner of their being, particularly the exercise of the last mentioned, his power in creating things out of nothing, as much exceeds our comprehension as his foreknowledge of future contingencies. We cannot indeed believe contradictions, and to impose them upon us is to affront the rational nature, but it is no absurdity

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 IX. perties of a being, whom *we cannot by*
 searching find out, nor understand to perfec-
 tion.

This particular branch of God's Omniscience, gives us a very high idea of him, as the proper object of our adoration. How wonderful, how much to be esteem'd for its perfection, is that understanding, which not only sees distinctly all the past and present actions and thoughts of all intelligent beings, but those which are yet future, and discerns, even at the greatest distance of durations, all the productions of free as well as necessary causes? What can be hid from him *who understandeth our very thoughts a-far off?* Surely no darkness can cover any thing from his sight. How despicable are the idols of the nations *who have eyes and see not, ears and hear not,* and who know not, and *cannot declare things to come?* How infatuated are their worshippers? How unhappy as well as inexcusable, are they who acknowledge no other God than chance or necessity, for what satisfaction can an intelligent being have in a world, suppos'd to be under no intelligent direction, but the
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course of things hurried on in it by giddy fortune, or irresistible fate, equally unknowing of futurity? On the contrary, the sincere servants of the true and living God have this never-failing consolation, that however ignorant they are of what is to come, concerning which their minds are naturally anxious, he sees the end from the beginning, and no event can possibly surprise him, for even the freest purposes of men, and all other rational agents, were known in his eternal counsels, and the issues of them comprehended in the fore-appointed scheme of his administration.

2dly, As this knowledge is peculiar to God, necessarily arising from the infinite perfection of his nature, and no finite mind can attain to any part of it with certainty, otherwise than by communication from him, he has wisely hid it from men, that they may learn to trust his providence with absolute resignation. We are not to form our schemes in life, and take the measures of our conduct, by a discernment of particular future events, for they are cover'd from our sight under impenetrable darkness, but by general laws which God has given us,
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and by our observations on the ordinary course of things. No man can be sure of success, *the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong*, the best concerted projects are liable to a multitude of accidents which do not fall within the reach of our foresight. But this ought to give us contentment, and here we ought to rest with pleasure, that the wise and good God knows all things, and having done what was on our part reasonable, we may safely *commit our way and our work* to him, leaving the direction of events to his providence. Nor ought we to pry too curiously into futurity, which God has concealed from us. This is an error which weak and distrustful minds are apt to fall into. The *Gentiles* were not so inexcusable in it, *who knew not God*, but for *Christians* to apply themselves to such as practise the arts of necromancy and divination, for revealing secrets and foretelling things to come, is to expose themselves as a prey to impostors, and to dishonour the true God, who has favour'd them with a clear manifestation of himself, by attributing to dæmons and their pretended agents, that knowledge which peculiarly belongs to him. And,

Lastly,

of its Nature, Manner and Extent.

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Lastly, Let us take no thought for to morrow, for our heavenly Father knows what we need ; he knows what is best, and what the event of things will be : And let us not boast of to morrow, nor be vainly puff'd up, with any expectations in this world, for God only knows, we know not, what a day, or any future time, may bring forth.

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The Wisdom of God manifested in
the Constitution and Government,
both of the natural and moral
World.

I Tim. i. 17.

*Unto the king eternal, immortal, invisible,
the only wise God, be honour and glory for
ever and ever. Amen.*

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IT is evident beyond all rational contradic-
tion, that the world was made, and is go-
vern'd by design, and that the appearances
of nature, and the series of events, which e-
very one may observe, cannot be accounted
for without supposing intelligence in the u-
niversal Cause. But there is a difference be-
tween understanding and wisdom, as be-
tween a power, or faculty, and the right use
of

of it. Understanding is the fundamental capacity of wisdom, and wisdom is the proper exercise and improvement of understanding. Our own experience, and our observations upon the conduct of mankind, lead us to distinguish between acting with design and acting wisely, the *former* is the character of all rational agents, but, alas! we have too good reason to know that the *latter* does not always accompany it: And wisdom admits of various degrees, the inequality arising from several causes, either an unequal measure of knowledge, for according to our discernment of the reason of things, their relations, connexions and dependencies, so must our conduct be wise or unwise; or from the motives which influence the springs of action. We find in our selves a variety of affections, which prompt us to act, preventing deliberate attention: Men do not always govern themselves according to the dictates of cool reason, and pursue the measures which themselves know, or believe to be the best, but are often bias'd by prejudices, and misled by their particular propensities, to do what their own minds do not approve. Therefore knowledge and wisdom are different qualities, and they must be consider'd

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as distinct attributes in the Deity, tho' in him, as may be afterwards observ'd, the one is justly infer'd from the other, and the same arguments which prove his intelligence in general, prove him also to be wise.

Wisdom in any agent is estimated by his approbation of such ends, as in the judgment of the person forming the estimation are most suitable to his nature, and an invariable pursuit of those ends by the best and most effectual methods. It is first of all, absolutely necessary that a right design be propos'd, else no scheme of action can possibly obtain our esteem as wise, or intitle the agent to that character. If we see a man ever so ingenious about trifles, and contriving methods which have the greatest aptitude, to accomplish low ends, and unworthy of his rational nature, this can never raise any veneration for him in our hearts, nay, we shall pronounce all his contrivances foolish. Now concerning ends, 'tis plain that to us they are determin'd by our affections, and the measure of them, I mean the rule whereby we judge whether they be good or bad, right or wrong, is no other than our own approbation : Subordinate ends are only considered as means, and derive their value from the higher purposes which they serve ;

serve ; and ultimate ends to the human mind SERM.
are either private happiness, or the good of X.
others, to the pursuit of which we are de-
termin'd by self-love and benevolence, the
general governing springs of action in our
nature ; 'tis the actions only which ultimate-
ly terminate in those ends, or which have a
tendency to promote them; that we pro-
nounce wise. The man who takes the mea-
sures, and steddily adheres to them, which
have the strictest connexion, not with the
gratification of a particular appetite or pas-
sion, but his own true, most extensive and
complete felicity; or with the greatest pub-
lic good, is to be acknowledged a wise man;
he who acts upon lower and inconsistent
views, does not merit that character.

But the question is, how shall we judge
concerning the ends of the Deity, so as with
understanding to pronounce him wise? Can
we pretend to know what is or is not be-
coming the dignity and perfection of his na-
ture? Or, shall we make the instincts plant-
ed in our minds for the particular purposes of
our being, a standard whereby to examine
his actions, and pass a judgment upon them?
I answer, that tho' indeed the Divine excel-
lencies infinitely surpass our understanding.

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and we cannot take upon us to judge, as from a complete knowledge of them, what views they may require to be pursued ; yet there are some things which we cannot possibly help thinking worthy of every intelligent nature. Our minds are so constituted that we necessarily approve and admire goodness, and the Being who appears in his counsels to have intended, and by his actions to promote the most extensive happiness of other beings which are capable of it, we must judge to have the first and essentially requisite qualification of a wise agent. Again, tho' we have not such a knowledge of the Divine perfections, and of the nature and reason of things, as to qualify us for judging, *a priori*, what is fittest for him to do ; yet by observing the mutual relations and harmony of things which he has made, and the aptitude of some, as means, to answer others as the ends of them, we may collect, what in fact he did intend, and thereby discern the wisdom of the whole constitution. It is impossible indeed for any finite understanding to penetrate into the depths of his designs, or take in the intire scheme of his administration ; we know not what remote and very important purposes may be serv'd by his works,

beyond

beyond all the views which fall under our SERM. observation, *for who hath known the mind of* X. *the Lord, and who hath been his counsellor?*

But even by such a partial observation as our limited capacity can reach to, we may be able to trace the marks of excellent understanding in some of the ways of God, and from thence reasonably conclude, that perfect wisdom governs the whole. For example, the Divine government over mankind, and the methods of providence towards them, may have a relation to the universe, and affect other orders of intelligent beings in a manner which we cannot comprehend; but considering it abstractly, and as intire in it self, without any such relation, which is our way of conceiving, it may appear to us wise, and worthy of the most excellent Being.

2dly, Wisdom consists in the choice and the use of proper means for accomplishing good ends. Supposing an agent to have very right intentions, which is so far praise-worthy, yet it shews a defect of understanding, if he fails in the execution, by choosing means which are not fit: And it is this which is principally meant by wisdom, so far as it denotes an intellectual ability, for to the ends which they pursue, moral agents are deter-

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min'd by their affections, but in the choice of means their understanding only can direct. Therefore imperfect minds which do not comprehend all the relations and connexions of things, and do not foresee all future events, must be deficient in wisdom, tho' without any fault in a moral sense, and the character of wise must be appropriated to God as it is in the text, for *he is only wise*, having a perfect knowledge of every thing which shall ever come to pass, and which any power will, or can possibly produce. It is elegantly said in the book of *Job*, *he putteth no trust in his servants, and his angels he chargeth with folly* \* ; their understandings, tho' vastly large, are not infinite, their great natural capacity is improv'd to a very high measure of knowledge, by their standing always in the presence of God and receiving his instructions ; yet it is insufficient for the government of the world, and the direction of its affairs, which God hath reserv'd in his own hands, committing nothing to the contrivance of his ablest ministers, (they are only employ'd to execute his orders) because of their imperfection in wisdom.

\* *Job* iv. 18.

In this sense, the perfect wisdom of God SERM.  
is necessarily infer'd from the other absolute X.  
perfections of his nature. If he be every  
where present, and wherever he is present,  
there is activity which cannot be resisted, and  
intelligence which cannot be misled or im-  
pos'd upon, if he is absolutely Omniscient,  
knowing not only all things which now are,  
with the greatest exactness, even the most  
secret thoughts of intelligent beings, but al-  
so all things which shall be produc'd, whe-  
ther by necessary or free causes; it follows  
that he can never possibly be mistaken in his  
measures, or come short of a right judgment  
upon the expediency of things, or the fitness  
of means for attaining the ends he proposes.  
Since his power is infinite and cannot be con-  
troul'd, nor his designs defeated by any op-  
position, and there is no imaginable cause  
which should induce him to alter his designs,  
\* *but his counsel standeth for ever, the thoughts  
of his heart to all generations*; since it is so,  
nothing can be wanting to the highest per-  
fection of wisdom; no weakness, no error,  
no irresolution or unsteadiness can ever be  
charg'd on any of his measures. Such is the

\* Psal. xxxiii. 11.

SERM. rashness and folly of poor short-sighted mortals, that they take upon them to censure the works of God as defective in wisdom, altho' we have not only the same evidence of this which is common to other of his attributes, that is, we know it by its fruits and effects; but supposing his other perfections to be prov'd, his knowledge, and his power, and his omnipresence, we are satisfied before hand, by reasoning which is fully convincing, without considering his works of creation and providence, which abundantly display his wisdom; we are satisfied, I say, that he is, and necessarily must be infinitely wise.

Another general argument to prove the wisdom of God, is taken from the faint and imperfect images of it which are in some of the creatures, and which must be deriv'd from the *father of lights*, himself therefore possess'd of that perfection in the highest degree. As intelligence in the effect is a clear evidence of it in the Author, tho' of a superior kind, for it could not possibly proceed from an un-intelligent Cause; so particularly, the highest improvement, and the best use of understanding, can never exceed, nor indeed equal the original Fountain from which all knowledge flows, and therefore the wisdom of  
God

God is absolutely supreme. Since God only SERM.  
hath put wisdom into the inward parts and X.  
given understanding to the heart, all the mea-  
sures of wisdom which any created and finite  
beings can attain to, must needs be inferior  
to his, for the effect can neither originally  
have, nor ever possibly arrive to the perfec-  
tion of the voluntary complete cause ; if it  
could, then of that equal, and therefore in-  
dependent perfection, or degree of perfection,  
it would be a cause to it self, rather there  
would be no cause at all. Tho' 'tis true *this*  
is an improvable ability in imperfect minds,  
which grow in wisdom by attention, indus-  
trious inquiry, and careful observation, yet  
never independently on God, nor can their ac-  
quirements rise to an equality with the Divine  
understanding ; for the very capacity of im-  
provement is derived from him, the means  
are under the direction of his providence, and  
the success depends on his good pleasure. And  
the increase, as it is limited in its degree, by  
the will of him who hath determin'd the  
measures of perfection to which every one of  
his creatures shall, or can attain, so it im-  
plies an imperfection from which the first  
Cause is absolutely free, whose wisdom, as

SERM. all the other excellencies of his nature, is un-  
 X. capable of any addition or diminution.

But the most obvious proof of the wisdom of God, and to attentive minds it is fully convincing, is, by his works of creation and providence, his originally making all things in heaven and earth, and disposing them in the order in which they appear, his preserving them all and governing them, in the way which is most suitable to their several natures, and so as they may best answer the ends of their being. They are made so as to have a visible mutual relation to each other, with the most exquisite skill and contrivance, and plainly to discover that the whole is under the direction of one ruling Counsel. Inanimate things are upheld by the power of God, and directed in their motions, constantly and uniformly, to serve particular purposes; sensitive beings have a suitable provision made for the support of their lives, and are govern'd by instincts which determine them to pursue the proper ends of their nature; and rational agents have laws given them for regulating their conduct, and they are furnished with proper motives of action, by the influence of which they are directed, freely, and with understanding to  
 pursue

purſue the proper ends of their being. Upon a general ſurvey of theſe works of God, there appears an obvious congruity in the whole, and a deſigned ſubſerviency of ſome to others. It is evident, that the motions of the heavenly bodies, and the conſtant uniform influence of them in the various productions upon our globe, are under ſuch a direction as to answer the end of ſuſtaining a multitude of living things in their regular ſucceſſions; animals are under an apparent oeconomy, whereby they are render'd uſeful to one another, and all of them ſubordinated to man. Now I ſay, even upon ſuch a ſlight and general view, we have a clear diſcovery of infinite Divine wiſdom. The greater variety there is in any ſyſtem, which muſt all be within the comprehension of the mind that form'd it, provided there appears unity of deſign and regular contrivance, the larger ſtill we muſt conclude the underſtanding to be. A narrow capacity reaches only to a few things, placing them in due order, if a great multitude be put under its care, it is embarras'd and thrown into confuſion; but how vaſt is the comprehension of that providence which takes under its guidance the whole heavens and the earth, with all things

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SERM. that are in them, which conducts the motions of the cœlestial orbs, yet without neglecting the meanest animal or vegetable on this earth, and so adjusts all the parts of the stupendous fabric, that whatever changes any of them may undergo, their correspondence to each other is uniformly maintain'd, and the harmony of the whole.

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Especially the variety of kinds, yet more than the multitude of individuals, properly dispos'd, demonstrates the wisdom of the Creator and supreme Governor of the world. There is no diversity at all in the productions of necessary unintelligent causes, and in proportion to their measure of understanding, the operations of free agents are confin'd to a few similar effects, or extend to a greater variety. It is thus that we estimate a human genius; the man who is skill'd in many different branches of learning, in history, in languages, in politics and philosophy, or who knows how to act a proper part in very different stations of life, is reputed wiser than he whose knowledge is confin'd to a few particulars. But how adorable is that wisdom which has display'd it self marvelously in the whole gradation of being, which shines conspicuously, not only adjusting with the utmost



utmost exactness, the mechanism of the material world, but has form'd intirely different and superior kinds, namely spirits, to whose nature and condition of being, the methods of his providence are as well accommodated as to the other. The constitution and form of government under which intelligent creatures are plac'd, is, at least, as clear a manifestation of the Divine wisdom, as the frame and direction of the corporeal system. And, which is most worthy of our observation to the present purpose, these essentially different kinds are most conveniently dispos'd of, with relation to each other: Spirit and body are united in the human composition, and as the system is distinguish'd in its formation by the Creator's skill, it is as much distinguish'd by the administration of his providence. From man there is a descent, I mean as to the degrees of their perfection, in the works of God which we are best acquainted with. The next inferior rank are the brutal species, and among them a beautiful variety, some making a much more considerable figure than others in the animal kingdom; some more eminently useful, and even making nearer approaches to the human understanding. From them the perfection of  
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animal life lessens by various descending degrees, till it comes so near the vegetable world as scarcely to be distinguished. Of vegetables there are as various kinds, all of them ministering to sensitive beings as a superior order, and these latter are directed to the proper use of them by particular instincts: And inanimate things are constantly so govern'd as to serve the purpose of producing the several sorts of herbs, trees and fruits. This order is maintain'd amidst an infinite diversity, and as there is a scale of being appointed by the great designing Author, so there is a subordination of use, the lower still serving the higher, till we ascend to man, the chief of the works of God in our world. Who that attends to this obvious face of nature, and the daily administration of providence, can help acknowledging not only design, that is, the being of God, but perfectly wise counsel, discover'd in the admirable œconomy of all things, as far as his works come within our knowledge?

A more particular and accurate inquiry into all these things, would set the evidence of Divine wisdom still in a clearer and stronger light, showing not only that the universe considered as one intire work, discovers

vers wonderful counsel in the constitution of SERM.

it, having all its parts for several uses regular- X.  
ly dispos'd and fitted to each other, but every

particular being which can be consider'd as a separate intire system, and complete in it

self, carries in its frame the clearest manifestations of its Author's perfect understand-

ing. Not only *the Lord by wisdom stretched out the heavens, and established the earth by his discretion,* but in the constitution of every

single terrestrial and celestial body, is manifested the exquisite skill of their designing in-

telligent Maker. As to the celestial, they are too far distant for our minute observation,

and human science is principally conversant about their magnitude, distance and regular

motions, in which the modern improvements of astronomical learning open a surpris-

ing scene, displaying the wisdom of God beyond what appears to the first views of an

uninstructed spectator : In the composition of bodies whose properties are better known to

us, as air, water, earth, stones, minerals, vegetables of every kind, animals, and espe-

cially the human body ; in all of these and each of them, the manifold wisdom of the

Creator is discover'd. And here also it is worthy of our observation, that the progress

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of learning has most eminently tended to establish the foundations of religion, for the discoveries which have lately been made in natural history, philosophy and anatomy, have greatly illustrated and confirm'd this important article we are now considering. It is not convenient in this short discourse to descend to particulars, even which are commonly known ; but this I may safely say, that it shows an amazing infatuation in any man, who has not spent his life in the utmost obscurity, intirely unacquainted with that knowledge of nature which is the subject of common conversation in this age and these parts of the world, not to be convinc'd, that as the works of God are *manifest*, so *in wisdom he has made them all*, and particularly that the human body is *fearfully and wonderfully made*.

If we proceed farther to consider man in his better part, which *God made after his own image*, the workmanship will appear in a peculiar manner, worthy of the Author's perfect understanding. And first of all, let us observe our situation in the universe. We are nearly allied and closely united to the corporeal world, a part of matter fitly organiz'd to convey the notices of external things, and

and to be the mind's instrument of action, is a part of our selves. Is not wisdom manifested in placing rational capacities thus conveniently for contemplation, and for the proper improvement of them in a rational happiness, which especially arises from adoring, and actively shewing the praises of the Almighty, All-wise and bountiful Creator? Since this earth is such a beautiful fabric, so curiously fram'd and adorn'd, and all God's works in it, even those which are unintelligent, praise him in a silent way, by giving to rational beings an occasion of observing and admiring his perfections manifested in them, can we help thinking it was worthy of the wise Author, nay, does it not appear to be the finishing excellence of such a work, to furnish it with understanding inhabitants, fitted with proper powers and affections for enjoying it, capable of discerning its various beauty, and applying it to the delightful purpose of celebrating his praise. This honorable province is therefore wisely assign'd to man, as he is qualify'd for it by the faculties of his nature, and holds the first rank in this lower visible part of the creation.

But if we consider the human constitution by it self, it will appear to be the finish'd production

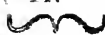
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duction of a wise Author. To judge of this it is necessary to have in view the ends of our being, which obviously arise from the very frame of our nature. Man is a compound of body and spirit; by the former of which he has a necessary relation to the material world, which is the first appointed stage of his existence, his life consider'd as an animated system of matter, is nourish'd by the productions of the earth, and the necessities of his animal nature employ the cares of his mind. The other part, the spirit, is endued with nobler powers, and is capable of higher enjoyments, of the pleasures of virtue; of self-approbation and the favour of God, which are wholly independent on the body. These ends, as different as the essences of soul and body, are united in our constitution, and may be joyntly pursu'd without confusion. For the purposes both of the animal and rational life, we are fitted with proper faculties, instincts and affections; we have senses whereby are communicated to us such ideas of external objects as are useful to the animal nature, and likewise the materials of entertaining knowledge to the mind; we have appetites directing and prompting us to the use of those things which are the means

of

of preserving the present life, and of such happiness as it is capable of, without being left wholly to the conduct of calm reason, which would be too weak to answer the end sufficiently, and by attending such affairs would be too much diverted from more important employments : And particularly, in considering the animal part of the human life, it can hardly escape our observation, that provident nature has shewn her wise care for the species, by planting in the individuals; instincts which powerfully determine them to pursue its general interests, tho' often accompanied with great labour, anxiety and pain. The superiour part in our composition, the spirit, is made for nobler ends, and is qualified to pursue them by nobler faculties; affections and determinations ; it has understanding, liberty, choice, an instinct of benevolence as well as self-love, and conscience, whereby it judges of its own dispositions and actions, according to a deeply engraven and invariable sense of good and evil, from the consciousness of which different moral qualities in it self, arises the most solid inward joy, or the most painful reflexion. These powers appear to our own minds to have a very great excellence in them, and to dignify us highly

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above other beings in the world about us, and the regular exercise of them leads to a great, perpetually increasing happiness, to the pursuit of which we are directed by attending to our own frame. The understanding is a faculty which points to its own proper use and improvement, not only directing the exercise of all our other powers, but affording it felt an eminent pleasure, far superior to all sensual gratifications. Liberty, tho' in us unavoidably accompanied with a possibility of doing wrong, yet is absolutely necessary to our doing right in a moral sense, from which the highest satisfaction arises in the mind. It is virtue which raises our nature to the greatest perfection it can attain to, and what stronger inducement can there be to the practice of it, than what is inseparable from our very constitution, the joy of self approbation which naturally flows from it, and the self-reproach which necessarily follows the contrary? And as the human mind is naturally solicitous about futurity, another state of existence is the subject of its presaging thoughts, and its earnest desires extend even to immortality, which, together with the scanty measure of its attainments here, both in knowledge and enjoyment, far



below what its faculties are capable of, and seem to be design'd for ; is at least a probable argument that it is design'd to subsist hereafter. That same consciousness of integrity or moral goodness, which affords the truest present tranquillity and satisfaction to the mind, gives it also confidence towards God as the righteous Judge of the world, rendering it secure in the expectation of all changes which he shall appoint.

If we descend to a more particular consideration of the laws of nature, we shall find that they are every way worthy of a wise Law-giver, as having a certain connexion with the ends of his own constitution, and of our being. The virtue of sobriety, a very important part of the law written in our hearts, evidently tends to the preservation and the easy enjoyment of life, and to the more vigorous exercise of our superiour powers and affections ; the fear of God, as it is our wisdom, the injunction of it shews the wisdom of the natural law, for it improves the mind, and yields it the most delightful entertainment, and it secures the practice of every other virtue ; and charity is *the perfect bond* of human society, fit therefore to be prescrib'd by that gracious Governor whose care

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extends to all mankind, and who by thus providing for the common safety, has wisely promoted, instead of diminishing the happiness of every individual; for the truest contentment of mind accompanies an universal, undissembled good will. Thus all the works of God have the evidences of his wisdom clearly stamp'd upon them, whether we view them in the whole or in parts, and the more diligently we apply our selves to this inquiry, the more we shall be satisfied that the character of *only wise*, justly belongs to him.

Another illustration of this subject is taken from the manner of the Divine operations, which are so contriv'd, that a vast multitude of effects depend on one or a few causes. This is always regarded as an excellency in any work, which still appears the more beautiful, manifesting the capacity of the Author, the more various its regular appearances are, and the greater simplicity there is in the manner of producing them. When every several effect has a particular separate cause, this gives no pleasure to the spectator, as not discovering contrivance; but that work is beheld with admiration and delight, as the result of deep counsel, which is complicated in its parts, and yet simple in its operation, where a great variety

riety of effects are seen to arise from one principle operating uniformly. That this is the true character of the works of God, we shall be satisfied by considering the natural and the moral world, in both which a vast diversity of appearances depend upon single causes. The best explication which has yet been given of the great phœnomena in the mundane system, resolves them into attraction and gravitation, that is, a force impress'd on all bodies whereby they mutually attract, or tend towards each other, according to the quantity of matter they contain, and in proportion to their distances. It is this which accounts for the regular motion of the planets, so necessary to the beauty and order of the visible world, for the pressure of the air so useful to the preservation of the animal life, for the ascent of vapours from the earth and the waters, and their descent when collected and condensed, in refreshing rains, for the perpetual flux of rivers, for the ebbing and flowing of the sea, and for the stability of the earth, supporting innumerable living creatures, with all convenient furniture for their accommodation ; and it is the foundation of all human mechanical arts, without which

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life would not be tolerable. But this simple cause, productive of so many important appearances in nature, must be attributed to God the first mover, as his work ; for it is not to be explained without having recourse to his power and will ; it is evidently an active force, and therefore cannot be ascrib'd to matter which is wholly and essentially unactive, and whatever appearance of action it has, can only be by the contact of its superficial parts ; whereas the force of gravity penetrates to the centers of all bodies, and affects them at the greatest distance : Either therefore it must be the immediate operation of the first Cause himself, or of an inferior agent by his direction, acting constantly and uniformly on every part of corporeal nature. Other instances might be given, to shew that the material world is govern'd by the influence of single causes, producing a great diversity of effects, according to the different nature of the subjects they work upon, as in the general laws of motion, the various operations of fire, the almost numberless effects which depend upon the constant unvaried nature and properties of water, and many more ; but that of gravity mention'd before, is the most universal that we know, and the

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most satisfying to inquisitive minds ; as to a SERM.  
careful attention to it, and diligent observa- X.  
tion of its effects, are owing the greatest mo-  
dern improvements in natural philosophy, all  
directly leading to this conclusion, that God  
himself, by his own interposition, wisely and  
constantly guides, what is commonly called  
the course of nature.

I shall not insist on the principal appearan-  
ces of the animal life, which are not to be  
attributed to mechanism, depending on gra-  
vity, tho' some have vainly attempted to ac-  
count for them that way ; this however may  
be observ'd concerning them, that they seem  
to be laid on one general uniform foundation.  
As there are common mediums by which the  
images or impressions of material objects are  
convey'd to sensitive beings, so the percep-  
tions rais'd in them which are similar, as far  
as we can judge, not arising from the nature  
of things (for no man can account for the  
particular sensations in animals from the fi-  
gure and other primary qualities, or from  
the motion of the bodies which occasion  
them ;) they must proceed from a general  
law of nature, or, which means the same  
thing, the uniform operation of the first su-  
preme Cause. In the same manner, the in-

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instincts and appetites of animals, determining them by a short and easy method, to use the necessary means of their own preservation, and of such enjoyment as they are capable of, must be resolv'd into the uniform direction of nature, caring for its own works.

But the moral world is the chief of God's works which we know, wherein his wisdom is principally display'd, and the same character of simplicity, may be justly applied to the constitution by which *it* is govern'd. The main ends of it are the perfection and happiness of intelligent beings, ends most worthy of supreme Goodness; but it is the province of wisdom to direct the means by which they shall be obtained. Now to this purpose, the great Author of nature has not given a separate rule to every individual, whereby it should be directed to pursue its own interest independently on all others; but together with self-love, wisely implanted in every one, in order to provide for private happiness, has united them under the general law of benevolence, which attracts free agents into a beautiful harmonious society, as by the force of gravity bodies are united into a regular connected system. What could be better contriv'd to preserve the common


peace

peace, and promote the common felicity of a multitude, than to charge every one with the care of his fellows, and make his own happiness depend upon it. And tho' the perfect happiness of mankind in the first stage of their existence, is not actually attain'd, that is no argument against the wisdom of the constitution, nor proves that the Author's intention is frustrated ; for as in many other productions of nature, especially in every kind of life, there is a gradual progress, which when compleated, is in the whole kind, an admirable instance of the Creator's wise design, tho' during the increase, but imperfectly discern'd, and many of the individuals never arrive to it ; so the principles planted in the human mind, tending to its own and the common happiness, do not produce their proper effect in some individuals, through their own fault, and not their full effect in the whole of the present state, being a state of appointed imperfection ; but they produce even now, such a measure of happiness as is sufficient to justify the wisdom of God in the constitution ; and the same principles rais'd to higher perfection in another state, will, by a more powerful operation, fully answering their end in the complete happiness of all

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SERM. all and every one, more illustriously mani-  
 X. fest the infinite understanding, as well as  
 ~~~~~ goodness of the supreme Being.

As self-love and benevolence, or the desire of private and public happiness, are not barely enjoyn'd by the authority of a Law-giver, but the affections themselves are planted in the heart of every individual, determining them all, as far as free agents in such a state could properly be determin'd, whereby the whole species are wisely directed to pursue the true ends of their being; so these two principles are intended to controul and regulate the exercise of all other affections and passions. It was necessary that the human nature should be furnish'd with inferior private appetites and passions, for the purposes of the animal life, and likewise with particular instincts of the public kind, such as compassion, gratitude and natural affection, where nearer attachments and pressing circumstances require a more vigorous and speedy interposal by kind offices, in behalf of some of mankind, than of others; which is evidently serviceable to, and ordain'd for the public good. But the universal principles of dispassionate self-love and benevolence, have properly the supremacy in our minds, to moderate

derate the lower springs of action belonging SERM.
to their several kinds, and to prevent their X.
excesses; if lower selfish desires hurry us 
with too great violence, they are reasonably
restrain'd by calm self-love to the whole of
our true interest; if particular instincts de-
termining us to relieve and communicate
pleasure to others, carry us at any time be-
yond their just measure, which is the case
with minds in which compassion and natu-
ral affection are very strong, they are check'd
by a calm consideration of the most public
good, which is the governing virtuous prin-
ciple. And now upon a deliberate view of
this whole constitution, as design'd by the
Author of nature, must it not be acknow-
ledg'd that wisdom appears in it? Supposing
the intention to be the happiness of mankind,
the greatest happiness they are capable of,
what could be more wisely contriv'd for an-
swering the end? These general plain laws
universally complied with, and having their
full effect, would raise the human nature to
its highest perfection, and spread united joy
and felicity over the whole kind; and they
are made easy to every man by being the
dictates of his own mind, and we are prompt-
ed to obey them by inclination. And where-

SERM. as our present condition of being is such as
 X. required a variety of particular instincts and
 determinations, to render it the more comfortable, and defend us from some inconveniencies we are liable to, from which variety there might arise an occasion of perplexity in our conduct, by the interfering springs of action ; the great ruling principles are always ready at hand, to be applied in every case for our direction.

Perhaps it may be alledg'd, that the proof of the wisdom of God in his works, which has been last insisted on, namely, *that* taken from this consideration, that a vast multitude of effects depend on one, or a few causes ; that this, I say, is not conclusive, because we cannot be absolutely certain that it is a method of operation, in it self, the best and most effectual for obtaining the ends propos'd ; tho' there is an apparent conveniency in it to imperfect agents, whose minds might be embarrass'd with a multiplicity of means, and their power insufficient for a great diversity of operations at the same time ; but this reason cannot affect the infinite understanding of the supreme Being. Without entering into this inquiry, which is perhaps too difficult for us, or pretending to prove that the
 method

method of operation which the Author of nature has plainly chosen, is more excellent and reasonable in it self abstractly considered, and with respect to him ; I shall only answer to the objection, that since God graciously intended to make his ways known to his intelligent creatures, and to manifest his wisdom so as they might be able to discern it, the method he has taken, is on that account, and to answer that end, absolutely the best. If the manner of working had been intirely different, if the means had been as various as the particular ends accomplish'd by them, if there had been as great a diversity of causes in nature, as of effects, and every design carried on by a distinct method of proceeding ; this might have been as effectual for any thing we know, and we are sure no more difficult to Omnipotence and infinite Understanding ; but then it must have been to us utterly incomprehensible, and minds so limited as ours are, indeed any finite minds, could have had very little knowledge of the wisdom of God ; whereas in the present constitution, he has so accommodated the methods of his operation to the capacities of his intelligent creatures, that the *invisible things of him may be clearly seen by them, and*

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they may trace the footsteps of his perfection in the things which he has made, which is the foundation both of their duty and their happiness, affording a most delightful entertainment to their minds, and directing them to form the measures of their conduct.

But one observation is necessary to be added, that tho' God has given us clear manifestations of his wisdom, and sufficient for our conviction, if we do not wilfully shut our eyes, against the light which breaks in upon us from every part of the known universe, from the constitution and the government of the inanimate, the sensitive; and the rational creatures; yet a great deal does and must still remain secret to us; there are treasures of wisdom and knowledge hid in him, which we cannot possibly comprehend; indeed the intire scheme of his counsels and works can be known to no understanding but his own. Every attentive person must be sensible, that our knowledge of nature is very imperfect. Our senses, which convey to us the ideas of material existence, are confin'd within a narrow sphere. We have reason to believe there are vast regions in the universe beyond the reach of their discernment, and by what peculiar methods they may

may be govern'd, different from those which take place in our system, we cannot pretend to judge. There may be also, no doubt there are other orders of intelligent beings besides mankind, and the laws by which they are ruled may differ in some particulars, from those which are given to us. Besides, of the things which fall under our observation, nay, which we are most familiarly conversant with, there are a great many properties and relations, indeed their very essences, the foundation of all their properties, are unknown to us. They are only the external appearances of things which we observe, and their connexions and dependencies are the subject of human science; but their intimate natures from which these appearances flow, are unknown. But shall we from our own ignorance, infer a defect of wisdom in the supreme Maker and Disposer of the universe? On the contrary, it ought to be allow'd, that if there be satisfying evidence of wisdom in all his works which we know, there is no reason to doubt of it in those parts which are remote from our view, or too deep for our penetration. What mind can be so weak or so prejudic'd as to suppose, that indeed wisdom rules in all that we see (the regularity
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and harmony of things extorts this acknowledgment,) but in all the rest of the universe confusion and discord may reign, and nature be under no wise direction? Wisdom is the perfection of a cause, not of an effect, it belongs to an agent uniformly directing the exertion of his active powers, not confin'd to some of his operations; and therefore, if a being appears to be wise in a great variety of his works which we know, we reasonably conclude that the same wisdom directs the whole of his conduct. This observation, with respect to the works of creation and providence, is justified by experience, for whereas some things in the world, the uses of which were not at all known in the infancy of learning, such as vast tracts of mountains, barren deserts and wide seas, have been strongly insisted on as arguments to show the want of wisdom in the frame of nature; these very things are since found, by later discoveries, and a more accurate inquiry, to be highly useful and to serve very important purposes. And as other objections of the same kind derive all their strength only from human ignorance and weakness, a more thorough knowledge would make them all disappear, and establish a conclusion directly

contrary

contrary to that which unlearned sceptics SERM.
would infer from them. In the mean time, X.
it shows the most conceited and presumptuous
folly for men to censure the Divine admini-
stration, merely because there are some things
in it which they cannot comprehend, when
the general voice of nature and providence
proclaims it wise.

The proper use to be made of this doctrine
is, that we should praise God. *All his works*
praise him by manifesting his wisdom, and
we whom he has made capable of discerning
the characters and evidences of that perfec-
tion, owe him the tribute of the highest ho-
nour and esteem. Power may strike our
minds with awe, and supreme Majesty make
our hearts tremble, but it is wisdom that at-
tracts veneration ; in whatever degree any
agent appears to be possess'd of that quality,
he is intitled to a proportionable measure of
our respect. Wisdom and folly make the
principal distinction among men, by which
they are held in reputation or contempt ;
tho' the differences of outward condition
may be often too much regarded, and men
of servile spirits may flatter the rich and
great in their folly, while the *poor man's wis-*
dom



dom is despised; yet the language of the heart is different, and true wisdom wherever it is found, necessarily commands our inward esteem. But what is all the wisdom of men, or indeed the largest finite understandings, but an imperfect glimpse, when compared with the intellectual perfection of the Father of lights?

As praise is the noblest employment of the mind, one can't but be sensible of dignity and self-worth in doing honour to transcendent excellence, by affectionate acknowledgments and applauses; so it is a most delightful exercise, pleasure is inseparable from the hearty congratulation, and the soul even partakes of the intellectual and moral perfection, which it joyfully celebrates: And since the consciousness of dignity, and the delight which accompanies praise, must always bear a proportion to the apprehended excellency of the object, the praise which is given to the supreme Being, with understanding and sincere esteem, must, on this account, infinitely exceed all others. It is therefore most becoming such imperfect rational creatures as we are, to contemplate the works of God, with this design, that we may discern the manifestations

festations of his wisdom in them, and there-
by excite in our selves those pious and de-
vout affections, and that superlative respect,
which are the very essence of praise, as it is a
reasonable and moral service.

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Any one who attentively considers the frame and condition of human nature in this world, must see, that tho' its capacities are great, and visibly intended for important ends, yet this our infancy of being, is very weak, that the present is a state of probation, wherein the progress of our understandings and our moral powers, with the enjoyment arising from them, in a great measure, depend upon such a diligent use of our own faculties, as a careful attention to the nature and order of them will direct. The first impressions made upon our minds are by sensible objects, and our appetites to them naturally arise, which being customarily indulg'd, the higher powers and affections of the soul are neglected and become weak ; yet are we not left without an obvious remedy against this inconvenience and infirmity of our nature : As the least reflection will convince us, that there are higher and nobler powers in our nature, capable of a rational, a more

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refin'd and sublime enjoyment, than any which can belong to the animal part of our constitution ; so the proper exercise of those higher faculties is naturally pointed out to us, by the work of God's law written upon our hearts, and by the evidences of his being and perfections, which are most plainly inscrib'd on his works, wherewith we are continually surrounded.

But still it is in our power to neglect the culture of the virtuous affections, and to let the natural motives of piety slip out of our minds ; whether we will do so or not is a great part of our trial : This however is certain, that nothing can be more worthy of us, or of more immediate importance to our greatest perfection and happiness, than that we should, with deliberation, design and diligence, apply our selves to the proper exercise and improvement of our rational and moral faculties, in order to establish the supremacy of conscience, and, on that foundation, the inward harmony of the mind, and to obtain that enjoyment which naturally arises from universally self-approving, virtuous integrity. But tho' this be evidently rational and important, (scarcely will any thing

thing be alledg'd in justification of the contrary ;) yet how few are there of mankind, even of those who are in reputation for wisdom and virtue, who make it their business to cultivate their rational and moral capacities, or have ever taken a resolution to make that their chief care through the course of their lives ; for the most part, we learn our piety and virtue, as a foreign discipline, and only by outward instruction ; therefore it fits so awkwardly upon us, and the exercise of it is attended with little of such dexterity, vigor, warmth of affection and pleasure, as accompany the business of nature, which religion really is, in it self, and in the primary way God has taken to teach it to us, that is, by writing its main principles and instructions upon our hearts.

If we are sincerely dispos'd to employ our selves in this excellent, this comprehensive duty of praising God, wherein our best affections join their force, and all the springs of manly pleasure unite in raising the satisfaction of the mind ; if, I say, we are sincerely dispos'd to employ our selves in it, the means are ready at hand ; the works of God, in a most amazing and beautiful instructive va-


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riety, present themselves to us with their manifestations of his wisdom; they pour their evidence from all quarters, and into all the avenues of the mind, inviting us to behold perfect counsel and wise design, which is the most agreeable object we can contemplate. There is no part of the universe to which we can turn our attention, nor any species of beings in it, that does not afford us the plainest discoveries of Divine skill and power in their formation and œconomy. *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work, day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. The beasts of the field and the fowls of the air teach us, and the fishes of the sea declare to us, that he is perfectly wise who gave them their being, and appointed their various uses, with all the circumstances of their condition. In this view the work of the Lord appears honourable and glorious; and it is sought out of them that have pleasure therein; they trace the signatures of counsel upon it, with the highest admiration, and their hearts are fill'd with joy and praise. A heart full of such sentiments will be its own instructor in religion, and needs not to be taught*

taught from abroad, what duty it owes to God, SERM.
what love and gratitude, what confidence, X.
obedience and resignation. 

Providence, as I have already observ'd, has afforded us great and peculiar advantages for making proficiency in this kind of knowledge, and thereby advancing in substantial piety. Some eminent persons in these last days, and that part of the world where we live, have happily employ'd an uncommon capacity, in searching out the works of nature, and illustrating the marvellous displays of Divine wisdom in them ; so that the subject appears in quite a different light from what it has hitherto done, and is even brought down to the level of vulgar understandings. What has been sometimes called philosophy, the vain, the poor production of impiety, ignorance and pride, was really what the Apostle calls, *the wisdom, through which the world knew not God*: But happy our times ! wherein whatever is worthy to be called learning, evidently terminates in religion as its last result, and shews us *all things full of God*. Let us pursue the method which has been so clearly mark'd out to us ; let those whose

SERM. talents and leisure enable them, endeavour
 X. to build a farther superstructure on the noble foundation already laid, and by investigating the secrets of nature, so far as human understanding can reach, discern the counsels of its Author, that they may give him due praise: And let them who are unqualified for such an undertaking, yet study to be acquainted with the useful discoveries others have made, and by affectionate meditation on them, feed the pure flame of rational devotion in their own breasts.

But above all kinds of natural knowledge, there is one branch which may be most profitably improv'd to the purposes of religion, by contemplating the wisdom of God in it; I mean the philosophy of human nature it self, not only or principally of the corporeal part, tho' even *that* is a wonderful work of God, a most curious structure, wherein Divine wisdom shines conspicuously. It is indeed surprizing, that any who have studied the animal constitution and œconomy, should forget God its Maker; others, we know, have made many just and pious reflections upon it, as an admirable monument of the Creator's skill, where-
 in

in he has shew'd himself *great in counsel* SERM.
and wonderful in working. But what I chief- X.

ly aim at is, that we should apply our selves to the serious consideration of our more inward fabric, that of the mind, whereby we are distinguish'd with the character of rational creatures. Of all the external objects we discern, bearing, in a vast variety, the marks of the Creator's intelligence and power, there is none which has any resemblance to this; it has no shape or colour, or any other sensible quality, yet there is nothing more real, nothing more important to us; we are conscious of its various, many of them deeply interesting perceptions and operations, accompanied with different kinds and degrees of pleasure and pain. This object, intimately near us, (for 'tis that whereby we are what we are, *our very selves*;) will, in that view of things we are now considering, appear most worthy of our first and careful attention. To this purpose, some of the principal appearances have been observ'd, in the preceding part of this discourse; but in every view we can take of it, it appears a beautiful offspring of God's light, and a noble production of
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his power : The intellectual and self-determining faculties, the self-reflecting, authoritative and controuling judgment of the mind, upon its own dispositions and voluntary acts, and the affections to spiritual and moral objects, characters and actions ; these are subjects of contemplation, to which we meet with nothing parallel in the whole of material nature ; and when, in conjunction with them, we consider the other subordinate powers and determinations of the human soul, its senses, appetites and passions ; there is a beautiful scene open'd to us, wherein we may entertain our selves most agreeably, and be furnish'd with excellent arguments of praise to our great and wise Creator. This Divine workmanship appears a regular system, comprehending a multitude of parts, but all connected together and variously related : The great end of a perpetually increasing rational perfection and happiness, is plainly intended, and the means are excellently fitted to it ; There are many inferior powers, instincts and affections, each serving a several useful purpose, and having pleasure annex'd to it, but all in subordination to the ultimate end,

end, which nature directs us steddily to pursue : In a system so various, containing so many different powers and springs of action, of opposite tendency, it can scarcely be expected, at least in its infancy and state of appointed imperfection, but that some disorders should happen, and so we find it in fact ; but still the remedy is in the soul it self; by the proper exertion of its own powers, there is provision made for inward order, harmony and peace, which is the natural, healthful and happy state of the mind. This science, like others, has had its vicissitudes ; sometimes in a more flourishing, sometimes in a declining state ; some eminent attempts have, of late, been made to rescue it from the obscurity and ignorance of the barbarous middle ages : But that every man, for himself, may study it successfully, nothing is more necessary than frequent, careful and unprejudic'd self-inspection, whereby pious affections will be excited in our minds, and we shall be led to ascribe, *to the only wise God all honour and glory for ever.*

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2dly, As by the manifestation of God's wisdom in the frame and constitution of things, we are directed to celebrate his praises with understanding and sincere affection; so by the continued exercise of the same glorious attribute in his government of the world, we are encourag'd to trust in him at all times and in all circumstances, if we sincerely endeavour to approve our selves to him by imitating his moral perfections, and obeying his laws (the only condition upon which, by the very constitution of our nature, we can have confidence towards God;) for he has the whole series of events under his direction, appointing even the remotest issues of them. Vain are the contrivances of wicked mortals, against the gracious designs of providence towards good men, *the counsels of the froward are turned headlong*, their mischievous purposes are disappointed, *for the Lord knows how to deliver the godly from temptations*. We ought not to pronounce judgment upon the first face of things, nor be greatly discouraged because of irregular appearances; we may be assured they are no more than appearances, for it is impossible there should be any real disorder, where

where infinite Wisdom rules : And tho' our SERM.
knowledge of particular events is very short, X.
this may always yield us satisfaction and
support our hope, that the whole course of
nature, and all the vicissitudes of human af-
fairs are govern'd by perfect reason.

Here is, one would think, a solid foundation of inward tranquillity to intelligent creatures, and a relief under all their anxieties for the future ; for what could a rational being desire, but that eternal unerring reason should direct the series of events, and determine what comes to pass. If, in fact, the world be so govern'd, and our persuasion of it rests upon solid grounds, this must be delightful to the human mind, a never-failing spring of consolation : Supposing on the contrary, that there were no such thing as counsel in the government of the universe, but that all things were guided by blind chance or necessity ; how must this dissipate the vigour of the soul, disorder all its powers, and fill it with horror : The present state, and indeed the whole of existence, would then be, in the strictest and most proper Sense, as *Job* represents the state of death,

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death, * a land of darkneſs as darkneſs it ſelf, and of the ſhadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkneſs. But ſince it is not ſo, ſince the only wiſe God reigneth, his counſel ſtandeth for ever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations, let all the rational inhabitants of the earth rejoyce, and the multitude of the iſles be glad thereof: What can give greater ſatisfaction and inward ſecurity to a conſiderate unprejudic'd mind; for, upon this principle, the laſt reſult of all things muſt be, juſt as ſuch a mind would wiſh it to be.

Laſtly, We ought always to acquieſce in the preſent diſpoſition of things by Divine providence, and comply with its counſels, as far as we know them. God's ways are unſearchable, and his judgments paſt finding out; but when he is pleas'd to ſhow his purpoſes in particular events, tho' we cannot diſcern the reaſons of them and their full deſign, it becomes us to ſubmit, not becauſe of his ſovereign dominion, which, abſtracting from the conſideration of his wiſdom, can never produce a rational reſig-

* Job x. 22.

nation, nor satisfy our understandings any more than unintelligent fate, the blind idol of *Atheists*; but because we know he is infinitely wise, who in these instances declares his will. He has, 'tis true, given us understanding, and we should use it in the best manner we can, for the direction of our own practice; prudence however will direct such as are conscious of their own weakness, to carry it with great deference to acknowledg'd superior understanding, and hearken to instruction: But surely the very imperfect understandings of men, should never exalt themselves against the perfect Wisdom which rules the universe. Therefore when God is pleas'd to interpose by disappointing our designs, and breaking our measures, the humblest resignation is our unquestionable duty; and what he has plainly discover'd to be the design and appointment of his providence, we should cheerfully submit to, because we are sure it is wisest in the whole: Still remembering, as a first maxim, and of the utmost importance, that what God has evidently shown, by the clear light of our own reason, to be the proper ends of our being, these we ought

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ought constantly to pursue, and inviolably adhere to that invariable rule which he has given us for the conduct of life. We cannot fathom the depth of his wisdom, nor know the secret of his counsels, *but unto man he has said, * Behold the fear of the Lord; that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.*

* Job xxviii. 28.

F I N I S.

